

Jeremiah

Transcription
of
Larry
Wilson

JEREMIAH

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You will notice a substantial portion of this book uses the NLT instead of Larry's preferred NIV. There are two reasons for this: (1) So many verses are quoted in this book that to stay clear of copyright infringement, an additional source for text is used. (2) The NLT was chosen for its readability. Stories simply sound better read from the NLT.

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On occasion italics and brackets in Scripture quotations have been added to enhance understanding. They are not intended to change the meaning of the texts, only to clarify. We encourage you to consider them and hope they will provide you with deeper insight as you study God's Word.

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Rex Johnson

Dedicated to the memory of Larry W. Wilson. He devoted his life to sharing the gospel and changed my life in the process.

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Introduction

When a person is born, he enters a world of perpetual issues. In Jeremiah's case, his nation was nearing destruction but few at the time were aware of it. About 200 years before Jeremiah was born, God's patience with the apostasy of Israel and Judah began to fray. Both nations were duly notified of His weariness with their evil.

Over the course of 120 years, God sent more than eight prophets to Israel¹. He had hoped that His people would repent and change but they didn't. So in 722 BC, He sent the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, to destroy the kingdom. The two remaining tribes in the south, Judah and Benjamin, were also on a degenerate course which would result in destruction.

In an effort to save the two from the same fate as their ten brothers, the Lord sent more than five prophets to Jerusalem prior to 605 BC—the last of whom was Jeremiah.

One day without warning or expectation, God burst into Jeremiah's reality. The 21-year-old son of a priest was overwhelmed and bewildered by the encounter and of his assignment. Jesus introduced Himself to Jeremiah saying, **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”**²

Even though Jeremiah tried to excuse himself from the appointment on the basis of age, the Lord assured the young man that He was capable of qualifying the unqualified.³ The Bible doesn't tell us how many times the Lord talked with Jeremiah over 53 years. We do know however that Jeremiah faithfully

¹ The ten tribes in the north

² Jeremiah 1:5

³ Jeremiah 1:7

serviced God for the rest of his life. Whereas God required an earlier prophet, Hosea, to marry a prostitute and have children¹, God forbade Jeremiah from marrying and raising a family.² The lives and actions of God's servants are sometimes living examples of God's plans.

It is ironic that Jeremiah, the last prophet to speak for God before Jerusalem's complete destruction in 586 BC, was able to rescue the very item that condemned Judah. History records that Jeremiah took the Ark of the Covenant which contained the tablets written by God's own hand and hid it to protect it from Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

When God called Jeremiah to serve Him as a prophet in 627 BC, another 21 year old sat on the throne in Jerusalem. In a way, Jeremiah and King Josiah shared a common destiny. They were both appointed before being born. Josiah came to the throne when he was only 8. When he turned 16, the youthful king began a process determined to turn the tide of Judah's idolatry.

Judah's root problem wasn't the worship of idols on the surrounding mountain tops or the selling of graven images, its basic problem was the degenerate and rebellious condition of its heart. One would think a faithful prophet and a dedicated king could make a big difference. Sadly, Judah was beyond the point of recovery. God even told Jeremiah that He would spare Jerusalem if he could find but *one* righteous soul there.³

Herein lies a very important point: The reformation of Josiah—the desecration of altars dedicated to foreign gods and the imposition of laws forbidding gross sin—did not change the hearts or attitudes of Jerusalem's citizens, and neither did Jeremiah's preaching (that we know of). The failure of these endeavors left God with no other option than the total destruction of Jerusalem.

1 Hosea 1:2

2 Jeremiah 16:2

3 Jeremiah 5:1

Jesus said to Jeremiah, **“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.”**¹

The life of a true prophet is always hard. God’s prophets suffered enormously because prophets were sent to identify sin by its right name. Consequently, the prophets were rejected, persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, or killed because they spoke against things people loved. How did God’s people degenerate into such a condition? The answer is, each generation sets a lower moral bar for the next, therefore each succeeding generation sees itself “no worse” than the previous. The inherited degraded standard allows for and even justifies its degenerate ways. But when decadent behavior is contrasted against “God’s unchanging standard of righteousness,” the gulf is wide indeed. Therefore prophets appear to be madmen or kooks spewing inflammatory words.

There is a profound lesson in this. Truth, nobility of character, and moral conduct pleasing to God, hasn’t changed from the beginning even though decadence abounds. The malignant power of sin will deaden the most devout Christian if his mind is not continuously uplifted to a higher standard by renewal each day.²

When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, the young man still lived with his family in the little town of Anathoth about three miles from Jerusalem. From his earliest memory, Jeremiah anticipated he would be a priest just like his father, for such was the privilege of Levite males. However, Jeremiah also understood that serving Jehovah was going to be a problem because Israel had embraced the worship and adoration of numerous gods.³

After his initial encounter with God, Jeremiah began to

1Jeremiah 4:22

2 Philippians 2:5

3 According to 1 Kings 11:3–5, Solomon had introduced polytheism to Judah through his 700 wives.

speak boldly against the worship of idols and its resulting wrath of God upon Jerusalem. His words were considered blasphemous so most of the religious leaders, even his own brothers, schemed to have him killed.

During Jeremiah's day, there were many sects of priests in Jerusalem, each representing a specific god; much like many churches in any given city today. In Jeremiah's day, Jehovah God, the ancient God of Israel, was merely one of many gods. God quizzed Jeremiah: "How could Israel, a nation delivered from slavery in Egypt by mighty acts of Jehovah, ever consider worshipping other gods?"¹ The obvious answer lies within the following issues.

(1) Spiritual darkness overtook the generations that followed Solomon because they exchanged the monotheistic worship of Jehovah for the foolish polytheistic worship of the nations around them. Israel *became* a nation of darkness through the adoption of foolish doctrines.²

(2) The carnal nature is not opposed to religion, it is opposed to divine rebuke. False religion is a two-sided coin that eliminates divine rebuke with pseudo-justification. On one side, it frees the "believer" from obedience to God's commandments (lawlessness); on the other, it imposes the harshest penalty and guilt for actions that have nothing to do with actual sin (legalism). In lawlessness, people become shameless in their evil deeds; in legalism, religion becomes external, harsh, and rigid. The result when combined is superstition and distance from God.

(3) Last, Israel abandoned the true God because Jehovah's priests compromised their high calling for power, money, and popularity. They miserably failed in proclaiming God's truth. The shepherds of the flock did not teach the people about sin, redemption, faith, restitution, or forgiveness. So God laid much of the failure of Judah at the feet of His priests.

1 Jeremiah 2:11

2 Jeremiah 7:28

Consider the sins of Judah which God identifies through Jeremiah.

1:16 **“I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made.”**

2:28 **“For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.”**

2:32 **“Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.”**

5:28 **“Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor.”**

6:10 **“To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.”**

7:9–10 **“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house [temple], which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’—safe to do all these detestable things?”**

8:7–8 **“Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the Lord. ‘How can you say, “We are wise, for we have the law of the Lord,” when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?’ ”**

8:10–11 **“From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace [coming upon this people].”**

9:8 **“Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks with deceit.**

With his mouth each speaks cordially to his neighbor, but in his heart he sets a trap for him.”

17:21–23 “This is what the Lord says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers. Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiffnecked and would not listen or respond to discipline.”

22:3–5 “This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. But if you do not obey these commands, declares the Lord, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.”

History confirms that Jerusalem was totally destroyed by God in 586 BC through His servant Nebuchadnezzar.¹ Afterward the land lay desolate so that it might receive its rest. The Jews had desecrated 70 sabbatical years over 430 years, therefore their exile in Babylon was 70 years.²

You may not know this, but the book of Jeremiah has many parallels with the coming Great Tribulation.

(1) God explains in the book of Jeremiah why He had to destroy His city and His temple and send His people into exile. This is most important to understand. The one problem God cannot fix is *corporate apostasy*. Destruction is its only solution. God destroyed *His* people three times in the Old Testament. He destroyed the faithless generation that came out of Egypt in 1437 BC, Israel in 722 BC, and Jerusalem in 586 BC. The irony in each destruction is that God’s people couldn’t see or understand their apostasy. The religious people wanted to kill Jeremiah because he condemned their actions, their city,

¹ Jeremiah 25:9

² 2 Chronicles 36:21, Ezekiel 4:5–6

and their temple.

Speaking the truth brings the same consequences today. If you don't believe it, stand up in your church and condemn the people or the church, using the authority of Scripture. Destruction is the only resolution for rebellion. This is why God will send a great king (Antichrist) against those who bear His name.¹ The religious people of the world are in apostasy but don't know it—they just won't listen. When love for truth is lost and there is no distinction between good and evil among those who claim to know God, that generation has historically been the last before God intervenes.² The destruction of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day parallels the fact that God will not spare from destruction, those who claim to be closest to Him.

(2) God explains in Jeremiah why Babylon must be destroyed at the end of the 70 years of exile. He also explains to Jeremiah the forthcoming destruction on other nations as well. God will destroy those who do not recognize Him when they corporately pass the point of no return. There are many instances of this in the Old Testament: God destroyed the world (in Noah's day), the Egyptians, Grecians, Sodom and Gomorrah, Jericho, Nineveh, and the Medes and Persians.

Just as God used the haughty Shalmaneser V and the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar as His servants of wrath upon apostate Israel and Judah³, so God will use Lucifer (the Antichrist) to decimate the wicked of earth during the end time.⁴ The Old Testament affirms that God grants nations a period of mercy and grace, but when a nation becomes corrupt and degenerate, He sends warnings, then judgments. When these have no effect, God destroys that nation. In so doing, He cauterizes the degeneracy of sin *for the benefit of future generations*. This is the only process whereby a higher level of morality can be established. This also explains why there has to be an end to

1 Daniel 8:23–25; 11:36–45

2 Jeremiah 11:7–13

3 Jeremiah 25:9

4 Revelation 9:4–6

this world and the creation of a new one.

(3) God reveals in Jeremiah His future plans of restoration for His people and the establishment of His kingdom. This promise of restoration is limited to restoration *from Babylon and a subsequent establishment of God's kingdom at the end of the 70 weeks*. Many Christians ignore this specificity. The restoration promised in the book of Jeremiah (and Daniel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel) has nothing to do with 1948 and Israel's independence from Great Britain. Rather, the promise being discussed is a restoration immediately following their exile in Babylon.

Jeremiah 25:9–12. **“I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will make it desolate forever.’”**

Jeremiah 16:14–15. **“‘However, the days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when men will no longer say, “As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,” but they will say, “As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.” For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers.’”**

There are four decrees in the Old Testament restoring Israel to its homeland. The first promptly occurred at the end of 70 years of exile.¹

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved

¹ 605–536 BC

the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: **‘This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.”’**¹

The book of Jeremiah offers a number of valuable insights about the ways of God. When the story in Jeremiah is compared to the story in Revelation, certain parallels are unmistakable because the actions of God are consistent. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Consider this: God is about to deal with the cumulative guilt of the whole world which is too diverse and apostate to recover. His wrath is about to be revealed to every person. God reminded Jeremiah of His interest in each one of us. **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? ‘I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.’”**²

One last thought before closing the introduction. Even though the destruction of Jerusalem was threatened over a period of about 250 years, when time for destruction came, the armies of Nebuchadnezzar appeared in *one* day. Even though God repeatedly warned His people through His servants the prophets, there was no noticeable change in their behavior. Even though God was patient and most forbearing, there was no repentance. God was willing to relent of His wrath but Israel and Judah scorned their benefactor. If God’s own people wouldn’t change, what’s the likelihood of a religiously diverse world repenting of their sins even when warned of coming judgments?

History says, “It won’t happen.” This is the reason the

1 2 Chronicles 36:22–23

2 Jeremiah 17:9–10

coming judgments of God will commence without warning one day in the very near future. **“While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”**¹ The Bible confirms that advance warnings from God did not change decadent behavior in Noah’s or Jeremiah’s day. Our day will be no different.

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:3

CHAPTER 1



One Voice Speaking Out

Although we cannot see God directly, we can see evidence of His handiwork around us. In fact, the Bible is a revelation of His sovereignty. However, our knowledge of God is obtained through sources other than God himself. That's why I decided to write about the book of Jeremiah. In my book, I write as if we're sitting at the kitchen table having a Bible study—looking at the life, times, and message of the prophet Jeremiah.

As a background, the book of Jeremiah covers a period of 53 years, one chapter per year of his ministry. Jeremiah began ministering as a young man and served the Lord faithfully during the reign of five kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Since Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin only ruled about three months each, the preponderance of Jeremiah's ministry was under the kings Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. It is during the 11th year of the reign of Zedekiah in 586 BC that Jerusalem is finally and completely destroyed.

To understand the book of Jeremiah takes a little effort

because it's not written in chronological order. Rather, it's organized into five sections which are logical. For example, when the book begins, the first chapter is about his call and commission, God's encouragement to him, and certain preparatory visions. Then the "meat of the book" begins to unfold.

Section 1 is the prophet's call. Section 2 is about the prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Section 3 starts in chapter 36 and contains biographical and historical information. Section 4 consists of prophecies regarding foreign nations. It also describes how God will deal with Babylon, Egypt, and Syria. And section 5 is a historical appendix that begins with chapter 52. The five divisions within the book of Jeremiah are relatively easy to understand. But remember, as we investigate the message in his wonderful book, we will be paying close attention to its chronological timing.

Now, for those who have read my Isaiah and Ezekiel books, you know that the focus of those prophets, as with Jeremiah, is about the failure of God's people and the coming destruction He intends to bring because of their negligence. The principals involved with bringing destruction upon His own people, are the same principles He uses with the world in general. That's why it's so important to understand the Old Testament prophets. The patience and long-suffering, the forgiveness and goodness of God is revealed in the Old Testament more clearly than the New, I think, because the issues of the New Testament are somewhat different in focus and scope. The Old Testament prophets reveal—albeit over time—a dimension about God's marvelous character.

Jeremiah begins his ministry around 627 BC; a time after the 10 northern kingdoms had already been destroyed, and God was preparing to destroy Jerusalem in the south. Evidently, the people of Judah and Benjamin, the 2 tribes in the south, didn't learn from the failure of the tribes in the north. So God raised up the young man Jeremiah to go speak His words to the people, the kings, and the priests. To sum up the entire book

of Jeremiah in one sentence, I would describe his experience as *one lone voice speaking out against an entire rebellious nation of religious people*.

Consider his predicament. The priests are against him. The king and his government are against him. In effect, the whole nation of Israel has wandered so far from God that Jeremiah sounds like a fanatic. The experience of Jeremiah, I would say, is a story of great loneliness. God forbid him to marry. And other than Baruch, the scribe who so faithfully assisted him, he really had no friends. Fortunately, Jeremiah did have someone come to his rescue, but as a spokesman for God, he really does stand alone.

Jeremiah's life parallels that of John the Baptist. He was a man of great dedication; a man willing to accept the responsibility God gave him. And even though his existence was a difficult experience, he bears up as God gives him grace.

The historical setting of his time has to be understood to appreciate all that Jeremiah wrote. He lived and began his ministry at a time when Assyria and Egypt were competing for supremacy. In ancient times, the law of the jungle was to lead or be led. Jeremiah lived at a time when Egypt was asserting its prowess, Assyria was doing its best to hang on to world control, and newcomer Babylon was beginning to show signs of emergence. So at this time there are three political players: Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon.

Midway through the ministry of Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar overthrew Necho II, pharaoh of Egypt, at the Battle of Carchemish. And in 605 BC, Babylon became the leader of world empires, superseding the authority of Assyria, who, about seven years earlier, had been defeated at the Battle of Nineveh. With Egypt subdued and Assyria in timeout, Babylon became the de facto superpower. This is important because God is raising up Nebuchadnezzar to accomplish what needs to be done; not only to punish Israel, but other nations that will need it as well.

When studying the Old Testament, it's often overlooked that God is working behind the scenes; not only against vile, wicked, and degenerate behavior of His own people, but the same behavior in other nations. God's policies in dealing with defiant, decadent, and degenerate nations, is consistent. He has no favorites. This is an important detail underscored in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 1:1–2 identifies Jeremiah as the **“son of Hilkiah, one of the priests from the town of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. The Lord first gave messages to Jeremiah during the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah.”** Jeremiah was a preacher's kid, and the Lord spoke to him in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah. Josiah was the young man who became king of Israel at eight years old. He is remembered for the reforms made in Israel when he was about 20 that brought about its remarkable transformation from idolatry. In the 18th year of his reign, a copy of the book of the law written by Moses was found. This renewed Josiah's commitment to bring Israel back into harmony with the word and law of God. Although relatively short lived, the reformation was truly amazing for a time.

Josiah died in 609 BC at the Battle of Megiddo when he presumptuously and foolishly went out to defeat Pharaoh Necho who wanted to do battle with Nebuchadnezzar. He died needlessly. Their dispute had nothing to do with Israel. Jeremiah was called in the 13th year of Josiah's reign so when he begins his ministry, he has a friend in the king who was also loyal to the God of heaven.

Jeremiah 1:4–5, **“The Lord gave me this message: ‘I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.’”** I love those verses. They say much more than most realize. Their meaning is twisted to present the fatalistic idea that God predestines all things. Really, though, the Lord is responding to Jeremiah's insecurity about the ability to be used.

The Lord told him in verses 7–8, **“Don’t say, ‘I’m too young,’ for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don’t be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the Lord, have spoken!”**

God foreknew Jeremiah just as He does you and me. God knew the date of our birth long before it ever happened. In Psalm 139:15–16 the Bible says, **“You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.”** Both Psalm and Jeremiah confirm that God sees the future. He knew Cyrus; He knew Nebuchadnezzar; He knew Jeremiah; He knew you and me before we came to be.

So God touched Jeremiah’s lips and said in verses 9–10, **“Look, I have put my words in your mouth! Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant.”**

Two important points: (1) The Lord put HIS words in Jeremiah’s mouth. Jeremiah is not a self-appointed critic of the religious system or degeneracy of Israel. (2) The words he speaks are not from a self-appointed someone who feels compelled to put the earth in order. A lot of people feel duty bound to impose their view of right and wrong, good and bad on those around them. But here, God chose a young man who didn’t have any words of his own, a man who didn’t want to say anything, a man who couldn’t speak eloquently. Not only did God give him the words to speak, but the ability and courage to do it.

The Lord said, *“Jeremiah, you’re going to tear down, you’re going to overthrow, and you’re going to present words of building and planting. Your words will be powerful. They will be influential and will have my authority backing them up.”*

Then in verse 11, the Lord said to Jeremiah, **“What do you**

see?” In the vision, the Lord had shown Jeremiah the branch of an almond tree. After Jeremiah described what he saw, the Lord said in verse 12, **“That’s right, and it means that I am watching, and I will certainly carry out all my plans.”**

What’s the point though? What does the branch of an almond tree mean? In ancient times, God often used something dead to illustrate how He could bring life again. Aaron’s rod that budded is an example. In the story of Nebuchadnezzar, even though the tree was cut down, life continued to spring forth from the stump. In the same way, God is going to cut off this almond branch if it is unfruitful. Look at what He says:

“Then the Lord spoke to me again and asked, ‘What do you see now?’

And I replied, ‘I see a pot of boiling water, spilling from the north.’

‘Yes,’ the Lord said, ‘for terror from the north will boil out on the people of this land.’¹ Disaster will be poured out.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, disaster comes out of the north. This is significant because in Daniel and Revelation the direction of north has prophetic significance. However, if the almond branch flourishes, He will nurture it.

God told Jeremiah at the beginning of his ministry, **“Listen! I am calling the armies of the kingdoms of the north to come to Jerusalem. I, the Lord, have spoken! They will set their thrones at the gates of the city. They will attack its walls and all the other towns of Judah. I will pronounce judgment on my people for all their evil—for deserting me and burning incense to other gods. Yes, they worship idols made with their own hands!”**² Judgments are coming because of wickedness.

God continues, **“Get up and prepare for action. Go out and tell them everything I tell you to say. Do not be afraid of them, or I will make you look foolish in front of them.**

¹ Jeremiah 1:13–14

² Jeremiah 1:15–16

For see, today I have made you strong like a fortified city that cannot be captured, like an iron pillar or a bronze wall. You will stand against the whole land—the kings, officials, priests, and people of Judah. They will fight you, but they will fail. For I am with you, and I will take care of you. I, the Lord, have spoken!¹ Note the reassurance given.

Two details need emphasis. In Jeremiah 1:5, God told Jeremiah that before he was formed in his mother's womb, he was known. And when Jeremiah was called, God knew what Israel would do in the future. The Lord also knew what was going to happen to Jeremiah, and what would happen when sending Nebuchadnezzar against His own people.

So here we are, approximately 25 years before the time of Nebuchadnezzar's first siege, which destroys and subjugates a portion of Jerusalem. This event is approximately 10–15 years prior to the time Assyria would lose some of its authority at the Battle of Nineveh.

So God, knowing in advance what the outcome would be, proceeds by choosing this young man. It's my guess Jeremiah was 30 years of age when he began his ministry. Prophets and spokespersons usually began public ministry around that age. He could have been a little younger considering his response when called: "I'm under age; I'm only a child." God replies, "Okay, get yourself ready, stand up, and say what I command you to say." The consequence of speaking for yourself is one thing, but to speak for God is a matter so serious that its effect can be eternal.

The Lord said to Jeremiah, "**Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them.**"² That is a tough place to be. But as we will find, Jeremiah is up to the challenge. And the Lord certainly gives him grace and strength to do what he's asked to do.

Now, Jeremiah often reiterates "The word of the Lord came

1 Jeremiah 1:17–19

2 Jeremiah 1:17

to me.” I need to say something about that before moving on to Jeremiah 2.

A lot of people today use the expression, “The Lord told me,” or “The Lord said to me.” I would ask those who speak like this to carefully consider what God has to say about such claims. In Jeremiah 14, the Lord takes a dim view of people claiming to speak for Him. When the word of the Lord comes to a prophet, there is no uncertainty, no ambiguity, no question that an intelligent and informed conversation took place between the Lord and the prophet.

So the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. And the word was “Go and shout my message in the hearing of Jerusalem.” God is speaking to His people. Put yourself in His place as you consider what He has to say.

“I remember how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me and followed me even through the barren wilderness. In those days Israel was holy to the Lord, the first of his children. All who harmed his people were declared guilty, and disaster fell on them. I, the Lord, have spoken!” Listen to the word of the Lord, people of Jacob—all you families of Israel! This is what the Lord says: ‘What did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves.’”¹

Isn’t that profound? By beholding we become changed. They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. Does that describe television today? Does that describe the intellectual and spiritual diet of most Americans today?

God goes on: **“They did not ask, ‘Where is the Lord who brought us safely out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness—a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and death, where no one lives or even travels? And when I brought you into a fruitful land to enjoy its bounty and goodness, you defiled my land and corrupted the possession**

¹ Jeremiah 2:2–5

I had promised you.¹ Did you notice what God said of His own people? *You defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.* His own people did this.

In the book of Leviticus, God says to Israel, *You are nothing but tenants in this land. I own this land.*² God reminds His people that the land never belonged to them. That's a key point. Israel was a mere tenant, and its people could live in the land as long as they were obedient to the landlord—the owner of the land.

God says in Jeremiah 2, “**‘And when I brought you into a fruitful land to enjoy its bounty and goodness, you defiled my land and corrupted the possession I had promised you. The priests did not ask, “Where is the Lord?” Those who taught my word ignored me, the rulers turned against me, and the prophets spoke in the name of Baal, wasting their time on worthless idols. Therefore, I will bring my case against you,’ says the Lord. ‘I will even bring charges against your children’s children in the years to come.’**”³

God is saying, *I am bringing charges against you again. Just as I killed off your forefathers in the wilderness, I’m bringing charges against you. And I will bring charges against your children’s children.* God punishes subsequent generations because they too become degenerate. This fact should concern each of us.

“**‘Go west and look in the land of Cyprus; go east and search through the land of Kedar. Has anyone ever heard of anything as strange as this? Has any nation ever traded its gods for new ones, even though they are not gods at all? Yet my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols! The heavens are shocked at such a thing and shrink back in horror and dismay,’ says the Lord. ‘For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me—the**

1 Jeremiah 2:6-7

2 Leviticus 25:23

3 Jeremiah 2:7-9

fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”¹

They have committed two sins for which they’re being called to account.

Verses 18–23. **“What have you gained by your alliances with Egypt and your covenants with Assyria? What good to you are the streams of the Nile or the waters of the Euphrates River? Your wickedness will bring its own punishment. Your turning from me will shame you. Long ago I broke the yoke that oppressed you and tore away the chains of your slavery, but still you said, ‘I will not serve you.’ On every hill and under every green tree, you have prostituted yourselves by bowing down to idols. But I was the one who planted you, choosing a vine of the purest stock—the very best. How did you grow into this corrupt wild vine? No amount of soap or lye can make you clean. I still see the stain of your guilt. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken! ‘You say, “That’s not true! I haven’t worshiped the images of Baal!” But how can you say that? Go and look in any valley in the land! Face the awful sins you have done. You are like a restless female camel desperately searching for a mate.’”**

So they have abandoned the Lord and prostituted themselves in alliances (unholy unions) with other nations for protection—two grievous sins.

Verses 24–30. **“You are like a wild donkey, sniffing the wind at mating time. Who can restrain her lust? Those who desire her don’t need to search, for she goes running to them! When will you stop running? When will you stop panting after other gods? But you say, “Save your breath. I’m in love with these foreign gods, and I can’t stop loving them now!” Israel is like a thief who feels shame only when he gets caught. They, their kings, officials, priests, and prophets—all are alike in this. To an image carved from a piece of wood they say, “You are my father.” To an idol chiseled**

¹ Jeremiah 2:10–13

from a block of stone they say, “You are my mother.” They turn their backs on me, but in times of trouble they cry out to me, “Come and save us!” But why not call on these gods you have made? When trouble comes, let them save you if they can! For you have as many gods as there are towns in Judah. Why do you accuse me of doing wrong? You are the ones who have rebelled,’ says the Lord. ‘I have punished your children, but they did not respond to my discipline.’”

Remember, the Lord is telling this to His people 20 years prior to Babylonian captivity. *Look, you have abandoned me, you have forsaken me, you have prostituted your nation by forming alliances with Egypt and Assyria, and you have bowed down and worshiped other gods. But now that trouble is coming, you come running to me for help. Should I listen or care? No.*

Chapter 3:1–5. “**If a man divorces a woman and she goes and marries someone else, he will not take her back again, for that would surely corrupt the land. But you have prostituted yourself with many lovers, so why are you trying to come back to me?’** says the Lord. ‘**Look at the shrines on every hilltop. Is there any place you have not been defiled by your adultery with other gods? You sit like a prostitute beside the road waiting for a customer. You sit alone like a nomad in the desert. You have polluted the land with your prostitution and your wickedness. That’s why even the spring rains have failed. For you are a brazen prostitute and completely shameless. Yet you say to me, “Father, you have been my guide since my youth. Surely you won’t be angry forever! Surely you can forget about it!”** So you talk, but you keep on doing all the evil you can.’”

Jeremiah was faced with a formidable task. How does one tell a religious people their religion is worthless, corrupt, and in apostasy? One of the most difficult things God can have a prophet do is call out a religious system. Only the Spirit can do what was done in Nineveh. Jonah delivered the message but it was the Spirit who moved the people to respond.

Jeremiah didn't win many friends or influence many people. Nevertheless, it was God's intention Israel hear the truth. Whether it liked it or not was its own choice. This says so much about the ways of God. He finds the right person to conduct His work, and that person can be the son of a preacher like Jeremiah or a pagan like Nebuchadnezzar—it doesn't matter. God can use anyone willing to be used.

In Jeremiah 3:4, God was speaking through Jeremiah to Israel. **“Yet you say to me, ‘Father, you have been my guide since my youth. Surely you won't be angry forever! Surely you can forget about it!’ So you talk, but you keep on doing all the evil you can.’ During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, ‘Have you seen what fickle Israel has done? Like a wife who commits adultery, Israel has worshiped other gods on every hill and under every green tree.’”**¹

It was customary in ancient times to put the “church” on top of a hill. I don't mean a church building necessarily, I'm referring to a place of worship. Israel as well as the pagan nations surrounding her, would place altars on the tops of hills. They wanted to be closer to their gods. They wanted a pleasant place to sit under the trees and enjoy the celebratory revelry that went with pagan worship. The whole idea in the text was that this practice was considered adultery by God.

Their worship had nothing to do with Him because He had already determined the place where He was to be worshiped. Humans don't get to override what God has decided. This is why in Revelation 17, the seven heads are also called seven hills. The idea is that on every high hill and under every spreading tree, Israel had committed adultery. Also in Revelation 17, God says, *Look, the whole world has been led astray by seven religious systems, seven heads, which are like seven mountains or hills—seven blasphemous, adulterous religions.*

Verses 7–8. **“I thought, ‘After she has done all this, she will return to me.’ But she did not return, and her faithless**

¹ Jeremiah 3:4–6

sister Judah [in the south] saw this. She saw that I divorced faithless Israel because of her adultery. But that treacherous sister Judah had no fear, and now she, too, has left me and given herself to prostitution.” God destroyed Israel—the ten tribes in the north—for their apostasy; but Judah didn’t learn anything from Israel’s demise.

I need to stress something before moving on. God said through Jeremiah, *I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of her adulteries.* Jeremiah 3:8 clearly reveals that God abandoned the ten tribes of Israel. He gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce. This meant, it’s over, finished, done. He subsequently had Shalmaneser V, the king of Assyria, destroy the ten nations of northern Israel in 722 BC.

In verse 8, God was saying that because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood. Religion became her obsession, and her benefactor (almighty God) was left out. Israel preferred gods of stone and wood to the living God.

Continuing with verse 10. “**But despite all this, her faithless sister Judah has never sincerely returned to me. She has only pretended to be sorry.’** Then the Lord said to me, ‘Even faithless Israel is less guilty than treacherous Judah! Therefore, go and give this message to Israel. This is what the Lord says: “O Israel, my faithless people, come home to me again, for I am merciful. I will not be angry with you forever. Only acknowledge your guilt. Admit that you rebelled against the Lord your God and committed adultery against him by worshiping idols under every green tree. Confess that you refused to listen to my voice. I, the Lord, have spoken!”’

‘Return home, you wayward children,’ says the Lord, ‘for I am your master. I will bring you back to the land of Israel—one from this town and two from that family—from wherever you are scattered. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will guide you with knowledge

and understanding. And when your land is once more filled with people,' says the Lord, 'you will no longer wish for "the good old days" when you possessed the Ark of the Lord's Covenant. You will not miss those days or even remember them, and there will be no need to rebuild the Ark.'"¹

Let me explain. Even though God gave Israel her certificate of divorce in verse 8, He is saying to Israel, *If you will repent, if you will come back, if you will change your evil heart and put away your stubbornness, I will take you back.*

In Jeremiah 23, God's great grief was with the spiritual leaders of Israel. He holds people responsible for their actions, but holds the priests responsible for the apostasy of the nation. The priests did not stand up and reveal the word of the Lord as required. As a result, degeneracy and apostasy became the norm.

Jeremiah 3: 17, "In that day Jerusalem will be known as 'The Throne of the Lord.' All nations will come there to honor the Lord. They will no longer stubbornly follow their own evil desires."

The book of Isaiah discusses *Plan A* and what God intended to accomplish. After punishing Israel and Judah, He wanted to bring them back to their homeland and try to work with them one more time. In fact, that's where the 70 weeks of Daniel come into play. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were contemporaries. They lived at the same time. However, God told Jeremiah certain things, Ezekiel other things, and Daniel still different things. But when all that was said is put together, the Lord's great plan can be seen.

His plan was to punish Israel in 722 BC. Then in 605 BC, it was Judah's turn. Afterward, a remnant who loved Him would be brought back to Jerusalem. So in Jeremiah 3, God was giving them the threat of punishment. He's also explaining how tenderly and broken-hearted He was over their apostasy. But in doing so, He was also revealing that He had a plan that

¹ Jeremiah 3:10-16

went far beyond the destruction of Jerusalem. That's what He meant in verse 15, when He said: *One of these days, I'm going to give you shepherds after my own heart who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. I'm going to bring you to Zion.*

The expression, The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, was considered a holy statement that warded off evil powers and threats of evil. In essence the Lord was saying: *In those future days, men will no longer say the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord or remember it because there won't be one. Instead, the Lord himself will be in your midst.*

Verse 18. **“In those days the people of Judah and Israel will return together from exile in the north. They will return to the land I gave your ancestors as an inheritance forever.”**

Many scholars, preachers, students, and laymen take these verses out of context and impose a litany of interpretations on them which have nothing to do with what was being said. Unfortunately, verses like this are used today to give Israel license to do whatever it wants in the Middle East. Yes, God was promising restoration. God was promising that some from Israel and Judah would come to the place given their forefathers as an inheritance. God was decimating the land and, yet, He was going to restore the land. The question is, what time is this referring to? When were these promises to occur?

Well, if Israel—and IF is the key word here—IF the exiles had returned in the right spirit with changed hearts, their attitudes adjusted, the fulfillment of all that God predicted would have happened by the close of the 70 weeks of Daniel 9. That is clearly confirmed in the book of Ezekiel.

Importantly, we need to keep Jeremiah and its prophecies within their context of time and timing. God was saying, *“I'm going to punish you, then I'm going to restore you.”* He was not talking about a time 2,000 years hence or the restoration of Israel in 1948. These texts have nothing to do with the modern nation of Israel. Read that last sentence again. You have to grasp that. These texts have to do with the decree mentioned

in Daniel 9 only—to restore and rebuild Jerusalem long ago. This misapplication of prophecy and scripture has created insurmountable problems. If you don't believe it, watch the news for 5 minutes.

In those days, the house of Judah will join the house of Israel and together they will come from a northern land. Well where is this northern land in which they're being sent? If they come out of it, they have to go there first. They're sent into captivity in Babylon, which is in the north. And that's from where they will leave to fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy.

In Jeremiah 1:14–15, the Lord said: **“For terror from the north will boil out on the people of this land. Listen! I am calling the armies of the kingdoms of the north to come to Jerusalem.”** Let's also look at Jeremiah 16:15. **“As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the people of Israel back to their own land from the land of the north and from all the countries to which he had exiled them, I will bring them back to this land that I gave their ancestors.”**

These texts confirm that there's a local-timing context. God was saying, *“I'm going to bring armies from the north against my people.”* That's what the boiling pot tilting away from the north symbolizes.

God is inflicting disaster upon His people from the north. Then he says, *“But I'm going to change that. After the destruction, the rebuilding will begin. And at that time, Jerusalem will be called the Throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord.”*

Now, this is not unconditional; and this is where many Protestants miss the boat. God is predicting, based on His foreknowledge, what could take place if His people—those called by His name—would repent, have a change of heart, and honor Him.

Jeremiah 3:19–20. **“I thought to myself, ‘I would love to treat you as my own children! I wanted nothing more than**

to give you this beautiful land—the finest possession in the world. I looked forward to your calling me “Father,” and I wanted you never to turn from me. But you have been unfaithful to me, you people of Israel! You have been like a faithless wife who leaves her husband.’ I, the Lord, have spoken.” God said, *“I thought after being so good to you, after treating you so kindly, that you would reciprocate, but you didn’t.”*

Verse 21. **“Voices are heard high on the windswept mountains.”** This is an allusion to the fact that there is famine; there’s no food or water; the hills are bare. **“The weeping and pleading of Israel’s people. For they have chosen crooked paths and have forgotten the Lord their God. ‘My wayward children,’ says the Lord, ‘come back to me, and I will heal your wayward hearts.’**

‘Yes, we’re coming,’ the people reply, ‘for you are the Lord our God. Our worship of idols on the hills and our religious orgies on the mountains are a delusion. Only in the Lord our God will Israel ever find salvation.’”¹ God says, *“I’d love to hear you say those words.”*

Verses 24–25. **“From childhood we have watched as everything our ancestors worked for—their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters—was squandered on a delusion. Let us now lie down in shame and cover ourselves with dishonor, for we and our ancestors have sinned against the Lord our God. From our childhood to this day we have never obeyed him.”**

God is saying, *“I want to hear those words. I want you to come back to me. Come now, let us reason together. Return faithless people and I will cure your backsliding. I will turn your sorrow into joy.”*

In Jeremiah 4:1–2, God says, *“Look Israel, if you will return, if you will repent, if you will put away your detestable idolatry, I will overturn your captivity, your punishment, and I will relent*

¹ Jeremiah 3:21–23

from the discipline I have planned for you.” Remember, Jeremiah is talking and delivering this message to Israel’s leaders, most of whom are prophets of Baal.

God is speaking through Jeremiah to His people. The Lord says, beginning in verse 3, **“This is what the Lord says to the people of Judah and Jerusalem: ‘Plow up the hard ground of your hearts! Do not waste your good seed among thorns. O people of Judah and Jerusalem, surrender your pride and power. Change your hearts before the Lord, or my anger will burn like an unquenchable fire because of all your sins.’”**¹

I want to make a simple but profound point. At the time of Jeremiah, Israel was a nation who continued the practices of burnt offerings, sacrifices, circumcision, observing Passover and other feast days. Its people continued with Sabbath worship and were very careful at being religious, but their religion had become a mere ritual.

God was saying, *“I cannot stand your rebellion. Circumcise your heart. Your heart is what I’m after.”* God is explaining in Jeremiah 4, *“I’m going to tell you what’s wrong and why I am so angry.”*

Verses 5–6. **“Shout to Judah, and broadcast to Jerusalem! Tell them to sound the alarm throughout the land: ‘Run for your lives! Flee to the fortified cities! Raise a signal flag as a warning for Jerusalem: Flee now! Do not delay! For I am bringing terrible destruction upon you from the north.’”**

The specificity of direction is a critical point. You will find in the Old Testament that after Israel had settled in Jerusalem, divine judgment always came from that direction. We will also see that judgment on Babylon came from the same direction as well.

Jeremiah begins verse 7 with a description of Babylon. **“A lion stalks from its den, a destroyer of nations. It has left its lair and is headed your way. It’s going to devastate your**

¹ Jeremiah 4:3–4

land! Your towns will lie in ruins, with no one living in them anymore. So put on clothes of mourning and weep with broken hearts, for the fierce anger of the Lord is still upon us. ‘In that day,’ says the Lord, ‘the king and the officials will tremble in fear. The priests will be struck with horror, and the prophets will be appalled.’”¹ The leadership of Israel will be overwhelmed.

Verses 10–12. **“Then I said, ‘O Sovereign Lord, the people have been deceived by what you said, for you promised peace for Jerusalem. But the sword is held at their throats!’ The time is coming when the Lord will say to the people of Jerusalem, ‘My dear people, a burning wind is blowing in from the desert, and it’s not a gentle breeze useful for winnowing grain. It is a roaring blast sent by me! Now I will pronounce your destruction!’”**

Two points to bring out. In earlier verses, the Lord had said, *“Sound the trumpet. Tell the people the time is coming to run for cover. Find the cities of refuge and get there. I have released a lion from his lair and he’s coming to destroy the city and lay waste the land. The king and his officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled.”*

To this, Jeremiah was interjecting as a mockery of what the priests and prophets, the king and all of his officials, were saying, **“Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have surely allowed the people of Judah and Jerusalem to be deceived by those who say, ‘You will be safe!’ But in fact a sword is already at our throats.”**

Jeremiah’s big problem throughout his fifty-year ministry, was that the priests who serve in the temple and the prophets of Baal are the same individuals. And they are telling the people: peace and safety, which interpreted means: The Lord will not allow His city to be harmed. He will not allow the Ark of the Covenant to be taken, or His temple to be destroyed. So in verse 10, Jeremiah is ridiculing the priests and false prophets,

¹ Jeremiah 4:7–9

the officials and the king, for contradicting the Lord.

In Revelation 7, the four winds (judgments sent by the Lord) are being held back by four angels until the 144,000 are sealed. These winds are not to winnow or cleanse, they're too strong for that; they are meant to punish. And just like Israel of old, we today need to acknowledge that God's judgments are coming.

Jeremiah 4:13. **“Our enemy rushes down on us like storm clouds! His chariots are like whirlwinds. His horses are swifter than eagles. How terrible it will be, for we are doomed!”** He's talking about the advance of the Babylonian army: describing how judgment is coming on the wings of chariots and horses, and how the men are armed for battle.

Continuing with verse 14. **“O Jerusalem, cleanse your heart that you may be saved. How long will you harbor your evil thoughts? Your destruction has been announced from Dan and the hill country of Ephraim. Warn the surrounding nations and announce this to Jerusalem: “The enemy is coming from a distant land, raising a battle cry against the towns of Judah. They surround Jerusalem like watchmen around a field, for my people have rebelled against me,” says the Lord. “Your own actions have brought this upon you.”**”¹

Jeremiah was overwhelmed as he listened to God express how broken hearted He was because Israel, His own people, had treated Him so disrespectfully. In essence, God complained to Jeremiah about being rejected. It's as if the counselor is pouring His heart out to the one being counseled. Read the next few verses carefully and try and put yourself in God's shoes. Read the verses aloud so you can hear the tenderness and broken heartedness in His voice as He relates His anguish to Jeremiah.

“My heart, my heart—I writhe in pain! My heart pounds within me! I cannot be still. For I have heard the blast of enemy trumpets and the roar of their battle cries. Waves of destruction roll over the land, until it lies in complete

¹ Jeremiah 4:14–18

desolation. Suddenly my tents are destroyed; in a moment my shelters are crushed. How long must I see the battle flags and hear the trumpets of war? ‘My people are foolish and do not know me,’ says the Lord. ‘They are stupid children who have no understanding. They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no idea how to do right!’¹

Jeremiah continues revealing God’s insight. “I looked at the earth, and it was empty and formless. I looked at the heavens, and there was no light. I looked at the mountains and hills, and they trembled and shook. I looked, and all the people were gone. All the birds of the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fertile fields had become a wilderness. The towns lay in ruins, crushed by the Lord’s fierce anger.

This is what the Lord says: ‘The whole land will be ruined, but I will not destroy it completely. The earth will mourn and the heavens will be draped in black because of my decree against my people. I have made up my mind and will not change it.’

At the noise of charioteers and archers, the people flee in terror. They hide in the bushes and run for the mountains. All the towns have been abandoned—not a person remains! What are you doing, you who have been plundered? Why do you dress up in beautiful clothing and put on gold jewelry? Why do you brighten your eyes with mascara?

Your primping will do you no good! The allies who were your lovers despise you and seek to kill you. I hear a cry, like that of a woman in labor, the groans of a woman giving birth to her first child. It is beautiful Jerusalem gasping for breath and crying out, ‘Help! I’m being murdered!’²

This is a lengthy testimony of God talking to Jeremiah, giving His perspective of how He feels about what He must do. He goes to great lengths to describe how it will be when Nebuchadnezzar finishes plundering the city. The whole land will

1 Jeremiah 4:19–22

2 Jeremiah 4:23–31

lie in ruin, though He promises not to destroy it completely. It's easy to see that God's heart was broken.

In Jeremiah 5:1, God begins to justify why He must do what He's about to do. He says, **“‘Run up and down every street in Jerusalem,’ says the Lord. ‘Look high and low; search throughout the city! If you can find even one just and honest person, I will not destroy the city.’”**

Jeremiah is from Anathoth, a city about three miles south of Jerusalem. He is an outsider. He's not from Jerusalem. He's not a citizen of Jerusalem. So God says to him, “Go up and down the streets, and find just one honest person, anyone with integrity. If you can find one, I will forgive the city.” Today, Jeremiah would have the same difficulty in Washington DC. And to prove my point, look at verse 2. **“But even when they are under oath, saying, ‘As surely as the Lord lives,’ they are still telling lies!”** Israel and Washington have the same problem.

Verses 3–5. **“Lord, you are searching for honesty. You struck your people, but they paid no attention. You crushed them, but they refused to be corrected. They are determined, with faces set like stone; they have refused to repent. Then I said, ‘But what can we expect from the poor? They are ignorant. They don't know the ways of the Lord. They don't understand God's laws. So I will go and speak to their leaders. Surely they know the ways of the Lord and understand God's laws.’ But the leaders, too, as one man, had thrown off God's yoke and broken his chains.”**

As the people go, so go the leaders. And where the leaders go, the people follow.

God continues in Jeremiah 5:6–7. **“So now a lion from the forest will attack them; a wolf from the desert will pounce on them. A leopard will lurk near their towns, tearing apart any who dare to venture out. For their rebellion is great, and their sins are many. ‘How can I pardon you? For even your children have turned from me. They have sworn by gods that are not gods at all! I fed my people until they were full.**

But they thanked me by committing adultery and lining up at the brothels.’”

In America today, God has supplied so much and yet we continue to commit adultery. We have forgotten God. We have made our god to be money. We have made idols of material objects that we endlessly pursue. We are consumed with the accumulation of more wealth.

God says, “Why should I forgive Israel? I supplied all their needs, and yet look what they did. They abandoned me. Should I not punish them? Should I not avenge myself on such a nation?” Hasn’t America done the same? Would it not be justified were God to avenge himself on America for the same reason?

CHAPTER 2



Last Battle In Megiddo

To make sense of and appreciate what takes place in the book of Jeremiah, we will jump around a bit to follow the story in chronological order. We need to approach it this way because, with God, timing is everything. Knowing where and when the words are spoken, and to whom and under what circumstances, really makes the Bible come alive. If the simple questions of who, what, when, where, and why are not addressed, the Bible can be manipulated to appear as though it says things it doesn't mean. That's why the chronology of Jeremiah is so important.

In 627 BC, when Jeremiah began his ministry, King Josiah was the ruling authority in Jerusalem. This was around 22 years before the Babylonian captivity. In 609 BC, Pharaoh Necho 2 of Egypt (sometimes spelled Neco) killed King Josiah. Necho was attempting to put the Babylonians in their place when Josiah, in stupefying arrogance, disobeyed the Lord and was killed in the battle of Megiddo.

This is an important parallel because the book of Revelation

speaks of a great battle called Armageddon. That word is derived from the two Greek words *Har* and *Magedon* meaning *the Mount of Megiddo*. Megiddo is known as the great battlefield of kings. Evidently, a large number of battles were fought there. The concept in Revelation 19 is that when Jesus comes, the beast and the kings of the earth wage war against Him. I can visualize Jesus riding a white horse with His army following, then colliding with Satan to do battle on this battlefield.

The parallel with Jeremiah is that King Josiah met Pharaoh Necho at this battlefield and Josiah was defeated. When Jesus comes, the kings of the earth meet on a vast battlefield like Megiddo. But, Revelation isn't referring to a small geographical site. The illustration in Revelation 19 is pointing out that God brings the kings of the earth together to do battle against Him. These kings are those living in every quadrant of the world. And all though they're thousands of miles apart, all will be unified in their effort to destroy Jesus at His appearing. So keep in mind that the book of Jeremiah is particularly important in understanding the book of Revelation.

Remember that Josiah is killed in 609 BC which is just four years prior to Babylonian captivity. So Jeremiah's message is becoming more direct and focused as we get closer to the destruction of Jerusalem. God had told Israel, time and again through Jeremiah, that He was going to bring judgments upon the city, the temple, and the people because they had abandoned Him. That was the point being made in Jeremiah 5:1.

In Jeremiah 5:9, we read that God has a vengeance; He has a broken heart; He's been abandoned. And so He says, "*Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and worship things that are not gods.*" This is where we begin reading, "**'Should I not punish them for this?' says the Lord. 'Should I not avenge myself against such a nation? Go down the rows of the vineyards and destroy the grapevines, leaving a scattered few alive. Strip the branches from the vines, for these people do not belong to the Lord. The people of Israel**

and Judah are full of treachery against me,' says the Lord."¹

God is giving the Babylonians permission to go through His vineyard and ravage it. **"They have lied about the Lord and said, 'He won't bother us! No disasters will come upon us. There will be no war or famine. God's prophets are all windbags who don't really speak for him. Let their predictions of disaster fall on themselves!'"**²

Jeremiah was presenting a view of God's wrath that was contrary to the popular opinions of false prophets who were preaching peace and safety. Disturbingly, Jeremiah shows up and begins preaching utter destruction. The false prophets have led the people into a deplorable view of God. They believed that God would do nothing; that He would send no harm to them; that He is a God of mercy and love, and they would never see sword or famine; that He was not opposed to their worship of false gods. I'm describing a time in which there were no absolutes. The parallel with today is astounding.

Another parallel is found in Revelation 11:5. The Bible says, *"If anyone tries to harm the Two Witnesses, fire comes out of their mouths and devours their assailants."* Many people believe the Two Witnesses are two human beings like Moses and Elijah. I don't believe that. The allusion in Revelation 11:5 is taken from Jeremiah 5:14 where the Lord said to Jeremiah, **"Because the people are talking like this, my messages will flame out of your mouth and burn the people like kindling wood."**

God was giving power to Jeremiah's testimony. He had already told Jeremiah, *"I'm going to give you the authority to tear down, destroy, overthrow, plant, and rebuild."* The words that Jeremiah speaks are not his own, they're God's. There is power in God's words.

God says in Jeremiah 5, **" 'O Israel, I will bring a distant nation against you,' says the Lord. 'It is a mighty nation, an ancient nation, a people whose language you do not know,**

1 Jeremiah 5:9-11

2 Jeremiah 5:12-13

whose speech you cannot understand. They will devour the food of your harvest; they will devour your sons and daughters. They will devour your flocks and herds; they will devour your grapes and figs. And they will destroy your fortified towns, which you think are so safe. Yet even in those days I will not blot you out completely,' says the Lord. 'And when your people ask, "Why did the Lord our God do all this to us?" you must reply, "You rejected him and gave yourselves to foreign gods in your own land. Now you will serve foreigners in a land that is not your own."'"¹

God is giving due warning, clear evidence of what He intends to do. He is doing everything possible to get the attention of His people—but tragically they won't listen.

In verse 22, He says: **"Have you no respect for me? Why don't you tremble in my presence? I, the Lord, define the ocean's sandy shoreline as an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross. The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the boundaries I set. But my people have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned away and abandoned me. They do not say from the heart, 'Let us live in awe of the Lord our God, for he gives us rain each spring and fall, assuring us of a harvest when the time is right.' Your wickedness has deprived you of these wonderful blessings. Your sin has robbed you of all these good things."**²

For Israel, there was a direct correlation between sin and the weather, between sin and the harvest, between sin and the nation's prosperity. God said, *"You don't understand who sends the autumn and spring rains. You don't understand who assures that the regular weeks of harvest come. Your wrongdoing has kept these away. Your sins have deprived you of the good I want for you."*

Jeremiah 5:26–27. **"Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait for victims like a hunter hiding in a blind.**

¹ Jeremiah 5:15–19

² Jeremiah 5:22–25

They continually set traps to catch people. Like a cage filled with birds, their homes are filled with evil plots. And now they are great and rich.”

Here’s an interesting parallel that takes us again to the book of Revelation. **“Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen! She has become a home for demons. She is a hideout for every foul spirit, a hideout for every foul vulture and every foul and dreadful animal.”**¹ John is describing a cage—a dwelling place.

Jeremiah 51:37 says, **“Babylon will become a heap of ruins, haunted by jackals. She will be an object of horror and contempt, a place where no one lives.”** Even though God was going to use Babylon to inflict damage upon Jerusalem, He would also inflict damage and destruction upon Babylon. The Bible predicts through Jeremiah that Babylon would become a heap of ruins and a haunt of jackals.

God was telling Jeremiah that there were wicked men among His people who trap and ensnare others into wickedness and wrongdoing. They resemble cages full of birds, their houses full of deceit; they’ve become rich and powerful. When some people become rich and powerful, they begin to assume prerogatives that belong to God. They begin to consider themselves as almighty, not subject to the authority of God or His laws. They begin to do horrible and detestable things.

Jesus speaking to Jeremiah says, *“Their evil deeds have no limit. They do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it. They do not defend the rights of the poor. Why should they? Who’s going to pay them? There’s no billion-dollar settlement. Why should I concern myself with something that is not financially lucrative? Let’s take on the tobacco industry instead. Let’s take on those industries where we can sue and make a lot of money. After all, they work only for the dollar, not in the service of God or man.”*

Jeremiah 5:28–31. **“They are fat and sleek, and there is no**

¹ Revelation 18:2

limit to their wicked deeds. They refuse to provide justice to orphans and deny the rights of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?’ says the Lord. ‘Should I not avenge myself against such a nation? A horrible and shocking thing has happened in this land—the prophets give false prophecies, and the priests rule with an iron hand. Worse yet, my people like it that way! But what will you do when the end comes?’”

Jeremiah 6 issues a warning for a time just before the Babylonian captivity, which happens to be about seven years before the attack by Nebuchadnezzar who is still an unknown name. His father Nabopolassar, was conducting the military campaigns defending the interests of Babylon. The young Nebuchadnezzar would become known only after the battle of Carchemish when Egypt was defeated. Afterward, Babylon ruled the known world.

God says to His people through Jeremiah. “**Run for your lives, you people of Benjamin! Get out of Jerusalem! Sound the alarm in Tekoa! Send up a signal at Beth-hakkerem! A powerful army is coming from the north, coming with disaster and destruction. O Jerusalem, you are my beautiful and delicate daughter—but I will destroy you! Enemies will surround you, like shepherds camped around the city. Each chooses a place for his troops to devour.**

They shout, “Prepare for battle! Attack at noon!”

“No, it’s too late; the day is fading, and the evening shadows are falling.”

“Well then, let’s attack at night and destroy her palaces!”

This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: ‘Cut down the trees for battering rams. Build siege ramps against the walls of Jerusalem. This is the city to be punished, for she is wicked through and through.’”¹

How does one give a message of warning and expect much to change when no one is listening?

¹ Jeremiah 6:1–6

Verse 10. “**To whom can I give warning? Who will listen when I speak? Their ears are closed, and they cannot hear. They scorn the word of the Lord. They don’t want to listen at all. So now I am filled with the Lord’s fury. Yes, I am tired of holding it in! I will pour out my fury on children playing in the streets and on gatherings of young men, on husbands and wives and on those who are old and gray. Their homes will be turned over to their enemies, as will their fields and their wives. For I will raise my powerful fist against the people of this land,’ says the Lord. ‘From the least to the greatest, their lives are ruled by greed. From prophets to priests, they are all frauds. They offer superficial treatments for my people’s mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their disgusting actions? Not at all—they don’t even know how to blush!’**”¹

Doesn’t that sound like social media today? There is no shame. That’s why they can’t blush.

“**‘Therefore, they will lie among the slaughtered. They will be brought down when I punish them,’ says the Lord. This is what the Lord says: ‘Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, “No, that’s not the road we want!” I posted watchmen over you who said, “Listen for the sound of the alarm.” But you replied, “No! We won’t pay attention!” Therefore, listen to this, all you nations. Take note of my people’s situation. Listen, all the earth! I will bring disaster on my people. It is the fruit of their own schemes, because they refuse to listen to me. They have rejected my word. There’s no use offering me sweet frankincense from Sheba. Keep your fragrant calamus imported from distant lands! I will not accept your burnt offerings. Your sacrifices have no pleasing aroma for me.’**

Therefore, this is what the Lord says: ‘I will put obstacles in my people’s path. Fathers and sons will both fall over

¹ Jeremiah 6:10–15

them. Neighbors and friends will die together.’

This is what the Lord says: ‘Look! A great army coming from the north! A great nation is rising against you from far-off lands. They are armed with bows and spears. They are cruel and show no mercy. They sound like a roaring sea as they ride forward on horses. They are coming in battle formation, planning to destroy you, beautiful Jerusalem.’ We have heard reports about the enemy, and we wring our hands in fright. Pangs of anguish have gripped us, like those of a woman in labor.”¹

Verse 26. “Oh, my people, dress yourselves in burlap and sit among the ashes. Mourn and weep bitterly, as for the loss of an only son. For suddenly the destroying armies will be upon you!”

How do you tell a people inebriated with sexual immorality, greed, materialism, and selfish pursuits to change their ways? What would they change into? Look what they’ve become. How could they be something they aren’t? Every day we’re becoming more of what we are becoming. Every day our life energy and focus form our character. We are conforming and coming closer to the will of God, or separating ourselves from His presence. Reflect on what this means in your life.

Continuing Jeremiah’s story in chronological order, let’s skip to Jeremiah 14. We are visiting chapters 14, 15, and 16 in the time of King Josiah’s reign, which ended in 609 BC.

Jeremiah 14:1 introduces an important event—a famine! **“This message came to Jeremiah from the Lord, explaining why he was holding back the rain.”** God withheld the rain as a sign to His people that He was displeased with them and that the testimony of Jeremiah was valid. Some 200 years earlier, in the days of Ahab, God withheld the rain for three and a half years. This was when Elijah and the prophets of Baal had the *showdown* on Mount Carmel.

¹ Jeremiah 6:15–24

The reason I mention it is because during the 1260 days of the two witnesses, it doesn't rain. This produces drought which produces famine. And just as there were drought and famine in the days of Jeremiah, there also will be in the days of the two witnesses.

If people understood what God is preparing to do, if people would hear and listen and believe what the Bible says, there would be a great change in the behavior of people. But pastors, preachers, and priests won't believe what Revelation's story actually predicts. This is Jeremiah's dilemma.

“Judah wilts; commerce at the city gates grinds to a halt. All the people sit on the ground in mourning, and a great cry rises from Jerusalem. The nobles send servants to get water, but all the wells are dry. The servants return with empty pitchers, confused and desperate, covering their heads in grief. The ground is parched and cracked for lack of rain. The farmers are deeply troubled; they, too, cover their heads. Even the doe abandons her newborn fawn because there is no grass in the field. The wild donkeys stand on the bare hills panting like thirsty jackals. They strain their eyes looking for grass, but there is none to be found.

The people say, ‘Our wickedness has caught up with us, Lord, but help us for the sake of your own reputation. We have turned away from you and sinned against you again and again. O Hope of Israel, our Savior in times of trouble, why are you like a stranger to us? Why are you like a traveler passing through the land, stopping only for the night? Are you also confused? Is our champion helpless to save us? You are right here among us, Lord. We are known as your people. Please don't abandon us now!’”¹

Notice how the Lord responds to their pleas in verse 10. **“So this is what the Lord says to his people: ‘You love to wander far from me and do not restrain yourselves. Therefore, I will no longer accept you as my people. Now I will remember all**

¹ Jeremiah 14:2–9

your wickedness and will punish you for your sins.’”

Closely follow what is said next. **“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Do not pray for these people anymore. When they fast, I will pay no attention. When they present their burnt offerings and grain offerings to me, I will not accept them. Instead, I will devour them with war, famine, and disease.’”**¹

The Lord said, *“Have no pity. Do not even pray for the well-being of these people. They will not recover. I don’t care if they fast. I don’t care if they cry. I don’t care what they do, they’ve gone too far and I’m done. All they have to look forward to now is being destroyed with sword, famine, and plague. When my judgments come, it’s too late. Justice demands it. My justice will not be turned away. I will remember their wickedness and they’re going to pay for it. Don’t pray for them Jeremiah. Yes, they’re going to weep and wail and gnash their teeth. They’re going to cry. They’re going to make all kinds of statements of repentance, but pay no mind. Today is the day of salvation, not tomorrow.”*

I’m sure, when the rain began to fall in Noah’s day, if the Lord had wanted to save all those outside the ark, He merely needed to open the door. We are saved by faith or not at all.

I want you to understand, there was a good reason why the people in Jeremiah’s day were faithless. That reason is summed up in verse 13. **“Then I said, ‘O Sovereign Lord, their prophets are telling them, “All is well—no war or famine will come. The Lord will surely send you peace.”’”**

And the Lord replied, **“These prophets are telling lies in my name. I did not send them or tell them to speak. I did not give them any messages. They prophesy of visions and revelations they have never seen or heard. They speak foolishness made up in their own lying hearts. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I will punish these lying prophets, for they have spoken in my name even though I never sent them. They say that no war or famine will come, but they themselves will die by war and famine! As for the people to**

¹ Jeremiah 14:11–12

whom they prophesy—their bodies will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and war. There will be no one left to bury them. Husbands, wives, sons, and daughters—all will be gone. For I will pour out their own wickedness on them.”¹

God lays the blame on the prophets, the clergy, the priests—those who claim to speak for Him. He says to Jeremiah, “*When I begin to do what I have to do—stand back! Those leaders are going to perish. And tragically, the people who believed them will too. The destruction will be so complete that no one will be left to bury the dead.*”

This is sobering. In the end, God will make sure everyone gets what is deserved. There is no escaping that inevitable day. There will be a payday, someday. And God lays the charge for lack of knowledge on the ministry.

I take it very seriously when people say, “The Lord said to me,” or “The Lord impressed me.” I say, “Wait a minute. Are you speaking for the Lord or are you speaking out of delusion conjured from your own mind? Are you speaking for the Lord or are you speaking out of a dream you’ve made up? Maybe you had a dream and thought it came from the Lord.” When God speaks, He means what He says. He is not trivial.

God goes on to tell Jeremiah, “*I’m going to do what I have to do. And when I do, it’s going to break my heart.*”

Verse 17. “Night and day my eyes overflow with tears. I cannot stop weeping, for my virgin daughter—my precious people—has been struck down and lies mortally wounded. If I go out into the fields, I see the bodies of people slaughtered by the enemy. If I walk the city streets, I see people who have died of starvation. The prophets and priests continue with their work, but they don’t know what they’re doing.”²

You can hear the Lord’s anguish in having to do what He must. Jeremiah’s prayer is actually Daniel’s prayer of Daniel 9.

¹ Jeremiah 14:14–16

² Jeremiah 14:17–18

“Lord, have you completely rejected Judah? Do you really hate Jerusalem? Why have you wounded us past all hope of healing? We hoped for peace, but no peace came. We hoped for a time of healing, but found only terror. Lord, we confess our wickedness and that of our ancestors, too. We all have sinned against you. For the sake of your reputation, Lord, do not abandon us. Do not disgrace your own glorious throne. Please remember us, and do not break your covenant with us. Can any of the worthless foreign gods send us rain? Does it fall from the sky by itself? No, you are the one, O Lord our God! Only you can do such things. So we will wait for you to help us.”¹

Some of the words Daniel utters are from Jeremiah 15. Jeremiah then continues his petition.

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Even if Moses and Samuel stood before me pleading for these people, I wouldn’t help them. Away with them! Get them out of my sight! And if they say to you, “But where can we go?” tell them, “This is what the Lord says: “Those who are destined for death, to death; those who are destined for war, to war; those who are destined for famine, to famine; those who are destined for captivity, to captivity.”’ ”²

These words are repeated almost verbatim in Revelation 13:10. The parallel between Jeremiah and Revelation is striking.

God looked down upon the houses of Judah and Israel and was sick over what He saw. Today, He looks upon the world and, corporately speaking, is sick with our sinfulness.

Jeremiah 15:3, “I will send four kinds of destroyers against them,’ says the Lord. ‘I will send the sword to kill, the dogs to drag away, the vultures to devour, and the wild animals to finish up what is left. Because of the wicked things Manasseh son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem, I will make my people an object of horror to all

¹ Jeremiah 14:19–22

² Jeremiah 15:1–2

the kingdoms of the earth.’”¹

The four deadly judgments God uses to destroy are sword, famine, plague, and wild beast. God is going to send these against Jerusalem.

He told Ezekiel, **“Now this is what the Sovereign Lord says: How terrible it will be when all four of these dreadful punishments fall upon Jerusalem—war, famine, wild animals, and disease—destroying all her people and animals.”**²

Remember that Ezekiel and Jeremiah are contemporaries. I bring this up because the opening of the fourth seal in Revelation 6 is the slaughter of twenty-five percent of the earth’s population, using these same four judgments. We saw them in Jeremiah’s day being implemented upon Jerusalem—God’s own people. The obvious question is, if God did this to His own, why not the rest of the world?

God is saying, *“I’ve measured your cup of sin and it’s full.”* This cup began filling up about 50 years earlier when Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, was king of Judah. The discussion in Jeremiah 15 happens around 609 BC, four years prior to the Babylonian assault. It is the last testimony given while King Josiah is alive.

“‘Who will feel sorry for you, Jerusalem? Who will weep for you? Who will even bother to ask how you are? You have abandoned me and turned your back on me,’ says the Lord. ‘Therefore, I will raise my fist to destroy you. I am tired of always giving you another chance. I will winnow you like grain at the gates of your cities and take away the children you hold dear. I will destroy my own people, because they refuse to change their evil ways. There will be more widows than the grains of sand on the seashore. At noontime I will bring a destroyer against the mothers of young men. I will cause anguish and terror to come upon them suddenly.’”³

That last verse reminds me of 1 Thessalonians 5, **“For you**

1 Jeremiah 15:3–4

2 Ezekiel 14:21

3 Jeremiah 15: 5–8

know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, 'Everything is peaceful and secure,' then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape."¹ Sudden destruction comes when least expected.

God is saying through Jeremiah, "*If you will repent, I will restore you.*" He is explaining through Jeremiah what He intends to do for the nation of Judah. Israel has already been destroyed, and now the Lord is preparing to destroy Judah. He will do so by sending Nebuchadnezzar out of the north to destroy.

As Jeremiah contemplates the severity of what God is about to do, he looks at his homeland, his countrymen, and the city of Jerusalem. And then he reflects on his own life—why he was born and why he lives at this particular time—saying to the Lord in verse 10: **"What sorrow is mine, my mother. Oh, that I had died at birth! I am hated everywhere I go. I am neither a lender who threatens to foreclose nor a borrower who refuses to pay—yet they all curse me."**

Jeremiah is the prophet of gloom and doom. Every time someone sees him they think, "Oh dear, what does he have to say now? All we ever hear from him is negative. He needs to 'lighten up.'"

The Lord said to Jeremiah in verse 11, **"I will take care of you, Jeremiah. Your enemies will ask you to plead on their behalf in times of trouble and distress."**

He's saying, "*Hang in there Jeremiah.*"

Verse 12. **"Can a man break a bar of iron from the north, or a bar of bronze? At no cost to them, I will hand over your wealth and treasures as plunder to your enemies, for sin runs rampant in your land. I will tell your enemies to take you as captives to a foreign land. For my anger blazes like a fire that will burn forever."**²

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3

² Jeremiah 15:12-14

In reply, Jeremiah says, **“Lord, you know what’s happening to me. Please step in and help me. Punish my persecutors! Please give me time; don’t let me die young. It’s for your sake that I am suffering. When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God of Heaven’s Armies. I never joined the people in their merry feasts. I sat alone because your hand was on me. I was filled with indignation at their sins. Why then does my suffering continue? Why is my wound so incurable? Your help seems as uncertain as a seasonal brook, like a spring that has gone dry.”**¹

The Lord responds, **“If you return to me, I will restore you so you can continue to serve me. If you speak good words rather than worthless ones, you will be my spokesman. You must influence them; do not let them influence you! They will fight against you like an attacking army, but I will make you as secure as a fortified wall of bronze. They will not conquer you, for I am with you to protect and rescue you. I, the Lord, have spoken! Yes, I will certainly keep you safe from these wicked men. I will rescue you from their cruel hands.”**²

The Lord is encouraging Jeremiah not to give up or give in.

In Revelation 10, John was told to take the little book and eat it, it was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. This is Jeremiah’s experience regarding the message he was instructed to give. Ezekiel had the same experience with his message.

The Lord gave these men a task they really didn’t want to do. They treasured the Lord’s words, but knew delivering them to a people who didn’t want to hear them would be a bitter experience. It was grinding and grievous to bear the reproach; the scorn and heartache that came with presenting it must have been unbearable.

Nothing militates against the carnal nature more than rebuke and correction. This is why today, as well as in Israel’s

1 Jeremiah 15:15–18

2 Jeremiah 15:19–21

day, preachers tend to praise rather than rebuke. But praise enables the slippery slope of sin to creep up when we aren't looking because the Devil is the master of gradualism. That's why succeeding generations are more degenerate. We can't stand against the tide of our carnal nature for very long. Jeremiah 17:9 confirms that **"The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"**

Jeremiah 16 is the last chapter written during King Josiah's life around 609 BC. At this time, Jeremiah was in his mid-40s, and Daniel and Ezekiel were just kids.

In beginning chapter 16, Jeremiah says, **"The Lord gave me another message. He said, 'Do not get married or have children in this place. [You are not to have a wife.] For this is what the Lord says about the children born here in this city and about their mothers and fathers: They will die from terrible diseases. No one will mourn for them or bury them, and they will lie scattered on the ground like manure. They will die from war and famine, and their bodies will be food for the vultures and wild animals.'"**¹

We have sword, famine, plague, and wild beast. The same are referenced in Revelation 11 and 19. And in verse 5, the Lord says to Jeremiah, **"Do not go to funerals to mourn and show sympathy for these people, for I have removed my protection and peace from them. I have taken away my unfailing love and my mercy."** *"It's over Jeremiah."*

"Both the great and the lowly will die in this land. No one will bury them or mourn for them. Their friends will not cut themselves in sorrow or shave their heads in sadness. No one will offer a meal to comfort those who mourn for the dead—not even at the death of a mother or father. No one will send a cup of wine to console them. And do not go to their feasts and parties. Do not eat and drink with them at all. For this is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God

¹ Jeremiah 16:1-4

of Israel, says: In your own lifetime, before your very eyes, I will put an end to the happy singing and laughter in this land. The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will no longer be heard. When you tell the people all these things, they will ask, ‘Why has the Lord decreed such terrible things against us? What have we done to deserve such treatment? What is our sin against the Lord our God?’ Then you will give them the Lord’s reply: ‘It is because your ancestors were unfaithful to me. They worshiped other gods and served them. They abandoned me and did not obey my word.’”¹

And of course, the offspring can do no better. How can children live up to a higher standard than their parents when they’re not informed as to what the higher standard is? How can children do better than their parents, when they’re not taught to do better? The slippery slope of degeneration comes in each generation.

Verse 12. “[Jeremiah, tell them] **You are even worse than your ancestors! You stubbornly follow your own evil desires and refuse to listen to me. So I will throw you out of this land and send you into a foreign land where you and your ancestors have never been. There you can worship idols day and night—and I will grant you no favors!**”²

We live in a time with numerous systems in place. Health care would be one, and education would be another. There are others, but you get the idea. Let’s talk about these systems for a moment. It may help us better understand what was taking place in Jeremiah’s day. In a system like health care, the objective is to care for the sick, suffering, and dying—is it not? Or is the objective of healthcare, prosperity for those who provide it? Somewhere along the way, the motive switched from *giving* care to *getting* money.

In God’s perfect way, the objective of healthcare is caring for people, not making money. Now don’t misunderstand. Yes,

1 Jeremiah 16:6–11

2 Jeremiah 16:12–13

the need to make money is paramount to the longevity of every business. But today, healthcare has morphed into a system that has very little compassion. Hospitals today seem to have lost their focus and, instead, have become places of apprehension, not healing.

In Jeremiah's day, there were a number of systems in place of which the sacrificial system was just one. And like today, that system morphed from what it was intended to be into its opposite—namely money getting.

The Lord spoke, *“Listen Jeremiah, as bad as it's going to be, this is not the end of my plans for my people. I'm going to give my people one more chance. Listen carefully to what I'm about to say. I want you to tell the people”*: **“‘But the time is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when people who are taking an oath will no longer say, “As surely as the Lord lives, who rescued the people of Israel from the land of Egypt.” Instead, they will say, “As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the people of Israel back to their own land from the land of the north and from all the countries to which he had exiled them.” For I will bring them back to this land that I gave their ancestors.’”**¹

God is emphasizing that He was going to clear the land and have that generation die as He did their forefathers in the wilderness. But He would keep a remnant as a new generation, and they would return to the Promised Land. That was His promise.

Verses 16–17. **“‘But now I am sending for many fishermen who will catch them,’ says the Lord. ‘I am sending for hunters who will hunt them down in the mountains, hills, and caves. I am watching them closely, and I see every sin. They cannot hope to hide from me.’”** This statement is profound. God's eyes see everything we do.

Verse 18. **“I will double their punishment for all their sins, because they have defiled my land with lifeless images of their detestable gods and have filled my territory with**

¹ Jeremiah 16:14–15

their evil deeds.”

God said in Leviticus 26, *“The land is my land. You’re just tenants here. You may possess and use the land as long as you want if you obey, love, and follow me.”* But they didn’t. They broke the covenant and God destroyed them. He demonstrated His judicial equilibrium. Restitution is required for wrongdoing.

This takes us to the end of King Josiah’s reign. Jeremiah 17 begins with King Jehoiakim who ruled from 609–598 BC, a period of about eleven years. It is during this time that Nebuchadnezzar takes the nobility of Jerusalem to Babylon. Daniel is in the first group.

In Jeremiah 17:1, God tells Jeremiah, **“The sin of Judah is inscribed with an iron chisel—engraved with a diamond point on their stony hearts and on the corners of their altars.”** The horns of the altar are where the blood from sacrifices was applied. The reference is to the transference of sin away from the sinner so the record of sin remained on the horns. The Lord is alluding to this by saying, *“Look, Judah’s sin can’t be washed away. The sanctuary can’t be cleansed. There is no atonement for what they’ve done. Their sins are engraved with an iron tool on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of the altar and cannot be removed.”* We have to understand the language to appreciate what He’s saying.

Verse 2. **“Even their children go to worship at their pagan altars and Asherah poles, beneath every green tree and on every high hill. So I will hand over my holy mountain—along with all your wealth and treasures and your pagan shrines—as plunder to your enemies, for sin runs rampant in your land.”**¹ I have already stated that a mountain was considered the dwelling place of God.

In Deuteronomy 12, He told Moses: **“These are the decrees and regulations you must be careful to obey when you live in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving**

¹ Jeremiah 17:2–3

you. You must obey them as long as you live. When you drive out the nations that live there, you must destroy all the places where they worship their gods—high on the mountains, up on the hills, and under every green tree. Break down their altars and smash their sacred pillars. Burn their Asherah poles and cut down their carved idols. Completely erase the names of their gods! Do not worship the Lord your God in the way these pagan peoples worship their gods. Rather, you must seek the Lord your God at the place of worship he himself will choose from among all the tribes—the place where his name will be honored. There you will bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, your sacred offerings, your offerings to fulfill a vow, your voluntary offerings, and your offerings of the firstborn animals of your herds and flocks. There you and your families will feast in the presence of the Lord your God, and you will rejoice in all you have accomplished because the Lord your God has blessed you.”¹

Today, it seems everyone does as they see fit. In Deuteronomy 12, Moses made it clear that God had chosen the place of worship. God established His place and that unique spot is where Israel was to worship God. There was nowhere else.

This explains why so many Christians today anticipate the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. But the temple in Jerusalem will never be rebuilt. When Jerusalem was destroyed the second time (AD 70), the Romans forbid Jews from inhabiting Jerusalem. Eventually, Jerusalem became dominated by Muslims who built the Dome of the Rock over the site. God had this done to signify that the Jews would never again possess the location initially appointed as the site of His temple.

Let's return now to the time of King Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar, and Jerusalem's destruction. Jerusalem was destroyed in 605 BC, 598 BC, and 586 BC. Jeremiah 17 takes place a few years before the first destruction. So the Lord is telling Jeremiah in verse 3, "*Mount Zion is my mountain and the place*

¹ Deuteronomy 12:1-7

where I have put my temple. Regrettably, I'm going to give it away as plunder.”

The place God put His temple has an interesting history. In the earliest days, Jerusalem was a city called Jebus. Its citizens were known as Jebusites. Jebus was in the province of Salem where Melchizedek was the high priest and king to whom Abraham gave tithes and offerings. King David conquered the city and changed its name to Jerusalem—the city of peace.

Years later, as Jacob was escaping from Esau to the household of Laban, he arrived at a place on top of Mount Moriah where he lay his head on a rock. In a dream, a ladder came down from heaven and touched the ground. This is the site where Abraham had earlier offered Isaac as a sacrifice and where the threshing floor of Araunah rested during David's reign. The Lord chose this particular spot to put the temple, His place of worship.

Jeremiah 17:4. **“The wonderful possession I have reserved for you will slip from your hands. I will tell your enemies to take you as captives to a foreign land. For my anger blazes like a fire that will burn forever.”** This is an interesting text. Do the words, *burn forever*, mean that God's anger against this generation will never subside? Does it mean that His anger against His people will never come to an end? No. It means that God's anger will burn until justice has been satisfied. Then, He will restore His people.

Verse 5. **“This is what the Lord says: ‘Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the Lord.’”** If you think you're a success because you're clever and shrewd, guess what? Cursed is the one who trusts in himself, the one who depends on man for strength.

Verse 6. **“They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land. But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and**

confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.”¹

This is such a consoling and comforting verse. What a wonderful testimony to those connected to Jesus. People connected to *living water* do not fear the heat. Individuals like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can take the heat. They bear good fruit. They don't worry during a time of drought for they know the Lord will provide.

Verse 9. **“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?”** What a powerful statement. The Lord is relaying to Jeremiah, *“I understand the human race. I understand the effects of sin. I understand how selfish, self-centered, and deceitful the human heart is. The human heart can justify anything it wants. I know mankind’s heart.”*

Verse 10. **“But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve.”** We may not see the reward in this life or justice applied. But remember, the story is not over. God gave us the book of Revelation so we can know how the story ends; how judicial equilibrium is ultimately imposed; how everyone's checkbook is balanced. God wants us to understand that this life is simply a preparation for eternity.

Verse 11. **“Like a partridge that hatches eggs she has not laid, so are those who get their wealth by unjust means. At midlife they will lose their riches; in the end, they will become poor old fools.”** God cautions us to be careful and thoughtful in all our dealings.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to emphasize the sacredness of the Sabbath. Beginning in Jeremiah 17:19, the Lord said to Jeremiah:

¹ Jeremiah 17:6-8

“Go and stand in the gates of Jerusalem, first in the gate where the king goes in and out, and then in each of the other gates. Say to all the people, ‘Listen to this message from the Lord, you kings of Judah and all you people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem. This is what the Lord says: Listen to my warning! Stop carrying on your trade at Jerusalem’s gates on the Sabbath day. Do not do your work on the Sabbath, but make it a holy day. I gave this command to your ancestors, but they did not listen or obey. They stubbornly refused to pay attention or accept my discipline.

But if you obey me, says the Lord, and do not carry on your trade at the gates or work on the Sabbath day, and if you keep it holy, then kings and their officials will go in and out of these gates forever. There will always be a descendant of David sitting on the throne here in Jerusalem. Kings and their officials will always ride in and out among the people of Judah in chariots and on horses, and this city will remain forever. And from all around Jerusalem, from the towns of Judah and Benjamin, from the western foothills and the hill country and the Negev, the people will come with their burnt offerings and sacrifices. They will bring their grain offerings, frankincense, and thanksgiving offerings to the Lord’s Temple.

But if you do not listen to me and refuse to keep the Sabbath holy, and if on the Sabbath day you bring loads of merchandise through the gates of Jerusalem just as on other days, then I will set fire to these gates. The fire will spread to the palaces, and no one will be able to put out the roaring flames.’”¹

One of the hallmarks of apostasy throughout Israel’s history was that Israel forgot God’s seventh-day Sabbath. The observance of the exalted day of rest God had made was trashed. New theology came along and made the commandments of God less important. In Nehemiah 13, we find that after the

¹ Jeremiah 17:19–27

70 years of Babylonian captivity, Israel began violating the Sabbath again.

The Sabbath becomes a reflection of what our relationship with the Lord really is. The more clearly we understand and practice entering into God's rest each week—obeying and depending upon Him for our financial security—is the true and proper way to success.

Utilizing God's Sabbath for selfish purposes is a violation of what it is about. After Babylonian captivity, the Pharisees, one of the leading religious groups in Israel, took this so literally that they missed the entire purpose of observing the Sabbath. When the man who was healed by the pool of Bethesda was caught carrying his mat on that sacred day, they ridiculed him instead of being moved by the miracle.

God wasn't saying, "Don't carrying your bed roll." He was talking about conducting business: buying and selling. The merchants came to the city to trade so Jeremiah stood at the gate and said, "Be careful. Do not carry a load through these gates, or out of your houses, or do any work on the Sabbath. Instead, keep the Sabbath day holy."

Israel had an opportunity to avert the coming calamity, to escape the destruction God intended for them. God tried so hard to induce His people to change their ways. But history shows that it is impossible for a degenerate generation to improve their bad behavior significantly. Sin is a one-way street to destruction.

CHAPTER 3



Sabbath's Significance

Jeremiah 17 occurred around 609 BC. It concludes with the Lord telling Jeremiah to stand at the gates of Jerusalem and warn the people “not to work” as they went in and out of the city on the Sabbath.

As Israel drifted farther from the Lord, the significance of the Sabbath diminished. We will soon see that God uses the Sabbath as a thermometer measuring the spiritual temperature of His people. God does not want His people worshiping the Sabbath. He wants His people observing the holiness imbued upon the seventh-day Sabbath when the earth was created.

The Sabbath is called the Lord's day because He made it holy by setting it apart from all other days. It is not holy because it is one of the Ten Commandments. It did not suddenly become holy at Mount Sinai. The Sabbath started at creation; and those who wish to honor God will cease from their work on the seventh day, just as He did. Hebrews 4 covers this.

In our study of Jeremiah, Israel was ignoring the Sabbath.

They had ceased its observance. We show our respect, or lack of it, by how we treat His holy day. Israel was not interested in giving God respect.

Let's now go to Jeremiah 7 which places us at the time of King Jehoiachin who reigned after King Jehoiakim. As stated earlier, Jehoiakim ruled about 11 years, from 609 to 598 BC. He was king in Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar set siege in 605, and then deposed at Nebuchadnezzar's second siege in 598 at which time Jehoiachin replaced him. Jeremiah 7-11 describes the context of what took place through two sieges by King Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 7:1-2, **“The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ‘Go to the entrance of the Lord’s Temple, and give this message to the people: “O Judah, listen to this message from the Lord! Listen to it, all of you who worship here!””**”

Now bear in mind that this apostate people were worshipping the Lord, yet God did not receive their worship. They showed up at the temple regularly, but He was not pleased with their worship and would not accept it. In Jeremiah's day, they went to church but God wasn't there, and they didn't know it because they couldn't discern His presence.

Jeremiah 7:3. **“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Even now, if you quit your evil ways, I will let you stay in your own land.’”**

This is four years prior to Nebuchadnezzar's first siege.

Verse 4. **“But don't be fooled by those who promise you safety simply because the Lord's Temple is here. They chant, ‘The Lord's Temple is here! The Lord's Temple is here!’”**

It was believed that those who made this declaration three times were secure, just as the Ark of the Covenant in the temple was secure. Incidentally, it was Jeremiah who eventually hid the Ark of the Covenant so the Babylonians couldn't take it as plunder.

Jeremiah is standing there and the Lord says, “[Do not trust in deceptive words or trite phrases.] **But I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans, and widows; only if you stop your murdering; and only if you stop harming yourselves by worshiping idols. Then I will let you stay in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever.**”¹

Let's review the Lord's list. *“If you'll really change your ways and (a) deal with each other honestly, justly, and fairly; (b) do not oppress the alien; (c) do not oppress the fatherless or widows or poor people; (d) do not shed innocent blood; (e) do not follow other gods to your own harm; then, I will let you live in this place and in the land I gave your forefathers. However, you go on doing these vile things and trust in deceptive words as though they will prevent evil from falling upon the temple of the Lord. How foolish. The words are worthless. Your superstition is meaningless.”*

Verse 9. **“Do you really think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, and burn incense to Baal and all those other new gods of yours, and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, ‘We are safe!’—only to go right back to all those evils again? Don't you yourselves admit that this Temple, which bears my name, has become a den of thieves? Surely I see all the evil going on there. I, the Lord, have spoken!”**²

The Lord responded to Jeremiah, **“Go now to the place at Shiloh where I once put the Tabernacle that bore my name. See what I did there because of all the wickedness of my people, the Israelites. While you were doing these wicked things, says the Lord, I spoke to you about it repeatedly, but you would not listen. I called out to you, but you refused to answer. So just as I destroyed Shiloh, I will now destroy this**

1 Jeremiah 7:5-7

2 Jeremiah 7:9-11

Temple that bears my name, this Temple that you trust in for help, this place that I gave to you and your ancestors. And I will send you out of my sight into exile, just as I did your relatives, the people of Israel.”¹

Verse 16. “Pray no more for these people, Jeremiah. Do not weep or pray for them, and don’t beg me to help them, for I will not listen to you. Don’t you see what they are doing throughout the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? No wonder I am so angry! Watch how the children gather wood and the fathers build sacrificial fires. See how the women knead dough and make cakes to offer to the Queen of Heaven. And they pour out liquid offerings to their other idol gods! Am I the one they are hurting?’ asks the Lord. ‘Most of all, they hurt themselves, to their own shame.’ So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘I will pour out my terrible fury on this place. Its people, animals, trees, and crops will be consumed by the unquenchable fire of my anger.’ This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Take your burnt offerings and your other sacrifices and eat them yourselves! When I led your ancestors out of Egypt, it was not burnt offerings and sacrifices I wanted from them. This is what I told them: “Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Do everything as I say, and all will be well!”’ ”²

This covenant is the bilateral, mutually agreed upon covenant, that God gave to the offspring of Abraham.

God also made a unilateral covenant with Abraham because of his great faith. *“Abraham, I’m going to make you the father of many nations, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. I’m going to do that. You have my word. I have seen your behavior, I have seen your character, and I feel safe that I can do this with you. However, I’m not going to enter into a unilateral covenant with your offspring. They will have to enter into a bilateral covenant with me.”*

¹ Jeremiah 7:12–15

² Jeremiah 7:16–23

Verse 24. **“But my people would not listen to me. They kept doing whatever they wanted, following the stubborn desires of their evil hearts. They went backward instead of forward. From the day your ancestors left Egypt until now, I have continued to send my servants, the prophets—day in and day out.”**¹

I want to emphasize that *servants the prophets* is a job title that specifically applies to individuals God selects as prophets to the nations—men such as Jeremiah, Obadiah, Jonah, Isaiah, and Habakkuk. The reason for this mental note is that in Revelation 7, the four winds of God’s wrath are held back until His 144,000 servants are sealed, after which the harm described commences.

In Revelation 10:7, Scripture says, **“When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled. It will happen just as he announced it to his servants the prophets.”** There’s that job title again.

The 144,000 will be like Jeremiah who was wholeheartedly dedicated to the Lord and His service; standing alone against the ebb and flow of the world’s established religions. They will endure the same rejection, humiliation, and physical abuse the prophets of old suffered.

In these next few chapters of Jeremiah, we’ll see this covenant stated over and over: *“If you will obey me, I will be your God and you will be my people.”* This phrase sums up the essence of the bilateral covenant between God and the offspring of Abraham.

In Galatians 3, it’s very clear that God, in New Testament times under *Plan B*, opened up the provisions of the covenant so that anyone who belongs to Christ and receives Him as their savior, becomes an heir of Abraham.

Christians today have missed the whole point of the covenant. It is still possible today for anyone, in any faith, to enter

¹ Jeremiah 7:24–25

into covenant with God. This covenant has always been open to anyone who lived on earth.

Isaiah 42, Acts 13, and Exodus 19 confirm that it was God's intention and purpose—from the very beginning—that Israel would be the trustees of His covenant. Israel was to provide understanding for all who wanted to be saved, receive blessings, and participate in what the covenant offered. Israel took the offer God intended for the human race and, sadly, appropriated it to themselves. Let me explain.

The difference between a will and a living trust is significant. A will goes into effect when the testator, that is, the person making a will, dies. And then in the case of a will, after the testator dies, the assets are then distributed and given to the beneficiary. Once the will is probated and all the property and possessions have been dispersed, the will has been fulfilled and no longer has any purpose.

The *plan of salvation* was treated as a will by Israel—as such, they were the beneficiaries as well as the testate of God's great blessings. They reasoned that the Messiah, patriarchs, and promises ALL belonged to them. But that's not what God had in mind. God actually planned for His covenant to be a living trust.

A living trust is where the assets of the benefactor are distributed to beneficiaries by way of trustees. A living trust does not require the death of the testate, it can be put into effect at any time. And so, when Adam and Eve sinned, the provisions of salvation were put into effect before Jesus died. This is why Hebrews 11 describes a host of people who are saved by faith even before Christ dies. The *plan of salvation* is not based upon a will.

Now, God's will can be interpreted and stated two ways: (a) as the desire of God, or (b) a legal document that went into effect when Jesus died on Calvary. The *plan of salvation* is not like a will that goes into effect when the testate dies. The *plan of salvation* is a living trust. It was the design of the Father

from the day Adam and Eve sinned, that the benefits of the *plan of salvation* be put into effect immediately. Remarkably, the floodgates to participate in these benefits have been open to the world since then.

Prior to the flood, God chose a select group of individuals to be the trustees of His living trust. We call them patriarchs. When God chose Abraham as a trustee and said, *“Abraham, I’m going to work with your descendants. They’re going to be trustees of my covenant. I want them to tell the world that I am willing to be the God of all who will come, surrender, and submit to its terms and conditions.”* Moses wrote those on parchment then read them to the people.

Tragically, Israel failed. Instead of distributing the assets of the covenant to the world, they kept its benefits for themselves and became totally corrupt. Acts 13 underscores this failure. In verse 42, Paul was speaking to a crowd of Jews in Antioch. As he and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, they were invited back the following Sabbath to speak more about the new message.

Verses 44–45. **“The following week almost the entire city turned out to hear them preach the word of the Lord. But when some of the Jews saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said.”**

They were furious because Paul was ministering to the Gentiles. Paul was showing from the Old Testament (there was no New Testament then) that the floodgates to eternal life, its provisions and blessings, are free for all who are willing to surrender to His conditions for salvation.

When the Jews heard there was a way to salvation that was not through or restricted to their religious system, they talked abusively against Paul. Their incitement caused an uproar throughout the city.

Verse 46. **“Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, ‘It was necessary that we first preach the word of**

God to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we will offer it to the Gentiles. For the Lord gave us this command when he said, “I have made you a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth.”¹ When the Gentiles heard this, they were very glad and thanked the Lord for his message; and all who were chosen for eternal life became believers. So the Lord’s message spread throughout that region.”¹

Paul was quoting from Isaiah 42 and 49.

Verse 50. **“Then the Jews stirred up the influential religious women and the leaders of the city, and they incited a mob against Paul and Barnabas and ran them out of town. So they shook the dust from their feet as a sign of rejection and went to the town of Iconium. And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”**²

I bring this up because God stated the covenant in Jeremiah 7, 11, and 30. That covenant being: *“If you will be my people—if you will obey me—I will be your God. And you will be the trustees of my covenant.”*

Once we understand the trusteeship—its privilege, responsibility, and function of the appointment—we begin to see its true context. God did not choose Israel as a special people at the exclusion of others. God is not exclusive. He is inclusive. The Bible says, *“For God so loved the WORLD, He gave His only son.”*

The Jews became exclusive because they considered themselves as having the truth, means, ways, and keys to salvation. They thought their religion and church was the linchpin through which the will of God would be done throughout the world.

God is clearly showing Israel that He had a different idea by raising up the “rebels,” Paul and Barnabas. The Jews hated

¹ Acts 13:46–49

² Acts 13:50–52

them and did not want these men in their church preaching a different gospel. That's why they persecuted them. In fact, Stephen was the first Christian martyred.

Churches can't stand it when a different (but powerful) gospel comes into their midst. It's the nature of religion. The last resort of false religion is force; so Paul and Barnabas were forced out of Antioch.

Paul sternly rebuked the Jews when he said, "**For this is what the Lord has commanded us [Jews], 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'**"¹

When the Gentiles heard this, they were thrilled. But when the Jews heard it, they were furious.

This trusteeship—serving the Lord as executors of His covenant—is what God planned from the beginning. That's why the bilateral covenant with the descendants of Abraham had to be ratified with sprinkled blood at the time of the Exodus.

The spectacular thing about this covenant is that in Revelation 21:7, its provisions will be stated again in the new earth. "**All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.**"

The covenant God makes with the redeemed will no longer be bilateral, it will be unilateral like the covenant God made with Abraham. The difference in the two covenants is important.

As an example, marriage is a bilateral covenant. Two people agree to be man and wife. They agree to remain married and faithful to each other for as long as they both shall live. The significance of this type of covenant is mutual consent.

A unilateral covenant though has only one party—a superior party. The rainbow is a sign of a unilateral covenant. God said, "*I will never again destroy the earth with a flood of water. And I put my bow in the clouds as a sign, as a token, of the*

¹ Acts 13:47

covenant.” Man didn’t enter into any kind of agreement. God just said, “I won’t do it.”

In like manner, God gave Abraham a unilateral covenant: “*I will make you the father of many nations.*” God also agreed to enter into a bilateral (mutual) covenant with Abraham’s offspring to accomplish what He wanted done; but only if they wanted to. If they didn’t, He would raise up others who would.

When God prepared to destroy the whole camp of Israel in the wilderness, Moses interceded and God relented by saying, “*Look Moses, I’ll bring up a family out of you. We’ll start all over with this new family.*”

From the very beginning, there has been a living trust administered by trustees. But when they became corrupt in Jeremiah’s day, the trustees had to be destroyed.

God knows that when sin reaches a point where His grace and mercy no longer have a redemptive effect, destruction is the only option. He does what He has to for the benefit of future generations and the world to come. The gospel was going nowhere in Jeremiah’s day because there was no gospel. The trustees had totally lost their driver’s license. They were going in their own direction, doing their own thing. Because the purposes and plans of God were going nowhere, He said, “*I’ve had enough of this. Away with these people.*”

The covenant is stated in Jeremiah 7:23.

“This is what I told them: ‘Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Do everything as I say, and all will be well!’ But my people would not listen to me. They kept doing whatever they wanted, following the stubborn desires of their evil hearts. They went backward instead of forward. From the day your ancestors left Egypt until now, I have continued to send my servants, the prophets—day in and day out.”¹ Again, there’s that job title.

Verse 27. **“Tell them all this, but do not expect them to**

¹ Jeremiah 7:23–25

listen. Shout out your warnings, but do not expect them to respond. Say to them, 'This is the nation whose people will not obey the Lord their God and who refuse to be taught. Truth has vanished from among them; it is no longer heard on their lips. Shave your head in mourning, and weep alone on the mountains. For the Lord has rejected and forsaken this generation that has provoked his fury.'"¹

Verse 30. "‘The people of Judah have sinned before my very eyes,’ says the Lord. ‘They have set up their abominable idols right in the Temple that bears my name, defiling it. They have built pagan shrines at Topheth, the garbage dump in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and there they burn their sons and daughters in the fire. I have never commanded such a horrible deed; it never even crossed my mind to command such a thing!’"²

God is referring to a deep ravine a few kilometers outside the city of Jerusalem called the valley of Ben-Hinnom.

Israel offered living children as burnt offerings to the vile god of Moloch. God was so disgusted with this practice that He had the valley of Ben-Hinnom desecrated to the point of becoming a sewer.

Verse 32. "‘So beware, for the time is coming’ says the Lord, ‘when that garbage dump will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. They will bury the bodies in Topheth until there is no more room for them. The bodies of my people will be food for the vultures and wild animals, and no one will be left to scare them away. I will put an end to the happy singing and laughter in the streets of Jerusalem. The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will no longer be heard in the towns of Judah. The land will lie in complete desolation.’"³

Each time Nebuchadnezzar set siege to Jerusalem, the

1 Jeremiah 7:27–29

2 Jeremiah 7:30–31

3 Jeremiah 7:32–34

carcasses of animals and dead bodies of people were dragged to this valley. It was filled with dead flesh just as Jeremiah had prophesied.

Jeremiah 8:1. **“In that day,’ says the Lord, ‘the enemy will break open the graves of the kings and officials of Judah, and the graves of the priests, prophets, and common people of Jerusalem. They will spread out their bones on the ground before the sun, moon, and stars—the gods my people have loved, served, and worshiped. Their bones will not be gathered up again or buried but will be scattered on the ground like manure.’”**¹

Israel worshiped the zodiac, which is based on the mythological gods of the Babylonians. It seems Israel worshiped every god that came along without discretion. God was so disgusted with Israel’s behavior that He promised, *“The dead will not be gathered up or buried but will be like refuse lying on the ground.”* This sounds like what happens to the Two Witnesses who will not be gathered up or buried.²

The Lord had been speaking through Jeremiah to a people blinded by religious conviction and degeneracy passed down through tradition.

The Lord asked Jeremiah, **“When people fall down, don’t they get up again? When they discover they’re on the wrong road, don’t they turn back? Then why do these people stay on their self-destructive path? Why do the people of Jerusalem refuse to turn back? They cling tightly to their lies and will not turn around. I listen to their conversations and don’t hear a word of truth. Is anyone sorry for doing wrong? Does anyone say, ‘What a terrible thing I have done’? No! All are running down the path of sin as swiftly as a horse galloping into battle! Even the stork that flies across the sky knows the time of her migration, as do the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane. They all return at the proper time each year. But**

1 Jeremiah 8:1–2

2 Revelation 10:9

not my people! They do not know the Lord's laws. 'How can you say, "We are wise because we have the word of the Lord," when your teachers have twisted it by writing lies?'"¹

The law had been distorted. People can make the Bible say almost anything they want; defend any behavior they want to defend. This was the case in Israel's day.

The Lord said to Jeremiah, **"These wise teachers will fall into the trap of their own foolishness, for they have rejected the word of the Lord. Are they so wise after all? I will give their wives to others and their farms to strangers. From the least to the greatest, their lives are ruled by greed. Yes, even my prophets and priests are like that. They are all frauds. They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of these disgusting actions? Not at all—they don't even know how to blush!"²**

It sounds as if Jeremiah is talking about our day. People don't change much.

"Therefore, they will lie among the slaughtered. They will be brought down when I punish them, says the Lord. I will surely consume them. There will be no more harvests of figs and grapes. Their fruit trees will all die. Whatever I gave them will soon be gone."³

Jeremiah 8:14 has an interesting connotation. **"Then the people will say, 'Why should we wait here to die? Come, let's go to the fortified towns and die there. For the Lord our God has decreed our destruction and has given us a cup of poison to drink because we sinned against the Lord.'"**

Jeremiah's statement is meant as a rebuke or mockery because he had several years earlier given the warning, *"Do not flee to Jerusalem, because it's going to be destroyed. A nation from the north is coming to bring the wrath of God upon this*

1 Jeremiah 8:4–8

2 Jeremiah 8:9–12

3 Jeremiah 8:12–13

evil city.” Now Jeremiah is taunting the listeners: “*Why are we sitting here? Let’s flee to the fortified cities and perish there.*”

Notice the similarity with Revelation. “*For the Lord our God has doomed us to perish, and given us poisoned water to drink.*” The word for poisoned water is *wormwood*. In Revelation, during the third trumpet, a third of the springs of water will become contaminated—poisoned water. One of God’s judgments is poisonous water. The better you understand the book of Jeremiah, the more clearly you will understand His actions in the book of Revelation.

Verse 16. **“The snorting of the enemies’ warhorses can be heard all the way from the land of Dan in the north!”** The tribe of Dan is the first territory Nebuchadnezzar entered coming down from the north.

Verse 17. **“The neighing of their stallions makes the whole land tremble. They are coming to devour the land and everything in it—cities and people alike. I will send these enemy troops among you like poisonous snakes you cannot charm. They will bite you, and you will die. I, the Lord, have spoken!”** The Lord is reminding them of when snakes filled the camp in Moses’ time.

Verses 18–19. **“My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken. Listen to the weeping of my people; it can be heard all across the land. ‘Has the Lord abandoned Jerusalem?’ the people ask. ‘Is her King no longer there?’ ‘Oh, why have they provoked my anger with their carved idols and their worthless foreign gods?’ says the Lord.”**

We need to be acquainted with this poetic language because it’s also seen in Daniel. The word *foreign* in this instance means *not appropriate*.

Jeremiah 8:20. **“‘The harvest is finished, and the summer is gone,’ the people cry, ‘yet we are not saved!’”**

God is saying, *“I’ve given my people chance after chance. I’ve given them warning after warning. I’ve sent my servants the*

prophets time and again and, yet, they refused to turn from their wickedness and be healed."

Verses 21–22. **"I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief. Is there no medicine in Gil-ead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people?"** He's saying, *"Since my people are crushed, I am crushed."* The poetic language being used is reflecting the perspective of a warrior.

Jeremiah 9:1. **"If only my head were a pool of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for all my people who have been slaughtered. Oh, that I could go away and forget my people and live in a travelers' shack in the desert. For they are all adulterers—a pack of treacherous liars. My people bend their tongues like bows to shoot out lies. They refuse to stand up for the truth. They only go from bad to worse. They do not know me,"** says the Lord."¹

Verses 5–6. **"They all fool and defraud each other; no one tells the truth. With practiced tongues they tell lies; they wear themselves out with all their sinning. They pile lie upon lie and utterly refuse to acknowledge me,"** says the Lord."

Verses 7–8. **"Therefore, this is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: 'See, I will melt them down in a crucible and test them like metal. What else can I do with my people? For their tongues shoot lies like poisoned arrows. They speak friendly words to their neighbors while scheming in their heart to kill them.'"**

Do you know people who speak cordially to your face, but inwardly are preparing a trap?

Verse 9. **"Should I not punish them for this?"** says the Lord. **"Should I not avenge myself against such a nation?"** [I gave the nation who agreed to be trustees of my covenant everything, but what have they given me in return?]

¹ Jeremiah 9:1–3

“I will weep for the mountains and wail for the wilderness pastures. For they are desolate and empty of life; the lowing of cattle is heard no more; the birds and wild animals have all fled. I will make Jerusalem into a heap of ruins,” says the Lord. ‘It will be a place haunted by jackals. The towns of Judah will be ghost towns, with no one living in them.’”¹

It saddens God to inflict punishment. But it has to be done for the benefit of future generations. In fact, nations are destroyed for the benefit of nations to come. Babylon fell for the benefit of the Medes and Persians. The Medes and Persians fell for the benefit of the Grecians, and so forth. God tears down one for the benefit of a new one. And ultimately, they all become corrupt and useless.

Now the Lord answers His own question. **“This has happened because my people have abandoned my instructions; they have refused to obey what I said. Instead, they have stubbornly followed their own desires and worshiped the images of Baal, as their ancestors taught them. So now, this is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Look! I will feed them with bitterness and give them poison to drink.’”**² This confirms again what is found in Revelation 8. What God did to Jerusalem of old, He will do to the world at large.

Verse 16. **“I will scatter them around the world, in places they and their ancestors never heard of, and even there I will chase them with the sword until I have destroyed them completely.”** God says, *“I will bring utter and complete destruction upon this city, the land, and even my nation Israel because of its great wickedness.”*

When God’s judgments fall during the Great Tribulation, clergy will wake up to discover that God is angry. They’re going to use these Old Testament passages to show that God is justifiably angry with our sinfulness—the very same sins denounced

¹ Jeremiah 9:10–11

² Jeremiah 9:13–15

in Jeremiah and Daniel. And, of course, they're going to declare that the only way to appease God is by repentance and obedience. This is the context in which Friday, Saturday, and Sunday laws will be implemented in their respective countries.

Verse 23. **“This is what the Lord says: ‘Don’t let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!’”**¹

If you're going to boast about anything, boast that you know God; that He exercises righteousness and forgiveness. But what more can God do when He has given the clearest revelation of his will, and only receives rebellion and rejection as a response?

Speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah said, **“‘A time is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will punish all those who are circumcised in body but not in spirit—the Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, the people who live in the desert in remote places, and yes, even the people of Judah. And like all these pagan nations, the people of Israel also have uncircumcised hearts.’”**²

Jeremiah 10:1. **“Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O Israel! This is what the Lord says: ‘Do not act like the other nations, who try to read their future in the stars. Do not be afraid of their predictions, even though other nations are terrified by them. Their ways are futile and foolish. They cut down a tree, and a craftsman carves an idol. They decorate it with gold and silver and then fasten it securely with hammer and nails so it won’t fall over. Their gods are like helpless scarecrows in a cucumber field! They cannot speak, and they need to be carried because they cannot walk. Do**

1 Jeremiah 9:23–24

2 Jeremiah 9:25–26

not be afraid of such gods, for they can neither harm you nor do you any good.’

Lord, there is no one like you! For you are great, and your name is full of power. Who would not fear you, O King of nations? That title belongs to you alone! Among all the wise people of the earth and in all the kingdoms of the world, there is no one like you. People who worship idols are stupid and foolish. The things they worship are made of wood! They bring beaten sheets of silver from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz, and they give these materials to skillful craftsmen who make their idols. Then they dress these gods in royal blue and purple robes made by expert tailors.

But the Lord is the only true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King! The whole earth trembles at his anger. The nations cannot stand up to his wrath. Say this to those who worship other gods: ‘Your so-called gods, who did not make the heavens and earth, will vanish from the earth and from under the heavens.’ But the Lord made the earth by his power, and he preserves it by his wisdom. With his own understanding he stretched out the heavens. When he speaks in the thunder, the heavens roar with rain. He causes the clouds to rise over the earth. He sends the lightning with the rain and releases the wind from his storehouses.”¹

This may be a bit of a puzzle. As we look around today, we don’t see any idols being worshiped—at least in America. People don’t bow down to statues in temples. A graven image is simply a graven image. There’s no life in it. People know that.

Israel knew that a chunk of wood carved into an idol was just a piece of wood. Yet, this is where it gets sticky. Israel used this physical object to represent its religious doctrine which was made up to serve their self-interests. They created these gods out of their imaginations to benefit themselves.

In America today, monotheism is popular. Many people have created their own god and given it the name Jesus Christ.

¹ Jeremiah 10:1–13

Now, let me go to the heart of the matter. This is idol worship; because it's a man-made god. Let me explain. When one person is describing the ways of Jesus Christ, and another who claims to know Jesus Christ is listening, the two don't necessarily see eye to eye because the two gods they believe in are different. See the confusion?

Since I've been sharing Revelation's story, pastors are the most offended by what I present. In fact, I've had unfortunate encounters with pastors who tell me in no uncertain terms that the god I serve is not the god they serve, even though we both call him Jesus Christ. I'm trying my best to explain and reveal the Jesus Christ found in the book of Revelation, but that revelation reveals a Jesus Christ nothing like the one they know. The consequence of this is that the Jesus Christ many have as the object of their worship is a figment of someone's imagination; thus it's been a challenge to know the real Jesus. Well, it won't be a challenge much longer because He's about to stand up to be recognized.

If you want to know what Jesus and the Father are like, merge all 66 books of the Bible into one harmonious whole. The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New. He hasn't changed. He's the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

In Israel's time, they had bought into the sophistry of heathen gods. A people willing to offer their children as burnt offerings prove that even outrageous concepts can be readily embraced when propagandized well enough, even when the logic is flawed.

This is what God was struggling with in working with Israel. Israel had reneged on God's requirements. Its people were no longer concerned with integrity or honesty, with fairness or justice. Israel had become depraved because its carnal heart had not accepted His condition for salvation. Does this sound like America? It does to me.

Verse 14. **"The whole human race is foolish and has no knowledge! The craftsmen are disgraced by the idols they**

make, for their carefully shaped works are a fraud. These idols have no breath or power. Idols are worthless; they are ridiculous lies! On the day of reckoning they will all be destroyed. But the God of Israel is no idol! He is the Creator of everything that exists, including Israel, his own special possession. The Lord of Heaven's Armies is his name!"¹

Jeremiah described Israel's coming destruction.

"Pack your bags and prepare to leave; the siege is about to begin. For this is what the Lord says: 'Suddenly, I will fling out all you who live in this land. I will pour great troubles upon you, and at last you will feel my anger.' My wound is severe, and my grief is great. My sickness is incurable, but I must bear it. My home is gone, and no one is left to help me rebuild it. My children have been taken away, and I will never see them again.

The shepherds of my people have lost their senses. They no longer seek wisdom from the Lord. Therefore, they fail completely, and their flocks are scattered. Listen! Hear the terrifying roar of great armies as they roll down from the north. The towns of Judah will be destroyed and become a haunt for jackals."²

Jeremiah implores of the Lord, **"I know, Lord, that our lives are not our own. We are not able to plan our own course. So correct me, Lord, but please be gentle. Do not correct me in anger, for I would die. Pour out your wrath on the nations that refuse to acknowledge you—on the peoples that do not call upon your name. For they have devoured your people Israel; they have devoured and consumed them, making the land a desolate wilderness."**³

Jeremiah is acknowledging, *"I know that my life is not my own. I was bought for a price. You knew me before I was born and appointed me to do what you wanted. You have a plan and*

1 Jeremiah 10:14–16

2 Jeremiah 10:17–22

3 Jeremiah 10:23–25

purpose for me.” The Lord responds, saying, *“Yes, I will deal with the enemies of my people. But first, I’m going to deal with my people because they are my greater enemy.”*

Jeremiah 11:1–5. **“The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ‘Remind the people of Judah and Jerusalem about the terms of my covenant with them. Say to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Cursed is anyone who does not obey the terms of my covenant! For I said to your ancestors when I brought them out of the iron-smelting furnace of Egypt, ‘If you obey me and do whatever I command you, then you will be my people, and I will be your God.’ I said this so I could keep my promise to your ancestors to give you a land flowing with milk and honey—the land you live in today.”’”**

Here is that bilateral covenant again: *“Obey me. Do everything I command you. Then you will be my people and I will be your God.”* This covenant is still intact today, contrary to what some preachers teach. The covenant is still available to all who willingly submit to it.

Let’s go to the gospel of John briefly. This exchange happened on Thursday afternoon about 24 hours before Jesus’ crucifixion on Friday. Jesus said to His disciples, **“If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.”**¹

Then in John 15:14, He continued, **“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go**

¹ John 14:15–18

and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other. If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.”¹

Jesus was saying, *“If you belonged to the world, you would seek its glory and relish its approval. But as it is, you don’t belong to the world, so it doesn’t love you.”* Jesus is simply reiterating in John 14 and 15 what was confirmed in 600 BC.

Going back now to the terms and conditions in Jeremiah 11. God said, *“If you will do this, then I will fulfill the oath I swore to your forefathers to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, the land you possess today.”* Jeremiah then replied, **“Amen, Lord! May it be so.”²**

“Then the Lord said, ‘Broadcast this message in the streets of Jerusalem. Go from town to town throughout the land and say, ‘Remember the ancient covenant, and do everything it requires. For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt, ‘Obey me!’ I have repeated this warning over and over to this day, but your ancestors did not listen or even pay attention. Instead, they stubbornly followed their own evil desires. And because they refused to obey, I brought upon them all the curses described in this covenant.’”³

We all have to be on the lookout. In the army, we used the acronym BOLO because we frequently had to be on the lookout for danger. The same is true for spiritual danger. If we’re not daily in the Word seeking understanding and restoration of our hearts and minds, we will soon digress to the desires of the carnal heart.

Jeremiah emphatically declares, *“The heart is desperately*

¹ John 15:14–19

² Jeremiah 11:5

³ Jeremiah 11:6–8

wicked and beyond cure.” So if we are not, as Paul says, being renewed with the mind of Christ, we will soon follow the worldly heart as our religion.

“Again the Lord spoke to me and said, ‘I have discovered a conspiracy against me among the people of Judah and Jerusalem. They have returned to the sins of their ancestors. They have refused to listen to me and are worshiping other gods. Israel and Judah have both broken the covenant I made with their ancestors. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am going to bring calamity upon them, and they will not escape. Though they beg for mercy, I will not listen to their cries.’”¹

These verses raise an interesting point. The new generation that finds itself in Babylon doesn't even realize what happened unless a survivor explains what went wrong and why they lost their homeland. This is the reason that at the time of the Babylonian captivity, God had sent a series of prophets to speak to Israel.

At the time of captivity, there was a lone voice crying in the wilderness. His name was Jeremiah.

While in captivity, God sent two other prophets: Ezekiel and Daniel. These two prophets were responsible for revealing the *what and why* of it all to the new generation.

In 722 BC, the house of Israel had been destroyed. In 605 BC, the house of Judah had been taken into captivity. So the Lord said, “*I'm bringing disaster on this place and no one will escape.*”

The interesting dilemma, as the story unfolds, is that Jeremiah begins telling the people, “*Surrender to Babylon. Don't fight God by aligning yourselves with Egypt to take on Babylon. Surrender! It is God's will that this temple be destroyed and the city left desolate. Make it easy on yourselves by doing as God says.*” But for saying this, they plotted to kill Jeremiah.

¹ Jeremiah 11:9–11

One of the most frightful realizations from verse 11 is when God says, *“Although they cry out to me, I will not listen.”* If we persist in being rebellious on an individual level, God will not listen to our petitions. He will not give us due consideration.

“Then the people of Judah and Jerusalem will pray to their idols and burn incense before them. But the idols will not save them when disaster strikes! Look now, people of Judah; you have as many gods as you have towns. You have as many altars of shame—altars for burning incense to your god Baal—as there are streets in Jerusalem. Pray no more for these people, Jeremiah. Do not weep or pray for them, for I will not listen to them when they cry out to me in distress.”¹

Verse 17. **“I, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, who planted this olive tree, have ordered it destroyed. For the people of Israel and Judah have done evil, arousing my anger by burning incense to Baal.”** The Lord is referring to verses 15 and 16.

“Then the Lord told me about the plots my enemies were making against me. I was like a lamb being led to the slaughter. I had no idea that they were planning to kill me! ‘Let’s destroy this man and all his words,’ they said. ‘Let’s cut him down, so his name will be forgotten forever.’ O Lord of Heaven’s Armies, you make righteous judgments, and you examine the deepest thoughts and secrets. Let me see your vengeance against them, for I have committed my cause to you.”² The phrase, *“like a lamb being led to the slaughter”* is a messianic expression that Jesus used in His day about himself.

Jeremiah acknowledged, “I know they’re trying to kill me because you’ve revealed that to me.”

The Lord then replied, **“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says about them: ‘I will punish them! Their young men will die in battle, and their boys and girls will starve to death. Not one of these plotters from Anathoth will survive, for I will bring disaster upon them when their time of**

¹ Jeremiah 11:12–14

² Jeremiah 11:18–20

punishment comes.’”¹

Jeremiah 11:19–20 are two important verses during a time of great injustice. Jeremiah’s life is being threatened, so he asks of the Lord, “**Let me see your vengeance against them, for I have committed my cause to you.**” The Lord kindly answers Jeremiah by assuring him. Isn’t it just like Jesus to give us hope when we need it most.

¹ Jeremiah 11:22–23

CHAPTER 4



A Genuine Prophet

The book of Jeremiah is not written in chronological order. Rather, the book is grouped into five segments: (1) Chapter 1 is an introduction and historical setting. (2) Chapters 2 through 35 are the heart of Jeremiah's prophecies concerning God's statements about Judah and Jerusalem. (3) Chapters 36 through 45 contain biographical and historical stories. (4) Chapters 46 through 51 reveal God's judgments on the neighboring nations. (5) Chapter 52 describes the fall of Jerusalem. Therefore, to read Jeremiah's book chronologically requires moving various chapters around.

We begin Jeremiah 26 with the story of Jeremiah escaping with his life. Remember as you read, this is taking place during the 11-year span of King Jehoiakim's reign, which lasted from 609 through 598 BC. Zedekiah also ruled 11 years and was king when Jerusalem is finally destroyed.

There were also two very brief periods of rulership. Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin each ruled for only about three months. So

we have two that ruled for three months and two that ruled for 11 years. Adding Josiah, a total of five kings ruled between 627 and 586 BC—the time period in which Jeremiah prophesied.

Jeremiah didn't die in Babylonian captivity. In fact, he was set free. Later, some of the remnant still in Jerusalem forced Jeremiah to go to Egypt with them. So it is believed that Jeremiah's ministry ended around 570–561 BC, around 53 years. And since there are 52 chapters in his book, one chapter per year is a good average.

Jeremiah 26 begins in the early reign of Jehoiakim who came to power around 609 BC—four years prior to Nebuchadnezzar's first siege.

“This is what the Lord says: Stand in the courtyard in front of the Temple of the Lord, and make an announcement to the people who have come there to worship from all over Judah. Give them my entire message; include every word. Perhaps they will listen and turn from their evil ways. Then I will change my mind about the disaster I am ready to pour out on them because of their sins. Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord says: If you will not listen to me and obey my word I have given you, and if you will not listen to my servants, the prophets—for I sent them again and again to warn you, but you would not listen to them—then I will destroy this Temple as I destroyed Shiloh, the place where the Tabernacle was located. And I will make Jerusalem an object of cursing in every nation on earth.’”¹

The priests, prophets, and people in the temple heard Jeremiah speak these words. **“What right do you have to prophesy in the Lord's name that this Temple will be destroyed like Shiloh? What do you mean, saying that Jerusalem will be destroyed and left with no inhabitants?”** And all the people threatened him as he stood in front of the Temple.² And as soon as Jeremiah had finished speaking they seized him with

¹ Jeremiah 26:2–6

² Jeremiah 26:9

the intent of killing him.

“When the officials of Judah heard what was happening, they rushed over from the palace and sat down at the New Gate of the Temple to hold court. The priests and prophets presented their accusations to the officials and the people. ‘This man should die!’ they said. ‘You have heard with your own ears what a traitor he is, for he has prophesied against this city.’ Then Jeremiah spoke to the officials and the people in his own defense. ‘The Lord sent me to prophesy against this Temple and this city,’ he said. ‘The Lord gave me every word that I have spoken. But if you stop your sinning and begin to obey the Lord your God, he will change his mind about this disaster that he has announced against you.’”¹

Jeremiah is wise and stands his ground.

“As for me, I am in your hands—do with me as you think best. But if you kill me, rest assured that you will be killing an innocent man! The responsibility for such a deed will lie on you, on this city, and on every person living in it. For it is absolutely true that the Lord sent me to speak every word you have heard.”²

“Then the officials and the people said to the priests and prophets, ‘This man does not deserve the death sentence, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.’ Then some of the wise old men stood and spoke to all the people assembled there. They said, ‘Remember when Micah of Moresheth prophesied during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah. He told the people of Judah, “This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: Mount Zion will be plowed like an open field; Jerusalem will be reduced to ruins! A thicket will grow on the heights where the Temple now stands.” But did King Hezekiah and the people kill him for saying this? No, they turned from their sins and worshiped the Lord. They begged him for mercy. Then the Lord changed his mind

1 Jeremiah 26:10–13

2 Jeremiah 26:14–15

about the terrible disaster he had pronounced against them. So we are about to do ourselves great harm.’”¹

It’s encouraging to know that there are some among the leaders who insightful enough to know that Jeremiah is a genuine prophet.

Verse 20. **“At this time Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim was also prophesying for the Lord. And he predicted the same terrible disaster against the city and nation as Jeremiah did. When King Jehoiakim and the army officers and officials heard what he was saying, the king sent someone to kill him. But Uriah heard about the plan and escaped in fear to Egypt. Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Acbor to Egypt along with several other men to capture Uriah. They took him prisoner and brought him back to King Jehoiakim. The king then killed Uriah with a sword and had him buried in an unmarked grave. Nevertheless, Ahikam son of Shaphan stood up for Jeremiah and persuaded the court not to turn him over to the mob to be killed.”²**

Chapter 26 demonstrates what happens when truth is told to a people who do not love the truth. Jeremiah did as God required. Either way the consequences were going to be severe. He knew that. So, while he is being challenged for his life, Micah stands up and says, *“Wait a minute. You remember how King Hezekiah relented and the Lord turned and spared his life, and spared this city as well. Jeremiah has not spoken anything that we haven’t heard before.”* There were prophets in Old Testament times that are not included in Scripture, and Jeremiah is speaking in harmony with them.

Let’s go now to Jeremiah 35 which continues the story chronologically. In the early years of Jehoiakim, when Nebuchadnezzar was about to enforce his first siege, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. As instructed, he went to the Recabite

1 Jeremiah 26:16–19

2 Jeremiah 26:20–24

tribe and invited a family into the house of the Lord and offered them wine. Now remember, the Lord told Jeremiah to do this.

“This is the message the Lord gave Jeremiah when Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king of Judah: ‘Go to the settlement where the families of the Recabites live, and invite them to the Lord’s Temple. Take them into one of the inner rooms, and offer them some wine.’ So I went to see Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah and grandson of Habazziniah and all his brothers and sons—representing all the Recabite families. I took them to the Temple, and we went into the room assigned to the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah, a man of God. This room was located next to the one used by the Temple officials, directly above the room of Maaseiah son of Shallum, the Temple gatekeeper.

I set cups and jugs of wine before them and invited them to have a drink, but they refused. ‘No,’ they said, ‘we don’t drink wine, because our ancestor Jehonadab son of Recab gave us this command: “You and your descendants must never drink wine. And do not build houses or plant crops or vineyards, but always live in tents. If you follow these commands, you will live long, good lives in the land.” So we have obeyed him in all these things. We have never had a drink of wine to this day, nor have our wives, our sons, or our daughters. We haven’t built houses or owned vineyards or farms or planted crops. We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed all the commands of Jehonadab, our ancestor. But when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked this country, we were afraid of the Babylonian and Syrian armies. So we decided to move to Jerusalem. That is why we are here.’”¹

As Nebuchadnezzar progressed in his advance toward Jerusalem, this family had moved into Jerusalem for safety.

“Then the Lord gave this message to Jeremiah: ‘This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: Go and say to the people in Judah and Jerusalem, “Come

¹ Jeremiah 35: 1–11

and learn a lesson about how to obey me. The Recabites do not drink wine to this day because their ancestor Jehonadab told them not to. But I have spoken to you again and again, and you refuse to obey me. Time after time I sent you prophets, who told you, ‘Turn from your wicked ways, and start doing things right. Stop worshiping other gods so that you might live in peace here in the land I have given to you and your ancestors.’ But you would not listen to me or obey me. The descendants of Jehonadab son of Recab have obeyed their ancestor completely, but you have refused to listen to me.”’¹

The parallel is that the Recabites respected their grandfather and obeyed him. Imagine that. But isn’t God even more valuable, important, and significant than any grandfather?

“Therefore, this is what the Lord God of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Because you refuse to listen or answer when I call, I will send upon Judah and Jerusalem all the disasters I have threatened.’ Then Jeremiah turned to the Recabites and said, ‘This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: “You have obeyed your ancestor Jehonadab in every respect, following all his instructions.” Therefore, this is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: “Jehonadab son of Recab will always have descendants who serve me.”’”²

The Lord is promising a perpetual service to the descendants of Jehonadab because of their faithfulness. God is paralleling this family to the whole family of Israel. And yet, He knows the case is hopeless.

Now turn back to Jeremiah 22. Although we’re going backward to a smaller chapter number, we’re actually moving forward in chronological order.

“This is what the Lord said to me: ‘Go over and speak directly to the king of Judah. Say to him, “Listen to this

¹ Jeremiah 35: 12–16

² Jeremiah 35: 17–19

message from the Lord, you king of Judah, sitting on David's throne. Let your attendants and your people listen, too. This is what the Lord says: Be fair-minded and just. Do what is right! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors. Quit your evil deeds! Do not mistreat foreigners, orphans, and widows. Stop murdering the innocent! If you obey me, there will always be a descendant of David sitting on the throne here in Jerusalem. The king will ride through the palace gates in chariots and on horses, with his parade of attendants and subjects. But if you refuse to pay attention to this warning, I swear by my own name, says the Lord, that this palace will become a pile of rubble.”¹ Now this is what the Lord says concerning Judah's royal palace: ‘I love you as much as fruitful Gilead and the green forests of Lebanon. But I will turn you into a desert, with no one living within your walls. I will call for wreckers, who will bring out their tools to dismantle you. They will tear out all your fine cedar beams and throw them on the fire. People from many nations will pass by the ruins of this city and say to one another, “Why did the Lord destroy such a great city?” And the answer will be, “Because they violated their covenant with the Lord their God by worshipping other gods”’²

Let's pause for a moment to contemplate that the destruction inflicted upon Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is a representation of the crumbling relationship between Israel and God. He destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC through Nebuchadnezzar because the nation had ruined the bilateral covenant they had agreed to.

The wellbeing of Jerusalem is in direct proportion to the health of the covenant. As Israel became more and more corrupt, God began to withdraw His blessings. **“At about that time the Lord began to cut down the size of Israel's territory. King Hazael conquered several sections of the country east**

¹ Jeremiah 22:1-9

of the Jordan River, including all of Gilead, Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh.”¹

The prosperity of Israel was directly connected to their relationship with the covenant. Now when I use the word *prosperity*, I’m not talking about riches; I’m talking about the number of poor. Because of greed and selfishness, and, of course, innate ability, there will always be the rich and, unfortunately, the poor. However, that was not God’s intention. If Israel had been faithful as God wanted, He would have eliminated poverty. No one would have been poor.

Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that everyone would have been equally wealthy. There has always been a minority who are go-getters—individuals who have a knack for making money. I am emphasizing that there would have been no one in poverty. BUT, because they forsook the covenant, they forsook its blessings.

In Jeremiah 22:10, Jeremiah uttered a prophecy. **“Do not weep for the dead king or mourn his loss. Instead, weep for the captive king being led away! For he will never return to see his native land again.”** Later, King Jehoiachin would die in exile.

“And the Lord says, ‘What sorrow awaits Jehoiakim, who builds his palace with forced labor. He builds injustice into its walls, for he makes his neighbors work for nothing. He does not pay them for their labor. He says, “I will build a magnificent palace with huge rooms and many windows. I will panel it throughout with fragrant cedar and paint it a lovely red.” But a beautiful cedar palace does not make a great king! Your father, Josiah, also had plenty to eat and drink. But he was just and right in all his dealings. That is why God blessed him. He gave justice and help to the poor and needy, and everything went well for him. Isn’t that what it means to know me?’ says the Lord.

‘But you! You have eyes only for greed and dishonesty!

¹ 2 Kings 10:32

You murder the innocent, oppress the poor, and reign ruthlessly.’ Therefore, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim, son of King Josiah: ‘The people will not mourn for him, crying to one another, “Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!” His subjects will not mourn for him, crying, “Alas, our master is dead! Alas, his splendor is gone!” He will be buried like a dead donkey—dragged out of Jerusalem and dumped outside the gates!’”¹

If you were king sitting on the throne and some disheveled guy came along saying, “*You’re going to have the burial of a donkey,*” how would you react?

When God speaks to the human race, He makes it clear that everybody on this planet is made of clay. In His sight, one person is no more valuable than any other. Furthermore, it offends God when we overlook the poor and needy. As you could imagine, He identifies so closely with their suffering.

In the United States we have a market-driven economy, which means that you are free to sell your product at any price you want. But that doesn’t mean anyone will buy it. The whole idea of a free market is that anyone can produce whatever he wants, competition then becomes the ultimate determinant. But when competition is reduced significantly or removed entirely, prices become unaffordable. This destroys the economy. The rich and poor suffer alike, but the poor suffer more. It offends God when we’re not concerned with the needy.

Let’s go to Jeremiah 25, which takes place about the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege.

“This message for all the people of Judah came to Jeremiah from the Lord during the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign over Judah. This was the year when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon began his reign. Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people in Judah and Jerusalem, ‘For the past twenty-three years—from the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, until now—the Lord has been giving

¹ Jeremiah 22:13–19

me his messages. I have faithfully passed them on to you, but you have not listened. Again and again the Lord has sent you his servants, the prophets, but you have not listened or even paid attention. Each time the message was this: “Turn from the evil road you are traveling and from the evil things you are doing. Only then will I let you live in this land that the Lord gave to you and your ancestors forever. Do not provoke my anger by worshiping idols you made with your own hands. Then I will not harm you.”

“But you would not listen to me,” says the Lord. “You made me furious by worshiping idols you made with your own hands, bringing on yourselves all the disasters you now suffer. And now the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: Because you have not listened to me, I will gather together all the armies of the north under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whom I have appointed as my deputy. I will bring them all against this land and its people and against the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy you and make you an object of horror and contempt and a ruin forever. I will take away your happy singing and laughter. The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will no longer be heard. Your millstones will fall silent, and the lights in your homes will go out. This entire land will become a desolate wasteland. Israel and her neighboring lands will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.”¹

This is in the fourth year of Jehoiakim who began his reign in 609 BC; so Jeremiah is making clear in 606 or 605 BC, that Israel’s captivity will last 70 years. The takeaway from the previous verses is twofold. The Lord identifies Nebuchadnezzar as “My servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.” And He is punishing the surrounding nations for their idolatry. It was God who stirred up the king to do His will.

Of course, Nebuchadnezzar thought it was his own aspiration because he wanted Judah out of the way. But God said,

¹ Jeremiah 25:1–11

“No. Sorry. You’re MY servant.”

Jeremiah 25:12. **“Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins,’ says the Lord. ‘I will make the country of the Babylonians a wasteland forever.’”** The light at the end of the tunnel was that Babylon would be punished, albeit 70 years hence.

Verse 13. **“I will bring upon them all the terrors I have promised in this book—all the penalties announced by Jeremiah against the nations.”** The final chapters of Jeremiah disclose the prophecies predicted to befall Babylon.

Verse 14. **“Many nations and great kings will enslave the Babylonians, just as they enslaved my people. I will punish them in proportion to the suffering they cause my people.”** This is judicial equilibrium at work—the Golden Rule.

In God’s economy, if you act like the Devil, you’ll pay for it. There is an opposite and equal reaction for every action. However, He also adds a penalty to the bill. This is why Babylon fell. It’s why the Medes, Persians, Grecians, and Romans fell. God was paying them all back.

Verses 15–16. **“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from my hand this cup filled to the brim with my anger, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink from it. When they drink from it, they will stagger, crazed by the warfare I will send against them.’”** There is a bit of figurative language here. It isn’t used much today so initially it may be difficult to understand. But watch how the scenario unfolds.

Verse 17. **“So I took the cup of anger from the Lord and made all the nations drink from it—every nation to which the Lord sent me. I went to Jerusalem and the other towns of Judah, and their kings and officials drank from the cup. From that day until this, they have been a desolate ruin, an object of horror, contempt, and cursing. I gave the cup to**

Pharaoh, king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials, and all his people, along with all the foreigners living in that land. I also gave it to all the kings of the land of Uz and the kings of the Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and what remains of Ashdod.

Then I gave the cup to the nations of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and the kings of Tyre and Sidon, and the kings of the regions across the sea. I gave it to Dedan, Tema, and Buz, and to the people who live in distant places. I gave it to the kings of Arabia, the kings of the nomadic tribes of the desert, and to the kings of Zimri, Elam, and Media. And I gave it to the kings of the northern countries, far and near, one after the other—all the kingdoms of the world. And finally, the king of Babylon himself drank from the cup of the Lord's anger.

Then the Lord said to me, 'Now tell them, "This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: Drink from this cup of my anger. Get drunk and vomit; fall to rise no more, for I am sending terrible wars against you." And if they refuse to accept the cup, tell them, "The Lord of Heaven's Armies says: You have no choice but to drink from it. I have begun to punish Jerusalem, the city that bears my name. Now should I let you go unpunished? No, you will not escape disaster. I will call for war against all the nations of the earth. I, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!"'"¹

Let me explain this. In ancient times, the expression *to drink from the cup* was to internalize the contents of the cup. When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "*Oh Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.*" Jesus didn't want to go through the bitter experience that the cup figuratively held.

Conversely, blessings were measured by this full cup method also. In Psalm 23, David stated that his cup was running over because the blessings lavished on him couldn't be contained. God used this figurative language because He wants Jeremiah

¹ Jeremiah 25:17–29

to tell the nations they're ALL accountable to God. And just as surely as their actions had brought His destruction upon His own people, He would, for the same reasons, do the same to the heathen nations. Judgment begins with the house of the Lord.

Basically God was saying, *"I'm putting my people away and desecrating the land so it has its rest."* Over the past 430 years, Israel had violated 70 sabbatical years so God would evict them from the land. God takes His Sabbath rest seriously and Israel had neglected it.

We read in 2 Chronicles 36:21, **"So the message of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled, just as the prophet had said."** God then moved upon the heart of Cyrus to set the Jews free.

My point is that God was setting the stage for total world destruction. He said to Jeremiah, *"Take this cup of destruction and carry it to all the nations and make them drink it, because they will go through and endure what I have put in this cup for them to experience."*

Jeremiah 25 sets up *Plan A*. Ezekiel, however, makes Plan A's prophecies more clear and fully amplified. In Jeremiah 25:17, the cup is taken to all the nations on the Lord's list—from Babylon in the north to Egypt in the south. All nations of the earth were going to be destroyed under *Plan A*. In *Plan B*, when Jesus comes riding on the white horse in Revelation 19, a sharp sword is coming out of His mouth with which He strikes down the nations (plural).

We've been looking at a figurative bit of apocalyptic prophecy. The Lord is making a profound statement of what He intended to do, so He gave Israel a glimpse of what His future plans were. In the illustration, the Lord told Jeremiah to take the cup filled with the wine of wrath and make all the nations to whom he was sent, drink it.

As a parallel, visualize the Last Supper as the disciples drank wine and ate bread to commemorate the Lord's blood and body. It was customary at Passover to drink wine with a special meal. Drinking wine from the cup is an illustration representing how we must swallow and experience its contents.

I'm dwelling on this for two reasons. I am convinced that the phenomenon we call war—World War 1, World War 2, Korea, Vietnam, and both Gulf wars—is a state of insanity perpetrated by those who are obsessed with the acquisition of territory, power, and possessions. I believe that, from time to time, God sends the spirit of war through an enforcer as judgment upon particularly evil people. He then brings judgment upon the enforcer when they become evil. We see this clearly in the history of Israel and Babylon.

Earlier in Jeremiah 25:8, the Lord called Nebuchadnezzar His servant. He was used to punish Israel by exiling them for 70 years. Afterward, God planned to restore them to their homeland.

Politicians exalt themselves and their prowess, but it is God who, at times, sets up kings and takes them down. God chose Israel, took them out of slavery through the desert and into their homeland. And then, because of their degeneracy, He evicted them using Babylon.

Historians would record this by describing each nation's aggression and military might. But the Bible gives the rest of the story. We see behind the curtain that God is at work. As He used the Babylonians to punish the Israelites, He then used the Medes and Persians to destroy the Babylonians.

I call this the full-cup principle. God grants every nation a period of grace. And when that grace has been forfeited, neglected, and ignored—when the sins of the people have filled the cup—God suddenly acts.

The fact that Israel didn't listen to Jeremiah didn't change God's plans. God proceeded with the destruction of Jerusalem

whether they liked it or not, believed it or not. God is sovereign. His will be done. Jeremiah was not out to prove that he was the Lord's servant through whom His will was communicated. He was simply a messenger.

Jeremiah 25 is particularly important to understand because its language is carried over into Revelation. The second angel's message begins in Revelation 14:8. **"Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen—because she made all the nations of the world drink the wine of her passionate immorality."** This is a message the 144,000 will present during the Great Tribulation. Their message will only become pertinent at that time. Right now, we're in *wait mode*, so the message is not considered important. But at that time, its significance will be inflammatory.

The second angel's message means: *"False is man's attempt to rescue himself from the wrath of God."*

The worldwide government formed in response to the crises caused by the first four trumpets—sometimes described as the four winds—will be led by the religious clergy of all faiths. All nations of the world will *drink* the intoxicating ideas the maddened leaders of *Babylon* will foist upon them.

We see the same language in the third angel's message. **"Anyone who worships the beast and his statue or who accepts his mark on the forehead or on the hand must drink the wine of God's anger. It has been poured full strength into God's cup of wrath."**¹ Now, instead of the wine of Babylon the Great, it's the wine of God's fury poured out on those who receive the mark of the beast. The Bible doesn't mince words about this. Satan is going to be granted power to dissolve all religions and create a one-world church.² To buy or sell, to eat, or even survive, we will have to compromise our consciences and worship the Devil.

God says anyone who drinks the delusions of the Antichrist and joins his church, **"Will be tormented with fire**

1 Revelation 14:9–10

2 Institutionalized religion as a political or social force.

and burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. The smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever, and they will have no relief day or night, for they have worshiped the beast and his statue and have accepted the mark of his name.” This is a promise.

As you begin to understand the language, you realize that under *Plan A*, God was going to destroy all nations. This was the bitter cup each was to drink. Eventually, all nations will drink from that bitter cup. Under *Plan A*, this would have happened at the end of the 70 weeks. This information was revealed to Daniel who wrote from Babylon. Jeremiah, of course, was writing from Jerusalem. God was saying, “*No nation will go unpunished.*”

Verse 29 is where Peter, no doubt, gets the idea that judgment begins in the house of God. **“I have begun to punish Jerusalem, the city that bears my name. Now should I let you go unpunished? No, you will not escape disaster. I will call for war against all the nations of the earth. I, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, have spoken! Now prophesy all these things, and say to them, ‘The Lord will roar against his own land from his holy dwelling in heaven. He will shout like those who tread grapes; he will shout against everyone on earth. His cry of judgment will reach the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring his case against all the nations.’”**¹

The word “nations” is plural. We are no longer just talking about Israel. A larger story is being told; it’s a bigger picture of what God intends to do. Verse 31 really brings Gods plan into focus. **“His cry of judgment will reach the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring his case against all the nations. He will judge all the people of the earth, slaughtering the wicked with the sword.”**

We learn from the book of Ezekiel what God intended to do, and when and how He would implement it. Isaiah had prophesied it earlier. Jeremiah’s message was for repetition and

¹ Jeremiah 25:29–31

enlargement. Albeit 600 years prior, God was revealing more as time drew closer. This was *Plan A*.

Jeremiah wrote, **“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: ‘Look! Disaster will fall upon nation after nation! A great whirlwind of fury is rising from the most distant corners of the earth!’ In that day those the Lord has slaughtered will fill the earth from one end to the other. No one will mourn for them or gather up their bodies to bury them. They will be scattered on the ground like manure.”**¹ Here again is a reference to the Two Witnesses.

The Lord was saying, *“What I’m doing to Jerusalem is only a piece of the puzzle. Israel, listen to me if you have ears to hear. My love and concern include the whole world. Even though you were only a tiny nation, I loved and blessed you. I made you trustees of my covenant. My overall plan was to bring an end to sin, establishing earth as a peaceful and happy home for eternity. The day is coming when I will deal with all nations just as I am dealing with you. I will reward every man according to his deeds. At that time, those I slay will be everywhere, from one end of the earth to the other.”*

In Revelation 19, when Jesus comes under *Plan B*, He will invite the birds to gorge themselves on the flesh of the wicked. When He comes the second time, He destroys the living wicked. The believers will rise to meet Him in the clouds. Think about this and let it sink in. If Jesus’ return were four years from now—allowing for the 1335 days of the Great Tribulation—everyone who’s ever been born, will either be in heaven or dead.

Verse 34. **“Weep and moan, you evil shepherds! Roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock! The time of your slaughter has arrived; you will fall and shatter like a fragile vase.”** The nation had become useless.

“You will find no place to hide; there will be no way to escape. Listen to the frantic cries of the shepherds. The

¹ Jeremiah 25:32–33

leaders of the flock are wailing in despair, for the Lord is ruining their pastures. Peaceful meadows will be turned into a wasteland by the Lord's fierce anger. He has left his den like a strong lion seeking its prey, and their land will be made desolate by the sword of the enemy and the Lord's fierce anger."¹

God lays an enormous responsibility on pastors. Clergymen are charged with the most solemn obligation placed upon any human being: to rightly represent the word of the Lord to the people. Where there is no understanding of God's salvation, people lose sight of reality. Israel became delusional, inebriated with their own gods. God laid the responsibility for this on the shoulders of the shepherds.

In following a chronological order, let's go back to Jeremiah 18. I know it seems counterproductive to jump around in order to keep moving forward but, it is necessary. We're going now to proceed through chapters 18, 19, and 20.

“The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ‘Go down to the potter’s shop, and I will speak to you there.’ So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over. Then the Lord gave me this message: ‘O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand. If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. And if I announce that I will plant and build up a certain nation or kingdom, but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless it as I said I would.’”²

There are people today who insist that the covenant given to the offspring of Abraham, namely the Jews, cannot be

1 Jeremiah 25:35–38

2 Jeremiah 18:1–10

relinquished. I submit that God says, *“It is true that I made a unilateral covenant with Abraham, and I will keep that covenant and see that he is the father of many nations. I will see that those who receive Christ as their Savior are his heirs. And at the end, when the great harvest of people from all nations, languages, tongues, and cultures are gathered to meet me, then it will be shown that Abraham is truly the father of the faithful. I gave the biological option a chance. But they failed me. So I had to abandon them.”*

God was stating that if at any time He announced a nation needed to be destroyed, but, if that nation repented, then He would relent and not inflict the planned disaster.

Verses 11–12. **“Therefore, Jeremiah, go and warn all Judah and Jerusalem. Say to them, ‘This is what the Lord says: I am planning disaster for you instead of good. So turn from your evil ways, each of you, and do what is right.’ But the people replied, ‘Don’t waste your breath. We will continue to live as we want to, stubbornly following our own evil desires.’”**

Today, the world is full of people, who, just as Israel of old, do not understand their obligation to the Lord. They do not understand the prerogatives of God. Nor do they appreciate His ways, claims, and sovereignty.

Verse 13. **“So this is what the Lord says: ‘Has anyone ever heard of such a thing, even among the pagan nations? My virgin daughter Israel has done something terrible! Does the snow ever disappear from the mountaintops of Lebanon? Do the cold streams flowing from those distant mountains ever run dry? But my people are not so reliable, for they have deserted me; they burn incense to worthless idols. They have stumbled off the ancient highways and walk in muddy paths. Therefore, their land will become desolate, a monument to their stupidity. All who pass by will be astonished and will shake their heads in amazement. I will scatter my people before their enemies as the east wind scatters dust. And in all their trouble I will turn my back on them and**

refuse to notice their distress.’”¹ This means their petitions will be to no avail.

So some of the listeners said, **“Come on, let’s plot a way to stop Jeremiah. We have plenty of priests and wise men and prophets. We don’t need him to teach the word and give us advice and prophecies. Let’s spread rumors about him and ignore what he says.”**² Let me remind you that the enemies of Jeremiah are religious people making plans to eliminate him. Jeremiah cries out, **“Lord, hear me and help me! Listen to what my enemies are saying. Should they repay evil for good?”**³ Interpreted, this means, *“I’m doing your work here. I’m giving the call to repentance but look what they want to do to me.”*

“They have dug a pit to kill me, though I pleaded for them and tried to protect them from your anger. So let their children starve! Let them die by the sword! Let their wives become childless widows. Let their old men die in a plague, and let their young men be killed in battle! Let screaming be heard from their homes as warriors come suddenly upon them. For they have dug a pit for me and have hidden traps along my path. Lord, you know all about their murderous plots against me. Don’t forgive their crimes and blot out their sins. Let them die before you. Deal with them in your anger.”⁴

Jeremiah was justifiably indignant. He was reminding the Lord that he was doing what was right and still being threatened.

So the Lord relied to Jeremiah. **“Go and buy a clay jar. Then ask some of the leaders of the people and of the priests to follow you. Go out through the Gate of Broken Pots to the garbage dump in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and give them this message. Say to them, ‘Listen to this message from the**

1 Jeremiah 18:13–17

2 Jeremiah 18:18

3 Jeremiah 18:19–20

4 Jeremiah 18:20–23

Lord, you kings of Judah and citizens of Jerusalem! This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: I will bring a terrible disaster on this place, and the ears of those who hear about it will ring!"¹

Verse 4. "For Israel has forsaken me and turned this valley into a place of wickedness. The people burn incense to foreign gods—idols never before acknowledged by this generation, by their ancestors, or by the kings of Judah. And they have filled this place with the blood of innocent children. They have built pagan shrines to Baal, and there they burn their sons as sacrifices to Baal. I have never commanded such a horrible deed; it never even crossed my mind to command such a thing! So beware, for the time is coming, says the Lord, when this garbage dump will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter."²

Verse 7. "For I will upset the careful plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will allow the people to be slaughtered by invading armies, and I will leave their dead bodies as food for the vultures and wild animals. I will reduce Jerusalem to ruins, making it a monument to their stupidity. All who pass by will be astonished and will gasp at the destruction they see there. I will see to it that your enemies lay siege to the city until all the food is gone. Then those trapped inside will eat their own sons and daughters and friends. They will be driven to utter despair."³

Verse 10. "As these men watch you, Jeremiah, smash the jar you brought. Then say to them, 'This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: As this jar lies shattered, so I will shatter the people of Judah and Jerusalem beyond all hope of repair. They will bury the bodies here in Topheth, the garbage dump, until there is no more room for them. This

1 Jeremiah 19:1–3

2 Jeremiah 19:4–6

3 Jeremiah 19:7–9

is what I will do to this place and its people, says the Lord. I will cause this city to become defiled like Topheth. Yes, all the houses in Jerusalem, including the palace of Judah's kings, will become like Topheth—all the houses where you burned incense on the rooftops to your star gods, and where liquid offerings were poured out to your idols.’”¹

Star gods refer to gods of the heavens—the constellations of the zodiac.

Verse 14. **“Then Jeremiah returned from Topheth, the garbage dump where he had delivered this message, and he stopped in front of the Temple of the Lord. He said to the people there, ‘This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will bring disaster upon this city and its surrounding towns as I promised, because you have stubbornly refused to listen to me.’”**² Jeremiah was delivering tomorrow’s news. And the religious leaders were furious.

Jeremiah 20:1. **“Now Pashhur son of Immer, the priest in charge of the Temple of the Lord, heard what Jeremiah was prophesying. So he arrested Jeremiah the prophet and had him whipped and put in stocks at the Benjamin Gate of the Lord’s Temple.”** Jeremiah has his head, hands, and feet in stocks; his body bleeding from being beaten. Jeremiah is languishing and suffering.

In Jeremiah 15:20, the Lord had told Jeremiah, **“I will make you as secure as a fortified wall of bronze. They will not conquer you, for I am with you to protect and rescue you. I, the Lord, have spoken! Yes, I will certainly keep you safe from these wicked men. I will rescue you from their cruel hands.”**

I’m sure Jeremiah was wondering how that promise would work. He’s in stocks and being beaten for doing what he was told to do. What happened?

Jeremiah 20:3. **“The next day, when Pashhur finally released him, Jeremiah said, ‘Pashhur, the Lord has changed**

¹ Jeremiah 19:10–13

² Jeremiah 19:14–15

your name. From now on you are to be called “The Man Who Lives in Terror.” For this is what the Lord says: “I will send terror upon you and all your friends, and you will watch as they are slaughtered by the swords of the enemy. I will hand the people of Judah over to the king of Babylon. He will take them captive to Babylon or run them through with the sword. And I will let your enemies plunder Jerusalem. All the famed treasures of the city—the precious jewels and gold and silver of your kings—will be carried off to Babylon. As for you, Pashhur, you and all your household will go as captives to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you prophesied that everything would be all right.”” This is quite a prophecy.

Now, while Jeremiah was recovering from his suffering he wrote a bit of poetry starting in verse 7. **“O Lord, you misled me, and I allowed myself to be misled. You are stronger than I am, and you overpowered me.”** The word translated *misled* also means *deceived* or *persuaded*. Jeremiah is saying, “*Lord, you convinced me. I chose to stand on your side. Have you even noticed?*”

Verses 7–8. **“Now I am mocked every day; everyone laughs at me. When I speak, the words burst out. ‘Violence and destruction!’ I shout. So these messages from the Lord have made me a household joke.”** Here is Jeremiah, the prophet of gloom and doom. Jeremiah is petitioning the Lord to “*Look at the other prophets. Look how well they’re doing. They have their own mega churches with energetic bands to rev up the crowds. People flock to them and give them applause. These preachers are prospering and have much wealth. But what do I have? Only insult and reproach.*”

Verse 9. **“But if I say I’ll never mention the Lord or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It’s like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can’t do it!”** Jeremiah was saying, “*I must speak for the Lord, even though the consequences are sever.*”

Verse 10. **“I have heard the many rumors about me. They call me ‘The Man Who Lives in Terror.’ They threaten, ‘If you say anything, we will report it.’ Even my old friends are watching me, waiting for a fatal slip. ‘He will trap himself,’ they say, ‘and then we will get our revenge on him.’ But the Lord stands beside me like a great warrior. Before him my persecutors will stumble. They cannot defeat me. They will fail and be thoroughly humiliated. Their dishonor will never be forgotten. O Lord of Heaven’s Armies, you test those who are righteous, and you examine the deepest thoughts and secrets. Let me see your vengeance against them, for I have committed my cause to you.”**¹

Jeremiah is saying, *“Lord, I can see there is no reason to say anymore. Nothing will turn the hearts of this people. I know that you must do what you have planned.”*

And then, finally, in a moment of exaltation, Jeremiah writes, **“Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For though I was poor and needy, he rescued me from my oppressors.”**² But after thinking about it for a moment, he says, **“Yet I curse the day I was born! May no one celebrate the day of my birth. I curse the messenger who told my father, ‘Good news—you have a son!’ Let him be destroyed like the cities of old that the Lord overthrew without mercy. Terrify him all day long with battle shouts, because he did not kill me at birth. Oh, that I had died in my mother’s womb, that her body had been my grave! Why was I ever born? My entire life has been filled with trouble, sorrow, and shame.”**³

As we read his poetic expression, we can sense Jeremiah’s humanness. He suffered enormously—both emotionally and physically—and yet remained committed to the Lord.

Jeremiah was a lonely man and few could understand his dilemma. He was standing between the Lord and a rebellious

1 Jeremiah 20:10–12

2 Jeremiah 20:13

3 Jeremiah 20:14–18

people. His precarious position is, if he doesn't do the will of the Lord, the Lord will deal with Jeremiah. And of course, conversely, in doing the will of the Lord, the people are going to deal with him. He suffers wrath either way. It will be the same for the saints in the end-time. There will be no difference.

In the end-time, during the Great Tribulation, if we serve the Lord, we will receive the wrath of Satan—the beast. And if we serve the Devil and obey the laws of the land doing what is demanded, we will receive the wrath of God. We're coming into a time of great consternation, just as Jeremiah found himself. That's why it's so important to understand his dilemma, to see his humanness and suffering. Hopefully, by Jeremiah's example, we will understand that God gives grace when we need it most.

Let's now go to Jeremiah 36:1–4. **“During the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king in Judah, the Lord gave this message to Jeremiah: ‘Get a scroll, and write down all my messages against Israel, Judah, and the other nations. Begin with the first message back in the days of Josiah, and write down every message, right up to the present time. Perhaps the people of Judah will repent when they hear again all the terrible things I have planned for them. Then I will be able to forgive their sins and wrongdoings.’ So Jeremiah sent for Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated all the prophecies that the Lord had given him, Baruch wrote them on a scroll.”**

His faithful friend Baruch wrote down all that Jeremiah dictated. In the next chapter, we will move from Jeremiah 36:4 to 45:1. Afterward, we'll come back to chapter 36 and pickup with verse 5, with Baruch taking the scroll to King Joachim.

As we close, remember two thoughts. (1) Jeremiah is caught between the Lord and the Devil. In serving the Lord, he gets the wrath of the people. But he would rather serve the Lord even in the midst of struggle because with the Lord, he has peace. (2) When God sends *the cup* to the nations and pours

His wrath upon the world, all will feel it. In the present, because the Lord is silent, He is a distant thought to most people. At this time, we live in relative peace and prosperity (at least in the West); as a result, people have become bold in their sinful ways. However, suddenly, one day in the very near future, the wrath of God will explode upon the world and its people. Everyone will then see a dimension of God that most preachers never discuss. Herein lies the great problem: *Where there's no vision, the people perish.*¹

¹ Proverbs 29:18

CHAPTER 5



Call to Repentance

The final years of King Jehoiakim were close in time to the destruction of Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 45, a discussion takes place between Jeremiah and his faithful scribe, Baruch. Evidently, Baruch had become quite discouraged by the animosity heaped on him and Jeremiah. Serving Jeremiah seemed to be getting him nowhere. In fact, it seemed that Jeremiah was in constant suffering; he was either in prison, in the miry pit, or being flogged. Meanwhile, the other prophets in Israel were prophesying peace. At this point in the story, we're actually talking about Judah which, at this time, was also referred to as Israel, because the 10 northern kingdoms had been destroyed about 120 years earlier.

Jeremiah 45:1. **“The prophet Jeremiah gave a message to Baruch son of Neriah in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, after Baruch had written down everything Jeremiah had dictated to him.”** The fourth year of Jehoiakim places us at the time of the first siege in 605 BC. As the chapter progresses, we'll move down to 598 BC.

Verses 2–3. **“He said, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: You have said, ‘I am overwhelmed with trouble! Haven’t I had enough pain already? And now the Lord has added more! I am worn out from sighing and can find no rest.’”’”**

Verses 4–5. **“Baruch, this is what the Lord says: ‘I will destroy this nation that I built. I will uproot what I planted. Are you seeking great things for yourself? Don’t do it! I will bring great disaster upon all these people; but I will give you your life as a reward wherever you go. I, the Lord, have spoken!’”**

Comforting words from the perspective that God is going to spare your life. But I think Baruch was just worn out from the constant threat and intimidation he and Jeremiah were experiencing. So the Lord sent a message for the faithful scribe, telling him that his life would be spared, and not to worry because the time had come for God’s wrath to fall upon the land and its people.

God’s wrath toward Jerusalem had been building for many years. His patience, long-suffering, and forgiveness had been extended many times. God was steadily calling His people to repentance. At the time Jeremiah and Baruch lived, the execution of His wrath was about to take place, so their message was for a doomed nation. That painful detail was hard for Baruch to accept.

In Jeremiah 45, God gives a message of encouragement to Baruch saying *“Look, I have a much bigger plan than you understand now; so don’t worry about your future. I will take care of you.”* Jeremiah 36:5 continues the story in chronological order.

“Then Jeremiah said to Baruch, ‘I am a prisoner here and unable to go to the Temple. So you go to the Temple on the next day of fasting, and read the messages from the Lord that I have had you write on this scroll. Read them so the people who are there from all over Judah will hear them.

Perhaps even yet they will turn from their evil ways and ask the Lord's forgiveness before it is too late. For the Lord has threatened them with his terrible anger.' Baruch did as Jeremiah told him and read these messages from the Lord to the people at the Temple. He did this on a day of sacred fasting held in late autumn, during the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah. People from all over Judah had come to Jerusalem to attend the services at the Temple on that day."¹

We're in the ninth month. The people know a siege is about to take place so they're shaking with fear. As you could expect, this is a great emergency on the level of a national crisis. They were scared, so much so, that the king and high priest—even the priests of all the other gods—had called a fast. All of the people, with great urgency, gathered seeking the Lord in an attempt to avert His judgments.

Verse 10. **"Baruch read Jeremiah's words on the scroll to all the people. He stood in front of the Temple room of Gemariah, son of Shaphan the secretary. This room was just off the upper courtyard of the Temple, near the New Gate entrance."**

In Jeremiah's day, the temple complex had a number of balconies which overlooked both the inner and outer courts. These balconies functioned much like an auditorium or theater. From these balconies, various priests would read proclamations. And so Baruch went to the temple and, from one of the balconies, read everything Jeremiah had dictated.

Verse 11. **"When Micaiah son of Gemariah and grandson of Shaphan heard the messages from the Lord, he went down to the secretary's room in the palace where the administrative officials were meeting. Elishama the secretary was there, along with Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Acbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials. When Micaiah told them about the**

¹ Jeremiah 36:5-9

messages Baruch was reading to the people, the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah, grandson of Shelemiah and great-grandson of Cushi, to ask Baruch to come and read the messages to them, too. So Baruch took the scroll and went to them. ‘Sit down and read the scroll to us,’ the officials said, and Baruch did as they requested. When they heard all the messages, they looked at one another in alarm. ‘We must tell the king what we have heard,’ they said to Baruch. ‘But first, tell us how you got these messages. Did they come directly from Jeremiah?’ So Baruch explained, ‘Jeremiah dictated them, and I wrote them down in ink, word for word, on this scroll.’¹

Later on, we’ll discover that the message was contrary to what the people wanted to hear. Remember, this was a day of fasting because the threat against Judah and Jerusalem was severe. The likelihood of imminent destruction was almost a certainty. Keep in mind that this is the first siege in 605 BC.

Because the words were so inflammatory, the officials said to Baruch in verse 19, “**You and Jeremiah should both hide,’ the officials told Baruch. ‘Don’t tell anyone where you are!’** Then the officials left the scroll for safekeeping in the room of Elishama the secretary and went to tell the king what had happened. The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll. Jehudi brought it from Elishama’s room and read it to the king as all his officials stood by. It was late autumn, and the king was in a winterized part of the palace, sitting in front of a fire to keep warm. Each time Jehudi finished reading three or four columns, the king took a knife and cut off that section of the scroll. He then threw it into the fire, section by section, until the whole scroll was burned up. Neither the king nor his attendants showed any signs of fear or repentance at what they heard. Even when Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah begged the king not to burn the scroll, he wouldn’t listen. Then the king commanded his son Jerahmeel, Seraiah son

¹ Jeremiah 36:11–18

of Azriel, and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. But the Lord had hidden them. After the king had burned the scroll on which Baruch had written Jeremiah's words, the Lord gave Jeremiah another message. He said, 'Get another scroll, and write everything again just as you did on the scroll King Jehoiakim burned. Then say to the king, "This is what the Lord says: You burned the scroll because it said the king of Babylon would destroy this land and empty it of people and animals. Now this is what the Lord says about King Jehoiakim of Judah: He will have no heirs to sit on the throne of David. His dead body will be thrown out to lie unburied—exposed to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. I will punish him and his family and his attendants for their sins. I will pour out on them and on all the people of Jerusalem and Judah all the disasters I promised, for they would not listen to my warnings." ' So Jeremiah took another scroll and dictated again to his secretary, Baruch. He wrote everything that had been on the scroll King Jehoiakim had burned in the fire. Only this time he added much more!"¹

To continue the story in chronological order, let's go back to Jeremiah 12 where we learn new details about what the Lord had promised and what was weighing on Jeremiah's heart.

Chapter 12 begins with Jeremiah having a *heart-to-heart* talk with the Lord. "Lord, you always give me justice when I bring a case before you. So let me bring you this complaint: Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil people so happy? You have planted them, and they have taken root and prospered. Your name is on their lips, but you are far from their hearts. But as for me, Lord, you know my heart. You see me and test my thoughts. Drag these people away like sheep to be butchered! Set them aside to be slaughtered! How long must this land mourn? Even the grass in the fields has withered. The wild animals and birds have disappeared

¹ Jeremiah 36:19–32

because of the evil in the land. For the people have said, ‘The Lord doesn’t see what’s ahead for us!’”¹

God then replies. “If racing against mere men makes you tired, how will you race against horses? If you stumble and fall on open ground, what will you do in the thickets near the Jordan? Even your brothers, members of your own family, have turned against you. They plot and raise complaints against you. Do not trust them, no matter how pleasantly they speak.”²

The Lord is urging, “*Jeremiah, look a little higher. You’ve got to see the bigger picture. You have to understand that my will and my ways have certain principles that always work. Diligence is one of them. It is a law of life. Diligence is always rewarded in an evil person as well as a righteous one; someone who is evil can apply diligence and succeed just as a righteous person can. Think of it this way: if you’re slothful, you’re going to go hungry. It doesn’t matter that your heart is Godly.*”

To his face, his brothers were saying one thing, but behind Jeremiah’s back, they were plotting to have him eliminated. Jeremiah was bringing shame upon his family. What he was saying against the Holy City and its “chosen” people was contemptible. His own family shunned him. He was an outcast. His enemies reviled him. So Jeremiah took his case directly to the Lord.

The Lord said to Jeremiah in verse 7, “**I have abandoned my people, my special possession. I have surrendered my dearest ones to their enemies. My chosen people have roared at me like a lion of the forest, so I have treated them with contempt. My chosen people act like speckled vultures, but they themselves are surrounded by vultures. Bring on the wild animals to pick their corpses clean! Many rulers have ravaged my vineyard, trampling down the vines and turning all its beauty into a barren wilderness. They have**

1 Jeremiah 12:1–4

2 Jeremiah 12:5–6

made it an empty wasteland; I hear its mournful cry. The whole land is desolate, and no one even cares. On all the bare hilltops, destroying armies can be seen. The sword of the Lord devours people from one end of the nation to the other. No one will escape! My people have planted wheat but are harvesting thorns. They have worn themselves out, but it has done them no good. They will harvest a crop of shame because of the fierce anger of the Lord.”¹

The Lord now concludes Jeremiah 12 with a prophecy that will be fulfilled and amplified in Ezekiel. Ezekiel 4 refers to a time in the future when the Lord would set up His kingdom on earth.

Jeremiah 12:14. **“Now this is what the Lord says: ‘I will uproot from their land all the evil nations reaching out for the possession I gave my people Israel. And I will uproot Judah from among them.’”** Remember, when Nebuchadnezzar decimates Jerusalem, those living in the surrounding areas move in to take the spoils.

So the Lord says in verse 15, **“But afterward I will return and have compassion on all of them. I will bring them home to their own lands again, each nation to its own possession. And if...”** The word **“IF”** is the most meaningful word in any contract. **“And if these nations truly learn the ways of my people, and if they learn to swear by my name, saying, ‘As surely as the Lord lives’ (just as they taught my people to swear by the name of Baal), then they will be given a place among my people.”**

There is some veiled language in the verses. After uprooting these people, God was going to restore them, too. *IF* they would learn the ways of His people and swear by His name, then they would be established among His people.

Understand what the Lord is really saying in these verses. God originally created and chose the descendants of Abraham to be a light to the Gentiles. And it was God’s intention that

¹ Jeremiah 12:7–13

after Babylonian captivity, His people would repent, come back, and be restored to their homes. It was His intent that succeeding generations would learn the hard lessons of the previous generations, and have a complete change of heart. The result being that, at the end of the 70 weeks, a universal restoration would have occurred.

Remember, this was taking place a few years before the revelation that there would be 70 weeks to prepare for the coming of Messiah. God was saying through Jeremiah, *“I’m going to restore my people. And if their neighbors will learn my ways, they will be established among my people as well. But if any nation does not listen, a time is coming when I will completely destroy it.”*

The end of their world is being described. The end then was not the end we understand today. It was an end that would have occurred at the close of the 70th week. Because God knows what He will do from the beginning, when He says things like this, we can now understand what He knew. Let’s now close Jeremiah 12 and the life of King Jehoiakim, who was dethroned in 598 BC with the second siege of Nebuchadnezzar.

When Jehoiachin came to power, he ruled over Jerusalem for about three months. He was a puppet and therefore not well regarded by his people or Nebuchadnezzar, so his stint as king didn’t last long.

In Jeremiah 22:20, the Lord has come to Jeremiah and asked him to speak to King Jehoiachin. **“Weep for your allies in Lebanon. Shout for them in Bashan. Search for them in the regions east of the river. See, they are all destroyed. Not one is left to help you. I warned you when you were prosperous, but you replied, ‘Don’t bother me.’ You have been that way since childhood—you simply will not obey me!”**¹

Verse 22. **“And now the wind will blow away your allies. All your friends will be taken away as captives. Surely then you will see your wickedness and be ashamed. It may be nice**

¹ Jeremiah 22:20–21

to live in a beautiful palace paneled with wood from the cedars of Lebanon, but soon you will groan with pangs of anguish—anguish like that of a woman in labor. ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘I will abandon you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah. Even if you were the signet ring on my right hand, I would pull you off. I will hand you over to those who seek to kill you, those you so desperately fear—to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the mighty Babylonian army.

I will expel you and your mother from this land, and you will die in a foreign country, not in your native land. You will never again return to the land you yearn for. Why is this man Jehoiachin like a discarded, broken jar? Why are he and his children to be exiled to a foreign land? O earth, earth, earth! Listen to this message from the Lord! This is what the Lord says: “Let the record show that this man Jehoiachin was childless. He is a failure, for none of his children will succeed him on the throne of David to rule over Judah.””¹

God didn’t have any use for Jehoiachin. He proved to be as wicked as his father, Jehoiakim.

Now on to Jeremiah 13:1 which has a bit of mystery to it. I’m not quite sure of its meaning. See what you make of it. **“This is what the Lord said to me: ‘Go and buy a linen loincloth and put it on, but do not wash it.’”** He is instructing Jeremiah to buy underwear. You can see why I’m mystified.

Verse 2. **“So I bought the loincloth as the Lord directed me, and I put it on. Then the Lord gave me another message: ‘Take the linen loincloth you are wearing, and go to the Euphrates River. Hide it there in a hole in the rocks.’ So I went and hid it by the Euphrates as the Lord had instructed me.”**² The Euphrates River was the northernmost boundary of the land of Israel, which was about 350 miles from Jerusalem. That’s a long walk.

1 Jeremiah 22:22–30

2 Jeremiah 13:2–5

Verse 6. **“A long time afterward the Lord said to me, ‘Go back to the Euphrates and get the loincloth I told you to hide there.’ So I went to the Euphrates and dug it out of the hole where I had hidden it. But now it was rotting and falling apart. The loincloth was good for nothing.”**¹

This appears to be a trip of 1400 miles. Here’s the math: 350 miles there, 350 miles back; many days later, he did it again. 1400 miles of hiking to find that the underwear is useless.

Verses 8–9. **“Then I received this message from the Lord: ‘This is what the Lord says: This shows how I will rot away the pride of Judah and Jerusalem.’”** Why did God choose underwear? Because underwear is as close and personal as it gets. The Lord was using an undergarment to demonstrate that he held the nation of Israel close and personal. Taking the underwear off and hiding it in rocks a great distance away is figurative of what He intended to do to Israel. God was going to remove His people to Babylon—a land far away.

In Jeremiah’s day, traveling was done either on foot or by animal. 1400 miles was no small task. This is quite an illustration. But the Lord told Jeremiah, **“This shows how I will rot away the pride of Judah and Jerusalem.”** Perhaps as Jeremiah made the trip, he would stop along the way and tell people about what God intended to do and why.

Verse 10. **“These wicked people refuse to listen to me. They stubbornly follow their own desires and worship other gods. Therefore, they will become like this loincloth—good for nothing! As a loincloth clings to a man’s waist, so I created Judah and Israel to cling to me, says the Lord. They were to be my people, my pride, my glory—an honor to my name. But they would not listen to me. So tell them, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: May all your jars be filled with wine.’ And they will reply, ‘Of course! Jars are made to be filled with wine!’ Then tell them, ‘No, this is what the Lord means: I will fill everyone in this land with**

¹ Jeremiah 13:6–7

drunkenness—from the king sitting on David’s throne to the priests and the prophets, right down to the common people of Jerusalem. I will smash them against each other, even parents against children, says the Lord. I will not let my pity or mercy or compassion keep me from destroying them.’”¹

I would like to go back for a moment and comment on the phrase “drinking the contents of this cup” found in Jeremiah 25. In the illustration, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to take *His Cup* to the nations and make them drink its dregs. The Lord intended for them to experience His wrath.

In Jeremiah 13, during the days of Jehoiachin, God said, *“I’m going to fill the land with drunkenness so they will destroy the land and each other. I will then bring my judgments to a close.”*

The phenomenon we call war is a condition where God pours out a spirit that totally inebriates one’s mind. When drunkenness, irrationality, and confusion consume the mind, destruction is the only solution. And many times, those who initiate war are the ones destroyed by it. God uses these situations to offer a better future for subsequent generations.

I know what I’m about to say is a horrible thought, but please, consider it. If World War 2 had not occurred and been as inclusive as it was, our world would be a much more violent place today. I know it’s hard to imagine, but I believe it to be true.

That war, because of its wholesale destruction, brought a sense of fatigue throughout Europe, Italy, Russia, Japan, and the South Pacific. The frightening reality of the effects of atomic energy on human life was also discovered. Now please, don’t misunderstand. There are elements in government and business that profit by war, and the more chaos, the better. I’m not referring to those people as being fatigued. I’m referring to real people who have a soul.

¹ Jeremiah 13:10–14

The state of drunkenness that comes upon the whole world during war involves everyone. That's what God was saying in Jeremiah's day.

Verse 15. "Listen and pay attention! Do not be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before it is too late. Acknowledge him before he brings darkness upon you, causing you to stumble and fall on the darkening mountains. For then, when you look for light, you will find only terrible darkness and gloom. And if you still refuse to listen, I will weep alone because of your pride. My eyes will overflow with tears, because the Lord's flock will be led away into exile."¹

Because Jerusalem has already suffered two sieges, you should think they would understand why this is happening. But they don't. Consequently, God intends even more harm and damage—utter destruction.

Verse 18. "Say to the king and his mother, 'Come down from your thrones and sit in the dust, for your glorious crowns will soon be snatched from your heads.' The towns of the Negev [the desert] will close their gates, and no one will be able to open them. The people of Judah will be taken away as captives. All will be carried into exile. Open up your eyes and see the armies marching down from the north! [There's that direction again.] Where is your flock—your beautiful flock—that he gave you to care for?

What will you say when the Lord takes the allies you have cultivated and appoints them as your rulers? Pangs of anguish will grip you, like those of a woman in labor! You may ask yourself, 'Why is all this happening to me?' It is because of your many sins! That is why you have been stripped and raped by invading armies. Can an Ethiopian change the color of his skin? Can a leopard take away its spots? Neither can you start doing good, for you have always done evil.

I will scatter you like chaff that is blown away by the

¹ Jeremiah 13:15–17

desert winds. This is your allotment, the portion I have assigned to you,' says the Lord, 'for you have forgotten me, putting your trust in false gods. I myself will strip you and expose you to shame. I have seen your adultery and lust, and your disgusting idol worship out in the fields and on the hills. What sorrow awaits you, Jerusalem! How long before you are pure?'¹

In 586 BC, during Jehoiachin's three month reign, Nebuchadnezzar's final destruction of Jerusalem was imminent.

God was saying, *"You have played the role of a harlot. You have had fun in your infidelity and prostitution. Now, I will show you what nakedness and shame really feel like. You will look upon the dead in the streets, their clothing stolen from their bodies."*

In Jeremiah 14, God sent drought, famine, and war trying to get Israel to repent. But they wouldn't.

Now to Jeremiah 23, which focuses primarily on the failure of Israel's priests (shepherds of the flock) and how they caused the fall of the nation. God laid the responsibility for Israel's failure on the shoulders of His priests.

Jeremiah writes starting with verse 1, **"What sorrow awaits the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were expected to care for,"** says the Lord. Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to these shepherds: **"Instead of caring for my flock and leading them to safety, you have deserted them and driven them to destruction. Now I will pour out judgment on you for the evil you have done to them. But I will gather together the remnant of my flock from the countries where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their own sheepfold, and they will be fruitful and increase in number. Then I will appoint responsible shepherds who will care for them, and they will never be afraid again. Not a single one will be lost or missing. I, the**

¹ Jeremiah 13:18–27

Lord, have spoken!’”¹

God’s wrath is being directed toward the priests, while talking about a day that is coming. He’s holding out hope that He could gather a remnant as His flock from the countries they had been driven to. The allusion here was that in the future, there would be restoration; the exile to Babylon was only a means to an end. God intended to bring destruction upon Judah and Benjamin because, corporately, the tribes had degenerated and could not repent.

Verse 5 begins a messianic statement. **“For the time is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David’s line. He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. And this will be his name: “The Lord Is Our Righteousness.” In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety.’”²**

Jeremiah 23 is holding out tremendous hope. It is revealing an apocalyptic fulfillment which God had in mind to accomplish at the end of 70 weeks. The book of Daniel goes into great detail about this.

The year was about 597 BC. Jerusalem had been ransacked twice. Jehoiachin was about to fall from the throne, and Zedekiah would become king of Judah ruling from Jerusalem. Through Jeremiah, God was saying, *“Your priests have ruined my flock instead of caring for them. They have scattered and driven them away. But a time is coming when I will gather a remnant and bring them back to their pasture.”*

This was speaking of a time when the kingdom of God would be set up and Jesus would sit on the throne of David. The hope and possibility of what God would do through Israel was amazingly profound. Today, the big problem is that many Christians relocate the context, setting, and placement of these words to the end of time during the Great Tribulation. But this

¹ Jeremiah 23:1–4

² Jeremiah 23:5–6

is not scriptural. You will see this for yourself as we build the story more completely.

Verse 7. **“‘In that day,’ says the Lord, ‘when people are taking an oath, they will no longer say, “As surely as the Lord lives, who rescued the people of Israel from the land of Egypt.” Instead, they will say, “As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the people of Israel back to their own land from the land of the north [Babylon] and from all the countries to which he had exiled them.” Then they will live in their own land.’”**¹

The Lord was talking about restoration from the land of the north where Israel would be exiled. We read that in Jeremiah 25.

“‘This entire land will become a desolate wasteland. Israel and her neighboring lands will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins,’ says the Lord. ‘I will make the country of the Babylonians a wasteland forever.’”²

In Jeremiah 23, the Lord is speaking of Israel’s exile and restoration. Verse 9 begins with a statement by Jeremiah while looking at his colleagues—those who claimed to be priests as he was.

“My heart is broken because of the false prophets, and my bones tremble. I stagger like a drunkard, like someone overcome by wine, because of the holy words the Lord has spoken against them. For the land is full of adultery, and it lies under a curse. The land itself is in mourning—its wilderness pastures are dried up. For they all do evil and abuse what power they have. ‘Even the priests and prophets are ungodly, wicked men. I have seen their despicable acts right here in my own Temple,’ says the Lord. ‘Therefore, the paths they take will become slippery. They will be chased

1 Jeremiah 23:7–8

2 Jeremiah 25:11–12

through the dark, and there they will fall. For I will bring disaster upon them at the time fixed for their punishment. I, the Lord, have spoken!

I saw that the prophets of Samaria were terribly evil, for they prophesied in the name of Baal and led my people of Israel into sin. But now I see that the prophets of Jerusalem are even worse! They commit adultery and love dishonesty. They encourage those who are doing evil so that no one turns away from their sins. These prophets are as wicked as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah once were.¹ Therefore, this is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says concerning the prophets: 'I will feed them with bitterness and give them poison to drink. For it is because of Jerusalem's prophets that wickedness has filled this land.'²

The *poison to drink* is a reference to the bitter water called wormwood which means poisonous water. It's translated in the NIV and other translations as poisoned water because the prophets of Jerusalem had spread ungodliness throughout the land. This is a parallel for today, is it not?

Verse 16. "This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says to his people: 'Do not listen to these prophets when they prophesy to you, filling you with futile hopes. They are making up everything they say. They do not speak for the Lord! They keep saying to those who despise my word, "Don't worry! The Lord says you will have peace!" And to those who stubbornly follow their own desires, they say, "No harm will come your way!" Have any of these prophets been in the Lord's presence to hear what he is really saying? Has even one of them cared enough to listen? Look! The Lord's anger bursts out like a storm, a whirlwind that swirls down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not diminish until it has finished all he has planned. In the days to come you will understand all this very clearly.'²

1 Jeremiah 23:9-15

2 Jeremiah 23:16-20

The Lord now tells Jeremiah about those false prophets. “I have not sent these prophets, yet they run around claiming to speak for me. I have given them no message, yet they go on prophesying. If they had stood before me and listened to me, they would have spoken my words, and they would have turned my people from their evil ways and deeds. Am I a God who is only close at hand?” says the Lord. ‘No, I am far away at the same time. Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?’ says the Lord.

‘I have heard these prophets say, “Listen to the dream I had from God last night.” And then they proceed to tell lies in my name. How long will this go on? If they are prophets, they are prophets of deceit, inventing everything they say. By telling these false dreams, they are trying to get my people to forget me, just as their ancestors did by worshiping the idols of Baal. Let these false prophets tell their dreams, but let my true messengers faithfully proclaim my every word. There is a difference between straw and grain! Does not my word burn like fire?’ says the Lord. ‘Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashes a rock to pieces? Therefore,’ says the Lord, ‘I am against these prophets who steal messages from each other and claim they are from me. I am against these smooth-tongued prophets who say, “This prophecy is from the Lord!” I am against these false prophets. Their imaginary dreams are flagrant lies that lead my people into sin. I did not send or appoint them, and they have no message at all for my people. I, the Lord, have spoken!

Suppose one of the people or one of the prophets or priests asks you, “What prophecy has the Lord burdened you with now?” You must reply, “You are the burden! The Lord says he will abandon you!” If any prophet, priest, or anyone else says, “I have a prophecy from the Lord,” I will punish that person along with his entire family. You should keep asking each other, “What is the Lord’s answer?” or “What is the

Lord saying?” But stop using this phrase, “prophecy from the Lord.” For people are using it to give authority to their own ideas, turning upside down the words of our God, the living God, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

This is what you should say to the prophets: “What is the Lord’s answer?” or “What is the Lord saying?” But suppose they respond, “This is a prophecy from the Lord!” Then you should say, “This is what the Lord says: Because you have used this phrase, ‘prophecy from the Lord,’ even though I warned you not to use it, I will forget you completely. I will expel you from my presence, along with this city that I gave to you and your ancestors. And I will make you an object of ridicule, and your name will be infamous throughout the ages.”¹

The Lord takes it very seriously when someone claims to “have a word from the Lord” while it really is nothing more than a delusion of their own mind. He is against those who make up lies. We need to be extremely careful with our statements about the Lord.

When the Lord communicated with Jeremiah, there was no doubt in Jeremiah’s mind he was having a discussion with a living entity. There was no apparition and no séance; the encounter was as real as talking to a friend.

Frequently, I receive letters from people claiming to have received a dream from the Lord. And my response goes something like this: “If God has indeed spoken to you, then speak. Reveal the truth that has been revealed to you. But if you’re left in mystery from what you have seen, you’re no better off than the rest of us. How can we understand something you don’t understand, when you were the one who had the encounter? Furthermore, how can I investigate your claim? How can your dream be validated?” Give me the Word from the Bible. That is the only standard of truth.

This brings us down through the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim,

¹ Jeremiah 23:21-40

and Jehoiachin. We have chronologically traveled from 627 BC to 597 BC.

I know this sounds like a broken record because Jeremiah, during the 30 years we've covered thus far, has repeatedly given much the same message. And of course this makes the study of Jeremiah appear to be repetitious. But when we look more closely, God actually reveals something of impotence in each iteration.

For example, consider this parallel. We have covered enough of Jeremiah to see that God explains to the generation who is to suffer His wrath, why He must destroy His city, His temple, and His people, and then send a remnant into exile. The only fix for corporate apostasy is total destruction. When a nation becomes corrupt, it cannot be rescued. When you have too many people over the edge, they cannot return so destruction is the only solution.

God destroyed His people three times in the Old Testament. (1) The faithless generation that came out of Egypt; (2) the ten northern tribes (Israel) in 722 BC; and then (3) Jerusalem in 586 BC. The irony in each of these destructions was that God's people could not see nor understand their apostasy. The religious people, when confronted with their wrongdoing, wanted to kill Jeremiah because he was condemning their actions, their city, and speaking against their temple.

Now, here's the parallel. The Great Tribulation that is coming upon the world is a parallel of what happened in Jeremiah's day. Religious people today are no different than they were then. Speaking the truth brings the same consequences. If you don't believe me, stand up in church and condemn the people sitting around you for wrongdoing on the authority of Scripture, then observe the results. It should be clear why destruction is God's only recourse.

To bring about the destruction of Jerusalem when Judah had apostatized, God employed the services of Nebuchadnezzar. When the ten northern tribes became corrupt, God employed

the services of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. During the Great Tribulation, God will send a great king and his army against all who claim to be religious. This great king is the Antichrist.

Religious people of the world are in apostasy. They don't know it so will not listen to correction. If you think they will, I encourage you to hold your Christian friends to God's high standard of conduct and notice the consequence. When love for truth is lost and the distinction between good and evil becomes gray, that generation becomes the final one. So the destruction of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day, is in fact, a parallel of what will happen in our day.

All religions of the world today have become corrupt. Think about that. This is why the seven heads of Revelation 13 represent the religious systems of the world. And God is sending a great king and his army against the world to destroy it. This is why the Antichrist (Lucifer, the Devil), when he physically appears claiming to be God, is known as the destroyer.¹ He is the angel king of the Abyss.

So as you look at Nebuchadnezzar coming against Jerusalem, God is sending a king and his army against His own people because they have reached the point of no return. They cannot discern between good and evil. But the parallel of the story doesn't stop there. We've already read in Jeremiah, several times, that God planned to deal with Babylon. In fact, Babylon was destroyed when the 70 years of exile ended.

God eventually destroys those who do not recognize Him. There are several instances of this in the Old Testament. The flood in Noah's day, the Egyptians during the Exodus, the Medes and Persians, the Grecians, Sodom and Gomorrah, Jericho, and Nineveh, are all examples of going too far for too long, in rebellion.

God will use Lucifer to decimate the wicked of earth just as He used Shalmaneser and Nebuchadnezzar as agents of wrath upon His apostate people. The Old Testament affirms that

¹ Revelation 9:11

God grants nations a period of mercy and grace. But when a nation becomes corrupt and degenerate, God sends warnings. Yet, when these warnings and following redemptive judgments have no redeeming effect, God destroys that nation. In so doing, He cauterizes the degeneracy of sin for the benefit of future generations.

This is the only process whereby a higher level of moral conduct is established for succeeding generations. It also explains why there has to be an end to this world and the creation of a new one. It's the only way to elevate mankind.

In Jeremiah 24, the prophet relays a vision from the Lord. **“After King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon exiled Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, to Babylon along with the officials of Judah and all the craftsmen and artisans, the Lord gave me this vision. I saw two baskets of figs placed in front of the Lord’s Temple in Jerusalem. One basket was filled with fresh, ripe figs, while the other was filled with bad figs that were too rotten to eat.**

Then the Lord said to me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’

I replied, ‘Figs, some very good and some very bad, too rotten to eat.’

Then the Lord gave me this message: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: “The good figs represent the exiles I sent from Judah to the land of the Babylonians. I will watch over and care for them, and I will bring them back here again. I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them hearts that recognize me as the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me wholeheartedly.”’¹

What a beautiful expression.

“Look at these figs. The good figs are like the exiles. I’m going to watch over them, I’m going to prosper them, and I will bring them home from the exile.”

¹ Jeremiah 24:1-7

“But the bad figs,’ the Lord said, ‘represent King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, all the people left in Jerusalem, and those who live in Egypt. I will treat them like bad figs, too rotten to eat. I will make them an object of horror and a symbol of evil to every nation on earth. They will be disgraced and mocked, taunted and cursed, wherever I scatter them. And I will send war, famine, and disease until they have vanished from the land of Israel, which I gave to them and their ancestors.’”¹

Here we see God’s judgments: *sword, famine, and plague*. In Revelation, the fourth seal is *sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts*. Again, we see God’s punitive judgments implemented. He’s saying, “*These poor figs are so bad, they’re useless.*” He’s referring to Zedekiah and all of his cronies who are ruling in Jerusalem.

Here, in the first year of Zedekiah, we find the promise of exile and destruction for the king. He was a bad fig from the beginning. The most significant part of this chapter though is verse 7. “*I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.*”

Some people will read this, look at ancient history and think, “*This doesn’t look conditional. It looks like God promised He would do it. And since it hasn’t happened yet, it must be coming.*” But that’s not the case. God gave the exiles the same prerogatives, privileges, and power of choice that He gave those who were destroyed. Of the returning exiles, many tried to live wholeheartedly before the Lord. Nevertheless, corporately speaking, it was a complete failure. Not on God’s part, but on man’s. Man has never been able, in his own strength, to satisfy the will of God.

In chapter 29, Jeremiah is still in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar has twice hauled exiles away: first in 605 BC and again in 598 BC. Jeremiah is sending this letter to the exiles. Let’s begin

¹ Jeremiah 24:8–10

with verse 4.

“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: ‘Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.’ This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Do not let your prophets and fortune-tellers who are with you in the land of Babylon trick you. Do not listen to their dreams, because they are telling you lies in my name. I have not sent them,’ says the Lord. This is what the Lord says: ‘You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.’”¹

The restoration being promised by Jeremiah is significant only to the Babylonian exiles. It has nothing to do with post 1948 Israel. Nothing!

Verse 11. **“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you,’ says the Lord. ‘I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.’ You claim that the Lord has raised up prophets for you in Babylon. But this is what the Lord says about the king who sits on David’s throne [Zedekiah] and all those still living here in Jerusalem—your relatives who were not exiled to Babylon. This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: ‘I will send war, famine, and disease upon them and make them like bad figs, too rotten to eat. Yes, I will**

¹ Jeremiah 29:4–10

pursue them with war, famine, and disease, and I will scatter them around the world. In every nation where I send them, I will make them an object of damnation, horror, contempt, and mockery. For they refuse to listen to me, though I have spoken to them repeatedly through the prophets I sent. And you who are in exile have not listened either,' says the Lord."¹

Understand the setting. Jeremiah is writing a letter to the exiles, instructing them to *"Stay in Babylon. Prosper and increase in numbers there. Marry. Plant your gardens. Pray for the city of Babylon, because as it prospers, you will prosper as well. Do not think for a moment that you are going to return to Jerusalem in less than 70 years. Do not think that those who are still here in Jerusalem are going to bring about the necessary restitution and redemption that I require. It won't happen."*

When the priests who had been exiled to Babylon saw what Jeremiah had presented in his letter, they accused him of being pro-Babylonian. They accused him of taking the side of the Babylonian king, and as such, he was treacherous and treasonous to the cause of the nation of Israel.

In verse 20, Jeremiah goes on to say **"Therefore, listen to this message from the Lord, all you captives there in Babylon. This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says about your prophets—Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah—who are telling you lies in my name: 'I will turn them over to Nebuchadnezzar for execution before your eyes.'**"²

These verses mention two specific prophets in Babylon: one by the name of Ahab, the other by the name of Zedekiah. Incidentally, the same name as the king in Jerusalem.

Verses 22–23. **"Their terrible fate will become proverbial, so that the Judean exiles will curse someone by saying, 'May the Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned alive!' For these men have done terrible**

¹ Jeremiah 29:11–19

² Jeremiah 29:20–21

things among my people. They have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and have lied in my name, saying things I did not command. I am a witness to this. I, the Lord, have spoken." In the rest of chapter 29, there was a real effort to get rid of Jeremiah.

As we close, I want to leave you with a vivid picture. The time and context of the book of Jeremiah are directly related to the 70 years in Babylon. There is no gap of 2000 years. God was talking about a restoration of His people following that exile. He had in mind that, eventually, by the time of Christ—which is about 500 years from the time of the exile's termination—the kingdom of God would be set up. That's what John the Baptist's message was all about. He was the voice in the wilderness crying out, "**Behold, the kingdom of God is at hand. Prepare for the way of the Lord.**" The time had come! But, alas, the generation that returned from Babylon, and the succeeding generations, repeated the same apostasy as their forefathers. Consequently, Jesus had to abandon them.

CHAPTER 6



Context and Timing

The setting in Jeremiah 30 is 586 BC during the time of Zedekiah, the last king of Israel before Nebuchadnezzar burns Jerusalem to the ground.

“The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Write down for the record everything I have said to you, Jeremiah. For the time is coming when I will restore the fortunes of my people of Israel and Judah. I will bring them home to this land that I gave to their ancestors, and they will possess it again. I, the Lord, have spoken!’

This is the message the Lord gave concerning Israel and Judah. This is what the Lord says: ‘I hear cries of fear; there is terror and no peace. Now let me ask you a question: Do men give birth to babies? Then why do they stand there, ashen-faced, hands pressed against their sides like a woman in labor? In all history there has never been such a time of terror. It will be a time of trouble for my people Israel. Yet in

the end they will be saved!’”¹

From Jeremiah’s perspective, this will be a very turbulent time in the future. God used veiled language to describe how the end of the world would occur. Under Plan A, God had planned that were Israel faithful, He would bring about the end of sin, and create a new heaven and earth, as was also stated in the book of Isaiah. What most people don’t understand though was that God intended to do this shortly after the conclusion of the 70 weeks.²

When Jesus came to earth as a baby, He was to grow up, have the guilt of sin placed upon himself and die as the atonement for sin. Then, after being resurrected, instead of returning to heaven, Christ would have proceeded to establish the kingdom of God upon this earth. And *IF* Israel had been faithful, it would have been establish at the end of the 70 weeks following AD 34.

There are prophecies by Jeremiah, Isaiah, and others that point forward to the resolution of the sin problem. The captivity of Israel was caused by sin and their rejection of God. So God, in veiled language, gives insight of what He intends to do. He doesn’t give the big picture at once. Rather, as time progresses, He encourages each succeeding generation by revealing greater light.

In Jeremiah 30, the Lord is having His prophet record His words because they reveal what He wants to do. I call it Plan A. Because Israel failed, the kingdom of God was not established when Christ lived upon earth. Jesus returned to heaven and now awaits the appointed time of Plan B. Incidentally, this is why there is a “new” Jerusalem displacing the “old.” At the end of the thousand years, there will be a new heaven and new earth. The Holy City will descend from heaven and God will, then, reign among men for eternity.

There are definite parallels between Plans A and B. However,

¹ Jeremiah 30:1–7

² Daniel 9

this doesn't mean the two can be indiscriminately mixed. The obvious parallels need to be considered, but each plan must be kept in its purview. Plan A will never be fulfilled. It was abandoned. Plan B however will be. Yet, there are instances in Plan B that are quite like what God intended to do under Plan A. And the better we understand Plan A, the better we can understand Plan B, and vice versa. Jeremiah 30:4 begins an explanation of God's forthcoming plans. It describes the day He reveals His sovereign authority.

Let's examine Revelation 1:7. **“Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him—even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen!”** The second coming will be a day of great darkness and gloom as Jesus rides down on a white horse to take care of the sin problem.

Joel 2 describes the same event. **“Sound the trumpet in Jerusalem! Raise the alarm on my holy mountain! Let everyone tremble in fear because the day of the Lord is upon us. It is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of thick clouds and deep blackness. Suddenly, like dawn spreading across the mountains, a great and mighty army appears. Nothing like it has been seen before or will ever be seen again.”**¹

What is this time of trouble? The NIV refers to it as Jacob's trouble. Why is this a time of trouble for Jacob? Where does the expression come from? Because we live several thousand years after Jeremiah and Ezekiel, we are able to look back at Plan A, and what would have happened had Israel been faithful.

Ezekiel 38 highlights what constitutes “Jacob's trouble.” Now remember, Ezekiel's ministry is just a few years after Jeremiah's although they were contemporaries.

In Ezekiel 38, the Lord states how Jerusalem is going to be attacked in the end-time. But under Plan A, the end-time is at the end of the 70 weeks. **“This is another message that came to me from the Lord: ‘Son of man, turn and face Gog**

¹ Joel 2:1–2

of the land of Magog, the prince who rules over the nations of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him.’”¹

God is telling Ezekiel to prophesy against a king called Gog. Of course, at the time Ezekiel is writing this, Gog doesn’t even exist yet. As it turns out, Gog is literally the Devil. Gog is the incarnation of the Antichrist under Plan A. The two territories mentioned (Meshech and Tubal) are where the Antichrist would have set up his authority (temple) on earth.

Verse 3. “Give him this message from the Sovereign Lord: ‘Gog, I am your enemy! I will turn you around and put hooks in your jaws to lead you out with your whole army—your horses and charioteers in full armor and a great horde armed with shields and swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya will join you, too, with all their weapons. Gomer and all its armies will also join you, along with the armies of Beth-tog-armah from the distant north, and many others. Get ready; be prepared! Keep all the armies around you mobilized, and take command of them. A long time from now you will be called into action. In the distant future you will swoop down on the land of Israel, which will be enjoying peace after recovering from war and after its people have returned from many lands to the mountains of Israel.’”²

The land being referred to is the Promised Land which includes the city of Jerusalem. It’s the land that would have recovered while its people were in exile in Babylon. The description is of a future time when the Antichrist, Gog, leading all other nations, would attack a land that had recovered from war.

Verses 9–11. “You and all your allies—a vast and awesome army—will roll down on them like a storm and cover the land like a cloud. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: At that time evil thoughts will come to your mind, and you will devise a wicked scheme. You will say, ‘Israel is an unprotected

¹ Ezekiel 38:1–2

² Ezekiel 38:3–8

land filled with unwallled villages! I will march against her and destroy these people who live in such confidence!’ ”

Does this sound like a place where righteousness dwells? Absolutely! Had Israel been faithful and matured in the Christ-like way, their nation would not have needed walls and gates, bars or locks. The Lord is predicting that at the appointed time the Devil would lead his armies against God’s people. This is the time referred to as *Jacob’s trouble*. Israel (Jacob) is in trouble, being attacked by an overwhelmingly powerful world-class army.

Gog’s evil scheme is found in verse 12, **“I will go to those formerly desolate cities that are now filled with people who have returned from exile in many nations. I will capture vast amounts of plunder, for the people are rich with livestock and other possessions now. They think the whole world revolves around them!”**

Ezekiel 5:5–6 explain the importance of Israel being centrally located. **“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is an illustration of what will happen to Jerusalem. I placed her at the center of the nations, but she has rebelled against my regulations and decrees and has been even more wicked than the surrounding nations. She has refused to obey the regulations and decrees I gave her to follow.”**

God selected Jerusalem’s strategic location for the purpose of evangelizing the world. In Ezekiel 38, Gog was going to attack God’s special city where people lived in great peace and happiness. The Devil is conspiring to loot and plunder, destroying the people gathered from the nations living at the epicenter of the land.

In verse 14, God says to Ezekiel **“Therefore, son of man, prophesy against Gog. Give him this message from the Sovereign Lord: ‘When my people are living in peace in their land, then you will rouse yourself. You will come from your homeland in the distant north with your vast cavalry and your mighty army, and you will attack my people Israel,**

covering their land like a cloud. At that time in the distant future, I will bring you against my land as everyone watches, and my holiness will be displayed by what happens to you, Gog. Then all the nations will know that I am the Lord.’”¹

Notice what happens. “When Gog invades the land of Israel, my fury will boil over! In my jealousy and blazing anger, I promise a mighty shaking in the land of Israel on that day. All living things—the fish in the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals of the field, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the people on earth—will quake in terror at my presence. Mountains will be thrown down; cliffs will crumble; walls will fall to the earth. I will summon the sword against you on all the hills of Israel, says the Sovereign Lord. Your men will turn their swords against each other. I will punish you and your armies with disease and bloodshed; I will send torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and burning sulfur! In this way, I will show my greatness and holiness, and I will make myself known to all the nations of the world. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”²

There’s a parallel. Just before the second coming, all the kings and their nations gather for war against the Lamb. And then at the end of the thousand years, Satan leads them against the Holy City. In retribution, fire from God burns them up.

The parallels in Plan A and Plan B are easy to see and understand. The confusing part for most people is that they’ve never looked at Jeremiah and Ezekiel within the context of timing. In the Old Testament, there is no such thing as a second coming. The second coming became necessary only when the first coming failed. This is why the book of Daniel was sealed up. If Israel had been faithful, Plan B, as recorded in Daniel, would have never been fulfilled.

So in Jeremiah 30, God is talking about the *great day of the Lord*. How awful that *time of trouble* would be. Israel is

1 Ezekiel 38:14–16

2 Ezekiel 38:18–23

the object of Gog's wrath. So, as the Antichrist and his forces move against the people of God, He steps in and destroys His enemies.

Let's leave Ezekiel and return to Jeremiah 30:8–9 to understand the setting. **“‘In that day,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.’”**

Under Plan A, Jesus would have occupied the throne and ruled from Jerusalem. According to scripture, David would have been resurrected and served as prince sitting at Jesus' right hand.

Verses 10–11. **“‘So do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant; do not be dismayed, Israel,’ says the Lord. ‘For I will bring you home again from distant lands, and your children will return from their exile. Israel will return to a life of peace and quiet, and no one will terrorize them. For I am with you and will save you,’ says the Lord. ‘I will completely destroy the nations where I have scattered you, but I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you, but with justice; I cannot let you go unpunished.’”** These words were meant to comfort the exiles.

Have you ever noticed that when God brings wrath upon the Israelites, He doesn't take into consideration that they are His own people. Let me illustrate.

When God destroyed the generation that came out of Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness 40 years until all but two died. Caleb and Joshua survived. God disowned everyone else. Being an Israelite meant nothing then and it means nothing now. In fact, Paul makes this perfectly clear in Romans 9.

There is so much confusion today about who Israel really is—much less its role in prophecy. It's frustrating that so many people have bought into this *half-baked idea* that the current

nation of Israel is central to God's plans. The truth is, God's chosen people are now those who possess the faith Abraham had. As I read Scripture from cover to cover, I find that God is not impressed with whom our father is. God only cares about the quality of our faith in Him.

Let's read what Paul says. **"With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them. They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God's people!"**¹ God no longer considers all of Jacob's descendant's as Israel.

Verse 7. **"Being descendants of Abraham doesn't make them truly Abraham's children. For the Scriptures say, 'Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,' though Abraham had other children, too. This means that Abraham's physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham's children."**²

When God destroyed Jerusalem, He killed two-thirds and spared one-third. He destroyed the wicked and spared enough of a remnant to start over. In Jeremiah 30:11 He says, **"I will completely destroy the nations where I have scattered you,**

1 Romans 9:1-6

2 Romans 9:7-8

but I will not completely destroy you.” God saves the worthy ones—the faith-full.

Verses 12–13, articulate why they’re in exile. **“This is what the Lord says: ‘Your injury is incurable—a terrible wound. There is no one to help you or to bind up your injury. No medicine can heal you.’”** When a nation passes the point of no return, destruction is the only solution.

God continues in verse 14. **“All your lovers—your allies—have left you and do not care about you anymore. I have wounded you cruelly, as though I were your enemy. For your sins are many, and your guilt is great. Why do you protest your punishment—this wound that has no cure? I have had to punish you because your sins are many and your guilt is great. But all who devour you will be devoured, and all your enemies will be sent into exile. All who plunder you will be plundered, and all who attack you will be attacked. I will give you back your health and heal your wounds,”** says the Lord. **‘For you are called an outcast—“Jerusalem for whom no one cares.”’** This is what the Lord says: **‘When I bring Israel home again from captivity and restore their fortunes, Jerusalem will be rebuilt on its ruins, and the palace reconstructed as before.’”**¹

God explained His plans for destruction and restitution in the same few verses. Jeremiah wrote His words in a letter and sent it to the exiles in Babylon with the intent of giving hope to the hopeless.

God continues in verses 19–20. **“There will be joy and songs of thanksgiving, and I will multiply my people, not diminish them; I will honor them, not despise them. Their children will prosper as they did long ago. I will establish them as a nation before me, and I will punish anyone who hurts them.”**

Verse 21 is a prophecy about the coming Messiah. **“They will have their own ruler again, and he will come from their**

¹ Jeremiah 30:14–18

own people. I will invite him to approach me,' says the Lord, 'for who would dare to come unless invited?'" God then restates the covenant in verse 22. **"You will be my people, and I will be your God."**

Next verse. **"Look! The Lord's anger bursts out like a storm, a driving wind that swirls down on the heads of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord will not diminish until it has finished all he has planned."**¹

This would have been true under Plan A and will be true under Plan B. The fierce anger of the Lord will be poured out during the Great Tribulation which consists of fourteen judgments: seven first plagues and seven last plagues. Then Chapter 30 ends with the insightful words, **"In the days to come you will understand all this."**

Jeremiah begins chapter 31 by stating, once again, God's covenant with His people. **"'In that day,' says the Lord, 'I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people.'"** He continues. **"This is what the Lord says: 'Those who survive the coming destruction will find blessings even in the barren land, for I will give rest to the people of Israel.'"**²

What is the *REST* God is alluding to? In Exodus 33, Moses talked with the Lord saying, **"If it is true that you look favorably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor. And remember that this nation is your very own people."** The Lord encouragingly replied. **"I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you."**³

Jesus used those very words in Matthew 11:28. **"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."** In Jeremiah 31, God was saying to His people in exile, *"I will come and give you rest."* To what was He

1 Jeremiah 30:23–24

2 Jeremiah 31:1–2

3 Exodus 33:13–14

referring? What was the *rest* being promised? There were three levels or types really. The first type is an inner peace, assurance in the most extreme and anxious situations. He gives us hope, solace, and comfort in the most despairing moments. The second type is when God physically and emotionally renews us; freeing us from burdens and problems which perplex us throughout the week. He gives us this level of rest each Sabbath. The third and ultimate type is the literal *LAND OF REST* He promised.

God laments in Psalm 95:10–11. **“For forty years I was angry with them, and I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them. So in my anger I took an oath: ‘They will never enter my place of rest.’”**” Of course this is referring to the Promised Land. That generation died in the wilderness struggling under the burden of survival.

God’s rest: *“Is a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar; for our father waits over the way, to prepare us a dwelling place there.”* If those words sound familiar, I just shared lyrics of an old hymn. When you’ve lived a life of turmoil, uncertainty, suffering, heartache, and pain, the most precious promise we can cling to is *REST*.

Returning to Jeremiah 31:3. **“Long ago the Lord said to Israel: ‘I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself. I will rebuild you, my virgin Israel.’”** The word virgin may sound contradictory. Why would God call His people *virgin* when they have played the role of a prostitute? He’s using it as a term of endearment. **“Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.”**¹

That verse reads very much like Psalm 51:10. **“I will forget the past and recreate within you a clean heart and renew within you a right spirit.”** Isn’t it spectacular how God can

¹ Isaiah 1:18

take any sinner, even a whole nation, and restore it to a state of purity?

Jeremiah 31:4–5. “I will rebuild you, my virgin Israel. You will again be happy and dance merrily with your tambourines. Again you will plant your vineyards on the mountains of Samaria and eat from your own gardens there.”

Skipping to verse 8. **“For I will bring them from the north and from the distant corners of the earth. I will not forget the blind and lame, the expectant mothers and women in labor. A great company will return! Tears of joy will stream down their faces, and I will lead them home with great care. They will walk beside quiet streams and on smooth paths where they will not stumble. For I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my oldest child.**

Listen to this message from the Lord, you nations of the world; proclaim it in distant coastlands: The Lord, who scattered his people, will gather them and watch over them as a shepherd does his flock. For the Lord has redeemed Israel from those too strong for them. They will come home and sing songs of joy on the heights of Jerusalem. They will be radiant because of the Lord’s good gifts—the abundant crops of grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the healthy flocks and herds. Their life will be like a watered garden, and all their sorrows will be gone.”¹

God repeatedly explains in the book of Jeremiah why destruction is necessary. And He gives abundant evidence for the hope of restoration. Briefly, it means, when a nation becomes corrupt and useless, so far gone it can’t be recovered, God destroys that nation so that future generations have a chance for peace and prosperity.

If sin were allowed to go unchecked, mankind would transform earth into a literal hell. Life would ultimately grind down to violence and suffering. So God cauterizes the growth of sin with war from time to time, killing millions, so that future

¹ Jeremiah 31:8–12

generations can start over. I encourage you to study Jeremiah 29–31 closely. Much of it relates to Plan B. Notice the following verses.

Jeremiah 31:27–29: **“‘The day is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will greatly increase the human population and the number of animals here in Israel and Judah. In the past I deliberately uprooted and tore down this nation. I overthrew it, destroyed it, and brought disaster upon it. But in the future I will just as deliberately plant it and build it up. I, the Lord, have spoken! The people will no longer quote this proverb: “The parents have eaten sour grapes, but their children’s mouths pucker at the taste.”’”** Meaning the children inherit the suffering of the parents.

Verse 30. **“All people will die for their own sins—those who eat the sour grapes will be the ones whose mouths will pucker.”** In other words, when the Lord sets up His kingdom, there will be a period of time when the old world transitions to the new.

Verses 31–32. **“‘The day is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,’ says the Lord.”** This is referring to the time of Moses.

Verse 33. **“‘But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,’ says the Lord. ‘I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, “You should know the Lord.” For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,’ says the Lord. ‘And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.’”**¹

¹ Jeremiah 31:33–34

This covenant awaits fulfillment. It has not been fulfilled yet.

Today we are at a critical stage in earth's history. We are the generation who must understand the harmonious linkage between New Testament and Old Testament theology. The book of Jeremiah is like an all-inclusive Bible. It includes issues and explanations which must be understood in their context to make sense. Otherwise, problems arise. What is said to certain people at certain times for certain reasons, must be kept in its specific context to be accurately understood.

Jesus said, **“When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day.”** If we took this message out of context, applying it to our day, we would draw a distorted conclusion. We have to keep such statements within the limits of its setting.

In Jeremiah 31 God meant, *“The days are coming when I’m going to rebuild Israel again. Just as surely as I brought disaster on her, I will bring blessing.”* Hebrews 8 uses Jeremiah’s words and applies them again. Watch closely. **“If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it.”**

The way some translations interpret this can be inferred to mean the agreement itself was flawed. But this isn’t the case. It was the people who were flawed, not the covenant. What went wrong was the way the covenant began being interpreted by Israel.

Hebrews is revealing that if Plan A had worked, there would have been no need for Plan B. Many Christians misinterpret the old and new covenants. They really don’t understand there’s only one covenant *until the time* for the kingdom of God to be established.

Now, you can relate to the covenant in two different ways. You can have a wrong relationship or a right relationship with the same covenant. But what is the correct perspective? The covenant is, **“If you will be my people, I will be your God.”** That is the covenant God gave to the descendants of Abraham.

It was conditional. It was bilateral. Both parties agreed.

It's like when I was in the third grade and sent a girl a note stating that I would be her boyfriend if she would be my girlfriend. I was looking for a mutual, meaningful, long-lasting relationship. But to my dismay, she turned me down. And after much wasted time trying to change her mind, I eventually had to move on. Well God had to move on. His people had turned Him down.

Notice what Hebrews says. **“But when God found fault with the people, he said: ‘The day is coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They did not remain faithful to my covenant, so I turned my back on them, says the Lord.’”**¹ The author was quoting Jeremiah 31:31.

Continuing with Hebrews 8:10. **“But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”**

At an appointed time, a new covenant will be made that is no longer conditional. The word *IF* will not be there. Revelation describes it as the sealing. This is the covenant that gives the saints eternal inheritance. This is the covenant that God has promised to the faithful who live now. If you will be my mine, the day will come when I will change your heart and mind. I will put my laws in your mind and write them on your heart. Intellectually, we will understand the wisdom of God's ways and laws. Emotionally, we will love them. The first to experience this sealing will be the 144,000.

However, until that time, as long as we have this carnal nature, the implementation of this covenant will not happen. We can taste it. That's what the born-again experience is all about.

¹ Hebrews 8:8-9

But even being born again, we still have the sinful nature within us. This is why Paul said he had to die daily. Dealing with sin that lived within him was a wrestling match, a struggle. Sin is constantly arising to take dominion over us.

Paul said in Romans 7, **“I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.”** He was explaining the struggle that comes with living for Christ which he had experienced in his own life.

The covenant God was talking about in Jeremiah 31—and also in Hebrews 8—will be implemented at the end of time when the gospel goes to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Notice when this occurs. **“They will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the Lord.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already. And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”**¹

I believe this covenant is restated and established again at the very end. Revelation 21:7 confirms that **“All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.”** This means that after those living at that time have been tested and found worthy, God will put His laws in their minds and hearts. Then the covenant will be fully-filled. He who goes through the Great Tribulation (time of trouble) and overcomes the beast—refuses to receive his mark, refuses to worship him, and stands firm in every imaginable trial—will inherit the new Jerusalem and eternal life. Yes, one day that will happen! You and I now, today, have the opportunity of a lifetime. By faith, we too can take hold of this covenant.

Revelation 21:8. **“But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”**

¹ Hebrews 8:11–12

Earlier I mentioned Jeremiah 31, where God indicated a time was coming when He would make a new covenant. **“But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,’ says the Lord. ‘I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, “You should know the Lord.” For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,’ says the Lord. ‘And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.’”**¹

I need to elaborate on those verses. Many Christians believe that when we confess a sin to the Lord, make restitution for it to our brother, that particular sin is forgiven and forgotten. This is not correct. It is not how God deals with sin.

In the Old Testament sanctuary service, when a sin was committed, the sinner (or his representative) would come to the temple and offer the appropriate sacrifice. In essence, the guilt of that sin would be transferred away from the sinner to the horns of the altar. There, the record of sin (the blood) was applied so that when the sinner walked away, he walked away forgiven. But the sin, at this point, is not forgotten, because that sin has been recorded in blood on the altar.

Now, on the Day of Atonement, the one day each year the altars were cleansed (the tenth day of the seventh month) the record of sin that accumulated throughout the year was removed. This meant the temple was no longer desecrated. Then, the sin was transferred again, this time to the scapegoat, who received the consequence for sin. This goat was summarily led out into the desert to die.

The lamb that was slain in order to transfer sin from the sinner to the altar, paid the penalty for sin. The scapegoat bore the consequence for sin. This process can be confusing. But we need to understand it to know how God ultimately deals with

¹ Jeremiah 31:33–34

the sin problem.

In the economy of law, there is a difference between punitive and compensatory damages. Punitive damages (paid as a penalty) have to be made because the law itself has been broken.

As an example, suppose you're driving 75 miles per hour where the speed limit is 30 and hit a car. You will pay a punitive fine as punishment for breaking the law. In addition, you will pay a compensatory fine for the damage caused to the other car. And as an added bonus, your insurance company will hold a grudge against you for 3 years—maybe more. This is the same way sin is handled, minus the grudge bit.

When a sinner brought his lamb to the altar to transfer sin away from himself to the altar, the lamb died as a result of sin because the penalty for sin is death. Now, on the Day of Atonement, when sin is removed from the temple, somebody (the scapegoat) is held responsible for sin. The scapegoat represents Lucifer, the father of sin. Jesus, the Lamb, died as the penalty for sin. When Lucifer dies at the end of the thousand years, the compensation for the consequence of sin from which the saints have been set free, will be upon his head. Satan will suffer in the extreme.

Now, the wicked whose sins were never transferred away, their sins will remain upon their own heads. And so, they will not only pay the penalty for their own sins (death by execution) but they will first provide the required restitution by suffering in the fire. God requires those responsible for sin to experience His vengeance. He will see to it that every checkbook is balanced. This is judicial equilibrium.

A time is coming, during the seventh trumpet, when all the sins of the saints will have been transferred onto the head of the scapegoat. And once the sins are transferred away from the saints, their sins will be forever forgotten. But until the judgment of mankind has been accomplished, our sins are still present. The records of sin are faithfully and carefully

dealt with throughout the entire process—they're not simply forgotten.

I like the book of Jeremiah because, theologically, it encompasses the whole plan of salvation and judicial equilibrium by which God operates His universe. Thus far, I've written about God's justice and judgments upon His own people, as well as their restitution and restoration. But in Jeremiah 46, God begins to deal with the wicked in neighboring nations.

Jeremiah is an apocalyptic parallel of Revelation. The better we understand Jeremiah, the better we will understand Revelation. One needs to read through Jeremiah a dozen times to really understand his writings. He packs so much into so few words. If only I could write that way.

Let's continue with Jeremiah 31:35–37. **“It is the Lord who provides the sun to light the day and the moon and stars to light the night, and who stirs the sea into roaring waves. His name is the Lord of Heaven's Armies, and this is what he says: ‘I am as likely to reject my people Israel as I am to abolish the laws of nature!’ This is what the Lord says: ‘Just as the heavens cannot be measured and the foundations of the earth cannot be explored, so I will not consider casting them away for the evil they have done. I, the Lord, have spoken!’”**

There is only one correct interpretation for these texts. I believe it is that there is still an Israel. God has always had an Israel. Today though, Israel is defined, not as those who lived in Jerusalem, not as those whose biological father is Abraham, instead, it is those who love the Lord with all their heart, mind, and soul. That is now the Israel of God. And it's the only one God acknowledges.

Remember when Elijah thought he was the only faithful prophet remaining? God said, *“Don't be foolish. There are 7000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”* God has always had an Israel. He's always had a people. It was His hope that He could use the family of Abraham to reach the other families on earth,

but Israel would not be faithful for very long.

So when Plan A failed, He threw open the gates and said *“Look, if you want to be a recipient of what I have promised Abraham, receive my Son and believe in Him. Only then will you be reckoned a Jew.”* That’s what Galatians 3:28–29 says. *“If you are in Christ then you are an heir of Abraham; you are a Jew—the Israel God loves—and you will receive all that Abraham was promised.”*

In John 14, Jesus explained **“There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.”** Jesus has prepared a place for Abraham’s descendants. The saints will not have to build the city they inherit.

In Jeremiah 31:38–40, God talks about Plan A. **“‘The day is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when all Jerusalem will be rebuilt for me, from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. A measuring line will be stretched out over the hill of Gareb and across to Goah. And the entire area—including the graveyard and ash dump in the valley, and all the fields out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the Horse Gate—will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be captured or destroyed.’”**

What is He saying? We know that Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. So how can God claim that He is going to rebuild the city, enlarge its gates and walls, and that it would never again be demolished? It’s because every promise found in the book of Jeremiah was based on the covenant: *“If you will be my people, I will be your God.”*

Christians today don’t understand the covenant. They read Jeremiah and assume he is talking about our day. That’s foolish. The context of Jeremiah, and I mean all of Jeremiah, is very much limited to Israel’s restoration from Babylon where they were in exile.

The Lord was saying, “*The day is coming when THIS city will be rebuilt.*” From Daniel 9, we know the decree was given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem where even Messiah himself appeared on time. I hope you’re understanding more clearly that the covenant, “**If you will be my people, I will be your God,**” was shattered by apostasy and destruction became the only solution.

Restoration is part of God’s plan for as long as He can bring it to pass. The promise of Messiah (the first advent) was God’s last attempt to have the biological nation of Israel *get in line*. If they would not follow the King of Kings in person, then He could do nothing else for them from heaven.

Now, let’s go to Jeremiah 46 to begin looking at the ways of God. We’re moving away from His people in the sense of being trustees of the covenant to those who were to be the beneficiaries. The principles by which He deals with the pagan nations need to be understood. The reason being, the parallel under Plan B for dealing with the world during the Great Tribulation follows these principles exactly. An understanding of Jeremiah will enable a clear understanding of Revelation.

In Jeremiah 46, God gives Jeremiah a message concerning Egypt. It is a message against the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish in 605 BC. Incidentally, this is when Nebuchadnezzar became the undisputed ruler of the (then) known world.

“The following messages were given to Jeremiah the prophet from the Lord concerning foreign nations. This message concerning Egypt was given in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, the king of Judah, on the occasion of the battle of Carchemish when Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, and his army were defeated beside the Euphrates River by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.”¹

We’ve now traveled back in time. God is speaking to the pagan ruler Neco. “**Prepare your shields, and advance into**

¹ Jeremiah 46:1-2

battle! Harness the horses, and mount the stallions. Take your positions. Put on your helmets. Sharpen your spears, and prepare your armor. But what do I see? The Egyptian army flees in terror. The bravest of its fighting men run without a backward glance. They are terrorized at every turn,' says the Lord.'¹

Pharaoh Neco has his soldiers psychologically revved up for battle at Carchemish on the Euphrates River. Neco has marched his army about 350 miles north of Jerusalem on a mission of conquest. Jeremiah continues with verse 6.

“The swiftest runners cannot flee; the mightiest warriors cannot escape. By the Euphrates River to the north, they stumble and fall.” A reference to the north keeps coming up in Jeremiah. The direction of north and the river Euphrates are important because, in Daniel and Revelation, they're both significant in the last days. Continuing with verse 7. **“Who is this, rising like the Nile at floodtime, overflowing all the land?”** Let me explain this.

A flood is one of the most destructive forms of natural disaster known to man. So it was often used in ancient literature to describe unstoppable destruction. Nothing can contain a flood. You can't stop it. The parallelism here is that proud, arrogant pharaoh Neco is out on a mission of conquest. He sees himself as invincible and his army as unstoppable.

He says in verse 8, *“I will rise and cover the earth. I will destroy cities and their people. I will be god and rule the world.”* To this God says, **“Charge, you horses and chariots; attack, you mighty warriors of Egypt! Come, all you allies from Ethiopia, Libya, and Lydia who are skilled with the shield and bow! For this is the day of the Lord, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, a day of vengeance on his enemies. The sword will devour until it is satisfied, yes, until it is drunk with your blood! The Lord, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, will receive a sacrifice today in the north country beside the Euphrates**

¹ Jeremiah 46:3-5

River.”¹ And guess who the sacrifice is going to be? It will be Neco.

Verse 11. **“Go up to Gilead to get medicine, O virgin daughter of Egypt! But your many treatments will bring you no healing.”** Here’s the expression “virgin daughter,” again. The term is used in this setting as scorn. Actually the nation had become a prostitute just like Israel. So God is saying, “You need to go to Gilead for healing, but remedies are in vain so there is no healing for you.”

Verse 12. **“The nations have heard of your shame. The earth is filled with your cries of despair. Your mightiest warriors will run into each other and fall down together.”** If pharaoh Neco had been smart, he would have listened to Jeremiah.

Verse 13. **“Then the Lord gave the prophet Jeremiah this message about King Nebuchadnezzar’s plans to attack Egypt. ‘Shout it out in Egypt! Publish it in the cities of Migdol, Memphis, and Tahpanhes! Mobilize for battle, for the sword will devour everyone around you. Why have your warriors fallen? They cannot stand, for the Lord has knocked them down. They stumble and fall over each other and say among themselves, ‘Come, let’s go back to our people, to the land of our birth. Let’s get away from the sword of the enemy!’”** There they will say, “Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, is a loud-mouth who missed his opportunity!” As surely as I live,’ says the King, whose name is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, ‘one is coming against Egypt who is as tall as Mount Tabor, or as Mount Carmel by the sea!’”² This great king and his army are likened unto a great mountain.

Verse 19. **“Pack up! Get ready to leave for exile, you citizens of Egypt! The city of Memphis will be destroyed, without a single inhabitant. Egypt is as sleek as a beautiful heifer, but a horsefly from the north is on its way! Egypt’s mercenaries**

1 Jeremiah 46:9–10

2 Jeremiah 46:13–18

have become like fattened calves. They, too, will turn and run, for it is a day of great disaster for Egypt, a time of great punishment. Egypt flees, silent as a serpent gliding away. The invading army marches in; they come against her with axes like woodsmen.”¹

Understand that Egypt is, at this time, wrestling to keep the world title of *King of the Hill*. However God says, “*Your days of prominence are over Egypt; you just don’t know it yet. You’ll be handed over to the people of the north.*”

Verses 25–26. **“The Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will punish Amon, the god of Thebes, and all the other gods of Egypt. I will punish its rulers and Pharaoh, too, and all who trust in him. I will hand them over to those who want them killed—to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and his army. But afterward the land will recover from the ravages of war. I, the Lord, have spoken!’ ”**

God was saying to Pharaoh Neco, “*I’ve had enough of you and your arrogance. I’m going to hand you over to Nebuchadnezzar to be humbled. Later though, Egypt will be restored.*” God uses the same principles to govern whether dealing with the heathen or His own people—they’re unchanging.

“‘But do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant; do not be dismayed, Israel. For I will bring you home again from distant lands, and your children will return from their exile. Israel will return to a life of peace and quiet, and no one will terrorize them. Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant, for I am with you,’ says the Lord. ‘I will completely destroy the nations to which I have exiled you, but I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you, but with justice; I cannot let you go unpunished.’ ”² God humbles the wicked.

And understand, if time lasts long enough, God will hand over the United States to another nation. God takes kingdoms down when warranted. He is sovereign.

1 Jeremiah 46:19–22

2 Jeremiah 46:27–28

CHAPTER 7



Apocalyptic Prophecy

This chapter begins with Jeremiah 47, looking at the whole story as set under Plan A during Jeremiah's day. Chapter 47 continues with prophecies relevant to kingdoms in the vicinity of Jerusalem and how God intended to deal with these pagan nations. Keep in mind, this pertains to the whole world of that time.

Language from the Old Testament establishes the context from which we are able to understand how it should be applied to the New Testament. For example, in the following verses God was speaking through Jeremiah concerning the Philistines.

“This is the Lord’s message to the prophet Jeremiah concerning the Philistines of Gaza, before it was captured by the Egyptian army. This is what the Lord says: ‘A flood is coming from the north to overflow the land. It will destroy the land and everything in it—cities and people alike. People will scream in terror, and everyone in the land will wail. Hear the clatter of stallions hooves and the rumble of wheels

as the chariots rush by. Terrified fathers run madly, without a backward glance at their helpless children. The time has come for the Philistines to be destroyed, along with their allies from Tyre and Sidon. Yes, the Lord is destroying the remnant of the Philistines, those colonists from the island of Crete.’”¹

The imagery of these flood waters is sobering. We know the direction of north means divine judgment. And we’ll see later in Jeremiah 50 how the Babylonians would be destroyed by people from the north. In Jeremiah’s day, the world was believed to be flat. The four points of the compass—north, south, east, and west—were viewed as being 2D on a horizontal plane. It was also used in a 2D vertical plane with north being at the top and south being at the bottom; east and west, of course, remain in their respective positions.

The previous chapter (Jeremiah 46) mentioned the land of the north being the source of judgment. Whether it came directly from overhead or geographically from the northern direction, the idea was that God’s judgment would *rain down* on nations. Babylon is really more to the east of Jerusalem than north, so north is being used figuratively. Picture the coordinate system Jeremiah is using: north was up toward the river Euphrates; south was down toward the desert of Arabia; west was left toward the Mediterranean Sea; and east was to the right across the desert toward Babylon. From Jeremiah’s point of view, everything is centered on Jerusalem. So the ancients used the imagery of a flood to describe unavoidable, unstoppable warfare—a divine judgment.

I’m being so tenacious about this because of what Daniel and Revelation tell us. To help underscore the point I’m making, let’s look at Daniel 9; the following verses concern the 70-week prophecy: **“A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their**

¹ Jeremiah 47:1–4

guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler—the Anointed One—comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times. After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end. The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven, but after half this time, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this defiler is finally poured out on him.”¹

What is described in Daniel 9 would not have happened had Israel been faithful. The vision would have been sealed up and not fulfilled. In the prophecy, God predicted that the temple, which had been rebuilt and restored, would again be destroyed. God had offered an attractive *benefit package* to Israel if they would just be faithful. But if Israel failed God, He would give them a *failing* grade and find another people to work with in order to keep His promises to Abraham. In *flunking* Israel, God opened the floodgates (through Christ) so that everything promised to Abraham would ultimately be fulfilled. God was revealing to Daniel that this prophecy hinges on Israel’s behavior during the seventy weeks. If they failed, Scripture describes what the end would be like. **“The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end.”**

Go now to Revelation 9:13. **“Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice speaking from the four horns**

¹ Daniel 9:24–27

of the gold altar that stands in the presence of God.”

This describes the sixth trumpet in the future. The fifth trumpet is the physical appearing of the Devil as Antichrist claiming to be almighty God. The sixth trumpet is a global war Satan and his minions undertake to conquer the world and set up an image to the beast. This will require everyone to worship the image. Consider the language: **“Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice speaking from the four horns of the gold altar that stands in the presence of God. And the voice said to the sixth angel who held the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great Euphrates River.’ Then the four angels who had been prepared for this hour and day and month and year were turned loose to kill one-third of all the people on earth. I heard the size of their army, which was 200 million mounted troops.”**¹

To get an idea of how staggering that number is, during the high point of World War 2, the maximum number of men in uniform was less than 10 million. The Bible is talking about 200 million soldiers—20 times greater than history has ever seen.

What is the significance of Revelation 9? From the books of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Hosea we know the Euphrates River was in the north. This is where Pharaoh Neco was destroyed and where the Philistines would be destroyed. The releasing of the four angels bound at the great river Euphrates and the mention of 200 million troops, tell us, this is about world war—although not Armageddon. This is the war Satan brings upon the world when he takes dominion.

Let’s read the description of that event. **“And in my vision, I saw the horses and the riders sitting on them. The riders wore armor that was fiery red and dark blue and yellow. The horses had heads like lions, and fire and smoke and burning sulfur billowed from their mouths. One-third of all the people on earth were killed by these three plagues—by the fire**

¹ Revelation 9:13–16

and smoke and burning sulfur that came from the mouths of the horses. Their power was in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails had heads like snakes, with the power to injure people. But the people who did not die in these plagues still refused to repent of their evil deeds and turn to God. They continued to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—idols that can neither see nor hear nor walk! And they did not repent of their murders or their witchcraft or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”¹ This occurs during the sixth trumpet.

Releasing the angels at a precise hour, day, month, and year at the great river Euphrates, and the war that follows, describe how God will send the Devil to accomplish His destructive work. In the same manner, He sent Nebuchadnezzar to punish Jerusalem. Afterward, He sent the Medes and Persians to punish Nebuchadnezzar. He then sent Alexander the Great to punish the Medes and Persians. Likewise, according to Revelation 9, at the end-time, God will send the Devil to bring destruction upon the world.

Why would He do this? For the same reason He destroyed Israel. What is the book of Jeremiah telling us about the behavior and actions of God? Let’s read 2 Thessalonians 2 starting at verse 7, **“For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way.”** Paul is speaking of Christ. He is our intercessor. Jesus alone is holding back the wrath of the Father. He has been standing between God and man for almost 6000 years. But, a time is coming when Jesus will step out of the way. The problem is, sin has power that is alive and working right now. It’s capturing people left and right. But when Jesus moves out of the way, the wrath of God will be intensely poured out.

What do you make of this verse? **“Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, but the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor**

¹ Revelation 9:17–21

of his coming.”¹ At this time, the Devil is not visible to the human eye. Right now, that man is not seen. But after Jesus moves out of the way and the censor is cast down, the trumpets will begin to sound. And during the fifth trumpet, the Devil will appear on earth. **“This man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles.”**²

When Satan appears, he comes masquerading as God. And by means of the miracles, signs, and wonders he is able to perform, people will believe he really is almighty God. Revelation 13 says, **“He did astounding miracles, even making fire flash down to earth from the sky while everyone was watching. And with all the miracles he was allowed to perform on behalf of the first beast, he deceived all the people who belong to this world.”**

Paul wrote that the coming of the lawless one would be in harmony with the work of Satan, even though he actually looks like God. Paul is describing a wolf in sheep’s clothing who will be *alive and well* at the second coming. This man of sin is not a system. He is a literal man—the Antichrist.

2 Thessalonians 2:10. **“He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them.”** This implies they’ve heard the truth. And, indeed, God will see to it that everyone in every nation hears the gospel during the Great Tribulation. In fact, by the time of the fifth trumpet, most will have made up their mind for or against the gospel. So God says, *“Okay, because they have refused to love the truth and be saved, I will send a powerful delusion so they will believe the lie and be condemned.”*

This physical appearing of the Devil is like the physical appearing of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah’s day. Israel had passed the point of no return. Now, there was a remnant who had not bowed the knee to Baal. But, corporately speaking, Jerusalem

1 2 Thessalonians 2:8

2 2 Thessalonians 2:9

deserved destruction. Sin had to be cauterized. Succeeding generations deserved a chance to live righteously. And for that reason, God sent His servant Nebuchadnezzar to deal with the problem. He will do this again at the end-time.

In some translations, Daniel 8 describes this great king as the man of sin. **“At the end of their rule [the ten kings at the time of the ten toes], when their sin is at its height, a fierce king, a master of intrigue, will rise to power. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause a shocking amount of destruction and succeed in everything he does. He will destroy powerful leaders and devastate the holy people. He will be a master of deception and will become arrogant; he will destroy many without warning. He will even take on the Prince of princes in battle, but he will be broken, though not by human power.”**¹ The king (horn power) of Daniel 8 is this man of sin.

I’m desperately trying to put Jeremiah’s message, story, and language into a framework that enables us to appreciate the picture that Daniel and Revelation is drawing for us. Notice the origin of direction from which this stern-faced king comes. Daniel 8:1 sets the stage. It describes the goat and ram, and then how the goat becomes great. When the goat’s large horn (Alexander the Great) is broken off at the height of its power (defeated), in its place, four horns grow toward the four winds of heaven. Afterward, out of one of the four winds, a fierce king comes into the scene.

Many people are derailed at this point, so let me explain. It really is simple to understand. The little horn actually comes out of one of the *four winds*. This means, *out of nowhere*. It does not come from one of the horns. Daniel 8:9 says, **“It extended toward the south and the east and toward the glorious land of Israel [in the west].”** This leaves only one direction for the horn power to come from—the north.

If we don’t understand the significance of north and the

¹ Daniel 8:23–25

significance of the Euphrates River, and how each is implemented in Jeremiah, Hosea, and Isaiah, then we will not appreciate the origin of the horn power. This horn comes out of nowhere. It is not an extension of the Grecian empire. It is not an extension of the Medes and Persians. The vision in Daniel 8 concerns the appointed time of the end—not ancient history. The angel clearly says so.

In the story, Satan starts small because he can only appear locally at any given time. Conversely, when Jesus comes, every eye will see Him. I take this to mean that the coming of Jesus and His approach toward earth will take at least 24 hours. This will allow the earth to rotate once on its axis so that every eye can see Him. But when Satan comes, he's not allowed to do this. He must appear in Melbourne, then Moscow, then Paris, and then, Los Angeles. He cannot appear simultaneously to the whole world. God forbids it. This is why he starts small then appears here and there wowing people with his counterfeit signs and wonders. But what does it mean when the Bible says that he grows until he reaches the host of the heavens?

In 2 Kings 17, the Lord warned Israel and Judah. **“Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets.’ But the Israelites would not listen. They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the Lord their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves.”** Whatever we worship, we become like. **“They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the Lord’s command not to imitate them. They rejected all the commands of the Lord their God and made two calves from metal. They set up an Asherah pole and worshiped Baal and all the forces of heaven.”**¹

¹ 2 Kings 17:13–16

The expression, *forces of heaven* (starry hosts), is taken from Greek mythology. You've heard of these gods: Thor, Zeus, Venus, and so on. We've all read about these make-believe deities. I understand that the twelve zodiac positions stem from these gods.

Let's read one more passage in 2 Kings 23. This is during the time of Josiah, the king in power when Jeremiah was called to become a prophet.

“Then the king instructed Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second rank and the Temple gatekeepers to remove from the Lord’s Temple all the articles that were used to worship Baal, Asherah, and all the powers of the heavens. The king had all these things burned outside Jerusalem on the terraces of the Kidron Valley, and he carried the ashes away to Bethel.” Bethel was the place of worship (a holy site) for the northern kingdom. **“He did away with the idolatrous priests, who had been appointed by the previous kings of Judah, for they had offered sacrifices at the pagan shrines throughout Judah and even in the vicinity of Jerusalem. They had also offered sacrifices to Baal, and to the sun, the moon, the constellations, and to all the powers of the heavens.”**¹

These verses are referring to the starry hosts and constellations as being the powers of the heavens. It is specifically addressing the polytheistic worship of these manmade gods.

Now verses 19–20, **“Then Josiah demolished all the buildings at the pagan shrines in the towns of Samaria, just as he had done at Bethel. They had been built by the various kings of Israel and had made the Lord very angry. He executed the priests of the pagan shrines on their own altars, and he burned human bones on the altars to desecrate them. Finally, he returned to Jerusalem.”**

This is talking about the powers of the heavens. And so, when we read in Daniel 8:10 about this stern-faced king—growing to

¹ 2 Kings 23:4–5

reach the host of the heavens, throwing them down to earth, and trampling them—we can then understand the correlation with 2 Kings 17, 21, and 23.

It simply means that the stern-faced king, Satan, Lucifer, the man of sin, and the Antichrist are the same entity. The reason for all these names is that no matter how we look at the story, we know who he is.

Now, when Daniel says that the horn power grew until it *reached the host of the heavens*, he means it developed until it seized the authority which belonged to the false gods. When the Devil arrives, it won't take long for him to convince those *who have refused to love the truth* that he is above everything called god.

It doesn't matter what we call god—if it's Allah, Jehovah, Jesus Christ, or Buddha—it doesn't matter. This stern-faced king will demonstrate that he is superior to any other. That's why Daniel 8:10–11 says, **“Its power reached to the heavens, where it attacked the heavenly army, throwing some of the heavenly beings and some of the stars to the ground and trampling them. It even challenged the Commander of heaven's army by canceling the daily sacrifices offered to him and by destroying his Temple.”** His intent is to show himself superior!

The horn power sets himself up to be as great as the Prince of the Host—a reference to Christ. Jesus is the king in waiting, and at the appointed time He will be crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Hence the Devil sets himself up to be as great as God Almighty.

Are you beginning to see that Jeremiah is relevant to understanding apocalyptic prophecy? His book contributes to understanding the end-time road map. If we don't have that Old Testament foundation, if we don't have appreciation for the cryptic language of the prophets, how are we going to understand the ways and patterns of God in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation with clarity and confidence?

Let's resume with Jeremiah 48. God has dealt with the Philistines. He destroyed them for the same reason He destroyed Egypt and Israel. Now we find that Moab is to suffer the same fate.

Verse 1. **“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘What sorrow awaits the city of Nebo; it will soon lie in ruins. The city of Kiriathaim will be humiliated and captured; the fortress will be humiliated and broken down.’”** Skipping to verses 6–7. **“Flee for your lives! Hide in the wilderness! Because you have trusted in your wealth and skill, you will be taken captive. Your god Chemosh, with his priests and officials, will be hauled off to distant lands!”** Chemosh is the supreme god of the Moabites. In fact, King Josiah demolished a temple built for that heathen god built by Solomon.

Verse 9. **“Oh, that Moab had wings so she could fly away, for her towns will be left empty, with no one living in them.”**

Verses 13–15. **“At last Moab will be ashamed of his idol Chemosh, as the people of Israel were ashamed of their gold calf at Bethel. ‘You used to boast, “We are heroes, mighty men of war.” But now Moab and his towns will be destroyed. His most promising youth are doomed to slaughter,’ says the King, whose name is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”** Ultimately, God dealt with Moab.

Now to Jeremiah 49. The language in Jeremiah as it relates to the timing and events of those days, is the same language used in Daniel and Revelation as it pertains to our day. That’s important to understand. God deals with each of these nations by sending a message through Jeremiah naming each one’s false god. For example, the Ammonites worshiped the god Moloch to whom children were offered as burnt offerings.

In Jeremiah 49:3, God says: **“Cry out, O Heshbon, for the town of Ai is destroyed. Weep, O people of Rabbah! Put on your clothes of mourning. Weep and wail, hiding in the hedges, for your god Molech, with his priests and officials,**

will be hauled off to distant lands.”

Each god had priests on earth representing it. Even today, we have clergy for every god that exists. Whether he's called pastor, priest, rabbi, guru, or holy man doesn't matter. Every religious system has its own hierarchy representing its god.

After destroying the Ammonites, God then promises to restore their fortunes as also promised to the Moabites. But when it came to destroying the Philistines, the Lord didn't mention restoring them. Some nations violate the very boundary of God's patience. There are evil deeds for which no atonement can be made and that God will not forgive.

In the days of Eli (Israel's high priest), Eli failed to correct his sons who had no regard for the Lord. They were so evil, the Lord eventually struck them dead. Their story is in 1 Samuel 2.

One day, a prophet confronted the high priest about how his sons were being promiscuous with women and doing all sorts of wicked things. But Eli couldn't bring himself to stop them. The prophet said to Eli, *“Because your sons have brought so much dishonor upon the Lord, none in your household will ever serve me as priests. None in your family line will even grow old. The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your family.”* Hophni and Phinehas were killed in battle on the same day. The Lord takes it very seriously when we violate His name.

God understands and judges on the knowledge base each nation has. The children of Abraham were given a knowledge base far superior to any other nation. It was God's plan that they be a light to the Gentiles. God wanted the knowledge of His offer of salvation explained to those in darkness. However, the flipside is, to those whom much *light* is given, much *elimination* is required. God wanted to give people of the surrounding nations the chance to accept His salvation.

As James reminds us, **“Remember, it is sin to know what**

you ought to do and then not do it.” Those who know a lot, are responsible for a lot; those who know less, less. Everyone is responsible for what he has. I encourage you to stop here and read Jeremiah 47–49 before proceeding.

Now as we proceed with Jeremiah 50, be aware that there are many parallels in chapters 50 and 51 between the Babylonians in Jeremiah’s day and the future Babylon that will be formed during the Great Tribulation. Keep that in mind for the remainder of the chapter.

“The Lord gave Jeremiah the prophet this message concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians. This is what the Lord says: ‘Tell the whole world, and keep nothing back. Raise a signal flag to tell everyone that Babylon will fall! Her images and idols will be shattered. Her gods Bel and Marduk will be utterly disgraced. For a nation will attack her from the north and bring such destruction that no one will live there again. Everything will be gone; both people and animals will flee.’” (Jeremiah 50:1–3) There’s that direction of north again.

Jump over to 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 for a moment. **“In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom: ‘This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any of you who are his people may go there for this task. And may the Lord your God be with you!”’”**

Cyrus is the one who brought about the destruction and defeat of the Babylonian empire in 536 BC. He is the new king and understood his divine appointment. No doubt this information came to Cyrus through Daniel. He set the Jews free right on time after the fulfillment of 70 years of captivity.

Back to Jeremiah 50:4–5: **“‘In those coming days,’ says the**

Lord, ‘the people of Israel will return home together with the people of Judah. They will come weeping and seeking the Lord their God. They will ask the way to Jerusalem and will start back home again. They will bind themselves to the Lord with an eternal covenant that will never be forgotten.’”

That was God’s hope and plan.

“My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray and turned them loose in the mountains. They have lost their way and can’t remember how to get back to the sheepfold. All who found them devoured them. Their enemies said, ‘We did nothing wrong in attacking them, for they sinned against the Lord, their true place of rest, and the hope of their ancestors.’ But now, flee from Babylon! Leave the land of the Babylonians. Like male goats at the head of the flock, lead my people home again. For I am raising up an army of great nations from the north. They will join forces to attack Babylon, and she will be captured. The enemies’ arrows will go straight to the mark; they will not miss! Babylonia will be looted until the attackers are gluttons with loot. I, the Lord, have spoken!”¹

We have to understand that at the end of seventy years, the exiles had become quite comfortable. After all, they had been told earlier to settle down, plant gardens, build houses, be fruitful, multiply, and pray for blessings on Babylon because as it prospered, so would they. And so they did. But when the 70 years were over, those who were 20 years old (at the time of captivity) were now old people, unable to make the trip back home. All who had been born in Babylon during the 70 years of captivity had never seen Jerusalem. Why would they want to go there? They were comfortable where they were.

Have you ever thought about extricating yourself from your present location and settling down somewhere else? It isn’t fun. In fact, it’s a lot of work. That’s why most people don’t do it unless they have to.

¹ Jeremiah 50:6–10

God told the exiles to remain in Babylon but not to let it become their permanent home. **“Flee from Babylon! Leave the land of the Babylonians.”** Doesn’t that sound like the clarion call, *“Come out of Babylon my people”* found in Revelation 18? Why leave the land of the Babylonians? The answer is in verse 9. **“For I am raising up an army of great nations from the north.”**

Verse 13. **“Because of the Lord’s anger, Babylon will become a deserted wasteland.”** The hanging gardens of Nebuchadnezzar are considered one of the ancient wonders of the world. Babylon was the city of the golden kingdom. The king created an incredibly beautiful city. Yet, here’s Jeremiah saying, **“All who pass by will be horrified and will gasp at the destruction they see there. Yes, prepare to attack Babylon, all you surrounding nations. Let your archers shoot at her; spare no arrows. For she has sinned against the Lord.”**¹

Babylon’s gods are Baal and Marduk and yet they have sinned against the Lord. Do you recognize the pattern? God says, *“Even though you don’t know me or recognize me or give me the honor I’m due, it makes no difference. I still observe you and will deal with you. I raised up Babylon but will take it down for the benefit of succeeding generations.”*

“Look! She surrenders! Her walls have fallen. It is the Lord’s vengeance, so take vengeance on her. Do to her as she has done to others!”² In verse 29, Jeremiah says, **“Send out a call for archers to come to Babylon. Surround the city so none can escape. Do to her as she has done to others, for she has defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.”** Similar language is used in Revelation 18:6. **“Do to her as she has done to others. Double her penalty for all her evil deeds. She brewed a cup of terror for others, so brew twice as much for her.”** This is referring to the great harlot, Babylon.

Hence, we have the cup and the judicial equilibrium: paying

¹ Jeremiah 50:13–14

² Jeremiah 50:15

back double for what has been done. This is describing punitive and compensatory damages—the Golden Rule. *“It will be done unto you as you did unto others.”*

“Come away from her, my people. Do not take part in her sins, or you will be punished with her. For her sins are piled as high as heaven, and God remembers her evil deeds.” This is the full-cup principle in a nutshell. Once we understand how the language is used and what it means, it’s quite easy to know what the Bible is saying.

Back to Jeremiah 50. “[God said,] **‘The Israelites are like sheep that have been scattered by lions. First the king of Assyria ate them up. Then King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon cracked their bones.’** Therefore, this is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: **‘Now I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria.’**”²

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, a superpower of that time, had 185,000 troops killed in one night by an angel who flew over and destroyed them. Ironically, when Sennacherib returned home, his own sons took his life for failing in the campaign so miserably. Continuing with verses 19–20. **“‘And I will bring Israel home again to its own land, to feed in the fields of Carmel and Bashan, and to be satisfied once more in the hill country of Ephraim and Gilead. In those days,’** says the Lord, **‘no sin will be found in Israel or in Judah, for I will forgive the remnant I preserve.’**” What a beautiful promise. After atonement had been made for wrongdoing, God’s heart was full of forgiveness. Seventy sabbatical years had been violated, but when atonement had been made, God accepted it.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, God talked to His people so they could understand what He intended to do. **“‘See, I am your enemy, you arrogant people,’** says the Lord, **the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. ‘Your day of reckoning has arrived—the**

¹ Revelation 18:4–5

² Jeremiah 50:17–18

day when I will punish you. O land of arrogance, you will stumble and fall, and no one will raise you up. For I will light a fire in the cities of Babylon that will burn up everything around them.’”¹

If there is anything that God hates, it’s arrogance. What does man have to be prideful about? Man is little more than animated dust. Although Jeremiah describes the end of Babylon from his time frame, he’s also describing a parallel of our end-time.

“The sword of destruction will strike the Babylonians,’ says the Lord. ‘It will strike the people of Babylon—her officials and wise men, too. The sword will strike her wise counselors, and they will become fools. The sword will strike her mightiest warriors, and panic will seize them. The sword will strike her horses and chariots and her allies from other lands, and they will all become like women. The sword will strike her treasures, and they all will be plundered. A drought will strike her water supply, causing it to dry up. And why? Because the whole land is filled with idols, and the people are madly in love with them.’”²

Verse 41. “Look! A great army is coming from the north. A great nation and many kings are rising against you from far-off lands. They are armed with bows and spears. They are cruel and show no mercy. As they ride forward on horses, they sound like a roaring sea. They are coming in battle formation, planning to destroy you, Babylon. The king of Babylon has heard reports about the enemy, and he is weak with fright. Pangs of anguish have gripped him, like those of a woman in labor. I will come like a lion from the thickets of the Jordan, leaping on the sheep in the pasture. I will chase Babylon from its land, and I will appoint the leader of my choice.”³

In Isaiah 45:1 and Jeremiah 51:11, we find that Cyrus, king

1 Jeremiah 50:31–32

2 Jeremiah 50:35–38

3 Jeremiah 50:41–44

of the Medes, is the one God chose. And this was revealed 60 years before Cyrus became prominent. When reading those Bible verses, did you visualize Jesus riding a horse with His army following close behind as described in Revelation 19?

Our task should be, and the pertinent question is, how can we put a puzzle together when we don't know about its pieces? The fact is, the more Scripture we have in our heads, the quicker we can *connect the dots*.

Let's move on to Jeremiah 51:1. **"I will stir up a destroyer against Babylon and the people of Babylonia."** When I read this, I think of Daniel 11 and Revelation 9. Notice these parallels. (1) The Abyss opens up and the Devil comes out. (2) His name in Greek and in Hebrew means Destroyer. (3) He becomes king of Babylon sitting upon his throne. These parallels are meaningful to me because I'm acquainted with the parts and pieces; and I'm putting them together so they can be meaningful to you too. God is saying, *"Babylon is past the point of no return."*

"Foreigners will come and winnow her, blowing her away as chaff. They will come from every side to rise against her in her day of trouble. Don't let the archers put on their armor or draw their bows. Don't spare even her best soldiers! Let her army be completely destroyed. They will fall dead in the land of the Babylonians, slashed to death in her streets. For the Lord of Heaven's Armies has not abandoned Israel and Judah. He is still their God, even though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel."¹

Verse 6. **"Flee from Babylon! Save yourselves! Don't get trapped in her punishment! It is the Lord's time for vengeance; he will repay her in full."** This reads very much like Revelation 18:4. **"Come away from her, my people. Do not take part in her sins, or you will be punished with her."** The parallel is the same.

Verses 7. **"Babylon has been a gold cup in the Lord's**

¹ Jeremiah 51:2-5

hands, a cup that made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank Babylon's wine, and it drove them all mad." Remember the second-angel's message in Revelation 14:8? "Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen—because she made all the nations of the world drink the wine of her passionate immorality."

Verse 8. **"But suddenly Babylon, too, has fallen. Weep for her. Give her medicine. Perhaps she can yet be healed. We would have helped her if we could, but nothing can save her now. Let her go; abandon her. Return now to your own land. For her punishment reaches to the heavens; it is so great it cannot be measured. The Lord has vindicated us. Come, let us announce in Jerusalem everything the Lord our God has done."**¹

There are just so many parallels here. Let me explain what Babylon is. When God's judgments rain down on the earth in the form of the first four trumpets, the world will suddenly be thrown into global crisis. Survival will be on every mind. As a result of the destruction, leaders of the prominent religions of the world will wake up to the realization that God is angry. These judgments will be correctly understood to be the wrath of God. In an effort to appease God, a religious revolution will erupt. Clergy from each religious system will offer to their political counterparts their means of solving this dire situation. Namely, appeasing God by legislating do-less-sin laws; laws that require the respect, honor, and worship of God. The idea being that if we stop sinning, God won't be angry anymore.

This legislated morality is the inebriating wine described in Revelation 14. And Babylon is the crisis government formed to appease an offended God. The problem with this solution is that clergy doesn't listen to or know God. Their decision is based on fear, not faith. Regardless of what man does, God will vindicate His people. Jeremiah 51 has a parallel in Revelation's story. Babylon will fall.

¹ Jeremiah 51:8–10

Verses 12–13. **“The Lord will carry out his purpose, his decree against the people of Babylon. You who live by many waters and are rich in treasures, your end has come, the time for you to be destroyed.”** Doesn’t this sound like Revelation 17 where the waters represent nations, multitudes, and languages?

Babylon is also likened unto locusts. **“Raise a signal flag to the nations. Sound the battle cry! Mobilize them all against Babylon. Prepare them to fight against her! Bring out the armies of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz. Appoint a commander, and bring a multitude of horses like swarming locusts! Bring against her the armies of the nations—led by the kings of the Medes and all their captains and officers. The earth trembles and writhes in pain, for everything the Lord has planned against Babylon stands unchanged. Babylon will be left desolate without a single inhabitant.”**¹

Go to Isaiah 10:5 for a moment. **“What sorrow awaits Assyria, the rod of my anger. I use it as a club to express my anger. I am sending Assyria against a godless nation [Israel], against a people with whom I am angry. Assyria will plunder them, trampling them like dirt beneath its feet.”**

This happened in 722 BC just as God said it would. In Jeremiah 51, we find the same language.

“‘Even if Babylon ascends to the heavens and fortifies her lofty stronghold, I will send destroyers against her,’ declares the Lord. ‘The sound of a cry comes from Babylon, the sound of great destruction from the land of the Babylonians. The Lord will destroy Babylon; he will silence her noisy din. Waves of enemies will rage like great waters; the roar of their voices will resound. A destroyer will come against Babylon; her warriors will be captured, and their bows will be broken. For the Lord is a God of retribution; he will repay in full. I will make her officials and wise men drunk, her governors, officers and warriors as well; they will sleep forever and not awake,’ declares the King, whose name

¹ Jeremiah 51:27–29

is the Lord Almighty.”¹

Think about it. The seven heads of Revelation 17 are like seven hills or seven mountains. The fortified stronghold mentioned in Jeremiah 51 is built on top of a mountain (or in the heavens). A mountain can represent a king or horn or head. That’s why Revelation speaks of seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads (mountains) represent seven religious systems. The ten horns represent ten kings. This makes sense because it was on the mountaintops where all of the idolatrous worship occurred. Once you understand how the language identifies certain pieces, Plan B’s picture really comes alive.

Before closing, let’s quickly go to verse 45. **“Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the Lord. Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumors are heard in the land; one rumor comes this year, another the next, rumors of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler. For the time will surely come when I will punish the idols of Babylon; her whole land will be disgraced and her slain will all lie fallen within her.”²**

God was telling His people in Babylon not to be worried because, *“When your 70 years are up, know that the destruction of Babylon will come.”* The Babylonians didn’t know about the 70 years. They would not have believed it if they had. Destruction is only a matter of time. Thus the time periods in Daniel and Revelation are pertinent to God’s people.

1 Jeremiah 51:53–57

2 Jeremiah 51:45–47

CHAPTER 8



Salvation is a Gift

The book of Jeremiah is rich in expressing the action of God dealing with the sin problem and revealing what He wants for and from His people. Jeremiah is a book of these two contrasts: terrible wrath and great mercy.

To grasp all that the book entails takes diligence. Digesting Jeremiah's fifty-three years of ministry condensed into 52 chapters, takes perseverance. It isn't for the fainthearted.

The setting of Jeremiah 27 is around 598–596 BC. Nebuchadnezzar's second siege had just ended and his third was forthcoming. Zedekiah was placed on the throne as a vassal and reigned 11 years. But in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar finally destroyed Jerusalem.

Chapter 27 begins. **“This message came to Jeremiah from the Lord early in the reign of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah. This is what the Lord said to me: ‘Make a yoke, and fasten it on your neck with leather straps. Then send messages to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and**

Sidon through their ambassadors who have come to see King Zedekiah in Jerusalem. Give them this message for their masters: **“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: With my great strength and powerful arm I made the earth and all its people and every animal. I can give these things of mine to anyone I choose. Now I will give your countries to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who is my servant. I have put everything, even the wild animals, under his control. All the nations will serve him, his son, and his grandson until his time is up. Then many nations and great kings will conquer and rule over Babylon.”**¹

So God is sending a message through Jeremiah to the ambassadors of the pagan nations who have come to talk with Zedekiah. Verse 8. **“So you must submit to Babylon’s king and serve him; put your neck under Babylon’s yoke! I will punish any nation that refuses to be his slave, says the Lord. I will send war, famine, and disease upon that nation until Babylon has conquered it.”** We see the same punitive judgments identified expressly in the fourth seal of Revelation 6.

Verse 9. **“Do not listen to your false prophets, fortune-tellers, interpreters of dreams, mediums, and sorcerers who say, ‘The king of Babylon will not conquer you.’”** God was putting the pagan nations on notice that He is THE great God. Of course, He knew they wouldn’t pay heed to His warning. He’s saying this to serve as a record for the people who hear, so that afterward, they will believe what He says in the future. And if they don’t, what else can He do?

Verses 10–11. **“They are all liars, and their lies will lead to your being driven out of your land. I will drive you out and send you far away to die. But the people of any nation that submits to the king of Babylon will be allowed to stay in their own country to farm the land as usual. I, the Lord, have spoken!”** God is saying, “Cooperate with me and it will go well with you.”

¹ Jeremiah 27:1–7

Even to those who don't know God, He gives warning. And even though the warning may be rejected, His hope is that a few survivors will believe and realize He rules the earth, a concept that politicians and military men find difficult to understand. They believe they conquer by their own prowess, but Scripture says otherwise.

Verse 12. **“Then I repeated this same message to King Zedekiah of Judah. ‘If you want to live, submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon and his people. Why do you insist on dying—you and your people? Why should you choose war, famine, and disease, which the Lord will bring against every nation that refuses to submit to Babylon’s king? Do not listen to the false prophets who keep telling you, “The king of Babylon will not conquer you.” They are liars. This is what the Lord says: “I have not sent these prophets! They are telling you lies in my name, so I will drive you from this land. You will all die—you and all these prophets, too.”’”**¹

Jeremiah was facing an uphill battle. His words are considered “pro-Babylonian talk” at a time when the zealots and loyalists were saying, “*Nebuchadnezzar will not take Jerusalem. We will fight to the last man.*” But God had already declared what would be.

Jeremiah continues in verse 16. **“Then I spoke to the priests and the people and said, ‘This is what the Lord says: “Do not listen to your prophets who claim that soon the gold articles taken from my Temple will be returned from Babylon. It is all a lie! Do not listen to them. Surrender to the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this whole city be destroyed? If they really are prophets and speak the Lord’s messages, let them pray to the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. Let them pray that the articles remaining in the Lord’s Temple and in the king’s palace and in the palaces of Jerusalem will not be carried away to Babylon!”** For the Lord of Heaven’s Armies has spoken about the pillars in front of the Temple,

¹ Jeremiah 27:12–15

the great bronze basin called the Sea, the water carts, and all the other ceremonial articles. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon left them here when he exiled Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, to Babylon, along with all the other nobles of Judah and Jerusalem. Yes, this is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says about the precious things still in the Temple, in the palace of Judah's king, and in Jerusalem: "They will all be carried away to Babylon and will stay there until I send for them," says the Lord. "Then I will bring them back to Jerusalem again."¹

As you might guess, the false prophets didn't like Jeremiah's words. In fact, they portrayed Jeremiah as a traitor. So the prophet Hananiah, from Gibeon, confronted Jeremiah. This took place around 594 BC in the fifth month of the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign.

Let's progress to Jeremiah 28. "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon," declares the Lord, "for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon."²

Hananiah uses the same title as Jeremiah and claims to speak with the same authority; they're both using the same language, appealing to the same God, claiming to speak in the name of the Lord, yet prophesying opposing messages. Looking at these two men, the people must have been confused in trying to determine which was the true prophet.

Jeremiah then responded to Hananiah, "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the

1 Jeremiah 27:16-22

2 Jeremiah 28:2-4

exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people:¹ Pay close attention to how Jeremiah handled the argument.

Verses 8–9. **“From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true.”**

Jeremiah couldn't prove that Hananiah was speaking falsely. How does one validate a vision or dream? Only evidence matters.

Verses 10–11. **“Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it, and he said before all the people, ‘This is what the Lord says: “In the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.”’ At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way.”**

He could say no more. How was he to prove that Hananiah was speaking falsely? Jeremiah hadn't been gone long when the Lord spoke to him again.

“Go and tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the Lord says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.’ Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, ‘Listen, Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore this is what the Lord says: “I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord.”’ In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet

¹ Jeremiah 28:6–7

died.”¹ This happened two months later. God eventually deals with false prophets. Those who speak in God’s name, even when He has not given them a message but are prophesying out of delusion, will be dealt with by God.

Now go back to Jeremiah 21 which follows Chapter 28 chronologically.

“The Lord spoke through Jeremiah when King Zedekiah sent Pashhur son of Malkijah and Zephaniah son of Maasiah, the priest, to speak with him. They begged Jeremiah, ‘Please speak to the Lord for us and ask him to help us. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is attacking Judah. Perhaps the Lord will be gracious and do a mighty miracle as he has done in the past. Perhaps he will force Nebuchadnezzar to withdraw his armies.’

Jeremiah replied, ‘Go back to King Zedekiah and tell him, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I will make your weapons useless against the king of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside your walls attacking you. In fact, I will bring your enemies right into the heart of this city. I myself will fight against you with a strong hand and a powerful arm, for I am very angry. You have made me furious! I will send a terrible plague upon this city, and both people and animals will die. And after all that, says the Lord, I will hand over King Zedekiah, his staff, and everyone else in the city who survives the disease, war, and famine. I will hand them over to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and to their other enemies. He will slaughter them and show them no mercy, pity, or compassion.”

Tell all the people, “This is what the Lord says: Take your choice of life or death! Everyone who stays in Jerusalem will die from war, famine, or disease, but those who go out and surrender to the Babylonians will live. Their reward will be life! For I have decided to bring disaster and not good upon this city, says the Lord. It will be handed over to the king

¹ Jeremiah 28:13–17

of Babylon, and he will reduce it to ashes.”¹ You have two choices: stay in the city and die, or surrender to the Babylonians and live.

Verse 14. **“I myself will punish you for your sinfulness.”** God punishes those who deserve it. This is *judicial equilibrium* which means *payday, someday*. There was a specific moment when Zedekiah became convinced that if he were to repent, and do what God wanted of him, the Lord would relent and not destroy Jerusalem.

As an example, God required in Levitical Law that all slaves be set free every sabbatical year. During the reign of Zedekiah, the year 591 BC was a sabbatical year. Evidently, Zedekiah decided to obey the Lord and free the slaves as a gesture of repentance, and to also solicit the Lord’s favor and protection. This was the deal he wanted. *“I’ll stop sinning if you will bless me for doing what I know is right.”* Well, after the slaves had been set free and a little time had gone by, the people began to complain that there was no one to do the manual labor. So like a “good politician,” Zedekiah relented and ordered that all slaves be returned to their masters.

Jeremiah 34:12. **“So the Lord gave them this message through Jeremiah: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your ancestors long ago when I rescued them from their slavery in Egypt. I told them that every Hebrew slave must be freed after serving six years. But your ancestors paid no attention to me. Recently you repented and did what was right, following my command. You freed your slaves and made a solemn covenant with me in the Temple that bears my name. But now you have shrugged off your oath and defiled my name by taking back the men and women you had freed, forcing them to be slaves once again. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: Since you have not obeyed me by setting your countrymen free, I will set you free to be destroyed by war, disease, and famine. You**

¹ Jeremiah 21:1–10

will be an object of horror to all the nations of the earth. Because you have broken the terms of our covenant, I will cut you apart just as you cut apart the calf when you walked between its halves to solemnize your vows.’”¹

Walking between the halves of a calf was a sign of a blood covenant. This dates back to Genesis 15 when God passed through pieces of the animals in His covenant with Abraham.

Verse 19. **“Yes, I will cut you apart, whether you are officials of Judah or Jerusalem, court officials, priests, or common people—for you have broken your oath. I will give you to your enemies, and they will kill you. Your bodies will be food for the vultures and wild animals. I will hand over King Zedekiah of Judah and his officials to the army of the king of Babylon. And although they have left Jerusalem for a while, I will call the Babylonian armies back again. They will fight against this city and will capture it and burn it down. I will see to it that all the towns of Judah are destroyed, with no one living there.”**² Enter into a covenant with the Lord, only if you intend to fulfill it.

Let’s go back now to Jeremiah 32. The story takes place in 586 BC in the 10th year of Zedekiah’s reign when Jerusalem is under siege. Nebuchadnezzar’s third and last siege took about 18 months to bring Jerusalem to its knees. This is how a siege works. An attacking army arrives and pitches its tents around a city cutting off all means of support. It is isolated. Food and water supplies cannot come in. All trade and commerce cease. And if people try to escape, they’re killed and displayed to psychologically demoralize those inside the city’s walls. Understand, a siege was a slow, distressing, agonizing death. And unless there was intervention by an outside ally, those inside were destined to die.

The Lord repeatedly tells Zedekiah and his officials, *“Throw open the gates, go out, and surrender. Do so, and you will live.*

¹ Jeremiah 34:12–18

² Jeremiah 34:19–22

But resist, and you will die.” Tragically, they didn’t listen.

Beginning with verse 1. **“The following message came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah. This was also the eighteenth year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem was then under siege from the Babylonian army, and Jeremiah was imprisoned in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace. King Zedekiah had put him there, asking why he kept giving this prophecy: ‘This is what the Lord says: “I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will take it. King Zedekiah will be captured by the Babylonians and taken to meet the king of Babylon face to face. He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, and I will deal with him there,” says the Lord. “If you fight against the Babylonians, you will never succeed.”’**”

At that time the Lord sent me a message. He said, ‘Your cousin Hanamel son of Shallum will come and say to you, “Buy my field at Anathoth. By law you have the right to buy it before it is offered to anyone else.”’

Then, just as the Lord had said he would, my cousin Hanamel came and visited me in the prison. He said, ‘Please buy my field at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. By law you have the right to buy it before it is offered to anyone else, so buy it for yourself.’ Then I knew that the message I had heard was from the Lord. So I bought the field at Anathoth, paying Hanamel seventeen pieces of silver for it. I signed and sealed the deed of purchase before witnesses, weighed out the silver, and paid him.”¹

Jeremiah, who is imprisoned in a city under siege, is buying land. Normally, this would be a foolish endeavor. Why would anyone use his life savings to buy a piece of land that an enemy is about to take possession of or burn to the ground. This was an object lesson of what was about to take place.

Verses 11–12. **“Then I took the sealed deed and an**

¹ Jeremiah 32:1–10

unsealed copy of the deed, which contained the terms and conditions of the purchase, and I handed them to Baruch son of Neriah and grandson of Mahseiah. I did all this in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, the witnesses who had signed the deed, and all the men of Judah who were there in the courtyard of the guardhouse.”

In ancient times, there were two copies of a deed. One was the sealed copy kept safe in the equivalent of a courthouse. The other was the unsealed copy kept by the owner. These two documents were proof of ownership.

Verse 13. **“Then I said to Baruch as they all listened, ‘This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Take both this sealed deed and the unsealed copy, and put them into a pottery jar to preserve them for a long time.’ For this is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Someday people will again own property here in this land and will buy and sell houses and vineyards and fields.’”**¹

Everyone was watching Jeremiah because he was acting strange. This sealed jar would serve as a time capsule to remain in the land and discovered when the exiles returned home.

Jeremiah then prays. **“O Sovereign Lord! You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you! You show unfailing love to thousands, but you also bring the consequences of one generation’s sin upon the next. You are the great and powerful God, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. You have all wisdom and do great and mighty miracles. You see the conduct of all people, and you give them what they deserve. You performed miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt—things still remembered to this day! And you have continued to do great miracles in Israel and all around the world. You have made your name famous to this day.**

You brought Israel out of Egypt with mighty signs and

¹ Jeremiah 32:13–15

wonders, with a strong hand and powerful arm, and with overwhelming terror. You gave the people of Israel this land that you had promised their ancestors long before—a land flowing with milk and honey. Our ancestors came and conquered it and lived in it, but they refused to obey you or follow your word. They have not done anything you commanded. That is why you have sent this terrible disaster upon them.

See how the siege ramps have been built against the city walls! Through war, famine, and disease, the city will be handed over to the Babylonians, who will conquer it. Everything has happened just as you said. And yet, O Sovereign Lord, you have told me to buy the field—paying good money for it before these witnesses—even though the city will soon be handed over to the Babylonians.’

Then this message came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘I am the Lord, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me? Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I will hand this city over to the Babylonians and to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he will capture it. The Babylonians outside the walls will come in and set fire to the city. They will burn down all these houses where the people provoked my anger by burning incense to Baal on the rooftops and by pouring out liquid offerings to other gods. Israel and Judah have done nothing but wrong since their earliest days. They have infuriated me with all their evil deeds,’ says the Lord. ‘From the time this city was built until now, it has done nothing but anger me, so I am determined to get rid of it.’¹

Verses 32–33 are why the wrath of God is about to be poured out upon the world during the Great Tribulation. “The sins of Israel and Judah—the sins of the people of Jerusalem, the kings, the officials, the priests, and the prophets—have stirred up my anger. My people have turned their backs on me and have refused to return. Even though I diligently

¹ Jeremiah 32:16–31

taught them, they would not receive instruction or obey.”

The people were speaking in the name of the Lord, but the way they lived, spoke, and acted were reprehensible to God.

Verse 34. **“They have set up their abominable idols right in my own Temple, defiling it. They have built pagan shrines to Baal in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and there they sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech. I have never commanded such a horrible deed; it never even crossed my mind to command such a thing. What an incredible evil, causing Judah to sin so greatly! Now I want to say something more about this city. You have been saying, ‘It will fall to the king of Babylon through war, famine, and disease.’ But this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I will certainly bring my people back again from all the countries where I will scatter them in my fury. I will bring them back to this very city and let them live in peace and safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”**¹ Time after time, we see this covenant promise restated.

Let’s read the rest of Chapter 32. **“And I will give them one heart and one purpose: to worship me forever, for their own good and for the good of all their descendants. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good for them. I will put a desire in their hearts to worship me, and they will never leave me. I will find joy doing good for them and will faithfully and wholeheartedly replant them in this land. This is what the Lord says: Just as I have brought all these calamities on them, so I will do all the good I have promised them. Fields will again be bought and sold in this land about which you now say, ‘It has been ravaged by the Babylonians, a desolate land where people and animals have all disappeared.’ Yes, fields will once again be bought and sold—deeds signed and sealed and witnessed—in the land of Benjamin and here in Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the hill country, in the foothills**

¹ Jeremiah 32:34–38

of Judah and in the Negev, too. For someday I will restore prosperity to them. I, the Lord, have spoken!”¹

We know that God’s intentions for those who came out of Egypt were never realized. All but two had to die in the wilderness because of rebellion. We know that the ten tribes which comprised the northern nation of Israel had to be destroyed because they, too, were unfaithful. We also know that the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin (to whom Jeremiah was sent), as well as the surrounding pagan nations, were destroyed for the same reason.

Now, when we read these wonderful promises of what God wanted to accomplish after the Babylonian exile, understand that the prosperity and restoration God speaks of is based on a covenant. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all refer to this covenant.

This covenant states: *“If you will be my people and cooperate with me, I will bring about all I have said. However, if you choose to continue in rebellion after the exile, you will be destroyed again.”* It’s this flipside-of-the-coin no one remembers.

In fact, history confirms that Israel was ultimately destroyed in AD 70. Its miserable failure came singularly as a result of not allowing the Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of its individuals. Destruction is God’s only solution for that problem.

Before proceeding, know that a corporate attitude is simply the attitude of the majority of a community. Now, a community can be a family, a tribe, a city, a nation, or even the world. In this case, it is the nation’s attitude toward God. In order for Israel to be what God wanted, its people had to allow the Holy Spirit to lead. God wanted *at least* the majority of His *chosen* people dedicated to Him—to sincerely love Him. So when speaking corporately, God is dealing with the nation as a whole. Sadly, Israel utterly failed when its majority became hard hearted, refusing to listen. God wanted His people to want Him, but they didn’t.

¹ Jeremiah 32:39–44

It's no different today. In the United States of America, the majority of people are hard hearted. It comes with the process of degeneracy which ultimately leads to destruction. It is for this reason, God's four judgments come. Sword, famine, plague, and wild beast are described throughout Jeremiah and Revelation. This means, they not only applied to ancient Israel, but will apply to America as well. The majority of the world is simply corrupt. Jeremiah 33 discusses this ongoing corporate process.

The chapter begins while Jeremiah is imprisoned. King Zedekiah doesn't want this *loose cannon* with pro-Babylonian sentiments, running wild causing political trouble. Mind you, the prophet was only saying what the Lord wanted. The leader and his advisors thought they knew more than the Lord. Isn't that the way of the world?

Verses 1–2. **“While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the Lord gave him this second message: ‘This is what the Lord says—the Lord who made the earth, who formed and established it, whose name is the Lord.’”** Who's speaking here? The One who made the earth or the pipsqueak ruling from the throne of a besieged city?

Verses 3–4. **“Ask me and I will tell you remarkable secrets you do not know about things to come. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: You have torn down the houses of this city and even the king's palace to get materials to strengthen the walls against the siege ramps and swords of the enemy.”**

The Babylonians would build ramps closer and closer to the city walls so they could harangue and harass the soldiers and people inside. Eventually, the army would scale the walls, open its gates, and march into the city. This happened in the story of Joab, when, as a young soldier, he scaled the wall of Jebus and opened its gates so David's army could capture the city. David then changed its name from Jebus to Jerusalem.

Verse 5. **“You expect to fight the Babylonians, but the**

men of this city are already as good as dead, for I have determined to destroy them in my terrible anger. I have abandoned them because of all their wickedness.” Some people believe that God doesn’t kill or bring harm. That is foolish. Such statements show an absolute lack of understanding about what the Lord clearly said to Jeremiah.

Verse 6. **“Nevertheless, the time will come when I will heal Jerusalem’s wounds and give it prosperity and true peace. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and Israel and rebuild their towns. I will cleanse them of their sins against me and forgive all their sins of rebellion. Then this city will bring me joy, glory, and honor before all the nations of the earth! The people of the world will see all the good I do for my people, and they will tremble with awe at the peace and prosperity I provide for them.”**¹ God is in the business of restoration.

Verses 10–11. **“This is what the Lord says: You have said, ‘This is a desolate land where people and animals have all disappeared.’ Yet in the empty streets of Jerusalem and Judah’s other towns, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and laughter. The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will be heard again, along with the joyous songs of people bringing thanksgiving offerings to the Lord. They will sing, ‘Give thanks to the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, for the Lord is good. His faithful love endures forever!’ For I will restore the prosperity of this land to what it was in the past, says the Lord.”**

The Lord doesn’t give censure without renewal. In the book of Revelation, as horrible as the story is of what men and the Devil (the Antichrist) will do to God’s people, the last chapters are truly inspiring. God has to tear down what is wrong before He can rebuild what is right. That’s the only resolution to sin.

Verse 12. **“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: ‘This land—though it is now desolate and has no people and animals—will once more have pastures where shepherds**

¹ Jeremiah 33:6–9

can lead their flocks. Once again shepherds will count their flocks in the towns of the hill country, the foothills of Judah, the Negev, the land of Benjamin, the vicinity of Jerusalem, and all the towns of Judah.' I, the Lord, have spoken!

'The day will come,' says the Lord, 'when I will do for Israel and Judah all the good things I have promised them. In those days and at that time I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David's line. He will do what is just and right throughout the land.'

In that day Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this will be its name: "The Lord Is Our Righteousness." For this is what the Lord says: David will have a descendant sitting on the throne of Israel forever. And there will always be Levitical priests to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings and sacrifices to me.'

Then this message came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'This is what the Lord says: If you can break my covenant with the day and the night so that one does not follow the other, only then will my covenant with my servant David be broken. Only then will he no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. The same is true for my covenant with the Levitical priests who minister before me. And as the stars of the sky cannot be counted and the sand on the seashore cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of my servant David and the Levites who minister before me.'¹

Consider this concept. The reason there has been two thousand years since the conclusion of the seventy weeks is that, to fulfill the prophecy and covenant given to Abraham required much time to grow a *numberless* host who are ready to receive His salvation. By allowing time for the human race to populate, God expands the borders of heaven.

Let's skip over to Revelation 7:9-10 for a moment. What is John describing? **"After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language,**

¹ Jeremiah 33:12-22

standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, ‘Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!’”

The significance of the message of this song is that we don’t deserve to be there. Salvation is a gift which belongs to God and he bestows it on the redeemed.

Verses 11–14. **“And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God. Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, ‘Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you are the one who knows.’ Then he said to me, ‘These are the ones who died in the Great Tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.’”**

The harvest at the end of the age is going to be innumerable. God will rescue the sincere of heart then destroy those who have participated in evil. There is no other option.

The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:19–21, **“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”**

When I watch television—and that’s very little—I’m aghast at what is broadcast when it so clearly offends the Lord. Debauchery, greed, hatred, jealousy, immorality, drunkenness, idolatry, and murder contaminate almost every program. What an abomination to the Lord. The tragic part is that these are the very things that entertain the majority of our country—even our world. The wrath of God is coming because evil has

provoked His anger.

Jeremiah 33:23–25. **“The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ‘Have you noticed what people are saying?—“The Lord chose Judah and Israel and then abandoned them!” They are sneering and saying that Israel is not worthy to be counted as a nation. But this is what the Lord says: I would no more reject my people than I would change my laws that govern night and day, earth and sky. I will never abandon the descendants of Jacob or David, my servant, or change the plan that David’s descendants will rule the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, I will restore them to their land and have mercy on them.’”**

The Lord is saying, *“You can count on me.”* I will not reject those who have lived by faith. This is about, individually, circumcising the heart and allowing the Lord into our lives.

In Jeremiah 37, the final destruction of Jerusalem is near. The chapter begins with some history. **“Zedekiah son of Josiah succeeded Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim as the king of Judah. He was appointed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon [in 598 BC]. But neither King Zedekiah nor his attendants nor the people who were left in the land listened to what the Lord said through Jeremiah.”**¹

One day, King Zedekiah sent a runner to Jeremiah with this message: **“Please pray to the Lord our God for us.”** This request was because the Babylonians had gone off to fight the Egyptians. You see, when the Babylonians first set siege to Jerusalem, the Egyptians came out to meet them in force. Pharaoh wanted to get rid of the Babylonians because they were near his border. And when an opposing army is on your border, you don’t have time to react to provocation without tremendous loss to your country and people. Pharaoh instinctively knew that when Jerusalem fell, the Babylonians would move down into Egypt and take control of his country. So his strategic plan was, if he attacked the Babylonians while they lay siege

¹ Jeremiah 37:1–2

to Jerusalem, the Israelites would join him in routing them. As expected, when the Babylonians heard the report of Egypt heading their way, they withdrew to engage the Egyptians.

Now verse 6. **“Then the Lord gave this message to Jeremiah: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: The king of Judah sent you to ask me what is going to happen. Tell him, “Pharaoh’s army is about to return to Egypt, though he came here to help you. Then the Babylonians will come back and capture this city and burn it to the ground.’”**

This is what the Lord says: Do not fool yourselves into thinking that the Babylonians are gone for good. They aren’t! Even if you were to destroy the entire Babylonian army, leaving only a handful of wounded survivors, they would still stagger from their tents and burn this city to the ground!

When the Babylonian army left Jerusalem because of Pharaoh’s approaching army, Jeremiah started to leave the city on his way to the territory of Benjamin, to claim his share of the property among his relatives there. But as he was walking through the Benjamin Gate, a sentry arrested him and said, ‘You are defecting to the Babylonians!’ The sentry making the arrest was Irijah son of Shelemiah, grandson of Hananiah.

‘That’s not true!’ Jeremiah protested. ‘I had no intention of doing any such thing.’ But Irijah wouldn’t listen, and he took Jeremiah before the officials. They were furious with Jeremiah and had him flogged and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary. Jonathan’s house had been converted into a prison. Jeremiah was put into a dungeon cell, where he remained for many days. Later King Zedekiah secretly requested that Jeremiah come to the palace, where the king asked him, ‘Do you have any messages from the Lord?’

‘Yes, I do!’ said Jeremiah. ‘You will be defeated by the king of Babylon.’

Then Jeremiah asked the king, ‘What crime have I committed? What have I done against you, your attendants, or the people that I should be imprisoned like this? Where are your prophets now who told you the king of Babylon would not attack you or this land? Listen, my lord the king, I beg you. Don’t send me back to the dungeon in the house of Jonathan the secretary, for I will die there.’

So King Zedekiah commanded that Jeremiah not be returned to the dungeon. Instead, he was imprisoned in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace. The king also commanded that Jeremiah be given a loaf of fresh bread every day as long as there was any left in the city. So Jeremiah was put in the palace prison.”¹

Moving now to Jeremiah 38 where Jeremiah is imprisoned. One day, Jeremiah was overheard telling the people, “**This is what the Lord says: ‘Everyone who stays in Jerusalem will die from war, famine, or disease, but those who surrender to the Babylonians will live. Their reward will be life. They will live!’** The Lord also says: ‘**The city of Jerusalem will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.**’ So these officials went to the king and said, ‘**Sir, this man must die! That kind of talk will undermine the morale of the few fighting men we have left, as well as that of all the people. This man is a traitor!**’ King Zedekiah agreed. ‘**All right,**’ he said. ‘**Do as you like. I can’t stop you.**’ So the officials took Jeremiah from his cell and lowered him by ropes into an empty cistern in the prison yard. It belonged to Malkijah, a member of the royal family. There was no water in the cistern, but there was a thick layer of mud at the bottom, and Jeremiah sank down into it.”²

They did this with the expectation that he would die of starvation without raising suspicion as to his whereabouts.

Verse 7. “**But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, an important**

¹ Jeremiah 37:6–21

² Jeremiah 38:2–6

court official, heard that Jeremiah was in the cistern. At that time the king was holding court at the Benjamin Gate, so Ebed-melech rushed from the palace to speak with him. ‘My lord the king,’ he said, ‘these men have done a very evil thing in putting Jeremiah the prophet into the cistern. He will soon die of hunger, for almost all the bread in the city is gone.’

So the king told Ebed-melech, ‘Take thirty of my men with you, and pull Jeremiah out of the cistern before he dies.’

So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to a room in the palace beneath the treasury, where he found some old rags and discarded clothing. He carried these to the cistern and lowered them to Jeremiah on a rope. Ebed-melech called down to Jeremiah, ‘Put these rags under your armpits to protect you from the ropes.’ Then when Jeremiah was ready, they pulled him out. So Jeremiah was returned to the courtyard of the guard—the palace prison—where he remained.”¹ Not only was Ebed-melech a comforting friend, he must have been a godly man. At this time, Jeremiah was probably close to 70.

Verse 14. “One day King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and had him brought to the third entrance of the Lord’s Temple. ‘I want to ask you something,’ the king said. ‘And don’t try to hide the truth.’

Jeremiah said, ‘If I tell you the truth, you will kill me. And if I give you advice, you won’t listen to me anyway.’

So King Zedekiah secretly promised him, ‘As surely as the Lord our Creator lives, I will not kill you or hand you over to the men who want you dead.’

Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, ‘This is what the Lord God of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: “If you surrender to the Babylonian officers, you and your family will live, and the city will not be burned down. But if you

¹ Jeremiah 38:7–13

refuse to surrender, you will not escape! This city will be handed over to the Babylonians, and they will burn it to the ground.”’

‘But I am afraid to surrender,’ the king said, ‘for the Babylonians may hand me over to the Judeans who have defected to them. And who knows what they will do to me!’ Jeremiah replied, ‘You won’t be handed over to them if you choose to obey the Lord. Your life will be spared, and all will go well for you. But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the Lord has revealed to me: All the women left in your palace will be brought out and given to the officers of the Babylonian army. Then the women will taunt you, saying, “What fine friends you have! They have betrayed and misled you. When your feet sank in the mud, they left you to your fate!” All your wives and children will be led out to the Babylonians, and you will not escape. You will be seized by the king of Babylon, and this city will be burned down.’”¹ When Zedekiah heard this, he must have been terrified.

Verse 24. “Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, ‘Don’t tell anyone you told me this, or you will die! My officials may hear that I spoke to you, and they may say, “Tell us what you and the king were talking about. If you don’t tell us, we will kill you.” If this happens, just tell them you begged me not to send you back to Jonathan’s dungeon, for fear you would die there.’ Sure enough, it wasn’t long before the king’s officials came to Jeremiah and asked him why the king had called for him. But Jeremiah followed the king’s instructions, and they left without finding out the truth. No one had overheard the conversation between Jeremiah and the king. And Jeremiah remained a prisoner in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.”²

Jeremiah 39 is the epilogue of the story. “In January of the ninth year of King Zedekiah’s reign, King Nebuchadnezzar

¹ Jeremiah 38:14–23

² Jeremiah 38:24–28

of Babylon came with his entire army to besiege Jerusalem. Two and a half years later, on July 18 in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign, a section of the city wall was broken down. All the officers of the Babylonian army came in and sat in triumph at the Middle Gate: Nergal-sharezer of Samgar, and Nebo-sarsekim, a chief officer, and Nergal-sharezer, the king's adviser, and all the other officers of the king of Babylon. When King Zedekiah of Judah and all the soldiers saw that the Babylonians had broken into the city, they fled. They waited for nightfall and then slipped through the gate between the two walls behind the king's garden and headed toward the Jordan Valley.

But the Babylonian troops chased them and overtook Zedekiah on the plains of Jericho. They captured him and took him to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who was at Riblah in the land of Hamath. There the king of Babylon pronounced judgment upon Zedekiah. The king of Babylon made Zedekiah watch as he slaughtered his sons at Riblah. The king of Babylon also slaughtered all the nobles of Judah. Then he gouged out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him in bronze chains to lead him away to Babylon.

Meanwhile, the Babylonians burned Jerusalem, including the royal palace and the houses of the people, and they tore down the walls of the city. Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took as exiles to Babylon the rest of the people who remained in the city, those who had defected to him, and everyone else who remained. But Nebuzaradan allowed some of the poorest people to stay behind in the land of Judah, and he assigned them to care for the vineyards and fields. King Nebuchadnezzar had told Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, to find Jeremiah. 'See that he isn't hurt,' he said. 'Look after him well, and give him anything he wants.' So Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard; Nebushazban, a chief officer; Nergal-sharezer, the king's adviser; and the other officers of Babylon's king sent messengers to

bring Jeremiah out of the prison. They put him under the care of Gedaliah son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan, who took him back to his home. So Jeremiah stayed in Judah among his own people.

The Lord had given the following message to Jeremiah while he was still in prison: ‘Say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, “This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: I will do to this city everything I have threatened. I will send disaster, not prosperity. You will see its destruction, but I will rescue you from those you fear so much. Because you trusted me, I will give you your life as a reward. I will rescue you and keep you safe. I, the Lord, have spoken!”’¹

The narrative of Jeremiah 40–44 concerns the experience of Jeremiah when Jerusalem was captured in 586 BC and the subsequent events of his life.

In Chapter 42, the remnant—the poorest of the poor who were left after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the countryside and the city—recognized that Jeremiah was a prophet and asked him to pray as to whether they should go to Egypt to be safe from the Babylonians. The Lord told them not to leave Jerusalem. After hearing the Lord’s answer, the people went anyway and also forced Jeremiah to go. He died there. After destroying Jerusalem, the Lord sent his servant Nebuchadnezzar into Egypt and destroyed them all.

The last chapter of the book of Jeremiah is a recap of the final 11 years of his life. I encourage you to also read the book of Lamentations which Jeremiah wrote as well. The consensus in both of Jeremiah’s books is that God’s patience has a limit.

Isn’t it ironic that the prophet spent 50 years preaching against evil while faithfully delivering God’s message of coming destruction caused by apostasy. I hope this inspires you to read the WHOLE book of Jeremiah.

¹ Jeremiah 39:1–18

