

JEREMIAH

The Weeping Prophet

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "The Wycliffe Bible Commentary." Moody Press
- "Teach the Text Series."

Historical Background

The whole Middle East was in major turmoil when Jeremiah came on the scene. Probably more than fifty years had passed from the time Isaiah had been prophesying and warning the people of Judah as to what was coming. But complacency is a grave danger to any people, because they think if a prediction doesn't happen immediately, it will not happen at all. That kind of mindset seemed to be on the people, although there was a brief time of revival under the good king Josiah. The Assyrian empire was collapsing under the pressure of the Medes and Babylonians who had an alliance at that time, and they were rising in power. The Egyptian army was on the way to support the Assyrians when Josiah thought to stop them, but was killed in the attempt. Josiah's son succeeded him but only for three months. He was suspected of favoring the Babylonians, so was taken captive into Egypt and the Egyptians put a very wicked man, Jehoiakim, to be their puppet ruler over Judah.

Then the Babylonian empire came into ascendancy when Nebuchadnezzar was rising to leadership there. Under his leadership the Egyptian army was totally crushed, and then Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah. It was then Daniel and some others were taken to Babylon to be groomed for leadership roles in that empire. Jeremiah had seen all these things happen and was actively speaking for God to the people who seemed indifferent. They had a smug complacency about their supposed connection with God, thinking that no matter what they did as people, God was still on their side.

Judah was under Babylonian control though they did have their own wicked kings who had authority subservient to the rule of the empire. Idolatry in religion was still being mixed with their so-called worship of God. After all, they felt because they had the temple, God was there. They didn't accept the fact that "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands." When the final king of Judah, Zedekiah, made an attempt to rebel against the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar, who was now the Babylonian king, came against Judah and totally ruined the city, tore down the temple and even the walls of the city. Jerusalem was totally sacked, burned, and destroyed. Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes, and then he was blinded and they took him to Babylon in chains.

There were some people left in Judah as caretakers, among whom was Jeremiah, who for years had warned the people of what was coming and was despised by his own people for doing so. When some of the remaining Jews resisted the puppet ruler of Judah, they along with Jeremiah, who they forced to go with them, escaped to Egypt. That was where Jeremiah lived out the remainder of his life and he died there.

Jeremiah, the prophet

There are more personal things we know about Jeremiah than we know about other prophets. He was in the family line of priests who lived in a community designated for those who had a priestly ministry. So, he grew up in a place where God was on the minds of the priests and Levites who lived there. Likely he was raised with a religious consciousness, although the priests and temple workers were carrying on mostly a form of religion to which all had become used to and some likely bored with. Even the glories of the temple and the sameness of the routine, didn't keep the people from going after the licentious behavior of the worship of idols that included blatant immorality.

By nature, Jeremiah was a self-conscious person who was given to self-criticism and analysis, which made him feel unworthy and fixated on his "differentness" from those around him. In one of his prayers he specifically asked the Lord to "direct his steps," and when he had to be "corrected," please don't make it too hard, because I don't think I could take it. He certainly held nothing back from the Lord, nor did he hold back from passing on to the people the messages from the Lord he was to deliver to them. Consequently, he had no friends but was rather despised, hated and even imprisoned because of his frank and open warnings and condemnation of their lifestyle.

The Lord commanded Jeremiah not to get married and have children, because of the judgment that was coming would sweep away the next generation. His depressing messages of coming judgment, really irked the people who were living for pleasure in their religious idolatry mixed with Judaism in their self-centered lives. He just didn't fit the mold that was popular and so was despised, because he represented God. People still are uncomfortable if we speak of God "too much" and commit ourselves to living for Him. They consider doing what is right on our part, is a condemnation of how they live and what they do.

The Lord knew His servant, and at times assured this timid man that he could be strong and courageous when he needed to be. He seemed to be one of those people who “wear their heart on their sleeve.” His dark prophecies made him an object of antagonism, because he did not give any message of hope. His message wasn’t speculation, but was to tell them what was going to happen and what they could expect. They had passed the point of no return, and God was going to deal in judgment with the people who had corrupted themselves and the nation. They had corrupted the religion of the Jews.

After all the Lord had done for the people of Israel since He brought them out of Egypt hundreds of years before, He was now going to undo. They had rejected the Lord so long and in so many ways that there was nothing else for Him to do. They had been stubborn against His laws; they had despised His promises and ignored their side of the covenant that had been made with them as a chosen people. Now they were going to experience the consequences of their sin.

However, in the last part of the book, after the time of judgment is passed; mercy and covenant promises would prevail and be brought back, and triumph would come. Restoration and renewal will come to the nation in the future. Beyond judgment, grace will overcome and the new covenant will be written on the hearts of the people. It will be real to them then. Jeremiah’s prophecy was to denounce the sins of Judah and pronounce the judgment God gave him to declare to them. But it was also to give them light in view of His promises. In the future, after repentance will come forgiveness and cleansing. A new day is coming when all they had hoped for, but had rejected previously, would come to pass. The blessings of the future would go beyond all their expectations. God does keep His promises and extends His infinite mercy.

What then, are some lessons we can learn from the book of Jeremiah? We will be reminded again, that if we don’t take God seriously and we disregard His supreme authority over us, we will be lost. If we sin, and don’t consider the sin as an affront against God, we will have to endure the consequences of sin – just judgment carried out by God Himself. All sin is against God to whom we are accountable. If we respond in sincere repentance to God, and put our faith in His provision for cleansing from sin, He can forgive our sins, give us new life, and a relationship is formed with Him in which our love for God, and His for us is reciprocated. We will be given a work to do for Him that makes our life full and meaningful.

Jeremiah 1

JEREMIAH’S CALL

Jeremiah was a priest by birth but a prophet by the call of God. Exactly how the word of the Lord came to him, we don’t know. But we know it was plainly understood. It was precise and to the specific point for a specific purpose. Jeremiah was planned for by God who formed him and knew him as a person in his mother’s womb. He had been set apart even then to accomplish a specific work for God, appointed to give warnings to sinful nations. He was to be a spokesman for the Lord to the people of his day.

It is plain from what the Lord told Jeremiah when he was an adult, that personhood happens before birth. God knew who He was because He had arranged for his life and even had a plan for his life before conception. Personhood begins in the heart of God who has a purpose for all of us. He does give us the freedom of choice after we are born and have come to the place of conscious decision making, to do what He wants or not. Each person has the free will to be independent of God and accept the consequences of that choice, or to follow the path of God’s leading in life and enjoy fellowship and communion with our Creator/God.

Some people are called to do a specific work, like Jeremiah, and others seem to have a more general responsibility to do whatever we do “as unto the Lord, and not (just) unto man.” The common role of all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, is to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind and use our strength for the role we are to fill for His glory. We are to obey Him and do His will which is revealed to us in general terms in the Bible. Then we are able to serve Him in whatever work He gives us the privilege to do for Him. He opens doors for us to live meaningful lives, and then trusts us to act on that which is before us in appropriate way with the right motives.

Jeremiah was timid and felt inadequate to speak to people who would oppose him and resent the messages he had to give. Animosity against one who bears bad news is not uncommon. Yet, that warning must be given and the bad news God gives must be declared clearly. Because a person is young is not an acceptable excuse to not go where God wants us to go and do what God wants us to do. It is God’s message His appointed servants are to convey, not our opinions, nor is it necessarily what people want to hear. We may be afraid, but faith overcomes fear. It does not mean we will not have fear. If we pass on what we know God wants to be said, He will give the power to endure the results or deliver from the danger that may occur, whichever suits His divine will.

It is possible for us to either overestimate ourselves and our abilities, or to underestimate the capacity God has given us to do what He wants. Lack of self-confidence, lack of trust in God, lack of experience and faith to go beyond what

is normal, can keep us from active obedience to our Lord. Education that makes us more skilled in the things of God, training from faithful mentors, and practical experience, combined with God-given common sense can all be used to eternal profit if applied to the calling God gives us. It is to be expected that in this world in which we live, those who deny the very existence of God, or the involvement of God in human life, and will reject Him, will reject those who speak for Him. There will be insults, antagonism and even hatred toward those who are committed to following Him. It is unrealistic for us to expect people to like us if they don't like what we say and what we live for.

When a person speaks for God, it must be the message that God give, and we get that from God's word. Preachers, are expected to be "the Lord's messengers in the Lord's message." The work of the Lord is like farming and building, God told Jeremiah. We have to root out the bad before we plant the good seed. We have to tear down the defective building before we can build a sound structure. Jeremiah had to prophesy to the nations and kingdoms about their state before the Lord first, before any hope could be given. Our area of service maybe this street, this community, our family or some far part of the world. Wherever we are, it is our obligation to God and the people, to act on His direction and authority, not in self-will. God gives the ability to us to do any task He designates to us. He has promised to be with us as we carry out the commission our Lord gave.

An illustration of encouragement was given to Jeremiah which we can take for ourselves. In California, the almond trees blossom before anything else - usually in February. The Holy Spirit is at His life-giving work in people before we even get there with the Gospel message, and He prepares hearts of people to accept the message of salvation if they choose to. The boiling pot illustration indicated to Jeremiah, that an evil misery was going to come on them from the north that would affect them all.

We do not have the capacity to "change the world," nor are we able or called to do that. We are called to give the message of the Gospel, which, when acted upon, change people as individuals from within. Then as they also pass on the Gospel message, the multiplying principle takes effect and the world can be changed by the word of the Lord. Jeremiah faced opposition right from the beginning of his ministry, but he was not to let that stop him. Even though everyone would be against him, he was strengthened by God to be firm and faithful. The leaders of the people – government, business and religious leaders, would be his enemies and attacked and openly opposed him because he was a bearer of bad news. But that faithful man had the promise of the Lord that He would be delivered.

There are consequences to sin, and we will be grieved when we see the results of idolatry, immorality, injustice, self-pleasing – and all the other ways self-centered people live who reject the Lord. Even believers in Christ can be enticed to compromise truth and turn away from what they know is right. To do that is to waste one's life. What could be full and beneficial to many, can be wasted on ourselves, our opinions and any potential for God, and a life that could have been lived for Him, can be wasted.

Jeremiah 1:5. *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."*

PRE-BIRTH.

God had a plan for that person before the day of his birth.
There is no way we can argue the unborn has little worth.
Before they are born - God knows the role He intends for us to take;
The path we take in life, and the mark He wants us to make.

Set apart by God: first to live, not intended before birth to be killed.
Life is like a sacrament which God wants, His purpose to be fulfilled.
The life ahead; our work, He knows - from beginning to the end.
The Omniscient God, the Life-Giver: no one purposeless does send.

From the moment of conception, there is in that small thing,
All the characteristics needed that one may to the God of life bring
The purpose and the worth of a life lived for God's glory.
Sad to say, in many lives the result is a different story.

I don't know exactly when free-will comes into play,
Or when one is totally responsibility for that they do and say.
But I am sure no one is an accident; God makes no mistakes.
It is wrong when one kills the pre-born; it is a human life he takes.

"O Righteous God, I live in a nation where the life of the unborn is not considered a human life. There are those who are challenging the legislation passed. Give them courage and may their voices be heard. But more importantly: may those parents realize right at the beginning of a life, the value of that life to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 2

FORSAKING GOD

Beginning at this chapter, there are nineteen chapters in the book of Jeremiah that are reproofs, condemnations and warnings to the people of Judah. These were likely given in the early part of Jeremiah's ministry. The first warning was because they had neglected the worship of God and turned to the immoral and sexually oriented worship of idols. The second message was for Judah to remember what happened to the northern tribes of Israel. The third was a condemnation of their own religious practices. The fourth tells of the coming consequences for them breaking the covenant the nation had with God. The fifth points out why any intercession on their behalf by Jeremiah was unable to prevent the just judgment that was coming on them. The sixth section contains two sermons and then the imprisonment of Jeremiah for "telling it like it is."

A description of the love, loyalty and devotion between Israel and the Lord in their past history, relates that it was like that of a newly married couple. There was mutual faithfulness and commitment to each other. God intended that to continue, and even after all of the unfaithfulness of the Jews toward Him, He still wants that. Someday that will be true when our Lord Jesus Christ is "received by His own."

There is disappointment in a relationship when the promise of commitment is not kept. When time after time, promises are broken, and it is obvious there is attraction to another source, and from another source, that is more important to one party in the relationship, than the one to whom they gave a promise is likely to be broken. Both Israel and Jacob (Judah) had turned away from the Lord, and the covenant relationship they had enjoyed in the past, with God, had become worthless (vanity).

Jeremiah reminded them, as did other prophets, of the faithfulness of God to them. He always did what He said. He cared for them, provided for them, protected them, fought for them – and now the younger generation didn't even care for their heritage. They were just living for the moment. The prophets did not want them to forget who they were, where they came from, who brought them there and God's love for them. Jeremiah reminded them of times when they were close to God, and the blessings they enjoy as God's people from that privileged place of nearness.

In a series of questions, the whole problem of the defection of the people of Judah from God to idolatry is addressed. The leaders deliberately rejected what was right and substituted what was expedient to them and their constituency. They didn't consult with the Lord about anything, and seemed satisfied with just their form of religious practice, as long as it didn't interfere with their idolatry. Consequently, the Lord laid charges against them like would be done in a court of law. Witnesses from the west (Cyprus) and east (Arabia), even though they were idolaters, were at least committed to their idolatry. Right between them was Israel and Judah, who instead of testifying to those around of the faithfulness, truth and reality of a living God, turned to the practice of worshipping lifeless idols. The attraction of sexual congress in the name of religion, overcame their profession of faith by appealing to the sinful nature of those who had only religion.

The comparison Jeremiah wrote about was that of a spring fountain of fresh spring water, to a cistern that had stale water and cracks in it, that couldn't hold enough water to quench their thirst. The little water there would be lukewarm, tasteless at its best and they would still be thirsty because there wasn't enough to do more than whet their appetite. The religious systems of men are really worthless. They have forms but no faith. They are geared to the emotional needs of the moment, but not the spiritual need for eternal life. There is a constant desire and asking for money to fund their various "ministries." There is not the "cheerful" giving of grateful hearted believers who are anxious to offer what they have to God.

Israel and Judah were not downtrodden slaves. God had brought them out of bondage into their own land. They had one time been a mighty power for good and for God right in the center of all the Middle East nations. But then they took their eyes off the Lord who had brought them out to bring them in, and they looked with lustful eyes to the attractions of idolatry. Then this was passed on to their children and grandchildren who didn't appreciate what they had and how they got it. It is of great importance to tell our young people how they came into the place of blessing they have become used to. Some great work of God in the past opened the way to present blessings for all of us.

To correct such ungodly behavior, God had allowed enemies to overcome them for a period of time during the time of the judges, until there was repentance and they turned back to God. This happened over and over. Then there was a time of great victories under the leadership of king David, and a time of peace under Solomon. Then deterioration set in like a dreadful disease. Occasionally they revived, only to go downhill again. Then after being brought into bondage again, they turned to Egypt to help them escape from Assyria.

In Jeremiah's prophecy he had brought them right to where they were in history with current events. It was the Egyptians they had turned to who had killed king Josiah. The people had brought all of this on themselves by their rebellion against God, and they still didn't seem to get it. But they turned in outward forms to God, but they did not bluff God. Jeremiah told them that instead of being a real vine from which fruit can be gathered, they were a wild

fruitless vine without reality in spite of their outward show. They could wash themselves as hard as they want with soda (nitre) and soap, the hardest cleanser they could find, but an outward show doesn't cut the inward filth that God sees.

Inwardly, they were like animals in heat in their going after the idol worship they craved. The desire for the immoral ungodly practices of idolatry was still in them just looking for a way to satisfy their lust for sin. Sin is far more staining of the mind and heart than the outworking of the flesh. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Sin stains are before God who "looks on the heart."

The five questions the Lord asks through the prophet in the later part of the chapter go right to the heart of the whole situation in which Judah was found. They wanted God to do something for them by defeating their enemies, but they had rebelled against him. He had been rejected like a husband rejected by his bride. He had led His people through the wilderness and difficult times, but here they were exalting themselves and making demands of God. The people of Judah like the northern tribes of Israel, had turned to other nations, false gods and made alliances with potential enemies to deal with their problems, rather than turn to the Lord.

When David was king and during most of the reign of Solomon, the people of God had served the Lord and were unified

Strong under divine leadership. When those leaders who followed them turned after other nations and false gods in times of testing, they failed and fell. Human alliances with godless people will always fail and fall apart some way. There are plain lessons for us to learn. "Cursed be the man who trusts in man, and maketh flesh his arm." Jeremiah stated that in a later chapter. God has been and is faithful to us, but in order to have meaningful fellowship and communion with Him, we must be faithful to Him. He doesn't change, but we do. Our actions and attitudes can bring down righteous chastisement on us from our Father who loves us if we turn away from Him to godless religion, faithless society, and careless living.

Jeremiah 2:2. *"Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem saying, thus saith the Lord, 'I remember the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.'"*

GOD REMEMBERS.

At the beginning, just like a bride in her youth,
The people of God followed their Object of love.
But temptations distracted and turned them aside,
From the God who had blessed them, their affections did move.
The Lord championed their cause because they loved and obeyed -
And from their enemies around; He preserved them and saved
From the entrapments of evil that threatened their life.
But, no, from Him they turned, losing all they could have.

Farther and farther, in vanity they went,
Until they themselves became vain - life was far spent.
Yet with pleadings of a lover whose life-love is gone,
God continued to call them through the prophets He sent.
"Remember God's faithfulness, when in slavery you were bound."
"Don't forget you were loved in spite of enemies around."
"For the sake of your children, and grandchildren too,
Think of what you once had, and the blessings you found."

Ah, folly rejoices to see such a change -
In "blessed people" to turn from all they could claim.
Two evils they committed that made their waters run dry -
And into mud and deep mire, they went to their shame.
They turned from the Source of the pure water from God.
They hewed out of rock, holes that nothing will hold.
Down on their heads they brought results of mire and dirt -
They had forsaken and turned from the grace of their Lord.

Such lessons we learn in this day when we're living,
In a place where there's taking - not very much giving.
The wells and the cisterns of this world all will leak.
The God of salvation gives the water worth having.
When any of God's children, in repentance of sin,
Turns around and comes back in contrition to Him -
They will find His forgiveness and welcoming grace,
For in Christ, we are accepted, received and forgiven.

“O God of holiness: for any of God’s people to turn from Thee causes such grief. I am sure they do not understand how serious such an action is, until they have gone too far. Please give me insight into myself, that I will know when I am in such a place or condition of danger. I want my heart and soul fixed on Thee, lest at any time the allure of temptation finds an answering cord in this fickle heart of mine. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 3

SPIRITUAL UNFAITHFULNESS

Israel had been like an unfaithful wife to the Lord, and they were so impudent and arrogant that they thought they could return to God whenever they wanted, and He would receive them and not judge them. They had been like a prostitute in their idolatry, and still expected God to bless them just because they wanted Him to. God withheld rain to express His displeasure with them and to make them stop what they were doing and think about the consequences of their sin. Sadly, they only called upon Him when they were in such a place of danger, they could do nothing about it. They wanted God at the same time, as they wanted gross evil.

Covenants are agreements made between consenting parties with terms to be met and adhered to, with a view to the best possible outcome for both. The marriage covenant is a lifetime agreement that can bring joy and contentment when both parties maintain their responsibilities to it. Two unique features in this covenant are explained in the book of Ephesians. The wife is to submit to her husband’s leadership, as unto the Lord. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. When those two terms of the covenant are met, there is joy and oneness in that relationship.

In this chapter of Jeremiah, Israel as a nation, is compared to a wife who is not submissive to her husband, and is unfaithful to him. The descriptions given are that of adulterous behavior on the part of Israel. A few years earlier, the northern tribes of Israel had been taken captive by the Assyrians for doing the same things the people of Judah were now doing. Jeremiah spoke for the Lord in urging them to learn the lessons of defeated Israel, but Judah did not respond to his warnings nor did they change their behavior. Judah knew what had happened, but still there was no repentance. They pretended repentance briefly when there was a revival under Josiah, the good king, but that revival didn’t go deep. It was only external and that is neither real nor does any apparent change last.

Israel in the north didn’t even try to appear like they were obeying God. They were out and out in their open sin. Judah though, carried on the outward forms because they had the temple, the priesthood and the kingly line designated by God. They were far more responsible for their disobedience and outward form of religion, than those who did not pretend to obey God. Judah as a nation, had looked down on their neighbors for their open and blatant immorality and flaunted idolatry. But they were more responsible to do what was right, and were more guilty when they were wrong, because their guilt was both within and without.

Yet, God in grace as a Father, and in mercy as a Husband, offered forgiveness if there was genuine repentance and forsaking of sin. He called Israel to repent and be restored to Him, even after their unfaithfulness to Him. The call of God to restoration included all of the Jews, north and south; those who had been taken captive, and those who were about to become captives. But it didn’t happen. They rejected the last call of mercy for that generation of Jews.

Judah carried on in the outward forms of Judaism, but it was only false repentance, false obedience and faithless forms. Counterfeit repentance without change inward as well as outward, is only treachery. True repentance involves change in the mind and then in the heart. From there it will produce outward change that is real and lasting in both behavior and in attitude. It wasn’t too late for Judah, even when the Lord called through Jeremiah at the “eleventh hour.” But there will come a time for every nation, people and individual, when the last call of mercy goes out. After that, there is no getting back to the place of repentance. Those are people like Esau, who found no place of repentance though he “sought it carefully with tears.”

All of the things that happened to those people who lived before us, and are recounted on the pages of holy scripture, are “for our learning.” There are principles that need to be practiced in order to serve God acceptably. They are practices that need to be carried out in ways that we know please God. It is a wise person who learns from those who failed before us, and have passed on to us lessons to be paid attention to lest we fall into the same sin and the consequences that follow. The same can be said of assemblies and nations. History is one of the very best teachers we have. It is wisdom on our part to learn the lessons of failed nations and assemblies that have abandoned scriptural practices for expediency and “majority rule.”

The Lord called to His people who He loves, to return to Him. He hates their sin but He loves them. He will give them the kind of leadership they need if they will return back to Him and listen to His word to them. He looked forward to a time when real shepherds of God’s people will truly put their confidence in the Lord, and not rely on symbols like the

ark. At that time the Lord Jesus will be the King on the throne in Jerusalem. There will be the kind of leadership they need if they turn back to Him and listen to Him. In that regathering the covenant He has with His people will be on their hearts and the remnant of Israel will have the joy of fellowship with Him. Those who choose evil will be rejected and lost to God. The believing remnant will be brought back to the Lord in confession and joyful restoration. For us who live in similar times and among people who have similar practices and pursuits, let us learn the lessons from those who lived before us. The failure of the Jews in Jeremiah's generation should make us stop and consider ourselves and what we are doing and why. "If the shoe fits; wear it!"

Jeremiah 3:25. *"We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."*

FAITHFULNESS.

Who can you trust when faith is on the shelf?
Is there anyone who will give right from within himself
The commitment needed that God can in him trust
With the responsibility to give His Word to us?
He needs someone who will tell things as they are;
Who from within himself can for others sincerely care,
Yet not compromise truth, and will righteousness demand.
These traits are not so common in a normal man.

Amidst the faithlessness that characterizes our age,
There are not many you can find in this immoral craze,
Who will speak for God in spite of what others do -
And not allow the pressures on them to undermine what's true.
The history of unfaithfulness should teach us to pay attention
When messengers of God come challenging us to a decision
Between right and wrong that each one may consider,
The decision they make now, will affect them each forever.

With a sense of the importance, whenever one speaks for God,
Each one of us need to make sure what we say is from the Lord.
Compromise and doubt have brought down on man, disgrace.
Things cannot stay as they are, with faithlessness going at this pace.
God will receive again these who from their sin repent -
When they hear the warnings given by those He sent.
It is up to those who are faithful to speak up while there is time;
So those who do return to God, acceptance by Him will find.

"Lord God, it seems to me that we have almost a hopeless task to reach people. I am so conscious of my need of Thee, Father, that I am wondering whether I am capable of speaking for Thee in the upcoming meetings. Give me assurance of Thy presence with me, I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 4

SOUND THE ALARM!

The first part of this chapter is a continuance of the message in the previous chapter. It is a call to return to the Lord before the calamity prophesied actually comes upon them. It is an urgent message to not turn aside from or waver in determination to get back to God. Their privileges as God's chosen people would be withheld as long as they refused to commit themselves to the Lord and separate themselves from the sinful lifestyle of the people in the world around them. Whenever people face their alienation from God, it is important to quickly get back to God and get onto the fruitful ground of true worship of God and heartfelt service for God. If you don't do it now, you will be too late because judgment is already on the way here.

This warning was not to be taken lightly because the plans of the conqueror were already being started to be carried out. They were warned to flee to the cities of defense for survival. The enemy was going to come on them from the north. The armies of the lion (Gentiles) were coming and will destroy all they had before them, as they came. The intimidation and power of the conquerors will take away all the courage of the sinful leaders of the nation. The willful king and his advisors and officials who were remiss in their leadership will melt in fear in front of the Babylonians. The priests and prophets who wanted to please the people rather than God, will be totally afraid.

When we get to verse ten, Jeremiah, in an emotional outburst is overcome with sorrow and confusion. Other prophets had said, "Peace, peace," but there was no peace. They had claimed to speak for God, and Jeremiah may have thought that what they said was true. That God would miraculously intervene and the coming judgment would be

averted. It is possible those prophets spoke as they did because God had blessed in crisis times in the past, and had promised blessing in the future, so they took it for granted that God would deliver them now. Never take the longsuffering of God for granted and expect that He will always overlook sin. He will never overlook sin. Sin has to be legally and justly dealt with, because God is a holy God. He does not compromise His integrity nor does He circumvent His laws.

When God deals with sinful people, He gives them space and time to genuinely repent, and turn in faith to the only One who can forgive sins. Those who appear to repent but do not truly face up to sin and its consequences, but cover it over, He takes action in justice and judgment. When there is counterfeit repentance and religious forms carried out by people whose hearts are still as hard as "fallow ground," He has no recourse but to punish those who practice falsehood in the name of God.

Judah is portrayed as a young woman getting caught out in a wild harsh storm that cannot be used to winnow grain. Because the wind is too strong, both chaff and grain would be blown away. The call to the people of Jerusalem to repent (wash) and get rid of all their wicked practices, and the wickedness within them, was so they could be saved. But it did not happen. The enemy was coming through Dan and would come down across the whole country in destructive power before they got to Jerusalem.

Heartbroken, Jeremiah expresses his own emotions and anguish as he sees the sure devastation and judgment coming on his own people who would not listen to his warnings. They would not turn in repentance to God. They only wanted deliverance from their enemies. How awful the feelings of dread there would be before the unstoppable calamity about to fall on blessed people who did not value their blessings. But remorse is not repentance. In the eyes of Jeremiah, it seemed like the world around him had returned to what it was like before God acted in creation. Before God acted in creation the earth was without form and void, but by the power of God it became a glorious world.

All Judah could seem to do was bad. They had gone so far from God and what He had intended, that they didn't even know how to do what was right anymore. It is possible to do what is wrong so often, that it seems to be normal practice and conduct. When we first neglect what pleases God, we will soon ignore that. When we ignore God and His will and ways, the time will come when to do that which is right is so foreign, that we become embarrassed to do what is right and what pleases Him. It is our responsibility as children of God, to pursue that which is right, and do it with our might, and with all our heart and soul.

God did give a little bit of light by saying He would not completely obliterate the people of Judah. He would not make this a "full end." His covenant promises are such that a small remnant of true believers would survive. Through them there would come a fulfillment of those promises for the future. That gave a glimmer of light to Jeremiah in the midst of his prophecy of doom and judgment. Judah would try to entice the invaders again like they had in time past when the Babylonians had taken some captives and plunder, and gone back to Babylon. But this time, in spite of Judah acting like a harlot, or a woman in pain, Judah was going down!

Jeremiah 4:3. *"For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."*

FALLOW GROUND.

They chose to do God's things their way,
Not realizing the greatness of the price to pay,
When there was nothing more to do or say -
God told them to get to work.

There were too many things men had left undone.
Efforts they made were put on the wrong one.
God wanted them to return back to their home -
And break up the fallow ground.

Much they are doing is unproductive.
For some reason they ignore God's clear instruction.
They press on determined to their own destruction -
Instead of breaking up the fallow ground.

So instead of waiting, get up and go to work.
There is seed to be planted in the fertile dirt.
To neglect to act, many people will be hurt -
Go out and break up fallow ground.

I look around and see fallow ground here
Wherever we labor for the Lord fallow ground is near.

Fallow ground is waiting for the labor of those who care.
We must prepare the fallow ground.

“Lord God of the harvest, I pray the Holy Spirit to guide me to the fields where the fallow ground waits to be broken up and brought into production for the Lord. Open my eyes to see where Thou dost lead. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 5

“NO, NOT ONE!”

It is possible to get so used to sin and all that is associated with the on-going practice of willful sin, that we forget what honesty, integrity and righteous living are really like. That is what it was like with the whole population of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah's prophecy. God who knows the hearts of all people, told Jeremiah to search through the streets of Jerusalem, and if he could find just one honest man, He was willing to pardon the whole city. But Jeremiah could not find one among the common people. So, he searched among the leaders and there was no one there as well.

Some were using God's name as an oath to say they were telling the truth, and that only made it worse, because they were swearing to lies. To do such a thing and use such words, are quite common today. “God is my witness; I did not do what I am being charged with,” and they have their hand upraised while saying those words, and it not being true, heightens the degree of guilt.

As those who belong to Christ, our witness and our words must be true to God and His word as we represent Him to our children and those around us. If not, such hypocrisy and pretense will turn people away from God and away from us. He is looking for truth and faithfulness in those who belong to Him. When we try to fake reality, even our faces reveal falsehood because they become shifty and hard. Our eyes are not genuinely compassionate and kind toward others when we are deceptive.

Jeremiah couldn't find honesty and honor among the common people. Instead he found rebellion. So, he went to those who were leaders; those who are “great” among the people, like teachers, professors, government officials and even the religious leaders. But they were no more righteous than anyone else. They were false followers of God. They were supposed to teach and guide others in the ways of righteousness, but they actually led them in the wrong way. There were no true followers of the Lord in the whole city.

Consequently, the Lord was going to leave them as defenseless as a person among wild animals that stalk and devour their prey. This was not without a reason. The rebellion of the nation was deliberate. It was not done in ignorance. Repeated warnings had been given by true prophets and they had been ignored and even rejected. Again, and again they had turned away from that which they had been taught was right in the sight of God. But apostasy, when repeated over and over again, finds no way back to righteousness.

Sadly, not only the adults who knew what was right but had done wrong were at fault, but their children followed their example. The next generation usually ends up doing just as bad as their forefathers, and often go even farther into sin and debauchery because of the failures of the older generation. Judah had sinned grievously against the Lord, and the consequences of their sin was surely coming upon them.

In such times, there are often those who deny that they have done anything wrong, and say that God would not let anything bad happen to them. “After all, He is a God of love!” Then when their evil ways in which they are immersed catches up with them, and brings result which are devastating and tragic, they complain against God for allowing it to happen. By nature, people resist taking ownership of their own sin. They usually look for someone else to blame. “My parents made us read the Bible and go to church. They insisted on praying before eating a meal.” Psychologists will jump on that with glee, and support children in blaming their “religious” parents for their own deviant behavior. Even inmates in prison blame their father for not saying, “I love you,” or for not saying enough times. If they can't think of anyone else who fits their complaint, they blame God and lie about Him. Jeremiah calls them “wind bags” in our modern idiom. Their words are meaningless lies.

In contrast to what the false prophets said, are the words of Jeremiah. His warnings were like a powerful fire that left no question as to what was coming. A powerful nation, with a long and mighty history was coming and would defeat them. They did not speak the language of the Jews who call out for mercy and they will not hesitate to do what they want and take what they want. The people of Judah could call out in fear and supplication as much as they wanted, but the invaders would not even know what they were saying. They would have no place of escape.

For His own covenant's sake, God would not allow complete annihilation, but would preserve a remnant through whom His promises would be fulfilled. When the people of Judah asked why all this would happen to them, Jeremiah,

the faithful prophet, plainly said what they had heard before: "You have forsaken the Lord, and you have deliberately turned to idolatry." From the minds and hearts of the people, there still was the desire for tolerance of sin, and a willful rejection of the fact that holiness and righteousness is essential for fellowship with God. Life as God intends for us to lead it, will still, and always be, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,"

The distress and concern of the Lord was real, and yet the people couldn't seem to understand why sin is "such a big deal," to God. When we place ourselves as the supreme authority in our lives, we are incapable of understanding what the standards of life as God intends really are. Those people didn't get what God meant because they were willfully blind, and deliberately deaf to His messengers, His warnings and His just judgments that were coming because of their sin. They disrespected their Creator who put a boundary on the sea. They should have known He has a boundary on human behavior and human minds. But, "No," they were defiant, rebellious and hard-hearted against the One who controls and established the forces and actions of nature. Who did they think they were that they could defy Him, and not face judgment?

The attitudes and actions of people reveal the condition of their minds and emotions toward God. People often expect God to provide everything for them, do whatever they want, whenever they want and yet they have no fear or reverence for God and feel no obligation to Him. How arrogant, and how blatant are the sinful minds of human beings! The gods of human imagination are nothing more than pipe dreams that people have to excuse their deviant behavior and lifestyle. They are willing to prosper and win over the defeat of less fortunate people than themselves who get in the way of their selfish ambitions. They are willing to trap others in order to promote themselves. They live to get rich, and are determined to do so even at the expense of others.

Many in our day, the same as in that ancient past, don't care what happens to anyone else as long as they get what they want. That attitude and the actions that accompany such an attitude are idolatrous behavior. God is against that and will judge it in the way He determines and in the way it deserves. Instead of another call to repentance from God to His erring people in Judah, from the words of Jeremiah come the sounding of inescapable doom that is unavoidable. There will be no further reprieve offered.

Jeremiah 5:3. *"O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return."*

ONLY TRUTH COUNTS.

The words sound good, but the reality is not there.
People are choosing what they listen to, the rest they will not hear.
They do only those things they want to, the rest they leave undone.
Actions that they take are for selfish reasons alone.

It seems to make no difference if one is rich or poor.
Both classes of people don't seem to care, and God they do ignore.
The poor won't pay attention, they don't think God exists.
The rich and great only care about what suits them as the best.

The adulterers choose to sin, then wipe their mouths and say,
"Don't be so old-fashioned. We're living in a new day."
Homes and families are falling apart because of selfish pride.
Children hardly know what they will find, or what parents will decide.

No wonder that God allows things to come we really do not want.
If we will not pay attention to His Word, then He takes another slant,
And steps back keeping His hands off the consequences of our choices.
We have to expect what we sow we reap, when we ignore the "prophets" voices.

We are not done with terrible things, there will be more to come.
Most people are not ashamed of their sin, but still there remains some
Who have the fear of God impressed upon their souls - and wait,
For the Lord to come before judgment falls; when that happens, it is too late.

But if we hear the truth and respond appropriately,
The Lord God is ready for us to return, He is waiting patiently.
He knows when I mean something sincerely, the truth does really count.
And there is a way back to God when I repent and do not doubt.

“O God, may Thy people continue to shine as lights and beacons, guiding others to Thy truth. May they not be weary in what they do because so few pay attention. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 6

JERUSALEM UNDER SIEGE

There are serious consequences to face when people ignore the Lord, reject His offers of mercy, and replace the word of God with lies. Chapters four through six describe the coming invasion of the Babylonians and give the warnings the Lord had Jeremiah pass on to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. In this chapter the people of Benjamin that borders Judah from east to west, and comes right to where Jerusalem is located, are warned to not flee to Jerusalem, but away from Jerusalem. Even with its walls, Jerusalem was no longer a safe place to be. Coming judgment would not be stopped because they refused to repent, so the doom of which Jeremiah prophesied was inescapable.

The people of Judah broke the covenant the Lord had with Moses in chapter two. In chapter three the call to repent came, but they refused to repent. Chapter four through six describe the coming Babylonian invasion and chapter six also gives the closing action of the coming judgment. Jerusalem is like a young woman who was cut off from safety. It would be judged because they continued in open sin and rebellion against the Lord. So, the Lord made it plain that He was the One who was having the Babylonians come upon them in justice and judgment. The army was coming like a large flock of sheep under the leadership of shepherds who were the foreign leaders.

The invaders were impatiently preparing to go to war at noon or night. They wanted to conquer Jerusalem right away. They were urgent in seeking success in this conquest. Normally soldiers rest at night so they can be prepared to deal with their foes when they can see them, but the Babylonians were so anxious that they were ready to continue the siege around the clock. The “mounds” (mount) were ramps of earth piled up against the wall of the city so they could put battering rams to break down the walls.

The cause of all of this terrible assault was the wickedness of the people who were spouting up wickedness like a spring of water. Their sin was like “in your face” arrogance. Spiritual wickedness is like a disease and unhealed wounds before God. The wells of Jerusalem only brought forth that which was evil. The wise person, city, and nation will respond to warnings and take action against sin, or God will make desolate all that people trust in. It is not easy to accept discipline, either self-imposed or put on one who loves sin and wants to keep on doing the sinful practices they have come to enjoy. When justice is dealt, everything will be lost that people have trusted in. In the case of the people of Judah, the invaders took everything and what they didn’t keep they destroyed. The campaign of the Babylonians was so intense that people couldn’t even find a left-over grape on a vine to eat.

Jeremiah’s reaction to the unbelief of the Jews was almost like he couldn’t believe how hard they had become. They had closed their ears to his warnings and wanted no part of living for the Lord. Discipline is not exciting to many people because there is not a lot of drama and surprises that give people a short-term thrill. The common people and the leaders of the Jews were all “tarred with the same brush.” They were all covetous and false in their dealing with others. They had no shame, even when it came to the sinful lives they were living. Jeremiah knew that the Lord would hold nothing back in the coming judgment. He was resigned to what was happening. The Lord told him that young and old alike were guilty and would all be brought down in judgment for their sin.

They were told they would lose all their personal possessions including houses and property. Everything they had counted on would be turned over to the conquerors before whom they would fall. The unmitigated covetousness of the people would be judged, from that of leaders of government, to the priests who were responsible for the spiritual well-being of the people. False prophets and priests deceived the people with assurance of peace, even when calamity was coming and was at their door and was happening right before their eyes. In essence the false leaders were saying, “Just ignore what is happening and it will go away.” People can say it as sincerely and as much as they want, but saying, “Peace, peace when there is no peace,” will not bring peace. Denying truth doesn’t change it, nor does glossing over a wound and saying it is not too bad doesn’t make it okay.

People then and now do not want to listen to true prophets or preachers because their messages are not what people want to hear. So, they don’t pay attention to the messages of warning and they offer their own kinds of sacrifices that are useless even though they may be costly and look good. They were called to remember their forefathers and the patriarchs who were people of faith and had experienced God at work in their lives. The paths of righteousness have not changed just because legislation is past that removes the ancient standards of God. The heritage of God’s people has been tried and proven to be “the old paths, and “the good way,” that result in salvation. The truth of God’s word remains undaunted and victorious in bringing blessing to those who are obedient and faithful to the Lord. It will also bring to pass in reality, the warnings that accompany the word of God to those who will not believe God.

Watchmen were important men in the villages and unwallied cities of Judah and Benjamin. Jeremiah was a watchman in the city of Jerusalem. It is incumbent upon people to pay attention and take action on what the watchmen say. People around them were called to witness to God's righteous judgments on His people who had despised and rejected Him. God knows what people think and he knows when they accept or reject His word. There is no way anyone can avoid the omniscience of God. All the expensive things they were using to make sacrifices acceptable was worthless to God, because the outward sacrifices are not necessarily a testimony to what a person is inside.

Consequently, all the outward bluff was nothing to the Lord. He was going to stop them in their tracks. The way of the transgressor is hard. Let us who live today learn from the failures, the deception, the falseness of religion of those people in the past. The Babylonian army brought terror and justice on the ungodly then. God has His own way of correcting the behavior of His people wherever they are, by using the means He knows will bring the results He desires. The Jews in Jerusalem were mourning because of the cruelty that was unleashed upon them, but it was not unfair of God, nor was it, vindictiveness. It was justice and divine holiness that had to be enforced in order to establish a future of peace.

Courage failed when the thoughts of what was happening and was yet to happen, began to sink into hard hearts. The people finally had to face themselves and realize they brought all of this down on themselves. Fear would be everywhere they looked. Terrorism has been a tactic of warfare all through history. When the threat is not that close to us, we are inclined to ignore that and say to ourselves, "Let them worry about that. It's their problem." But when it comes to us, we are inclined to hit the panic-button and say, "Why doesn't somebody do something?" It is not common for people to admit they are getting what they deserve when the outlook is bad. Jerusalem was going into mourning like a woman who lost her only son.

The prophet was their watchman who was calling to them to test them. God wanted them to be tested like ore is tested to see whether the metal is good or not. They were being tested to see if they would turn from their wickedness and to determine if their repentance was real. They failed the test. They paid no attention to the warning of the prophet, and could not, nor would not be refined, because all they were was dross to be rejected by the Lord. What they were in themselves was only fit to be burned up because they had gone so far. They were all false, deceptive and counterfeit and so the Lord rejected them.

It is wisdom on the part of people in every age, and particularly those of us living in the present in this place, to learn the principles God taught His people through the prophets. We need to listen to God's word, and heed the instructions that come to us personal from it. When warnings are given by reliable people who have a consistent testimony for telling the truth of God for our benefit and learning, stop whatever we are doing and act on the advice and truth they tell us.

Jeremiah 6:16. *"Thus saith the Lord, 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' But they said, 'We will not walk therein.'"*

OLD PATHS.

The paths of the ancients are not hard to find,
For the scriptures make plain to us all -
Time after time, God brings clear to my mind,
Lessons of old, so that I will not fall.

One stands in the ways, looks, and loudly calls out,
"Which way is right, please tell if you can,
So that all who are following you, will never doubt,
This is God's way, not the ways of mere man."

There is goodness and mercy in the ways of the past,
Enoch and Noah knew, when they walked them with God.
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob each knew at the last,
The blessings received by being led by the Lord.

All down through the ages, those who walked the old paths,
Found a rest for their souls was at hand, right there.
It is the same here today, when for old paths we ask,
God walks with us and daily each burden will share.

These are not just traditions that are made by old men,
But proven paths that the righteous have trod.
These ways have been proven again and again,
To be the ways we walk, when we walk with our God.

Don't ignore the voices of the ones who will ask,
For the ways that lead homeward to heaven.
These ancient paths walked by the saints in the past,
Are good; on them God's perfect rest is given.

“I know where these paths are found, Father, and I also know that when I walk them, others often scorn. I need to be reminded often of the ancient ones who walked with Thee on these same paths so that I will not turn aside from them. Noah found grace on these paths; Abraham found faith and Jacob found forgiveness. I have found rest to my soul on these paths. I never want to lose the restfulness of this good way. Amen.”

Jeremiah 7

FALSE RELIGION

The next four chapters of Jeremiah's prophecy was to seek to wake up the people of Judah to their false trust in the temple. To them it was a symbol, a fetish or a charm that made them think God was with them no matter what they did or what they believed in. Jerusalem was no more holy than any other city just because the temple was there. The people were practicing idolatry there and resisted the warnings given to get back to righteousness in their religious practices, in social justice and in everyday living. The contrast between knowing what the word of God said and what they were practicing in every part of their lives, was far apart. Wisdom is knowing and doing what God says.

There are several sermons that were given by Jeremiah “in the gate,” or the outer court of the temple. They were given over a period of time when Jehoiakim was king after the death of Josiah. Egypt was the power behind the king who allowed the ways of the world, idolatry, hypocrisy in business and counterfeit religion to run rampant in Jerusalem and Judah. People would come to the temple for the feast days but it was only a false form, even though the original purpose of the feasts of Jehovah were to be for the glory of God and the blessing of His people. According to the description of how his messages were rejected, and the response of the people in chapter twenty-six, what he said hit home. They didn't like to hear it one bit, and almost killed him because of what he said.

In this temple sermon, Jeremiah was speaking for the “Lord of hosts,” the God of war. He confronted the people who came to the temple carrying out religious forms, and he charges them with using the temple as no more than a charm or fetish. Apparently, there were religious leaders there who promoted this idea. They had the temple, therefore they had God with them. Instead of listening to, and obeying the word of the Lord, they were paying heed to the words of deception coming from the people-pleasers, and accepting what they said as okay.

Religious ritual without a pure conscience and cleansed heart, is an affront to the holiness of God. He is of “holier eyes that to behold iniquity.” It is possible for us to allow our “idols” in life to control our daily habits, our thoughts and our motives. If we go to the house of God with the wrong motives, that will negate any worship, service or participation that we might think will please our Lord. To such we give warning. To take the place of a worshiper, partake of the bread and the cup, teach children in a class and participate in all the assembly activities while practicing a sinful lifestyle, is abhorrent to our Lord. The place and practices of church life is not what makes us acceptable to God. They are the results of life lived for God each day of the week.

Attending the temple according to what Jeremiah told the people, was only a sham, because the people were lying, cheating, practicing idolatry, and committing adultery. They were in general, living profligate lives in which the house of God had no real part. They simply went there because it was the “the thing to do.” The temple was just like another idol to them. They were using as a “hideout” like robbers to cover their sinful practices. The Lord Jesus used these words when He drove the moneychangers and hucksters of religion out of the temple when He was here.

The tabernacle had been at Shiloh, but when the Philistines captured the ark, either they or some other people must have destroyed the tabernacle about that time. Jeremiah warned the people of Jerusalem that the same thing that happened to the tabernacle would happen to the temple. They were trusting in forms, not in the Lord, and they were using the temple and temple services, simply to support their subterfuge. Again, and again God spoke to those people and they turned a deaf ear to Him and His servant. So, He was going to allow the same thing to happen to Judah, as happened to those of the ten northern tribes.

There was no hope of change, so the Lord instructed Jeremiah not to intercede for them anymore. He would not be answering any requests for their recovery. It was obvious they were committed to do evil and would not answer the Lord's call. They wanted their false faith and religious practices and forms. They seemed to have no consciousness of the awfulness of their sin, and didn't want anyone to try to change their minds. They did not want to be reminded anymore of sin their and its consequences by Jeremiah. The children and the women as well as the men were involved in the worship of the goddess of love and immorality. Whole families were doing this evil openly without

shame or repentance. They had cut themselves off from God and He was no longer going to preserve them or help them. They had harmed themselves, so they would do the hurting.

We need to remember that in whatever aspect of our lives, there are other people who will be affected by what we do and say. Our children and grandchildren watch and learn from us what we believe to be true and right before God. What they do with that knowledge is up to them as they get older. We must maintain our consistency as individuals, as assemblies and as citizens who give due respect to those in authority, respect and reverence God and give Him glory and honor. When our reputation is that of people of integrity, and our worship and service for God is genuine, then we can leave the results of our testimony to our Lord.

When the Lord is angry, it is not some quick act of temper, or some whim leading to a spur-of-the-moment action. Years, generations and centuries of forsaking God, had finally come to an end. The slowness of God's anger does not mean that it is not real, or there are no consequences associated with it. God's anger is righteous and deliberate with an objective in view. But His anger is so real and so serious that even nature is involved. Fire and famine; fear and being forsaken are evidence of God's just anger.

God had given to His people an order for sacrifices and offerings to be conducted, in order to keep people aware of who He is, and what His desire was for them. But as time passed, and the historical drift set in, those things became no more than a ritual to them. All that had been real and significant to the people of Israel in the past, had deteriorated into symbolism and religious hypocrisy, without repentance for sin or obedience to the Lord. When Moses died, a drift started that Joshua could see. He had been there in the exodus, and for all the years in the wilderness. When he was old, he wanted the people to know he could see that, even as he declared his own faith publicly as his last testimony to them. When the generation following the one who had heard Joshua speak grew up, "They did every man that which was right in their own eyes."

Through the reigns of various kings, there were some times of good, but the evil had finally come to the place where God rejected them. They were beyond recovery even when Jeremiah was preaching to them. There is no real worship of God when He is not there with His people. Sinful living, religious forms, personal and national hypocrisy, social injustice and idolatry extinguished the true worship of God, even though the pageantry is there, and popular sermons are preached.

All of that is no more than an excuse to do what people want for the good of the majority. We have sinful "spiritual advisors" who live immoral lives and tell people because it is what they practice, it is okay. Parents by the millions offer their living children to be burned in hospital incinerators, because unwanted children would interfere with the way they want to live their lives. To have the child they conceived would "negatively affect their personal and mental health." What an awful indictment when God has to say to His people, "Do not pray any more for this people."

Jeremiah 7:19. *"Do they provoke me to anger? saith the Lord: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?"*

WHY BLAME GOD?

We hurt our own selves when we turn away from God.

It is foolish for us to say He's to blame when we do what we know is bad.

When the course we take is a willful one, chosen for expediency -

There is no one to charge with causing the hurt that brings harm down on me.

To separate ourselves from God and do what we know is not right -

Is similar to a green plant being kept away from the light.

There is a withering effect at first, and when no water is supplied -

It doesn't take very long for that plant to gradually wither, and die.

We are the losers when we think we're independent and can go out and act on our own.

The weakness that comes is because we chose to do things all alone.

God is our source of spiritual strength; without Him we are defeated.

The only way to avoid the problems sin causes, is when God's mercy is entreated.

A believer's life is hidden with Christ in God; never try to cut yourself off from Him.

The actions of unbelief in a real Christian, are very egregious sins.

We harm ourselves when we act like this, we have only ourselves to blame.

The ultimate result is bad all around; we bring on ourselves our shame.

It is a known fact; all sin is against God; often its effects are felt

By many who perhaps don't know the difference when judgment is on them dealt.

Those who are God's people have higher standards because we know what is true.

To complain to God when chastening comes is something we must eschew.

“Lord God, the effects of sin in the life of a believer often has far-reaching consequences. I pray for the brother that has either fallen into sin, or chosen to do what he did - that he will face up to and confess what he did, and in repentance and contrition, return to Thee for mercy and forgiveness. I pray that I might be willing to avoid such temptations and not allow that in my life. I ask for help - in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 8

CONSEQUENCES OF DECEIT

The thought of corpses being out in the open or bones being seen, like from open graves, would have been probably the most horrible things the Jews could ever think of seeing. But these were people who had sacrificed their own children to the sun-god, the moon-god and the gods of the stars. Now their own dead bodies would be out in the open when the destruction of Jerusalem would take place. That kind of desecration and humiliation would have been totally abhorrent to those people who had been so outwardly proper in their religious formalism, but were idolaters inwardly.

Even though we may be taught that which is wrong, and even have been deliberately lied to by spiritual advisors and influential people, that does not excuse us for refusing to repent of our sins and turn to the Lord for salvation and forgiveness. In all of us as human beings, is a God-given awareness of right and wrong, as well as an inborn consciousness of God. Idolatry is just a way of trying to get around the standard of righteousness that is in every person. The written law only defines the law that God has written on the “fleshy tables of the heart” of every person.

It is in us as people, that when we stumble and fall, we don't just lie there, but it is our natural inclination to get up if at all possible. How strange it is then, that when people fall morally and spiritually, they don't change directions which would be normal common sense. But, “No!” As God looked on, He saw the people of Judah making a deliberate choice for sin, and deceived themselves into thinking they could get away with sin and there would be no consequences to face. They had completely lost their perspective concerning what God wanted, by minimizing their own evil actions. With stubborn self-centeredness, they hung on to deceit and had the audacity to say, “What have I done?” as if they had done no wrong.

Human stupidity is contrasted to the natural inclination of storks and doves. They know when to leave the potential danger of coming winter, by migrating to where they know they will be safer and will be able to find food. They do that in advance of the coming storms that could kill them. But God's people rebelled against Him, and against that which they instinctively know is right.

When temptations come and choices have to be made, it is incumbent upon each person to sensibly consider what is right. Even one's own conscience guides in these matters. Then it is up to each person to deliberately move away from that dangerous place. God has already provided a “way of escape,” so that temptation can be endured and/or rejected, and we can be preserved from falling.

From verse eight through verse twelve, the spotlight is put on the false prophets and priests; the leaders of the people, who were doing the deceiving. They couldn't give the right sense and meaning of the law because they were not keeping it, neither were they even seeking to obey the Lord. Their covetousness and greed left them with no spiritual sense and consequently, no spiritual values, let alone wisdom to guide and lead other people. Even those leaders of the people had no sense of shame when they sinned.

The Lord speaks in verse thirteen, and then concludes the judgment statement in verse seventeen with, “saith the Lord.” He is fully aware of who they are and what their attitude was, and so made it plain that there would be scarcity of food and hunger would come upon them all. The cities with walls would not keep them safe from the invaders who were coming from the north. The lack of fresh water can bring a whole fortified city down to surrender, because water is needed for survival. Bitter, poisonous waters sound the death-knell for those who would be besieged.

Predictions of peace given by false prophets, were only false hopes, and deceptive hopes for healing were in vain. There was no hope to escape what lay ahead. There was a mighty cavalry, and a great number of armed forces who would be terrifying to those people who were willingly deceived. They would have to face the consequences of their choices. The coming invaders were like poisonous snakes who would not, and could not be contained.

The weeping prophet found no place of comfort for his soul as he mourned for his own people. They were his people, and he called out from his heart; “Why is all of this happening to such a privileged and important nation of people?” So, God told him again from the depths of His holiness and wisdom. They were still trapped by their idols and the deception that turned them away from God in the first place. The righteousness necessary for fellowship with God was not in their hearts. Even though they were captives, there was no evidence of turning away from that which

caused their captivity. Correction of such spiritual wickedness, to bring about spiritual holiness and acceptance by God, has to come from an inward change, not just to follow an outward form.

In verse twenty there are three very important statements of truth learned in their hopeless condition, by those who had been taken captive and were exiled. First, they acknowledged they had plenty of opportunity to repent and turn to the Lord before being taken captive. "The harvest is past." Second is their confession of neglect. "The summer is ended." Third, they were expecting judgment. "We are not saved." They could have been saved, but those people for the most part, died in a foreign land, far away from God and the place where they should have been and could have been.

The grieving of Jeremiah, was that of a passionate advocate who saw the rejection of what he did for the people, and their rejection of the Lord he served. God could heal His people, but not until the root of the problem was dealt with. A covering balm was there, but the spiritual health of the people would not be recovered until the hearts of the people was restored to the Lord, and they actually returned and responded to Him in repentance and faith. God offers healing, but He does not force it on people who will not face their sin problem and accept His gracious offer of forgiveness of sin to the repentant sinner. It is then His grace is revealed in the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf.

Jeremiah 8:20-22. *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people and I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"*

IS THERE NO BALM?

That last loaded wagon leaves the harvest field.
Loud praises rise from laborers gone home.
Unrestrained joy arises in the unified heart of Master and servants.
The long harvest season is over - home at last - and rest.

But what is that sound that rises? The groans - the cries I hear?
How strange that with such joy above, there is such sorrow below.
Words of regret; of sorrow; of remorse; of hopelessness -
"We are not saved! We are not saved! We are not saved!"

What astonishment - it is beyond comprehension.
They were right there all the time - right where blessings abounded.
But for their miseries, a tender-hearted prophet mourns,
And watches, and cries out - "Is there no balm?"

There is a Great Physician able to help and ready to heal.
He is near; right where they are; right where He is needed.
But a willful patient who will not submit to the rules of healing -
Will be without the benefit of both the physic and the Physician.

From our vantage point of God's grace, we watch a dying world.
We wonder at the wholesale rejection of God and His healing balm.
We grieve, we are moved, we too mourn as we look ahead -
Oh, may my heart be broken and a passionate concern flow out from me -

THERE IS A BALM IN GILEAD!

THERE IS A PHYSICIAN HERE!

"O God of the ages: I learn from the past; Thou art always ready to hear and warn and call to those who are not saved. But I also learn that the time of blessing does have an end. May this heart of mine be moved like the old prophet and let people know there is a balm close at hand, and it is theirs for the taking. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 9

THE NECESSITY OF JUDGMENT

When lies and deceit are mixed with the practices of biblical Christianity, there is no way to separate them once they permeate the minds of those who accept such a mixture. God's way of dealing with sin is always appropriate and truly just. It is not arbitrary, vindictive or with bitterness. It is always balanced so the punishment is suited to the offense. It is in knowledge that Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, grieved over the prediction of the coming invaders, killing his own people as they would sweep over the country. His personal grief is such, that he can't stop.

Then he considers their lying and deceit; their rebellion and attitude toward God; their treachery, adultery and idolatry, and he wants to get as far away from them as he can. He wants to disassociate himself from them because he knows divine judgment is coming, and that it is just. He recognizes the essential nature of holiness and why the imminent calamity cannot be withheld any longer, but that didn't make his grief any less.

How kind it was of God to draw near, to His grieving servant and give a precise, simple explanation of the “whys and what fors” that made this necessary. When He spoke to Jeremiah, He described what they were like. For generations this had been going on, but it was getting worse and gaining in momentum, until there was not stopping the downward slide they were on. No one would even pay heed to warnings. The deceptive words of the false teachers and leaders, had the power to deceive and convince the hearers that the lies they were being told, were actually the truth. One lie was not enough, but their deception was continuous until people believed the lies and were damned.

This same thing has happened in this country today, and likely it is the same in much of the world. Sin is being promoted as normal living. It has gone on so long now, that personal sins have become social sins through the whole society. In fact, those who stand up against what is accepted by the majority today, are considered ignorant and antisocial. There is acceptance of modern idolatry and false worship, even in so-called Christian churches. The movies people watch; the people they listen to on television; all the different forms of modern media describe fundamental Christianity as intolerant and bigoted. Those who live according to the truths of the Bible are considered narrow-minded hypocrites.

As far as the majority of people; to take the Bible literally and not put our own opinion or “way of looking at it” on its teaching, is cold-hearted, unrealistic and uneducated. Those of us who believe the scriptures of truth to be inspired by God as to their origin, do not believe we have the right to make changes to them to adapt to the changing standards of modern society. We believe the standards of morality and living, are divinely given, and that God has every right to expect us to abide by what He has said, and not to put our own interpretation on them. God still offers salvation from sin, and a new life in Christ to those who genuinely repent of their sins and forsake that which has kept them separated from God. It is when they assume responsibility for their own sins, and accept the fact that they committed them and so they need to take ownership of that which they have done, that they will face their own guilt before God. It is then they will be anxious to turn to Christ, the Redeemer and Savior of sinners and accept the salvation He gives by grace through faith.

Our nation and people in general world-wide, are just beginning to suffer the consequences of the deceptive world-view that has been taught to the last two generations by godless educators. Now, the people who learned from them, lead the country, conduct the major businesses, teach the children, and take the place of spiritual advisors in many churches. The Lord told Jeremiah his place was among those sinful people, and so it is with Bible-believing, faithful believers in Christ today. We must stay among the people and tell them of God’s plan of redemption, even as they begin to go into the refining fires of affliction. Truth and deceit have become so mixed, that the pain and loss of that which we thought we had gained, has to be tested by “fires” that come from God. Such things as natural disasters, pestilences, uncontrollable diseases, and epidemics are already increasing in number, as well as in intensity.

The problems are reaching such intensity in this 21st century, that they are similar to that which came on Judah when Jeremiah was preaching. It is no longer merely words and ideas that are being suggested and then taught; they are now believed, until it is in the hearts of people so that they are no longer ideas and words, but actions of deception that lead to rebellion against God and chaos in society.

As Jeremiah again heard the word of the Lord, he wept and wailed as he could see all that could have been useful and good, gone; and it had all become useless and barren – even the very ground they walked on. The Lord told His prophet that even the city of Jerusalem, and the once prosperous and vibrant communities of Judah, would become home to wild dogs and jackals. It would be impossible for human beings to live there because the ruin was so complete. In verse twelve, Jeremiah seeks to grasp the immensity of what was happening, and asked a series of questions to get the full meaning of the lessons God’s judgment was teaching.

Believers in Christ often cannot comprehend the awfulness and seriousness of sin, because we too become used to it. Sin and its practices are so common, that unless we commit ourselves to reading the scriptures of the Bible to learn what God says, and meditate on the meaning, we may even think that God is being too hard. However, when we learn the implications of sin and its impact on everything and everybody, we realize that the evil practiced by human beings cannot be allowed to go on if humanity is even to survive, let alone have a relationship with our Creator.

How patient our Lord is with His people! He knows when doubts and fears come upon us. He understands the necessity of explaining in the easiest possible terms, His holiness. It does not allow for stubborn and rebellious disobedience. If it did, it would only be a short time and lawlessness would abound everywhere. Lawlessness leads to confusion and chaos. That leads to the end of moral humanity and human existence. The worship of idols like Baal, allows and even promotes people killing their own offspring, and euthanizing old people because they no longer are active sources of income for the government programs young people want to propagate. Also, most older people have a moral compass of some kind, and when they speak up and out against evil, they bother the smug complacency of those who consider themselves “contributors to the public good.” Soon after getting rid of old people,

the same practice will be put on unborn children doctors say might be “mentally deficient,” and will be a drain on society and even on their family. The mental acuity of such people will be decided by a “committee,” that establish a man-made standard of intelligence that people decide is needed in order to live in society and be a “contributor.” That group of “professionals” will declare they are “responsible for the public good.”

Again, the Lord told Jeremiah what has to be done, and what He will definitely do. Because of His covenant promise, a few would survive to carry on the national identity and seed in view of the future. Because of the present judgment, professional mourners will have more than they can keep up with after the bitterness and the poison and the sword have done their work. Survivors will be scattered until they are no longer identifiable as God’s chosen people.

The wailing of the women for the dead will be heard all over the land of Judah, and the country will be laid waste, including the private homes. They whole nation will be destroyed as an identifiable people. Young girls will be called upon to join the older wailing women because the funerals will be so many. Death has no barriers and it will reach into private homes and public places as well as battlefields. Bodies of the dead will lie on fields like fertilizer. It will look like the reapers have cut down the standing grain and left it to lie on the ground, the decimation will be so great.

People admire certain things in others and would like to see the same things in themselves. Human wisdom, power, and riches have great appeal to the natural man. Unfortunately, most avoid what God delights in. Lovingkindness, righteousness and love are some of God’s qualities that can be seen in us. Certainly not to the extent that they are found in Him, but to the extent that they suited to in us. The focus of these things is on others, not on ourselves. It must be declared openly that God does judge sin in those who profess faith in Him, the same as He does in those who don’t even believe in God. The rebellious heart of any person, remains unchanged until there is true repentance and true faith in Christ.

Jeremiah 9:23-24. *"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."*

KNOWING GOD.

Men have their templates to decide what is important to them.
Wisdom comes near the top of the list - we want to be like Solomon.
Power follows close behind, it usually brings results.
Riches impress a lot of people, who will overlook your faults.

But none of these are lasting; they may go as fast as they came.
When they are gone for a while no one remembers your name.
Set not your heart on any of them they are all only external things.
Self-glory or the glory of men, are all that these can bring.

What really is important is knowing God and how we can best please Him.
Anything else is of much lesser value, what is valuable is what is within.
God is full of lovingkindness; He wants that to be in me.
When that is in God’s children, the Father’s reflection others can see.

Decision making with faith and grace are characteristics to be admired.
Applying biblical principles in life are practices to be desired.
To ignore injustice and unrighteous living lead to wrong decisions.
Knowing God, with our trust in Him, is eternal life’s main condition.

These things that are inherent in God, He delights in when they’re in us.
To know God and enjoy His fellowship is the highest way He can bless
Those who commit themselves to daily walking in His will -
That knowledge in eternal life and brings delight to Him still.

“I thank Thee, Father, That I know Thee and the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope I can bring delight to Thee and glorify Thee in all aspects of my life. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 10

DEADNESS OF DECEPTION vs TRUE AND LIVING GOD

When Jeremiah preached this last temple sermon, his point was quite plain. Judgment will fall on those who trust in idols instead of the Living God who is the Maker of all things. Idols are powerless, lifeless images made from human imagination. To worship them, or the ways of the world, is worthless. Nothing comes from the nothingness of idolatry

except deception. To replace the worship of the Living, True, Eternal, Creator God of all things, with lifeless human-constructed gods made of wood and metal, will bring judgment and destruction on all who do such an arrogant thing.

God is holy, and such sacrilege on the earth He created for man's good and use, has to be eradicated. Truth and deception cannot mix. Grace and works cannot mix. Light and dark cannot mix. Life and death cannot mix. In grace and mercy, God withholds just judgment to give people opportunity to repent and forsake evil. If that does not happen, then justice demands the removal and elimination of evil so that righteousness, justice and kindness can guide and guard life on earth.

There are those who worship the creation, not the Creator. So, they read "signs in the sky" and form conclusions on man's opinions. Others cut down trees and shape the wood with their own tools to look like something they imagine in their own sinful minds. When it is decorated to suit their imaginations, they have to prop it up because it is lifeless. It is like a scarecrow in a melon patch. All it can do is scare people for a while until they get used to its deadness. And yet, people bow down and worship such a thing or what they think it represents. Sadly, it becomes a religious form that deceives people and perverts the moral standards of holy and righteous living. People do not then fear the idols but use them for the personal gain they can get from simple people and unsuspecting children.

In contrast, is the King of nations; the Great Almighty, Living God who is wiser than the wisest person who ever lived, stronger than the strongest. The little child who learns the meaning of "Jesus loves me, this I know," is wiser and knows what is more important than the philosophy of a great thinker, or a religious advisor who bows before creation or images covered with gold. When the righteous anger of the Lord is stirred against sin, the earth trembles like it did when our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross. Rocks broke then and graves were open up when the Great Redeemer became my Savior, bearing my sins in His own body on the tree. The gods of pagans who worship them will perish by the hand of the One who made the earth and the stars of heaven that people worship. He speaks in the thunder of His power. He stores water over our heads and releases it a little at a time as rain when He chooses to.

The fraud of idolatry had swept the world with its useless and senseless control over the minds of people. Today it has many forms it takes, from money, to crosses covered with gold and a whole lot of other things in between. These figments of imagination are lifeless but can over-power common sense and moral living. The result of sinful choices and/or sinful errors, make people who respond to the appeal of their idols, spiritually ignorant and dull of hearing with intelligence. The end of such an attitude will ultimately be shame, and far worse, such who continue that way, will perish eternally.

What a contrast that foolish ignorance is when compared with the God of Israel, the eternal God, the Creator/God, the Lord God Almighty. With reverence and respect, we bow humbly before the Living God, our Gracious Father, and worship with full hearts in spite of all that other people do around us. The warning goes out: destruction and exile are imminent. Gather what you will because you are about to be hurled out of your homes, your land and your country. Only punishment will make Israel, or any people, realize that you can't sin against God and get away with it. Our God is supreme over kings and kingdoms, nations and people, idols and those who worship them.

Either Jeremiah or someone else in Judah, bemoans the fate about to fall on them, and prays with a cry of despair and hopelessness. Their homes (tents) are destroyed; the children (people) of Judah and Jerusalem are scattered; the leaders of the people who had no spiritual sense, still don't. Instead of guiding the people to put their faith in God, they led them astray into the useless mixture of idolatry and counterfeit religion. The consequences of ignoring the Almighty God and substituting idolatry of any kind, whether it is pleasure, sports, business, success, fame, power or even religion, is to face "everlasting destruction." That comes sooner than one might think, because destinies are sealed at death. Many who know that is true, but ignore the urgency of their situation, will submit to the lie of the deceiver after the Lord comes, and they will be lost forever.

Jeremiah prayed at the end of this last temple sermon, and openly admitted that God's ability to give direction to our lives is so far beyond our own that there is no way to make a comparison. It is beyond our capacity and ability to control our future by skill or will-power. Whether people will admit it or not, doesn't change the fact that God's power and God's purposes will "be done on earth as it is in heaven." How gracious and tender of Him to direct our steps! It is with this in mind that Jeremiah asks that the discipline that must be carried out, be done with divine justice, not in bitter anger. He is not saying they did not deserve what was coming, but is making an appeal for justice. He also wanted justice to be carried out on those invaders who consumed the land completely and left nothing behind them.

Jeremiah 10:23-24. *"O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing."*

DON'T BE AFRAID.

We don't really know for sure what is coming next -
Let alone, in time yet to come.
When we are willing to let God control and correct -
Things will be right because for Him they are done.
God's limitless ability is far superior to mine -
I am wise when I yield to His will.
I may not understand what is happening at the time -
So, I should trust Him, hold my peace and be still.

That doesn't mean that I just sit around and wait -
For everything to be done without effort from me.
It is only reasonable that I am willing to participate -
With enthusiasm and to the best of my ability.
But it does mean that I will not act independently -
Nor take the control of things happening into my hands.
God can guide me in each event to act righteously -
And through me, bring about His sovereign plans.

I will ask for wisdom in all things that I do -
I need God; He makes things I do to come out right.
When I start in a work, I trust Him to see it through -
As long as with Him I am walking in the light.
God will direct my steps if I follow in His -
Every action and result will bring Him glory.
When all is said and done in a way that He is pleased -
It will all be a good testimony to "His-story."

"Father, there has been answers already this week as we have sought to walk in Thy will. Even the time spent here with Thee has been of great value to me. I hope it has been acceptable to Thee. May it in some way bring honor and glory to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 11

BROKEN COVENANT

This chapter begins a whole large section of the book of Jeremiah in which the prophet is in constant conflict with the false prophets and ungodly kings of Judah. The privileged people of Israel had entered into a covenant with the Lord when they were at Mt. Sinai with enthusiasm and commitment, at least verbally. The words in this chapter that reaffirm the terms of the covenant and the consequences of breaking them are clear. "Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant." God had carried out in every detail His part of the covenant. He had brought them into the promised land and had driven out the enemies of Israel before them with hornets. But it wasn't long before the children of Israel broke the terms and began to feel the penalty of breaking it. Unfortunately, they kept going farther and farther away from God and adding false gods and altars. The temple had become only a symbol of past glory and was not able to keep coming judgment away from Judah.

Israel was still God's "beloved," and the temple had been once where He dwelt among His people, but they had rejected Him, so the temple was no longer His dwelling place with them. The Lord instructed Jeremiah to tell the people their special relationship with Him was over. Even after the good reforms under king Josiah, they quickly returned to worshipping idols. When the terms of a covenant are deliberately not kept by one party, the covenant is no longer valid. God did not stop loving the people, but His patience had limits. Generations had past when there was departure and then restoration, but the space between kept getting longer and longer. By the time the Lord gave this order to Jeremiah, the people of Judah had refused completely to obey the covenant God had made with them as His people through Moses at Mt. Sinai. Even intercession on the part of a man like Jeremiah was of no effect. The covenant relationship was broken.

The curse of God on them was because, even though He had kept all His promises, the people of Judah had violated, ignored and rejected them. In the past God had brought the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, and in liberty He had brought them into "a land flowing with milk and honey." Promises had been made by the Lord to them, and by them to the Lord. They had been warned over and over by judges, prophets and even some kings to obey the Lord and return in repentance to Him. Instead, they didn't listen and stubbornly went their own way.

Jeremiah could see all that was happening and publicly told that to the people of Judah, and added his own "Amen," to what the Lord had said. Moses had gone over all of this with the children of Israel just before he died. He told them what would happen if they kept the terms of the covenant, and warned them as to what would happen if they didn't.

Jeremiah's words made it plain to them that was where they had come to after all those generations had passed. The covenant was no longer effective because of their rebellion and idolatry.

The Lord used the word, "conspiracy," to indicate this was not a mistake on their part, but a deliberate decision on the part of both Israel and Judah to reject the Living God and follow the worship of lifeless idols. This was not some accidental event. The result was, the Lord was bringing a calamitous disaster on them from which there would be no escape. They could call out to God all they wanted, but He was not going to answer. The covenant had been broken completely by the people of Israel. They had as many idols and altars as they had streets and cities. The Lord even instructed Jeremiah to not pray for them because the time had come for justice to be administered.

Strangely, most people even now don't think sin is any more serious than the sniffles or a slight cold. The bitterness and consequences of sin are often withheld because of God's grace, as He waits for people to repent and turn to Him for salvation. When that does not come, the prayers and intercession of those who care for the offenders, has no effect. Salvation comes when a sinner "Turns and comes to Jesus, 'er the day of grace is ended," and "while the Holy Spirit's moving, teaching us salvation's way." Salvation comes when faith in Christ is real, and a person is then committed to Him rather than to their own sinful ways. When salvation is rejected deliberately, then we leave those people to the sovereign will of God to do what He knows best without any human intervention. Israel was once "My Beloved," to the Lord, but because they chose wickedness, that nation of people that was once "the green olive tree, fair and of goodly fruit," became like a dry stick, ready to be burned. The exile was going to happen.

Then the subject changes to Jeremiah personally. God warns him that his own people, in his own hometown were plotting to kill him to shut his mouth. He did not want to hear any more warnings from him. Likely their own consciences were bothering them, but at least he was interfering with their chosen way of life. People are often hostile toward those who warn them of the consequences of their actions and of their sinful lifestyle. They often will say, "Who do you think you are to judge me? You're just a Bible-thumping bigot who is intolerant of anything else but what the Bible says! God loves people. He wouldn't dare send anyone to hell – if there even is one!"

Jeremiah's message if obeyed, would hurt the business of those who profited from all the aspects of idolatry that would bring a sense of guilt and doom on the people. People then, the same as now, want to feel good about themselves and enjoy whatever sin they want. Some even think they can fly in the face of fear by saying, "NO FEAR!" until they get a terminal disease or are fatally injured. Then they want God to step in do then, what they didn't want Him to do when they thought they were in control of life and death. Freedom of the will is useable when a person can think and choose in a rational mind. Those in leadership positions in Jeremiah's community could not accept a rebuke because it threatened their control over the people. Both politicians and religious leaders think those over whom they have influence should do what they say, not what God says in the Bible. Even the general population of Jeremiah's day, including his own kinfolks did not want to acknowledge they were wrong.

When threatened, we can choose to be quiet and say to ourselves we did our job and "let the chips fall where they may." We can find a place to go and hide where no one will find us. Or we can call on the Lord to preserve us in the danger, and can conduct ourselves with grace, dignity and integrity and use every opportunity we can to quietly pass on the truth of God either individually or publicly. God can give us the grace, faith and courage to be faithful to our Lord, and to give us the wisdom as to when to speak and when to be silent.

Jeremiah apparently, didn't realize the bitterness that people had toward him. On the other hand, those who opposed him must have thought that if they got rid of the messenger, they would get rid of the reality of the message he gave them. Deception has many forms, and denial of the truth is one of the major ones. Those who wanted to kill Jeremiah thought that because he had never married and had no children, that his message as well as the man himself would soon be forgotten. However, the opposite is true. He is remembered, and his words are well-known all over the world. They are read and are still warning people of the danger of forgetting the covenants we make. The covenant of grace even has its demands.

Jeremiah 11:6. *"Then the Lord said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them."*

TERMS.

Covenants are not made to be broken -
No matter what others may say.
When one gives another his word -
The covenant is in place to stay.
When a covenant is made with God -
That is of highest worth.
God remembers every word of the covenant -
And demands we maintain the truth.

When the covenants are broken -
It is time to stop and review -
The person you made the covenant with -
And how that covenant still affects you.
The terms were agreed upon by both persons -
And we are expected to follow those terms.
These covenants were not made in a corner -
Go back over them and your credibility earn.

Listen and pay earnest attention -
To the one who cut covenant with you.
Don't be stubborn but go back -
And follow that commitment through.
Obey the warnings God gives -
Listen well - and show Him good faith.
You will find He has kept all the terms -
And is willing to show you His grace.

"There are far too many broken covenants Father, between people and Thee. I pray today that Thou will give me power to be faithful to all those I have made. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 12

WHERE IS JUSTICE?

The coming persecution of Jeremiah, and attempts on his life that he was warned about in the past part of the previous chapter, continue through the first six verses of this chapter. Jeremiah questions God about this and why God does not do something about the wickedness of those who oppose God and His servant. Why don't people get what they deserve? The "retribution principle" is deeply ingrained in the human mind and heart of every person. But Jeremiah wasn't questioning the righteousness of God but the timing of His agenda. We all want fairness and justice, and even retribution in some form of punishment; and we want it quickly if it is against someone who has done some bad thing to us. But if it is the other way around, and we deserve it; we want God to hold back until we can negotiate in some way with Him to see if we can get Him to lift the punishment deserved, or at least lighten it. It is foreign to human nature to act in grace and mercy for a long time. We want repentance and confession right away. God is different. He is long-suffering and not willing that any should perish. So, He is patient, and gives offenders ample opportunity to consider what will happen to them if they continue doing what they do. He wants "all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." Then they will return in repentance and faith to Him.

The wicked do prosper – for a while. They talk a lot about God, religion, and what is right or wrong in others, but they do nothing about themselves. All the talk is only "cheap talk" because God is far from their hearts personally. They do not want God to rule them. Jeremiah knew the righteousness of God would be vindicated, and so he asked that what his fellow-citizens had planned for him, would be done to them. There were those who had assured the people that Jeremiah's prophecy regarding coming judgment that could not be averted, was false. They told people it would not happen, and as far as they were concerned, Jeremiah would not live long enough to see his prophecy fulfilled.

Life had become very tough for Jeremiah, and yet God had told him that He was going to judge the wickedness of those who were planning to kill him. The answer the Lord gave to His servant was in essence, "If you think the opposition from your own people is bad, how are you going to handle yourself when the real trouble comes?" It is hard to take when family and acquaintances want to kill you, but the big race will come when the mounted armies of the invaders flood the country.

There are biblical principles we must remember to live by as those who are travelling upward, while others are travelling down. Our Lord when He was reviled, reviled not again. We should have the same attitude. When people we know and trust, turn against us; we need to simply ask those who are still with us, "Are you going to do the same?" and then go to a private place and pray to our Father – and leave it there. To threaten retaliation for wrongs done, is not at all Christ-like. Silence in the face of argumentative opposition is usually our best defense. "Take it to the Lord and leave it there," are more than words from a hymn. That is a principle to follow.

God hasn't promised His own servants a life of ease or a pleasant journey through this world on our way to heaven. "All that live godly, shall suffer persecution." It is to be expected that when the children of God go opposite to the majority of people, we are going to get bumped harder and more often, then if we happen to bump into people going the same way. Also, to go uphill and against the tide, and the current is going downhill and getting faster and more crowded, we will have to remain committed and focused on the goal, not on what is going on around us. It is our responsibility to remain committed to God and His word, even though the going gets harder, the closer we get to the

end of the age. God will keep His promises and will do what He knows must be done, in His own time. "Flowery beds of ease" are contradictory to holy living in an ungodly world. In a way, when the Lord's people are opposed and suffer persecution, it is evidence of the hostility of the opposition against God who is our Father, and the Lord Jesus who is our Savior, more than it is against us personally.

It was a cause of deep grief to God to have to forsake His house; the heritage of the land and the people He loved, but there was no other way to be righteous, just and impartial in judgment. Legal justice had to be carried out on His own people that same as it is on anyone else. God is holy, and holiness demands that wickedness be not overlooked. His own people had refused to respond to His entreaties. They paid no attention to the warnings of His servants for many generations, nor to the foretastes, of what coming judgment would be like that He allowed from time to time to happen to the nation. In spite of His love for them, they refused to return in faith to Him. So, the demonstrations of His love for them was being withdrawn, and Judah was left for their enemies like an unusual speckled bird is picked on by other birds, and attacked until dead. However, what would befall the Jews, would eventually happen to those who attacked and conquered them.

"The shepherds" were the leaders of the invading forces of Babylon, which would include Nebuchadnezzar and those who joined him. They destroyed and devastated property which is not what true shepherds do. Instead of fruitfulness, the land of Judah would be made desolate. Idolaters from high places where the idols were worshipped, would be instruments of war (swords) to carry out divine, just judgment on those who reap what they sow. There would be no place for them to go that would be safe. The hand of the Lord that had protected them for hundreds of years was removed, and they were left on their own, just like they wanted and had chosen in pleasant times.

"To whom much is given, much is required" was true of Israel, and it is true to us today. There is no excuse for us to expect God to overlook willful disobedience on the part of any people. Israel had failed over and over again in spite of all the blessings God had bestowed on them as His chosen people. They had demonstrated faith in God in the past, but little by little they had turned toward the ways of the world around them, including idolatry. Trust in God no longer seemed relevant to them, so they were uprooted and scattered. This is a real warning to God's people today. We must not turn from the walk and work of faith, to living by sight and commitment to what which is visible around us.

Even though God had to cast the people of Israel and Judah off in the past because of their rejection of Him, He gives a little bit of light regarding Israel's future. They rejected the Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. But the Sovereign Lord of all, has promised a future time when His chosen earthly people, Israel, will "be established." They will be brought back to God, and He will restore them to their land. They will be used by the Lord to teach the truth of God to other nations. Because of their great coming King, and His earthly people, nations all over the world will be blessed as the love of God for the world is openly declared. Millions will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, the Supreme Lord of all, and they will be blessed because of His grace.

Jeremiah 12:5. *"If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"*

IT IS REALLY HARD.

Even for those who are obedient and faithful; life can really be tough.
God hasn't promised in every situation we will always have enough.
But He has promised when things seem too much, His grace will sufficient be.
Sometimes all one can do is stand still and His salvation see.

God's people stood on the banks of the sea, with the enemy approaching behind.
There was nowhere to turn; no place their own rescue to find.
The God who opened the sea for them is still the same God today.
When you don't know which way to turn; trust Him to open the way.

There are times when we don't think we can handle the problems that before us arise.
We see events that seem impossible for us to handle - at least in our own eyes -
When we are in the middle of the test, the way ahead then becomes clear.
The end of the matter is in sight, and there is no longer any reason to fear.

Just because a problem is solved, doesn't mean we won't have any more.
Actually, God gives warnings that some things will be harder than before.
Some battles to fight are between equals, but that isn't always the case.
There are things we have to contend with, which alone we cannot face.

That is why we dare not turn away from the path the Lord Himself chose.
There may be coming to us, harder times than any of those.
We live in a land of peace now; we have been able to live quite at ease.

Perhaps there is coming to us times, when we will be sailing on stormy seas.

When the Jordan overflows its banks, how will I handle things then?
Will I trust in the Lord alone? Or will I put confidence in men?
May I learn well ahead of time the lesson, to let nothing come between me and the Lord.
And in the swelling of Jordan, find guidance for my life in His Word.

"I have lived in peace, Father. There have been some times when issues have had to be faced and some solutions found. When the time comes when I am in myself, hopeless - I pray, Father, that I will have sense enough to look to Thee alone when floods overflow me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 13

WARNINGS IN PARABLES

For many generations, God's people had lived on the land He gave them and He had not forsaken them even when they had not carried out all He intended; and they had "done that which was right in their own eyes." As the years went by and some of Israel's kings had become power hungry and then turned to idolatry, they had become more like the ungodly nations around them. By the time Jeremiah was preaching to them, the people of Judah had become hostile toward the Lord and deliberately rejected Him. At the time of Jeremiah's service for the Lord, they had gone even farther and rejected God's honor and glory, and had substituted that with their own arrogance and pride. His glory they had seen in the past and that He had shared with His people, was gone. They now had shame and humiliation coming upon them as a result of their rejection of the Lord.

To illustrate that to the people and the leaders, the Lord sent Jeremiah to buy a new linen girdle. That was the undergarment that people wore from waist to knees next to their skin. That is what we are most wanting to be clean and will often wash that garment more times than other clothes. However, Jeremiah was told by the Lord to bury that new linen girdle (sash) by the river in a marked place and leave it there in the silt and mud. It was there a long time before he was told to go and dig it up. It would not only be dirty, but it would be rotten, moldy and smelly. That linen garment would be totally corrupt, useless and not fit for wearing, nor could any washing make it able to be used.

That illustration was to show what had happened to the intimate relationship the Lord once had with Judah, who He loved and valued, but now that closeness was gone. Their pride and arrogance had ruined all that God intended to share with His people and wanted to do for them but they had corrupted themselves completely and were now abhorrent to the Lord. The spiritual life of the nation was as corrupt as those idolatrous nations around them. They knew better than to follow the ways of the evil going on in the name of religion, but did it anyway.

In the past all of Israel and Jerusalem had enjoyed the blessing of fellowship with God. Now, when they sought glory for themselves, they were completely ruined. Nothing more could be done for them or with them. The rottenness of pride can never be made acceptable to God. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." When pride lifts its ugly head, there is no remedy except for it to be cut down in some way. Human pride and divine wisdom do not cohabit. For every person it is "Christ or the world; the broad or the narrow way." You cannot have both. It is one or the other.

The parable of the wineskins, or more likely, clay vessels, that were filled with wine was put out where it could be seen by bystanders. When he was asked what was the point of those pots full of wine being set out, Jeremiah spoke for the Lord. The message was particularly directed toward leaders, but it included all who lived in Jerusalem, warning them that they will experience the wrath of God. They will be like drunken people who cannot stand before the invaders bringing just judgment upon them. Parents and children will experience the same things. The whole of Judah will be in a state of chaos and confusion in the face of the enemies that will come upon them and pour out the righteous wrath of God on His rebellious people.

Another strong warning was given in poetic form, perhaps to give emphasis to the message against the proud and the arrogant people who will be humbled until there is nothing but darkness surrounding them. Pride goes before the fall, and carries in itself the means to generate its own destruction. Pride exalts self, and looks down on others. Pride keeps for itself what should be shared. Pride blames others for its own faults and evil consequences. Pride makes us think we "did it our way" because we are smarter and more skilled than others. Pride makes us think we have the answers, when we don't even know the problem. Pride makes us think we don't have to bother with what God says in His word. Pride means one goes up against God and thinks it will get its way with God who is determined to bring the proud person down to where they have to turn to God if they want relief.

Instead of the king and queen leading the nation back to God, which was their responsibility, they led them into captivity to Babylon. From the barrenness of the Negev desert through all the cities and villages of Judah, the whole

nation that followed the king and queen were brought down in chains to nothing but captive slaves. Then they were marched away to Babylon.

The last of the five illustrations the Lord gave to Jeremiah is that of Jerusalem being like a shepherdess who abandons her flock to become a harlot. Jerusalem led the way into sin and degradation. Consequently, like an abandoned prostitute, Jerusalem will be totally used, abused, humiliated, discarded and abandoned. There will be nothing useful in the city when the enemies from Babylon are done with her. What an awful and serious group of warnings these were to the people of Judah, but it all fell on deaf ears.

The color of skin of a man or animal is part of who we are. It is impossible to change anything about our physical characteristics because they are a genetic fact that is part of our physiology. In the same way, the threat of being taken into captivity could not make the people of Judah repent because that was the way they were. They were so used to sin, idolatry and the evils associated with that practice, that it was ingrained in them. They did not even want to consider repentance, and so they lost their ability to even do it.

There is a time when repentance is possible, but if the offer of mercy is rejected over and over, then sin takes control over body, soul and spirit. When that happens, it is impossible to change. God hasn't changed in any way toward people, but people change in their attitude and way toward Him. Esau tried to repent, but he couldn't find any way or place for it to be real in him. The pattern of living and the attitude of human minds toward God can become so set against Him, that the hardness in them cannot be broken. One had said, "The same sun that melts the snow, hardens the clay." If a person is not careful, they will lose the desire to be right with God, and will not even fear the eternal consequences of sin.

Jeremiah 13:23. *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."*

IMPOSSIBLE TO CHANGE.

There may come a time when we have become so used to sin,
That we find no ability or desire to change even though there once had been
A desire to follow the Lord and please Him in our daily life -
But arrogance and worldliness brought darkness where once there was a clear light.

As time goes on from day to day, habits become deeply ingrained.
We can get to the place where what one time caused pain -
Now no more pricks our seared conscience as it did in times before.
It is possible to think things alright which one time we did abhor.

We never should put off changes we must make to please the Lord.
The sooner we address the habits that control us and throw them overboard -
The sooner the desire will go that once did your life control.
It is not only the will of God, but it will bring peace unto your soul.

Patterns of living can be set if we continue in them too long.
God can change our natural weakness, and by His power, make us strong.
If we insist on following what is wrong; before long we will not change.
Like the kind of skin, we are born with, to start over is too strange.

Today is the day to do what is right, do not put off until tomorrow -
The things that need to be stopped, before they bring much sorrow.
God does not reject those who turn to Him, He is ready to give grace
To overcome those things, we can't change in ourselves, but we can when we act in faith.

"O Gracious God, the new nature Thou hast given me is truly greater than the old one. Yet, there still is the tendency at times to view things, and perhaps be tempted to act, according to the pressure around me. I pray for grace to not give way to my deceitful flesh. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 14

DEARTH IN THE LAND

It can be very difficult to be a bearer of news of impending doom and an intercessor for sinful people at the same time. That was the position in which Jeremiah was found in this chapter. It doesn't seem like these chapters are necessarily in chronological order, but are rather put in the place they are found in order to give us a sense of how and why things happen the way they do according to God's purposes. There are two dialogues between Jeremiah and the Lord here. The fact that the first one is in poetic form, serves to emphasize the seriousness of the drought. It

was a specific act of God, with a specific purpose, toward specific people. The arrogance of rebellion and the pride of self-opinionated people had to be dealt with.

The drought is first felt in the city where the servants of the nobles, leaders, priests and prophets were sent out to get water, and had to return with none. Then it is felt by the farmers who had planted seeds but there was no water to germinate the seeds nor to give life to growing plants. The farmers covered their heads in desperation and fear, knowing that without rain there would be no food. Even the wild animals that roamed the wilderness could find no water. The sensitive smell of animals can usually detect water that people would not be able to find, but in the drought that had come over Judah, even animals couldn't smell water. Everything was totally dry.

The people finally called out for rescue, but without any sense of grief for their sins that caused the drought. Jeremiah prayed as an intercessor for the people, but he knew he was merely asking for a reprieve. He was fully aware of the fact that the people of Judah and all the children of Israel had broken the covenant that had been made as a nation with the Lord. Deuteronomy 28-30 was available for them to read or listen to. The terms of the covenant left no room for misinterpretation. The dearth in the land certainly has a cause behind it, and Jeremiah by using the word "backsliding," indicated that the apostasy of the people was the cause.

Even though we are not the children of Israel and do not live in Israel, the principle of deliberately rejecting the truth of God, and denying His authority and right to judge humanity for sin, can move the Lord to act in judgment upon nations and people. The increasing severity and occurrence of natural disasters, pestilence, and events over which mankind has no control, should be a wake-up call to believers and unbelievers alike, that God has a controversy with us. Something serious is wrong, and it is time for us to face up to the sins that are separating us from the blessings of God's grace, and His mercy that has withheld just judgment.

When Jeremiah said, "For Thy name's sake," gives a sense that he was really meaning the people thought, "Yes, we have sinned, but maybe You are powerless to do anything about the drought, and You don't care about what happens to us." That would be adding insult to injury if that is what the people really had in their minds, but that same attitude is prevalent in people today when they run into problems over which they have no control. The people of Judah knew they needed "the Hope of Israel;" they needed "the Savior" instead of idols, and almost in insolence, laid claim to their covenant position which they themselves had broken. They claimed they were His people and needed His presence with them, but they made no verbal commitment to the Lord, and put the blame on Him for bringing the trouble they caused, on them.

This attitude is still in most people today. People do not want God in their lives, because holiness and righteousness cannot coexist with sin and degradation. People want God to answer them when they call on Him, but only then. When sickness and trouble come, they call on God, but at the same time they say, "God, help me," they blame Him for letting the problem come in the first place. People still blame God for allowing the consequences of their own choices and sins catch up with them and bring them down in quivering fear. When they are afraid to live and afraid to die, they call out in desperation for God's help, but when the emergency is past, they forget Him completely, and abandon the righteousness they put on for a short time. They go back to the same sinful lifestyle and think that is normal living. Often, they go farther into sin than they had been before.

The last lines of this poetic message contain the words of the Lord explaining to Jeremiah why He will not deliver them from the drought and their armies that are coming. The people, not just the leaders, love to go their own way, not the way the Lord intends nor the way He has guided their forbearers in the past. They do not want to follow God. Not only that, they do not restrain themselves from going where they want to go, and doing what they want to do. The consequences of blatant, immoral idolatry are lasting and cannot be allowed to continue in God's people. The drought that was on the land was the result of their own choices.

Jeremiah, who had again taken the place of intercessor, is told for the third time to stop it. The willful sin of the people was still in their hearts in spite of the dearth in the land. They broke the covenant the nation had with the Lord, and so the terms of the covenant were that judgment was inevitable. "God is of holier eyes than to look upon sin." He was told to not look on all the religious pretension and rituals they were going through to try to indicate they were serious about repenting and forsaking sin. It was all a sham. "Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart." God told Jeremiah He would not accept a counterfeit religious ceremony without real repentance and genuine humility.

Apparently, there were paid prophets in the court of Judah's king, similar to the diviners who were in the courts of idolatrous kings in the nations around Judah. Basically, their role was to get paid for telling the king and the people what they wanted to hear but attach the name of the Lord to it. They wanted a religious connotation to their false messages, similar to what many "religious advisors" to today. By making a statement, "In the name of the Lord," it is

supposed to be right because they say it is right; not necessarily what the word of God says. A message is not true unless the word of God can support it by a written statement or by tried and proven biblical principles.

Those evil men faced the same death by war and famine as everyone else in the kingdom of Judah, including those who paid them. They had no commission from the Lord or message from God. They were no more than pagan diviners in "sheep's clothing." Their message of deceit would be found out for what it was when they were punished by just judgment like everyone else who had listened to them. The Lord's message to them was that the time for weeping had come. The time of famine and war would take away their smirks of smug complacency, and blaming God for what was to happening to them. Paid prophets and phony priests alike were going down, and there wouldn't be people around who would even bury their bodies. They were being exposed for what they really were.

Apparently, Jeremiah couldn't help himself. His grief was so real and his compassion for his own people moved him so much, that he cried out to the Lord again. He identified himself with the wickedness of the people and the nation. He was truly a sincere and faithful prophet and intercessor, but he was also one of the people of Judah. The people he was seeking to represent were not faithful, and they were not sincere. In their insincerity and wickedness, they stubbornly opposed the Lord. They wanted God to bless them, but they were not willing to do what was necessary to receive His blessing.

Expressions of sorrow for doing wrong is one thing, but to repent of sin, forsake evil, and deliberately turn to the Lord for mercy, is another thing entirely. Forgiveness can be righteously granted to the truly repentant person, people or nation when evidence of repentance and faith in God is real. Nothing else will do. Hypocrisy, whether it is religious or any other kind of hypocrisy, will be condemned and punished. Jeremiah understood the only hope they had as a people, was in God. He is the Almighty God, the Creator and the Sustainer of life which He gives to people, animals and plants, and the One who gives it has the right, and can, take it away.

Jeremiah 14:8. *"O Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble. Why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?"*

HOPE OF ISRAEL.

Backs against the wall - seeking for some shade.
Nothing to show for their labor - no flour for bread to be made.
The leaders send out the children to look - no water is there to be found.
The seeds are sown in the fields - they lie lifelessly in the ground.

The cows have their calves in the open - and leave them, they have no milk to give.
Wild animals head for high ground - seeking good air that they might live.
Wherever one walks there is dust - the grass has all withered and died.
False prophets say things are fine - but all they are saying is lies.

It is possible to have the right name - but be far from God in the heart.
We may look for someone to blame - but the one we see in the mirror is where we start.
The routine and forms may look good - but idols aren't only carved forms.
It is possible to claim spiritual food - but give only what are pagan norms.

When there is dearth in the land there's a cause - we must determine now what it is.
To search ourselves before the Lord - means no longer our will but His.
We have heard all the explanations - from those who say they have the answers.
But we need to start with ourselves - no longer do we leave things to chances.

When we call upon the Hope of Israel - we must realize God is the same today.
They made their plaintive appeals - I need to be wise in what I say -
For God looks on the heart to see - if reality is in my words.
And the actions I take hereafter - should follow the example of the Lord.

He pleased not Himself, but His Father - His Father is my Father too.
All He did brought glory and honor to God - I must honor God in what I do.
When He called out to His Father - there was no barriers in between.
When I call to the Hope of Israel - the reality of my words must be seen.

"O Lord God, we are called by Thy name; we are gathered to, and in, Thy name; we want to honor and glorify Thy name. Leave us not alone, O God. Draw near to us and enable us to know Thy mercy in our weakness. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 15

VALUELESS INTERCESSION - GREAT DISCOURAGEMENT

Jeremiah had been interceding for the people of Judah for a long time, and he continued even after the Lord had told him the time had passed for their recovery. Again, the Lord addresses Jeremiah's on-going concern by telling him that even Moses and Samuel, famous and effective intercessors for Israel in the past, wouldn't be able to stop the coming judgment. Those two men on several occasions pleaded for God to spare His people, "And the Lord answered." This time these people had gone too far. They were so wicked and stubborn, that they would not pay attention to the true prophets. They had become hostile to the warning messengers and to the Lord for repeating the warnings so often. "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be reprov'd, and that without remedy."

God's mind and heart were no longer favorable toward the people of Judah at all. There were four kinds of fate that would come: death, across the whole spectrum of the population; the sword, that indicated death in battle; starvation, because of famine and lack of rain; captivity, for those who survived the first three. Then there are three destroyers that give emphasis to the totality of the judgment. The sword kills the living. Dogs, birds and wild animals devour the dead. Manasseh's wicked reign surpassed that of all the evil kings of Judah. The people of Judah followed the example and leading of the wicked king because that is what they wanted themselves.

In poetic form perhaps for emphasis, the Lord gives the answer to the three questions that were raised, likely in the mind of Jeremiah – "No one!" Then He goes on to describe what was coming. God had often planned to punish His people, and then, because He is "longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live," He showed mercy. Not this time! Now He was not going to show mercy. He had taken them at their word of promise many times before, and they failed to keep it. Now the "winnowing" time had come. He was going to "thoroughly purge His floor." Young men would fall in battle and both Judah and Jerusalem would be childless. Even a mother with seven sons, the ideal number, would perish, and her seven sons. Those who survive the actual battle will be killed.

The bitterness in the soul of Jeremiah indicated the mood he was in. Self-pity had made him feel very low to the place in which he regretted he was ever born. He had to face the fact that he could not in himself bring the people to repent of their sins. It seemed like the more he preached, the harder they got. He had not been involved in any things that could be disputed, but that didn't make any difference. He was the object of their rejection and they were even wanting to do him harm to the extent of wanting to kill him.

In a kindly way, God encouraged His discouraged servant by telling him his enemies in Judah, would be coming to him during the coming troubles and they would plead with him to do for them what they were not willing to do for themselves. The Lord also made it plain that there would still remain a small remnant after all the judgment has passed. The nation will not go into oblivion entirely. Some will be set free to experience "good" in the future. Meanwhile, there was no people or nation that could stop the "iron and bronze" of Babylon from plundering the country and taking captive those who managed to live through the war.

People and plunder would be the same to the Babylonians who were the "fire" God sets against those who reject Him. Even though Jeremiah had been the object of persecution, and seemed to be at the end of his rope, he remembered the times God had spoken to him in the past. He had believed the word of God. He had assimilated them and made them his own. He had found great delight in the fact that he was identified as one associated with the Lord God of hosts.

In times of bitterness and discouragement, God's people need to remember who has called us by His grace. The course through life for every believer will be different than that of other believers, but that is arranged by our Lord. When we find ourselves wondering what is happening to us and why, we need to go back to where "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and they were the rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts."

In a kind of sideways comment, Jeremiah implied, "So, what's wrong with me now? I never married because You told me not to. I only have a few friends because I have been doing what You told me to do. I only say what You tell me to say. So, why are You letting me down now?" Jeremiah definitely was not happy with what God was doing around him and to him. At the first reading, it almost scares us to think what a holy God would do and say to those who complain to Him. And then we are reminded that He knows us, and remembers that we are but dust.

Without anger, but firmly and patiently, God rebuked and corrected His servant. God hears the reasons for our discouragement. God is willing to listen to our frustrations, fears and doubts. But He will not accept nor tolerate accusations that He is unfaithful or unreliable. When for some reason we ever allow that in our thinking, our lives or in any situation; there is the absolute necessity of repentance. Then He is able to justly restore us to Himself. In essence He was telling Jeremiah to not do what He forbade, because he was a servant of God. If someone were to come to him, he could respond to that need, but do not go and join them in what they are doing. And "do not speak to Me again in worthless blaming words."

These are lessons for us as the people of God and servants of His who are to obey the words of our Lord. Stay the course, no matter what other people do. Open up frankly and sincerely in prayer to God. Trust Him in spite of all the difficult circumstances and pressures under which you may be found now. Use your influence in a good way for others, but don't let them influence you to not live by faith in God. Stand your ground; be strong and do not capitulate to the enemy nor surrender to popular opinions. You know who God is, and you know who you are. Get your strength, support and encouragement from God.

Jeremiah 15:16. *"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts."*

LOST WORDS.

Where did they go, those words that gave hope?
Words that brought so clearly to me -
The need of my soul, the awfulness of sin;
The words that made my blind eyes to see?

Where can I find the meaning of grace?
That favor that brought life to my soul?
The mercy I needed, when none I deserved -
That was granted, and now I'm made whole.

Where is the promise that I'm justified by faith;
When in Jesus I put all my trust?
To be cleared forever from the guilt of the past -
Is assurance from God that I'm blessed.

The words of my Lord are found right at hand -
They are contained in the scriptures of truth.
I read them and heed them, and they work in my life;
And increasingly, I am grasping their worth.

God's words are instructive - a lasting delight -
They produce a satisfaction complete.
The best way to describe their impact on me -
Is the benefit from the food that I eat.

More than just blessings as I read Father's words -
Is the joy that comes when I think.
My mind fills with thoughts of my Savior and Lord,
And my heart fills with the rejoicing they bring.

The words are not lost - they are right before me,
And the thoughts I receive give me great joy.
Though all around is darkness, opposition and grief -
From eating God's words, blessings are filling my soul.

"Father God, again Thy word has spoken to me, and I find that when I ingest their truth, I am strengthened, I am filled and I rejoice. I am not only blessed by what Thy words say, but they remind me I am Thine - I am in the family of God. I give Thee glory and thanks. Amen."

Jeremiah 16

NO JOY; A LITTLE HOPE

We can't stop the course of history, but wise people will learn from the past and seek ways to apply it to the present in order to give us some hope for the future. There are principles of life over which we have no control, such as, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." None of these biblical principles are up to man's decisions. These, and many other principles are unavoidable in life. So, when the Lord told Jeremiah the day of disaster was coming, there was no question as to if it would happen. The only unknown was exactly when it would happen. But coming events cast their shadow before them, and it was in God's plan for His servant Jeremiah, to be a shadow. He was to be a visible as well as an audible warning to the people of Judah.

His celibacy was for a warning to other people of the coming judgment that would leave fathers to die on battlefields, and children and women would die in the streets and fields, or be taken captive as slaves. So, the sad and lonely prophet who had no wife or children, was a social misfit wherever he went. Because of his celibacy and his prophetic messages, it was impossible for people to forget what God had promised would happen to them. That was why they

wanted him dead. They thought if he was silenced, what he predicted wouldn't happen, and life could go on for them as it had been when they were living in licentious pleasure and sin.

Jeremiah was told by the Lord to not attend funerals and social gatherings such as festivals which included weddings. His singleness was to emphasize the fact, that an end of joy and gladness was soon coming. By not attending funerals emphasized the end of comfort and consolation for grieving people. The nation had forsaken God, and He withdrew His compassion from them. He was going to allow them to be removed from the land He gave them to possess. But in this chapter, Jeremiah was also told by the Lord of another exodus that will take place among the children of Israel, when they will return from the Gentile nations to which they are now exiled, and will be restored to the Lord in the land He promised their forebearers. Even the Gentile nations will respond to the Lord when He returns.

The Lord made clear to Jeremiah the coming judgment would be very hard on women and children, not just the men who would go out to fight the battles. The women wouldn't even have time to mourn the dead, because there would be more dead people than time to even bury them when the Babylonians come. Jeremiah was also made to understand that God no longer called them "My people," but "this people." The Lord had disassociated Himself from them, because that was what they had done to Him long before. They were not the people of God just because their forefathers were.

Many of our own forefathers had a reverential fear of God about them in this country. There was respect for God and the Bible, even though many had never put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. They knew what the Bible stood for and considered the words of scripture to be true and holy. The true people of God are those who personally believe in Him. They put their faith in God alone for salvation and trust Him to teach them and guide them through life by the word of God in the Bible. The people of God love Him and their desire is to obey Him. Our heritage is not a mere human heritage, but the heritage of people who knew God and lived for God. Those of us who had such people for our parents and grandparents, are very blessed and should be extremely grateful to those who went before us. The God who loved and guided them, is the same God who loves and guides us.

How sad it was that every age group suffered in the judgment on Judah. The path parents and grandparents followed as they turned away from God to idolatry and sinful living, was the path their children were following. So, the children were actually either practicing, or being prepared to practice, the same evils that the generation before them had showed them as an example for living. Therefore, the children were not exempt from the coming judgment. Every social group and every age would experience the loss of their peers. Every day Jeremiah moved among the people he was a testimony that judgment day was coming. Laughter and joy would be lost to them as he passed by. He was a living, walking reminder to them of the warnings that he preached.

When people asked him why the Lord would let a disaster come on them, or what they had done that was so bad, he would tell them the same thing again. And they would react the same way again. They either didn't believe him, didn't believe it was going to happen in their day, or didn't think it was going to be as bad as he said. Then they would go back to their idols and back to the immoral practices that idolatry permitted and promoted.

Their only hope they to survive as an identifiable people, lay with future generations. As for those living in Judah and Jerusalem at that time, there was definitely going to be defeat and captivity. They had willfully, not turned away from their "detestable and abominable" idols, and so they would be like fish to be caught or wild game to be hunted when the Babylonian conquerors came upon their land.

Jeremiah's prayer affirms his trust in the Lord, and had some words of hope as he looked by faith into the future. He saw a time when Gentile nations as well as the Jews, will experience a revival and turn to the Lord. Judah had gone too far for the present generation to avoid punishment. The price of national sin had to be paid. Yet, in the future, there will be a work and a mission for the Jews to accomplish.

Then in this chapter, the Lord speaks again, and makes plain that His plans and purposes are, that all people will come to know Him personally. He would be the One who would teach them, and cause them to know Him. When that happens, they will see idolatry in all its' forms, for the sham that it really is. That was the reason for Israel to be set apart from other nations in the first place. God intended them to be a people for His name. Through them and their unique connection to the Lord God, other people and nations would turn to the Lord. Sadly, it worked the opposite way, and the children of Israel became like the ungodly. They went in the way of the ungodly; all the way into idolatry, and in Jeremiah's time, to deliberately reject the Lord God of Israel. So, they would either perish or be taken into captivity.

That same purpose is in the world today for the people of God who have been saved from both Jews and Gentiles. God has made of the two, "one new man;" the church composed of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The

purpose of the church is to glorify God and reflect the honor and grace of our Lord, and to proclaim the Gospel to an unbelieving world. Instead, the church has increasingly become like the world. In many local churches, worldly practices have replaced biblical practices, because they try to appeal to the souls of unregenerate people. Even though entertainments are done "in the name of the Lord," doesn't mean that is of the Lord. If teaching, preaching and practices are not done by the power of God and under the authority of the Lord, it is not "in the name of the Lord" just because people say it is.

God's holy word must not be set aside, or taken out of context in order to appeal those who are not believers. The "seeker friendly" programs and "ministries" are not right if they do not have biblical teaching or principles behind them. The house of God, the local assemblies of God in each area, need to remain committed to doing God's work in God's way. We must remain true to the Bible and the practice of scriptural truth in order to have God's blessing and the power of God working in our midst.

Jeremiah 16:21. *"Therefore, behold I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know my name is THE LORD."*

MY HAND...MY MIGHT...MY NAME.

The hand of the Lord was restrained until the purposes of God were fulfilled.
Then when it was stretched out against Egypt, His judgments did all unfold.
God who delivered His people then, can deliver His people today.
The strength of His hand is such that He protects us, every step of the way.

God wants the people of the world to know nothing ever happens by chance.
Some give the houses of mourning, not much more than a passing glance.
The house of feasting attracts them, for they love the pleasures of sin.
Rather than obey Jehovah, they choose to make a mockery of Him.

When that occurs there's the danger, that God's might will be directed toward them.
It is not that He doesn't care for them, but that they chose to reject Him.
He uses His might for correction to bring His people back to belief.
But when rejection of God's grace happens, rejecters will find no relief.

Our God is mighty to save; His words are given to bring faith
To those who by nature are condemned, but are ready to respond to His grace.
He is the Lord of hosts; He is mighty and strong in victory.
Though He can bring down the nations, He is ready to lift up me.

It is well for us to remember the name "Jehovah" means, "THE LORD."
That name is to be praised by His people, both here and all over the world.
Some have blasphemed His name, for that, there is a price to pay.
His name and His doctrine are as one, both we must trust and obey.

No matter what others may do, we must cause His name to be known.
His hand, His might and His name are through us, His people shown.
By His grace we won't abandon His truth, and will stand for Him in this age.
O Lord, give me the power to be faithful to serve Him for all of my days.

"Father God, there are many I know who have taken a different way than I have. Give me the grace and wisdom to walk faithfully in the way of Thy choosing. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 17

A CURSE OR A BLESSING

In the previous chapter the Lord spoke of the reason for the people of Judah being caught like fish and hunted like wild animals. They "defiled My land," and "filled My inheritance" with "detestable and abominable" idols. In this chapter the Lord tells them they will lose the inheritance He gave them and they would be slaves in a land they would not know.

When people put their trust in themselves and what comes from the desires of their own wicked hearts, they will suffer defeat. They will experience loss of everything, and bring the wrath of God upon themselves, instead of victory and blessing which those who trust in the Lord receive. References in this chapter are directly related to the covenant God made with them through Moses that we read about in the book of Exodus. The words of the commandments were engraved on tablets of stone by the hand of God. The words of Judah's sins were engraved by a chisel with a hard point on the hard hearts of stubborn people. Their sinful record was also engraved on the horns of the altar to be remembered by God, so their sacrifices meant nothing.

Any sacrifices made on their altars by those whose hearts cherish their sins, are not only useless, but are an unacceptable affront to our holy God who sees the deceitfulness of unregenerate human hearts. The heart, in Old Testament scriptures, is the place where decisions are made. This is more than just a reference to human emotions. It refers to plans made; purposes defined; devising ways to carry out those purposes and plans. In the "heart" is where reason, intelligence and the will are symbolized. All that the Jews of Judah were involved in when engaging in idolatry, was not some accident or incidental matter. It was what they wanted.

Their young children knew that those altars, the groves with the Asherah poles, and the trees that hid people from view, were important to their parents. The children knew what went on in those places, and the sins of the parents that were etched on their hearts. That behavior and the evil associated with it had spread to the children who also participated in the worship of idols. The next generation had become participants in disobedience to God. Consequently, all the wealth of Jerusalem, all that the people had personally, would be lost including their freedom and ultimately, their lives. Sin does have high wages that must be paid.

There is a contrast made here between trust in man and trust in God. These two are completely opposite in practices and outcome. A curse in this passage is divine judgment which is punishment for the many wrongs they had done. The hope of change in behavior was no longer expected, so deliverance from judgment was no longer offered. In contrast, divine favor produces benefits to the person who puts their trust in the Lord. God will see that person is planted like a tree in the right place. Life-giving resources are there when God plants a person of faith where He wants them. Fear is banished from one who puts their confidence in God. Even in the worst situations, God sustains the ones who trust Him. The life of faith of the trusting person is fruitful in giving needed strength in times of difficulty and crisis. That becomes a blessing to others as a testimony to the grace of the Lord that is obvious to those who look on.

Verse nine is a key verse to understanding human life; let alone times of tension, temptation and crisis. In human beings, there is no innate, natural tendency toward perfection of character, conduct and life in general. Our natural inclination is to sin, and right from the time we are born, when we become conscious of other people around us, our fallen nature seeks "Me first" over all others. Our deceitful hearts are beyond any cure by ourselves or anyone else, except the Lord. We were born with an incurable sin-sickness. That is why we must be born again by the Spirit of God. We cannot understand why children sin, even though they are taught to do the opposite. The only explanation is they have received the sin-nature from their parents.

But the Lord knows the heart and mind of every person. He knows the condition of everyone and their tendencies in life relating to their emotions, who and what they love, and their conduct in life. His judgments are according to His sovereign knowledge and will. It is on that basis He will bring every person before Him and will make clear that "to whom much is given, much is required." "The Judge of all the earth," will always do right. He will judge "every man according as his work shall be." What is in us by choice, always comes out. Sin is an incurable, spiritual heart disease. The illustration given in this passage of bad eggs, is to remind us that a person can go in for wealth, pleasure and whatever that person wants, but without God it will not end well. The final result of doing what is wrong will be disgrace and final loss.

Jeremiah understood the importance of trusting and relying on God during those difficult times of persecutions he was enduring. The natural tendency in such time is fear. Hope is in the sanctuary of God. The sanctuary is always open to any of us who seek the Lord and crave fellowship with Him. That is the only safe place to find confidence and assurance to go through the unknown that is ahead. In Jeremiah's prayer, he claims he has been obedient to the Lord and trusted Him. The accusation of those who opposed him was that he was a false prophet. But he knew his trust was in the Lord and that was a sure place. He also wanted the Lord to vindicate him from those who were against him.

The last part of the chapter, is a lengthy commentary on the Sabbath day covenant sign the Lord made with the children of Israel when they were in the wilderness. The people of Jerusalem and Judah ignored that term of the covenant, and continued doing business, and whatever work they wanted, on the Sabbath day. That meant they were rejecting the Lord and fellowship with Him, in order to make more money. Financial success and money itself were more important to them than the will of God. That has not changed in our day. Even though the Sabbath was a covenant sign with the Jews, the Lord's day now has certain things we are to do for the Lord and with the Lord, that override our desire for more money and financial security.

The whole tenor of the passage is that those people were living for money, pleasure, idolatry and the immoral pleasures those things brought, and they had rejected God and His will and promises. It had affected their children as well as the adults, so the whole population were under the judgment of God and would be punished. The open

rejection of the Lord will eventually lead to being cast out. All that was claimed personally by the people was going to be burned with fire, and that fire doesn't go out.

Jeremiah 17:9-10. *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and is desperately wicked: Who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."*

THE HEART.

There is nothing hidden, God scans the heart to see what is really there.
His all-seeing eyes see the intentions graven, and whether there's faith or fear.
The acts and even the intention to sin is not something you can avoid.
When one trusts in the flesh or a man, he has departed from the Lord.

The "heart" is the center of reason; like when we stop and think a thing through.
After reasoning the pros and cons, we decide on what we will do.
There is a major problem in this - the heart of man is deceitful.
Even though it is the center of "self," it tempts me to be unfaithful.

The "heart" also symbolizes intelligence where common sense rises or falls.
There is a grave and powerful temptation to think one knows it all.
Even then deceitfulness raises its ugly head and leads to intellectual pride;
Making even an intelligent man think there is some way from God he can hide.

The "heart" and the will are part of one and the same, both in results are involved.
Reason and intelligence join with the will, and we think all problems are solved.
But that's not the way it really is, because the heart is deceitful still.
The incurable wickedness of the natural heart, our spirit and faith will kill.

So, I must take time to consider, what is of most importance to me.
I can be deceived by my natural heart, but God put a new heart in me.
The Lord searches and knows my heart, and from it determines reward.
He knows what is done for self-interest, and what is done for the Lord.

I can find what I need to overcome the deceitfulness of my heart.
I can go to the fountain of living waters and that is where to make a new start.
All that I need is there: in that fountain of God's life I will find -
Everything has been supplied on which to feed the new heart and mind.

"Father of mercy, I am so naive that I am unaware, for the most part, of the deceitfulness of my own heart. Create in me a clean heart, O God. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 18

THE POTTER'S PLANS

Chapters eighteen through twenty, focus on what the Lord taught Jeremiah when he went to the house of the potter. Object lessons often are more effective than just audible words. The more of our senses that are involved in communicating a message and/or a concept, the more they are indelibly impressed on our minds. When sight, touch and smell are all directed to what we hear, a positive response is more likely. Jeremiah learned the lessons God intended, but the people of Judah did not.

God is sovereign and has the right to do what He wants, to produce the desired results in His people. Some corrections are made and we hardly know that a change has occurred in us at first. Then we begin to realize that in us is an increase in fervor, in joy, and in motivation to step forward and take action on what we know is right. We realize the Great Potter was at work in us when we attended a conference, a ministry meeting, a prayer meeting or in a conversation with a caring brother or sister. Other times, the work of the Potter puts us flat on our back where we are helpless to do anything but look up. It is then we see by faith the face of the Potter, and surrender our independence and stubbornness to His divine sovereign will.

As a potter has control over what he does with the clay in his hands, so our Lord moves and molds us. He applies pressures in order to find and remove pieces of foreign substances that don't belong in the clay. Those things create weakness in the finished product. Anything that is inconsistent with the material the potter has chosen to use, can mar the whole vessel. God makes a new creation of those who are "in Christ," and gives them a new nature. Those things that are of the world, the flesh and the devil, defile the new creation if we allow them in our lives. It is for that reason the Lord chastens those who He loves. He wants them to be useful and fulfilled, by living a meaningful life of fellowship with Him.

The word, “marred,” really is much stronger than we usually use the word. It means “ruined;” “no good;” “useless.” There is no way to use the clay with the foreign material in it, or the vessel in which that is hidden, because the vessel is weak and will break when used. In grace, the Lord is not done with us when we fail Him, but we should expect, and in a certain sense, welcome the strong hands of our Father taking us right back where He began with us, and starting over again.

This indicates there is hope for the hopeless who look at themselves and their failures. God is able, and desires to use us when we forsake that which has marred our testimony, and return to the Lord in contrition, repentance and child-like faith. But if we refuse to surrender our independent, assertive attitudes, and defy the authority of our Lord over us; that stubborn, willful, self-centered person is really taking a position of opposition against God.

In the context of this chapter, the clay in the hands of the potter is referring to the nation of Judah. That analogy isn't limited to the Jews because they are a chosen nation to be His earthly people. All nations are under His authority, and when the wickedness among the Gentiles becomes such that judgment must be carried out, God gives them time to repent like He did when He sent Jonah to Nineveh. He gave them a forty-day notice before they would be overthrown. Remarkably, the repentance there was genuine and total among the population. They were spared at that time because of God's grace, patience and mercy.

When God's warnings are spurned, ignored and rejected, the vessel (that nation) is reduced to a lump of clay. It takes time to regain that which has been lost, if it ever can be regained. Centuries have passed, and Israel is still not back to where they once were and where God intends them to be. But He is working on the “clay” even today. The Potter of nations, even though He is sovereign, responds to the will of the people. A whole series of “ifs” are in this chapter and they teach us that the promises of God, whether they are for good or for judgment, depend on how humans respond when warnings are given. God does not change in His character, so He does not ignore sin. He responds to those who in true repentance for sin, put their faith in Him for deliverance. In stubbornness, the people of Judah mocked God, and suffered because of that.

The “virgin of Israel” deliberately chose worthless idols instead of the Living God. The horribleness of that choice, the consequences of it they still suffer, seemed totally unnatural to sensible people. Nature has a natural course to follow like a stream of water that takes melting snow downstream, but the people of Israel preferred “strange water,” polluted water. They chose idols instead of God. They chose rough roads instead of the tried and proven highways that had been made smooth by many generations who had lived and walked by faith. The only result that could follow the course they chose, was desolation, disaster, destruction – living and dying without God.

When Jeremiah made that prophecy plain to the people, they turned on him. His words and actions were opposed to the social and moral behavior of the people of Judah. The king and his officials; the priests and the false prophets; even those who were “wise,” brought charges against him. He had been interceding for those very people, and then they openly opposed him. His good toward them, was repaid with evil toward him.

In Jeremiah's prayer at the end of the chapter, not only was he frustrated because they refused his warnings, but he was frightened because of their threats. Knowing that the whole matter was beyond his ability to do anything about, he wanted the Lord to take severe and immediate action against them. But at least he didn't try to take matters into his own hands, even though he wanted vindication. He wisely left the severe judgment in the hand of the Lord to take place in God's time.

Jeremiah 18:3-4. *“Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make.”*

A WORK ON THE WHEELS.

Lessons to be learned are found in unusual places.
Go there and learn what the Lord there will teach us.
An example is there leaving a powerful message -
Go down to the potter and learn.

His work finds its genesis in the depths of his mind.
He searches his storehouse for the best clay to find.
His hands start to form a peculiar design.
Down at the potter's house is where you will learn.

Not with loud noise or with great shows of strength -
Not with applause or sermons known by their length -
But with quiet observation and silent whispers that think -
Here at the potter's house I can learn.

I learn that the Potter has a way that He forms -
The clay into shape, that with His mind does conform.
I learn that the pressure of His hand must be borne -
To be what the Potter has planned.

The pressure of hands, the turn of the wheel -
The texture of clay, and how the Potter can feel -
Any imperfections I miss, but to Him they are real.
The Potter wants a work that will last.

So back to the water, and back to the beginning,
The clay is reformed for the Potter's revealing
What to me seems trivial, but to the Potter is sinning -
And the Potter starts over again.

This time the clay is pressed hard in His hands.
This time what was hidden does not hinder His plans.
This time, as in "our times" that are left in God's hands -
I have learned at the house of the potter.

I will not always fully know the value of pain.
I will not always want Him to start over again.
But I will always cherish the lessons so plain -
I learned at the house of the potter.

"I have learned some things by experience Father, and I am thankful now, though I may not have been at the time, that when something is hindering Thy work; I want it removed. May I always be sensitive to the pressure of Thy hands on this clay form I am in. Sometimes the quickest way to get my attention is when I hurt physically. Whatever will bring the greatest glory to Thee, I hope I am ready for. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 19

THE BROKEN JAR

Once a vessel has been made and baked in the oven, it cannot be remade. If it is unacceptable for use, it is broken and the pieces thrown into the scrap-heap. The only thing that can be done with a useless vessel is to discard it and get another one to take its place. This is what the prophecy of Jeremiah is about in this chapter. Israel was about to be discarded as God's representative nation on earth. His original intention was that they be a kingdom of priests, but because of sin, the tribe of Levi was chosen to fill that role. Then because of sin, a series of judges were chosen to deal with those who were doing that which was right in their own eyes. Even after getting the promised land and each person having the promises of God at their disposal, they wanted a king so they would be like other nations. Manasseh was the most wicked of the kings, and yet the people wanted what his leadership provided including idolatry.

It was just after that Jeremiah was told by the Lord, as we read in this chapter, to go and buy a jar, likely a water jar made of clay that was well hardened. There was no way to change its shape or do anything different to it. This was another of the object lessons Jeremiah was told by the Lord to use in his messages to the people of Jerusalem and Judah. Each object lesson increased in intensity beginning with the branch of an almond tree. That was a warning of coming judgment. A boiling pot of water tipped toward the south was the second one, telling of the judgment coming from the north and that it will be indiscriminate. The ruined girdle-belt, describes why the judgment was coming. Sinful people had refused to listen to the warnings from God and turn in repentance from their idolatry, to the Lord. Therefore, they were totally useless to God and to men. The clay in the potter's hand gave a glimmer of light to them as a last call of mercy if they would repent. God was willing to start over with them, if the evil was removed. In this object lesson, there is only hopelessness and sure judgment coming.

There is a time when "God's patience may weary someday, and leave thy sad soul in the blast. By willful resistance you've drifted away, over the dead-line at last." Jeremiah with the clay jar in his hands, took the leaders of the people and of the priests to the gate where broken vessels, "potsherds," were thrown into the pile of garbage in the valley below. It was there, and to those men who had led the people astray that he delivered his fearful, prophetic message.

The carnage he described that would take place in Jerusalem when they would be besieged by the Babylonians, and would run out of food to eat. They had offered incense to the sun, moon and stars on the rooftops of their houses, and had sacrificed innocent people and even some of their own children to idols, right in that valley of Hinnom. The place where they had committed such abhorrent acts against those who were innocent in the worship of Baal, was

the place where they would be killed and buried until there were too many bodies to bury. The ones not buried would be eaten by birds and wild animals. In his prophecy, Jeremiah described the siege of the city and the terrible acts of cannibalism when the food supply was gone. The whole scene is almost too gruesome to consider, but then we have to stop and consider our country. Over one million abortions a year take place as innocent children are offered by hard-hearted parents who want "freedom of choice." The bodies of aborted children are burned in hospital incinerators in this favored country. Our whole standard of morality has been rejected to the place where those who do want God says, are considered intolerant and bigoted in the same way Jeremiah was. In his warning, he told those leaders that even their homes would be burned because of their offerings of incense to false gods. The whole city would be flattened and burned just like the valley was, in the scrap heap of the "valley of fire" (Tophet).

After Jeremiah had given that awful message at the potsherd gate, the Lord instructed him to smash the jar into pieces as the end of the object lesson. The nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem would be smashed to pieces just like the broken jar. The bodies of the dead would be piled up in that "fireplace," and the fire would be the end of that era of Jewish history. He was then told to tell that same message to everyone right in the court of the temple. The people of Judah and Jerusalem had a half-hearted attitude toward the "Jewish religion," with the forms of sacrifices, feast-days and other traditions that had grown up around temple worship over the years. They tried to mix paganism and the worship of God, which would have especially offensive to the Living God who brought them all the way from the call of Abraham to the present. It was no wonder the prophet pronounced his message of doom when he spoke; "Thus saith the Lord of hosts (the Lord Almighty), the God of Israel."

Such lessons that can be learned from them should teach us, and warn us of the danger that is coming down on our heads as a nation. Four out of ten pregnancies, along with serious child abuse in this nation will bring staggering consequences. The overpowering influence of pleasure, sports and open immorality will lead us to the same end as that of Judah and Jerusalem if there is no real repentance. Religious life in this country has become another form of entertainment to some people, and to others they want to practice a sinful lifestyle and have a religious form to attend when they feel so inclined. We must repent and turn from our national sins and national disgrace, to God, or we too will be smashed to pieces.

Jeremiah 19:1, 10. *"Thus saith the Lord, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests. Then thou shalt break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee."*

TOPHET.

What an awful place to learn a lesson!
But a serious one was needed.
The message of warning had gone out,
But the warnings were not heeded.
The time had come to illustrate
What God was going to do.
They hadn't listened to the voice of reason,
Maybe here in this spitting place it will get through.

The old men in the government,
And the old religionists too -
As they stood where garbage around them burned
Watched as the prophet threw
The earthen bottle to the ground,
Where it broke into many pieces.
Each piece representing the people
The Word of God no longer reaches.

To think we can continue on in sin,
And think there are no consequences,
Is a fool allowing himself to be deceived,
By the world and ungodly influences.
We may think our bottle is full
Of all the things we do desire.
But that too will be broken to shards,
And all it contained cast into the fire.

Just because one is old,
Doesn't mean he is always wise.
Just because one has accumulated riches,
Doesn't mean he has won life's prize.
All of that can go in a moment,
If we the righteous God ignore.

It will all go into the garbage pit -
And for the sinner, judgment is in store.

It may not be the nicest place
To learn what God wants to teach us.
But sometimes extreme steps must be taken,
Before God's Word can reach us.
When the bottle is broken -
And all that it held is lost.
Stop to consider the results -
And seriously count the cost.

"Father God, I am not sure if I am numbered among the ancients, but I have learned a lesson today. May there never be anything come or happen in my life, that will turn me away from Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 20

THE COST OF OBEDIENCE

To serve the Lord in faithful obedience to His will and His word, involves costs and conflicts that cannot be avoided. It is wishful thinking, and likely deceptive service that would lead a preacher in our day, like prophets in the past, to think everyone will like us and appreciate everything we have to say. Warnings of divine justice coming upon those who reject Christ and God's salvation are not spoken of by those who want to please people. Believers who are warned about not submitting to the word of God alone, but adding or subtracting things to make the Christian life easier, will not like to hear that kind of message. The challenge of wholehearted commitment to Christ as the priority in the life of a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not well accepted by those who want a Sunday morning commitment and the rest of the week for their own interests. That is one of the reasons a salaried clergy often undermine the power of the Gospel. A person who speaks under the terms of a contract is obligated to say what he is being paid to say.

Many people who claim to be Christians have never been born again by the Spirit of God through the word of God revealing the Person and work of Christ and their personal Savior. Those who speak to the people for God must have the truth of God which they have made their own as they read the Bible, deeply settled in their souls. Unfelt truth has very little effect on others if it has no real effect on me. Those who are faithful to God need to learn how to deal with hostility from without, and discouragement within. The truth that hurts us is also the truth that heals us. Our sense of discouragement comes from looking at ourselves and/or people around us. Encouragement comes from the Lord through His word, and quite often, through His people who read His word and pass what they have learned on to us.

When Pashur whose role seemed something like a temple policeman, heard Jeremiah speak in the court of the temple, he arrested the prophet and put him in prison. Whether he was of Egyptian background, or just had an Egyptian name is not really all that important, but it does show that the world's influence can come right into the house of God. If God's people yield to the pressure to conform to the ways of the world, they will not be willing to hear and heed the whole counsel of God. This enforcer of some kind would have heard Jeremiah's message which he gave in the previous chapter, and because of the hostility and complaints of the people, and likely the working of his own conscience, was moved to take action against Jeremiah.

This is the first time in this book that Jeremiah is referred to as "Jeremiah the prophet." This was no small thing that he did. To lift a hand against a prophet of God is to lift a hand against God. This leader of people acted on behalf of the people instead of defending the house of God and what went on there. The word "smote" doesn't give the real sense of what happened to Jeremiah. He was seriously beaten before he was imprisoned.

How we bear up before hostility as servants of God, depends a great deal on how we have maintained personal fellowship with the Lord. It is possible to be so concerned about others and what happens to them, that we neglect taking care of our own spiritual condition. Then when opposition continues without letup, we are in danger of discouragement because of the on-going tensions such situations and pressures bring. It is absolutely necessary that every believer maintains an active daily tending to our own soul and spirit through listening to God through His word, and by speaking openly to Him from our hearts in prayer. That is when we are able to "cast our care upon Him," knowing from the reality of personal experience, "That He careth for you."

When Jeremiah was taken out of imprisonment and faced Pashur, he didn't hesitate to tell him what would happen to him. Even Pashur's new name would terrorize himself, as well as his family and his friends in the days ahead. All of those associated with him would be taken captive to Babylon (mentioned by name the first time), and he would see those who were his friends killed right in front of him. Pashur seemed to consider himself a strong leader, but was really a cowardly man. There were three different invasions by the Babylonians. The first one in 605 BC would likely

have been when Daniel and others were taken to Babylon. The second invasion when Jehoiachin was king would likely have been when Pashur and his family were taken captive. Each succeeding invasion increased in intensity. The third and final one was nine years later and whatever was the motivation behind it, there was nothing left standing when it was over.

When we are called to serve the Lord in uncertain times and in difficult places, it is not uncommon to have quite significant highs and lows, depending on how people take the messages of the Gospel and if there are any result or not. It is not too hard to understand how Jeremiah's last and longest "confession" is a real unburdening of his soul to the Lord. His openness to the Lord and the complaints he made, describe the real human struggles of a preacher. To preach an unpopular message may bring persecution and open opposition from those who hear. Despair, personal sorrow and criticism when nothing good comes back from the effort put forth, makes one wonder whether they heard the message from the Lord right, whether they delivered it in the right way with the right spirit, or whether they were out of the mind of the Lord altogether.

In the poetic part of this chapter, Jeremiah's complaint began with him saying to the Lord that he didn't volunteer to be the prophet to give the warnings to hard-hearted and stiff-necked people. He made it clear to the Lord that it was God who chose him to do that work, and he didn't have any choice in the matter. As far as he was concerned, he was forced into this hard task and his reward was derision and threats. The message he had to give was filled with violence and the end result was going to be terrible. In a way he was blaming God that he was being attacked, but it all happened because he did what God told him to do and say.

However, when he held back and told himself he was done with preaching, he found that he couldn't hold back. The truth of God was so deep in Jeremiah, that he had to speak out openly. The message of God's truth, that there is judgment coming for the sins of the people, was in his own soul and he had to speak up. He found he could not be silent in the face of the coming judgment his own people were bringing down on their own heads. He knew, and so does every true servant of God, that when repentance is real, forgiveness is offered by our Gracious God. We must open our mouths and pass on God's truth regardless of what happens. Truth has to be told in spite of the slander that may come against the messenger, and the mockery, threats of retaliation and revenge.

The change of tone that follows Jeremiah's first despairing complaint, was not some fickle mood swing, but rather the fact that a mere human being's emotions can change depending on what we allow our minds to dwell on. He had been looking at other people and how they reacted to the word of God given through his mouth. Then he got looking at himself and how he was picked on and how he felt when threatened. But when he looked at the Lord, and realized God was with him as a mighty warrior who is so fierce and powerful that those who oppose Him are stricken with real terror, he rises in his spirit to the heights of exaltation.

At this high point, he recognizes the concern the Lord has for the righteous. The Lord can see into the most secret part of both the righteous and the wicked. The Lord also knows the heart and mind of His servant. He thought God would carry out divine justice on Jeremiah's enemies right then. However, when it didn't happen like he wanted, poor Jeremiah went down into despair again. The highs and lows of a person in tense times can come quickly. The faith of a servant can be strong and his expectations high, but a sudden change of circumstances can pull the rug out from under us.

When one is very conscious of the presence of God with us, and then we face ourselves as to who we are in ourselves, our insufficiency and inability; it is not surprising that we become very conscious of our weakness and failures. Jeremiah really had a tough time that day. He questioned his calling to the work of the Lord because it was so oppressing and depressing at that time. Those he had trusted as friends had betrayed him and turned against him. His enemies from his own nation kept at him trying to silence him. The darkness of his message was there was no hope. Doom was certain, and he wished he had never been born.

Those who have been called by the Lord to preach the Gospel, can identify with Jeremiah to a certain extent. We do have the blessing of seeing light where there is darkness, when sinners repent and turn to Christ for salvation. We have the joy of seeing those who were dead in trespasses and sin, come to new life in Christ. Still, it is very depressing, and can be discouraging when we preach night after night and no one is interested, and no one seems to even want God's salvation. Then we hear of souls saved in other places, and our hearts are lifted up in faith, and we continue on preaching, knowing that God is the One who saves and bring results. It is our work just to give the message from our hearts and pray that God will bless what is said to produce what He intends.

Jeremiah 20:9. *"Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones. And I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."*

DESPAIR.

Is this what God intended? This anger and animosity?
Why such blatant opposition? Why these personal attacks on me?
This is not what I expected when speaking for the Lord!
Such violence being shown against God! Is this the real world?

The lessons taught and illustrated, were given in good faith.
If only people would pay attention, perhaps they then would taste
The blessings of the Lord, when they true repentance show -
What else can be done for them that God in His grace can show?

Maybe I should stop speaking and go somewhere to hide.
Maybe this opposition will pass and those who oppose think I died.
Maybe if I watered down the message God gave me to speak,
People then would think well of me if I seemed like one who is weak.

But this fire that burns within when thinking of people going to hell -
Would be on my soul forever if warnings I refused to tell!
The consequences would be on both those who hear - and me!
The faces of the unwarned ones, I would always see!

No, I cannot stay silent when such dangers are before!
I must speak the truth of God, even if men abhor
The sight of me, the words I speak, even the ground I walk upon.
It is my responsibility to continue speaking until all hope is gone.

Far be it for me to continue to wallow in despair.
The God I serve and speak for is here, and everywhere.
He has put this message in me, until it burns within my heart.
By His power and matchless grace, I will finish what He said to start.

“Father, this soul of mine sometimes seems only a bit warm instead of full of divine heat. May this time spent with Thee create a burning fire in my bones that will enable me to warn and entreat sinners to come to Thee for salvation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 21

“ABSOLUTELY NOT!”

The modern mindset of most people is to overlook most social injustice unless it is directed at me. Those in authority are probably most unwilling to ignore challenges made against them and their lifestyle, including how they treat those who are under them in position. They don't mind coming down hard on those they think owe them money or the government they represent, because they seem to forget they are supposed to be servants of the people, not the other way around. That is one of the most serious problems those in places of leadership have. Consequently, injustice becomes a way of life to those who lead, and often those who are led accept injustice with an acquiescent shrug and a “What can we do?” attitude.

The situations in the book of Jeremiah are not written in chronological order, but usually in topical order. With that in mind, the incident in this chapter happened quite some time after the events of the previous chapter. The Pashur of chapter twenty and king Jehoiachin had been taken away to Babylon in the second invasion. Then after several years, the new puppet king Zedekiah, decided to take matters into his own hands and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (The spelling is different but the person is the same). That certainly angered Nebuchadnezzar and he and his army were coming to Jerusalem determined to stamp out those pesky Jews once and for all.

Even though it had happened twice before, the local leaders lost sight of what their position really was and had become unjust in dealing with the general population. The rebellion of Zedekiah was a foolish act of a self-centered man who was not right with either God or man. For a person to think they can sin with a high-hand and not face any consequences is the foolish thinking of a person who pays no attention to tomorrow. They only think of the present and what brings pleasure and a “quick fix” at this moment. Sadly, this is not uncommon among people today. Many only live for today and the momentary gratification of the flesh.

Zedekiah and his associates in leadership positions thought their ethnic heritage and “favored-nation” status with God, would bring divine intervention on the behalf, and deliverance by the hand of God, whenever they wanted it. They just didn't want God in their lives to interfere with their sin and debauchery. It is not ethnicity nor family heritage that determines our relationship with God. Not even religious affiliation has anything to do with the reality of fellowship

with the Lord. A covenant relationship formed between two parties in which each one is committed to the other, even to the giving of one's life to benefit the other participant, is in such a relationship. God had fulfilled all the terms of His covenant with Israel for centuries, but Israel had only a hit and miss response in which the "miss" was most common.

When a person today comes to Christ for salvation, the terms of the new covenant come into play. It began when "Christ died for the ungodly." When we as the ungodly sinners come to Him in repentance for our sin and put our personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our own Savior, our side of the covenant takes place. We die to ourselves and are alive to Christ. We testify publicly to that fact in our baptism, in which "we are raised to walk in newness of life." We die to ourselves and are alive in, and to, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Things were not happening in Jerusalem and Judah as Zedekiah had wanted. The committee of men he sent as a deputation to Jeremiah, was with the intention of getting God to come to their aid, and stop the coming invasion. They wanted Jeremiah to speak to God on their behalf, even though they had been ignoring God and persecuting the prophet of God for years. Zedekiah had not changed, nor had the other political, business, social and religious leaders. They were still idolaters and unjust toward those over whom they had taken control. Also, they were definitely hostile toward Jeremiah, what he said, and who he represented. In Zedekiah's arrogance, he had made Nebuchadnezzar angry, and they were coming on him with a vengeance, and a powerful army.

Zedekiah and his cohorts found out that ignoring God, persecution and hostility toward people of faith who serve God, brought an inevitable "payday someday." For forty years Jeremiah had been preaching to, and warning the people. He had been mocked, persecuted, despised and imprisoned. But when the enemy was at the gate, those wicked people wanted God. Living by faith openly in our day marks a difference between us and those around who may even claim to be Christians, but live like everyone else. Usually in some way it will bring rejection when we want to bless others; mockery when we publicly declare unchangeable truth; and disappointment on our part when we had hoped and prayed that the word of the Gospel would be accepted and believed.

If people of faith are not careful, when our expectations are not met, even though we teach children the truth of God, preach the Gospel regularly, and seek to live holy lives; we can become despondent and disillusioned. The financial, physical, mental and emotional costs of working in the kingdom of God, and not getting any visible results can make us discouraged to the extent we are tempted to quit the work. For His own reasons, God has called us to do what He tells us, and leave the results and the time-table to Him.

The answer the Lord gave to Jeremiah to pass on to those wicked leaders, must have terrified them as much or more than the fear of the approaching army. They found out it was God who was attacking them. All of a sudden, God became real to them and they were told that not only was He the One behind the coming judgment, but unless individuals surrendered to the Chaldeans, they would die. Instead of being a traitor, Jeremiah was really a patriot who wanted his people to survive the coming disaster. He made it plain when he was speaking for the Lord, that Jerusalem was done; finished! Everything would be destroyed and burned. Not one else would rise in rebellion to Nebuchadnezzar.

No pity would be shown to the people or even their animals. The epidemic of whatever kind it would be, would bring death to the population of idol-worshipping people. A city under siege is often overcome with the consequences of having no food or water. That affects animals as well as people. The few people who would survive the siege would be those who chose "the way of life," and fled the city.

For people of any time and place who do not acknowledge God and ignore the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, nor listen to the warnings of preachers; they are sealing their doom. Unless people repent and forsake their sins and turn to the Lord; to expect God to help them when they are in trouble is foolish. God would not be just if He overlooked sin or covered it up as if it wasn't serious. But He has provided redemption for us at His own cost and offers it to us freely by His grace. To ignore that or reject it, is to be lost forever in the face of coming judgment. Those who only want God in their lives when they are in trouble, or to escape trouble, will find that He is against them, not for them. No matter what their heritage is or their profession of religion, the terms of the new covenant require full payment for sin, either by the sinner or by one who is willing to pay that cost and assume the debt I owe. That is the beauty and glory of the Gospel message.

The faith of parents, membership in or attendance at a church, or taking the title, "Christian," does not make a person acceptable to God. "He that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Those who have leadership responsibility need to lead, guide and defend God's people. They need to protect them from the results of misunderstanding and rejecting God and His truth. The Gospel and its results are the only hope for the lost souls of men and women.

Jeremiah 21:8. *"And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I have set before you the way of life, and the way of death."*

MAKING A DEAL?

Are you thinking you can make some kind of deal with God?
After all the deception, do you think He can trust your word?
The calls He made to you, you treated with disdain.
The laws He gave, you ignored and refused to maintain.
The grace He showed you, you took it daily for granted.
The mercy He directed your way, you despised as one disenchanted.
His love for you went completely unrequited.
His longsuffering toward you, continually you slighted.

So, here's the deal God has decided to offer to you.
As a rejecter, with you He is already through.
You can remain in the city, and here you will surely die.
You can leave the city and the enemy will make you pay.
There is a point of no return, and that you have already passed.
You can try to pretend for a few days, but it won't last.
The choices you made with your high and mighty hand -
Have brought final judgment down on your heads and land.

When one is called by God's grace to be reconciled to Him -
It is not to make some compromising deal as a man.
God has never done anything He has to apologize for.
He wants to save and preserve you from judgment that is in store.
The offer of mercy has gone out to you again and again.
God is not going to make a deal so you can continue in sin.
He has set before you the choice of death or life.
He has provided the terms of reconciliation at the highest price.

"I wonder, O God, if I have made plain to those who hear me speak; the reality and the character of Thyself. Move me again to consider how to give people some insight into Thy Person and Thy work as I study Thy Word this day. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 22

AN INDICTMENT OF KINGS

The next few chapters of the book of Jeremiah are not necessarily written in chronological order. It is the topics that are addressed, not the historical context. In this chapter the topic is injustice. The kings who followed Josiah were all materialistic idolaters who were unjust, covetous, self-centered men. Materialism is the idol that is most worshipped today and it was similar in the days of Jeremiah. Those greedy materialistic leaders did not want any prophet/preacher disturbing their ways of life, nor did they want them getting those people they were exploiting to rise up against them. Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were the two that locked horns most against Jeremiah. His basic message was repent and do justice or die.

Jeremiah spoke to them for the Lord as a group and as individuals. They could have changed the course of the nation if they had done what was right and judged what was wrong. Obedience to God and to His laws carried out in a nation, is the basis for justice. Protecting the defenseless people from those who take away what little they have, would be carrying out just judgment. Jeremiah's message to them was if they would rule justly, they would enjoy the benefits of the throne of David who had covenant blessings assured from God. But the kings were actually doing the plundering. So, if they would not do what was right, not only would the king be brought down to desolation, but all of his family would too. No matter how high they had come in the royal line of David and the kings who followed him, they would be brought down and burned.

Doing what is right is much more than having all the information we need about a matter, and knowing the doctrinal correctness about Bible teaching. Obedience from the heart of God's people is much more than doing good for the benefit of other people. Faith in our God has to do with our motivation and the inward constraints of love for God. To not do evil is good. To do good for the benefit of others is a good thing. To love God and bless others with Christ-like love, is evidence of faith in God.

Idol worshipping and injustice are linked and often one leads to the other. To covet another person's success, prosperity and property, may lead one to try to build on what others have done, do the same, and try to more than they have accomplished. That is evidence of the idol of materialism, and that often depends on unfairness in business or putting another person down in order to go higher. Injustice in government leaders may result in higher

prices, higher taxes, cutting corners on projects in order to save money for one's own objective of "worship." When all is finally over and done, God will carry out just judgment according to His infinite knowledge and wisdom. As in the case of the kings Jeremiah warned, what could have been profitable and good if those who led were just and fair, was going to be a disastrous downfall, and passers by will ask, "What caused this?" The answer is, idolatry and injustice.

Tears and grief should be for those who reject the Lord, deny God and serve sin, rather than for those who are righteous. We revere and respect the morals, the honor and the obedience to the Lord of those who followed the Lord like king Josiah. His sons and grandson were just the opposite to him and Jeremiah was looking ahead to what was going to happen to them. It is the concern of true believers in Christ, that we reflect the character of our Lord, and will be identified as those who are "in Christ." The attitude of Christ toward unfairness and injustice, will be the normal response of Christians toward those who have spiritual and physical needs. We have a concern for the exploited people, the abused and suffering; and the blatant taking of the life of those who are yet unborn, but are human beings with all the characteristics of humanity in them from conception.

Jeremiah's message from the Lord becomes very personal to specific kings who were oppressive, unfair extortioners. Shallum, Josiah's son, in the three months he was king got a reputation for being unjust and unrighteous when he forced unpaid laborers to build a luxurious palace for him. It was noted for its extravagance and useless luxury. He was taken away as a captive to Egypt and was noted for being the first king of Israel to die in exile.

Another of Josiah's sons, Jehoiakim, followed the same road of unfaithfulness to God and to His people. He was a cruel dishonest man who had none of the characteristics of his father. He did not stop at extortion and murder to get what he wanted. Jeremiah told him he would have the burial of a dead donkey that would be taken to the dump outside the city and left to be devoured by wild animals and birds.

We may inherit a lot of things from our parents and forebearers, but education, money, heritage and all the trappings of the "good life," and success, does not produce good character. It is our relationship and fellowship with God that makes us the kind of person God intends. We have to decide personally what is important in life. If we ever find ourselves too busy or too comfortable to find time for God, His people and His assembly; then we are in danger. We are not our own. Our life and our labors are to be for God's glory, not self-advancement.

For our learning, we know that there are adequate resources in this world to meet human needs, but there is a great disparity between the "haves" and the "have nots." This can, and should be adjusted to adapt to places and people, and is one of the reasons Christians seek to meet the needs of others. Actions of grace that God has placed in our hands, is one of the ways God demonstrates His love.

Coniah, known as Jeconiah or Jehoiachin, was an eighteen-year-old king, but he was a failure as far as God was concerned, right from the start. His sins spoiled him from being any use for God at all. Jeremiah told him that if he was a ring on God's hand, He would take it off and give it to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. It was only a short time and he was taken into exile. Even though Zedekiah was king after Jehoiachin, he and his sons died before Jehoiachin who was the last king of David's line until Christ was born.

For us to know God, means we are to be like Him in character and conduct. Moral and righteous living is emphasized when one knows God. Acting in justice and defending the defenseless is evident when one knows the Lord. Meeting the needs of others is consistent with knowing God. Communicating to God and listening to Him through His word, is how we learn to know Him more, mature in the divine nature, and grow in the practical aspects of eternal life that has been imparted to us. To know God involves us having an attitude like Him toward others, even as He acted in grace, mercy and love to us.

Jeremiah 22:3. *"Thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place."*

BUILDING CHARACTER.

He had every opportunity, his father before him taught him well.
He inherited his father's money, but didn't heed what his father had to tell.
For some reason he was hardheaded and hardhearted; you couldn't tell him a thing.
He was probably spoiled in some ways, and chose all prosperity could bring.

A great heritage is passed on; from one generation to the next we can gain
An insight into how God dealt with them: this is one way to train
The coming generation to be wise, compassionate and graceful -
Teach them well: instill lessons of faith that they may be thankful.

A good education can help one to get along well in the world.

One can learn about a lot of things, and in one or two be thorough.
But character doesn't necessarily come from what we learned or know.
A relationship with God forms the basis from which good character grows.

When prosperity is a higher priority than good character;
If a relationship with God is missing - no new nature;
If God's guidance in His Word and His truth you will not hear -
Then be warned - a fall and judgment behind it is near.

To refuse to listen to the words of wisdom and guidance is a mistake.
And the path of holiness and God-fearing respect you don't take -
Then there will be consequences for those attitudes and actions that follow.
The results of stubbornness and greed make all successes hollow.

Hear the word of the Lord; pay close attention to those who teach you.
Consider ahead of time the end results when all of this is through.
There have been covenants made by those who have gone before us.
Hear and heed the word of the Lord; build character others can trust.

"Father, I think of the generations past in my family. The heritage I have been left is now mine to pass on to my family. O God, may my children be able to pass on to theirs, a sense of the honor they have simply by being the following generation of faithful people of character. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 23

THE TRUE AND THE FALSE

As Jeremiah wrote down the words of the Lord that summarize in these first verses those "shepherds," the wicked leaders of Judah, he might have thought, "Is there no hope for us forever?" In this chapter, the leadership of kings, priests and false prophets are contrasted by the coming leadership of Christ, the Messiah of Israel. The evil shepherd/rulers scattered and abused the people. The Lord Himself would gather the remnant of the scattered people. The evil leaders had not cared or attended to those who had been entrusted into their care, so harsh judgment was coming on them. The Lord would bring them back to where they belong, and would make them to be fruitful, increase in numbers, and they would be where and what He wanted them to be.

The remnant is a small group who remain true to the Lord, when all around them people go their own sinful ways and despise those who live by faith. Noah and his family were a very small remnant that remained true to God when the wickedness of the majority of people made God repent that He had even made man. Joshua and Caleb were a remnant left out of the whole tribe of Israel. They were able to enter Canaan because they had full confidence in God. The true prophets saw a small remnant of the children of Israel respond to their warnings, while the majority of the people blatantly disregarded the warnings they were given. When the Lord Jesus was here, he said few would find and enter the narrow gate and walk the narrow way, while the majority would follow on the broad way to destruction. Even in Christendom, the majority of people have the "Christian religion," but few have ever been born again into the kingdom of God.

Jeremiah wrote of the coming Messiah who would be the perfect King, and who would reign in righteousness. Even His name, "Jehovah Tsidkeenu," means, "The Lord our Righteousness." The "Branch" refers to a new growth that will do what is "just and right" in Israel. He will be the perfect Ruler and the "Good Shepherd" of His people. He is spoken of here in contrast to Zedekiah and all the last ruling kings of Israel who were notable for being unjust in their rule, and insatiable in their idolatry. When the coming King reigns, a new and startling reality will happen in Israel as the seed of Abraham returns to the place where God starts over to fulfill the covenant with a whole new-born nation of Israel that will be born in a day.

The salvation of the nation of Israel will be so spectacular and different, that it will eclipse by far the exodus of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses. In the coming millennium, the Lord will live among His people and deliverance and blessing will be solidly established for a thousand years. That time will be so much better and greater than anything that had been experienced in Israel's "glory days," that there is no way to compare it. Even though the glories of the future are not clear to us, "We know who holds the future," and we know His inherent glory is such that we will be constantly amazed at the sight of His glory and grace.

The rest of this chapter deals with the topic of the terrible consequences of false prophecy and those people who promote deception. There were those who claimed to speak for God but did not tell the truth, and what they did say was inaccurate and deceptive. False prophets gave messages of peace and prosperity instead of warnings of just judgment for sin. The outcome of such deception is that people become confirmed in their sins, and sinful ways.

That was why Jeremiah's heart was broken like the Lord's and he mourned over the people who were being deceived and wanted that kind of misleading falsehood that allowed them to continue in their open sin. Religious leaders led the people of God astray, but it was the false prophets who confirmed them in that way. It happened years before in Samaria by the lying and immoral prophets of Baal, who mixed Jewish and pagan religions. Such deceivers still make people think all is well when it is not. Jeremiah's message and that of all true prophets, was very unpopular because it revealed the sins of the people.

False prophets then and now appear to speak the message of God, and will use scriptures, even out of context, to support what they say. They do not live according to the principles that they teach. They water-down the word of God to make it more appealing to those who listen to them. By doing that, they encourage in a subtle way, people to disobey God by ignoring or discounting what is written in the holy scriptures. Often such prophets are self-serving people who appeal to the audience, and pointedly tell the people what they want to hear, and what they pay for, rather than what God says.

The way the Lord described them is like those who lived perverted lifestyles in Sodom and Gomorrah. Such conduct has a similar effect on the whole country as we are now seeing happen in this country. Instead of correcting the ungodly way of living being practiced by the people, laws are changed and false prophets reinforce that is condemned in the Bible. That is like eating contaminated food and drinking poisoned water. No one who ignores God and stubbornly follows the way of their own imagination, will escape the consequences of evil in spite of what the false prophets say. None of them will avoid the violent whirlwind of divine righteous wrath.

If those religious advisors in that day had listened to God and told the truth to the people, they would have turned away from their evil ways. They thought of a deity as no more than a god who was limited to a neighborhood, and was merely a shortsighted disinterested idea that wasn't all that important to them. They would consult with the idols of their imagination when they wanted and conjured up and answer from their own sinful minds. The false prophets seem to have been amazed that the Lord was present on earth as well as in heaven. An omnipresent God was not in their thoughts. False prophets depend on dreams of their own imagination to get others to do what they say.

The contrast is that a true prophet has a word from the Lord. The difference is like the straw of falsehood that is useless for food, and wheat that nourishes and gives life. When we are entrusted with a word from the Lord to pass on in a private conversation or a public gathering, it is important that we give the truth of God with accuracy and the support of practicing what we preach. People have a right to expect that what we teach and preach is effective in our own lives. The "fire" of the word of God tests the quality of what we say, by how we live. The "hammer" of the word of God judges our thoughts, motives and attitude as it relates to my own heart as an inward reality. The fire and hammer deal with what are seen and unseen, and the wheat of the word of God is what gives evidence of life and growth that leads to maturity.

The Lord is against false prophets who say that their message comes from the Lord but is contrary to His word. They steal from others what they falsely claim they get from God. Their lying interpretations which are only dreams, cause other people to go wrong, because what they say is "an oracle from the Lord," is not in any way from God. False prophets and their messages will be forgotten and forsaken. People will eventually see them for what they really are. They will be an everlasting disgrace and an everlasting shame that will follow them forever.

This whole chapter gives us the light of hope in the assurance that "the Lord our Righteousness" will bring blessing in a coming day. It is also a serious reminder to us that we need to submit to the guiding of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, to live out the word of God that we teach. In order to proclaim the word of God in truth, we need to know what it says and means in the context and then we can apply it appropriately to situations around us. We need to know it, obey it, live it, illustrate it, teach it and preach it. That will lead us to worship God and devotedly follow Him and live for Him.

Jeremiah 23:6. *"In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, 'The Lord our Righteousness.'"*

JEHOVAH TSIDKEENU.

They had all the words, but used them in false ways.
The warnings they should have given, they chose not to say.
Irresponsible leadership is a crime against the sheep.
The pastors who should have cared, didn't even know where they sleep.

Compare the false prophecies with what the Righteous King says.
Judgment and justice are expected of leaders in each and every way.
This is exemplified in "The Lord our Righteousness."
Under His leadership the world will all be blessed.

False prophets have some identifiable characteristics.
They may speak words that are true, but their lives have different statistics.
The things they say and the things they do are just not the same.
Avoiding speaking warning truths is how they avoid the blame.

The message of God they may have received, but the hard parts they dilute.
It is not uncommon for them to smooth over consequences of the evil fruit.
Contrast that with what Jehovah Tsidkeenu says who embodies truth.
He alone really knows what true righteousness is worth.

Those who have hidden agendas may encourage others to disobey.
The standards of righteousness and holiness God gives, all are here to stay.
"The Lord our Righteousness" does not change for any reason the standards He has made.
For the acts of disobedience there is a price that must be paid.

Arrogant, self-serving people are an offence to all concerned.
They won't accept responsibility for the leadership they spurned.
The word of Jehovah Tsidkeenu is like a hammer breaking rock in pieces.
As a fire that burns away all dross, the innermost parts it reaches.

Never think for a moment that words some way don't count.
The Lord will uphold His words; false words will find you out.
"The Lord our Righteousness" is King - a Righteous Branch.
His justice and judgment are pure - there is nothing left to chance.

"Thou art the Faithful and True God, O Lord: may those who are responsible for the spiritual well-being of others, never forget this. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 24

"GOOD FIGS" – THE REMNANT

In previous chapters, Jeremiah had spoken against the injustice of the leaders of Judah and what was going to happen to them. Then he spoke for the Lord to the false prophets and the consequences of their deception to the people and to themselves. In this chapter he speaks to the people in general and describes some of them as a "basket of good figs," and the rest as a "basket of bad figs." Both of these are set before the temple of the Lord, so these are open before the eyes of the Lord. This vision of the people gives a summary of the Lord's determination to restore the good and destroy the bad.

To make this plain, this chapter is divided, with the first part an explanation of those who would go into exile, accepting the chastening of the Lord. When Jehoiakim rebelled against the Babylonians, he died. His son, Jehoiachin was likely about eighteen years old or thereabouts, and he surrendered to the second army of the Babylonians who came against Jerusalem. It was then the skilled craftsmen and artisans were taken to Babylon. Those who resisted the chastening hand of God, died by the sword of the Babylonians, and the poor and weak remained in Judah with Zedekiah as the puppet king over them.

The ones taken into exile were not good people, but they did submit to God's judgment for sin. They were taken into exile because of their sin, idolatry, injustice and the other things Jeremiah had been warning them about for years. They were not called "good figs" because they were worthy of that designation or because they were innocent and the "bad figs" guilty. It was only because of the grace of God that they survived. All they could do was surrender to the invaders and in doing so they surrendered to the will of God, and submitted themselves to the just judgment of God. They hadn't even yet repented and turned to the Lord, but the Lord initiated the restoration to fellowship with Him when they were taken captives. He was confident that the relationship He once had with the people of Israel would eventually be restored.

It was God who watched over the remnant in their captivity. It was God's basic purpose to bring them back to Himself spiritually. It was God who created in them "a heart to know" Him. It was the Lord who brought them to the place where they made the decision to return to Him and be faithful to Him. Then they would experience His salvation and the blessing of being His people who would "not have any gods before Him." The time would come when they would return to "their God" with all their heart. True repentance brings true restoration.

The bad figs in the illustration Jeremiah gave, were those who for one reason or another, remained in Judah or ran to Egypt to escape the justice of God on His sinful people. Zedekiah had learned nothing from all that had happened before he became king. He was still an idolatrous, wicked man who rejected the counsel and advice of Jeremiah. Jeremiah had to remain in Jerusalem and continue there to be the Lord's spokesman. Zedekiah would not listen to

the voice of the Lord, but rather rebelled against the Babylonians again and he lost. In his defiance, he would not surrender as Jeremiah had told him to.

He would not accept the fact that God was using Judah's enemies as a way to get them to halt, repent of their sin and turn to the Lord in contrition. Consequently, Zedekiah had to watch his own sons killed in a terrible way before him, and then had his eyes put out. The death of his sons was the last thing he saw, and likely would never forget.

Defiance against God and His revealed will, leads to defeat and destruction. Sadly, it does not only affect guilty leaders, but those who follow such leaders will suffer as well. When the "blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch." Even today, those who are God's chosen earthly people are a reproach to many. Those in business are often called a "byword." To those who live in or near their land but are of different nationalities, they are a "curse." They have had to fight wars - "the sword;" then starvation in which millions died, and plagues that defy description. The prophecies of Jeremiah have come to pass.

But there is yet a remnant that the Lord will gather to Himself in a time to come. In grace, God will restore His relationship with Israel as He promised. The remnant will be small but they will come from exile in all parts of the world and be gathered unto Him. He will give them a new heart that they will love and serve Him in spirit and in truth. The blessings of this church age of grace that believers in Christ enjoy today, will extend to the remnant in a day to come. Those "bad figs" that rejected our Lord Jesus when He was here 2000 years ago, and drove His new-born children out of Jerusalem after His death, burial and resurrection, typify what is happening today to His chosen people who deny and reject Him.

Jeremiah 24:7. *"And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."*

GOOD FIGS.

Just like the prophet said, they were captured and taken away.
The best ones and the young people were put in bondage that fatal day.
Like a basket of good figs, they were kept to serve a foreign king.
While those who were left like bad figs, had to do with very few things.

Four young men of note were some of those God thought were "good."
Remarkably, the young men were confident as to where they stood.
Before God as people of faith, and as those who represented Him on earth;
They had their minds made up when they were young, what their testimony really was worth.

God had set His eyes on Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah and Mischael.
So, when temptations were placed before them, by faith they did not fail.
Like good fruit, they were able to live out God's truth even in a foreign land.
God Himself preserved them with His powerful and tender hand.

We live in a Babylon today with myriad voices clamoring for attention.
Compromise is offered today in almost every possible situation.
Like those of old, God gives a heart, to know Him and always honor His name.
Those four had to make their choices, and today we do the same.

Others may not understand our reasons - they think we should be like them.
Those around want us to follow the majority, and be just like other men.
But God is our God forever; He had planted us and won't let us die.
Our purpose in life is established, and He will guide us with His eye.

God looks at us like a building which He built and will not pull down.
He sees us as a productive field that brings bounty out of the ground.
He calls us His own people; with our whole heart we want to honor Him.
And the scriptures of truth declare, "Those that honor Me, I will honor them."

"O God, the people of God may not be popular here, but those who look on them see "A basket of good figs." The testimony I hear coming from others who know them too, is one that honors Thee. Bless them today even those most are not very well in body. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 25

TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF PREACHING

For over twenty years, the people of Judah had heard the preaching, prophesying and warnings of Jeremiah. He had told them repeatedly what would happen to them if they did not stop their idolatry, and the injustice and wickedness

that had taken away the moral fiber of the people. All through the time of Josiah's reign, the king had brought about good changes in the nation, but for the most part of the people, it was outward only. The hearts and minds of the people were not right toward God. Consequently, when Josiah's son, Jehoiakim became king, he opened up the nation to idolatry and all the evil practices the unregenerate people wanted; and they were delighted.

However, that was short lived. Four years and it was all over. Dazed Jews who didn't think anything bad would ever happen, were carried off as captives to Babylon. The whole nation seemed to be bewildered and wondered, "Whatever has happened? Why has this happened to us?" What Jeremiah had told them over and over for years would happen; actually, did happen. The people had heard Jeremiah's warnings so often, and they had rejected it so often, that they had paid no attention to him. It is a typical human reaction to warnings, that if they are given and nothing happens when we expect it to happen, then there is nothing to it. People either discount it to a false alarm, or just some religious crackpot sounding off.

They not only rejected the message, but they also rejected the messenger. It would be hard to preach for twenty-three years and see no results. But a faithful servant of the Lord like Jeremiah, does not give up. He knows God well enough, that he does not shirk his duty and ignore his responsibility. A true servant knows God does what he cannot do. "One plants; another waters; and God gives the increase." It is incumbent on those who serve the Lord, to not give up on the work to which we have been called. Nor should we ever forsake it, even though we get no response, or we may even get a negative response. A call from God is not to be abandoned until we know, from His word or some unavoidable way, that that work is finished.

There were other prophets beside Jeremiah who were sent to the people of Judah to call them to repentance. They went back again and again, early and late, and they weren't listened to either. So, it was not just a rejection of Jeremiah; it was a rejection of God. The "Lord of hosts" made it plain to the people through His servants that it was He who they rejected. The words of warning they heard from His servants, were His words. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar and all those allied with him, were coming to Judah. They were under divine sanction to punish the unrepentant and destroy those who refused to surrender to His authority. They were to take captive those who surrendered, and enslave them as a punishment for their sin. That had been prophesied to them for years, and now, suddenly it happened. God's timetable isn't subject to human clocks or calendars. He lives in an eternal "now" in which there is no difference between a year or a day to Him.

Those who surrendered to the Babylonians would survive and spend the rest of their lives in slavery as captives in Babylon. The next generation, after seventy years of captivity and servitude, would have the opportunity to return to Israel. That would not be because the Babylonians would set them at liberty. Rather, Babylon itself would fall under the judging hand of God for their own sin and wickedness. There would be no remnant of Babylonians to survive and pass on their evil ways. They would be a "perpetual desolation." They would be annihilated as an entity. They were not exempt from judgment because God had used them as a tool for His purposes. They were justly dealt with because of their own sin and wickedness. One act of divine direction and obedience, does not negate the consequences of a lifetime of sinning. Death for sin is the only way sins wages is paid for.

There is a penalty for sin no matter who commits it. Failure to listen to God in the many ways He has to speak to people, results in death. To not listen to, and to disobey the word of God is serious and has serious consequences. It is when we are willing and ready to listen to the word of God, and obey it, that we will find joy in life. Our sovereign God has plans to be carried out, and the way He chooses to do it is up to Him. He may not approve of what people do, but if what they do has the results He desires, He allows it to happen. Those who take matters into their own hands, and act in their own way, may have an effect for good on others, but they will have to face justice themselves for their actions. We need to remember God is in control of history, and is working His own will for an ultimately good purpose.

All nations are accountable to God because He is "the Judge of all the earth." He always does what is right Himself by His just standards of righteousness, not by the counterfeit justice of mankind. The Babylonians had defeated the cruel Assyrian/Egyptian alliance, and were in the right place, at the right time to do what God wanted in relation to Israel. Jeremiah didn't physically go to the seventeen nations he prophesied against to deliver his message of judgment on them. But the message they got, and the warnings were heard. They were responsible to act on the warnings or suffer.

To the north, south and east, all the nations were judged on the same basis as the children of Israel. The judgment began in Jerusalem, and spread out through the whole Middle East. The strong hand of divine judgment would overwhelm them all like a great and damaging storm. That was Jeremiah's message to them. God does not cause sinful behavior, but He does allow what people choose to do, to bring about His plans. God is not petty in anger, nor does He arbitrarily favor one group above another. He is just and righteous in all He does, even though we may not understand what He does and why, at the moment with our limited knowledge of things. But this we are assured of;

God does demand and expects righteousness and justice on earth. In His own sovereign ways, He does what He does, with good intent, and a good end in view.

Jeremiah 25:11. *"And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment: and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years."*

SEVENTY YEARS.

To some of us seventy years doesn't seem so long -
When it measures the length of life.
To those who are captives, seventy years are like forever -
Especially when they are linked with strife.

Those who looked ahead and saw what was coming -
Rose early to warn the people.
But those who lived for sin wouldn't take the warning -
So, God stepped in to judge the evil.

For over twenty years, the warnings were repeated -
And for twenty years they all were ignored.
When one has for years the population entreated -
He will finally warn them no more.

I am thinking of some who for over fifty years -
Have heard the Gospel message of grace.
They attend the meetings seeming to have open ears -
Even have their own seating space.

How long will God's mercy extend itself to them.
God has spared them to hear again
The word of salvation, and God's remedy for sin -
But still they continually reject Him.

For over seventy years I have lived in this world -
Over the last sixty in the family of God.
How thankful I am that when I finally understood
The way of salvation, I then trusted in the Lord.

"O God of all grace, I praise and thank Thee now for these many years I have been able to serve and enjoy my life with Thee. Please preserve me from failing Thee in any way for the rest of the journey. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 26

IT'S PERSONAL NOW

Some parts of the book of Jeremiah are historical in the context to give a sense of when and where the warnings were given in the light of events in the Middle East at that time, and in Middle East history. Other events are in chronological order to help us learn how one thing follows another and the "cause and effect" of the things people do. In the immediate previous chapters, the warnings are given in a topical way to make plain the reasons why government leaders, religious leaders and ordinary citizens have to face the consequences of choosing sin over righteousness; of disobeying God's word, and acting independently of God altogether.

This chapter begins a biographical section of the book of Jeremiah, perhaps with the purpose of the Holy Spirit giving a warning to God's servants in every age what may happen to them if they ignore what preachers and prophets say. However, it is of greater importance to warn those who lift up their hands against those upon whom God has set His hand and His heart. The "powers that be" are ordained of God, but when God "anoints" His servants to speak for Him, both the person and the message they give cannot be ignored or rejected without grave consequences yet to come.

The events recorded in this chapter were near the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, while those of the previous chapter are near the end. The temple messages of Jeremiah certainly had an effect on the people and leaders. Those messages are in effect, summarized in the first verses, and the results in the last part of the chapter. Jeremiah's prophetic words certainly were heard, and he was specifically told by the Lord to tell it all – to every single word, leaving nothing out. When God gives His servants a message to deliver, it is a command. To delete those parts that seem harsh so we don't offend anyone, or to suit the audience of the people, is to repress what God intends to be heard. The Lord's message must be given in its entirety. The way it is given depends on the attitude, the heart and the mind of the one who speaks for God. A harsh warning can produce better results if the person giving it feels it first in his own soul.

Jeremiah has been referred to as “the weeping prophet,” and one can sense the heart-break in the man as he warns the people of coming judgment that cannot be avoided. There was still hope when the temple messages were given, that if the people would listen, repent, turn away from idolatry and evil, and return to the Lord, they could still find mercy and be delivered. God’s basic desire is that all people will be saved. “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” “God our Savior; will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” Both the negative and positive statements indicate God’s love and mercy are extended toward the repentant person, and nation. But spurned grace brings righteous judgment.

Jeremiah’s repeated messages offered this grace, even as he warned of the just judgment of God on those who persisted in the immoral practice of the nation. Leaders were extorting the poor. The wealthy were covetous and wanting more. Government authorities were making unjust decisions. The religious leaders were actually apostate. All of which led to a sinful, wicked lifestyle of the whole population that was their pleasure.

The people had been faithfully warned by the prophets who did not hold back all that needed to be said. There was the offer of recovery if repentance was real, although the word “perhaps,” suggests that it was not likely to happen. This was “the last call of mercy.” Evil in our day is as institutionalized in government and society as it was in the days of Jeremiah. In our changing and changeable society, slavery is absolutely terrible because it is the control of one person by another; but abortion is acceptable, because it is the killing of a child by parental permission. Price gouging is abominable, but sexual perversion is considered normal.

Of great interest to us today, is that groups of people, similar to those who opposed and wanted to kill Jeremiah, have the same attitude toward Bible-believing Christians. The warnings of Jeremiah made the religious leaders and those who followed them, say he deserved to die, because he told them of the coming consequences of their actions. Believers in Christ today are called intolerant bigots to their face and are being spoken against, challenged, taken to court and charged, because they will not accept the perversions and sinful lifestyle that is accepted by the government, religions, educators and gradually, the whole population.

Also, of great interest, is the fact that it was the “elders of the land,” not the leaders in the city, who brought a reasonable sense of decorum to the matter when Jeremiah was charged. As Jeremiah spoke to them, and all those who were there; he again made it clear that there was hope for mercy to be shown if repentance and change was real. If not, there was certain doom coming on the city and nation. Jeremiah was no longer in the bonds of self-pity, but in a calm measured way, told them to do to him whatever they felt they needed to do, but if they killed him, they would be guilty before God of putting to death an innocent man.

Some of the older men, “elders,” from villages outside the city had good sense, and recalled the prophecy of Micah verbatim even though it was given one hundred years before when Hezekiah was king. They also mentioned an event that had just recently happened when Urijah had also prophesied the same things as Jeremiah. He had fled to Egypt, but those who hated his words of prophecy tracked him down to Egypt, brought him back and killed him. That would be fresh in the minds of all those who were there, and maybe some of them were in on that perversion of justice.

It was then that one of the nobles of the city had enough. He stood up and identified himself with Jeremiah, and in essence, told them all to back off, and go no further with their spurious charges. God is able to move the mind and heart of any person, and have them carry out His will against all odds.

Jeremiah 26:2. *"Thus saith the Lord; Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word."*

TELL IT ALL.

He stepped forth with the word of the Lord -
To make sure everyone could hear.
The new king and those who followed his lead -
Didn't want the message that reckoning was near.
So those who didn't want to believe
That pay day was coming on them soon -
Thought they could stop it from happening -
If they shut the mouth of the prophet who spoke of doom.

What we hear may not always please us -
But what we think, is not the point to be made.
If what God's message has to say, grieves us -
We are not wise to ignore what is said.

Those who speak are those the Spirit moves -
To bring correction, and repentance is its aim.
Call a halt to things, consider well, and then choose -
Is what is said the truth, or is he seeking for himself a name?

When the time comes for you to speak for God -
Be clear in your mind what the message is.
Then when you step out to give hearers the word -
You are not speaking your own words, but His.
Do not omit a word that God wants spoken.
Clarify the message so all the people know
God's fellowship with them has been broken -
The only result acceptable is repentance that shows.

There may be a temptation to leave out the hard parts -
And repress what we know people do not like.
But the purpose of the message is to change hearts -
And that a change will come in the way the people take
The Word of the Lord when spoken by a man of faith -
Who knows what he has to say is true,
He tells it all, not omitting a word, and speaks with grace,
That the hearers will do what God wants them to.

“Lord God, may I remember when I speak for Thee to the people, I am not at liberty to say what I want. Help me keep control of my lips as well my thoughts. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 27

THE YOKE, OR DEATH

There are basically two purposes for a yoke. One is to make bearing a heavy load easier by spreading the weight across the whole body, or linking two together to make possible the sharing of the load. The other is to bind an animal or person to a yoke to control them, or humiliate them to accomplish the will of another person. So it was that early in the kingship of Zedekiah, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to make a number of yokes: one for himself and five others for kings of nations around Judah. Ambassadors of those nations were to take the yoke back to their own kings as an evidence of their willingness to be subservient to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. If they submitted, they would live. If they didn't, they would die.

The fact of submission to another, particularly when it means slavery or servitude, is humiliating and considered cowardly. Proud people do not want to do this, ever! To be a prisoner of war is really a surrendering of one's freedom and one's own will to another. It in essence means, "I am too weak to resist. You are stronger than I am." That is very hard to do unless one realizes that danger they are in and the consequences that await them if they do not surrender. That is what a sinner does when they realize, "I am in danger of losing my soul in hell forever, if God does not save me. It is Jesus alone who can save me!" Thankfully, whenever a person comes to that place where they put their trust in Christ to save them, He does that and gives them new life – eternal life, and they will never perish.

Judah had been invaded before and many people had been taken captive to Babylon. A number of young men including Daniel and his friends, would have been in that group in the early conquest of Judah by Babylon. There had been another when an uprising brought the consequences of rebellion. Now, Jeremiah told Zedekiah it was going to happen again because there was no change in the minds and hearts of him or the people. This time it was going to be much worse. It would include the nations around Judah with whom he was trying to form a defensive alliance, as well as Judah. The whole near and middle east would become subservient to the "king of Babylon." God called him, "My servant," because He was using a proud arrogant man to serve Him, whether the man knew it or not. The time came in Nebuchadnezzar's life when he was humbled like an animal before the Lord for seven years.

The sovereign acts of God are unavoidable, no matter how vigorous is the denial of that fact by false prophets and fortune-tellers. It was sad, but true, that the people of Judah followed their deceiving prognostications rather than the God of Israel. A lesson that needs to be well-learned is that a decision to submit to God is a life-or-death decision. God's power over earth, and all that lives on earth, is His right because He created it all for His own purposes. Even though He allows the free-will of mankind to go so far, He alone controls history and current events. To ignore God's will and pay attention to vain speculations and promises of better days ahead, is to perish. To submit to God and obey His word, is to live an abundant life now and forever. God does, or allows to be done, that which is right to Him; not necessarily to us.

Nebuchadnezzar was not a messenger of God, but rather a tool in God's hand to fulfill just judgment on law-breakers, idolaters and those who were determined to live wicked lives for their own pleasure. Stubbornness and self-will have to be eliminated in order for justice and peace to result. So, by using Nebuchadnezzar, God was "making the wrath of man to praise Him." The Lord would allow those who surrendered to the tool He was using to bring just judgment, to live and survive under the bondage of captivity. The nations around would be in servitude, but it would be in their own land under the authority of a foreign ruler. The Jews would be taken away. The message of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, king of Judah, and those who followed him, was to surrender and live! To resist was to die!

False prophets were telling the priests and people that this crisis time would soon be over and everything the Babylonians had taken from the temple would be brought back. Jeremiah told those same people; those prophets were lying to them. They could say that the city would survive this threat and the temple would not be destroyed, but that wouldn't change what was really going to happen. Then he challenged the false prophets to be intercessors for the people to the Lord, and see what happened.

The Lord had told him, not just the vessels of the temple would be taken to Babylon, but the invaders would take the huge bronze laver that was fifteen feet across, and seven and a half feet high. They would also take the huge bronze pillars from the entrance that were twenty-seven feet high and eighteen feet around. Anything else that remained in the temple would be taken as well, before the temple was destroyed. The false prophets of course told the people, God would never allow that to happen to His house.

When people get focused on buildings, trappings, and forms of religion instead of God, they have no real evidence of divine life. Counterfeit Christianity uses outward attractions that appeal to the natural, sinful flesh of man, to take the place of the Lord. Amos, a prophet many years before, had warned the people of the uselessness of distractions which they were looking to for some spiritual experiences. Just because something has a spiritual name, or someone says they have had some kind of unusual experience, doesn't make it right. Amos told the people to prepare to meet God, by telling them, "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live!" The same is true for us. It is the Lord Himself who is to be the true center of our attention and attraction.

Poor ignorant Zedekiah tried to make some alliances with other nations, because he did not want the disgrace of surrender, but he was caught and enslaved as a coward in spite of his bold opposition to Jeremiah's message. True to His word, God had them carried away captives, but He also said a different foreign king would return the temple treasures back to Jerusalem. Seventy years later, it was Cyrus the Persian king, who did that when the remnant returned to the destroyed city.

Jeremiah 27:2. *"Thus saith the Lord to me; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck,"*

YOKES.

For those who choose their way and not the Lord's way
A yoke will be laid on them impossible to break.
Sin does not casually sit by; there's a price to pay -
There are consequences when sin's way you take.

Someone says to a youth they casually know,
"Try this, it will make you into a man!"
Before long that young person begins to show -
He can't break that yoke, try as hard as he can.

To the young adult whose days of education are past;
Now he steps out in business to succeed.
And he finds there are ways to make money fast -
If to the pricking of his conscience he pays no heed.

By the time he is rich and has reached his goal;
He finds he is yoked to covetousness.
The price is high, and he can find no rest to his soul.
He has material things, but abandoned righteousness.

When he is old and is trying to enjoy the fruits of his labor -
He finds he has done so many things; none brings him joy.
He is a stranger to those who love the Lord, and even the neighbor -
When he tries to be friendly, only further annoys.

As the time comes when we look back on our life -
And we know there are only a few steps to the end.

We realize the yoke was heavy - not really light;
All we thought we had gained, we cannot spend.

The knees are bent in youth, and the head bowed low.
The One who told us, "Come," has a yoke to give.
He rises with the yoke on him - and knows,
This yoke is easy, and life is full of promises.

"Lord God, the world has an attraction for the young - I fear for my grandchildren. The temptation to follow the friends they have is very high. Please keep them from yielding to temptation. Hedge them about with thoughts placed in them by Thee of the truth they learned, the righteousness of their heritage and the will of God. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 28

FALSE PROPHET – FALSE PROPHECY

People who don't read the Bible very much, or who only read the parts of the scripture that are interesting to them, and tells them what they want to hear; find prophecy boring and discount it as irrelevant to them. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," is a principle both of Bible study and of the study of history. We learn how to avoid what is wrong when we learn from the mistakes and bad choices of those who lived before us. It is a wise person and a wise nation that not only knows what caused disasters and wars, but also takes the needed time and effort to review ourselves. It is then we can learn what steps to take immediately to change from the course we are on, to that which is right.

Unfortunately, there are educators, politicians, philosophers and spiritual advisors today, that spend time and effort on writing "revisionist history," so they can manipulate the minds of the present generation of young people who live for pleasure. Those "teachers" adapt present practices that are popular to an objective that is deceptive and sinful. In order to suit the immoral practices of business, government, society and even religion, and to allow the lifestyle that people want, to be socially okay; they change the lessons of history and the Bible, to a "revisionist point of view." They are paid to tell the people what they want to hear, rather than what is reality. An audience-oriented message may be pleasing to the people, but if it is not true, then woe-betide the false teacher who misleads the people. A reckoning time will inevitably come. Both he, and those who pay heed to his false message, will suffer the consequences of deception. When spiritual truths are involved, it is not only life-or-death, but heaven-or-hell!

Apparently, there were court prophets like Hananiah, whose livelihood was based on them giving so-called "spiritual insight" to the king and his advisors. This chapter continues where the previous one left off. Jeremiah had a wooden yoke around his neck and across his shoulder as a visible illustration of the warning prophecy he gave. Hananiah, the paid prophet, went to the temple and spoke to the same people Jeremiah had just warned, and said that he had a message from "the Lord of hosts."

False prophets and teachers often use the same language and the same terms like "born-again," "saved," "believer," and such like, as do Bible-believing preachers and teachers. But the way they use these words, and what they make them out to mean, are different. They may be used in a mocking, sarcastic way, or will use them to mean something entirely different than the biblical context teaches.

The second invasion of Judah by Babylon had resulted in Jehoiakim, a very wicked king, being killed, and his eighteen-year-old son being his successor. The young king promptly surrendered and was taken captive into exile in Babylon. Hananiah publicly refuted Jeremiah's prophecy by saying the Lord told him that within two years, Nebuchadnezzar would be defeated, and all the treasures he had taken from the temple would be returned. He said king Jehoiachin and all the captives would be back home in Jerusalem. In other words, everything would soon be back to normal, so don't be upset by what Jeremiah had prophesied. All Hananiah said was contradictory to Jeremiah's message.

Jeremiah was standing there listening, and likely all the priests and the people there, turned to see what he would say to this prophecy that was diametrically opposed to what he had told them. In my mind's eye, I see a sad-faced Jeremiah say openly, "I wish what he said were true!" even though he knew it wasn't. In a way he was in sympathy with Hananiah's prediction, but he had to remind them all that he was not the only prophet who had warned them of "war, disaster and pestilence" that would come because of their sin. For many years, other prophets beside him had warned them but they paid no heed to the warnings. It was God's mercy that had withheld His judgment.

Seventy years of exile had been openly prophesied, but the people and the priests preferred the two-year prediction of Hananiah. False prophets say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." That is ordinarily the message of deception. "Don't worry. Everything is going to work out good!" If we are going to be true to God's word and faithful to

Him, there will be times when in spite of what we wish were true, we have to speak the truth even though it is unpopular. In order to be obedient to God, we dare not compromise His word even though it hurts. The truth may be unpopular, but false hope and false comfort from deceptive words, will bring eternal damnation in the end.

When Hananiah went over to Jeremiah and took the wooden yoke off him and broke it, the drama of the moment would have pleased all who watched. The symbolism of the yoke of submission was gone, and the people believed what they wanted to believe, rather than what condemned them. This is a common response to the Gospel today. People will say, "I don't believe all that stuff," as if their believing it made a difference to its reality.

Jeremiah left without remonstrating or arguing, because he knew that God does what His servants cannot do. Hananiah had not said a word about sin and its consequences. He never spoke a word against the people regarding their disobedience to the Lord. He never called for repentance and a turning from idolatry to the Lord. All he wanted was to give good news. To preach the Gospel of grace, without referring to the need of salvation from sin and its consequences, is to deceive the people who hear the message. "The preaching of the cross" and the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, without explaining why Christ had to die, and why the wages of sin had to be paid – and how, is to not preach "the truth as it is in Christ."

When the Lord sent Jeremiah to Hananiah to speak to him personally, it likely put terror into the soul of that false prophet. Jeremiah told Hananiah, the wooden yokes would be replaced with unbreakable iron yokes. The consequences of a false prophecy would be soon obvious to everyone who trusted in its lie. More than that; Hananiah wouldn't live out the year because of his rebellious words. Two months later, he was dead. One can imagine the stir among the citizens of that city when they heard the news of the death of the popular prophet, and that it had been predicted by the true prophet of God.

Jeremiah 28:15. *"Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; the Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie."*

POPULAR LIES.

There are those in our world who don't care what they say.
To unvarnished truth, little attention they pay.
They want people to feel comfortable day after day -
So, they tell "feel good" lies to them.

The devil is the first one to tell man a lie.
He subtly told Eve she would not surely die -
If she just went ahead and took what looked good to the eye.
And all must die because she listened to him.

There are scary stories parents tell children to get them to behave;
Not admitting their sinful nature is something they gave
To their children, who now forbidden things naturally crave -
It is part of our nature to sin.

"Do the best you can," is the message some tell.
"God is merciful, no one will go down to hell."
These popular lies refuse to admit we all fell -
They say God will take everyone in.

People prefer comforting lies more than the truth.
Plain truth is so necessary when it is sounded forth -
Because through it, is established man's true moral worth -
Facing truth is where new life begins.

Take warning as to where popular lies will end.
When the storm clouds arise and darkness descends -
Into perdition is where popular liars the Judge will send -
Because they wouldn't pay attention to Him.

"Righteous and Holy God, may I never forget that the words I say and the example I set have consequences I am responsible for as a watchman. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 29

SETTLE DOWN, MAKE THE BEST OF IT!

Some things that happen are inevitable. The seasons of the year follow the same pattern, and the hours of the day are not changed just because we change our clocks. Day follows night, and death follows sin. A change of behavior does not mean a person is changed, and a real change does not happen overnight. The prophecy of Jeremiah was

that seventy years of exile would happen. It would follow all the years and generations of Jews practicing idolatry and social injustice in which the rich and noble exploited the poor and humble.

Those who were of the royal family and the leaders of the nation, and those who were notable in the capital city, would be taken as exiles to Babylon. Also, the skilled workers and the artisans were taken away to use their talents and skills for the “king of Babylon.” The attitude of those who were forcibly removed from their homes and businesses would naturally be that of bitterness, antagonism and rebellion. Captives often plan and plot ways to escape, and will not rest until they are back “in control of our own lives.”

It was to those who were already exiled before the final destruction of Jerusalem, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to write a letter. In essence the letter said, “Face it: you are there as exiles for the rest of your lives. The seventy years of national exile is the result of hundreds of years of sinning without repentance or restoration to God. So, settle down and make the best of it. You are not going home to the promised land. You are there for the duration. Idolatry and rejection of God has brought this on you. You made the choice; now you accept the consequences. Make as normal a life there as you can, because you are not leaving there.”

The Hebrew exiles were not in Babylon as real oppressed slaves, but rather as those who had been deported from their homeland. Deportees do not go back to where they were exiled from. They apparently were able to live as they pleased in Babylon with the exception they were not leaving. Daniel became a high government official as well as quite a number of other exiles. He served under several different rulers but never went back to Israel. He likely survived the whole seventy years and more before he died. The exiles were able to have their own homes and gardens to raise their own food. They were able to go into business and some became wealthy men of commerce. They could live normal lives as long as they adhered to the laws of Babylon and submitted to the government of the country in which they were living.

Many Jewish people today have kept their identity as a people, through all the years since they were exiled. They are scattered all over the world in most countries. They are able to own property, be government officials and even leaders of nations apart from Israel. They own businesses and factories. They are scientists and educators. They are philosophers and bankers. They work in laboratories and universities. Many are doctors and health-care workers. Yet many have kept their identity as sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and are prospering after nearly three thousand years away from the promised land. Fulfilled prophecies regarding the Jews are one of the most compelling proofs of the inspiration of the scriptures.

The people to whom Jeremiah wrote were told by God to submit to the authority of the Babylonians. They were to allow their children to marry each other within the confines of Jewish nationality. They were to seek the rest and well-being of the nation in which they were confined. They were to pray for the good of the nation and its prosperity because if it had peace and prosperity, the exiles would also. They were told to not be hostile or rebellious against those in authority, nor should they be openly discontented, because they were not going to leave no matter how they felt.

It was made plain to them, that after seventy years passed, God had His plans that were to be carried out on behalf of His people. He knows the future because He holds the future. His plans for them were good and hopeful. The peace and hope for them in the future would be according to God’s will, not theirs, and it would be with His goals in mind, not just for the sake of their liberty. He would answer their prayers then, and they would be able to find God, and be truly unified with Him in their hearts. He would release them from their captivity and would restore them to their promised homeland.

None of us knows all about our own future, but when we know who holds the future, we can live with the joy and confidence of faith. When that is real to us, each task we do, each day we live, can be meaningful. It does not mean that life will be easy nor will we be free from pain and suffering. It does not mean we will not experience hardship, or that we will not live without opposition and persecution. But it does mean that God has a plan that includes us that will end in a wonderful conclusion in glory. In hope, in faith we call upon Him with confidence as we move through the difficulties of life.

We do not despair because God has promised His presence with us in every situation. We can talk openly to Him, and in grace, He gives us assurances in His word. We seek Him with our hearts unreservedly, and find Him right where He said He would be – with us until the end of the age. We can be in communion with our Gracious Father in times of sorrow, frustration, serious problems and unusual situations – as well as in our victories of faith. He does not fail us. The next one who sits on the throne of David, is the One we know as my Lord and my Savior; my King and my God.

There were those in Babylon among the exiles who were deceivers, dreamers and false prophets; but they claimed they were prophets of the Lord. They fomented agitation and rebellion. They were characteristic of most false prophets who speak "lying words," and it is not uncommon for them to be adulterers and immoral people living immoral lives. When people reject the revealed word of God, those things go hand in hand with their vain deceptive predictions. But they do not escape God's notice. The false prophets in Babylon did not escape the eye of Nebuchadnezzar either, and because of their rebellion, were actually roasted and died. To teach rebellion against the revealed will and word of God will only give a moment of deceptive comfort, that will lead to a long, long time of punishment. God has a plan for His people, and we should live every day of our lives with that before us and never allow anything to make us lose sight of the future He plans.

Jeremiah 29:11-13. *"For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken to you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you..."*

GOD'S THOUGHTS.

THOUGHTS OF GOD'S HEART: *limitless in love; greatest of all grace; matchless in meekness; boundless in scope; unsearchable in wisdom; undeniable in reality; unfathomable in mercy.*

Love longing for expression; grace waiting for appreciation; meekness filling all expectation; mercy without reservation; giving faith for clarification; dispensing wisdom for our edification; letting us live in anticipation.

DEPTH OF GOD'S THOUGHTS: *as long as His eternity; as wide as His infinity; as high as His majesty; as full as His supremacy; as deep as Christ's humility; as lasting as His longevity.*

No philosopher can compare in meditation; no oceanographer can fathom their destination; no astronomer can measure their duration; no writer can describe their revelation.

PRECIOUSNESS OF GOD'S THOUGHTS: *compassion to the sorrowing; concern for the suffering; caring for the lonely; clarifying for the searching; coming for the waiting; calming for the restless.*

He loves me, and to me He is "the preciousness"; He knows me, and for me to live is Christ; He saved me, and as for me- I am His; He lives in and with me, and I am an open book to Him; He has promised to come for me, and I say, "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

PEACE OF GOD'S THOUGHTS: *bringing goodness where there is evil; bringing blessing where there is misery; bringing hope where there is none; bringing light where there is darkness; bringing truth where there is falsehood; bringing holiness where there is sin.*

He is not agitated with all that goes on, and I am content; He is not disinterested in the difficulties that abound, so I will meet needs; He is not in despair with current events, so I will live in hope; He is not without solutions to problems, so I will be ready to be used.

When we pray, He hears; when He hears He answers; when He answers – it is right.

When we seek, He doesn't hide; when we search, He waits for us – it is reasonable.

When our heart is in it, He wants us to find Him; when we call, He listens for us.

When we have no reservations, He is there; when He is important to me, I am important to Him

"O Holy God and Father: I know I am treading on holy ground when I am reading this text of scripture. I would not dare to intrude where I should not go. But I find it very exhilarating to think that Thou art even thinking of me and toward me. I get goose-bumps, Father, just being made so vividly aware of the fact that I am the focus of Thy attention. May I never forget it, and may I always live in the light of it. Amen."

Jeremiah 30

A LONG LOOK

Up until this chapter, the book of Jeremiah is basically a continual warning of coming judgment on Judah that included pestilence, famine, war, captivity and destruction. The next three chapters look farther into the future to the time when there will be the restoration of both the northern tribes of Israel that had been taken captive over one hundred years before by the Assyrians, and Judah, some of whom had already been taken captive by the Babylonians, and others to soon follow.

The first verses speak of the time of "Jacob's trouble," the tribulation that will pass; and then hope will return to "My servant Jacob; and finally, the 'captivity of Jacob' will really be over. The name "Jacob" is used because the future belongs to a united Israel; not north and south. There will be a real restoration of the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the covenant relationship God made with Abraham and with David. The chapter briefly describes Jacob's trouble; Jacob's deliverance; the healing of Zion; the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the vengeance of God on those who opposed His people.

This book of restoration that Jeremiah was to write goes farther back than the covenant made at Mt. Sinai when Moses received the law from God. "The law of Moses" was based on the "if you" responses of Israel to the word of the Lord in order to be blessed. Jeremiah's book also goes farther into the future, to the covenant made with David that the "throne of David" would be established by the Messiah who will sit on that throne. Most of this "book" is written in poetic form which is a means of emphasizing the message to being more than a reciting of facts, to being a message to reach the hearts and souls of people in view of changing that person or nation. This restoration is of God's people to God, so there is no mention of the temple. It is a fulfilling of a covenant relationship between Abraham, a man of faith and a friend of God; David a king chosen by God and a man after God's own heart – and the God of the covenant. There are no dates or times mentioned except the "time of Jacob's trouble." This book of poetry is pointing to a restoration without any end. Therefore, it is bigger and more important than the restoration of the exiles from Babylon.

This prophetic book of poetry has positive messages of hope for the future. There is optimism so that future generations beyond the captivity, and beyond subjugation to Rome, and beyond the tribulation; will know that God is true to His word. Centuries that seemed hopeless, passed slowly as Israel went farther and farther away from God. In this message/book, Israel will be restored to the land God promised. The new covenant that replaced the one they broke with disobedience and open wickedness, will be established and obeyed.

The poem begins with a lament describing the Day of the Lord and the sufferings of the Jews that are yet ahead. The whole world will be convulsed in terrible judgments on men from men; on mankind from creation and on mankind from God. "And except those days be shortened, there should no flesh be saved." Israelis will be hunted and will have to flee to hiding places to survive until the Lord is revealed from heaven. It is in that open revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, that God intervenes, and the yoke of bondage that has been on the sons of Jacob will be broken by the Lord Almighty. Freedom will come to God's earthly people; not just freedom from Babylon, but from "foreigners" who had enslaved them in nations all over the world. Looking way ahead, Jeremiah tells them they will serve the "Lord their God," and the Messiah of the seed of David will be their king. God Himself will save His people.

The sin of Israel cannot be cured by being religious or being good. The wounds of rebellion against God, and the wages of sin are incurable. God cannot overlook sin and its causes and be a just God. People who have not repented of their sins and who have not faced their inability to save themselves, are not ready for God's salvation. Spiritual life and a sinful lifestyle cannot coexist. People who choose sin over salvation are not ready for freedom. That is why Israel as a nation that has been chosen by God as His earthly representative, is not ready yet for real freedom. There is more to come. A person in the same way, is not ready for salvation until they have willingly repented of their sins and forsaken them. It is after that happens; they will be ready to turn in acknowledgement of their need to the Savior.

Sin by its very nature is terminal. There is no cure for sin. Being good; being religious; doing the best you can; pronouncements of forgiveness of sins by other people are all meaningless. They are deceptive attempts to avoid the fact that "the wages of sin is death." Confidence in false cures for sin is useless. It will not stop the spread of sin in the soul and it will ultimately bring pain on the sinner. The only way sin is dealt with is death. How wonderful the Gospel message is to the sin-conscious sinner. "Christ died for our sins...;" "God demonstrated His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "The Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

There was no way for Judah to escape just judgment, Jeremiah wrote in this book within a book; because legal justice has to be served on the condemned. So, God had the right and necessity to allow the claims of justice to fall on "Zion." Also, those who have persecuted the Jews and do as they have done to them, will have the same things done to them. They scoffed at the God of the Jews who left them, but when "Jacob" (the united tribes) is delivered and brought back to "Jacob's tents," those same nations will give praise and honor to God when they see the nation of Israel restored.

The captives will be restored to the Lord. The city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt into the city God wants in its final completeness that didn't happen by the work of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. It has been destroyed and rebuilt eleven times, but when it is rebuilt as a holy city, a stable city; there will be real thanksgiving and joy because the "Governor" will be the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. That will be the reason for real joy. They will be God's people in truth, in heart, in fellowship with Him; and He will be their God in the way He intended when He first chose them out of all the nations. Justice will be done on those who oppose the Lord and the Jews, but it is God who will do it. Vengeance is His prerogative. There will not be a revolt of the exiles or the nation needed against their oppressors because the Almighty God will do what needs to be done in His own way.

Jeremiah 30:22. *"And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."*

MY PEOPLE.

"Jacob's trouble" is coming, it cannot be avoided.

Because of rejection of God and His will, a time is appointed,
When all the world will know God is God, over all the nations;
And all Israel will cry out for their own preservation.

Though His earthly people are now scattered over all the world;
There will be a time after righteous wrath is unfurled -
When there will be a re-gathering of the chosen people of God
Will return to their land and King Jesus is Lord.

However, during this present time there is a work going on.
Though it may be, by most, overlooked now, but not for long -
For when our Lord calls His church to rise up and come to Him -
The world will fall prey to the satanic man of sin.

He is our God now, and will be that forever.
From His safe hands, no one can sever
Those who He has called and claimed for His own -
To share with Him forever a place at His throne.

Presently He has brought us to spiritual life by His grace.
Those He has justified, live their lives by faith
In Him who has called us from being outcasts to sons -
And we are accepted by God because of what Christ has done.

Now we are His people, the great Bride of His choice -
It is delightful to us when we are able to hear His voice.
When he calls us His people; "The Bride of the Lamb,"
We are assured we are in the family of the great "I AM!"

"O God of all grace and full of mercy: it is wonderful for me to know that I am one of "Thy people." The position of being placed, "In Christ," is so far higher than I can conceive, that I am limited to giving Thee my grateful thanks and praising Thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 31

THE RESTORATION

The key at the heart of this chapter is that God reaches out toward His people with kindness. His love for His people is continuous, deep and everlasting. He wants the best for His people, but sin has its consequences and His warnings against sin should never be taken lightly. He is looking forward to the "day" referred to in this chapter, when God brings salvation and restoration to Israel. The response to God's great love and redeeming restoration, is joyful worship that will at last be found turning sorrow into joy. All His people, even the weak and overlooked will be restored when He returns at the Day of the Lord.

It is then the basic covenant relationship He had with the seed of Abraham will be reestablished with all the children of Israel of whatever tribe or nation of which they were a part. That unique people whose identity has survived since they were captives in Egypt and then exiled into Babylon, have been loved with "everlasting love." That has been demonstrated by a lovingkindness that has no comparison. Such incomparable love is infinite in its nature and unmatched in its scope and reality. It is like breathing heavenly air, rather than being filled with dread because of our failure. God's forgiveness, when granted to the repentant nation or repentant sinner, is not by a limited measure. He is justly able to draw us to Himself in love, by His grace.

No longer are the children of Israel in that day, going to be looked at as an unclean woman of the street. In that coming day, they will have a new start in life with the Lord, as an innocent virgin. This poetry addresses the people of the northern tribes in the first twenty-two verses. They have been scattered to all parts of the world so that they have no identifiable existence today. But God "knows them that are His," and those who belong to Him as His earthly people, He will gather to Himself; no matter who they are, where they are, or in what condition they are found. The weak, infirm, vulnerable people who are His, will be inexplicably drawn by Him to the place where they will dwell with their King. They will come there like metal shavings being drawn by a magnet, overcoming all obstacles. It will be like they will be walking on a level, smooth path to where the Lord will be.

Like sheep return to the shepherd when he calls; the redeemed of the all Israel will be delivered and gathered together, where there will be for them, all the fullness of God's provision to meet their physical needs. There will be comfort that will replace all the years of sorrow, and joy will be real then that meets the emotional needs of His people. The sacrifices of peace and fellowship will meet their spiritual needs as they will finally be satisfied with the goodness and mercy of God.

When the northern tribes of Israel, which included the sons of Joseph, Rachel's son, were taken captive; they were gathered at Ramah. From there they were taken away as captives amidst the sorrow and weeping. Weeping at Ramah also happened when the male babies of that area, were ordered killed by order of Herod at the time of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. What weeping has taken place at Ramah! Now however, the Lord speaks through Jeremiah, and tells them of the time when weeping will be past, and their children will come back to the promised land from all different places bringing hope for the future to those who were going into exile. In that future time, sorrow will be replaced by real joy.

The most notable of the northern tribes was Ephraim, and they, along with all of that nation; sank into terrible degrading sins of the worst kind. But repentance and a plea to the Lord for restoration will finally become real in the future. They will be like a person who is "kicking himself" for how awful they had acted; how sinful they had been and how arrogant and unrepentant they had been toward the Lord. The Lord asks two questions regarding those people, and the answer to them both is "yes." God still loves His people, and a remnant will be found who will repent of their sins and return to Him. God has mercy and love that is never diminished for any reason. So, He can, does, and wants to forgive the repentant sinner today and in the future, who turns to Him in faith.

In view of a coming day when justice has been served, and repentance is real, advice is given to mark the way that led them into exile in the first place. It is then they will know the "way back to God from the dark paths of sin." The people of Israel will someday come into the good of redemption. When their dark journey of centuries of being away from God in heart, soul and mind, is truly repented of, then it will be turned into a new day and the remnant will be restored to the Lord. It is then they will again know what it means to be God's chosen earthly people.

When Jeremiah awoke from however God had revealed to him the return of Israel, he looks ahead and sees the blessings of the new covenant. It is on the basis of this new covenant that God forgives His people so they can truly "know the Lord." Where there had been corruption and oppression, there will be justice and holiness. Those characteristics of God will be seen in His people. Israel and Judah will be united as one people and nation. No longer will people put the blame for their own sin on those who were before them. People will be accountable for what they do, without looking for excuses.

The new covenant the Lord has with His people is not going to be "carved in stone," as on tablets of legality, but will be engraved on the hearts of true believers. This is one of the things that happens when a person is born again. The knowledge what pleases God is built into the new nature by the Holy Spirit. The desire to be obedient to Him and be willing to do what will honor and please our Lord, isn't something we have to learn, because that is part of the new nature, but the commitment to actually doing what is right depends on us. This revolutionary new covenant is far superior to the old in that it enables us to know God personally, and forgiveness is a fundamental part of it. This new covenant is as real to those who have accepted Christ as the sunrise is each day.

For us to show and demonstrate characteristics of the new covenant is possible now because of what our Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. Every just claim that divine justice had against us, has been met by His sacrificial work on our behalf. God is satisfied to accept what our Lord Jesus Christ did for us, as a just means of cancelling the debt of sin we owed him and could not pay. So now His law is in our minds, so that intellectually, the principles of substitution are grasped and accepted as a reasonable way for justice to be done. "We love Him, because He first loved us." When it is written on our hearts, it is more than an intellectual response, because it affects our personality, our nature, our emotions and our conduct.

This is what is meant by a personal relationship with God being the result of a repentant sinner coming in an admission of their guilt to put personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That relationship does not come by instruction, but by the new birth and the resultant new nature that God gives us. Then we have a "relationship with God." Eternal life in us is the result of the new covenant and all it entails. The obedience of a child of God who has this new life in Christ, is that it is an internal desire, not an external form that cannot be kept. "The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." The dwelling place of God is not in some tabernacle or temple, but in the hearts of His people.

Now when we say, "Know the Lord," we are not talking about a mere awareness or a nod of recognition toward the Lord, but through obedience and worship, a significant relationship has been formed, maintained and deepened to the place that anything that interferes with it is rejected immediately. This personal knowledge of our Lord is unique to every individual no matter who they are in age, status, gender or nationality. God's promise to forgive and forget our sins is a fact when a person hears God's word, responds to what they hear, and acts in faith to the terms of the new covenant.

God has the ability and right to do whatever He wants with His creation and the actions of nature. He can do the same with people, but in the closing part of this chapter, He makes a promise to preserve His people. He is not going

to do away with nature even though He has that right, and He is not going to break His promise to His people with whom He has made this new covenant. The terms of this covenant connect the Old Testament of our Bible with the New Testament. The new covenant extends beyond Israel to include all people because it is a covenant based on grace, not law, so it is a “better” covenant.

When the exiles from Babylon returned to the land of Israel, the boundaries of Jerusalem were restored and are given at the end of this chapter. Perhaps this was given as an assurance to those going into exile, that God could be counted on to keep His promises precisely in contrast to how they had treated the terms of the old covenant. What a blessing we have today to be able to be a part of this new covenant!

Jeremiah 31:33. *“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*

THEIR GOD – MY PEOPLE.

Year after year; generation after generation – and still the loved ones go farther and farther away. Away from God; away from the way of God’s choosing; away from blessing.

On they go – not looking back to where they came from. No consideration for their Almighty Deliverer. Walking away from their calling; walking away from righteousness; walking away from blessing; walking away from the promises of God.

But they are still loved – loved with an everlasting love. That love has never ceased – never will, and never can. That love provided for them in the past. It has been there through all the years. Yet, it never has been reciprocated. The love of the Lord shone upon them even when they were going the wrong way. That love kept them alive all down through the years, even though they didn’t know it.

The loving-kindness of the Lord draws them back, back – back to Himself. And the time will come when they return to Him. His law will be in their inward parts and written on their hearts. They will be God’s people, loyal and obedient to God. They will know Him; seek Him; serve Him and put their trust in Him.

Engraved on their hearts, not on stone – the day will come when the covenant made is established, and a personal relationship with God becomes real to them – finally.

May I never take for granted the fact that everlasting love has been continually given to me, drawing again and again with the bands of loving-kindness. On this heart of mine is written the words of God’s truth. May I always learn from the people of God in the past, so that I will never make the same mistakes they made.

“O God, my God: may I never lose sight of Thee and the value of the covenant of Thy grace that has been established in me. I am nothing apart from Thee. I have no claims, no reason to ever think I am worthy of the mercy Thou hast shown to me. I do rejoice in the words Thou hast placed in my heart, and I revel in the privilege of being one of Thy people - accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 32

AN EXPRESSION OF HOPE

It is not always easy for us to live in the constraints and restraints of our everyday life with a view toward the future many years ahead of us, and even looking beyond our death’s day. Faith in God and a constant awareness and application of the word of God to us personally, is a constant need each day in order for us to really “live by faith.” To maintain a balanced and obedient life for God now, and yet live in the reality that we are presently in the kingdom of God that lasts forever, is to live life to its fullest. Faith takes the next step just in front of us without knowing the outcome for sure, but it is also a reflection of our confidence in the future based on the promises of God.

When the Lord instructed Jeremiah to buy a piece of land in Anathoth where he was born and brought up, even though it had already been confiscated by the Chaldean army, would take a real act of faith in God’s promises. That was the reason why the Lord had him do it. To buy property was a public matter, and there was a definite protocol that had to be followed as was given in Leviticus. Even more, was the fact that Jeremiah was imprisoned by king Zedekiah, because he had prophesied that the king would lose the country, the city would be destroyed and he would be taken captive to Babylon.

Perhaps even more than those other reasons, why the faith of Jeremiah was so important to God, was the fact the city was already under siege, and mounds were being built up to breach the walls. The end was obviously near for Judah, Jerusalem, the king and the inhabitants of the country. Yet, God wanted Jeremiah to publicly buy that piece of

land from his kinsman. To buy a piece of virtually worthless ground, doesn't make sense if thought of only from human perspective. It would seem very foolish to those who heard about and watched the transaction. "What a poor investment!" was likely a common comment. That is, unless the person who buys the land can see farther into the future than those looking on. That was the point the Lord was making. Trust doesn't always come easy. Abraham had to look beyond Ur of the Chaldees to a future city whose builder and maker is God. Moses had to look beyond the present when he was in Egypt, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. David had to look beyond hiding in the cave of Adullam, to the fact that he had been anointed by Samuel to be king. Jeremiah had to look beyond the captivity of Babylon and centuries of dispersion, to a new covenant with God and a new day.

We have to look beyond what is happening now, to what God has promised in the future. Some things may seem impossible to us, until we realize that "with God, all things are possible." Our faith is not in what is going to happen, but in God who makes things happen according to His will. He worked with and through His people in the past, and He can and does, through His people now.

Everything regarding the right of redemption of family land was done. The shekels were weighed out on the scales. The deed was signed and witnessed to, and both witnesses signed both copies of the deed; and it was all done right there in the prison. Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch, took care of the safe-keeping necessary so that all was done right. One can imagine how those who looked on were thinking in the light of their present circumstances. Then Jeremiah openly stated: "The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, 'Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land!'" I imagine there was skepticism on the part of those observers, but Jeremiah did what God told him to do, in faith and confidence in the wisdom and sovereignty of God. He proclaimed openly his own confidence in the future based on the promise of God, and a new covenant.

However, after this was all done openly, he prayed to God in private and expressed some doubts as to the sensibleness of buying the land then. It seems like he thought it wasn't a wise move to take just then. That is not uncommon to us, because we are inclined to look at our life as believers in view of what is practical at the moment. We need to remember God knows better than we do, what is happening around us, and why. When we take the needed time to think, meditate, read the scriptures and pray; our doubts go away, and our fears regarding the "what ifs" of the future are calmed.

Jeremiah had no doubts about the prophecies God gave him to pass on about the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem. He had warned the people of Judah for years about what would happen if there was no repentance and turning to God, and then it was happening right in front of him. But the restoration after total destruction caused him some doubt. He had affirmed his faith by saying, "Nothing is too hard for Thee!" and he reviewed his confidence in God as it related to the past of God's dealings with Israel – but this? "Isn't this a bit too much to expect?"

In His kindness and grace to His servant, the Lord spoke to Jeremiah personally and used the same words Jeremiah had used; "Is anything too hard for Me?" The answer is the same when the Lord asked it as when Jeremiah asked it. The answer is obviously, "No!" Then the Lord described two completely out of the ordinary things He was going to do. He was going to completely destroy Jerusalem and have the people taken away. Then He was going to establish an everlasting covenant with His people, and was going to restore the city, the land to His people, and the people to Himself. What Jeremiah had done when he bought that property was a symbolic act relating to the promises God had made regarding the future restoration of Israel to Himself.

For all the evil the children of Israel had done right from the time of Solomon on, the people had gone farther and farther away from God. Solomon had built the glorious temple as the house of the Lord to dwell with His people, but he also built pagan temples and high places to false gods. The sins of the people were so great they had to be removed from the presence of the God. They had intentionally turned their backs on God in acts of open and serious disrespect and rebellion. They wouldn't even have done that to their own human king. The sacrificing of their own children to whom God gave life, to false gods right outside the gates of the city, was a detestable, infuriating thing to God who gave life to those children.

With God, eliminating evil isn't the point of bringing just judgment on sin. It is to open the way for good to come, and for righteousness to be established. God's plan is not to abandon His own people forever, but to bring them into the blessings that will be based on the new covenant. "They shall be My people, and I will be their God." They will be brought back to Him in a covenant relationship that will be established forever. Those who live in the light of the future "restoration of all things," live with hope and a sense of expectation in what the future holds. Our hopes are not here and now, but in the future and for all eternity. This time of preparation gives us the "singleness of heart" that makes us love and fear God, and commit ourselves to Him without reservation.

Jeremiah 32:17-18. *"Ah Lord God! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: Thou hast shewed loving-kindness unto thousands, and recompenseth the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name."*

DEMONSTRATE FAITH.

How strange it must have seemed when the prophet in prison,
Bought a field occupied by enemy soldiers.
It would be similar to an older man with body bent and face wizened,
To yield to the Lord, and bear a great weight on his shoulders.
When faith in God is a demonstrated part of our life -
We don't have to wonder if it is too heavy a load.
If the load is the burden of a friend or awful pain in the night,
Then we trust Him, knowing this is the will of the Lord.

There are times the prophet had, and I have had them too -
When people we have spoken to, turn their backs on the instructions.
But I am obligated to give the message all the way through -
And teach fully to them, God's only way of salvation.
We cannot make people believe all the things we say -
Some things God has left to their own choice.
Our responsibility is to plainly show to them the way -
Then they must personally respond to the Spirit's voice.

We may think we have failed when we see no results -
And the listeners turn back to their own sin.
There may be times when with anger and insults -
People walk away from God - even cursing on Him.
However, I must remember God made everything with His word -
And also, He can soften the hardest of men's hearts.
I have to keep on working as a servant of the Lord -
And let God finish in His own way, whatever He starts.

I have heard it said, "The sun that melts ice, also hardens clay."
And this I know by evidence to be true
When there are times, I am concerned all that I had to say -
Those who heard the message will totally eschew.
Then I recall the verse, "God is the God of all flesh,"
Nothing, and no one is too hard for Him.
It is important none of His revealed truth I repress -
But I must demonstrate my faith to them.

"Lord God, before me are two series of Gospel meetings and some teaching meetings for believers. Please give me the messages of truth Thou would have me to present, and help me to pass these on in full fellowship with Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 33

THE LAST CHAPTER: "RESTORATION!"

It is possible for those who are saved by God's grace today, to not realize that we are already participants of the benefits of the new covenant. The Lord will fulfill those promises to Israel in the day of the Lord yet to come. In this final chapter of the book of the restoration of Israel, the Lord goes back to the two covenants of grace He made with Abraham and David as individuals. The covenant of Moses was the covenant of law which Israel broke before Moses even came down from Mt. Sinai. All down through the next centuries when Israel was guided by judges and kings, every generation failed to keep the covenant of the law. We are motivated to keep the grace-covenant by which we are saved through faith, by virtue of the new life that has been implanted in those who are born again by the Spirit and the word.

Even when Jeremiah was still in prison, the Lord spoke to him the second time. This time it was for His servant who was suffering, and knew as far as the people living at that time, everything was coming down around their heads. Disaster could not be avoided. In a message of grace, the Lord gave hope and encouragement to Jeremiah in God's promises for the future. A time of restoration would come to the exiles after seventy years of captivity were passed, and again at the end times when the true Messiah will rule and reign. The justice of God is balanced by His mercy.

The reference the Lord made to him about creation, seemed to assure Jeremiah that if God can, and has created the world and everything on it, He has the authority and ability to do all kinds of "great and mighty things." He has the

right and power to forgive sinners. He can change them into a holy nation of peculiar (unique) people, in spite of all the wickedness they had done. When God's people "call" on Him in prayer, He hears and answers.

Time spent in prayer and fellowship with God, warms our souls, and gets us looking beyond ourselves, suffering we might be enduring, difficult situations in which we are found, or the things happening around us. Prayer takes us to where we are talking to the One who can make any needed changes in events, others or us. When we ask, He is ready to answer in His own way and according to His sovereign will. Intercession on behalf of others enlarges our vision to see beyond ourselves. Supplication puts things in perspective to where we can be assured that needs beyond our ability to supply, are heard by God and filled from His abundant provision. By asking, "calling," with thanksgiving, we acknowledge that we know God well enough to have confidence in Him to deal with the things that happen in our lives that are in His domain. They are beyond us, so we turn them over to Him in humility and faith, without self-will, worry or self-pity. With our heart and mind, we submit to His plans and obey Him.

Apparently, Zedekiah and those who were under his leadership, were pulling down houses, including the king's house, to get material to repair the walls that were being battered down by the Chaldeans. It is against this dark scene that the Lord tells Jeremiah about a time of health and healing that will come. The city and the houses will be rebuilt. There will be a time of cleansing, and there will be pardon that will bring complete salvation and holiness. That time will come when they will believe the Gospel and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Instead of wickedness and punishment; death and destruction; there will be cleansing and forgiveness. Joy, praise and peace will be in the city that will bring glory to God and honor to His name. It will be a complete reversal of all the judgment that came upon them because of centuries of sin and uncleanness. It that future day, the whole nation will again come back into prosperity spiritually and economically.

God's faithfulness to His people is that He will "perform that good thing" which He promised. These will be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the "Branch" of righteousness, who will be the King and Priest of His people. Those scriptures are fulfilled in both the first coming of Christ to be our Savior and Lord, and when He comes again as the King/Priest who will rule in righteousness and justice on the throne of David.

For us living now in this day of grace who believe in Him; He is our great High Priest making intercession for us and maintaining our fellowship with God and mediating for us. We have personal access to our Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest at all times. Through Him, we can enjoy fellowship and communion with God. Because of the new covenant, we have forgiveness, joy and a righteous King/Priest now, as individual children of God. Israel will experience that as a nation in a day yet in the future. We are able to experience as individuals, whether Jews or Gentiles, the blessings of that personal relationship that gives us joy and moves us to worship Him personally and privately and well as collectively and publicly in the "house of God."

We accept a failure rate in doctors, government leaders, weather forecasters, religious leaders – even in parents, probably of 20% or more. How many of us know whether our doctor was first or last in the class? But we accept these people as responsible, even if they don't keep all their promises or fulfill our expectations. But we expect our God to keep His promises, which He does – 100%! Idols and the false gods of science, education, business, material benefits and many more things which people live for and worship, cannot be relied on at all to give what they claim. The terms of the new covenant that God has made with us are absolutely sure! They can be counted on now – and forever!

Jeremiah 33:3. *"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."*

CONNECTION.

Are there events happening in your life that seem too large?

Call on God!

Does the enemy of your soul seem to be preparing a final charge?

Call on God!

When all that you see brings fear,
When there is trouble both far and near,
When it seems like the enemy is coming here,
Call on God!

When there are many doubts and fears within,
Call on God!
When you are being tempted with some private sin,
Call on God!

If you know your will is weak,
If the temptations have reached their peak,
If it is the strength of soul and mind you seek,

Call on God!

When tasks you have been called to, seem so large you cannot cope,

Call on God!

When there is failure you see that's so large that you lose hope,

Call on God!

He is the One who knows every situation,

He is the One who promised full salvation,

He is our everlasting consolation,

Call on God!

“Gracious God, my Father: I thank Thee for being a pardoning God. I thank Thee for Thy great promises. I thank Thee for giving some insight to me as to the future. I thank Thee for being willing to hear me when I call. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 34

BETRAYING THE COVENANT

Chapters thirty-four and thirty-five give a historical appendix to the first major division of the book that goes from chapter two through chapter thirty-three. Warnings of coming judgment if there was no repentance and returning to the Lord, were given repeatedly in different times and ways. Exhortations to take genuine and sincere actions to avert just judgment, were ignored as if they would never happen or as if they were only trivial matters. There were messages telling the people what would happen regarding the exile. The lessons learned from the potter were very clear, but were ignored. Kings, false prophets, deceptive priests and hard-hearted people were all warned. There was even a light shown as to promises of future restoration, but it didn't bring change that was real.

A concise description of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies are now given. Babylonians under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, and the conscripted army of those countries already controlled by Babylonians came down from the north and took all the fortified cities as they came. Two of the fortified cities near Jerusalem, Azekah and Lachish, were the last to fall, so Jerusalem was surrounded on all sides by the enemy. It was when all this was happening around him, that Jeremiah was told to go again to Zedekiah the king, and tell him what was going to happen to him personally. He did see Nebuchadnezzar face to face. He did see Jerusalem burn. He did see his sons and nobles die in front of his eyes before they were put out. He did go into captivity rather than be killed in battle. The prophecy was true.

For some reason, Zedekiah paid attention to Jeremiah and had freed the Hebrew slaves who had been indentured servants because of debts owed. By law, they should have been set free after six years of labor, but that hadn't been happening until the warnings came from Jeremiah. After it had been done, the Egyptians came against the Babylonians, so for a time the siege wasn't as strong against the people of Jerusalem. So, they took back the slaves they had freed. By doing that, they “profaned My name,” the Lord said. That was an act of personal insult against the terms of the covenant that they had ignored. It was a deliberate specific rejection of the word of God. They desecrated the covenant and the God of the covenant as if it were an insignificant and powerless agreement.

Our Lord Jesus revered the name of God when He was here. “Hallowed by Thy name.” God is faithful to His commitments and He expects us to be faithful to ours. Promises made are to be kept. Business transactions, pledges to friends and promises made in marriage vows are not trivial words. Any public vow made before people in the presence of God, carries the weight of obligation as well as privilege. To not keep vows is in essence profaning the name of the Lord before who they were made. People sometimes say, “God is my witness, I never did that.” When such is the case, to not truly have meant it, or not to have intended to do what we said, is to profane the name of the Lord.

To swear using the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to profane His name. To preach anything that is not true is to profane His name. To have a personal agenda and use God's name to support it, is to profane His name. To treat, or use the name of God in any way that is not consistent with His word, and as if it were not important or is powerless, would profane His name. To talk about God in any conversation without acknowledging His holiness and power, or in any way that would belittle Him, would profane His name.

Those arrogant people; including the leaders, the civil servants, the priests as well as the people in general who had broken the covenant that had been “cut” (as in cut a calf in half and walk between the two halves); would be treated that way themselves. Any hypocritical, superficial promises made in the name of God, is profane. In contrast; God is faithful to His promises. He keeps His commitments and expects us to. He wants us to live out what we promise; not just make promises to impress people with our piety. People who betray each other, lie to each other, or deceive each other, will also not think much about it. But God does. Because He is faithful to His word, He expects His people to be true to their word.

Jeremiah 34:11. *"And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name: but ye turned..."*

LIBERTY.

Free from oppression imposed by another -
The guidance for life taught by a father and mother -
Not dominated or controlled by somebody other -
Then those that have that right.

Liberty is a word used but often not the right way.
It doesn't mean I can be careless about what I do and say.
It does mean when I rise to start each new day -
I have the freedom to walk in the light.

If there were no guidelines and laws under which we abide;
There would be chaos and danger on every side -
Results from unrestrained living, there'd be no place to hide -
There would be the danger of a constant fight.

To impose my own will on others without legal or divine sanction -
Would put me in the place where others could take action
Against me for my willful and unlawful attraction
To walk as do the children of night.

To profess liberty to do as I want and ignore God's Word -
Means I am not willing to submit to Jesus as Lord -
And it also means I am making myself out to be my own god
And all moral restraints can take their flight.

Liberty is more than the sound of a broken bell -
It is more than a statue on a harbor isle.
It is the freedom to walk in the light of the Savior's smile -
That is when liberty shines bright.

"I thank Thee, Father God, for the blessed freedom I have been brought into. I am free to follow the signs on the path of righteousness. I am free to live within the guidelines of Thy Word. I am free to follow the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit. I am not surprised how well it works to walk in the freedom of Thy light - because all of this liberty comes from Thy heart of love. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 35

AN EXAMPLE

This chapter goes back in time a few years to the beginning of the Babylonian incursions into the land of Israel and Judah. The reign of good king Josiah was only a faded memory. His son Jehoiakim had led the nation down a path of wickedness and self-will. Instead of keeping the terms of the covenant made with God, they were breaking them, and even going beyond the inherent moral laws that are implanted in every human being. Those laws are in us even though they are not written laws.

It was into this scene of departure and wickedness when the Babylonians had taken over much of the territory, that the nomadic Gentile tribe of the Rechabites, came to Jerusalem. They had no villages or fortified cities in which to live, because they lived in tents. They owned no property which they claimed as their own. There didn't seem to have been any difficulty between them and the children of Israel. They were probably just "those odd people" who move from place to place as far as the Jews were concerned. Because they needed protection from the Babylonians who were taking over the countryside and taking some people captive to Babylon, they came to Jerusalem, and were living there in their tents.

Through those Gentile people, God was going to teach a lesson to His people who He had chosen to bear His name. For over two hundred years they had obeyed the word of their ancestor, Jonadab, to not drink wine, to live in tents, and to not get bogged down in materialism. So, it would have been surprising to them when Jeremiah, obeying the word of the Lord, told them to come into a temple chamber with him. One can imagine the priests, the temple guards and the religious practitioners saying among themselves, "Who does Jeremiah think he is? What's he doing, bringing *those* people in here to our temple?"

When Jeremiah had bowls of wine brought in to the room, and cups from which to drink wine; and then to tell them to "Drink wine!" when he knew they didn't do that – the Rechabites would wonder what he was doing by putting that before them. It may have been the word went out to the people around the temple, "Do you know what Jeremiah is doing? He has those Rechabites in there and is trying to get them to drink wine! He knows they don't drink!" When they refused to do what Jeremiah told them to do, based on the words of a mere man who had died two hundred years before, the people of Jerusalem would likely have mocked Jeremiah – until he turned and spoke to them.

God has His own ways of teaching and impressing on His people lessons that they may not learn in normal ways. How much teaching do we hear compared with how much we take heed to? How often have we heard the same truths over and over, until it seems so redundant, we do not even pay attention to what is said? The Lord arranged a "teaching moment" for His people, by using the example of the commitment of the Rechabites to the teaching they heard from the generations before them. Their fidelity to what Jonadab their ancestor had said generations before them, was still being maintained. This was used as a lesson in faithfulness and obedience to God, which was not there in God's own people. The sins of the people of Judah and Jerusalem was in stark contrast to the commitment of the Rechabites.

They kept their vows to a human leader who lived long before them and had been dead for years. By contrast the children of Israel broke their vows with the Living God who was their present Divine Leader. Jonadab told his family not to drink a long time before the ones Jeremiah talked to were even born, and neither they nor their progeny drank wine in obedience to what he had taught them. Over and over God had commanded His people to turn away from sin, but they refused to listen to Him, and deliberately went their own ways. The Rechabites obeyed family laws that dealt with temporal issues of human life. The Jews refused to obey God's laws that dealt with eternal things and that affected their eternal destiny. The Gentile Rechabites had obeyed the words of their ancestor for hundreds of years, but the people of God had disobeyed the words of the Living God for hundreds of years. Consequently, the Gentile Rechabites would be rewarded by at least one of them always serving God. Israel on the other hand, would be punished by a just judgment. That was why the Babylonians had come and why Jehoiakim would die at their hand.

Who really are the people of God? The Jews had thought it was only them. Even when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, they thought they were "the people." As the Gospel was preached "beginning at Jerusalem," it soon found its way to the Gentiles, and has now reached the uttermost part of the earth. The people of God are those who are faithful to God. It is God's intention that there be faithful people, who will remain faithful to their faithful God. Such people will listen to His word and obey Him. Those Rechabites were used as an example to the Israelites, and they are also an example to us. Even in difficult times of turmoil on every side, they remained true to their family traditions, and faithful to the faith of their fathers, even if it meant being different to everyone else in society around them.

Family traditions can have a strong motivation to succeeding generations to remain true to God and His word. But all it takes is for one discontented relative to reject what they have been taught, and it can have an adverse effect on that whole generation, and consequently, all the generations that follow. It is to be hoped that by hearing the word of God from parents and grandparents, every generation will realize the importance of listening to, and obeying, the word of God themselves. Family traditions and identity, hopefully have a strong and positive effect on generations that follow. When young people finally come to grips with "who they are" as adults, perhaps they will realize the value of what they had learned, and maybe have not completely rejected, from those who cared for them and their destiny. It may be that there could be a return to faithfulness to God as a result.

That can happen when prayer, Bible reading, church life, participation in the work of the Lord and other evidences of living by faith are real. There is strength and courage that give power to live life as God intends when we are faithful to Him. When people drift away from what they were taught, it is very hard to get back to where they have something to pass on to those who follow them. Usually that hope is gone, and the next generation is not only lost to a meaningful life now, but most will be lost to God for all eternity. There is very little we can teach children who have turned away from faith in God and His word. The ones who follow will not likely ever become Christians. They will pursue a life defined by the standards and goals of the world system. And will experience the severe consequences of rejecting God, denying His word and removing themselves from the life and standards of Christian relatives. We are not defined in the long view of life by our nationality, but by our faith. It is in this context we will live – and die!

Jeremiah 35:6-7. *"But they said, we will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever: neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye are strangers."*

FAMILY VOWS.
Many years ago, a man told his family,
"We are going to be different."
So, they lived in tents and didn't sow any seeds -

They didn't drink wine - and committed themselves to it.
The generations passed, and still they continued to live -
Like strangers from another country in their own land.
They stuck to those vows, generations before them made,
Even though they were made to a mortal man.

How telling it is when people are willing to break,
In a short time, vows made before or to eternal God.
Yet if a promise is made, we try our very best to keep it,
Even though it is only a man we have given our word.
Contrast a fallible man and an infallible God;
Which one should we determine to obey?
"God, of course," is the answer we hear -
So why do we not do all that He does say?

One vow is made to a man who will die;
Some were made to those who are already dead.
The other makes a vow to an eternal God who won't die,
Who has a right to expect us to do what He has said.
Hundreds of years have come and passed by,
And still we return to the words spoken by a man of old.
Yet many times we forget or refuse to obey God,
Shortly after His will for us we were told.

God looks on vows more seriously than we;
When God says a thing, it is as good as already done.
He expects, and certainly has a right to have
Obedience from every daughter and son.
He rewards by His grace the ones who obey His will,
And will punish to correct the actions of the others.
The family vows are much less in importance
Then those made to God by Christian sisters and brothers.

Some vows people make are based on petty opinions;
There may be others made of great.
But when vows are made before the eternal God;
Those vows they make are of a different sort.
One just fulfills the will of a man,
Who bases the vows on some petty peeve.
Vows made to God are so important to Him;
It is our responsibility Him to always please.

When choices that change lives arise before me,
I need to remember the vows that I made to God.
Those commitments are such that I dare not avoid,
Carrying out those vows before the Lord.
The family may be scattered to many parts of the earth,
In just a few score years or more.
But the vows made to God will have an effect,
Even when I find myself on the eternal shore.

"I have learned today Father, that even though a family heritage is important with all its quirks and quarks; the response I make to Thy will and purpose for me, far outweighs what is expected of me from ancient family members who have passed on. Give me the wisdom to temper my expectations of the younger ones in my family, with Thy revealed Word. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 36

INDESTRUCTABLE WORDS

When a book or letter is only casually read, it isn't long before the message contained in the writing is forgotten. If a letter comes from a loved one, it is usually read over and over so that nothing of importance in the letter is missed or misunderstood. The same is true in reading the Bible. Many read the Bible quite faithfully but casually; much in the same manner as a history text book, geography, or novel is read. Sometimes it is read to find an answer to a question someone might ask, or to find a way to make a particular point. This is often done by politicians. Religious people may read it out of duty or habit. Preachers and teachers may read it to try to find a passage of scripture on which to hang a lesson or point to be made to suit a situation. When a person knows the Lord and wants to obey Him, they will read the Bible as "the word of God," and will take personally what it says to them and apply its truth to ourselves. It

begins as a refreshing drink of milk, and then becomes our necessary food as the meat of the word of God feeds our soul and strengthens us for the activities of each day.

Chapters 36-38 of Jeremiah deal with the suffering and persecution of Jeremiah, and why it happened. He had received prophecies from the Lord, and had done what God told him to do by passing the messages along to the people. To know what God says is one thing. To apply it to ourselves and pass it on to others is another. The value of the written word is that what has been said verbally, can be repeated word for word if it is written down. In that way there can be no mistake as to what was said. The terms of a contract can be reviewed as often as necessary to make sure all the persons involved are satisfied and each understands what has been agreed to. A written bill of sale has more value than a person saying, "All right. That is settled." God knows the heart of man, and He knows the value of the written word of God. Right from the first words Moses wrote down to the last words John wrote that compose the scriptures of true we call the "Holy Bible," or the "Sacred Book;" these are the words of God to us.

The point of the book of Jeremiah's prophecies being written, was to see if "it may be," or "perhaps" there would be repentance on the part of the people, the leaders and the king. If there was repentance and a return to the Lord, He would spare His people. The righteous anger of the Lord against sin does not shut off the possibility of repentance. At the beginning of the chapter the "perhaps," phrase seemed to be a glimmer of hopefulness that there could possibly be a change in the people. If so, that would bring a change in the Babylonian invasion that was nearing Jerusalem. But by the end of the chapter, there is no question as to the finality of divine justice bringing judgment on Judah.

Jeremiah dictated the words of the prophecies to Baruch, his secretary, who wrote down carefully all Jeremiah said. Jeremiah had received those prophecies from the Lord, so there could be no mistake as to what was told him. There is a curse on those who add to or take away from the meaning of the written word of God. When the writing was done, Baruch was told by Jeremiah to go and read it in public in the temple. Apparently, Jeremiah was prevented from going to the temple at that time. Because it was "a day of fasting," there would be a lot of people there to hear what he read. National emergencies often called for a day of fasting, and likely this was because of the approach of the Babylonian army that had overcome most of the land of Israel and was approaching Jerusalem.

Baruch read the text of the book aloud to the people, so they would have opportunity to repent and turn from their wicked ways to the Lord. Public reading of the scriptures, is an important part of any assembly gathering. The fact of it being read is one thing, but how it is read is another. Paul wrote to Timothy and told him to "give attendance to reading." He was referring to the public reading of the word of God. To read the Bible casually and carelessly out loud in a meeting of an assembly, is to demonstrate a degree of indifference toward God Himself. Respectful, careful reading of the Bible in our meetings, adds the weight of the word of God to the souls of those who hear, so that a serious response is made.

It must have been well-read and well-heard, because government officials wanted to hear it again for themselves. When Baruch read the words of the book to the officials, it frightened them to the extent they looked at each other in fear and came to the conclusion this has to be heard by Jehoiakim the king. The third time it was read, it was read by Jehudi. Whether it was the way he read the words, or the message of the words, he barely got started. He had only read "three or four leaves," when the king took a knife and cut up the pages, threw them in the fire and burned the whole book. But he did not destroy the word of God, nor did he divert the coming judgment because he denied it was going to happen.

This is the last narrative regarding Jehoiakim. His hostility to God and to the word of God by burning the book with fire, was a vain attempt to stop the prophecies of Jeremiah from being fulfilled. Three of his princes realized what the king was doing, and were sensitive to the seriousness of the action he took. When he rejected God's word, He rejected God. When he rejected God, God rejected him, and he died knowing that by burning the word of God, he had settled his fate and his destiny as well as that of his family. His son Jehoiachin, who had a brief three months as king after Jehoiakim's death, was taken captive to Babylon. What a sad legacy to leave to a family on the part of an arrogant, self-centered leader. To ignore God's word, and to deny its power and authority by human defiance, is to come under divine judgment.

To read the word of God and to obey it, brings good news, salvation, light, understanding and blessings from God Himself. The understanding and response to the word of God, is how a relationship is formed with God and maintained. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." To reject and ignore the authority of the word of God, is offensive to God and has serious and lasting consequences. To refuse to listen to God, does not lessen our responsibility to His word. It actually increases it. Anyone who speaks out for God, must be willing to stand up and be counted, no matter what other people may or may not do. It is possible to become complacent and insensitive toward the word of God. It is in the middle of darkness and sin, that the truth of the word of God shines the brightest.

Jeremiah 36:2. *“Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day.”*

WRITE A BOOK.

When God tells a person to write a book, it is important for him to listen.
God does not have a book written for fun, but to teach people an important lesson.
If danger is coming and the people are complacent, a book is one way they will know -
That God is concerned for the welfare of His people, and repentance He wants them to show.

The words of God were spoken to the prophets, and he spoke those words to the scribe.
The information given wasn't to be ignored, it was to bring an end to their pride -
That the nation, from the king right down to the common man, would stop in their tracks and
repent.
So, it was a word from the Lord that could be read over and over, that to a sinful people was sent.

When God chose to put His words in a book; it was not a casual act - it was holy.
And those words when we read them affect our lives, especially when we obey them only.
This is not some trivial message to be taken or left; they are truths to be acted on by faith.
To ignore the Holy Bible is to ignore the Holy God, who has given His Word as an act of grace.

The king of old resented the words that had been written; he cut it up and had them all be burned.
He and his nation suffered and by God was rejected; it would've been if he had turned
The pages of that book, and read carefully every word; he would have seen how to be saved.
Instead he cut and burned what God in mercy gave; and they either died or became slaves.

May I never think that I can live without God's Word; it is truly "my man of counsel and guide."
All the things God intends from me and how His work to perform, I learn when I in His Word abide.
By God's grace alone I will seek out His faithful Word, and learn what the Holy Spirit does teach.
Then when it is up to me to speak to those around, I will have imbibed the truths I seek to preach.

“I thank Thee, O God, for giving us Thy Word. It surprises me that I can understand what I read, even those these are the words of the Living God. I thank Thee for those who in times past were used by Thee to make the scriptures available to me and the billions of people in the world. I praise Thee for this great act of mercy. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 37

IMPRISONED

From this chapter through chapter forty-four. The book of Jeremiah is a historical narrative describing the final days of the siege of Jerusalem. Jehoiakim had been an openly wicked, hard-hearted king who had resisted the Babylonian invasion and was captured, and died on the way to Babylon. His young son, Jehoiachin, was only king for three months, and he was taken away captive to Babylon. Zedekiah, his uncle, was then made vassal king by the Babylonians. It seems like he was a weak, vacillating, superstitious man who would only do what was expedient at the moment. Apparently, under pressure from his counselors who would not submit to the authority of the Babylonians, the people of Judah rebelled again, and the Chaldean army came again this time to completely wipe out any and all who would resist Babylonian authority.

The Chaldeans (Babylonians) pillaged and burned their way across the land and surrounded Jerusalem and laid siege to the city. This chapter and the next one is a historical account of what happened when Zedekiah was king, and includes the account of the imprisonment of Jeremiah. The king and those associated with him, began to see the prophecies of Jeremiah coming to pass right in front of them, but they still gave no heed to the call to repent and return to the Lord. They even called for Jeremiah to come and pray for them. Instead heeding Jeremiah's message, Zedekiah made an alliance with the Egyptians, and placed his hope on them coming to the rescue of Judah.

In emergency situations, it is not uncommon for leaders to call on people to pray to God to get them out of the problem they had allowed to come in. A call to prayer that is not accompanied with confession of sins committed, and a turning away from what caused the problem in the first place, is not really what prayer is. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed. The motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast." Saying "prayers," is simply a form of religious activity that is for public consumption, rather than broken, humbled hearts, calling in sincerity upon the sovereign God who is not moved by superficial words.

The persecution of God's people cannot stop the work of God. The power and authority of God Himself is given in His word. What God says, will happen. Those who oppose God's word and are hostile toward those who speak for Him, will find themselves foolish losers. Truth does not always make people feel good. When God's people violate the

teaching of God's word, there are consequences that follow. Hostility against those who teach it, and a denial of the message of the scriptures of truth, does not change a thing. What God says will happen; will definitely happen!

When the Egyptian army came to help in response to the alliance made with the king of Judah, the Chaldeans who were laying siege to Jerusalem, turned from the siege to deal with the coming threat. It was when Jeremiah was going to lay claim to the land in Anathoth he had bought, he was stopped by the gate-keeper and was accused of defecting to the Chaldeans. Everyone in Jerusalem knew who Jeremiah was and what he had prophesied because he had been publicly warning people for years. Neither the king nor those who counseled him had paid attention to the prophecies he made, but they were looking for ways to legitimately silence him. Now they thought they finally had one.

For our instruction and interest, is the fact that from the king to the gate-keeper, every person in this narrative is known by name to God. It is important that no one thinks they are unknown, just because they think they are not an important person. No one is insignificant to the One who gave them life in the first place. The reason we have been given life is because we have a place to fill in God's scheme of things on earth. We are here to "serve our day and generation." It is "in Him we live and move and have our being." All that we do in life, as well as who we are, is under divine scrutiny. God isn't waiting to pounce on us when we fail, but He has a purpose for us and wants us to accomplish that purpose. That is what our life is all about. It is when we understand that fact, and seek the Lord with all our heart, that He will find us, save us, and use us. It is then we will find, that when we open up our lives to do His will, we have a meaningful purpose in life.

The false charges of the unreasonable gate-keeper, who like those for whom he worked; would be against Jeremiah for His "defeatist message." Those charges were just what the nobles who had wanted his prayers to bring relief to them, were looking for. They wanted his prayers to change events, not them. People who want a superficial Christianity that does not cost them anything, and does not meddle with what they want for themselves; will be hostile to the unvarnished truth. A relationship with God means that we accept the terms of that relationship; not that the other person has to accept me as I am, without me making the changes such a commitment means. To enter into that kind of a covenant would be unacceptable to any person, let alone a holy God who cannot look upon sin, nor does He condone it in any way.

Jeremiah was imprisoned, even though where he was going, and what he was going to do were well within his rights. The accusation that he was defecting was openly and patently, a false charge, which gave the nobility the excuse they were looking for. They severely beat him and put him in a dungeon for a long time. Obviously, the king was not in control of things and was afraid of those who were his advisors. Often those who seem to be openly bold, are just covering up for their insecurities and fears. It is not right that we should despise and ignore such people, no matter who they are. But it is good to be able to discern what people are like and what they really mean when they speak. Often, what they say, they think you want them to say; or what other people want them to say.

Zedekiah was obviously afraid of others, and so secretly got Jeremiah out of the dungeon and asked him a stupid question. "Is there any word from the Lord?" For years Jeremiah had been giving him and all the people the word of the Lord and they wouldn't pay any attention to it! So, Jeremiah told him again what he had told him many times before. Judah would be defeated and carried into captivity. It may be a good thing from time to time, when people ask stupid questions that have been asked and answered many times before, to point out to them their real difficulty, rather than be side-tracked by silly comments and questions.

Jeremiah asked him in what seems to be a sarcastic way, why he didn't ask his paid prophets the same question. Implied, is he knew they would tell him what he wanted to hear. They had opposed Jeremiah's true prophecies of warnings about coming judgment, if repentance and restoration to the Lord didn't take place soon. The false prophets of the court pacified everyone by using the same terms Jeremiah did, but gave the listeners what they wanted to hear, rather than what was true. Zedekiah did give a little concession to Jeremiah in that he permitted him to stay out of the dungeon, but he didn't let him out of the prison. He also had food to eat, even though he remained incarcerated in the prison courtyard.

Unless the heart of a person is changed, nothing of lasting value will happen in their life. Anything that seems like a victory will be short-lived, and then justice will still have to be served on those who refuse to repent and believe the Gospel. Believers in Christ need to remember that this is enemy territory in which we are found. There may be times when all seems good and getting better here in the world, until we look below the surface of human deception and see that the heart of man is getting worse.

Jeremiah 37:17. *"Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."*

SUPERFICIAL WORDS.

“Is there any word from the Lord? Sounds like a question from an anxious seeker.
Is he anxious or is this earnest entreaty? In this case it was neither.
He wanted an answer from another person’s prayer, but the price of repentance would not pay.
The words he wanted to hear were of his choosing; there was no value in the words he did say.

“How are you today?” or “I am just fine,” can be said superficially without any meaning.
It may be an attempt at social politeness, while inside one is mentally screaming.
Facial expression and tone of voice have a lot to do with the meaning of words.
Much of our communication visual and physical, is more than just what is heard.

The Lord when He was here, was moved with compassion as He saw people scattered like sheep.
When He spoke, His words were spoken with grace, and His promises He did keep.
Every changing situation He adapted to, so His words were both salt and light.
People all knew, whether understood or not, all the things the Lord said were right.

To speak to others about things that are important, we must take into consideration;
What I say must be true because the consequences are high, leading to salvation or
condemnation.

A casual or “smart remark” can mislead another person into thinking,
What I have to say may not be sound; it is there for the leaving or taking.

When speaking for God take time to think, and what way to say this is best.
Both the words and the way the message is delivered affects whether people listen or resist.
To say things that are important, use as few words as possible so there is no mistake.
Those who listen and pay close attention, hopefully the right decision will make.

To avoid confusion in a future day, I must be careful with the words I use now.
If I am lightweight and speak like a fool, everything will seem like a vain empty show.
Superficial words make me to be a superficial man, and though I may use words with skill -
When the time comes to warn of coming danger, superficial words their urgency kills.

“All-knowing God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart always be acceptable to Thee. Preserve me from speaking too quickly when criticized; too slowly when a matter is urgent; from using too many words when time is short; from being silent when I should speak. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 38

A TRUE SERVANT

God often teaches us the most important lessons in life, and how to respond in a spiritual and dignified way to pressures, when events around us are really going bad. When opposition is the greatest; from unexpected sources come the best answers, and the most effective help we need. In whatever place or situation, we are allowed to serve our Lord, He often gives us opportunity to serve Him and His people in ways we never would have planned for, or even thought of. There may be an element of fear at first, and then we remember who we are, who has called us, and the limitlessness of our Gracious Father. As we go forward in faith and practical trust, He takes it from there. He gives the needed strength, wisdom and grace to do what is necessary and to bring the results He desires.

Ebed-Melech (“the king’s servant”) was likely a paid mercenary from Ethiopia who had a responsible position in the protection of the king. African mercenaries were sought after by leaders who didn’t trust the people around them. Zedekiah’s counselors were obviously men he was afraid of and did not trust. When the defense forces are weak anyway, and the leaders are known schemers, a king needed someone near him like Ebed-Melech who could see the big picture. When Shephatiah heard Jeremiah’s message to those who visited in jail, he passed it on to the leaders who didn’t have the sense to know they were a bunch of losers.

It may seem strange at first, to think those princes couldn’t discern what was happening right before their eyes. However, it is not uncommon for those who have experienced the miraculous deliverance of God in the past, to think He will always deliver us at the last minute, in a certain way. By experience we have learned that “God’s ways are past finding out.” He has no limits nor lack of ideas as to how to bring about His desired results. A disobedient and rebellious attitude toward God, has consequences that cannot be avoided. Payday always comes. An important lesson is that can and must trust God in spite of the circumstances in which we are found, and in spite of our expectations as to what the conclusion of a matter will be.

To be knee-deep or more in mud, in the bottom of a well, is not the place most preachers would expect to be after forty years of faithful preaching. Jeremiah had spent all of his life as an unpopular, criticized, rejected, faithful messenger of God. His warnings and prophecies fell on resentful and deaf ears. To most of us, we would consider his

work to be a failure. But faithfulness to God, is more important than success, and of far more value than to be popular with the people. For those who work for others, success is what the boss says is success. For those who serve the Lord, the results of Gospel preaching, Bible teaching and plodding labor, are what God says is success, not what people say or think.

Zedekiah was the last of the kings of the Jews, and stands in stark contrast to the coming King. Zedekiah was a weak, spineless man who seemed to agree with anything anyone said at the moment. He would change in a few minutes from wanting to please one group, to pleasing those that were on the opposite side of a matter. He would act on the spur of the moment, and couldn't seem to make sensible decisions himself. This pitiful man listened to what the counselors said regarding Jeremiah's prophecy. It was not what they wanted to hear and believe, because it again was that the city will die "by the sword, by pestilence and by famine."

He had told them they could physically survive if they surrendered to the inevitable, but those men and most of the people in the city rejected the warning message. They would not allow themselves to accept the consequences of their sin, but seemed to think that God would pull them out of the cesspool they had made for themselves, at the very last minute. They could have surrendered and lived. If they didn't but continued to resist and rely on themselves – they would die. The choice was theirs, and the consequences were what they brought on themselves.

For that message that went against independent human nature, Jeremiah was put into a well where he would die, without any human hands actually being put forth to kill him outright. They all knew he was a prophet of God, and would not want to have to admit, "I killed him." It was then Ebed-Melech, a Gentile and a man of courage and moral strength, stepped forward to bring justice in spite of what others said or did. He went boldly to the place where court was being held and justice was supposed to be done by the king. Zedekiah was there to pass judgments on matters that came before him, so right out in the open before everyone, this bold man of character who had confidence in a righteous and just God, put the injustice of the nobles right in the king's lap. This bold declaration from a man who likely had military responsibilities in the government, moved the king to reverse his previous decision. He also told him to take thirty men with him to make sure no one would stop him from rescuing Jeremiah.

God's servants are not guaranteed they will avoid persecution from enemies, or even opposition from those who should be participants in the work of the Lord. There are generally some people who will find fault with anything that goes "against the grain" of popular opinion. They will look hard and find something that could go wrong, and will criticize, and maybe even seek to undermine what could and should be a good thing. Confrontational evangelism is not well-accepted by most professing Christians. "Friendship evangelism" is what they "feel comfortable" with and will not support serious Gospel preaching. Even outreach evangelism to some is not liked because "everybody has the right to their own opinion;" and, they say, God is sovereign and will save who He wants without us interfering in their lives.

It is God's approval we need, not the approval of people. The real reward for faithful service comes from God, and will not always, or maybe even never, be given here on earth, because we may not be able to handle that without pride. It is always the right thing, to do the right thing, even when we are afraid in ourselves, or are afraid what will be done to us. But then, we will have the regrets that come from not doing what we know we could have and should have.

The pathetic king Zedekiah, still fearful of others, had a secret meeting again with Jeremiah. And again, Jeremiah told him he could still surrender to the Babylonians, and he would live and the city would not be totally destroyed. The other choice was to resist and be openly humiliated, the city would be burned, no one would escape, and most would die unnecessarily. Obedience is often hard, but the consequences of disobedience are far worse. Not only that; the choices we make, affect other people, and may be the cause of their suffering and death. Public opinion is not the basic criteria for making our choices. To worry too much about it, is to never find a good and lasting solution.

Jeremiah told the officials what the king told him to say, and it was the truth, although not all of the truth. There are times when it is wise to withhold some information that is not necessary, because it won't affect the outcome of a matter or event. If everything was told, it can bring some bad results that could have been avoided by wisely refraining from letting "everything hang out." To know what not to say, is often as important, and maybe more important than to say everything, because everything may be too much.

Jeremiah 38:20. *"But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live."*

PEOPLE-PLEASER.

He is so unsure of himself, that he hardly knows what is right or wrong.
When pressure is applied, he yields to the one he thinks is momentarily strong.
He wants to feel good about himself, so he agrees with what anyone says.
It is hard to trust in any person who only wants all the people to please.

When we hear what a person has to say, we form an opinion of him.
But when we find out what he really means, it is different than when he talks to them;
Then we are faced with the reality we have a people-pleaser right here in our midst.
So how are we to act and respond when approached by a person like this?

It is important for me to be committed to the truth, and let that person know
That what I am saying to him is true, and I expect him, in turn to show
He is not going to try and bluff me by saying what he thinks I want to hear.
Deception is not acceptable at all, and will in no way harm me or endear.

People-pleasing is a danger to all concerned, especially when there's trouble ahead.
It is a serious thing to do, when people are made apathetic by what he said.
To know something is wrong and keep silent, is unacceptable even in a doctor.
When there are enemies arrayed against us, we want a true person as our protector.

For those who the Lord has called to speak to the people for Him -
To not tell all the truth as a people-pleaser, is really a serious sin.
If the hearers obey the warnings of God through one who speaks His Word -
Even though some will not like what they hear, you will be clear before the Lord.

“Father, please help me to be aware of the tendency to want to please people. I want to be like Haggai, “The Lord’s messenger, in the Lord’s message.” There will doubtless be people who want a different, or watered down, message. Give Thy servant the wisdom and courage to say what is right, in the right way. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 39

JERUSALEM FALLS

Following chronological order, the historical account continues to the last message of Jeremiah in chapter forty-four. Chapter fifty-two gives a further account of this event which summarizes the siege and fall of Jerusalem and the concluding events that lead to the “captivity.” For two and a half years the city had been under siege, and then the defeat that had been prophesied happened. For years Jeremiah had warned the people and lived with their hostility and opposition because they refused to believe the message from God which he had been told to give to them. He had been ostracized, criticized, imprisoned and beaten, but he was faithful to the Lord through it all.

People today do not like to hear warnings of coming judgment now, any more than when Jeremiah preached. Even Christians downplay the justice and judgment of God on people because of their desire to continue to live in sin with no immediate consequences. Then comes a devastating flood, an earthquake, uncontrollable fires, tornados and hurricanes that bring widespread damage and death. Atrocities in wars, famines, pestilence and mindless shooting of innocent people – and people ask, “Where is God? Why doesn’t He do something? Why does He allow this to happen to people?” False teachers and false prophets have a “modern smooth cross” message, as A.W. Tozer wrote. They have a “seeker friendly” sermon that does not cause any discomfort, because the people do not want to hear an open, honest warning of “sin, righteousness, temperance and judgment to come,” which the Holy Spirit gives to God’s servants to pass on to others. What happened to the people of Judah, is happening to us now. History is repeating itself right before our eyes.

In one day, the whole siege was over. The walls were penetrated and the “city was broken.” Babylonian leaders sat in an open court as a council of officials who were now in charge. It was immediately evident to the people that it was the Babylonians, not Zedekiah and his nobles, who were in control of their lives. Those foreign leaders would now decide who lived or died; who would go as captives and who would be left as caretakers of the land. When they came into the city; Zedekiah, his family and his counsel of nobles had fled and gone down to the Jordan Valley by Jericho. In the same place the children of Israel had entered the promised land, the fleeing king and his few followers were captured. They went out where Joshua and the Israelites came in hundreds of years before. This time, they were the defeated people and they were marched two hundred miles north to be humiliated, kept captive and killed. Zedekiah’s sons and his nobles were put to horrible deaths right in front of his eyes. Their death pangs were the last thing he saw in life as his eyes were then gouged out. From there, he was shackled and led to Babylon in disgrace and humiliation, as a blind, ruined man.

Poor people who had nothing, and had been taken advantage of by the leaders of Judah, were now given land to till and have for themselves. This clever policy of the Babylonians when they conquered a country, would leave the impoverished and downtrodden people in charge as caretakers of the conquered country. They would be glad to be loyal to the foreign power that had freed them from the unfair treatment of their own leaders. There would be no reason for them to rebel or cause any problems to the new regime. They finally got from the strangers, what had been denied them by their own people.

It may have been because Jeremiah was still in prison when the city was taken, or perhaps his messages had reached the hearing of the conquerors; but for some reason, Jeremiah was freed and granted favor by Nebuchadnezzar. Two previous times when the country was invaded by Nebuchadnezzar, the people had been warned by Jeremiah. It is likely that Jews who had been taken in the early invasions, like Daniel and others who had been given positions of importance in the government, had the ear of Nebuchadnezzar and told him of the messages Jeremiah had been giving to the people. Jeremiah was in no way a traitor, but was rather a true patriot who knew from the Lord what was happening to his people, and the only way they could possibly survive.

To not tell the truth even when the news is bad, is deception, and it is misleading to the people. Young people as well as the older people need to know there are unavoidable consequences to them personally if they live a sinful life. They also need to know that the nation whose normal lifestyle has become immoral, ungodly and unjust; will have to face the consequences that will ultimately come upon them. We do no favor to people by ignoring the truth or treating it as if it were unimportant. When people refuse or ignore warnings because they are given in a nonchalant way; the messenger/preacher is at fault. When it is given as an urgent truth with faithful warnings that demand immediate action, the listeners are at fault if they ignore the warnings.

The outcome of the whole tragedy, was that Zedekiah became a blind, disrespected, contemptible captive who had been only concerned about himself and his position. Jeremiah for forty years had experienced those things in the interest of telling the truth. Now he was free, respected and delivered because he had believed God. His concern for his people was genuine and his appeal for them to surrender was for their survival and welfare. The king's concern and that of his nobles, was only for themselves and the positions they held.

Ebed-Melech, the Gentile stranger from Cush (Ethiopia) was able to live because he put his trust in the Lord. We serve God when we serve people, and that man, in faith, was able to free Jeremiah from the well and preserve his life. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." To trust in the Lord, and take appropriate action by faith in Him, brings its reward in God's own time.

Another African Gentile from Ethiopia, many years later, left Jerusalem to go back to Ethiopia (Cush), and he too went rejoicing with the blessing of God upon him. "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Favored parts of the world, like North America today, pretty much stay the same as far as the number of Christians who live here. In Africa, South America and Asia, the number of those trusting in Christ are swelling remarkably as they hear the Gospel and believe on Him as their personal Savior. Ebed-Melech likely didn't know too much about the Jewish religion, nor was he able to be a participant in the religious forms they followed, but he did know and trust God himself, and that is what is important in the long run. Forms are just that. They do not give life nor do they change the sinful nature of man.

Jeremiah 39:18. *"For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord."*

IT HAPPENED!

The prophet was faithful, the message was clear;
Those who ignored it or refused to hear -
Were captured and made slaves, just as predicted.
For the choices they made, from then on, they were afflicted.

For many years the message had been given to repent.
More than one prophet to the nation was sent.
To despise and reject the messenger of the Lord -
Indicates plainly you do not believe God's Word.

Many have spoken often of the Lord's promise to return.
That message seems far-fetched to most, and it they spurn.
For some reason they think things will continue just to go on;
Even though God's standards of righteousness for a lifetime they have known.

Warnings of life after death have often been given;
Teaching from the Bible about hell and about heaven.
More and more it is rejected and people think death is the end.
Instead of stopping to reason, they turn a deaf ear to the messenger God sends.

Just like in the past when what was prophesied took place -
There is coming on this world, an end to the day of grace.
What was warned about then, caught the people who rejected;
So, the coming of the Lord with catch unprepared those who neglected.

Many people live in sin carelessly right up to death's day.
"Eat, drink and be merry," is what many of them say.
Others will say, "Hell and heaven are here on earth."
They reject the warning message and the teaching of the new birth.

Even so, we must keep on warning and living life by faith.
I know there will be an end to God's offer of saving grace.
All that God says, will really happen; I know this to be the truth.
Even if only a few believe Him, it will be of endless worth.

"O God, I am made to consider this morning the promise of Christ's Coming and the great loss of those who will not believe Thy Word. I am thankful I am ready for that time or for death. Help me to be faithful to Thee and the people around who we give warnings to. I know these things will happen. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 40

RELEASED

The life of Jeremiah reads like a living account of the words in 1st Corinthians 15:19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Even in his old age Jeremiah had to watch his people who had rejected him and his message from the Lord, either die in the streets or be marched off to Babylon as a nation of captives. He was allowed to go with into Babylon if he wanted to, or to remain with the impoverished people who were left behind on the land to harvest the crops and work the farmland. It seemed like he hesitated a bit, so the commander of the Babylonians told him to stay with the designated governor in Mizpah.

Nebuzaradan, the commander of the Babylonians didn't know God, but apparently believed in the existence of the God of the Jews. He also acknowledged that it was God who allowed them to be victorious over the Jews. He even knew why they were victorious. Jeremiah's message to the people of Judah was easily summarized by Nebuzaradan, "Because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed His voice, therefore is this thing come upon you." People from afar knew that Jeremiah's message had been ignored; they knew the warnings given had been deliberately rejected and that the people of Judah and Jerusalem chose to not obey God.

To know about God, is far different than knowing Him and believing in Him. Many people know God exists, but choose to not accept Him or submit to His authority over them. They don't want to obey His word, so reject the authority of the scriptures in the Bible, and substitute their own interpretations to suit their own interests. A personal acquaintance with God makes the difference between being a real Christian, or a mere adherent to Christianity and whatever form it takes to suit one's preference. It also makes the difference as to whether a person goes to heaven or hell after they die. It is essential to put personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as one's Savior, in order to have a personal relationship with Him who guides us in this life, and makes us acceptable to God.

In the lives of God's people today, we are given choices similar to the people of faith whose actions of faith are recorded in Hebrews 11. Apparently, Jeremiah was free to go to Babylon where he likely would have been accepted by the Babylonians, and could have lived out his last days in a measure of comfort. To remain with those who were poor would mean he would be deprived of most things, even in the last years of his life. He was not in any way a traitor to his people, and he chose to stay and help the poor. There must have been part of Mizpah that had been left livable when the army passed through that area, because it became the center from which Gedaliah, the appointed governor, worked from. It was to Mizpah Jeremiah went.

Soldiers who had fought against the Babylonians and somehow escaped, came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and were granted amnesty. They were told to work as laborers in the harvest and were to be farmers. Displaced Jews who had gone to other countries also returned. They too were to be harvesters and laborers. The caretaking people were to maintain the country but were not to be given independence to live and control their lives as they had before. They were in essence captives in their own country.

One of those men who returned was Ishmael who was of the royal line, and had gone to be with the Ammonites. He had joined in with the others who returned to be subservient to the "powers that be," but his agenda was different. He was sent there by the Baalis, king of the Ammonites to assassinate the governor. When the rumor was told to Gedaliah that Ishmael had come to kill him, he discounted it as a mere rumor. Naïve faith in people when warnings are given is actually foolish ignorance. The heart of every man is naturally deceitful, and even though one who professes to be saved, doesn't mean that profession is real. Change from within is very different from an outward change. A professed conversion to Christ, will become evident soon. The attitude of a new creation cannot be maintained by a counterfeit conversion. The conduct of life may appear to be exemplary but the motivation behind

that conduct is not always easily seen. A person whose words seem good, but whose attitude and bent in life is not all that different from before the “conversion experience,” is not a person to be trusted.

Jeremiah 40:4. *“And now, behold I loose thee this day from the chains that were upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee: but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go.”*

THITHER GO.

Over fifty years ago, a good friend of mine,
Was praying, and reading the Bible to find,
The mind of the Lord, in order to get
Assurance of a change, and whether God would let
Him leave where he was, for another shore -
And God made clear - “Go to Labrador.”

Often when reading of those in the past,
God reveals to the seeker a definite path
To take, when his desire is to honestly choose,
The way to please God, and never to lose
The blessing of living close to his Lord -
God's will is made clear, from a verse in His Word.

The scriptures that speak, when we read in the morning,
May guide us, encourage us, or give us a warning.
When my mind is opened - listening for my Lord to speak;
Then the Spirit gives to me some reason to think
He has guidance for me; a way I should go,
And through verses like this, God's will I shall know.

When my brother in Christ, with assurance and faith,
Packed his bags and went to that northern place -
He had confidence that God, in His holy design -
Had people there to save: his work was to find
Them, and give them the Gospel that burned in his heart -
So, the Spirit of God, a divine work could start.

It is only right, when God's Word we will read,
Should expect to find guidance and instructions to heed.
Uncertainty and ignorance soon fade away,
When we anxiously wait for what God will say
To us, and to all who are ready and willing to prove,
That God will speak clearly to us, when His will we choose.

“Lord God of all who seek Thy will: the times when it is unmistakably clear Thou hast spoken through Thy Word, are very precious moments in the lives of Thy children. We never forget them for they have given us confidence that we are in the way of Thy choosing. Thanks so much. Amen.”

Jeremiah 41

THEY BLEW A SECOND CHANCE

The children of Israel who were left behind in the land, had a second opportunity to yield to the will of the Lord and return to Him in humility and faith. They could have experienced renewed fellowship with Him as privileged people who could begin again their lives of testimony and uniqueness among the people of the world. True, the temple was gone, and all the outward forms of religion that they had carried on without thinking much about who they were and what they were doing. The trappings of Judaism were not evident, and that was likely a good thing. Now, the only thing that counted was what was real between them and the Lord. They had a second chance to get back to the Lord; to obey Him, and to worship Him “in spirit and in truth.” When such times come in our lives when we have failed Him in some way, the “second chance” is really the “chance of a lifetime.” A wise person will face themselves, and in true humility will repent and return to the Lord. It is then we will find mercy and pardon.

It was likely just after the harvest was over when the poor people who were left, had gathered what they did not sow, and reaped from fields that were not their own, that Ishmael showed up. He and those with him had a nefarious reason to come back to the land they had abandoned before. They would not surrender to the Chaldeans and thus to divine chastisement for their sin, nor would they fight against them, but escaped to Ammon. His return, though it was

in subtility at first, appeared to be to take back the country under his leadership, with the help of those other men of the nobility who came with him. Gedaliah had been warned by Johanan, but did not believe the warning.

It is foolish to think that all dangers are passed, when one event has brought us down so far that we have to look up to see the bottom. When someone of maturity and responsibility gives a "heads up," type of warning regarding a person or issue that arises, pay attention and quickly take appropriate steps to determine if the warning is real. Then deal with the problem when it arises, rather than later when things have gone too far. Perhaps it was just courtesy or custom to show hospitality, but when a warning has been specifically given, and especially when a name is associated with the problem, do not welcome a suspected one with open arms.

Gedaliah must have completely dropped his guard, and so all those who were around him, including the Babylonian soldiers, came off the alert, and welcomed those cowardly men who would not submit to divine justice and surrender, nor did they stay to defend their country. The consequences of such stupidity as to show kindness to those whose character was obvious to those who have discernment, were fatal. They all were quickly killed. Gedaliah had been appointed to govern, not to show partiality to those who in the past were considered the upper class. They avoided responsibility in the past. He should have had sense to know they couldn't be trusted in the present.

The atrocity was so complete that it was not even known for two days. The eighty men from the north who wanted to get right with God and were on their way to Jerusalem, even though they knew it was in ruins, must have been just plain folks. They realized God had a place where he had met with His people before, and they wanted to meet Him there. It was in their minds, the conviction that worship and sacrifice was important, even if all that was left was the site that was considered holy. They were on their way there when Ishmael and his men killed them, likely to take what they had, and then they filled a well with their corpses.

When there is no responsible godly leadership, and the people are not committed to following the scriptural guidelines for life, faith, and conduct; there is no loyalty to God and His word. Anarchy and confusion are the results of weak leadership that doesn't take into consideration the possibility of danger to God's people. The pretense of subtle people may be as real as the fake tears of Ishmael. The results will be so damaging, that it can bring the end to a work of God.

What could have been a time of restoration and recovery to the Lord, turned into a time of death and despair. Jeremiah was likely one of those who was taken, along with the women of the court. Older people would not have been able to defend themselves against those armed killers who came from Ammon and were taking them back there as captives. There still was antagonism against the Babylonians on the part of Johanan and those who were with him. They had not submitted to the divine discipline of God, even though they had been allowed to stay in the promised land. Now, even more than before, they were anxious to get away to Egypt for fear of what the death of Gedaliah would bring on them by the Babylonians. The group of people they had released from Ishmael, were made to go with them to Egypt.

Rather than seek the Lord and ask for His counsel, they were still the same as they had always been. They wanted to do things their own way. They didn't want God to rule over them any more than they wanted the Babylonians. The second chance God had given them in the land of Israel, was an act of grace, kindness and love toward them, even though they didn't deserve it. They spurned that, ignored God, and determined to go farther into the world to escape divine authority.

The offer of salvation doesn't go on forever. To reject God's mercy repeatedly, will someday result in the offer of grace and forgiveness being withdrawn, and judgment replacing it. Many people have heard the Gospel over and over again, but instead of repenting of their sin and accepting Christ, they continually reject what they know is right, and accept what is expedient, pleasurable and self-satisfying. This will seal one's doom and is like selling one's soul. It is similar to Esau who found no place of repentance, when felt he was good and ready to take what could have been his previously.

Jeremiah 41:3. *"Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war."*

ASSASSINATION.

They were warned, but the warning wasn't what they wanted to hear.
Those who gave warning knew the enemy was near.
But because what was said was what he couldn't conceive,
He died along with others because he would not believe.

Much that happens in life is beyond our perception.
People we know and trust aren't usually given to deception.
Even warnings from strangers deserves investigation.

Learn from a man of old who ignored warnings of assassination.

We can show kindness and still wisely keep our guard up.
From unexpected sources can come to us a bitter cup.
Character assassination doesn't only come from an unknown man.
It may often start with those who live nearby and close at hand.

When a rumor starts with serious warnings attached -
It is wise to check out the story before we are attacked.
If there is nothing to it - all is well and good.
But if it is true; then take appropriate steps as a wise man should.

False attacks may seem strange to those who want to live in peace.
But when they come against you, be sure and answer with grace.
There may be times when silence is the very best defense.
When these incidents occur; after talking to God, use your common sense.

Not everyone has your best welfare at heart.
But when warned of a danger, a good place to start -
Is to commit it to God, then do all you can do -
Trusting Him to accomplish what He wants from you.

"Father God, most times warnings come from those who care for us. Sometimes things have caught me totally unawares and I am perplexed as to what I should do. There have been times when it has been made plain to me, that anything I might say would make no difference. Give me grace to leave it alone. When those times require an answer from me, I ask Thee for wisdom to act according to Thy will, not my instincts. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 42

WILL YOU OBEY GOD'S ANSWER?

A person's real attitude toward prayer is often made evident when the request for prayer is made after one's mind is already made up. To such a person, prayer really is unimportant or of no value at all. When God's obvious answer is "NO," and we wanted it to be "YES," what will we do then? For one who wants to go into an unequal yoke, and is warned, do you claim "extenuating circumstances?" If the opportunity to make a large profit on an investment comes, am I willing to turn it down? When I have an earnest desire to do something that is good, right and scriptural; if the elders of my assembly tell me my desire is a good one, but I am not yet qualified to do what I desire, am I willing to yield to their instructions?

The desire of Johanan and all the people who were at Chimham, ready to leave for Egypt; was to get a word of "Okay, go ahead," from God. They knew that Jeremiah was God's servant/prophet, and that prophets had a special connection with the Lord as His spokesman. So, it seemed like a sincere request when both the poor and the powerful came together to ask Jeremiah to pray for them. After all, isn't prayer a good thing? Doesn't God answer prayers? Their fear of Babylonian reprisal for the death of Gedaliah motivated them to flee to Egypt. But what they wanted from God through Jeremiah, was a confirmation of the course of action they intended to take and had already chosen.

How sad it is when all a person wants God to do, is to "rubber stamp" the things they have already decided to do. Some will find a verse of scripture, or a part of a verse to fit the plans they have made. When they find something, they can make fit, they will say the Lord has confirmed to them what they are planning to do, but "we want to know what you think." Others will say they "have peace" that this is the right thing to do – and then they will pray for God's blessing on that which they have already decided on their own.

Jeremiah responded to their request in good faith, and promised to tell them the word of the Lord, with nothing held back. The ten-day wait should have given them an idea that what they thought was urgent, wasn't urgent at all. The Babylonians soldiers who were likely in various places around the country, hadn't come down on them. The problem was; they had already given voice to their own condemnation. They had wanted Jeremiah to ask for something they knew in their hearts they didn't really intend to change. To ask for God's guidance with no intention of obeying Him, is blatant hypocrisy. It is insulting to God when He is mocked in this way, and He is not deceived by words from the lips that are not from the heart.

The promise of God to be with them in the place where He wanted them, was full of blessings that were only attainable by faith. He would build them up if they would trust Him. He would make things grow if they planted. He would deliver them from harm when they put their faith in God, not on themselves or others. He would show them

mercy when mercy was needed. He would keep them safe and secure when all around them was strife. All they had to do was: "Trust and obey; for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus; but to trust and obey."

The plans they had to go further into the "world" of Egypt, were because they thought there would be no war or strife there. They thought they would have plenty to eat, and their troubles would be over, as they blended into Egyptian society. However, what they had hoped to escape, was to come down on their heads if they followed through with their plans. This reply to them from the Lord through Jeremiah was definitely not what they wanted to hear. War, famine, pestilence in Egypt? That is what they had in their own land! Why would that be in Egypt? Those people had refused to learn, even after all they had gone through, that their sin and self-will was the cause of divine judgment. They did not, and would not believe, what they did not want to hear! All they had endured in Judah would follow them to Egypt? No way!

Dishonesty in prayer is disobedience to God. To reject a God-given answer because one doesn't like the answer, is to disbelieve God, and to deny His right of authority over us. To expect Him to preapprove our plans is an insult to His sovereignty. He is not obligated to do what we want, nor is He obligated to deliver us from the consequences of our own willful actions. When we do our own thing, in our own way, in our own time – we are on our own, without God. What we really should want is to know His will, which we can get from His word, and sincere believing prayer, and then act according to His will, whatever it may be, in spite of what we might want.

Jeremiah 42:20. *"For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it."*

WHAT IS REAL?

They asked for prayer but apparently had no intention
Of acting on what God said; they just wanted divine intervention
To protect them as they went on the way of their own choosing,
Not truly believing that it was their own lives they'd be losing;
For they were looking to the world to give them protection;
Thinking that ancient enemies would make this time an exception.
But alas, they would find out at the end of the day -
God is not fooled by dissimulation when you pray.

The attitude one has when going to God in prayer,
Should be the same as if we could see Him visually here.
To go through the motions even when bowing the knees,
Isn't all that is involved, for our thoughts and intents He sees.
To say one thing to God verbally, and in our hearts mean another -
Is a hypocritical prayer; we shouldn't even bother
To do such a thing because that is not real prayer.
Remember, God knows what is said and meant, and is everywhere.

To pray and then go deliberately into the world and follow its ways,
Makes a lie about everything that we say when we pray.
Not only will we not receive what we in our hypocrisy intended -
We will find that as God's child, His chastening arm is extended,
To do whatever is necessary to keep us from going deeper into sin.
Then when chastening has done its work, we will be willing to obey Him.
The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much.
The hypocritical prayer of a dissembler is that of one completely out of touch.

"I know Father, there have been times when I have not really prayed but have just gone through the motions. Forgive me, I pray. May the prayers I make this day be such that there can be answers in peace. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 43

DOWNHILL TO EGYPT

Some Jews who had scattered to other nations before the Babylonian invasion, returned to Israel; but were now wanting to flee to Egypt taking the remnant of Judah with them, either willingly or by force. The arrogant leaders of that group were really upset when they heard the word of the Lord through Jeremiah. Azariah, Johanan and their arrogant associates must have thought they were more spiritual than Baruch, because they put the blame for Jeremiah's message from God on Jeremiah's secretary rather than on the prophet of God. The previous prophecies of Jeremiah had come true, so they were afraid to challenge him with being a false prophet. Those who had their minds already made up as to what they were going to do no matter what God's answer was, still wanted to find

someone to blame for their own actions. They said Jeremiah's prophecy was false, because this "tried and proven" prophet was being manipulated by Baruch.

To look for God's approval on our plans, and to ignore His revealed word to us, is hypocrisy. But even more, in situations like we find in this chapter; to charge one who gives God's truth from His word, to be one who tells lies, is "making God a liar." "He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he did not believe the testimony God has given of His Son." It is a common attitude among people today, to think the word of the Lord would not be different than the popular opinion and will of the people. To have an agenda already in mind, and wanting answers from God to agree with our plans, is dishonesty. To reject an answer from God because we don't like it, will leave us open to the consequences of self-will and self-centered interests. To blame someone else for not agreeing with our preconceived notions, is the actions and attitude of a fool.

How strange it is, that people are willing to go to great lengths to excuse themselves from the effects of their own faulty decisions. Then to go ahead and do the opposite of what God has made clear and plain to us, defies reasonable thought! But sadly, people do the same today as they did then, and seem to be surprised that the consequences of which they were warned, happens.

One of the most disturbing parts of this whole narrative, was that the arrogant leaders insisted that everyone go with them to Egypt, and do what they wanted them to do. Men, women and children were to go by choice or by force. Jeremiah and Baruch went unwillingly, but likely his sense of duty to his people was also a factor. He knew the leaders were bringing judgment, not only on themselves, but others. Likely they thought that if they had the prophets of God with them, God would look favorably on them. After all he had previously said came true, it seems beyond reason that they would reject his warning and advice this time – but they did.

One feels sad for Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. Forty years of faithful warnings to the people of Judah and Jerusalem were rejected. Forty years of being shunned and barely tolerated by his own people, would have made him a lonely man. Now, after the fulfillment of his prophecies; to have this one rejected and be forced to go to Egypt after having been offered to live in comfort in Babylon – he must have been really dejected. He loved God's people, and they were his people too, but to have this terrible end to look forward to again! How sad he must have been in Egypt, even in his old age. Surrounded by idolatry; his own people unhappy with him; under the control of a godless government – the old man had to live out his last years in an unhappy condition.

Irrational thinking is hard to explain, especially when the consequences of disobedience are already known. Jerusalem was probably still smoking in ruins because of the idolatry and disobedience of God's people. A second chance had been given to those people who remained in the land, and now it had been thrown away. They were acting in such an unthinking way, and now to go to where people worshipped the Queen of heaven, and to trust in the Egyptians to do for them God had promised – it is beyond reason! Sin is not reasonable. It is determined to have its own way no matter what the consequences may be. "A person convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still."

When it comes to obeying the word of God; people come up with all kinds of strange opinions, which to them seems rational and logical, as long as God is not in the picture. People rejected the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here, even after seeing the miracles He performed and hearing the wisdom and words with which He spoke. He was the Truth, and all he said was the truth; and yet He was rejected. Many who preach today think that if people hear a clear and logical presentation of the Gospel, people will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ because it is the clear and logical thing to do.

It is the Holy Spirit who guides people into all truth. We do have to give clear and logical messages, but it is the Holy Spirit who guides people through the word of God to put their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The offer is given, but when it is rejected over and over again – the last offer will come! The last opportunity for repentance for sin and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ will come! Then a person is too late, and will be without God, without Christ, and without hope forever.

The Lord told Jeremiah to put stones in the clay of the brick kiln, as a visible prophecy of the time when the Babylonians would come against Egypt. When that day would come, those who thought they would escape the judgment of God by the hand of the Babylonians would either die or be taken captives. They could have lived in their own land under divine protection, which they could not see visibly but would experience daily by faith. But they chose to disobey God. Willful disobedience ends freedom in Christ; and when that kind of freedom is gone, freedom is gone completely.

Jeremiah 43:7. *"So they came into the land of Egypt: for they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: thus they came even to Tahpauhes."*

GOING AGAINST GOD.

Watch the body language - the back seems to stiffen.
The neck also gets stiff and the eyes seem to harden.
The lips are pursed until the mouth is only a slit -
And the head is back farther into a rebellious tilt.

A first there is a silence as they hear what they didn't want.
Then in quiet, menacing tones they begin to talk.
They didn't hear what they wanted to hear; now they begin to accuse.
And voices get louder until with words, the messenger they abuse.

With stiffened body and voices getting louder they reject the word of God.
Arrogant, self-seeking and self-serving, they turn to the world.
They charge the servant of God with speaking a message that is false;
Then taking willful charge of things, they turn to a fateful downward walk.

Not satisfied with rejecting God's message, they force the messenger to go with them.
God allows this to happen because He is going to speak again through him.
He doesn't always take us out of the world but sends us into it.
Not to become a part of it, but God's truth to the world we commit.

We really do not have the power to determine the outcome of our message.
We do have to be sure that what we say is not obscured with useless verbiage.
Our tone of voice in explaining the truth needs to be clear - spoken with compassion.
Then when the truth has been given, our tone changes as we urge them to action.

When we have said what God gave us to speak, we then have to leave it with Him.
God, in His infinite wisdom, leaves the choices up to them.
We can't go along with what we know is wrong; we have to stand for what is right.
At the same time God leaves us to stay in the world that we might reveal His light.

“Righteous God, it is a real grief to me to know those who once spoke for Thee, now have gone the way of the world. If there is some way for there to be repentance, forsaking of sin, and recovery, I pray Thee to bring it to pass soon, before too many people are stumbled by his action. I pray Thee to keep me from falling into anything that would dishonor Thee this day. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 44

JEREMIAH'S LAST PROPHECY

Jeremiah's last recorded prophecy to the people of Judah was not a message of hope. In spite of all that had happened to them, they had not changed at all. They came to one of the main centers of Egyptian idolatry, and right away were attracted to the worship of the Queen of heaven. They were still the same willful, disobedient, idol worshipping people they had been for a long time. There may have been a temporary change without, but nothing had changed inside their hearts and minds. Jeremiah's final message to them from "the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel," begins with a reminder of what had happened in Jerusalem and Judah was because of idolatry.

It is possible to have experiences in life, in which we know God is dealing with us, and yet not listen and not learn a thing. History repeats itself because people do not learn the lessons from history, nor do they think the experiences that happened to their forefathers will ever happen to them. God teaches us lessons in the visible evidences of creation. His power, intelligence, and order are there for us to see every day. He teaches us spiritual lessons as to what is right and wrong by using our own consciences that makes humans distinct from all other forms of creation. When we observe the lives of faithful Christians, we learn how to live for God in an ungodly world, and still be true to Him in spite of what other people do. In the teaching we hear from mature believers in companies that have been gathered together by our Lord unto Himself, we learn the principles and practices of holy living. We learn as well, why and how we can live for God and be happy in the Lord. The most powerful and impacting way we learn from God is through His word that is unchanging, and yet is relevant to all the situations, needs, and responsibilities we have to God, others and ourselves. But if we do not heed or respond to what we hear by listening with our minds and hearts, there will come a payday of judgment.

This final message was given to the people of Judah in Egypt where they had willfully fled for safety. They had just been there a short time, when they again turned to the licentious, immoral activities of idol worship. Jeremiah reminded them that Judah and Jerusalem were destroyed because of the very thing they were doing. They had gone against God's will by coming into Egypt, and now had gone farther astray by doing the same things their forefathers did. Why could they not learn the lesson? The path they were on would lead to their destruction in Egypt the same as it did in Judah.

When sin is not repented of, it will eventually destroy the person who commits it. To refuse to learn a lesson, or to forget that which we have been taught, means that we will commit the same mistake over and over again until we have learned it; or suffer the severe consequences of not learning. If we can't learn from our failures to not do the same wrong thing again, then failure will come again, and again, and again until we do learn the lesson, or die from not learning it. Past mistakes point us to the right way to go. Learning from our past experiences, will help direct our lives in the present time, and in the future.

The people of Judah who escaped to Egypt, had not learned anything from all that had happened to them. Consequently, they were a joke to the people around them, and the Jews became a laughingstock to the nations. They became a curse and a byword. They are known for being intelligent and very smart intellectually, but failures and despised, socially and religiously. The farther we get away from the Lord, the more confused we will be; and the more despised we will be for professing much; for having much potential, but not living out what we profess.

Even though the people of Judah who were intended to be a remnant in the land of Israel, had made it to Egypt, the same sentence of the sword and famine would find them there. The judicial sentence of the God of justice would follow them, and deal with them there, just as it would anywhere they would go. However, in mercy, God did offer a remnant who had gone to Egypt, the opportunity to return to Judah and survived the disaster that was coming on them. How gracious it is of God to offer salvation to the guiltiest of sinners, if they admit their guilt, repent of their sins, and return in humility and faith to the Lord.

It seemed like any vestige of spiritual interest in God, was quickly lost when the Jews got to Egypt. They dropped right into the depths of idolatry with its emphasis on sex worship. Such evil is sinning against one's self as well as sin against God and other people. People who indulge themselves in evil, soon don't think of it as evil, but it is "the new normal." In fact, they become quite incensed against those who remain committed to the righteousness, holiness and morality of the unchanging standards of God's word and His laws.

One of the most flagrant statements of rejection of God and His words, and a determination to do evil, is in verses sixteen through nineteen. In defiance and boasting, the people of Judah responded to Jeremiah's message by saying they would rather trust and worship another god. The men and women both, who came from Judah, declared openly they would not listen to what the God of Israel said; and openly went to the immoral gods of the Egyptians. They attributed all their troubles to stopping idol worship. Even the women who were blamed for turning to idol worship, said their immoral activities in which they were indulging, was with their husbands' permission.

The consequences for rejecting God's word are clear and very serious. The choices and influence of mothers and wives on the worship, and practice of worship in a family, is very great. Women have a major influence on whether families are faithful to God or not. Man will often yield or cave in to the opinions and religious practices of their wives. It is important for Christian men to stand up and lead their families in the faith and worship of God. Many people will in retrospect, attribute their interest in spiritual things to "my godly mother. I can hear her in my mind praying for me. I can hear her singing hymns as she went about her work." Likely Timothy was most impacted by his mother and grandmother, to listen to the Gospel when he was young, and watch the reality of their lives in daily activities in the home.

Jeremiah repeated for the last time, what he had said many times before. To worship idols instead of the Lord who is the one true God, and to disobey His word; was the reason disaster struck Judah and Jerusalem, and it would come to them wherever they were in Egypt. When people allow idols of their own making, or things others make, into their lives and give them any place at all, let alone in the place of God; they have brought condemnation down on themselves. They will experience adversity, just punishment, and death – separation from God; because they deliberately chose to reject Him.

Events in history bear out the testimony, that what God said would happen, does happen. Pharaoh died by the hands of his own people. The Babylonians came against Egypt and the people of Judah were slain. There was a remnant who survived, even of those who went into Egypt. Baruch was one who was forced to go, but did not submit to the life of the Egyptians nor to their gods. Ebed-Melech also was one who was spared and escaped.

Jeremiah 44:16. *"As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee."*

ARROGANT REJECTION.

The prophet prophesied - the word of God was given - the consequences were made plain.
But they mocked the prophet - rejected God's word - and prayed to the queen of heaven.
They never could say they were not warned - that God didn't care for them.
Both men and women unequivocally said - they were not going to turn from their sin.

There is a pattern here that many follow today - they want a god of their own imagination.
They have no intention of believing the God of the Bible - they live by their own interpretation.
Of events and issues that are a part of life - they write books that revise history.
With an arrogant view of their own importance - they reject what the wise can see.

There is a popular conception in the mind of many, we have a right to do what we want to do.
No one can tell anyone else what is right or wrong - truth is entirely up to you.
If you want to believe there is a living God, that's okay but keep it to yourself.
Their god is the money their labor brings, or an idol that sits on a shelf.

They don't like the idea that sin has consequences, so the way they deal with this;
Is to convince themselves and others that sin is just what you say it is.
They have convinced themselves against common sense, truth is what I make it out to be.
"Don't you dare tell me what we all have to believe, just get away from me!"

So, we watch and pray, and wonder what to do next in order that people will turn to God and live.
We read God's Word and prepare a message, but people refuse what we have to give.
There's not a lot else that we can do to bring people to stop and seriously consider,
That the choices they make now and the things they believe have results that last forever.

When we bring that before people, many will say, "I believe when you're dead, you're dead.
We came from nothing and return to nothing, don't bother me with what's ahead.
You believe what you want to believe, just please leave this subject alone.
We can talk about the weather, politics or family - but if you want to talk about God - we're done."

So, what am I to do? What is left to me when people pay no attention to what I say?
I could think, "Just forget them;" but I know I should not cease to pray
That the Lord would step in, in His sovereign way, and bring about some unique situation -
That will ultimately turn people around in repentance and earnestly seek God's salvation.

"O Lord God, I look around and see so much indifference and antagonism against Thee, that it really concerns me. As I think of what may be coming, I have to stop before Thee and ask, Father God, that Thou would give me another opportunity to see these people that will attend these meetings, coming to true repentance and genuine faith in Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 45

BARUCH

A friend and true confidant, is an important person in one's life when one is made a target of opposition, scorn and rejection. Baruch was the scribe who wrote in book form the prophecies of Jeremiah. It also seems like he was one who could see beyond current events as a historian would, and envision the outcome of the current state of affairs. He had actually entered into Jeremiah's life and work for the Lord, so that he too was experiencing the same grief and sorrow that he was writing about. On at least one occasion, he was instructed to stand in the temple and read out loud to the people what he had been told to write down. It was at that time the message of the Lord recorded in this chapter came to him through Jeremiah.

Baruch was also a trusted companion. Jeremiah was to commit the deeds to the property he bought at Anathoth, to Baruch for safe-keeping. A person who can be trusted to write exactly what you say without adding to it or taking from it the impact of the message, is a very special person. When he can be trusted to take responsibility for important legal documents, that indicates his integrity is unquestioned. When that person can "weep with them who weep," he is not a pretender. When such a person is not seeking a high public profile, he has real character. When he is able to "play second fiddle well," that person is invaluable in the work of the Lord. He is doing what he does, "as unto the Lord."

Baruch's brother, Seraiah, was high up in the court of Zedekiah the king, so perhaps Baruch could have had a high government position of some kind. But he looked beyond position, and maybe even dreams of greatness in the king's palace, and saw the real dangers that were coming upon the nation. He took his place alongside of Jeremiah, and likely alienated those with whom his brother was associated; especially when he publicly read the damning prophecy in the temple. There is a cost to faith in God, and to faithfulness to the servants of the Lord. To look at a nation, an assembly of God's people and an individual through the eyes of the Lord, is evidence of a person who can be trusted with important things.

The events of this chapter likely took place right after Baruch read the book out loud in the temple. Jeremiah was not popular at all among the people, and those in leadership were out to get him. Baruch was associated with Jeremiah

for a long time as his secretary, writing of judgments that were coming, as well as of the difficulties Jeremiah was going through. So, it seems like Baruch was upset at the way things were going and was wondering what he was getting out of all the tension he was under.

It had been his work to write down what God told Jeremiah about the people, the nation, the king and about Jeremiah himself. In his condition of sorrow and uncertainty, it must have startled Baruch, when Jeremiah told him, "The Lord, the God of Israel," had something to say to him, to Baruch, personally! He had to dictate in words his own thoughts, and would have realized the Lord knew every word he wrote, and every thought that had entered his mind. Our every thought and intention, as well as our every word and action, is known to the Lord who made us. How important it is for us to bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." That obedience would then be genuine, not just outward actions! How grateful we should be to know that our Lord Jesus knows, and is "touched" by all that is a concern to us: our sickness, our losses, our grief, our pain – He knows and cares for us!

Our joy can be restored to us when we look to Him; serve Him with our hearts; keep our minds stayed on Him. If we look at what is happening to us, and focus our attention on those things, we will be frustrated and discouraged. Let us be conscious of all we have that is good and profitable, rather than those things that are bad and cause us grief. To be able to write words that may be used to testify to God's grace and bring blessings and benefit to others; is a wonderful privilege.

The Lord told Jeremiah to tell Baruch, to not look for recognition from people. Do not seek a high position like his brother had in the government. The nation was condemned, and the king and his men would all be taken captives or killed. This world in which we live, is condemned. There is unavoidable judgment coming on everything we see around us. We have to look higher where we can see "things that are above." That is where we are to set our affections. Baruch was assured by the Lord Himself that he would not die with those who had rejected the Lord.

We are not promised a smooth road to travel through life. Nor are we guaranteed freedom from pain and suffering when we serve the Lord. What God has promised, is to be with us when trials and difficulties surround us and come on us. He is our refuge and strength. He is our support and our comfort. He will not leave or forsake us. He is our helper and our guide through the difficulties and potential discouragements. Let us focus our minds and hearts on Him.

Jeremiah 45:5. *"And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not; for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all the places whither thou goest."*

UNPOPULAR.

When called to serve in the things of God, there is a simple fact to face.
A few people around may be glad to see you, but most will walk away
Because what you say and do, and the Person you represent,
Are contrary to what most folks want for themselves; you they will resent.

There are times when one is wise to stop and consider what he is doing;
And take the time to see where we have been and where we plan on going.
Because if I am seeking great things for myself, my motives are all wrong.
The simple truth is God has a principle: in my weakness, He is strong.

It is true that there are times when we resent the criticism of others.
The messages we are called to give, offends some sisters and brothers.
You know they are trying to avoid you, and may refuse to shake your hand.
And you feel bad about it because one is just a man.

It is God we are called to serve; He is the focus of our labor.
One of the ways we actually serve Him is by sincerely loving our neighbor.
He may not really appreciate us and never show any kindness back.
But the assurance one is doing right for God, makes up for anything we lack.

There is a burden upon us that other people do not have.
We know what is ahead of those who perish, and what they could've had.
We do not have the power to make other people change.
It is enough that we fulfill the work we do in Jesus' name.

"Father, I am thinking of those we will make connection with today and who we are preparing to connect with tomorrow. I really don't know how they will react but I do want to be in full fellowship with Thee in all I do and say. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 46

JUDGMENT ON EGYPT

The next six chapters in Jeremiah are warnings to ten nations that were neighbors to the people of Israel and Judah. These are prophetic indictments of Gentile nations that remind us that God is the God of all nations, not just the Hebrew nations. Sin is sin before God, no matter who a person or nation is. Judgment against sin had to be carried out, and God does this in a righteous way. "Be sure your sin will find you out," is not just a plaque to be hung on a wall, but is a decree of holy justice.

These prophecies relating to other nations are not given in chronological order in the book of Jeremiah. The first prophetic warning against Egypt likely fits in chapter twenty-five, shortly after king Josiah was killed by the Egyptians. The Egyptians made Jehoiakim their puppet king over Judah, and it is in that context, with the background of what seemed to be a victorious Egypt, that this prophecy is made. God used the nations around Judah and Israel to judge His own people, but that did not mean that He would not judge those same nations for their own idolatry and evil ways.

God has plans for the world, and He "would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." He has chosen the Jews to be His earthly representatives, but "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..." Because He is holy, He does not tolerate sin, and He deals with it with justice and fairness, not with prejudice and revenge. The divine standards of justice and morality did not begin when Moses got the commandments at Mt. Sinai. They have always been in place in humanity, right from the beginning.

The battle scene in this chapter is that of perhaps the greatest and most important one in the history of the ancient Middle East. The Egyptians had come north overcoming nations on the way to present-day Syria. It was there the army of Nebuchadnezzar met and defeated them. The Egyptians panicked and fled. They appeared invincible when they came north, but by the time the battle was over, Egypt had crumbled, because God was judging them and those who had joined them in alliances. One of those nations was Judah that had turned back into idolatry after the death of Josiah who had been killed by the Egyptians.

The Egyptian army relied a lot on mercenaries who were paid professional soldiers from other African nations, but it appears that there may have been some Greeks who are called Lydians. When the mercenaries were defeated and fled, the Babylonians came against Egypt like a swarm of grasshoppers. God was using one Gentile nation to bring judgment against another. God did not excuse their idol worship just because they were Gentiles. All idolatry is against God who has made every person conscious of God, whether they like to admit it or not. To substitute the living God with an idol made by the imagination of man, is an affront and an insult to "The God in whose hand thy breath is." To not glorify God, and to not believe in Him, is full reason for divine justice to be carried out against those who oppose the living God.

God punished people for positive reasons. He wants people to return to Him and to the purpose for which people have been created. When people will do that, He will have mercy in them and show them the riches of His grace. God does not punish people without a just cause. His purpose is to correct people for their willful ways, and to cleanse them from the cause and consequences of their sin. "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." In His sovereign dealing with individuals and nations, He has in mind purification and salvation as the objective. His love and justice are consistent with His holy character, and they are demonstrated to individuals and nations all over the world.

"There is no respect of persons with God," neither when it comes to sin or when it comes to salvation. "In every nation, he that feareth [God], and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." Peace and justice on earth, depends on people submitting to the gracious Ruler. Instead of armies to carry out His judgments on sinful men and nations, the sovereign Lord will bring to pass what is needed in a future day. Men have been determined to do things their own way to bring what they think is utopian conditions, and they all have and will fail. When all has been tried and has failed, then the King will reign in righteousness.

In the middle of all the turmoil and international chaos, both in the past and in the present; the Lord comforts His own people. He sustains and protects them in the midst of all that is going on around them. He does not promise to take them out of all that is happening, but keeps us by His power in it all. God has saved us, and He is with us. We deserved judgment just like everyone else, but He has shown us grace to which we have responded by faith. We should be condemned and lost forever because of our sins, but He has justly dealt with our sin-problem through our Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for our sins. Justice and judgment have been done on our behalf. It will be done in nations like as has happened to Egypt.

Jeremiah 46:28. *"Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished."*

LEGITIMATE REASONS.

Called with a holy calling, the nation stands unique - alone
Surrounding it, tempting it with their ways - and religion
Other nations; not satisfied to see it exist - different
Threats and opposition; temptations put before it - real attractions
Great numbers compared to us and we wonder - are we wrong?
Turmoil all around, and in others - great changes
What was once wrong is now right, or at least okay - lost standards
Integrity is an opposition to advancement - "It's no big deal!"
Ethics that guided generations unto this time - forgotten
The honor of righteous living and moral righteousness - an impediment
Respect and reverence laughed at and replaced - advancement
Faith considered a hindrance to science and knowledge - foolishness

God steps in to make Himself known - what is happening?
Weather changes; "natural disasters," unnatural events - awakening
Alliances form that threaten and then fall apart - men's plans
A few, reach for "The Holy Book" and read its message - holy fear
Quiet voices long unheard by the clamor, still speak - a few listen
Messages easily understood but seriously convicting - conscience speaks
Guilt long suppressed is faced and a halt is made - repentance
Grace long ignored, now clarifies the truth - a solution
Faith long focused in the wrong places is directed - to a Person
A voice long since the sound of foolish blather, calls out - in confession
A heart so hardened now is melted to tears - by Love
The lost one is found and joins with others - a peculiar people.

"Lord God of grace and longsuffering: Jacob still is wondering - and floundering. But I thank Thee for this spiritual nation that I am part of. It has personality imparted by Thee. Whether a field, a building and a bride - I am rejoicing with many others at what Thy grace is doing. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 47

JUDGMENT ON PHILISTIA

It is of great interest and helpful in reading the Old Testament to realize there are instances of "Gentile inclusion" in various places, even after the time of God's covenant with Abraham. The Lord Himself mentioned Naaman the leper, and the woman of Sarepta. Here in the book of Jeremiah we read about Ebed-Melech and his faithfulness to God in being faithful to His servant. So, this teaches us, that even though much of the story of redemption is based on the foundation of Jewish history, every person in every nation is responsible to God. It also means that people were able to be saved then and now, by putting personal faith in God, who has provided the way of salvation for all mankind. An interesting book that illustrates redemption, is "The Peace Child." The redemptive analogy is plain to the most undeveloped cultures so that no one has an excuse to not believe in God.

The five cities of the coastal country of Philistia on the "Philistine Plain," became subject to Israel when David was king. Previous to that time, and after as well, the Philistines were enemies that invaded the prosperous land of Israel to take what they needed and could not provide for themselves. When Israel divided into Judah and Ephraim (the northern ten tribes) the Philistines became independent again. When God deals in judgment on nations, it is because of their own sin, not just what they might do to other people. Idolatry, sacrificing of children, immoral activities in the name of religion, forming of despicable images to represent gods were all rampant in Philistia.

When the Egyptians came north, perhaps at the time when Josiah was killed by them, the army of whoever was Pharaoh at that time, also overcame the Philistines. Then an even greater menace came at them from the north as the Babylonians swept over Israel, Judah, Philistia and went on to conquer Egypt. Tyre and Sidon may have had an alliance with Philistia, but that didn't help any of those small countries. The Lord was allowing the Babylonians to be His tool of bringing justice and judgment on Gentile nations as well as the children of Israel. When the conquering Chaldeans were done, Philistia was like a "bald head." There was nothing left of it. The many battles between the Philistines and Israel were over.

People often wonder when reading through the Old Testament, at the dealing of God with sin in nations and in people, compared to what people expect from Him. The difference between God's moral attributes and human behavior and attributes are very different since sin entered, "and death by sin." God's goodness is universal so that all

over the world, every person has their “being” because of His life-giving and life-sustaining power and love. It is because of God’s goodness and grace we survive. God does have a perfect hatred against sin and those who are “workers of iniquity” are up against the righteousness and holiness of a sinless God. He knows what sin is and what it does. He knows where it leads when allowed to go on unchecked. If it wasn’t for God, there would not be a person alive in the world today as a result of human sin.

Holiness is a characteristic of God that always has been, and always will be, demonstrated. His power and holiness extend from eternity to eternity. It is unchanging, eternal and sovereign. Idols compete for human worship, but humans were never created for that demeaning evil practice. God created people so He could have fellowship with those whose hearts are linked in devotion to Him, as He is to us. When holy worship is replaced, God-centeredness is lost and the power to transform human life into that which is good and right, is also lost. God is impartial in His offer of salvation and in dealing with those who deliberately reject that offer of mercy and grace. He is committed to justice and righteousness as the basis of rule. They are the balance to His mercy and His truth. Long-suffering, balances the necessity of judgment in that God is “not willing that any should perish.” So, he waits sometimes for years, centuries and even millenniums to carry out just judgments that are deserved by ungodly nations.

All God does is in holy love. That is because He is love. He is the source of love in any person. The value He places on every individual far surpasses any love that can be known or shown by people. God’s mercy has been extended to every human being, because it is from Him life comes. His compassions never fail and His faithfulness is firm, reliable and trustworthy. His truth reveals who He is in His dealing with us and can be relied on in every situation to give us the needed answer. When all of His characteristics are considered and even in a small way understood, then we can know why vengeance is His and He will purge sin with all its vestiges, from the future He has prepared for those who love Him. The only way to deal with sin, is to make the consequences of sin final; eliminated so that no pollution or residual effects will remain.

In contrast to the attributes of God is man’s behavior and attitudes. Humans were created in the image and likeness of God. It was God’s intention that people would be happy and holy. But in order for this to be real and reciprocal, humans are rational and free to make decisions. The positive effects of that would be when we are able and ambitious to do what is right. When people are aware of what is around us, and are balanced and considerate in making decisions, then they can go forward with consistent courage, to live disciplined, trustworthy, faithful lives for the benefit of themselves, others and for God. Such people would be grateful to God and obedient to His words. They would be perceptive as to know what is not right, as well as what is. That would make us respectful toward God and other people, and motivate us to be responsible in all we do.

The negative side of our human experience, has to do with the consequences of sin that people choose. Arrogance and boasting follow many successes. A biased opinion in our own favor, accompanies a haughty and impatient mindset when we interact with others. There is fear and jealousy accompanied with resentment and rude comments, when others exceed our accomplishments. Pessimism, rebellion and a vengeful attitude follow restrictions that are placed upon conduct, because we have an “Up with man (me)!” attitude. Wickedness, ungodliness, anger and selfishness are in the human behavior when God is not considered. All of these things were seen in the people of Philistia, Egypt and the Gentile nations as well as in the people of Judah.

For God’s people today: we should make the fruit of the Spirit the controlling guidelines for our lives. Faith and courage will enable us to do what God wants, and to go beyond what is considered normal. Love and thankfulness to God and to others, will make us easy to live with. Meaningful connections with others and imagination to look beyond our eyesight, will help to make us successful in what we are called to do. The common sense to reject what we know is wrong, and an open and clean mind to do what is right, will make a person trustworthy. A thankful spirit and unhidden trust in God, will promote self-control and usefulness that makes life worth living.

Jeremiah 47:6. *“O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still.”*

SWORD OF THE LORD.

The cries are not silenced, there is yet more to come.
Judgment against sin still is not done
Until there is repentance, not just cries of despair.
Turning from sin to God is not sounds in the air -
But is a complete change of mind about ourselves and God -
An honest admission of guilt, and turning to the Lord.
There will be sorrow of heart, not just empty words said.
And a total reversal from the life we once led.
Thoughts will be directed toward God and His will -
No longer will there be a craving for worldly things to fill
Our hands and our time, because old things pass away;

And there will be a new direction in life we follow each day.

Then the sword of the Lord can finally be put back in its sheath.
Then the interests of God's kingdom, the repentant one seeks.
Then instead of cries of rebellion, there will be songs in the night.
Then the claims of sin once yielded to, are now put to flight.
Then the motivation for righteous living is marvelous grace.
Then the one-time alien and stranger, is living his life by faith.
The sword of the Lord that was raised against sin -
Against the genuinely repentant sinner will never be raised again.
The judgment that fell in order to bring the needed correction,
Has done its necessary work and now there is full salvation.
Against the one who has come to Christ, the sword sleeps forever.
The ones who God saves from sin; from Him nothing can sever.

“O Righteous God, it is with praise and thanksgiving I worship Thee this morning. I thank Thee for giving me peace with Thee. The sword of judgment was used against my Savior instead of me and now it rests in the sheath. May my thoughts of worship today, truly be in Spirit and in truth. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 48

JUDGMENT ON MOAB

There are many sins committed by people and nations that characterize the wicked practices of humanity in their rebellion against God. In the judgments on the nations that Jeremiah warned, the one particular evil that stands out is arrogance. This is a common cause of divine judgment through the whole Bible. Being “lifted up with pride,” can happen to young believers who are prematurely promoted to some role for which they are not ready to fill. He may be intellectually and educationally qualified, but not personally qualified to lead and guide people. Experience gained by the mere process of living is essential training for those who lead others.

Human behavior without spiritual life is often disdainful of God. Even though a person may be a child of God, to think they can pick and choose what part of the scriptures they will obey, and ignore other parts that don't appeal to them or that interferes with the practice of life they choose, is arrogance. “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” God is angry at nations that elevate themselves above Him and divine authority. The standards for moral living are given in the Bible in plain words that can be easily understood. There is a very strong anti-God, anti-Christian, anti-Bible movement in this country going on right now. It began with deviant behavior, which became a deviant lifestyle. That soon became accepted by many people and then moved farther to open immorality. From there it has moved to a government-accepted “alternate lifestyle,” that is actually legislated as lawful. That in turn has led to not only immoral conduct as being legal, but not those who do not accept that as appropriate, are condemned. Even the Bible is called “hate literature” by some in authority. Biblical standards that come from God have been openly rejected. No wonder God is angry at arrogance. When such contradiction against divine truth is open and blatant in defiance against God, we wonder how long God will wait to bring just judgment on this nation, and what it will be.

The origins of Moab were the incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter. He was a “just” man, but that did not excuse his actions, nor were they overlooked by God. The descendants of Lot lived in the hills east of the Jordan River and formed their own gods, of which Chemosh was the main one. In their perverted minds, Chemosh demanded the sacrifice of their children to a god of their imagination.

“Sexual freedom” is one of the gods of our day that fills the minds of many. “Personal rights” is another, whether it be the right to abort one's own child, or take mind controlling drugs, or claim those rights over the rights of other people; this had led to all sorts of disorder in our society. “Pursuit of pleasure” is another, and people spare no expense to try to find satisfaction in this present-day god. These gods, and many more have taken over the lives of many people in this nation, and those same people arrogantly demand that the whole society agree with their deviant morals, and consider them the “new normal.” They insist that their rights are of greater importance than God's moral standards that have guided nations for centuries.

The prophetic warnings of Jeremiah to the people and cities of Moab, give us insight as to how God looks upon social, personal and national sins. The idols at Bethel and Dan could not stop the invasion of the Assyrians. The idols of Moab could not stop the just judgment of God on that nation. “The Lord of hosts” was against them because they had chosen to be against Him in their arrogance against Him and His people. Any who raise their hand and head against God in defiance, will be brought down in defeat, disaster and destruction.

Moab was condemned by God when He listed five specific words to describe their sins. “Pride” is mentioned twice. It is not tolerated by God because it takes credit for what He has done or made possible for them to do. It also looks

down on others as a way of making comparisons. To claim credit for what others have done, is to overestimate one's self, and is dishonest and abhorrent.

Arrogance is self-exaltation and a presumption of superiority over others. Conceit has to do with what a person thinks of themselves, and what they think has come from them as accomplishments. Haughtiness is expressions of disdain toward others. To have, or make an honest estimation of ourselves is not easy. By nature, we way over-estimate ourselves, and for the most part, admire ourselves. We secretly think everything would be good if everyone was like me. But when we take time to read the Bible, we see ourselves as God sees us. Then when we compare our accomplishments to what we have freely received from Him, we are humbled and totally ashamed of ourselves.

Defiance of God and His authority, has no greater final impact than a dog howling at the moon to turn off its light. As we read these verses, one is struck with the fact that God grieves over the judgment He must make fall on Moab. God does not rejoice over the failure of people; over their sins and the consequences that justice demands. The demise of a nation doesn't make God happy, but in order to bring about real blessing, He must deal with sin completely. The condition of nations, society and people so they can live as God intends, requires that justice must be done.

In a final promise of grace, at the end of this chapter, God gives a view of hope to Moab for the future. When Messiah reigns and the nations of Gentiles accept Him, they will be blessed along with the restored Jews. The six times God spoke to Jeremiah about Moab, reveals that He is against nations for their sins. Nations that arrogantly oppose God will be brought to shame. There will be just judgment on nations. Moab will be humiliated and destroyed, but a remnant will be left that will bring about a restoration in the future.

Jeremiah 48:10. *"Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood."*

NEGLIGENT WORKER.

He was called to serve in the highest possible calling.
The mantle of the servant of God upon him was falling.
The harvest was plenteous and the field full of ripe grain.
It was his privilege as a laborer to help bring the harvest in.
There were older ones nearby who had labored for years -
And knew what needed to be done and could silence his fears.
So, he started in haste to put his shoulders to the task -
Then suddenly the amount of effort needed, he began to grasp.

The day started early, but he was used to sleeping in.
Others had hours of labor done, when he came yawning to begin.
When the heat of the day came, he went looking for shade.
While he was dozing and resting, out in the field advances were made.
After the heat was tempered by a nice cooling breeze -
He came back with the other laborers intending to seize
The harvesting tools he had previously laid down -
But search as he could, they were no-where to be found.

While he was negligently resting, another laborer was hired.
He wasn't formally laid off, but in essence, he was fired.
He tried God's work to do in his own way and at his pace,
But found he was lacking the power and the needed grace
To do what the labor-intensive work does require.
He could not do what was needed without the strength from One higher.
Now he remains under the negligent worker's curse.
All he has to show for his life's work is a few coins in his purse.

"O Lord God of the harvest: the years of living have changed me a little and I don't seem to have the vigor I once had. I would like to be like Caleb - but I am afraid I am not. But I am praying today for Thy guidance in Thy service for Thy servant. I do not want to neglect the work Thou hast given me, nor leave undone what I am able to do. Strengthen me I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 49

JUDGMENT ON AMMON

God is doing His work throughout the whole world. He judges the wicked, and saves and restores the repentant wherever, and whoever, they are. His sovereignty extends in power over all nations on earth. His judgments are just and consistent whatever they are and however they come. Because one nation is judged in one way, and another

nation is judged differently, doesn't mean God is inconsistent. Rather, it demonstrates God's knowledge of every nation's sin and judges appropriately to the requirements of holy justice. Some Gentile nations will be restored like Moab, Ammon and Edom, while others are no longer even heard of.

The Ammonites were descendants of Ben-Ammi, the son of Lot's incestuous relationship with his youngest daughter. The Ammonites were condemned by the prophecy of Jeremiah for being worshippers of idols including Molech, the false god to whom they sacrificed children. They also took land from the Hebrews from time to times and there were wars and conflicts between them and the Jews historically. Whether there were walls or not, they could not escape the just judgment of God, although present-day Jordan is the territory of the Ammonites and the capital of Jordan is Amman. God had promised them there would be a time of restoration to be a recognizable people.

JUDGMENT ON EDOM

There was historically; antagonism between the Edomites, who were descendants of Esau, and the Hebrews who are descendants of Jacob. That bitterness was passed on from one generation to the next because the root of bitterness was never dealt with. There are a number of kinds of bitterness we read of in the scriptures. Job was in bitterness of soul. The heart can become bitter, we read in the book of Proverbs. Words can be bitter and enemies can be bitter unto death. The bitter waters of Marah can be made sweet by doing exactly what God says. There was the extreme enmity of bitterness toward the children of Israel on the part of the Edomites.

Unless the cause of bitterness is not defined, dealt with and forsaken; it will continue to "defile many." Bitterness will not stop bringing forth its evil fruit until the pride that is the major evidence of it, is humbled and eradicated. The Edomites were a proud people who considered themselves unassailable because of their mountain strongholds. Teman was considered a city in which wise people lived. One of Job's friends, Eliphaz, was a Temanite. Wisdom without grace, faith and God, is only the failing and unreliable wisdom of human intellect. To boast in ourselves and pride ourselves in our supposed wisdom, is a sure way of being brought down and humbled. The remarkable city of Petra is still there in the present country of Jordan, still waiting to be a place of safety for fleeing Jews in a coming day.

JUDGMENT ON DAMASCUS

The open opposition of Syria (Damascus) against Israelis today, is a continuation of the animosity that has been there for centuries. The polarization of that happened, as time and again people like Hadadezer and others came against the Hebrews. Then they were defeated by David's army, and subjugated, until they too came under the judgment of God through the Babylonian invaders. Opponents to God and His people, are up against the power of God that overcomes all opposition. The world, the flesh and the devil are enemies of God's people today. Hate for God, His Gospel and His people are imbedded in the human nature: "men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

Damascus was conquered by the Babylonians, the Greeks and other powers in the past, and has been often left in ruins. It has been rebuilt over and over again, and it is amazing that it is still an entity among the nations of the Middle East. Hatred against others is always to be foreign to a child of God. We are to "love your enemies, and do good to those who spitefully use you." Hatred of sin is a natural part of our new nature. But on the other hand, we are to "keep yourselves in the love of God... of some have compassion... others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garments spotted by the flesh."

JUDGMENT ON KEDAR AND HAZOR

Conflict between the seed of Ishmael and the seed of Isaac continued down through the generations, and is still a problem today among the nations in the Middle East. The Arabs of the deserts of Arabia used to be mainly nomadic tribes that did not live in fortified cities. They survived in the harsh climate in which they lived, by being able to move from place to place. The animosity between the Israelis and Arabs is nothing new, even though at times, like the present, there is an uneasy peace between them. Under the sophisticated cover of modern national identity, the Arabs and Israelis tolerate each other, and lately there has been peaceful co-existence.

The people of Kedar and Hazor were overrun by the Babylonians as Jeremiah had prophesied. The survivors have not let go of the latent bitterness of Ishmael toward the heritage of Isaac, because they believe they have been cheated out of a better location in which they, Arabs; rather than the Jews, would be at the "center of the world."

JUDGMENT ON ELAM

The Elamites were known as skilled warriors, particularly with bows and arrows. Their exceptional warlike abilities made them a people to be feared. Elam was where Darius had his residence, "Shushan," the palace, when he ruled the Persian empire. It was part of present-day Iran. The opposition of nations toward God's people, was dealt with when God demonstrated His control over people and nations, by scattering them.

Yet in the future, God is going to show His mercy to those people, and Moab and Ammon; even though there was no covenant between them. The sovereign God shows justice and judgment toward sin, but He also shows mercy and lovingkindness toward those who repent in humility, and put faith in Him.

Jeremiah 49:39. *"But it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the Lord."*

BRING AGAIN.

Conflict brings terror to those affected by it.
Once it gets started it feeds on its own flame.
To put out that fire, though it was small when first lit -
Is almost impossible, and we seek someone to blame.

A lifetime of selfish living and no moral restraint,
Has a price to pay that cannot be avoided.
Conflict takes no rest even though costing great pain,
And seldom brings a solution to those it exploited.

Pride has a way of lifting its proud head;
But God has His own way of stripping pride bare.
He has His plans to bring about humility instead;
The process when finished will assure us He cares.

The things we gathered and considered our own;
God can deal with Himself by means of holy fire.
Anything that takes God's place can into His furnace be thrown;
The fires of holy justice should our obedience inspire.

An arrogant look; thinking others less valuable -
May bring God to scatter His people afar.
The arrogant are often to sin's claim more saleable.
Those less self-important, know who they really are.

Idolaters who have desired something other than God
As first place in their lives; God will pursue.
His grace offers forgiveness according to His Word,
When they stop chasing shadows and idolatry eschew.

God always desires to draw all men to Him.
His mercy and love have provided a way -
To restore the lost wanderer and bring him again
To fellowship with God, and with Him they will stay.

"Lord God, the blessing of being called to Thyself has never escaped me. I am grateful that I was received by Thee in spite of my pride. As I watched those seven young men last night, and saw their interest, I took great courage and had a fresh view of the value of a soul. Help me to be a true servant of Thine in serving them. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jeremiah 50

JUDGMENT ON BABYLON

It was no secret to anyone that Jeremiah's prophecies concerning Judah, predicted Babylon would overcome the nation and take the people captive to Babylon. The big thing about that was the people of Judah, for the most part, didn't believe what he said. They had known for years what Jeremiah had prophesied, but because it hadn't taken place immediately, apparently, they didn't think would ever come to pass. It was quite another matter when his prophecy was made concerning the judgment of Gentile nations and particularly Babylon.

For some reason, Zedekiah the king had gone to Babylon, and Seraiah, Baruch's brother who was in government service, was one of those who went with him. Jeremiah had Baruch write down the words of this prophecy, and sent it with Seraiah to publicly read in Babylon. We don't know if it was read in the streets or to those who were leaders, but the prophecy concerning the judgment of God on Babylon was read. The message was devastating as far as Babylon's future was concerned. After it was read, Seraiah had been instructed to tie a rock on to it and throw it into the river. Likely the Babylonians would have wanted to reread it as a joke, or maybe in anger cut it up into little pieces. By throwing it into the river was not to discount the words of the prophecy, but to not allow it to be demeaned. It was also to illustrate the future of Babylon. The time was coming when it would sink into oblivion.

Even though there were still more Jews to be taken in captivity to Babylon, this prophecy of judgment that declared the end of Babylon, also told of the restoration of the people of God, the Jews. The great Babylonian empire would become only a vague forgotten shadow of ancient history. Israel, by contrast, would become the world leader under the leadership of the Messiah. The gods of the Babylonians would do nothing for them; in contrast to the Lord God of Israel who will keep His covenant with His people and show them "the way to Zion."

The Babylonians came from the north and overcame Judah. Another power would come from the north and overcome Babylon. It is true that Babylon was used by God to punish Judah for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against God. The Medes and Persians would also be used by God to punish the Babylonians for their sins of idolatry, cruelty and rejection of the God who brought Nebuchadnezzar down to eating grass like an ox. The difference is that the "people of Israel and Judah together," will be restored to God. Babylon, the symbol of evil, will be wiped out until there is nothing of its existence that will remain to be seen. The demise of Babylon began when Cyrus the king of the Medes and Persians conquered the city of Babylon without a battle. Gradually it declined in stages under the Persians, the Greeks, the Seleucids and the Parthians. By the times of the Maccabees between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, there was nothing left of what was once one of the "wonders of the ancient world." The only thing left was a pile of rubble that was gradually covered with the sand of the desert.

This is the longest description of judgment against a foreign power that Jeremiah gave. It stands in contrast to the "perpetual (everlasting) covenant" that God made with His people that will not be forgotten. When God makes a covenant, it can be counted on to be fulfilled from God's side. Human sin may interfere with the blessings associated with the covenant. We who belong to the Lord because the terms of the "New Testament," have been ratified by the life-blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and know the "way to Zion." Our future is in the "New Jerusalem," where God dwells with His people. The Heavenly Bridegroom and His blood-bought bride will share the joys of the covenant of companionship forever. That covenant will not be broken.

The descriptions of the judgments on Babylon, and the fall of that empire are contrasted from time to time in these two chapters, with references to the captive Jews and those Babylon would soon deport as captives to Babylon. They are seen as disobedient children who will seek the Lord with tears. They are referred to as "lost sheep," as God's "heritage." Even though we fail like the Hebrews in the past, the "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls," remains committed to us. When we take ownership of our own sin, and acknowledge our guilt to the Lord, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He doesn't ignore sin, but can justly forgive us because of the sin price that has been paid by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. The fellowship we lose because of unconfessed sin can be regained when we as His children and heritage, come to Him in repentance and faith.

Assyria was crushed by Babylon, and the time would come, the prophecy said, that Babylon would be crushed by the Medes and Persians. Israel will return to the place God promised, and will be pardoned and restored to their Lord. But Babylon, will go down completely, and no one, not even their gods would raise them up. The Redeemer of Israel will bring peace again to God's people, but Babylon will go down by the sword of justice, and nothing will be found where one of the ancient "wonders of the world" once stood.

The pride and arrogance that was characteristic of Babylon, and led to the downfall of the empire, is the same nationalistic sin in this nation today. Many of the great nations of the world have the same opinion of themselves. The only way to deal with pride, is to admit we have allowed it to rule us, and to turn to God. When we earnestly ask for forgiveness as a people, and ask for help to overcome the "soul-damning sin" of pride, perhaps the Lord will have mercy upon us and heal our land. In order for repentance to be genuine, we must focus our minds and hearts on the greatness and authority of God. His sovereignty over nations must be submitted to. His goodness can be shown toward those who have a humble and contrite spirit.

No earthly power, not even a nation, can survive the ultimate justice of God when they arrogantly forsake His authority, and substitute the sinful opinions of sinful humans as laws with which to govern sinful people. The same principle can be applied to every individual. Any person who thinks they can withstand the sovereign Lord, will fall under the "swelling of Jordan."

Jeremiah 50:5. *"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."*

WHICH WAY TO ZION?

God had used Babylon before to bring His chosen people to repent.
Now other nations unite and to Babylon are sent -
Because in pride, evil rose up and claimed the power used was their own.
Now Babylon is so destroyed, it is hard to find even a stone.

God's people had gone so far, they didn't know the way back;
But God had His servant to show them what they had lacked.
Now walking across the desert sands to go home -
Their divisions are gone and they travel as one.

It is going to happen again; Israel is surrounded once more.
Babylon, Assyria, Persia and others still have a score
They want to settle, and they want Israelis to blame.
They want Israel annihilated without even a name.

But we know God is not finished, He will complete what He began.
A day in the future will come when their promised land
Will truly be theirs, and those who want their destruction
Will acknowledge the King on the throne is Israel's salvation.

Today across the world, God has sheep of another kind.
From every nation and culture, every continent and clime -
There are those scattered like sheep who soon will be gathered
As one at His coming, and then divisions won't matter.

At present we are walking on the desert sands of life.
We move almost unnoticed through a world filled with strife.
But we know this road we travel is leading us home.
And soon we will be gathered to Him, to whom the ends of the world will come.

So, we know the way to Zion is to go straight ahead.
It is a pity to know that many of God's people instead
Are asking the way to Zion because they don't take the time to read
The compass of God's Word, and its guiding words to heed.

“Father, I am praying today for family members who don't have a commitment to Thy Word as a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. Give them a desire to return to practicing Thy truth. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 51

JUDGMENT ON BABYLON cont.

Even before the fall of Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord gave in the prophecy contained in these two chapters, the end of the story of Babylon. This prophecy is a reminder to us that God is all-powerful and He will bring ultimate justice to our nation. Those who have ignored Him, rejected him, and substituted idol/gods of their own making, will suffer the consequences of their own actions. Those who have responded to God's grace, and those who have favored God's earthly people, the Jews; will survive the coming times of retribution and tribulation.

When the Lord comes and sits on the throne of David, He will restore His repentant people simply because He is the God of all grace. He will also judge those nations that defy God, and that will not recognize His sovereignty over men and nations. His judgments are always just. Forgiveness and pardon will be granted to those who come in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Righteous wrath and just judgment will be meted out on those who refuse His salvation.

This chapter, like the previous one, continues to warn in poetic form and poetic justice, the empire of Babylon. Many metaphors are used to describe what will happen to Babylon. The strong winds that remove chaff from grain; swarms of locusts that devour the living plants – these are used to warn that the “gold cup” of Babylon will be taken away. The Medes and Persians will overcome all the land the Babylonians claimed, and they would eventually go away to nothing except a shadowy memory in the minds of a very few people.

“That night was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans slain,” was the night the River Euphrates was diverted far upstream, so the Persians could enter the city of Babylon on the riverbed. Like “the sea,” they conquered Babylon without a battle, while the Babylonian leaders were feasting at Belshazzar's table.

In contrast to what happened to Babylon, was the Lord's support of the exiled Jews. He was still the God of grace toward them, and “at the time of vengeance,” God preserved His people. Jeremiah's prophecy indicated the time would come for the Jews to prepare to return to Jerusalem. All of this was prophesied before the Babylonians had carried them all away captive. God was telling them of the end of the seventy years of captivity when His people would be able to return to Jerusalem, even before the last of the people were taken. Zedekiah was still the puppet king and had been called to Babylon for some reason. Baruch's brother, Seraiah, went with him and took this written prophecy to read.

This is a reminder to us that "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day." God's heart was still toward Jerusalem and His promises regarding the future of the people of Israel will come to pass. Even though guilt can paralyze people because of what happened in their past, we need to listen to the voice of God in His word, and recognize what His intention is; not focus on ourselves and our failures or victories.

When justice has been done, and sin has been dealt with, God intends His people to get on with the purpose of their calling. We need to keep the lessons learned in our minds with a determination to not let that failure or sin happen again. God can bring good out of evil if He so desires, but evil still must be punished in one way or another. How thankful we are that One "bore our sins in His own body on the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." It is our responsibility to remember that God still rules. All the people of the world, and all the nations are under His omnipotent authority. Even when events seem out of control, we need to remember, "My times are in Thy hand."

God's sovereignty and God's judgments are not inconsistent in any way. There is no reason for God's people to panic, even when we are in the middle of dark times. The downward course of events in the world into deep darkness morally and spiritually, seems to be accelerating. But God's people have no reason to despair, because "He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." God has His own timetable of events, and His responses follow His warnings.

As Seraiah walked to the edge of the Euphrates River, and threw that scroll weighted down with a rock into the water and watched it sink; I wonder how the on-lookers would have reacted. Likely some would laugh. Others would wonder at the significance of the gesture and others would probably shrug their shoulders in indifference, and go back doing what they always had done. For Jeremiah and Baruch his secretary, this was the end of the book of prophecies.

Jeremiah 51:5. *"For Israel has not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel."*

NOT FORSAKEN.

All around there is turmoil and trouble.
The plans they once made, now are burst like a bubble.
They thought to do everything in the way they would choose,
Now all they had gained, forever they will lose.
The strength they claimed because of the arms young men bear -
Cannot save them from enemy armies drawing near -
The pride they had in themselves now has fled.
The nation that once ruled others, is now permanently dead.

However, out from the middle of all the destruction around -
A remnant of despised people is there to be found.
They will be re-gathered, though for generations were divided.
The only way they have survived is the Lord Himself has provided
Miraculous means never thought of by men.
God made it possible so He could gather again
His chosen people to take the leading place
Among all the nations that He might reveal His grace.

I do not live among the thunders of war,
But all around me, sinister and subtle forces are
Trying to stop the message of salvation by grace.
There is mockery and there are plans to water down faith,
Until it means something different than believing God -
And they want to include every religion in the world,
As a means of reaching God - each one by his own road,
Without giving consideration to God's infallible Word.

We have to stand up to the pressure to conform.
Our faith in God and His Word cannot be lukewarm.
It is essential that we who believe in Him let it be known
To those who want to stop our faith, that God doesn't forsake His own.
Though the land is filled with sin and people go their own way -
Even though we are not many, we are here to stay
As long as God wants us here, and for His truth we stand.
We are not going to be defeated by sinful, mortal man.

“O Gracious God, the encouragement of Thy Word comes at very critical times. How timely it is to me to be reminded that Thou are not going to forsake Thy people. I praise Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jeremiah 52

THE FINAL FALL

When passages of scripture are repeated, it is not just a matter of redundancy, but it is a way of emphasizing a passage of scripture, an event or a series of events, for our instruction. This concluding chapter of the book of Jeremiah does not contain the words of Jeremiah. Those were concluded at the end of the previous chapter. In this brief historical account of events at the second “carrying away into Babylon,” perhaps were written by Baruch or some other person who the Spirit of God used to close out the scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies that he had spent his whole life giving. The warnings from God to His people through Jeremiah, came over and over, and yet were ignored; he was maligned and imprisoned; and was still alive when what he had prophesied actually came to pass.

To most mere historians, and in the eyes of the world in general, Jeremiah was a failure. He was unsuccessful in getting the nation to repent and turn from sin to God. He was without friends; his family wanted nothing to do with him, and he was both poor and unpopular. His prophecies warned of the destruction of Jerusalem, the capital city, which to the thinking of most people, would be impossible. The temple and its incredible monetary worth, seemed to the people to be an untouchable monument to past glory, even though they still used it in their hypocritical religious activities. To think that the whole nation would be devastated seemed to be beyond the imagination of the people. Neither the political or religious leaders paid any attention to Jeremiah, except to torment him and put him in prison. No one liked him or listened to him because he did not say what they wanted him to say.

No matter what people do today in their opposition against God, the Bible and Christianity; we dare not compromise the truth of the Bible, because it is the word of the living God. He will defend His own word in His own way. It is our responsibility to teach it, preach it and pass it on to others with a sense of urgency, and “so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” We are not called upon to be popular but to be faithful. We are not told to be interesting but truthful. Jeremiah did what God wanted, said what God told him to say, and left the results of his life-effort to God. He completed what God gave Him to do, and we too need to be committed to do the same today.

Popularity, fame, success and wealth may come, but all of those things can be quickly lost. Selfish goals that are reached are not how lasting success is measured. To be obedient to our Lord, faithful to His word, committed to His people and righteous in life is what is important for His representatives on earth to give themselves to. Everything else has no real eternal value or purpose. It is far better to be successful in the eyes of the Lord, than to be a favorite among people.

The account of carrying away captive the people of Judah to Babylon, is almost identical to the account in the last two chapters of 2nd Kings. There were three different times people from Judah and Jerusalem were taken away. The first was in 597 BC when after Jehoiakim was killed when he opposed the invaders, his eighteen-year old son, Jehoiachin had the sense to surrender, and many others survived because of that choice he made. Jeremiah had told them that was the only way they could stay alive. There were around 10,000 who were skilled in one way or another, or were artisans or young people who had potential, that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to use in Babylon. Apparently, only 3023 actually ended up in Babylon. The young king was put in prison, and the conscripted work-force would have been put to work to benefit Babylon. It may be at that time Daniel and others were placed into government service.

The world benefits from the skills and commitment of the people of God today, who do their work as unto the Lord and not merely unto men or for financial gain. Our response to the obligations of daily labor often is the strength, or weakness, of our Christian testimony. Some believers are listened to when they talk about the Lord, simply because they are different from those who complain or are lazy and complacent in their daily responsibilities.

The second deportation came ten years later when Zedekiah and his counselors chose to rebel against the Babylonian authorities. In spite of Jeremiah’s warnings, they persisted in resisting the punishment of God on them because of their sin of idolatry and rejection of the call to repentance, and to turn to the Lord for salvation. After the long siege against Jerusalem was successful in breaching the city walls, Zedekiah and those with him got as far as Jericho and were there captured and sent in chains several hundred miles north to the center of Syria. Where Israel entered the promised land hundreds of years before, was where the last king was captured. The last thing he saw in this world was his own sons and the counselors he had listened to, being put to a horrible death before his eyes. Then he was taken to Babylon and imprisoned for the rest of his life. 832 captives reached Babylon when that deportation took place.

Five years later there was another time when the forces of Babylon came, and that time they took 745 people captive to Babylon. That was likely a response to the killing of Gedeliah who was the appointed governor, and those who did

that went to Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them. The result of these three times of captives being carried away to Babylon, was that there was nothing of value left in Jerusalem or Judah.

All of the uncounted wealth in the temple was taken to Babylon. Temple worship had been reduced to mere form so that there was no real "worship of the Lord" there. The temple was stripped of everything and then burned, along with the big houses of the nobility and rich in the city of Jerusalem. The walls were even brought down before the destruction of the city was finished and left a smoking ruin.

There is a faint glimmer of light at the very end of the book of Jeremiah, in that Jehoiachin was released from prison, and the lineage of David survived because of God's covenant promise. This light bit of light gives hope of the promised restoration that will usher in a new day in the future. To live in the conscious knowledge of the presence of God is the most important factor in finding meaning and blessing in life. Sin separates people from God. Believers experience that distancing when they turn away from obeying the word of the Lord, to paying attention to the words of men that sound very plausible because they are written by famous popular people.

Thankfully, through Christ sins can be forgiven. Christians who repeat sins that have either become habitual to them, or they are swept off their feet by the persuasion of skilled orators, will find their fellowship with the Lord hindered. Unless those sins are repented of, that fellowship and the spiritual blessings that fellowship gives us, will be gone. We must never let sin steal our joy and ability to worship the Lord in the "beauty of holiness." Those who lead God's people need to recognize the critical role they fill in the work of the Lord. May all who lead, be godly and obedient like Jeremiah in spite of all the pressures that come against us to conform to the world around.

Jeremiah 52:4. *"And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about."*

IT CAME TO PASS.

Sometimes it is good to stop and review events of the past.

These histories are given that our children when they ask,
Can learn from the mistakes and the good things others have done;
And when faced with choices in their lives, will make the right ones.

We who are older have failed, of that there is no doubt.
When we take time to think, we can see how God brought things about
That He, in spite of our failings, had a purpose to fulfill.
He had a plan for the ages, and that plan remains still.

Very often I feel like a failure with not much success in life.
It seems like there have been a lot of times I've been in the middle of strife.
Usually those things that divide seems very insignificant to me,
But others insist that is how things are meant to be.

Jeremiah must have seemed like a failure to those who looked on.
He did what God told him to, and after he was gone
People could remember what he told them and why;
His warnings were given that God's people would not die.

So, I guess I will never know during these years I live,
What will be the results or value of what I had to give;
It may be someday when generations yet to come,
Will want to review who they are and where they come from.

The encouraging part of reviewing a book like this,
Is to see through it all, God's ways we can trace.
The prophet had to tell what was wrong and what was right.
I too must do the same so God's people walk in the light.

There is no question, we need to take time to look back,
To see what we need to continue to do, and where we lack.
And when the younger ones come with questions to ask,
We will be able to tell them what has come to pass.

"Father God: am I just thinking like an older man, or should I spend some time going over the past mistakes and victories with these young people? I want them to put their confidence in Thee alone, not in the way others have done things. And yet, it does seem there are reasons to go back over our history. Guide me, I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

