JEREMIAH
AND LAMENTATIONS
BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



The weeping prophet, the potter's house and the fall of Jerusalem, and God's promise of a new covenant written on the heart

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Jeremiah and Lamentations Bible Study

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

Jeremiah and Lamentations take us through the last forty years of the kingdom of Judah and into the ashes that came after. Jeremiah is the record of a prophet who was called as a young man to tell his own people a message they did not want to hear: turn back to the LORD, or Babylon will come and take everything. He preached it for more than forty years, and he was mocked, beaten, jailed and thrown into a muddy cistern for it. Then he lived to see it happen. Lamentations is the grief poured out over Jerusalem after it fell. Yet both books carry a hope that the fire could not burn up. God promised to bring His people back, to give them a new covenant written on the heart, and to raise up a righteous King from David's line. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on these books. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand how He speaks to a people who will not listen, and how He keeps His promises after the worst has happened. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Jeremiah. The book is not arranged in order of time. A message from the days of King Jehoiakim can sit right next to one from the days of Zedekiah, eighteen years later. So the first thing to do with any chapter is to look for the heading that names the king or the year, and to ask where we are in the story. Jeremiah's promises need their context too. One of the most quoted verses in the Bible, "plans of welfare and not for calamity" (Jeremiah 29:11), was written in a letter to exiles who were told to settle in Babylon for seventy years (29:10). God's

good plans for them did not mean an easy road or a quick way home. They meant God had not forgotten them. Lamentations has its own setting: it was written in the ruins of Jerusalem, and its five poems are the honest cry of people who had lost everything. We read them best when we let them be what they are, real grief brought to God, with hope rising from the middle of it.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Jeremiah and Lamentations are real history and real prophecy, and this study takes them at their word: Jeremiah was a real man, the kings he faced were real kings, Jerusalem really fell to Babylon in 586 B.C., and the exiles really came home after seventy years, just as God said. Where God's promises reach beyond the return from Babylon, to the regathering of Israel in the last days and the reign of the Messiah, I take them as promises God will keep to the nation of Israel, not as promises taken away and given to someone else. Jeremiah often speaks in poetry, and poetry uses pictures. When the LORD calls Himself "a spring of living water" (2:13) or calls Judah an unfaithful wife, the text itself tells us these are pictures, and we read them that way. When Jeremiah buries a linen sash or wears a yoke on his neck, he is doing a real act that God told him to do, so that the people could see the message as well as hear it. A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "the LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, YHWH, often written Yahweh, which He made known to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God. Jeremiah often calls Him "the LORD of armies" (for example, Jeremiah 7:3), a title that means He is the commander of the armies of heaven (older Bibles say the LORD of hosts).

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Each book also has its own Overview and Background before its first chapter, so you know who wrote it, when its events happened, and why it was written.

Why Jeremiah and Lamentations Are Studied Together

In our English Bibles, Lamentations comes right after Jeremiah, as it does in the old Greek translation of the Old Testament. (In the Hebrew Bible it is placed with the Writings, among the five short scrolls read at the Jewish feasts and fasts. Lamentations is read on the fast that remembers the burning of the temple.) The two books belong side by side. Jeremiah spent forty

years warning that Jerusalem would fall, and his book ends with a chapter that tells how it did (Jeremiah 52). Lamentations picks up right there and shows what it was like to live through it: the empty streets, the hungry children, the burned temple, the shame. The book does not name its writer, but Jewish and Christian tradition have long held that it was Jeremiah, the prophet who wept (Jeremiah 9:1) and who wrote laments before (2 Chronicles 35:25). Whoever held the pen, the two books speak with one heart. Both say plainly that the city fell because of sin, just as God had warned. Both also hold on to God's faithfulness in the dark. Jeremiah heard the LORD promise a new covenant, "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31). Lamentations, in the middle of its grief, says of the LORD's mercies, "His compassions do not come to an end" (Lamentations 3:22). Jesus Himself wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and He is the One in whom both books find their answer: the righteous Branch of David (Jeremiah 23:5) and the One who poured out His blood for the new covenant (Luke 22:20).

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Jeremiah has fifty-two chapters and Lamentations has five, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: fifty-seven weeks, a little over a year. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background of Jeremiah together, and another before Lamentations for its Background. Some groups take a break of a few weeks between Jeremiah 25 and 26, where the book turns from mostly sermons and poems to mostly stories.
- Two chapters a week: about thirty weeks. Many chapters pair well: Jeremiah 2 and 3 (Israel's unfaithfulness and the call to return), 4 and 5, 11 and 12 (the plot at Anathoth and Jeremiah's complaint), 18 and 19 (the potter and the broken flask), 27 and 28 (the yoke of Babylon), 30 and 31 (the book of comfort), 32 and 33, 37 and 38 (Jeremiah in prison and in the cistern), 40 and 41 (Gedaliah), 42 and 43 (the flight to Egypt), 46 and 47, and Lamentations 4 and 5. Take Jeremiah 7, 23, 25, 29, 31, 36, 50, 51 and 52 and Lamentations 3 one at a time, or give them extra time, because they are long or need the room.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of these books are hard. Three times God tells Jeremiah not to pray for his people (7:16; 11:14; 14:11), and some readers wonder if that means there are people we should stop praying for (it does not, and the study explains why). Judah's people burned their own children in the fire to false gods in the valley of Hinnom (7:31; 19:5; 32:35). God pictures Israel and Judah as an unfaithful wife (chapters 2 and 3; 13:22-27), and that imagery is handled plainly and modestly. Jeremiah's own prayers are raw. He complains to God (12:1-4; 15:10-18; 20:7-10), asks God to repay his enemies (11:20; 12:3; 15:15; 17:18; 18:21-23), and curses the day he was born (20:14-18). He was told not to marry or have children (16:1-4). The sieges bring famine so terrible that parents eat

their children (19:9; Lamentations 2:20; 4:10). Gedaliah is murdered at a meal (chapter 41). The words against the nations (chapters 46 to 51) are full of war and judgment. Lamentations describes starving children (2:11-12; 4:4), the abuse of women (5:11), and a man who feels that God Himself has turned against him (3:1-18). The study handles each of these plainly and with care, and it does not pretend that Scripture approves of everything it reports. Some people in your group may carry grief, depression, abuse, or the loss of a child, and these chapters can stir that up. Others may be going through a season when God feels silent, as Jeremiah did. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Jeremiah

Jeremiah is the second of the books we call the Major Prophets. It comes right after Isaiah and right before Lamentations. They are called major because they are long, not because they matter more than the twelve shorter books. Jeremiah is in fact the longest book in the Bible by number of words. It is named for the prophet whose messages it holds, Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, a priest from the small town of Anathoth, a few miles north of Jerusalem.

A prophet was a man God called to speak His words to His people. He did tell the future at times, but most of his work was calling God's people back to the covenant, the binding agreement God had made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Isaiah had preached about a hundred years before Jeremiah, when Assyria was the great danger and God spared Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. By Jeremiah's day Assyria was dying and Babylon was rising. Judah had gone through the long, wicked reign of Manasseh, and then a short revival under good King Josiah. Josiah's reforms cleaned the outside, but the heart of the people did not change. After Josiah died, his sons and grandson led the nation straight downhill. Jeremiah warned them for forty years that God would send Babylon against them if they did not turn back. They did not turn back, and in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar burned Jerusalem and its temple. 2 Kings 23 to 25 tells the same history from the side of the kings.

The theme of Jeremiah is that God's judgment on sin is sure, but it is not His last word. God gave Jeremiah a double work on the day He called him:

Jeremiah 1:10 (SLB)

"See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy and to tear down, to build and to plant."

Four words tear down and two build up. Most of the book is the tearing down: sin exposed, warnings ignored, and judgment carried out. But all through it, and above all in chapters 30 to 33, God promises to build and to plant again. He promised that the exile would last seventy years (25:11; 29:10), that He would bring His people home, that He would make "a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (31:31), and that He would raise up for David "a righteous Branch" (23:5).

Jeremiah has 52 chapters and 1,364 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Call of the Prophet (chapter 1)

- Jeremiah 1: The Call of Jeremiah

Part Two: Warnings to Judah and Jerusalem (chapters 2 to 25)

- Jeremiah 2: Forsaking the Spring of Living Water
- Jeremiah 3: Return, Faithless Israel
- Jeremiah 4: Disaster From the North

- Jeremiah 5: Not One Who Does Justice
- Jeremiah 6: Jerusalem Under Siege
- Jeremiah 7: The Temple Sermon
- Jeremiah 8: Is There No Balm in Gilead?
- Jeremiah 9: Let Him Who Boasts Boast in This
- Jeremiah 10: The Idols and the Living God
- Jeremiah 11: The Broken Covenant and the Plot at Anathoth
- Jeremiah 12: Why Does the Way of the Wicked Prosper?
- Jeremiah 13: The Linen Sash and the Wine Jars
- Jeremiah 14: Drought, Prayer and False Prophets
- Jeremiah 15: Jeremiah's Lament and God's Answer
- Jeremiah 16: Jeremiah Forbidden to Marry
- Jeremiah 17: The Deceitful Heart and the Sabbath
- Jeremiah 18: At the Potter's House
- Jeremiah 19: The Broken Flask
- Jeremiah 20: Pashhur, the Stocks and Jeremiah's Complaint
- Jeremiah 21: Zedekiah's Question
- Jeremiah 22: Words to the Kings of Judah
- Jeremiah 23: The Righteous Branch and the False Prophets
- Jeremiah 24: Two Baskets of Figs
- Jeremiah 25: Seventy Years and the Cup of Wrath

Part Three: Conflict With Kings and False Prophets (chapters 26 to 29)

- Jeremiah 26: Jeremiah on Trial for His Life
- Jeremiah 27: The Yoke of Babylon
- Jeremiah 28: Hananiah the False Prophet
- Jeremiah 29: Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles

Part Four: The Book of Comfort (chapters 30 to 33)

- Jeremiah 30: The Time of Jacob's Trouble
- Jeremiah 31: The New Covenant
- Jeremiah 32: Jeremiah Buys a Field
- Jeremiah 33: The Promise to David Renewed

Part Five: The Last Days of Jerusalem and After (chapters 34 to 45)

- Jeremiah 34: Freedom Promised and Broken

- Jeremiah 35: The Faithful Rechabites
- Jeremiah 36: The King Burns the Scroll
- Jeremiah 37: Jeremiah Arrested and Imprisoned
- Jeremiah 38: Jeremiah in the Cistern
- Jeremiah 39: The Fall of Jerusalem
- Jeremiah 40: Gedaliah at Mizpah
- Jeremiah 41: The Murder of Gedaliah
- Jeremiah 42: The Remnant Asks for a Word
- Jeremiah 43: The Flight to Egypt
- Jeremiah 44: The Queen of Heaven in Egypt
- Jeremiah 45: A Word to Baruch

Part Six: Words Against the Nations (chapters 46 to 51)

- Jeremiah 46: Against Egypt
- Jeremiah 47: Against the Philistines
- Jeremiah 48: Against Moab
- Jeremiah 49: Against Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor and Elam
- Jeremiah 50: Against Babylon
- Jeremiah 51: The Fall of Babylon

Part Seven: The Fall of Jerusalem (chapter 52)

- Jeremiah 52: Jerusalem Falls and Jehoiachin Is Released

Where this book points to Christ: the clearest link is the new covenant. Jeremiah heard God promise a covenant in which He would write His law on the hearts of His people and remember their sin no more (31:31-34). On the night before He died, Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:20), and Hebrews 8:8-12 quotes Jeremiah's promise in full. Jeremiah also promised a King from David's line, "a righteous Branch," whose name would be "The LORD Our Righteousness" (23:5-6; 33:15-16). That King is Jesus, the Son of David. Matthew quotes Jeremiah when Herod killed the children of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:17-18; Jeremiah 31:15), and Jesus used Jeremiah's words from the temple sermon when He cleared the temple (Matthew 21:13; Jeremiah 7:11). Jeremiah himself is a picture of Christ in some ways. He was rejected by his own people, plotted against by his own hometown, wept over Jerusalem, and suffered for speaking God's truth. When Jesus asked who people said He was, some answered "Jeremiah" (Matthew 16:14). But Jeremiah could only warn and weep. Jesus wept over the city and then gave His life for sinners.

Background of Jeremiah

Author: The book names its author in its first verse: "Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, from the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin" (1:1). Jeremiah was a priest by family, but God called him to be a prophet. He did not do all the writing by hand. He dictated his messages to his helper Baruch the son of Neriah, a scribe (36:4). When King Jehoiakim cut up that first scroll and burned it, Jeremiah dictated it again "and again many words like them were added to them" (36:32). The words of Jeremiah end at 51:64: "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah." Chapter 52 was added by someone else, most likely Baruch or another faithful scribe, and it is nearly the same as 2 Kings 24:18 to 25:30. Many modern scholars believe that the book grew over a long time, and that later editors wrote many of its prose sermons in Jeremiah's name. I take the book at its word. It tells us plainly how Jeremiah's words were written down, by whom, and when, and that is the way I read it.

Who it was written to: First to the people of Judah and Jerusalem in their last forty years as a kingdom, and then to the exiles in Babylon (chapter 29) and the Jews who fled to Egypt (chapter 44). It was also written for every generation after, as a warning of what happens when God's people will not listen, and as a promise that God keeps His word to Israel.

Jeremiah's ministry: God called Jeremiah "in the thirteenth year" of King Josiah (1:2), which was 627 B.C. Jeremiah was young, and he said so (1:6). He preached through the reigns of the last five kings of Judah, saw Jerusalem fall in 586 B.C., stayed with the poor who were left in the land, and was then forced to go to Egypt with the people who fled there after Gedaliah's murder (43:6-7). His last messages were given in Egypt. Scripture does not tell us how or when he died. His ministry ran more than forty years, from 627 B.C. to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and some years beyond.

The kings of Jeremiah's day: The writer of Kings dates each king carefully, but scholars give slightly different years because of co-regencies and different ways of counting a king's first year. In this study I follow one standard set, the dates worked out by Edwin Thiele and those who built on his work, the same dates used in my study of 2 Kings, and I give them as "about."

- Josiah, son of Amon: about 640 to 609 B.C. A godly king who found the Book of the Law in the temple and led a great reform (2 Kings 22 and 23). He was killed in battle against Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo in 609 B.C.
- Jehoahaz, son of Josiah: 609 B.C., three months. Jeremiah calls him Shallum (22:11). Pharaoh Neco took him to Egypt, where he died.
- Jehoiakim, son of Josiah: about 609 to 598 B.C. Placed on the throne by Pharaoh, then forced to serve Babylon. He was Jeremiah's bitter enemy and burned his scroll (chapter 36).
- Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim: about 598 to 597 B.C., three months. Jeremiah calls him Coniah (22:24) and Jeconiah (24:1). He was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. and released from prison there about 560 B.C. (52:31-34).

- Zedekiah, son of Josiah: about 597 to 586 B.C., the last king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar made him king. He was weak and afraid of his own officials. He asked Jeremiah for a word from God more than once, but he would not obey it. He rebelled against Babylon, and Jerusalem fell in his eleventh year (52:5).

The world around Judah: Assyria, which had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., was falling apart. Its capital, Nineveh, fell in 612 B.C. to the Babylonians and their allies. Egypt tried to step into the gap, but in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, crown prince and then king of Babylon, crushed Pharaoh Neco's army at Carchemish on the Euphrates River (46:2). From then on Babylon ruled the region. Babylon took captives from Jerusalem three times: in 605 B.C. (when Daniel was taken), in 597 B.C. (when King Jehoiachin and the prophet Ezekiel were taken), and in 586 B.C., when the city and temple were burned. Jeremiah often calls the Babylonians the Chaldeans, the name of the people who ruled Babylon in those years.

The book is not in time order: The messages in Jeremiah are grouped mostly by subject, not by date, so it helps to know roughly where each part falls. Here is a short guide:

- In the days of Josiah (627 to 609 B.C.): chapter 1 and most of chapters 2 to 6 (see 3:6).
- In the days of Jehoiakim (609 to 598 B.C.): the temple sermon (chapter 7, told again in chapter 26), much of chapters 8 to 20, and chapters 22, 25, 26, 35, 36 and 45.
  Chapter 46:1-12 is dated to his fourth year (605 B.C.).
- In the days of Jehoiachin (597 B.C.): parts of chapters 13 and 22 (13:18; 22:24-30).
- In the days of Zedekiah (597 to 586 B.C.): chapters 21, 24, 27 to 29, 32 to 34 and 37 to 39, and 49:34-39 and 51:59-64.
- After the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C. and later): chapters 40 to 44, in Judah and then in Egypt. Chapter 52 closes the book with the fall of the city and Jehoiachin's release about 560 B.C.

When it was written: Over Jeremiah's whole ministry. The first scroll was written in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, 605 B.C. (36:1-2), and rewritten with more added after the king burned it (36:32). The last messages come from Egypt after 586 B.C. Chapter 52 was added after Jehoiachin's release about 560 B.C.

The Greek translation: The Septuagint, the old Greek translation of the Old Testament, gives a shorter form of Jeremiah, about one eighth shorter than the Hebrew, and places the words against the nations (our chapters 46 to 51) in the middle of the book, after 25:13, in a different order. This study follows the Hebrew text, as the SLB and nearly all our English Bibles do.

Purpose: Jeremiah was written to call God's people to repent before it was too late, to explain why Jerusalem fell when it did fall (God had warned them again and again), and to give hope to the exiles: God would bring them back after seventy years, and one day He would gather Israel from every land, give them a new heart, and set the righteous Son of David on the throne. It also shows us what faithfulness looks like when it costs everything. Jeremiah obeyed God when no one listened, and God kept him through it all, just as He promised on the day He called him (1:8, 19).

Jeremiah 1: The Call of Jeremiah

Scripture

1:1-10 The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, from the priests who ***were*** in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reigning. And it came in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the finishing of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth from ***the*** womb I consecrated you; a prophet to the nations I appointed you." And I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Look, I do not know ***how*** to speak, for I ***am*** a youth." And the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I ***am*** a youth,' for to all to whom I send you, you will go, and all that I command you, you will speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I ***am*** with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. And the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Look, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy and to tear down, to build and to plant."

1:11-19 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "What ***are*** you seeing, Jeremiah?" And I said, "I am seeing a rod of almond." And the LORD said to me, "You have done well to see, for I ***am*** watching over My word to do it." And the word of the LORD came to me a second ***time***, saying, "What ***are*** you seeing?" And I said, "I am seeing a pot blown upon, and its face ***is*** from the face of ***the*** north." And the LORD said to me, "From the north the calamity will be opened on all the inhabitants of the land. For look, I ***am*** calling to all the clans of the kingdoms of the north," declares the LORD, "and they will come, and they will set each one his throne ***at*** the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will speak My judgments with them concerning all their evil, in that they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods and have bowed down to the works of their hands. And you, you will gird your loins, and you will arise, and you will speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, look, I have made you this day into a fortified city and into an iron pillar and into bronze walls against all the land, against the kings of Judah, against its officials, against its priests, and against the people of the land. And they will fight against you, and they will not prevail against you, for I ***am*** with you," declares the LORD, "to deliver you."

Preview

The book opens by telling us who Jeremiah was, where he came from and how long he preached: from the thirteenth year of King Josiah to the fall of Jerusalem, about forty years. Then Jeremiah tells us how it began. God told him that He had known him and set him apart before he was born. Jeremiah said he was too young. God touched his mouth, put His words there, and sent him with a hard job: to tear down and to build up. Then came two pictures, an almond branch and a boiling pot tipped from the north, and a promise that God would make him strong enough to stand against his whole nation.

This chapter is about God's call and God's presence. Jeremiah did not volunteer, and he did not feel ready. God did not answer his fears by telling him how capable he was. He answered by saying, "I am with you." As we read it, we should ask what God has called us to, and whether we are trusting His presence or our own strength.

Study

1:1-3 *The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, from the priests who **were** in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reigning. And it came in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the finishing of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.*

These verses are the heading for the whole book. "The words of Jeremiah" are his words, and yet verse 2 says at once that "the word of the LORD came" to him. That is what a prophet is: a man whose words are God's words.

Jeremiah was "from the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin." Anathoth was a small town about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. It was one of the cities given to the priests (Joshua 21:18). Many think Jeremiah's family came from Abiathar, the priest Solomon sent home to Anathoth (1 Kings 2:26), but Scripture does not say so. His father Hilkiah was a priest. He is probably not the high priest Hilkiah who found the Book of the Law in Josiah's day (2 Kings 22:8), since that Hilkiah served in Jerusalem, but we cannot be sure.

The word came "in the thirteenth year" of Josiah, which was 627 B.C. It kept coming through Jehoiakim and to "the eleventh year of Zedekiah," when Jerusalem went into exile "in the fifth month," 586 B.C. The heading skips the two kings who reigned only three months each, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. Jeremiah's work went on after the fall too (chapters 40 to 44), but the heading marks the main span: forty years of warning a nation that would not listen.

1:4-5 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth from **the** womb I consecrated you; a prophet to the nations I appointed you."*

"Before I formed you in the belly I knew you." This is one of the great verses of the Bible, and it is worth slowing down for. God says three things to Jeremiah.

First, God knew him before He formed him. To "know" here is more than to know about. It is the knowing of a personal choice, the way God says to Israel, "Only you have I known" (Amos 3:2). Before Jeremiah's body began to take shape, God had already set His mind and His love on him.

Second, God "formed" him in the womb. The word is the one used of a potter shaping clay, and of God forming Adam from the dust (Genesis 2:7). Jeremiah was not an accident of biology. God made him, piece by piece, as David says of himself in Psalm 139:13-16.

Third, "before you came forth from the womb I consecrated you." To consecrate is to set apart for God's use. Jeremiah's calling did not begin when he felt ready. It began before he drew his first

breath. God also told him the scope of it: "a prophet to the nations." He would speak mostly to Judah, but his words would reach Egypt, Moab, Edom, Babylon and the rest (chapters 46 to 51).

What does this mean for us? I want to be careful. God's call to be a prophet was special to Jeremiah, as it was to Paul, who said God set him apart from his mother's womb (Galatians 1:15). We should not say that every person is called to be a prophet. But the truth under the verse belongs to all of us. God knows each person before birth, and He forms each one in the womb. That is why Christians have long treated the life of an unborn child as precious to God. The baby in the womb is not a blob of tissue waiting to become someone. God is already forming that child, and He already knows him.

This verse also speaks to anyone who feels unwanted or unplanned. Your parents may not have planned you, but God did. Before anyone else knew you, He knew you.

1:6-8 *And I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Look, I do not know **how** to speak, for I **am** a youth." And the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I **am** a youth,' for to all to whom I send you, you will go, and all that I command you, you will speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I **am** with you to deliver you," declares the LORD.*

Jeremiah's answer was honest: "Alas, Lord GOD! Look, I do not know how to speak, for I am a youth." When the SLB prints "Lord GOD," the Hebrew is Adonai Yahweh, Lord YHWH. Jeremiah used God's name and His title together, and then told Him He had the wrong man.

"Youth" was a word for anyone from a boy to a young man not yet settled in life. Jeremiah may have been in his late teens or early twenties. In that culture the elders spoke and the young listened. Jeremiah could not picture himself standing before kings and priests.

Moses gave nearly the same excuse (Exodus 4:10). God's answer to both was the same. He did not argue about Jeremiah's age or skill. He said, "Do not say." Then He gave two commands and a promise. Jeremiah would go wherever God sent him, and he would speak whatever God commanded. And he was not to be afraid of their faces, "for I am with you to deliver you."

Notice what God did not promise. He did not promise that people would listen, or that Jeremiah would not suffer. Jeremiah would be beaten, jailed and left in a muddy pit. God promised to be with him and to deliver him, and He did, every time. Jesus gave His followers the same promise when He sent them out: He is with us always (Matthew 28:20).

1:9-10 *And the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Look, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy and to tear down, to build and to plant."*

"The LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth." When Isaiah was called, a seraph touched his lips with a burning coal to cleanse them (Isaiah 6:6-7). Here God touched Jeremiah's mouth Himself, and said, "I have put My words in your mouth." This fulfills the promise God made through Moses, that He would raise up prophets and put His words in their mouths

(Deuteronomy 18:18). Jeremiah's worry was that he did not know how to speak. God's answer was that the words would not be his.

Then God told him his work. He was set "over the nations and over the kingdoms." Jeremiah never held an office or commanded an army. His authority was the word he carried. When God's word goes out, nations rise and fall.

There are six verbs. Four tear down: "to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy and to tear down." Two build up: "to build and to plant." That is the shape of Jeremiah's whole book. Most of it is plucking up and tearing down: exposing sin and announcing judgment. But the last two words are not an afterthought. God tears down so that He can build. He would bring Judah back after seventy years, and He promised one day to plant Israel in their land for good (24:6; 31:28; 32:41).

God still works this way in our lives. Before He builds, He often has to tear down our pride, our false hopes and our idols. It hurts. But He does not tear down to leave us in ruins.

1:11-12 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "What **are** you seeing, Jeremiah?" And I said, "I am seeing a rod of almond." And the LORD said to me, "You have done well to see, for I **am** watching over My word to do it."*

God gave Jeremiah two pictures to confirm his call. The first was simple. "What are you seeing, Jeremiah?" "I am seeing a rod of almond," a branch or stick from an almond tree.

The point is a play on words in Hebrew. The almond tree is called shaqed, the "wakeful" tree, because it is the first tree to bloom in late winter, while the others still sleep. God answered, "I am watching over My word to do it." The word for watching is shoqed. Every time Jeremiah saw an almond tree bloom, he would remember that God was awake and watching over what He said.

This matters for a prophet who would preach for forty years and see little happen for a long time. People mocked him because his warnings seemed slow to come true (17:15). But God was not asleep. He watches over His word, and He does what He says. That is true of His warnings and of His promises.

1:13-16 *And the word of the LORD came to me a second **time**, saying, "What **are** you seeing?" And I said, "I am seeing a pot blown upon, and its face **is** from the face of **the** north." And the LORD said to me, "From the north the calamity will be opened on all the inhabitants of the land. For look, I **am** calling to all the clans of the kingdoms of the north," declares the LORD, "and they will come, and they will set each one his throne **at** the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will speak My judgments with them concerning all their evil, in that they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods and have bowed down to the works of their hands.*

The second picture was "a pot blown upon," a large cooking pot with a fire under it, being fanned so that it boiled hard. Its face was "from the face of the north," so it was tipped toward the south, ready to pour out its scalding contents on the land.

God explained: "From the north the calamity will be opened on all the inhabitants of the land." Babylon lies to the east of Judah, but the desert between them was impassable for an army, so invaders always came around through the north, down the coast and the valleys. Jeremiah would speak again and again of the enemy "from the north" (4:6; 6:1, 22). Later the name was given plainly: Babylon (20:4).

The kings of the north would "set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem." In the ancient world the city gate was where judgment was given. Foreign kings sitting in Jerusalem's gates meant they would be the ones passing sentence. It came true in 586 B.C. when the officials of Babylon sat in the Middle Gate of the city (39:3).

Why would God do this? Verse 16 gives three charges: "they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods and have bowed down to the works of their hands." The root of it all was forsaking the LORD. Idolatry is what fills the empty place when we leave God. People do not stop worshiping. They just worship something smaller, something their own hands made.

1:17-19 *And you, you will gird your loins, and you will arise, and you will speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, look, I have made you this day into a fortified city and into an iron pillar and into bronze walls against all the land, against the kings of Judah, against its officials, against its priests, and against the people of the land. And they will fight against you, and they will not prevail against you, for I* ***am*** *with you," declares the LORD, "to deliver you."*

"You, you will gird your loins." In those days men wore long robes. To gird the loins was to tuck the robe into the belt so you could run or work or fight. It means, get ready for action.

Then comes a hard word: "Do not be dismayed before them, lest I dismay you before them." God's servant could not afford to be afraid of people. If Jeremiah let fear of his hearers control him, God would let him be shaken in front of them. The fear of man is a trap (Proverbs 29:25). The fear of God sets us free from it.

God's promise was even stronger. He would make Jeremiah "into a fortified city and into an iron pillar and into bronze walls." A young man who felt weak would stand like a fortress. And he would need to. The list of those against him is the whole nation: "the kings of Judah," "its officials," "its priests," and "the people of the land." Jeremiah would stand almost alone.

"They will fight against you, and they will not prevail against you, for I am with you." The chapter ends where verse 8 did, with the same promise: "I am with you," and "to deliver you." Jeremiah's courage would not come from his own strength. It would come from the presence of God. That is still where courage comes from. When we stand for the truth and feel outnumbered, we are not alone.

Summary

Jeremiah was a priest's son from Anathoth, and the word of the LORD came to him from 627 B.C., the thirteenth year of Josiah, until the exile of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. God told him that He had

known him before forming him in the womb, set him apart before his birth, and appointed him a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah said he was too young and could not speak. God told him not to say that, promised to be with him and deliver him, touched his mouth and put His words in it, and set him over nations to pluck up and tear down, and to build and to plant. The almond branch showed that God watches over His word to do it. The boiling pot tipped from the north showed that judgment would come from the north because Judah had forsaken the LORD for idols. God told Jeremiah to get ready and not be afraid, and promised to make him a fortified city against the whole land, because "I am with you."

Study Questions

1. What do verses 1-3 tell us about Jeremiah's family, his hometown and how long he preached? (1:1-3)

2. What three things did God say about Jeremiah before he was born? (1:5)

3. What excuse did Jeremiah give, and how did God answer it? (1:6-8)

4. What did God do to Jeremiah's mouth, and what did He say He had put there? (1:9)

5. Which words in verse 10 describe tearing down, and which describe building up? Why do you think both are there? (1:10)

6. What is the meaning of the almond branch? How would that help Jeremiah during long years when his warnings seemed not to come true? (1:11-12)

7. What three sins did God name as the reason for judgment? (1:16)

8. Verse 5 says God knew and formed Jeremiah in the womb. How should that shape the way we think about our own lives and about every unborn child?

9. Jeremiah felt too young and unprepared. Where do you feel unqualified for what God may be asking of you? What does God's answer in verses 7-8 say to you?

10. God told Jeremiah not to be afraid of people's faces. Whose disapproval do you fear most? How does the promise "I am with you" change that?

Jeremiah 2: Forsaking the Spring of Living Water

Scripture

2:1-19 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Go, and you will proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: I remember for you the steadfast love of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your walking after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel ***was*** holiness to the LORD, the first of His produce; all who devour it will be held guilty; calamity will come to them,' declares the LORD." Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me, and walked after vanity, and became vain? And they did not say, 'Where ***is*** the LORD, who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of desert plain and pit, in a land of dryness and deep darkness, in a land ***that*** no one has passed through, and ***where*** no man has dwelt?' And I brought you into the land of the fruitful field, to eat its fruit and its good things; and you came in and made My land unclean, and My inheritance you made into an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where ***is*** the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me, and the shepherds transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after ***things that*** do not profit. Therefore I will contend with you again," declares the LORD, "and with your sons' sons I will contend. For pass over ***to*** the coasts of Cyprus and see, and send to Kedar and consider carefully, exceedingly, and see whether ***anything*** like this has happened. Has a nation exchanged gods, and they ***are*** not gods? And My people has exchanged its glory for ***that which*** does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be exceedingly desolate," declares the LORD. "For My people has done two evils: they have forsaken Me, a spring of living water, to hew out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which cannot hold the water. ***Is*** Israel a slave? Or ***is*** he one born of ***the*** household? Why has he become plunder? Against him young lions roar; they have given their voice, and they have made his land into a waste; his cities are burned, without inhabitant. Also the sons of Memphis and Tahpanhes will graze on you, ***on the*** crown ***of your head***. Have you not done this to yourself by your forsaking the LORD your God at the time ***when*** He was leading you in the way? And now, what ***is it*** to you ***to be*** on the way to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Shihor? And what ***is it*** to you ***to be*** on the way to Assyria, to drink the waters of ***the*** River? Your evil will discipline you, and your apostasies will rebuke you. And know and see that ***it is*** evil and bitter, your forsaking the LORD your God, and the dread of Me ***is*** not in you," declares the Lord GOD of armies.

2:20-37 "For from long ago you broke your yoke; you tore off your bonds, and you said, 'I will not transgress.' For on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree you ***are*** lying down, playing the prostitute. And I, I had planted you a choice vine, all of it a seed of truth. And how have you turned yourself, toward Me, ***into*** the degenerate ***shoots*** of the alien vine? For though you wash with soda, and use much soap for yourself, your iniquity ***is*** stained before Me," declares the Lord GOD. "How can you say, 'I have not made myself unclean; after the Baals I have not walked'? See your way in the valley; know what you have done, a swift young camel entwining her paths, a wild donkey accustomed to ***the*** wilderness, in the desire of her soul she sniffs the wind; her heat, who can turn it back? All who seek her will not grow weary; in her month they will find her. Withhold your foot from ***being*** barefoot, and your throat from thirst. And you said, '***It is*** hopeless! No, for I

have loved strangers, and after them I will walk.' Like the shame of a thief when he is found, so they have been put to shame, the house of Israel, they, their kings, their officials, and their priests and their prophets, who say to the wood, 'You ***are*** my father,' and to the stone, 'You gave birth to us.' For they have turned to Me a back and not a face; and in the time of their calamity they will say, 'Arise and save us!' And where ***are*** your gods which you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your calamity; for your gods have been ***as many as*** the number of your cities, O Judah. Why do you contend with Me? All of you have transgressed against Me," declares the LORD. "In vain I have struck your sons; they did not accept correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion. O generation, you, see the word of the LORD! Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of deep darkness? Why have My people said, 'We have roamed free; we will not come to You again'? Will a virgin forget her ornaments, a bride her sashes? And My people have forgotten Me days without number. How you make your way good to seek love! Therefore you have also taught the wicked women your ways. Also on your skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent needy; you did not find them breaking in, but on all these ***things***. And you said, 'For I am innocent; surely His anger has turned back from me.' Look, I ***am*** entering into judgment with you because of your saying, 'I have not sinned.' Why do you go about so much to change your way? Also by Egypt you will be ashamed, just as you were ashamed by Assyria. Also from this ***one*** you will go out, and your hands ***will be*** on your head; for the LORD has rejected your objects of confidence, and you will not prosper by them."

Preview

This is Jeremiah's first sermon, and it reads like a court case. God remembers the early days when Israel loved Him and followed Him through the wilderness. Then He asks a hard question: what did your fathers find wrong in Me that made them leave? He calls heaven itself to be shocked. His people have done two evils: they left the spring of living water and dug broken cisterns that hold nothing. The rest of the chapter piles up the evidence: idols on every hill, trust in Egypt and Assyria, innocent blood, and through it all a people who say, "I have not sinned."

This chapter is about what it means to forsake God, and how foolish it is. Most people who leave God do not think they are leaving anything. They think they are adding something better. Jeremiah shows that every substitute for God is a cracked tank in the desert. As we read, we should ask what broken cisterns we have been digging, and whether we have been drinking from the spring.

Study

2:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Go, and you will proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: I remember for you the steadfast love of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your walking after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel* ***was*** *holiness to the LORD, the first of His produce; all who devour it will be held guilty; calamity will come to them,' declares the LORD."*

God sent Jeremiah to "proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem." The first words are tender. "I remember for you the steadfast love of your youth, the love of your betrothals." Steadfast love translates the

Hebrew hesed, the loyal, covenant kind of love. God looks back to the exodus and the years in the wilderness as the time of Israel's engagement, when she followed Him "in a land not sown," trusting Him for food and water.

God is not saying Israel was perfect in the wilderness. Exodus and Numbers show they grumbled often. But they followed. And God remembers that.

"Israel was holiness to the LORD, the first of His produce." The firstfruits of the harvest belonged to God and were holy (Leviticus 23:10). Anyone who ate them without right was guilty. In the same way, Israel belonged to God, and nations who tried to devour her would answer to Him. That is still true. God has not given up His claim on Israel (Romans 11:28-29).

2:4-8 *Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me, and walked after vanity, and became vain? And they did not say, 'Where **is** the LORD, who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of desert plain and pit, in a land of dryness and deep darkness, in a land **that** no one has passed through, and **where** no man has dwelt?' And I brought you into the land of the fruitful field, to eat its fruit and its good things; and you came in and made My land unclean, and My inheritance you made into an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where **is** the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me, and the shepherds transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after **things that** do not profit.*

Now God speaks to the whole people, "O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel." His question cuts deep: "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me?" God invites them to name one wrong He had done. They could not.

Instead they "walked after vanity, and became vain." The word for vanity is hebel, a breath or vapor, the same word that runs through Ecclesiastes. Idols are nothing, and people who worship nothing become empty themselves. We become like what we worship (Psalm 115:8).

They forgot what God had done. They never asked, "Where is the LORD, who brought us up from the land of Egypt," who led them through a land of drought and deep darkness, and brought them into a fruitful land. Then they "made My land unclean."

Verse 8 names the leaders, and every group failed. The priests never asked, "Where is the LORD?" The people who taught the law "did not know Me." The shepherds, meaning the kings and rulers, "transgressed against Me." "The prophets prophesied by Baal." Baal was the Canaanite storm god, thought to send rain and good crops. When those who should lead people to God stop seeking Him, the whole nation drifts.

2:9-13 *Therefore I will contend with you again," declares the LORD, "and with your sons' sons I will contend. For pass over **to** the coasts of Cyprus and see, and send to Kedar and consider carefully, exceedingly, and see whether **anything** like this has happened. Has a nation exchanged gods, and they **are** not gods? And My people has exchanged its glory for **that which** does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be exceedingly desolate," declares the LORD. "For My people has done two evils: they have forsaken Me, a spring of living water, to hew out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which cannot hold the water.*

"Therefore I will contend with you." Contend is a law-court word. God is bringing charges.

He tells them to search the world, from "the coasts of Cyprus" in the west to "Kedar" in the eastern desert, and see if any nation has ever done what Israel did. "Has a nation exchanged gods, and they are not gods?" Pagan nations stayed loyal to their idols, which were not gods at all. But "My people has exchanged its glory for that which does not profit." Israel's glory was the living God Himself. They traded Him for nothing. Paul describes the same exchange in Romans 1:23.

God calls on the heavens to be "appalled" and to "shudder." All creation is called to witness something that should never happen.

Then comes the key verse of the chapter. "For My people has done two evils: they have forsaken Me, a spring of living water, to hew out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which cannot hold the water."

To understand this, we have to think like people in a dry land. Living water meant running water, from a spring or a stream. It was fresh, cool and always flowing, and you did not have to make it. A cistern was a pit cut into the rock to catch rainwater. It took hard work to dig. The water in it sat still, and by summer it was stale. And if the rock cracked, the water drained away, and all your work was for nothing.

The first evil was leaving God. The second was trying to replace Him. Israel did both. They walked away from a spring that never runs dry and went to work digging tanks that leaked. Their idols, their alliances with Egypt and Assyria, and their trust in their own plans were all broken cisterns.

Every person does this when he turns from God. We dig for satisfaction in money, success, pleasure, relationships, even religion without God. They take hard work, and they never hold. Jesus stood up at the feast and invited anyone thirsty to come to Him and drink, and He said rivers of living water would flow from the one who believes (John 7:37-38). He told the woman at the well that whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst again (John 4:13-14). The spring Israel left is open to us in Christ. Why keep digging?

2:14-19 ***Is*** *Israel a slave? Or* ***is*** *he one born of* ***the*** *household? Why has he become plunder? Against him young lions roar; they have given their voice, and they have made his land into a waste; his cities are burned, without inhabitant. Also the sons of Memphis and Tahpanhes will graze on you,* ***on the*** *crown* ***of your head****. Have you not done this to yourself by your forsaking the LORD your God at the time* ***when*** *He was leading you in the way? And now, what* ***is it*** *to you* ***to be*** *on the way to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Shihor? And what* ***is it*** *to you* ***to be*** *on the way to Assyria, to drink the waters of* ***the*** *River? Your evil will discipline you, and your apostasies will rebuke you. And know and see that* ***it is*** *evil and bitter, your forsaking the LORD your God, and the dread of Me* ***is*** *not in you," declares the Lord GOD of armies.*

"Is Israel a slave?" Israel was God's own son (Exodus 4:22), not a slave. So why had he become plunder? "Young lions roar" at him, a picture of the invading armies. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C., and its cities lay in ruins.

"The sons of Memphis and Tahpanhes," two cities of Egypt, would also shave Judah's head, a sign of shame. Judah trusted Egypt, and Egypt would turn on her. In 609 B.C. Pharaoh Neco killed King Josiah and put Judah under tribute (2 Kings 23:29-35).

"Have you not done this to yourself?" Judah's troubles were not bad luck. They came from "forsaking the LORD your God at the time when He was leading you in the way."

Verse 18 shows Judah running back and forth between Egypt and Assyria "to drink the waters of the Shihor," a branch of the Nile, and "of the River," the Euphrates. These are more broken cisterns. Then verse 19 gives a sobering truth: "Your evil will discipline you." Often God's judgment is simply letting sin bring its own results. We reap what we sow. "Know and see that it is evil and bitter, your forsaking the LORD your God." Sin is always bitter in the end.

2:20-22 *"For from long ago you broke your yoke; you tore off your bonds, and you said, 'I will not transgress.' For on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree you* ***are*** *lying down, playing the prostitute. And I, I had planted you a choice vine, all of it a seed of truth. And how have you turned yourself, toward Me,* ***into*** *the degenerate* ***shoots*** *of the alien vine? For though you wash with soda, and use much soap for yourself, your iniquity* ***is*** *stained before Me," declares the Lord GOD.*

"From long ago you broke your yoke." An ox that breaks its yoke runs free, but it is no longer useful or safe. Judah had thrown off God's rule and said, "I will not transgress," or I will not serve.

"On every high hill and under every luxuriant tree you are lying down, playing the prostitute." This is the first of many places where Jeremiah describes idolatry as spiritual adultery. God's covenant with Israel was like a marriage. Turning to other gods was unfaithfulness to Him. The picture also fit the facts, because Canaanite worship on the high places, outdoor shrines on hilltops, often included sexual rites. God uses strong words because He takes our faithfulness to Him seriously.

God had "planted you a choice vine, all of it a seed of truth," but it had turned wild (compare Isaiah 5:1-7). And no amount of scrubbing could fix it: "though you wash with soda, and use much

soap for yourself, your iniquity is stained before Me." We cannot wash away our own sin. Only God can, and He has, through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7).

2:23-25 *"How can you say, 'I have not made myself unclean; after the Baals I have not walked'? See your way in the valley; know what you have done, a swift young camel entwining her paths, a wild donkey accustomed to **the** wilderness, in the desire of her soul she sniffs the wind; her heat, who can turn it back? All who seek her will not grow weary; in her month they will find her. Withhold your foot from **being** barefoot, and your throat from thirst. And you said, '**It is** hopeless! No, for I have loved strangers, and after them I will walk.'*

"How can you say," God asks, when they claimed, "I have not made myself unclean"? Judah denied going after the Baals. God points to "the valley," most likely the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, where they worshiped idols (7:31).

Then God uses two pictures from the animal world. A young camel runs this way and that with no sense of direction. A wild donkey in season sniffs the wind looking for a mate, and no one can stop her. Judah's chase after false gods was like that: restless, driven by desire, and out of control. The males "will not grow weary" looking for her. She made herself easy to find.

God urged them to stop before they ran their feet bare and their throats dry. But the answer was hopeless: "It is hopeless! No, for I have loved strangers, and after them I will walk." This is what sin does when we keep feeding it. We stop thinking we can change. We stop wanting to.

2:26-28 *Like the shame of a thief when he is found, so they have been put to shame, the house of Israel, they, their kings, their officials, and their priests and their prophets, who say to the wood, 'You **are** my father,' and to the stone, 'You gave birth to us.' For they have turned to Me a back and not a face; and in the time of their calamity they will say, 'Arise and save us!' And where **are** your gods which you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your calamity; for your gods have been **as many as** the number of your cities, O Judah.*

A thief is ashamed when he is caught. So the house of Israel would be put to shame, from the kings down to the prophets.

Look at their worship. They say "to the wood," "You are my father," and "to the stone," "You gave birth to us." They gave the honor of Creator and Father to a carved pole and a standing stone. "For they have turned to Me a back and not a face." And yet, "in the time of their calamity," they will cry, "Arise and save us!"

That is how many people treat God. They ignore Him when life is good and expect Him to come running when trouble hits. God answers with a hard question: "where are your gods which you made for yourself?" Let them save you. Judah had as many gods as it had towns. None of them could help.

2:29-32 *Why do you contend with Me? All of you have transgressed against Me," declares the LORD. "In vain I have struck your sons; they did not accept correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion. O generation, you, see the word of the LORD! Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of deep darkness? Why have My people said, 'We have roamed free; we will not come to You again'? Will a virgin forget her ornaments, a bride her sashes? And My people have forgotten Me days without number.*

"Why do you contend with Me?" Judah was arguing with God, as if He were the one at fault. But "all of you have transgressed against Me."

God had disciplined them: "In vain I have struck your sons; they did not accept correction." Worse, "your sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion." Manasseh had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood (2 Kings 21:16), and tradition says Isaiah was killed in his days. Jesus mourned over Jerusalem as the city that kills the prophets (Matthew 23:37).

"Have I been a wilderness to Israel?" Had God ever failed them? Yet they said, "We have roamed free." They wanted independence from Him.

Verse 32 is one of the saddest lines in the book. "Will a virgin forget her ornaments, a bride her sashes? And My people have forgotten Me days without number." No bride forgets her wedding dress. But God's people forgot Him, not once but for days beyond counting.

2:33-37 *How you make your way good to seek love! Therefore you have also taught the wicked women your ways. Also on your skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent needy; you did not find them breaking in, but on all these **things**. And you said, 'For I am innocent; surely His anger has turned back from me.' Look, I **am** entering into judgment with you because of your saying, 'I have not sinned.' Why do you go about so much to change your way? Also by Egypt you will be ashamed, just as you were ashamed by Assyria. Also from this **one** you will go out, and your hands **will be** on your head; for the LORD has rejected your objects of confidence, and you will not prosper by them."*

Judah was skilled at seeking "love" from other gods and other nations, so skilled that even "the wicked women" could learn from her. Then the charge grows heavier: "on your skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent needy." They had not caught these poor people breaking in, which under the law could excuse killing a thief at night (Exodus 22:2). These were innocent people, crushed by the powerful.

Worst of all was Judah's answer: "For I am innocent." "I have not sinned." God says that is exactly why He is entering into judgment. The most dangerous place a person can be is denying sin. 1 John 1:8-9 says if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, but if we confess, God is faithful to forgive.

Judah kept changing its plans, now trusting Egypt, now Assyria. But "by Egypt you will be ashamed, just as you were ashamed by Assyria." They would go out "and your hands will be on your head," a sign of grief and captivity (2 Samuel 13:19). "The LORD has rejected your objects of confidence." Anything we trust in place of God, He will one day take away.

Summary

God sent Jeremiah to remind Jerusalem of the love of its youth, when Israel followed Him in the wilderness and was holy to Him. Then He brought charges. Their fathers had left Him though He had done them no wrong, and they chased worthless idols and became worthless. Priests, teachers, rulers and prophets all failed. No nation had ever traded its gods, yet Israel traded its glory for what does not profit. They committed two evils: they forsook the LORD, the spring of living water, and dug broken cisterns. Their trust in Egypt and Assyria would shame them, and their own evil would discipline them. Like a wild animal driven by desire, they ran after idols, called wood and stone their father, and still expected God to save them in trouble. They forgot God days without number, shed innocent blood, and claimed they had not sinned. Because of that, God would judge them and take away everything they trusted in place of Him.

What helps me remember God in ordinary days is simple. I look out the window or take a walk outside. His creation reminds me He is near. It is easy to forget Him in a busy day if I never look up.

Study Questions

1. How does God describe Israel's early days with Him? (2:2-3)

2. What question does God ask about their fathers, and what answer could they give? (2:5)

3. How did each group of leaders fail? (2:8)

4. What are the two evils God names in verse 13? Why is a broken cistern such a fitting picture? (2:13)

5. What does "Your evil will discipline you" mean? (2:19)

6. What did the people say to wood and stone, and what did they say to God when trouble came? (2:27-28)

7. What did Judah say about its own sin, and why did that make things worse? (2:35)

8. Jesus offers living water (John 4:13-14; 7:37-38). What would it look like for you to drink from Him rather than dig your own cisterns?

9. What "broken cisterns" are people around you trusting today? Which ones are you most tempted by?

10. God says His people forgot Him "days without number" (2:32). What helps you remember God in the middle of ordinary days?

Jeremiah 3: Return, Faithless Israel

Scripture

3:1-11 Saying, "Look, a man sends away his wife, and she goes from him and belongs to another man; will he return to her again? Will not that land be utterly polluted? And you, you have played the prostitute ***with*** many companions; and return to Me?" declares the LORD. "Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see: where have you not been lain with? By the roads you sat for them, like an Arab in the wilderness; and you have polluted ***the*** land with your prostitutions and with your evil. And the showers have been withheld, and ***the*** spring rain has not come; and you have had the forehead of a prostitute woman; you refused to be ashamed. Have you not just now called to Me, 'My father, You ***are*** the companion of my youth. Will He keep ***anger*** forever? Will He watch ***it*** to perpetuity?' Look, you have spoken, and you have done the evil things, and you have been able." And the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what apostate Israel has done? She ***has been*** going on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree, and she has played the prostitute there. And I said, 'After she has done all these ***things***, she will return to Me.' And she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw ***it***. And I saw that for all the causes ***for*** which apostate Israel committed adultery, I sent her away and gave her the document of her divorce; and treacherous Judah her sister was not afraid, and she went and played the prostitute, she also. And it was, from the lightness of her prostitution, that she polluted the land, and she committed adultery with the stone and with the wood. And also for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather with falsehood," declares the LORD. And the LORD said to me, "Apostate Israel has justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

3:12-25 Go, and you will proclaim these words toward the north, and you will say, 'Return, apostate Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not make My face fall on you, for I ***am*** loyal,' declares the LORD; 'I will not keep ***anger*** forever. Only know your iniquity, that against the LORD your God you have transgressed, and you have scattered your ways to the strangers under every luxuriant tree, and to My voice you have not listened,' declares the LORD. Return, O backsliding sons," declares the LORD, "for I, I have been husband over you; and I will take you, one from a city and two from a clan, and I will bring you ***to*** Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, and they will shepherd you ***with*** knowledge and insight. And it will be, when you multiply and are fruitful in the land in those days," declares the LORD, "they will not say again, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD,' and it will not come up on a heart, and they will not remember it, and they will not miss ***it***, and it will not be made again. At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The throne of the LORD,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem; and they will not walk again after the stubbornness of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of ***the*** north to the land that I gave as an inheritance to your fathers. And I, I said, 'How I will set you among the sons and give you a land of desire, an inheritance of the beauty of the beauties of nations!' And I said, 'You will call Me, My father, and from after Me you will not turn back.' Surely ***as*** a woman deals treacherously from her companion, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping of the supplications of the sons of Israel; for they have perverted their way, they have forgotten

the LORD their God. "Return, O backsliding sons; I will heal your apostasies." "Look, we have come to You, for You ***are*** the LORD our God. Truly, ***it is*** for falsehood, from the hills ***and the*** tumult ***on the*** mountains; truly in the LORD our God ***is*** the salvation of Israel. And the shameful thing has consumed the toil of our fathers from our youth, their flock and their herd, their sons and their daughters. Let us lie down in our shame, and let our disgrace cover us; for against the LORD our God we have sinned, we and our fathers, from our youth even until this day, and we have not listened to the voice of the LORD our God."

Preview

God keeps using the picture of a marriage. Under the Law, a man who divorced his wife could not take her back after she had married another. Judah had gone after many lovers, yet she still expected God to welcome her back with no change of heart. Then God tells Jeremiah to look at the two sisters. Israel, the northern kingdom, had been unfaithful and God had sent her away into exile. Judah saw it all and did the same, only with a show of turning back. Then comes a surprise: God calls to faithless Israel in the north, "Return," and promises a day when Israel and Judah will come home together, Jerusalem will be called the throne of the LORD, and the nations will gather to His name.

This chapter is about real repentance. God is not interested in tears that change nothing, or in a return made "with falsehood." He wants His people back with all their heart, and He opens the door wide to anyone who will admit his sin and come. As we read, we should ask whether our own turning to God has been real or only for show.

Study

3:1 *Saying, "Look, a man sends away his wife, and she goes from him and belongs to another man; will he return to her again? Will not that land be utterly polluted? And you, you have played the prostitute* ***with*** *many companions; and return to Me?" declares the LORD.*

God begins with a question from the Law. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 said that if a man divorced his wife and she married another man, the first husband could not take her back, even if the second marriage ended. That law protected marriage from being treated like a revolving door. "Will he return to her again? Will not that land be utterly polluted?"

Then God turns the question on Judah. "You have played the prostitute with many companions; and return to Me?" Judah had not gone after one other god but many. By the standard of the Law, there should be no way back.

And yet the rest of the chapter shows that God's grace goes beyond what the Law allowed. He calls His people to return. That is the wonder of the gospel. We had no right to come back, and God made a way.

I want to say a word about the picture itself, since this chapter uses it so much. God is not teaching us about human divorce here, and He is not speaking about any woman's worth. He is using the

closest human bond there is to show how deeply idolatry wounds Him. God's love for His people is like a faithful husband's love, and our turning to other gods is that personal.

3:2-5 *"Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see: where have you not been lain with? By the roads you sat for them, like an Arab in the wilderness; and you have polluted **the** land with your prostitutions and with your evil. And the showers have been withheld, and **the** spring rain has not come; and you have had the forehead of a prostitute woman; you refused to be ashamed. Have you not just now called to Me, 'My father, You **are** the companion of my youth. Will He keep **anger** forever? Will He watch **it** to perpetuity?' Look, you have spoken, and you have done the evil things, and you have been able."*

"Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see." The bare hilltops were the sites of the high places, where Judah worshiped idols. There was not a hill where she had not been unfaithful. She waited by the roads for her lovers "like an Arab in the wilderness," like a desert raider waiting to ambush travelers.

God had already sent a warning: "the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come." The Law said drought would come if Israel turned to other gods (Deuteronomy 11:16-17). The Baals were supposed to bring rain, and they brought none. Still Judah had "the forehead of a prostitute woman," a face that would not blush.

Then verses 4-5 show the kind of repentance God rejects. Judah was saying the right words: "My father, You are the companion of my youth." She hoped God would not stay angry forever. But God answers, "you have spoken, and you have done the evil things." The words were pious. The life did not change. Many think this points to the days after Josiah's reform, when the temple was cleaned up but hearts stayed the same.

3:6-8 *And the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what apostate Israel has done? She **has been** going on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree, and she has played the prostitute there. And I said, 'After she has done all these **things**, she will return to Me.' And she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw **it**. And I saw that for all the causes **for** which apostate Israel committed adultery, I sent her away and gave her the document of her divorce; and treacherous Judah her sister was not afraid, and she went and played the prostitute, she also.*

This section is dated "in the days of Josiah the king." God asked Jeremiah, "Have you seen what apostate Israel has done?" Apostate means one who has turned away from the faith. "Israel" here means the northern kingdom, the ten tribes who broke away after Solomon. They worshiped on "every high hill and under every luxuriant tree."

God had waited for her to come back. "And she did not return." So God "sent her away and gave her the document of her divorce." That was the exile of the northern kingdom to Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6-18).

"Her treacherous sister Judah saw it." Judah watched what happened to Israel and learned nothing. "She went and played the prostitute, she also." It is one thing to sin in ignorance. It is far worse to sin after watching God judge the very same sin in someone else.

3:9-11 *And it was, from the lightness of her prostitution, that she polluted the land, and she committed adultery with the stone and with the wood. And also for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather with falsehood," declares the LORD. And the LORD said to me, "Apostate Israel has justified herself more than treacherous Judah.*

Israel's sin was so casual, "from the lightness of her prostitution," that she defiled the land and "committed adultery with the stone and with the wood," meaning idols of stone and wooden poles.

Then comes the key point of verse 10. Judah "did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather with falsehood." Josiah's reform was real for Josiah. He tore down the high places and cleansed the temple (2 Kings 23). But for many of the people, it was outward only. They went along with the king, and their hearts did not change.

So God said a shocking thing: "Apostate Israel has justified herself more than treacherous Judah." Israel was not innocent. But Judah had more light, more warnings and a godly king, and she faked her return. Pretended repentance is worse in God's eyes than open rebellion. Jesus said the same kind of thing about the cities that saw His miracles and still did not repent (Matthew 11:20-24).

3:12-13 *Go, and you will proclaim these words toward the north, and you will say, 'Return, apostate Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not make My face fall on you, for I **am** loyal,' declares the LORD; 'I will not keep **anger** forever. Only know your iniquity, that against the LORD your God you have transgressed, and you have scattered your ways to the strangers under every luxuriant tree, and to My voice you have not listened,' declares the LORD.*

Now Jeremiah is told to "proclaim these words toward the north." The northern tribes had been in exile for about a hundred years. Yet God still called to them: "Return, apostate Israel." God had not forgotten them.

"I will not make My face fall on you, for I am loyal." The word loyal comes from the same root as hesed. God is faithful to His covenant even when His people are not. "I will not keep anger forever."

But there was one condition: "Only know your iniquity." Repentance begins with honesty. God asks them to admit three things: that they had transgressed against the LORD their God, that they had scattered their ways to strangers under every green tree, and that they had not listened to His voice. God does not ask us to fix ourselves before we come. He asks us to tell the truth about what we have done (1 John 1:9).

3:14-15 *Return, O backsliding sons," declares the LORD, "for I, I have been husband over you; and I will take you, one from a city and two from a clan, and I will bring you **to** Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, and they will shepherd you **with** knowledge and insight.*

"Return, O backsliding sons." God changes the picture from a wife to sons, and He says, "I, I have been husband over you." The word can also mean master or owner. He still claims them as His own.

"I will take you, one from a city and two from a clan, and I will bring you to Zion." Not everyone would come back, only a remnant, a faithful few. But God would gather them one by one and bring them to Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

Then God promised good leaders: "shepherds according to My heart, and they will shepherd you with knowledge and insight." The bad shepherds of 2:8 would be replaced. God did give some good leaders after the exile, like Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But the full meaning points to the Messiah, the Good Shepherd (23:4-6; John 10:11), and those who serve under Him.

3:16-18 *And it will be, when you multiply and are fruitful in the land in those days," declares the LORD, "they will not say again, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD,' and it will not come up on a heart, and they will not remember it, and they will not miss **it**, and it will not be made again. At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The throne of the LORD,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem; and they will not walk again after the stubbornness of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of **the** north to the land that I gave as an inheritance to your fathers.*

These verses look far ahead, "in those days," to a time when Israel has multiplied in the land.

People "will not say again" the words "The ark of the covenant of the LORD." The ark was the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Law and stood in the Most Holy Place of the temple. It was the throne of God's presence in Israel. Yet God says a day is coming when no one will miss it, and "it will not be made again." Why? Because at that time Jerusalem will be called "The throne of the LORD." The whole city will be His throne, not one box in one room. Scripture does not tell us what happened to the ark. It was most likely destroyed or taken when Babylon burned the temple in 586 B.C.

"All the nations will be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem." The nations will come to worship, "and they will not walk again after the stubbornness of their evil heart."

"The house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel." The divided kingdom will be one again. They will come "from the land of the north" back to the land God gave their fathers.

When does this happen? It did not happen fully in the return from Babylon. The ten northern tribes were not gathered as a nation then, and the nations did not stream to Jerusalem, and the hearts of the nations did not change. I believe this points to the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ, when He rules from Jerusalem, Israel and Judah are one nation in their land, and the nations come to worship the King (Isaiah 2:2-4; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 14:16). Some teachers

read these verses as fulfilled spiritually in the church, but the details are about Jerusalem, Judah, Israel and the land, and I take them as God's promise to Israel that He will keep.

3:19-20 *And I, I said, 'How I will set you among the sons and give you a land of desire, an inheritance of the beauty of the beauties of nations!' And I said, 'You will call Me, My father, and from after Me you will not turn back.' Surely **as** a woman deals treacherously from her companion, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD.*

God tells what He had longed to do. "How I will set you among the sons and give you a land of desire." He wanted to treat Israel as a beloved child and give her the most beautiful land among the nations. He hoped she would call Him "My father" and never turn back.

"Surely as a woman deals treacherously from her companion, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel." God's heart is open in this verse. This is not a cold judge reading charges. It is a Father and a Husband who has been betrayed.

3:21-25 *A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping of the supplications of the sons of Israel; for they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the LORD their God. "Return, O backsliding sons; I will heal your apostasies." "Look, we have come to You, for You **are** the LORD our God. Truly, **it is** for falsehood, from the hills **and the** tumult **on the** mountains; truly in the LORD our God **is** the salvation of Israel. And the shameful thing has consumed the toil of our fathers from our youth, their flock and their herd, their sons and their daughters. Let us lie down in our shame, and let our disgrace cover us; for against the LORD our God we have sinned, we and our fathers, from our youth even until this day, and we have not listened to the voice of the LORD our God."*

Now we hear a sound on the same bare heights where Israel had worshiped idols: "the weeping of the supplications of the sons of Israel." They are weeping and pleading, because "they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the LORD their God."

God answers at once: "Return, O backsliding sons; I will heal your apostasies." God does more than forgive. He heals the sickness that made them wander.

Then Jeremiah gives the words of a true confession, the words God wanted to hear. "Look, we have come to You, for You are the LORD our God." They admit that the hills and their noisy worship were "for falsehood," and that "in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel." The "shameful thing," a name for Baal, had eaten up everything their fathers worked for, even "their sons and their daughters." They would lie down in their shame.

Notice what this confession includes. It does not blame others. It says, "we have sinned, we and our fathers." It admits a long history: "from our youth even until this day." And it names the root: "we have not listened to the voice of the LORD our God." This is what real repentance sounds like, and it is the opposite of the false return in verses 4-5 and 10. God gave His people the words to say. He does the same for us in His Word. When we come to Him honestly, He always receives us (Luke 15:20-24).

Summary

God used the Law on divorce to show that Judah, who had gone after many idols, had no claim to return, yet He still called her back. Drought had come as a warning, but Judah kept a shameless face and spoke pious words while doing evil. In Josiah's days God showed Jeremiah that Israel in the north had been unfaithful and sent into exile, and that Judah saw it and did the same, returning only "with falsehood." So faithless Israel looked more righteous than treacherous Judah. God then called the northern exiles to return, asking only that they admit their sin. He promised to gather a remnant to Zion, give them shepherds after His heart, and one day make Jerusalem the throne of the LORD, gather the nations to it, and bring Israel and Judah home together. The chapter ends with God's invitation, "Return, O backsliding sons; I will heal your apostasies," and a true confession of sin.

Study Questions

1. What law does God point to in verse 1, and why does it seem to shut the door on Judah? (3:1; Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

2. What was wrong with Judah's words in verses 4-5? (3:4-5)

3. What had happened to Israel, and what did Judah learn from it? (3:6-8)

4. Why did God say faithless Israel was more righteous than Judah? (3:10-11)

5. What is the one thing God asked the exiles to do in verse 13? (3:13)

6. What future promises are given in verses 16-18? Which of them have not yet been fulfilled? (3:16-18)

7. What does the confession in verses 22-25 include that the false return in verses 4-5 lacked? (3:22-25)

8. Judah returned "with falsehood," going through the motions of a revival. How can we tell the difference between real repentance and religious show in our own lives?

9. God says, "I will heal your apostasies" (3:22). Where do you need God not only to forgive you but to heal the pull that keeps drawing you away?

10. God called to people who had been gone for a hundred years. Is there someone you have given up on, or a part of your own life you think is too far gone? What does this chapter say to that?

Jeremiah 4: Disaster From the North

Scripture

4:1-18 "If you return, O Israel," declares the LORD, "to Me you will return; and if you remove your detestable things from before Me, and you do not wander, and you swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will boast." For thus says the LORD to the man of Judah and to Jerusalem: "Break up for yourselves unplowed ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and remove the foreskins of your heart, O man of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My rage go forth like fire and burn, and there be no one who quenches ***it***, because of the evil of your deeds." Declare in Judah, and in Jerusalem make ***it*** heard, and say, "Blow a trumpet in the land"; call out, fill ***your voice***, and say, "Gather yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities." Lift up a standard toward Zion; take refuge, do not stand still; for I ***am*** bringing calamity from the north, and great destruction. A lion has gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land into a waste; your cities will be laid in ruins, without inhabitant. For this gird yourselves ***with*** sackcloth; mourn and wail; for the burning of the anger of the LORD has not turned back from us. "And it will be in that day," declares the LORD, "***that*** the heart of the king will perish, and the heart of the officials; and the priests will be appalled, and the prophets will be astounded." And I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Truly You have utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'Peace will be yours,' and a sword has reached to the soul." At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, "A scorching wind of the bare heights in the wilderness ***is on*** the way of the daughter of My people, not to winnow and not to cleanse, a wind too full for these ***things*** will come for Me; now I also, I will speak judgments with them." Look, like clouds he goes up, and like the storm wind ***are*** his chariots; his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are devastated! Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, so that you may be saved. Until when will your thoughts of wickedness lodge in your inner being? For a voice declares from Dan, and proclaims trouble from the hill country of Ephraim. Make ***it*** known to the nations, look; proclaim against Jerusalem, "Besiegers are coming from the land of the distance, and they have given their voice against the cities of Judah. Like guards of a field they are against her all around, for she has rebelled against Me," declares the LORD. Your way and your deeds have done these ***things*** to you. This ***is*** your evil, for ***it is*** bitter, for it has reached to your heart.

4:19-31 My inward parts, my inward parts! I writhe! The walls of my heart! My heart is in turmoil within me; I cannot keep silent; for you have heard the sound of a trumpet, O my soul, the shout of battle. Destruction on destruction is proclaimed, for all the land is devastated; suddenly my tents are devastated, in a moment my curtains. Until when will I see a standard, ***and*** hear the sound of a trumpet? "For My people ***is*** foolish; they do not know Me; they ***are*** foolish sons, and they ***are*** not understanding; they ***are*** wise to do evil, and to do good they do not know." I looked at the earth, and look, ***it was*** formlessness and emptiness; and to the heavens, and their light ***was*** not. I looked at the mountains, and look, they ***were*** quaking, and all the hills shook to and fro. I looked, and look, there ***was*** no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I looked, and look, the fruitful field ***was*** the wilderness, and all its cities were pulled down from before the LORD,

from before the burning of His anger. For thus says the LORD: "All the land will be a desolation, and I will not make a complete end. For this the land will mourn, and the heavens above will be dark, because I have spoken, I have purposed, and I have not relented, and I will not turn back from it." From the sound of ***the*** horseman and ***the*** archer every city is fleeing; they have gone into the thickets, and they have gone up on the rocks; every city ***is*** abandoned, and there ***is*** not a man dwelling in them. And you, O devastated one, what will you do? Though you clothe ***yourself in*** scarlet, though you adorn ***yourself with*** ornaments of gold, though you tear open your eyes with paint, in vain you make yourself beautiful; lovers reject you; they seek your life. For I have heard a sound like a sick ***woman***, distress like one bearing her first child, the sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath; she spreads out her hands: "Woe to me now, for my soul faints before murderers!"

Preview

The chapter opens with one last appeal. If Israel will truly return, the nations will be blessed. Judah must break up the hard ground of its heart and circumcise its heart to the LORD. Then the alarm sounds. A lion has come out of his thicket. An invader is coming from the north like a storm, with chariots like a whirlwind. Jeremiah cannot hold in his grief. He cries out in pain at the sound of the trumpet. Then he sees a vision of the land after judgment, as if creation had been undone: formless and empty, no light, no people, no birds. Yet God says, "I will not make a complete end."

This chapter shows us both God's call and God's warning, and it shows us a prophet's heart. Jeremiah did not enjoy preaching judgment. It tore him apart. As we read, we should feel the weight of what sin does, and hear how much God wanted His people to turn back before it was too late.

Study

4:1-2 *"If you return, O Israel," declares the LORD, "to Me you will return; and if you remove your detestable things from before Me, and you do not wander, and you swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will boast."*

"If you return, O Israel," declares the LORD, "to Me you will return." Real repentance is not just turning away from something. It is turning back to Someone. God tells them what that looks like: remove "your detestable things," the idols, from His sight, and "do not wander" anymore.

Then they would swear, "As the LORD lives," and mean it, "in truth, in justice, and in righteousness." To swear by the LORD was to confess Him as the true God. Judah had been using His name while serving idols (5:2).

Look at what would follow: "then nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will boast." This goes back to God's promise to Abraham, that all nations would be blessed through his seed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). Israel's faithfulness was meant to draw the world to God. When God's

people walk with Him, others see Him. When they do not, His name is dragged through the mud (Romans 2:24).

4:3-4 *For thus says the LORD to the man of Judah and to Jerusalem: "Break up for yourselves unplowed ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and remove the foreskins of your heart, O man of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My rage go forth like fire and burn, and there be no one who quenches **it**, because of the evil of your deeds."*

God gives two pictures from farming and from the covenant.

First, "Break up for yourselves unplowed ground, and do not sow among thorns." Unplowed ground is hard ground that has gone wild. Seed thrown on it will not take root, and if it is thrown among thorns, it will be choked. Judah's heart had grown hard. God's word could not take root until the ground was broken up. Hosea used the same words (Hosea 10:12), and Jesus told a parable about seed on hard ground and among thorns (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23).

Second, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and remove the foreskins of your heart." Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11). Every Jewish man had the outward sign. But God had always wanted more than the outward sign. He wanted a heart that was cut free from sin and given to Him (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6). Paul says the same thing: real circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit (Romans 2:28-29).

If they would not, God's "rage" would "go forth like fire and burn, and there be no one who quenches it." This was not a temper tantrum. It was the holy anger of God against the evil of their deeds.

4:5-8 *Declare in Judah, and in Jerusalem make **it** heard, and say, "Blow a trumpet in the land"; call out, fill **your voice**, and say, "Gather yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities." Lift up a standard toward Zion; take refuge, do not stand still; for I **am** bringing calamity from the north, and great destruction. A lion has gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land into a waste; your cities will be laid in ruins, without inhabitant. For this gird yourselves **with** sackcloth; mourn and wail; for the burning of the anger of the LORD has not turned back from us.*

Now the tone changes. Jeremiah speaks like a watchman on the wall. "Blow a trumpet in the land." "Gather yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities." People in the countryside ran for the walled towns when an army came.

"Lift up a standard toward Zion." A standard was a flag on a pole, set up to show people where to run. The danger is "calamity from the north, and great destruction."

"A lion has gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations has set out." Jeremiah does not name him yet, but this is Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He was a destroyer of nations indeed. He would make the land a waste and leave the cities "without inhabitant."

So Jeremiah calls the people to put on sackcloth, rough cloth made of goat hair, worn in mourning. "For the burning of the anger of the LORD has not turned back from us." Notice the word "us." Jeremiah does not stand apart from his people. He grieves with them.

4:9-10 *"And it will be in that day," declares the LORD, "**that** the heart of the king will perish, and the heart of the officials; and the priests will be appalled, and the prophets will be astounded." And I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Truly You have utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'Peace will be yours,' and a sword has reached to the soul."*

"In that day" every leader would fall apart: the king, the officials, the priests and the prophets. The people who should have led the nation would be stunned and helpless.

Then Jeremiah cries out one of the hardest lines in the book: "Alas, Lord GOD! Truly You have utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem." What does he mean? The false prophets had been telling the people, "Peace will be yours" (6:14; 14:13; 23:17). Now the sword was at their throat.

Did God lie to them? No. God had told them the truth through Jeremiah for years. But God allowed the false prophets to speak, and He let the people believe what they wanted to hear. Scripture shows God doing this as a judgment on those who refuse the truth (1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Jeremiah's cry is the honest anguish of a man who sees the disaster coming and cannot understand how the people were so blind. He speaks to God about it, not about God behind His back. That is the right place to take our confusion. God does not lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2), and He never forced anyone to believe a lie. They chose it.

4:11-13 *At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, "A scorching wind of the bare heights in the wilderness **is on** the way of the daughter of My people, not to winnow and not to cleanse, a wind too full for these **things** will come for Me; now I also, I will speak judgments with them." Look, like clouds he goes up, and like the storm wind **are** his chariots; his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are devastated!*

The invader is like "a scorching wind of the bare heights in the wilderness." Farmers used a gentle breeze to winnow grain, tossing it up so the wind would blow away the chaff. This wind would be no gentle breeze. It would be "not to winnow and not to cleanse." It would be a hot desert wind, too strong for that work, a wind sent by God to judge.

"Like clouds he goes up, and like the storm wind are his chariots; his horses are swifter than eagles." Babylon's army would roll in like a storm front. Habakkuk, who lived at the same time, described the Babylonian horses the same way (Habakkuk 1:8). And the people cry, "Woe to us, for we are devastated!"

4:14-18 *Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, so that you may be saved. Until when will your thoughts of wickedness lodge in your inner being? For a voice declares from Dan, and proclaims trouble from the hill country of Ephraim. Make **it** known to the nations, look; proclaim against Jerusalem, "Besiegers are coming from the land of the distance, and they have given their voice against the cities of Judah. Like guards of a field they are against her all around, for she has rebelled against Me," declares the LORD. Your way and your deeds have done these **things** to you. This **is** your evil, for **it is** bitter, for it has reached to your heart.*

Even now, with the enemy on the move, God calls once more: "Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, so that you may be saved." It was not too late yet. "Until when will your thoughts of wickedness lodge in your inner being?" Evil thoughts were like guests that had moved in and would not leave. Repentance means throwing them out.

"A voice declares from Dan." Dan was the far northern edge of the land. Then the news comes "from the hill country of Ephraim," closer still. It is like a messenger running from town to town as the enemy comes south. "Besiegers are coming from the land of the distance." They would surround Jerusalem "like guards of a field," the men who camped around a field to protect the crop. These guards were there to keep the people in.

Why? "For she has rebelled against Me." Verse 18 makes it plain: "Your way and your deeds have done these things to you." This was not bad luck or politics. It was the harvest of sin. "This is your evil, for it is bitter, for it has reached to your heart."

4:19-22 *My inward parts, my inward parts! I writhe! The walls of my heart! My heart is in turmoil within me; I cannot keep silent; for you have heard the sound of a trumpet, O my soul, the shout of battle. Destruction on destruction is proclaimed, for all the land is devastated; suddenly my tents are devastated, in a moment my curtains. Until when will I see a standard, **and** hear the sound of a trumpet? "For My people **is** foolish; they do not know Me; they **are** foolish sons, and they **are** not understanding; they **are** wise to do evil, and to do good they do not know."*

Now we hear Jeremiah's own heart. "My inward parts, my inward parts! I writhe!" He doubles over in pain. "My heart is in turmoil within me; I cannot keep silent." He has heard the trumpet and the shout of battle, and he feels it in his body.

"Destruction on destruction is proclaimed." "Suddenly my tents are devastated." Jeremiah speaks as if the people's homes are his own. "Until when will I see a standard, and hear the sound of a trumpet?" How long must he watch this?

This is why he is called the weeping prophet. He did not stand above his people pointing a finger. He stood with them and broke inside. That is the heart every pastor and every Christian should have toward a world under judgment. Jesus had it when He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44).

Then God answers with the reason. "My people is foolish; they do not know Me." They are "foolish sons." They are "wise to do evil, and to do good they do not know." They were clever and skilled in sin, and clueless about righteousness. Paul wanted the opposite for believers: wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil (Romans 16:19).

4:23-26 *I looked at the earth, and look, **it was** formlessness and emptiness; and to the heavens, and their light **was** not. I looked at the mountains, and look, they **were** quaking, and all the hills shook to and fro. I looked, and look, there **was** no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I looked, and look, the fruitful field **was** the wilderness, and all its cities were pulled down from before the LORD, from before the burning of His anger.*

These four verses are some of the most powerful in the book. Four times Jeremiah says, "I looked," and four times he sees something terrible.

"I looked at the earth, and look, it was formlessness and emptiness." These are the same two Hebrew words used in Genesis 1:2, tohu and bohu, for the earth before God shaped and filled it. "And to the heavens, and their light was not." On the first day God made light (Genesis 1:3). Here the light is gone.

"I looked at the mountains, and look, they were quaking." The solid things of the world shake. "I looked, and look, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled." On the fifth and sixth days God made birds and man. Here they are gone. "The fruitful field was the wilderness, and all its cities were pulled down."

Jeremiah is seeing creation run backward. Sin had come into the world through man, and now judgment for sin was undoing the order God had made. This is poetry, and it describes the land of Judah after Babylon came: empty, dark, silent and ruined. But Jeremiah uses the language of creation to show how complete the judgment was. When God's people reject their Creator, everything good He made begins to come apart.

Some teachers have used verse 23 to support the idea of a gap of long ages between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, with an earlier world judged before Adam. I do not think Jeremiah is speaking about that. The context is the invasion of Judah, its cities, its people and "the burning of His anger" (4:26). Others see the vision as also looking ahead to the day of the LORD at the end of the age, when the heavens are darkened and the earth is shaken (Isaiah 13:10; Matthew 24:29). The words fit that day too, but the first meaning is the coming ruin of Judah.

Why does it all happen? "From before the LORD, from before the burning of His anger." Judgment is not random. It comes from a holy God who takes sin seriously.

4:27-28 *For thus says the LORD: "All the land will be a desolation, and I will not make a complete end. For this the land will mourn, and the heavens above will be dark, because I have spoken, I have purposed, and I have not relented, and I will not turn back from it."*

Here is a ray of light in the dark. "All the land will be a desolation, and I will not make a complete end." Even in His anger God keeps a remnant. Judah would be crushed, but not wiped out. God's promises to Abraham and David could not fail. We will hear this again in 5:10, 5:18, 30:11 and 46:28.

But the judgment itself was settled. "The land will mourn, and the heavens above will be dark, because I have spoken, I have purposed, and I have not relented, and I will not turn back from it."

There comes a point when warnings have been rejected so long that judgment is fixed. Judah was close to that point.

4:29-31 *From the sound of **the** horseman and **the** archer every city is fleeing; they have gone into the thickets, and they have gone up on the rocks; every city **is** abandoned, and there **is** not a man dwelling in them. And you, O devastated one, what will you do? Though you clothe **yourself in** scarlet, though you adorn **yourself with** ornaments of gold, though you tear open your eyes with paint, in vain you make yourself beautiful; lovers reject you; they seek your life. For I have heard a sound like a sick **woman**, distress like one bearing her first child, the sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath; she spreads out her hands: "Woe to me now, for my soul faints before murderers!"*

At the sound of the horsemen and archers, "every city is fleeing." People hide in the bushes and climb into the rocks. The towns are empty.

Then Jeremiah speaks to Jerusalem as a woman trying to save herself by her beauty. She puts on scarlet, gold jewelry and eye paint, hoping to win over her lovers. In the ancient world a city sometimes tried to buy off an invader or win allies with gifts and charm. But "in vain you make yourself beautiful; lovers reject you; they seek your life." The nations Judah had flirted with would turn on her.

The last picture is the cry of a woman in childbirth, "distress like one bearing her first child." "The daughter of Zion," a tender name for Jerusalem, gasps for breath and spreads out her hands: "Woe to me now, for my soul faints before murderers!" The chapter ends not with a trumpet but with a cry. Sin always promises beauty and ends in pain.

Summary

God called Israel to return to Him truly and put away their idols, so that the nations would be blessed through them. He told Judah to break up the hard ground of their hearts and circumcise their hearts to the LORD, or His anger would burn like fire. Then Jeremiah sounded the alarm: a lion, a destroyer of nations, was coming from the north. Leaders would be stunned, and Jeremiah cried out that the people had been deceived by the message of peace. The invader would come like a scorching wind and a storm. God called Jerusalem to wash its heart while there was still time, and said its own deeds had brought this on. Jeremiah writhed in grief, and God said His people were wise in evil and ignorant of good. In a vision Jeremiah saw the land undone like creation in reverse: formless, empty, dark and silent. Yet God promised not to make a complete end. Jerusalem's attempts to charm her lovers would fail, and she would cry out like a woman in labor.

Study Questions

1. According to verses 1-2, what does true return to God look like, and what would happen to the nations if Israel returned? (4:1-2)

2. What do the pictures of unplowed ground and circumcision of the heart teach about what God wants? (4:3-4; Romans 2:28-29)

3. Who is the lion and destroyer of nations, and where would he come from? (4:6-7)

4. What had the false prophets been telling the people, and why was Jeremiah so troubled by it? (4:10)

5. According to verse 18, what brought this disaster on Judah? (4:18)

6. How does Jeremiah describe his own grief in verses 19-21? What does that show about his heart toward his people? (4:19-21)

7. What words from Genesis 1 does Jeremiah use in verse 23, and what is he showing by using them? (4:23-26)

8. What promise of mercy does God give in the middle of judgment? (4:27)

9. God told His people to break up their hard ground. Is there an area of your heart where God's Word is not taking root? What would it look like to break it up?

10. Jeremiah grieved over people who were rejecting God. How do you feel about the people around you who do not know Christ? What would it look like to share Jeremiah's heart for them?

Jeremiah 5: Not One Who Does Justice

Scripture

5:1-19 Rove about in the streets of Jerusalem, and see, please, and know, and search in its open places, if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks faithfulness, and I will forgive it. And though they say, "As the LORD lives," therefore they swear to falsehood. O LORD, ***are*** not Your eyes on faithfulness? You struck them, and they did not writhe; You brought them to an end; they refused to accept correction; they made their faces stronger than rock; they refused to return. And I, I said, "Surely these ***are*** poor; they have acted foolishly, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God. I will go for myself to the great ***ones***, and I will speak with them, for they, they know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God." Surely they altogether had broken the yoke, had torn off the bonds. Therefore a lion from the forest has struck them; a wolf of the desert plains will devastate them; a leopard ***is*** watching over their cities; everyone who goes out from them will be torn in pieces; for their transgressions are many, their apostasies are numerous. "How, for this, can I forgive you? Your sons have forsaken Me and have sworn by ***those that are*** not gods. And I satisfied them, and they committed adultery, and ***to*** the house of a prostitute they thronged. They have been well-fed horses, lustful; each one neighs to the wife of his neighbor. Will I not punish for these ***things***?" declares the LORD. "Or on a nation which ***is*** like this, will My soul not avenge itself? Go up among its vine rows and destroy, and do not make a complete end; remove its tendrils, for they ***are*** not the LORD's. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have utterly dealt treacherously with Me," declares the LORD. They have denied the LORD, and they have said, "Not He! And harm will not come on us, and sword and famine we will not see. And the prophets will become wind, and the word ***is*** not in them. Thus let it be done to them." Therefore thus says the LORD God of armies: "Because you have spoken this word, look, I am making My words in your mouth into a fire, and this people wood, and it will consume them. Look, I am bringing on you a nation from afar, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. "It ***is*** an enduring nation; it ***is*** a nation from long ago, a nation whose language you do not know, and you do not hear what it says. Its quiver ***is*** like an open grave; all of them ***are*** mighty men. And it will devour your harvest and your food; they will devour your sons and your daughters; it will devour your flock and your herd; it will devour your vine and your fig tree; it will shatter the cities of your fortifications in which you are trusting, with the sword. And also in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not make a complete end with you. And it will be, when you say, 'Why has the LORD our God done all these ***things*** to us?' then you will say to them, 'Just as you forsook Me and served gods of foreignness in your land, so you will serve strangers in a land ***that is*** not yours.'

5:20-31 Declare this in the house of Jacob, and proclaim it in Judah, saying, 'Hear this, please, O foolish people, and without heart; eyes they have, and they do not see; ears they have, and they do not hear. Do you not fear Me?' declares the LORD. 'Or do you not tremble before Me, who appointed the sand ***as*** a boundary for the sea, a perpetual decree, and it will not pass over it? And they shook back and forth, and they will not prevail; and its waves roar, and they will not pass over it. And this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and have gone away. And they have not said in their heart, "Let us fear, please, the LORD our God, who gives rain,

autumn rain and spring rain in its time, the weeks of the appointments of harvest He keeps for us." Your iniquities have turned these aside, and your sins have withheld the good from you. For wicked ***men*** are found among My people; he watches like the bending down of fowlers; they set a trap; they catch men. Like a cage full of birds, so their houses ***are*** full of deceit; therefore they have become great and have grown rich. They have grown fat; they have become sleek; also they have passed beyond matters of evil; they have not pleaded the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they may prosper; and the justice of the needy they have not judged. Will I not punish for these ***things***?' declares the LORD. 'Or on a nation which ***is*** like this, will My soul not avenge itself? An appalling and horrible thing has occurred in the land: the prophets have prophesied with falsehood, and the priests rule by their hands, and My people have loved ***it*** so. And what will you do at its end?'"

Preview

God sends Jeremiah on a search through the streets of Jerusalem: find one man who does justice and seeks truth, and God will pardon the city. Jeremiah looks among the poor, then among the leaders, and finds no one. The people swear by the LORD and lie. They have grown fat and sleek, cheating the poor and ignoring the orphan. They say, "Not He," as if God would do nothing. So God will bring a nation from far away whose language they cannot understand. Yet twice more He says, "I will not make a complete end."

This chapter is about a whole society that has lost its moral center: religion with no truth, wealth with no justice, and leaders who tell people what they want to hear. It ends with a line that could describe many churches and nations today: "My people have loved it so." As we read, we should ask whether we would pass the test of verse 1, and whether we love the truth even when it costs us.

Study

5:1-2 *Rove about in the streets of Jerusalem, and see, please, and know, and search in its open places, if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks faithfulness, and I will forgive it. And though they say, "As the LORD lives," therefore they swear to falsehood.*

"Rove about in the streets of Jerusalem." God tells Jeremiah, and anyone else who will listen, to search the city: the streets and the "open places," the squares where people met and did business. The goal: "if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks faithfulness, and I will forgive it."

This reminds us of Abraham pleading for Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). God would have spared Sodom for ten righteous people. Here He offers to spare Jerusalem for one. That shows how ready God is to forgive. It also shows how deep the rot had gone.

"Though they say, As the LORD lives, therefore they swear to falsehood." They used God's name in their oaths, the most solemn promise a person could make. But their oaths were lies. They were religious on the outside and dishonest at the core.

5:3 *O LORD, **are** not Your eyes on faithfulness? You struck them, and they did not writhe; You brought them to an end; they refused to accept correction; they made their faces stronger than rock; they refused to return.*

Jeremiah answers God: "O LORD, are not Your eyes on faithfulness?" God looks for truth in people's hearts. But Judah had none.

God had disciplined them: "You struck them, and they did not writhe." They felt nothing. "You brought them to an end; they refused to accept correction." They "made their faces stronger than rock." They hardened themselves. "They refused to return."

This is what happens when we resist God's discipline. Hebrews 12:5-11 tells us God disciplines those He loves, for our good. The right response is to be trained by it. The wrong response is to set our face like stone. Judah chose the wrong one.

5:4-6 *And I, I said, "Surely these **are** poor; they have acted foolishly, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God. I will go for myself to the great **ones**, and I will speak with them, for they, they know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God." Surely they altogether had broken the yoke, had torn off the bonds. Therefore a lion from the forest has struck them; a wolf of the desert plains will devastate them; a leopard **is** watching over their cities; everyone who goes out from them will be torn in pieces; for their transgressions are many, their apostasies are numerous.*

Jeremiah thought maybe the problem was only with the poor. "Surely these are poor; they have acted foolishly, for they do not know the way of the LORD." Maybe they had never been taught. So he went to "the great ones," the leaders and the educated. Surely they knew God's ways.

But "they altogether had broken the yoke, had torn off the bonds." The ones who knew the most had thrown off God's rule just as completely. Knowledge without obedience is no better than ignorance. It is worse, because it is willful (James 4:17).

So three wild animals would attack: "a lion from the forest," "a wolf of the desert plains," and "a leopard" watching outside their cities. These are pictures of the enemy armies, waiting to tear apart anyone who went out. The reason: "their transgressions are many, their apostasies are numerous."

5:7-9 *"How, for this, can I forgive you? Your sons have forsaken Me and have sworn by **those that are** not gods. And I satisfied them, and they committed adultery, and **to** the house of a prostitute they thronged. They have been well-fed horses, lustful; each one neighs to the wife of his neighbor. Will I not punish for these **things**?" declares the LORD. "Or on a nation which **is** like this, will My soul not avenge itself?*

"How, for this, can I forgive you?" God is not saying He is unable to forgive. He is saying they had given Him no ground for it, because they would not repent.

Their sins were spiritual and physical. "Your sons have forsaken Me and have sworn by those that are not gods." And then, "I satisfied them, and they committed adultery." God had filled them

with good things, and they used His gifts to sin. They crowded "the house of a prostitute," which can mean both pagan shrines and real immorality.

Verse 8 is blunt: "They have been well-fed horses, lustful; each one neighs to the wife of his neighbor." Prosperity had made them like animals in season, chasing other men's wives. When people forget God, sexual sin is never far behind (Romans 1:24-25).

"Will I not punish for these things?" God asks twice in this chapter (5:9, 29). His justice requires it.

5:10-13 *Go up among its vine rows and destroy, and do not make a complete end; remove its tendrils, for they **are** not the LORD's. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have utterly dealt treacherously with Me," declares the LORD. They have denied the LORD, and they have said, "Not He! And harm will not come on us, and sword and famine we will not see. And the prophets will become wind, and the word **is** not in them. Thus let it be done to them."*

God speaks to the enemy armies as if they were workers in a vineyard: "Go up among its vine rows and destroy." But again, "do not make a complete end." Prune off the branches, "for they are not the LORD's." The wild branches that did not belong to God would be cut away. The vine itself would survive.

The charge: "the house of Israel and the house of Judah have utterly dealt treacherously with Me."

Then we hear what the people were saying. "They have denied the LORD, and they have said, Not He!" In other words, God will not do anything. "Harm will not come on us." They did not deny that God existed. They denied that He would act. That is a very common kind of unbelief, even among religious people. Peter warned that in the last days mockers would say the same about Christ's return (2 Peter 3:3-4).

They also mocked the true prophets: "the prophets will become wind, and the word is not in them." The word for wind is ruach, which also means spirit. They said Jeremiah was all hot air.

5:14-17 *Therefore thus says the LORD God of armies: "Because you have spoken this word, look, I am making My words in your mouth into a fire, and this people wood, and it will consume them. Look, I am bringing on you a nation from afar, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. "It **is** an enduring nation; it **is** a nation from long ago, a nation whose language you do not know, and you do not hear what it says. Its quiver **is** like an open grave; all of them **are** mighty men. And it will devour your harvest and your food; they will devour your sons and your daughters; it will devour your flock and your herd; it will devour your vine and your fig tree; it will shatter the cities of your fortifications in which you are trusting, with the sword.*

God answers: "Because you have spoken this word, look, I am making My words in your mouth into a fire, and this people wood, and it will consume them." They called Jeremiah's words wind. God would make them fire. The words they mocked would come true and burn them up.

"I am bringing on you a nation from afar." Moses had warned of exactly this in Deuteronomy 28:49-52: a nation from far away whose language Israel would not understand,

who would eat their crops and besiege their cities. Babylon was "an enduring nation," "a nation from long ago," with roots going back to the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:9). Its language was Akkadian, which the people of Judah could not understand. Isaiah warned of a foreign tongue too, and Paul applied that warning in 1 Corinthians 14:21.

"Its quiver is like an open grave." Every arrow meant a death. The enemy would "devour" four times: the harvest and food, sons and daughters, flock and herd, vine and fig tree. Their walled cities, the fortresses they trusted, would be shattered. Whatever we trust in place of God will fail us.

5:18-19 *And also in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not make a complete end with you. And it will be, when you say, 'Why has the LORD our God done all these **things** to us?' then you will say to them, 'Just as you forsook Me and served gods of foreignness in your land, so you will serve strangers in a land **that is** not yours.'*

"And also in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not make a complete end with you." For the third time God promises to keep a remnant (4:27; 5:10). He is angry, but He is faithful.

Then God gives Jeremiah an answer to a question the people would ask in exile: "Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?" The answer: "Just as you forsook Me and served gods of foreignness in your land, so you will serve strangers in a land that is not yours." The punishment fit the sin. They wanted foreign gods in God's land. So God would send them to serve foreigners in a foreign land.

5:20-22 *Declare this in the house of Jacob, and proclaim it in Judah, saying, 'Hear this, please, O foolish people, and without heart; eyes they have, and they do not see; ears they have, and they do not hear. Do you not fear Me?' declares the LORD. 'Or do you not tremble before Me, who appointed the sand **as** a boundary for the sea, a perpetual decree, and it will not pass over it? And they shook back and forth, and they will not prevail; and its waves roar, and they will not pass over it.*

"Hear this, please, O foolish people, and without heart." Without heart means without understanding. "Eyes they have, and they do not see; ears they have, and they do not hear." This sounds like the description of idols in Psalm 115:5-6. They had become like the idols they worshiped. Jesus used similar words about the people of His day (Mark 8:18).

"Do you not fear Me?" God points to the sea. He "appointed the sand as a boundary for the sea, a perpetual decree." The waves roar and toss, but they cannot cross the line God set (Job 38:8-11). The sea obeys its Creator. His people would not.

5:23-25 *And this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and have gone away. And they have not said in their heart, "Let us fear, please, the LORD our God, who gives rain, autumn rain and spring rain in its time, the weeks of the appointments of harvest He keeps for us." Your iniquities have turned these aside, and your sins have withheld the good from you.*

"This people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and have gone away." Creation stays in its place. Judah did not.

God gives them every good thing. He "gives rain, autumn rain and spring rain in its time." In Israel the autumn rains came in October and November to soften the ground for planting, and the spring rains in March and April to bring the crops to harvest. God also keeps "the weeks of the appointments of harvest," the steady seasons. Yet they never stopped to say in their hearts, Let us fear the LORD.

"Your iniquities have turned these aside, and your sins have withheld the good from you." When the rains failed, it was not that God had become stingy. Their sins had blocked the blessing. Sin always costs us good things God wanted to give.

5:26-29 *For wicked **men** are found among My people; he watches like the bending down of fowlers; they set a trap; they catch men. Like a cage full of birds, so their houses **are** full of deceit; therefore they have become great and have grown rich. They have grown fat; they have become sleek; also they have passed beyond matters of evil; they have not pleaded the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they may prosper; and the justice of the needy they have not judged. Will I not punish for these **things**?' declares the LORD. 'Or on a nation which **is** like this, will My soul not avenge itself?*

God names the sins of the rich and powerful. "Wicked men are found among My people." They lay in wait like hunters with bird traps, "they catch men." Their houses were "like a cage full of birds," stuffed with things gained by "deceit."

"Therefore they have become great and have grown rich. They have grown fat; they have become sleek." They looked successful. But they did not plead "the cause of the fatherless," and they did not judge "the justice of the needy." Orphans and the poor had no one to stand up for them.

God has always cared deeply about how we treat the weak (Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 10:18; James 1:27). A nation can be wealthy and religious and still be under God's judgment because it crushes the poor. "Will I not punish for these things?" The question needs no answer.

5:30-31 *An appalling and horrible thing has occurred in the land: the prophets have prophesied with falsehood, and the priests rule by their hands, and My people have loved **it** so. And what will you do at its end?'"*

"An appalling and horrible thing has occurred in the land." What is it? Three things together.

"The prophets have prophesied with falsehood." They spoke lies in God's name.

"The priests rule by their hands." The priests took their direction from the false prophets, or went along with them, and used their power for themselves.

"And My people have loved it so." This is the worst part. The people were not victims of bad leaders. They wanted it that way. They liked the lies because the lies were comfortable. Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when people would not put up with sound teaching but would gather teachers to tell them what their itching ears wanted to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Then God asks the question that hangs over the whole chapter: "And what will you do at its end?" When the judgment comes, when the comfortable lies fall apart, what then? That is a question every person must answer. The only safe place to stand at the end is on the truth of God's Word and the work of Christ.

Summary

God told Jeremiah to search Jerusalem for one man who did justice and sought truth, and He would pardon the city. No one was found. People swore by the LORD falsely and hardened themselves against His discipline. Jeremiah looked among the poor, then among the leaders, and found that both had thrown off God's yoke. So enemies would attack like a lion, a wolf and a leopard. God had filled them with good things, and they had used them to chase idols and their neighbors' wives. They said God would do nothing and the prophets were wind, so God would make Jeremiah's words a fire and bring a far-off nation with a foreign tongue to devour everything they trusted. Still, God would not make a complete end. Creation obeys God's boundaries, but His people did not, and their sins had withheld His rain. The rich grew fat by deceit and ignored the orphan and the poor. False prophets spoke, priests ruled by them, and the people loved it. God asked, "What will you do at its end?"

Study Questions

1. What was Jeremiah told to search for in Jerusalem, and what would God do if he found it? (5:1)

2. What did Jeremiah find among the poor, and then among the great ones? (5:4-5)

3. How did the people respond when God disciplined them? (5:3)

4. What did the people say about God and about the prophets in verses 12-13, and how did God answer? (5:12-14)

5. What promise of mercy does God repeat in this chapter? (5:10, 18)

6. What does the sea teach about God's power and Judah's stubbornness? (5:22-23)

7. What sins of the rich are named in verses 26-28? (5:26-28)

8. Verse 31 says the people loved the lies of the false prophets. Why are comfortable lies so appealing? Where do you see that today?

9. If someone searched your town, your church or your home for "one who does justice, who seeks faithfulness," what would they find?

10. God asks, "What will you do at its end?" (5:31). How would you answer that question about your own life?

Jeremiah 6: Jerusalem Under Siege

Scripture

6:1-15 Flee for refuge, O sons of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem, and in Tekoa blow a trumpet, and over Beth-haccherem raise a signal; for calamity has looked down from the north, and great destruction. The lovely and the dainty one, I have likened the daughter of Zion. To her shepherds and their flocks will come; they will pitch tents against her all around; they will graze, each one ***at*** his hand. Consecrate battle against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us, for the day has turned, for the shadows of evening are stretched out. Arise, and let us go up in the night, and let us destroy her fortresses. For thus says the LORD of armies: "Cut down trees, and pour out a siege mound against Jerusalem. She ***is*** the city to be punished; all of her ***is*** oppression in her midst. As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps her evil fresh; violence and devastation are heard in her; before My face continually ***are*** sickness and wound. Let yourself be disciplined, O Jerusalem, lest My soul be alienated from you, lest I make you a desolation, a land not inhabited." Thus says the LORD of armies: "They will thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel like the vine; return your hand like a grape gatherer over ***the*** branches." To whom will I speak and give warning, that they may listen? Look, their ear ***is*** uncircumcised, and they are not able to pay attention. Look, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them; they do not delight in it. And I am full of the rage of the LORD; I am weary of holding ***it*** in. "Pour ***it*** out on the child in the street, and on the gathering of young men together; for also a husband with a wife will be caught, the old with the one full of days. And their houses will be turned over to others, fields and wives together; for I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land," declares the LORD. "For from their least even to their greatest, every one ***is*** gaining unjust gain; and from prophet even to priest, every one ***is*** doing falsehood. And they have healed the fracture of My people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' and there ***is*** no peace. Were they ashamed because they had done an abomination? They are not at all ashamed, and they do not know ***how*** to blush. Therefore they will fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them they will stumble," says the LORD.

6:16-30 Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads and look, and ask for the paths of ancient time, where this ***is***, the good way, and walk in it, and find rest for your soul." And they said, "We will not walk ***in it***." "And I raised up watchmen over you: 'Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet.'" And they said, "We will not pay attention." "Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what ***is*** in them. Hear, O earth: look, I am bringing calamity on this people, the fruit of their schemes; for they have not paid attention to My words, and My law, they have rejected it. Why ***is*** this to Me, frankincense ***that*** comes from Sheba, and the good cane from a land of distance? Your burnt offerings ***are*** not for acceptance, and your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me." Therefore thus says the LORD: "Look, I am giving stumbling blocks to this people, and they will stumble over them, fathers and sons together; a neighbor and his friend, and they will perish." Thus says the LORD: "Look, a people is coming from the land of ***the*** north, and a great nation will be roused from the remotest parts of ***the*** earth. They take hold of bow and javelin; it ***is*** cruel, and they have no mercy; their voice roars like the sea, and on horses they ride, arranged like a man for battle against you, O daughter of Zion." We have heard the report of it; our hands hang limp; distress has taken hold of us, anguish like ***a woman*** giving birth. Do not go out ***into*** the field, and do not walk

on the road, for the enemy has a sword; terror ***is*** all around. O daughter of my people, gird yourself ***with*** sackcloth and roll in ashes; make for yourself the mourning of an only ***child***, a wailing of bitterness; for suddenly the destroyer will come on us. "I have made you an assayer among My people, a fortification, that you may know, and you will test their way. All of them ***are*** the most stubborn of rebels, going about ***with*** slander; bronze and iron, all of them ***are*** destroyers. The bellows puff; from the fire the lead is consumed; in vain someone has refined thoroughly, and the evil ***ones*** have not been separated. They have called them rejected silver, for the LORD has rejected them."

Preview

The enemy from the north is closer now. Jeremiah warns his own tribe, Benjamin, to flee Jerusalem. The enemy commanders plan their attack, cutting trees for siege ramps, eager to strike by noon or by night. God says Jerusalem keeps its evil fresh the way a well keeps its water fresh. Everyone, from the least to the greatest, is greedy for gain, and the prophets and priests heal the wound of the people lightly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. God invites them to stand at the crossroads and ask for the old paths, the good way, and find rest. They answer, "We will not walk in it."

This chapter shows how a people can hear the truth again and again and still refuse it. It also shows the danger of comfortable religion: incense and offerings brought to God by people who will not listen to Him. As we read, we should ask whether we have been settling for a light healing, and whether we are willing to walk in God's good way when He shows it to us.

Study

6:1-3 *Flee for refuge, O sons of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem, and in Tekoa blow a trumpet, and over Beth-haccherem raise a signal; for calamity has looked down from the north, and great destruction. The lovely and the dainty one, I have likened the daughter of Zion. To her shepherds and their flocks will come; they will pitch tents against her all around; they will graze, each one **at** his hand.*

"Flee for refuge, O sons of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem." Jeremiah was from the tribe of Benjamin, and Jerusalem sat on the border between Benjamin and Judah. Normally people fled into Jerusalem when an enemy came. Now Jeremiah tells them to flee out of it. The city that seemed safest would be the most dangerous place to be.

"In Tekoa blow a trumpet, and over Beth-haccherem raise a signal." Tekoa was a town about ten miles south of Jerusalem, the hometown of Amos. Beth-haccherem was a hilltop nearby where signal fires could be seen. In Hebrew, Tekoa sounds like the word for blowing a trumpet. The warnings were to go out south, because the danger came "from the north."

God had made "the daughter of Zion" lovely and delicate, like a fine pasture. Now "shepherds and their flocks" would come, the enemy kings and their armies, and they would camp all around her and graze her bare.

6:4-5 *Consecrate battle against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us, for the day has turned, for the shadows of evening are stretched out. Arise, and let us go up in the night, and let us destroy her fortresses.*

Now we hear the enemy talking. "Consecrate battle against her." Ancient armies offered sacrifices before battle, as if war were a holy act. "Arise, and let us go up at noon." Armies usually rested in the heat of midday, but these soldiers were so eager they wanted to attack then.

Then the day slips away: "Woe to us, for the day has turned, for the shadows of evening are stretched out." They are frustrated that night is coming. So they say, "Let us go up in the night, and let us destroy her fortresses." They will not wait for morning. This shows how relentless Babylon would be.

6:6-8 *For thus says the LORD of armies: "Cut down trees, and pour out a siege mound against Jerusalem. She **is** the city to be punished; all of her **is** oppression in her midst. As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps her evil fresh; violence and devastation are heard in her; before My face continually **are** sickness and wound. Let yourself be disciplined, O Jerusalem, lest My soul be alienated from you, lest I make you a desolation, a land not inhabited."*

Now God speaks, and we learn who is really giving the orders. "Cut down trees, and pour out a siege mound against Jerusalem." A siege mound was a ramp of dirt and timber built up against the wall so soldiers and battering rams could reach the top. God Himself is the commander behind Babylon's army. "She is the city to be punished."

Why? "All of her is oppression in her midst." Then a striking picture: "As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps her evil fresh." A spring keeps pouring out new water. Jerusalem kept pouring out new evil, day after day. "Violence and devastation are heard in her."

Yet even now God pleads: "Let yourself be disciplined, O Jerusalem, lest My soul be alienated from you." God's heart was still reaching for her. He did not want to turn away. But if she would not accept correction, He would make her "a desolation, a land not inhabited."

6:9-10 *Thus says the LORD of armies: "They will thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel like the vine; return your hand like a grape gatherer over **the** branches." To whom will I speak and give warning, that they may listen? Look, their ear **is** uncircumcised, and they are not able to pay attention. Look, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them; they do not delight in it.*

"They will thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel like the vine." When grape pickers finish a vineyard, gleaners go back over it to pick what was left. The northern kingdom had already been carried away. Now Judah, the remnant, would be picked clean too. "Return your hand like a grape gatherer over the branches" means go back again and again.

Jeremiah answers in frustration: "To whom will I speak and give warning, that they may listen?" "Their ear is uncircumcised." Just as their hearts were uncircumcised (4:4), their ears were closed off and could not take in God's word.

"The word of the LORD has become a reproach to them; they do not delight in it." That is the root problem. They did not only ignore God's Word. They mocked it. It was a joke to them. Compare this to the man in Psalm 1:2 whose "delight" is in God's law. What we delight in shows where our heart is.

6:11-12 *And I am full of the rage of the LORD; I am weary of holding **it** in. "Pour **it** out on the child in the street, and on the gathering of young men together; for also a husband with a wife will be caught, the old with the one full of days. And their houses will be turned over to others, fields and wives together; for I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land," declares the LORD.*

"I am full of the rage of the LORD; I am weary of holding it in." Jeremiah had God's message burning inside him, and he could not hold it back any longer (compare 20:9).

God tells him to pour it out on everyone: "the child in the street," "the gathering of young men," "a husband with a wife," "the old with the one full of days." No age group would escape. This is painful to read. When judgment comes on a nation, the innocent suffer alongside the guilty. That is one reason sin is so terrible: its effects spread to everyone around it.

Their houses, fields and wives would go to others. This was one of the curses Moses had warned about for breaking the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:30).

6:13-15 *"For from their least even to their greatest, every one **is** gaining unjust gain; and from prophet even to priest, every one **is** doing falsehood. And they have healed the fracture of My people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' and there **is** no peace. Were they ashamed because they had done an abomination? They are not at all ashamed, and they do not know **how** to blush. Therefore they will fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them they will stumble," says the LORD.*

Here is one of the best-known passages in Jeremiah. "From their least even to their greatest, every one is gaining unjust gain." Greed ran through every level. "And from prophet even to priest, every one is doing falsehood." The religious leaders were liars too.

"They have healed the fracture of My people lightly," saying, "Peace, peace," and "there is no peace." Think of a doctor who puts a small bandage on a broken leg and tells the patient he is fine. The people had a deep wound, the sickness of sin, and the prophets treated it as a scratch. They told everyone things were fine. That kind of preaching feels kind, but it is cruel, because it keeps people from getting real help.

This still happens. Any message that tells people they are fine without dealing with their sin is a light healing. The gospel begins with bad news, that we are sinners under God's judgment, so that the good news of Christ can really heal us.

"Were they ashamed because they had done an abomination? They are not at all ashamed, and they do not know how to blush." They had lost the ability to feel shame. When a person or a nation can no longer blush at sin, it is in grave danger. "Therefore they will fall among those who fall."

6:16-17 *Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads and look, and ask for the paths of ancient time, where this **is**, the good way, and walk in it, and find rest for your soul." And they said, "We will not walk **in it**." "And I raised up watchmen over you: 'Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet.'" And they said, "We will not pay attention."*

"Stand by the roads and look, and ask for the paths of ancient time, where this is, the good way, and walk in it, and find rest for your soul."

Picture a traveler at a crossroads, unsure which way to go. God says, stop. Look. Ask. The "paths of ancient time" are not just old traditions. They are the ways of God given to Israel's fathers, the covenant way of trust and obedience that Abraham, Moses and David walked. It is "the good way." And those who walk in it "find rest for your soul." Jesus used the same words when He invited the weary to come to Him and learn from Him, and they would find rest for their souls (Matthew 11:28-29). The good way leads to Christ.

"And they said, We will not walk in it." That is a flat refusal. God had also "raised up watchmen," prophets like Jeremiah, to warn them to "Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet." "And they said, We will not pay attention."

Two invitations. Two refusals. They were not confused about what God wanted. They knew, and they said no.

6:18-21 *"Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what **is** in them. Hear, O earth: look, I am bringing calamity on this people, the fruit of their schemes; for they have not paid attention to My words, and My law, they have rejected it. Why **is** this to Me, frankincense **that** comes from Sheba, and the good cane from a land of distance? Your burnt offerings **are** not for acceptance, and your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me." Therefore thus says the LORD: "Look, I am giving stumbling blocks to this people, and they will stumble over them, fathers and sons together; a neighbor and his friend, and they will perish."*

Now God calls witnesses: "Hear, O nations," "Hear, O earth." Let the whole world see what is about to happen and why. "I am bringing calamity on this people, the fruit of their schemes." Their own plans had planted this harvest. "They have not paid attention to My words, and My law, they have rejected it."

Then God asks a strange question: "Why is this to Me, frankincense that comes from Sheba, and the good cane from a land of distance?" Frankincense was a costly incense from southern Arabia. "Good cane" was a fragrant reed used in the holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:23). The people were bringing expensive, imported offerings to the temple. They spared no cost on worship.

But "your burnt offerings are not for acceptance, and your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me." God did not want their gifts without their obedience. Samuel told Saul long before that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). God still wants our hearts before He wants our gifts. Church attendance, giving and worship songs mean nothing to Him if we reject His Word in our daily lives.

So God would put "stumbling blocks" in their way, and they would fall together, "fathers and sons," neighbors and friends.

6:22-26 *Thus says the LORD: "Look, a people is coming from the land of **the** north, and a great nation will be roused from the remotest parts of **the** earth. They take hold of bow and javelin; it **is** cruel, and they have no mercy; their voice roars like the sea, and on horses they ride, arranged like a man for battle against you, O daughter of Zion." We have heard the report of it; our hands hang limp; distress has taken hold of us, anguish like **a woman** giving birth. Do not go out **into** the field, and do not walk on the road, for the enemy has a sword; terror **is** all around. O daughter of my people, gird yourself **with** sackcloth and roll in ashes; make for yourself the mourning of an only **child**, a wailing of bitterness; for suddenly the destroyer will come on us.*

God describes the enemy again: "a people is coming from the land of the north," "a great nation" from "the remotest parts of the earth." They carry bow and javelin. "It is cruel, and they have no mercy." Their noise is like the roaring sea. They ride in battle order against her: "O daughter of Zion."

Then the people speak: "We have heard the report of it; our hands hang limp." They cannot even lift their hands to fight. Fear grips them like a woman in labor. "Do not go out into the field, and do not walk on the road." "Terror is all around." Jeremiah used that phrase so often it became a nickname for him (20:3, 10).

"O daughter of my people, gird yourself with sackcloth and roll in ashes." The deepest mourning in that culture was for "an only child," because with that child the family line ended. That is how bitterly Jerusalem would grieve. "Suddenly the destroyer will come on us."

6:27-30 *"I have made you an assayer among My people, a fortification, that you may know, and you will test their way. All of them **are** the most stubborn of rebels, going about **with** slander; bronze and iron, all of them **are** destroyers. The bellows puff; from the fire the lead is consumed; in vain someone has refined thoroughly, and the evil **ones** have not been separated. They have called them rejected silver, for the LORD has rejected them."*

The chapter ends with a picture of Jeremiah's role. God says, "I have made you an assayer among My people." An assayer tested metals to find out how much silver was in the ore. Jeremiah's job was to "test their way," to show what the people were really made of.

The result was bad. "All of them are the most stubborn of rebels, going about with slander; bronze and iron." They were not precious metal at all. They were the cheap, base metals.

Silver was refined by heating ore with lead in a furnace. The lead carried off the impurities, leaving pure silver. Here "the bellows puff; from the fire the lead is consumed." The refiner kept the fire hot until the lead was all burned up, but "in vain someone has refined thoroughly, and the evil ones have not been separated." No silver came out. All of God's warnings and discipline had produced nothing.

"They have called them rejected silver, for the LORD has rejected them." The word for rejected sounds like the word for silver. They looked like silver, but they were dross. God refines His people

so that their faith comes out pure (1 Peter 1:7; Malachi 3:3). When people refuse the fire, there is nothing left but rejection.

Summary

Jeremiah warned the people of Benjamin to flee Jerusalem, because disaster was coming from the north. The enemy was eager to attack day or night, but God was the One commanding the siege, because Jerusalem kept its evil fresh like a well. God pleaded with the city to accept discipline, but the people's ears were closed and they mocked His word. Everyone, from the least to the greatest, was greedy, and the prophets and priests healed the people's wound lightly, saying "Peace, peace" when there was no peace, and no one could blush anymore. God invited them to ask for the old paths, the good way, and find rest for their souls, but they refused to walk in it or listen to the watchmen. Their costly offerings meant nothing without obedience. A cruel nation would come from the north, and Jerusalem would mourn as for an only child. Jeremiah was made a tester of metals, and the people proved to be rejected silver.

Study Questions

1. Why did Jeremiah tell the people of Benjamin to flee out of Jerusalem instead of into it? (6:1)

2. Who is really giving the orders for the siege, according to verse 6? (6:6)

3. What does it mean that Jerusalem kept its evil fresh "as a well keeps its water fresh"? (6:7)

4. What did the prophets and priests say to the people, and why was it so harmful? (6:14)

5. What did God invite the people to do in verse 16, and how did they answer? (6:16-17)

6. Why did God reject their frankincense and sacrifices? (6:19-20; 1 Samuel 15:22)

7. What does the picture of refining silver show about God's work with His people? (6:27-30)

8. Where do you see people today being told "Peace, peace" about things God calls sin? Have you ever wanted to hear that yourself?

9. Jesus promised rest for the soul to those who come to Him (Matthew 11:28-29). Where are you at a crossroads right now? What would it mean to ask for the good way and walk in it?

10. God refines His people through hard times. What has God been refining in you, and how are you responding to the fire?

Jeremiah 7: The Temple Sermon

Scripture

7:1-15 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the house of the LORD, and you will proclaim there this word, and you will say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah, who come in through these gates to bow down to the LORD. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Make your ways and your deeds good, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust for yourselves in the words of falsehood, saying, "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD ***are*** these." For if you thoroughly make your ways and your deeds good, if you thoroughly do justice between a man and his neighbor, ***if*** you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and do not walk after other gods to your harm, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from long ago and until forever. Look, you are trusting for yourselves in the words of falsehood, to no profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear to falsehood, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you have not known, and come and stand before Me in this house, on which My name is called, and say, "We are delivered," so as to do all these abominations? Has this house, on which My name is called, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Also I, look, I have seen ***it***,' declares the LORD. 'For go, please, to My place which ***was*** in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these deeds,' declares the LORD, 'and I spoke to you, rising early and speaking, and you did not listen, and I called you, and you did not answer, then I will do to the house on which My name is called, in which you are trusting, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, just as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out from before My face, just as I cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.'"

7:16-34 "And you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up for them a cry and a prayer, and do not entreat Me, for I ***am*** not hearing you. Are you not seeing what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The sons are gathering wood, and the fathers are kindling the fire, and the women are kneading dough, to make cakes for the queen of the heavens; and ***they are*** pouring out drink offerings to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger. Are they provoking Me?" declares the LORD. "Is it not themselves, for the shame of their faces? Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Look, My anger and My rage ***are*** about to be poured out on this place, on mankind and on the animals, and on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched.' Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I did not speak with your fathers, and I did not command them in the day ***that*** I brought them out from the land of Egypt, concerning matters of burnt offering and sacrifice. But this thing I commanded them, saying, "Listen to My voice, and I will be God to you, and you, you will be a people to Me; and you will walk in all the way that I command you, so that it may go well for you." And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear, and they walked in counsels, in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and they went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out from the land of Egypt until this day, and I sent to you all My servants the prophets, day ***by day*** rising early and sending. And they did not listen to Me, and they did not incline their ear, and they stiffened their neck; they did

evil more than their fathers. And you will speak all these words to them, and they will not listen to you; and you will call to them, and they will not answer you. And you will say to them, "This ***is*** the nation that did not listen to the voice of the LORD its God, and did not accept correction; faithfulness has perished, and it has been cut off from their mouth." Cut off your hair and throw ***it*** away, and take up a lamentation on the bare heights; for the LORD has rejected and has abandoned the generation of His fury. For the sons of Judah have done the evil in My eyes,' declares the LORD. 'They have put their detestable things in the house on which My name is called, to make it unclean. And they have built the high places of the Topheth, which ***is*** in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come up on My heart. Therefore look, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'and it will no longer be said, "The Topheth," and "The valley of the son of Hinnom," but rather "The valley of the slaughter"; and they will bury in Topheth for lack of room. And the corpses of this people will become food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth, and there ***will be*** no one who terrifies ***them***. And I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of ***the*** bridegroom and the sound of ***the*** bride; for the land will become a desolation.'"

Preview

God sends Jeremiah to stand in the gate of the temple and preach to the crowds coming in to worship. The people believed that because the temple of the LORD stood in Jerusalem, the city could never fall. Jeremiah tells them that is a lie. They steal, murder, commit adultery and worship Baal, and then come into God's house and say, "We are delivered." God asks whether His house has become a den of robbers, and He points to Shiloh, where the tabernacle once stood and which He destroyed. Then God tells Jeremiah not to pray for this people, describes whole families making cakes for the queen of heaven, and exposes the worst sin of all: parents burning their children in the fire in the valley of Hinnom.

This chapter is about false security. Judah trusted in a building, in rituals, and in being God's people, while living as if God did not see. Jesus quoted this sermon when He cleared the temple. As we read, we should ask whether we have been trusting in our church, our baptism, our family or our religious habits, instead of in the Lord Himself, and whether our lives match what we say we believe.

Study

7:1-2 *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the house of the LORD, and you will proclaim there this word, and you will say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah, who come in through these gates to bow down to the LORD.*

"Stand in the gate of the house of the LORD." On feast days thousands of worshipers streamed through the temple gates. Jeremiah was to stand right where they entered and speak to "all Judah, who come in through these gates to bow down to the LORD."

Chapter 26 tells of this same sermon. It was given "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim" (26:1), about 609 B.C., soon after Josiah died, and the priests and prophets demanded Jeremiah's death for it (26:8-11).

7:3-4 *Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Make your ways and your deeds good, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust for yourselves in the words of falsehood, saying, "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD* ***are*** *these."*

The message begins with a call and a promise. "Make your ways and your deeds good, and I will cause you to dwell in this place." God's promise of the land was tied to how they lived (Deuteronomy 4:40).

Then comes the warning: "Do not trust for yourselves in the words of falsehood, saying, The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these."

Why would people say that three times? It had become a slogan, almost a magic charm. About a hundred years earlier, God had saved Jerusalem from the Assyrian army in a single night (2 Kings 19:35). Since then, many believed that God would never let His city or His temple fall, no matter what. The temple became a lucky charm. As long as it stood, they felt safe.

That is false security. A building cannot protect people who will not obey the God who lives there. The same danger is real today. A person can point to his church, his baptism or his believing family and think that makes him safe with God, while his life shows no faith at all. What saves is a living trust in God that changes how we live (James 2:17).

7:5-7 *For if you thoroughly make your ways and your deeds good, if you thoroughly do justice between a man and his neighbor,* ***if*** *you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and do not walk after other gods to your harm, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from long ago and until forever.*

God spells out what good ways means. "Thoroughly do justice between a man and his neighbor." Do not oppress "the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow," the foreigner, the orphan and the widow, who had no one to stand up for them in court (Deuteronomy 10:18).

"Do not shed innocent blood in this place, and do not walk after other gods to your harm." Justice for the weak and faithfulness to God go side by side (Matthew 22:37-40).

If they did these things, God would let them dwell "in the land that I gave to your fathers, from long ago and until forever." God's gift of the land to Israel was meant to be forever.

7:8-11 *Look, you are trusting for yourselves in the words of falsehood, to no profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear to falsehood, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you have not known, and come and stand before Me in this house, on which My name is called, and say, "We are delivered," so as to do all these abominations? Has this house, on which My name is called, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Also I, look, I have seen* ***it****,' declares the LORD.*

"You are trusting for yourselves in the words of falsehood, to no profit."

Then God lists their sins. "Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear to falsehood, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods." This is a walk through the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-16). They were breaking them one by one.

And then they "come and stand before Me in this house, on which My name is called, and say, We are delivered." They sinned all week, went to the temple and felt safe, and then went back "to do all these abominations."

"Has this house, on which My name is called, become a den of robbers in your eyes?" A den was the cave where robbers hid between raids. Judah robbed and murdered in the city and then ran to the temple as their hideout.

"Also I, look, I have seen it." God was not fooled.

Six hundred years later, Jesus walked into the temple and found merchants and money changers cheating the people in its courts. He drove them out and said that God's house should be called a house of prayer, "but you have made it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:13). He was joining Isaiah 56:7 with this verse. The same sin had come back. And the same end followed: the temple of Jeremiah's day was burned, and the temple of Jesus' day was destroyed in A.D. 70.

7:12-15 *'For go, please, to My place which* ***was*** *in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these deeds,' declares the LORD, 'and I spoke to you, rising early and speaking, and you did not listen, and I called you, and you did not answer, then I will do to the house on which My name is called, in which you are trusting, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, just as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out from before My face, just as I cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.'"*

"Go, please, to My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first." Shiloh, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, was where the tabernacle stood in the days of the judges (Joshua 18:1; 1 Samuel 1:3).

"See what I did to it because of the evil of My people Israel." In Eli's day Israel carried the ark into battle like a lucky charm, and the Philistines captured it (1 Samuel 4). God abandoned Shiloh (Psalm 78:60), and in Jeremiah's day it was a ruin. The people could walk there in a day and see what happens when God's people trust in His house and not in Him.

"I spoke to you, rising early and speaking, and you did not listen." "Rising early" is a picture of how eager and constant God was in warning them. He did not wait. He kept sending word (7:13, 25).

So God would do to the temple, "in which you are trusting," "just as I did to Shiloh." And He would cast them out, "just as I cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim." Ephraim was the leading tribe of the northern kingdom, and it had been taken into exile by Assyria in 722 B.C.

7:16 *"And you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up for them a cry and a prayer, and do not entreat Me, for I **am** not hearing you.*

"And you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up for them a cry and a prayer, and do not entreat Me, for I am not hearing you."

This is one of the hardest verses in Jeremiah, and God says it three times (7:16; 11:14; 14:11). We need to read it carefully.

First, notice what it tells us about Jeremiah. God would not need to tell him to stop praying if he had not been praying. Jeremiah loved these people and pleaded for them, even while they hated him.

Second, this was a word to Jeremiah, about that generation, at that moment. They had been warned for many years and refused every time, and their judgment was decided. In 15:1 God says that even if Moses and Samuel stood before Him, He would not turn toward this people. The point was not that prayer is useless. The point was that the sentence on the nation was fixed.

Third, it did not end God's care for individuals. Jeremiah kept praying anyway (14:7-9, 19-22), and later prayed for the remnant when they asked (42:2-4). God still spared those who listened, like Ebed-melech (39:15-18) and Baruch (45:5).

Does this verse mean there are people we should stop praying for? No. This was a special command to a prophet who knew God's settled decision about his nation. We do not know such things about anyone. The New Testament tells us to pray "on behalf of all men" (1 Timothy 2:1), even for our enemies (Matthew 5:44), and Jesus prayed for the men who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). If you have prayed for someone for years and wonder if it is worth it, it is. Keep going.

7:17-20 *Are you not seeing what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The sons are gathering wood, and the fathers are kindling the fire, and the women are kneading dough, to make cakes for the queen of the heavens; and **they are** pouring out drink offerings to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger. Are they provoking Me?" declares the LORD. "Is it not themselves, for the shame of their faces? Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Look, My anger and My rage **are** about to be poured out on this place, on mankind and on the animals, and on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched.'*

"Are you not seeing what they are doing?" God shows Jeremiah why. It was a whole-family project. "The sons are gathering wood, and the fathers are kindling the fire, and the women are kneading dough, to make cakes for the queen of the heavens."

The queen of heaven was most likely the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, known in Canaan as Astarte, a goddess of love and fertility tied to the planet Venus. Chapter 44 tells more about her worship.

"Are they provoking Me?" God asks. "Is it not themselves, for the shame of their faces?" Their sin grieved God, but in the end, the people they hurt most were themselves. Sin always comes back on the sinner.

So God's anger would be "poured out on this place," on people, animals, trees and crops, "and it will burn and not be quenched."

7:21-23 *Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I did not speak with your fathers, and I did not command them in the day **that** I brought them out from the land of Egypt, concerning matters of burnt offering and sacrifice. But this thing I commanded them, saying, "Listen to My voice, and I will be God to you, and you, you will be a people to Me; and you will walk in all the way that I command you, so that it may go well for you."*

"Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat flesh." The burnt offering was wholly burned for God. God says, with bitter irony, go ahead and eat that too. It means nothing to Me.

Then comes a verse that has puzzled many readers: "I did not speak with your fathers, and I did not command them in the day that I brought them out from the land of Egypt, concerning matters of burnt offering and sacrifice." But didn't God give laws about sacrifice in Exodus and Leviticus? He did.

The answer is in verse 23: "Listen to My voice, and I will be God to you." When God brought Israel to Sinai, His first word was not about sacrifice but obedience: "if you will surely listen to My voice and keep My covenant" (Exodus 19:5). The sacrifices came after, as part of a life of listening to God. Hebrew often says not this but that, when it means not mainly this but that. Sacrifice was never the heart of the covenant. Obedience was (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13).

7:24-28 *And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear, and they walked in counsels, in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and they went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out from the land of Egypt until this day, and I sent to you all My servants the prophets, day* ***by day*** *rising early and sending. And they did not listen to Me, and they did not incline their ear, and they stiffened their neck; they did evil more than their fathers. And you will speak all these words to them, and they will not listen to you; and you will call to them, and they will not answer you. And you will say to them, "This* ***is*** *the nation that did not listen to the voice of the LORD its God, and did not accept correction; faithfulness has perished, and it has been cut off from their mouth."*

"They did not listen, and they did not incline their ear." Instead "they walked in counsels, in the stubbornness of their evil heart." "They went backward and not forward."

This had been true since the exodus. God kept sending "My servants the prophets, day by day rising early and sending," and each generation "stiffened their neck," like an ox that will not bend to the yoke.

God told Jeremiah ahead of time, "they will not listen to you." Faithfulness, not success, is what God asks of His servants (1 Corinthians 4:2).

"Faithfulness has perished." The word also means truth. Truth had disappeared from their mouths.

7:29-31 *Cut off your hair and throw* ***it*** *away, and take up a lamentation on the bare heights; for the LORD has rejected and has abandoned the generation of His fury. For the sons of Judah have done the evil in My eyes,' declares the LORD. 'They have put their detestable things in the house on which My name is called, to make it unclean. And they have built the high places of the Topheth, which* ***is*** *in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come up on My heart.*

"Cut off your hair and throw it away." Cutting the hair was a sign of mourning (Job 1:20). "Take up a lamentation on the bare heights," the very places of her idolatry.

Then the worst sins. They put "detestable things," idols, inside God's own temple. Manasseh had done this (2 Kings 21:4-7), and it seems to have come back after Josiah.

"They have built the high places of the Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire." The valley of Hinnom ran along the south and west sides of Jerusalem. Topheth was a place in it, perhaps a fire pit or altar. There people offered their own children as sacrifices to false gods, especially Molech (32:35) and Baal (19:5). Two kings of Judah had done this with their own sons, Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Josiah had defiled Topheth to stop it (2 Kings 23:10), but it came back.

It was the murder of children, and God hated it: "which I did not command, and it did not come up on My heart." The Law forbade it in the strongest terms (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). God loves children and defends the helpless, and Jesus took children in His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16).

Its name, Ge Hinnom, became Gehenna, the word Jesus used for hell (Matthew 5:22).

If this passage touches a wound for you, perhaps the loss of a child or something in your past you deeply regret, please hear this: God's anger here is against those who killed children without repentance and kept on doing it. For anyone who comes to Him in repentance, there is full forgiveness in Christ (1 John 1:9). And I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

7:32-34 *Therefore look, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'and it will no longer be said, "The Topheth," and "The valley of the son of Hinnom," but rather "The valley of the slaughter"; and they will bury in Topheth for lack of room. And the corpses of this people will become food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth, and there* ***will be*** *no one who terrifies* ***them****. And I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of* ***the*** *bridegroom and the sound of* ***the*** *bride; for the land will become a desolation.'"*

"Days are coming" when the valley would get a new name: not Topheth or the valley of Hinnom, "but rather The valley of the slaughter." So many would die in the coming siege that "they will bury in Topheth for lack of room." The place where they killed their children would become their own graveyard.

"The corpses of this people will become food for the birds of the heavens." In that culture, to be left unburied was the deepest disgrace. It was one of the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:26).

Then the saddest line of all. God would silence "the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride." No more weddings, no more laughter in the streets. Jeremiah repeats this line (16:9; 25:10), but in 33:10-11 God promises that one day the voice of the bridegroom and the bride will be heard again in Jerusalem.

Summary

God sent Jeremiah to the temple gate to warn the worshipers not to trust in the slogan "The temple of the LORD." They were breaking the commandments, oppressing the weak and worshiping Baal, then coming to God's house and saying, "We are delivered." God asked if His house had become a den of robbers, words Jesus later quoted, and pointed to Shiloh, which He had destroyed, as a picture of what He would do to the temple. God told Jeremiah not to pray for this people, because their judgment was fixed, while whole families made cakes for the queen of heaven. God said His first command at the exodus was not about sacrifice but "Listen to My voice," and the nation never listened. Worst of all, they burned their children at Topheth in the valley of Hinnom, something God never commanded and never thought of. That valley would become the valley of slaughter, and the sounds of joy and weddings would cease from the land.

Study Questions

1. Where did God tell Jeremiah to preach this message, and who was his audience? (7:2)

2. What slogan were the people trusting in, and why was it a lie? (7:4)

3. What did God say they must do to stay in the land? (7:5-7)

4. Which of the Ten Commandments were they breaking, and what did they say when they came to the temple? (7:9-10)

5. What is a "den of robbers," and how did Jesus use this verse? (7:11; Matthew 21:13)

6. What happened at Shiloh, and why did God tell them to go and look at it? (7:12-14)

7. Why did God tell Jeremiah not to pray for this people? Why does this not mean we should stop praying for anyone today? (7:16; 1 Timothy 2:1)

8. What did God say His first command was when He brought Israel out of Egypt? (7:22-23)

9. What are some things people trust in today the way Judah trusted the temple? Is there anything like that in your own life?

10. Whole families worked together to serve the queen of heaven (7:18). What are you teaching the people in your home, by your example, about whom to worship?

Jeremiah 8: Is There No Balm in Gilead?

Scripture

8:1-12 "At that time," declares the LORD, "they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its officials, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from their graves. And they will spread them out to the sun and to the moon and to all the host of the heavens, which they loved, and which they served, and which they walked after, and which they sought, and which they bowed down to. They will not be gathered, and they will not be buried; they will become dung on the face of the ground. And death will be chosen rather than life by all the remnant who remain of this evil clan, in all the places that remain, where I have banished them," declares the LORD of armies. "And you will say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: Do they fall and not rise? Does one turn away and not return? Why has this people, Jerusalem, turned away ***in*** an enduring apostasy? They have kept hold of deceitfulness; they have refused to return. I have paid attention, and I have heard; they do not speak ***what is*** right; there is no man who relents over his evil, saying, "What have I done?" Every one ***is*** turning in their course, like a horse rushing in the battle. Even a stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and turtledove and swift and crane keep the time of their coming; and My people do not know the judgment of the LORD. How can you say, "We ***are*** wise, and the law of the LORD ***is*** with us"? Truly, look, the stylus of falsehood of ***the*** scribes has made ***it*** into falsehood. The wise ***men*** are put to shame; they are dismayed, and they have been captured. Look, they have rejected the word of the LORD, and what wisdom do they have? Therefore I will give their wives to others, their fields to those who dispossess, for from the small even to the great, every one ***is*** gaining unjust gain; from prophet even to priest, every one ***is*** doing falsehood. And they have healed the fracture of the daughter of My people lightly, saying, "Peace, peace," and there ***is*** no peace. Were they ashamed because they had done an abomination? They are not at all ashamed, and they do not know ***how*** to blush. Therefore they will fall among those who fall; at the time of their punishment they will stumble,' says the LORD.

8:13-22 'Gathering, I will make an end of them,' declares the LORD. 'There ***will be*** no grapes on the vine, and no figs on the fig tree, and the leaf will wither; and ***what*** I gave them will pass away from them.'" Why ***are*** we sitting? Gather yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities, and let us perish there; for the LORD our God has silenced us, and has given us water of poison to drink, for we have sinned against the LORD. ***We*** waited for peace, and ***there was*** no good; for a time of healing, and look, terror. From Dan the snorting of his horses has been heard; at the sound of the neighings of his mighty ***ones*** all the land has shaken; and they have come and have consumed ***the*** land and what fills it, ***the*** city and those who dwell in it. "For look, I am sending among you snakes, vipers, which have no charm, and they will bite you," declares the LORD. My cheerfulness ***is*** upon sorrow; my heart ***is*** faint upon me. Look, the sound of the cry for help of the daughter of my people from a land of distances: "***Is*** the LORD not in Zion? ***Is*** her King not in her?" "Why have they provoked Me to anger with their idols, with vanities of foreignness?" ***The*** harvest has passed, ***the*** summer has come to an end, and we, we have not been saved. Over the fracture of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn; horror has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in

Gilead? Is there no physician there? For why has the healing of the daughter of my people not come up?

Preview

The temple sermon ends with a grim picture: the bones of Judah's kings, priests and prophets dug up and spread out before the sun, moon and stars they had worshiped. Then God asks why His people, unlike anyone else who falls, never get up and turn back. Even the stork and the swallow know their seasons, but God's people do not know His ways. Their wise men have rejected His word, and their prophets still cry, "Peace, peace." The chapter ends with Jeremiah's own heart breaking. The harvest is past, the summer is over, and the people are not saved. He asks, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?"

This chapter is about a people who would not turn around, and a prophet who could not stop grieving for them. It teaches us that knowing the Bible is not the same as obeying it, and that there is a time when opportunities pass. As we read, we should ask whether there is a "harvest" in our own lives that we are letting slip by, and where we go for healing.

Study

8:1-3 *"At that time," declares the LORD, "they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its officials, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from their graves. And they will spread them out to the sun and to the moon and to all the host of the heavens, which they loved, and which they served, and which they walked after, and which they sought, and which they bowed down to. They will not be gathered, and they will not be buried; they will become dung on the face of the ground. And death will be chosen rather than life by all the remnant who remain of this evil clan, in all the places that remain, where I have banished them," declares the LORD of armies.*

"At that time," the time of judgment from chapter 7, the enemy would "bring out the bones of the kings of Judah," and of the officials, priests, prophets and people, "from their graves." Invading armies sometimes did this to rob tombs of the treasure buried with the dead, or to shame a conquered people.

Then the bones would be spread out "to the sun and to the moon and to all the host of the heavens." The host of heaven means the stars and planets. Look at the five verbs: these were the lights "which they loved, and which they served, and which they walked after, and which they sought, and which they bowed down to." Judah had worshiped the sky (2 Kings 21:3-5; 23:5). Now their bones would lie before those same lights, and the sun and moon would do nothing. The gods they trusted could not even protect their graves.

"They will become dung on the face of the ground." The remnant that survived would be so miserable in exile that "death will be chosen rather than life." Sin promises life and freedom. In the end it makes people wish they were dead.

8:4-6 *"And you will say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: Do they fall and not rise? Does one turn away and not return? Why has this people, Jerusalem, turned away **in** an enduring apostasy? They have kept hold of deceitfulness; they have refused to return. I have paid attention, and I have heard; they do not speak **what is** right; there is no man who relents over his evil, saying, "What have I done?" Every one **is** turning in their course, like a horse rushing in the battle.*

God asks two simple questions from everyday life. "Do they fall and not rise?" When a man trips, he gets up. "Does one turn away and not return?" When a traveler takes a wrong turn, he turns back. That is just common sense.

"Why has this people, Jerusalem, turned away in an enduring apostasy?" Judah fell and stayed down. They took the wrong road and kept going. "They have kept hold of deceitfulness; they have refused to return."

God was listening: "they do not speak what is right; there is no man who relents over his evil, saying, What have I done?" No one stopped to think. No one asked the simple question that begins repentance. Instead "every one is turning in their course, like a horse rushing in the battle." A war horse charging into battle does not stop to think. It just runs, head down, into danger. That is how people rush into sin.

8:7 *Even a stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and turtledove and swift and crane keep the time of their coming; and My people do not know the judgment of the LORD.*

"Even a stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and turtledove and swift and crane keep the time of their coming." Israel lies on one of the great bird migration routes of the world. Every spring and fall, huge flocks of storks, doves, swifts and cranes pass over the land, right on schedule. They never miss their season. God built that knowledge into them.

"And My people do not know the judgment of the LORD." The judgment of the LORD here means His rule, His ways, the order He set for life. Birds follow their Maker's design by instinct. God's people, who had His written Word, ignored His design. Isaiah made a similar point: the ox knows its owner, but Israel does not know Him (Isaiah 1:3). Creation obeys. People made in God's image rebel.

8:8-9 *How can you say, "We **are** wise, and the law of the LORD **is** with us"? Truly, look, the stylus of falsehood of **the** scribes has made **it** into falsehood. The wise **men** are put to shame; they are dismayed, and they have been captured. Look, they have rejected the word of the LORD, and what wisdom do they have?*

"How can you say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us?" Judah was proud of having God's law. They had the scrolls. They had scholars. Josiah's reform had even brought the Book of the Law back into the center of national life (2 Kings 22-23).

"Truly, look, the stylus of falsehood of the scribes has made it into falsehood." A stylus was a pen. The scribes copied and taught the law, but they twisted it with false teaching, so that God's Word was made to say what people wanted. This is a danger in every age. It is possible to own Bibles,

study them and teach them, and still bend them to fit our own ideas. That is what eisegesis does: reading our own ideas into the text.

"The wise men are put to shame." "They have rejected the word of the LORD, and what wisdom do they have?" Real wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD (Proverbs 9:10). If we reject His Word, all our learning is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:20).

8:10-12 *Therefore I will give their wives to others, their fields to those who dispossess, for from the small even to the great, every one **is** gaining unjust gain; from prophet even to priest, every one **is** doing falsehood. And they have healed the fracture of the daughter of My people lightly, saying, "Peace, peace," and there **is** no peace. Were they ashamed because they had done an abomination? They are not at all ashamed, and they do not know **how** to blush. Therefore they will fall among those who fall; at the time of their punishment they will stumble,' says the LORD.*

These verses repeat almost word for word what God said in 6:12-15. God says it again because they did not listen the first time. Their wives and fields would go to others. Everyone, "from the small even to the great," was greedy for "unjust gain." "From prophet even to priest, every one is doing falsehood."

"They have healed the fracture of the daughter of My people lightly," saying, "Peace, peace," when "there is no peace." The religious leaders kept offering cheap comfort. And the people had lost their shame: "they do not know how to blush."

Why repeat it? Because some truths need to be said over and over. God's patience shows in the repetition. So does Judah's hardness.

8:13 *'Gathering, I will make an end of them,' declares the LORD. 'There **will be** no grapes on the vine, and no figs on the fig tree, and the leaf will wither; and **what** I gave them will pass away from them.'"*

"Gathering, I will make an end of them." The word for gathering is the word used for gathering the harvest. God came looking for fruit, but "there will be no grapes on the vine, and no figs on the fig tree, and the leaf will wither."

Grapes and figs were the main fruits of the land. A tree with leaves but no fruit looks healthy but gives nothing. Jesus once came to a fig tree with leaves and no fruit and cursed it, as a sign against the Jerusalem of His day that looked religious but bore no fruit for God (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21). He also said every branch in Him that bears no fruit is taken away (John 15:2). God looks for fruit, not just leaves.

8:14-17 *Why **are** we sitting? Gather yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities, and let us perish there; for the LORD our God has silenced us, and has given us water of poison to drink, for we have sinned against the LORD. **We** waited for peace, and **there was** no good; for a time of healing, and look, terror. From Dan the snorting of his horses has been heard; at the sound of the neighings of his mighty **ones** all the land has shaken; and they have come and have consumed **the** land and what fills it, **the** city and those who dwell in it. "For look, I am sending among you snakes, vipers, which have no charm, and they will bite you," declares the LORD.*

Now we hear the people talking, as the enemy comes. "Why are we sitting? Gather yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities, and let us perish there." They know there is no escape. At least they will die behind walls.

"The LORD our God has silenced us, and has given us water of poison to drink, for we have sinned against the LORD." They finally admit their sin, but only when it is too late to escape the judgment. There is a kind of sorrow that comes only from getting caught. Paul calls it "the grief of the world" that "produces death," as opposed to godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

"We waited for peace, and there was no good; for a time of healing, and look, terror." They had believed the false prophets. Now the promised peace never came.

"From Dan the snorting of his horses has been heard." Dan was the northern border of Israel, where invaders entered (4:15). The whole land shook at the sound of the cavalry.

"I am sending among you snakes, vipers, which have no charm." Snake charmers could calm some snakes with music. These could not be charmed. Babylon's army could not be bought off or talked out of its attack. It was like the snakes God sent in the wilderness when Israel rebelled (Numbers 21:6).

8:18-19 *My cheerfulness **is** upon sorrow; my heart **is** faint upon me. Look, the sound of the cry for help of the daughter of my people from a land of distances: "**Is** the LORD not in Zion? **Is** her King not in her?" "Why have they provoked Me to anger with their idols, with vanities of foreignness?"*

Now Jeremiah speaks for himself. "My cheerfulness is upon sorrow; my heart is faint upon me." The Hebrew is hard to translate here, but the meaning is clear: he is overwhelmed with grief and cannot find comfort.

He hears a cry from far away, "the sound of the cry for help of the daughter of my people from a land of distances." Jeremiah imagines the exiles in Babylon crying out: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" They cannot understand how this happened. Wasn't God supposed to protect Jerusalem?

Then God answers their question with His own: "Why have they provoked Me to anger with their idols, with vanities of foreignness?" The LORD had been in Zion. They pushed Him out with their idols. The problem was never God's absence. It was their unfaithfulness.

8:20-22 ***The*** *harvest has passed,* ***the*** *summer has come to an end, and we, we have not been saved. Over the fracture of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn; horror has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? For why has the healing of the daughter of my people not come up?*

"The harvest has passed, the summer has come to an end, and we, we have not been saved." This was probably a common saying. In Israel the grain harvest came in late spring, and the fruit harvest at the end of summer. If both failed, there was nothing to eat through the winter. The people had hoped for rescue, from Egypt or from some miracle, and season after season passed with no rescue.

This verse is a solemn warning. There is a time for every person to respond to God, and that time does not last forever. Paul says, "now is a day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). If you have been putting off coming to Christ, do not wait until the harvest is past.

"Over the fracture of the daughter of my people I am broken." Jeremiah takes his people's wound on himself. "I mourn; horror has taken hold of me."

"Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Gilead was the hill country east of the Jordan River. It was famous for its balm, a healing ointment made from the resin of a tree or shrub (Genesis 37:25). People went there for medicine and for doctors. Jeremiah's point is this: the cure was available. There was balm. There was a physician. "For why has the healing of the daughter of my people not come up?"

The answer is that the people would not come to be healed. They preferred the false prophets' light healing. The physician was the LORD Himself, who said, "I am the LORD who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

The old spiritual song answers Jeremiah's question: There is a balm in Gilead. For us, the balm is Jesus Christ. He said, "Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matthew 9:12), and by His wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24). The healing is there. The only question is whether we will come to Him for it.

Summary

God said the bones of Judah's kings, priests, prophets and people would be dug up and spread before the sun, moon and stars they had worshiped, and that the survivors would prefer death to life. People who fall get up and travelers who take a wrong turn come back, but Judah held on to deceit and rushed into sin like a war horse, while even migrating birds knew their seasons better than God's people knew His ways. They boasted of having the law, but the scribes had twisted it and the wise had rejected God's word. The prophets and priests still healed the people's wound lightly, so God would gather them and find no fruit. As the enemy came from Dan, the people admitted their sin too late. Jeremiah's heart broke for them. The harvest was past and they were not saved, though there was balm in Gilead and a physician there.

Study Questions

1. Why would the bones of Judah's leaders be spread out before the sun, moon and stars? (8:1-2)

2. What two common-sense questions does God ask in verse 4, and how did Judah fail them? (8:4-6)

3. What do the stork and the other birds know that God's people did not? (8:7)

4. What were the scribes doing with God's law, and what did the wise men reject? (8:8-9)

5. What did God look for and not find in verse 13? How does Jesus' cursing of the fig tree connect to this? (8:13; Mark 11:12-14)

6. When the people finally admitted their sin, why was it not true repentance? (8:14; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

7. What is the balm of Gilead, and what was Jeremiah's point in asking about it? (8:22)

8. Verse 6 says no one asked, "What have I done?" When was the last time you stopped and honestly asked that question about your own life?

9. "The harvest has passed," and "we have not been saved" (8:20). Is there anything you have been putting off with God? What would it mean to respond now?

10. Jesus is the physician for the sick (Matthew 9:12). Where do you need His healing, and what keeps you from going to Him for it?

Jeremiah 9: Let Him Who Boasts Boast in This

Scripture

9:1-11 Who will give ***that*** my head ***be*** water, and my eye a fountain of tears, that I may weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Who will give me in the wilderness a lodging place of travelers, that I may leave my people and go from them! For all of them ***are*** adulterers, an assembly of treacherous ***men***. And they have bent their tongue, their bow of falsehood; and not for faithfulness are they strong in the land; for from evil to evil they have gone out, and Me they do not know, declares the LORD. Take heed, each one, of his neighbor, and do not rely on any brother; for every brother surely supplants, and every neighbor goes about ***as*** a slanderer. And each one deceives his neighbor, and they do not speak truth; they have taught their tongue to speak falsehood; they weary themselves committing iniquity. Your dwelling ***is*** in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me, declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD of armies: "Look, I am refining them, and I will test them; for how will I act because of the daughter of My people? Their tongue ***is*** a beaten arrow; it speaks deceit; with his mouth one speaks peace with his neighbor, and in his inner being he sets his ambush. Will I not punish them for these ***things***?" declares the LORD. "Or on a nation which ***is*** like this, will My soul not avenge itself?" Over the mountains I will take up weeping and wailing, and over the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation, for they are burned up, without anyone passing through, and they do not hear the sound of livestock; from the birds of the heavens even to the animals, they have fled, they have gone. "And I will make Jerusalem into heaps of stones, a habitation of jackals; and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation, without inhabitant."

9:12-26 Who ***is*** the wise man, that he may understand this? And ***who is he*** to whom the mouth of the LORD has spoken, that he may declare it? Why has the land perished, ***and*** been burned up like the wilderness, without anyone passing through? And the LORD said, "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and they have not listened to My voice, and they have not walked in it, and they have walked after the stubbornness of their heart, and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them, therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Look, I am feeding them, this people, wormwood, and I will give them water of poison to drink. And I will scatter them among the nations which they have not known, they and their fathers; and I will send the sword after them until I have made an end of them.'" Thus says the LORD of armies: "Consider, and summon the wailing women, that they may come; and send to the skillful women, that they may come; and let them hasten, and let them take up a wailing over us, that our eyes may run down ***with*** tears, and our eyelids flow ***with*** water. For a sound of wailing has been heard from Zion: 'How we are devastated! We are exceedingly ashamed, for we have left ***the*** land, for they have cast down our dwellings.'" For hear, O women, the word of the LORD, and let your ear receive the word of His mouth; and teach your daughters a mourning song, and each woman her neighbor a lamentation. For death has come up into our windows; it has come into our fortresses, to cut off ***the*** child from ***the*** street, young men from the open places. Speak thus, declares the LORD: "And the corpses of mankind will fall like dung on the face of the field, and like cut grain behind the reaper, and there ***will be*** no one who gathers ***them***." Thus says the LORD: "Let not a wise ***man*** boast in his wisdom, and let not the mighty ***man*** boast in his might; let not a rich ***man***

boast in his riches; but in this let him who boasts boast: ***in*** having insight and knowing Me, that I ***am*** the LORD who does steadfast love, justice, and righteousness on the earth; for in these I delight," declares the LORD. "Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and I will punish every circumcised ***one*** in ***his*** foreskin: on Egypt, and on Judah, and on Edom, and on the sons of Ammon, and on Moab, and on all who are cut ***at the*** corner, who dwell in the wilderness; for all the nations ***are*** uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel ***are*** uncircumcised of heart."

Preview

Jeremiah wishes his head were a spring of water so he could weep day and night for his people. In the next breath he wishes he could run away to a desert inn and leave them, because they are all liars and traitors. No one can trust his neighbor or his brother. God says He will refine them and test them, and Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins. Then God calls for the professional mourners to come and teach the women songs of grief, because death is climbing in through the windows. In the middle of all this, God speaks some of the most important words in the Old Testament: let no one boast in wisdom, strength or riches, but let him boast that he understands and knows the LORD.

This chapter is about what we trust and what we boast in. Judah boasted in its cleverness, its strength and its wealth, and it was all about to burn. The only thing worth boasting in is knowing God. As we read, we should ask what we lean on when we want to feel secure, and whether we really know the God who delights in steadfast love, justice and righteousness.

Study

9:1 *Who will give **that** my head **be** water, and my eye a fountain of tears, that I may weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

"Who will give that my head be water, and my eye a fountain of tears, that I may weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

This verse is the reason Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet. He wishes he had an endless supply of tears, because ordinary weeping was not enough for the grief he felt. He saw the slain of his people before it happened, and it broke him.

Here is a man who preached judgment and wept over it. Those two things belong together. If we speak about God's judgment without tears, we have not understood it. Jesus wept over Jerusalem as He came near it (Luke 19:41), and Paul said he had great sorrow and constant pain in his heart for his fellow Jews who did not believe (Romans 9:2-3). A heart for the lost looks like this.

9:2-6 *Who will give me in the wilderness a lodging place of travelers, that I may leave my people and go from them! For all of them **are** adulterers, an assembly of treacherous **men**. And they have bent their tongue, their bow of falsehood; and not for faithfulness are they strong in the land; for from evil to evil they have gone out, and Me they do not know, declares the LORD. Take heed, each one, of his neighbor, and do not rely on any brother; for every brother surely supplants, and every neighbor goes about **as** a slanderer. And each one deceives his neighbor, and they do not speak truth; they have taught their tongue to speak falsehood; they weary themselves committing iniquity. Your dwelling **is** in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me, declares the LORD.*

Then, in the very next verse, Jeremiah says something that surprises us. "Who will give me in the wilderness a lodging place of travelers, that I may leave my people and go from them!" A lodging place was a bare shelter in the desert for caravans. Jeremiah wished he could get away from everyone.

Is that a contradiction? No. It is honest. He loved his people and grieved over them, and he was also worn out by them. Anyone who has loved a person caught in sin knows both feelings. God lets Jeremiah say both, and He records both. We do not have to pretend with God.

Why did he want to leave? "All of them are adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men." Then the chapter focuses on one sin above all: lying. "They have bent their tongue, their bow of falsehood." Their tongues were like bows, shooting lies like arrows. "From evil to evil they have gone out, and Me they do not know."

"Take heed, each one, of his neighbor, and do not rely on any brother; for every brother surely supplants." The word supplants is the word behind the name Jacob, who cheated his brother Esau (Genesis 27:36). Every brother had become a Jacob. Family members cheated each other. "Every neighbor goes about as a slanderer."

"They have taught their tongue to speak falsehood; they weary themselves committing iniquity." They worked hard at sin until they were tired from it. That is how a society looks when lying becomes normal: no one can trust anyone. "Through deceit they refuse to know Me." Lies and knowing God cannot live together, because God is truth (John 14:6).

9:7-9 *Therefore thus says the LORD of armies: "Look, I am refining them, and I will test them; for how will I act because of the daughter of My people? Their tongue **is** a beaten arrow; it speaks deceit; with his mouth one speaks peace with his neighbor, and in his inner being he sets his ambush. Will I not punish them for these **things**?" declares the LORD. "Or on a nation which **is** like this, will My soul not avenge itself?"*

"Look, I am refining them, and I will test them." As in 6:27-30, God pictures Himself as a refiner of metal, putting His people in the fire. The fire was coming because "how will I act because of the daughter of My people?" What else could God do with a people like this?

"Their tongue is a beaten arrow." A beaten arrow was one hammered into a sharp, deadly point. "With his mouth one speaks peace with his neighbor, and in his inner being he sets his ambush."

People smiled and said "Peace" while planning to hurt each other. Psalm 28:3 describes the same kind of people.

"Will I not punish them for these things?" This is the third time God asks this question (5:9, 29; 9:9). A holy God cannot ignore sin forever.

9:10-11 *Over the mountains I will take up weeping and wailing, and over the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation, for they are burned up, without anyone passing through, and they do not hear the sound of livestock; from the birds of the heavens even to the animals, they have fled, they have gone. "And I will make Jerusalem into heaps of stones, a habitation of jackals; and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation, without inhabitant."*

Jeremiah, or God through him, takes up "weeping and wailing" over the mountains and the pastures. The countryside is "burned up," empty, silent. There is no "sound of livestock," and even the birds and wild animals "have fled." It is like the picture in 4:23-26 of a land with all life gone.

"I will make Jerusalem into heaps of stones, a habitation of jackals." Jackals live in ruins. The proud capital of Judah would become a pile of rubble where wild dogs howled at night. Lamentations 5:18 describes exactly this after the city fell: foxes or jackals walking on Mount Zion.

9:12-16 *Who **is** the wise man, that he may understand this? And **who is he** to whom the mouth of the LORD has spoken, that he may declare it? Why has the land perished, **and** been burned up like the wilderness, without anyone passing through? And the LORD said, "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and they have not listened to My voice, and they have not walked in it, and they have walked after the stubbornness of their heart, and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them, therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Look, I am feeding them, this people, wormwood, and I will give them water of poison to drink. And I will scatter them among the nations which they have not known, they and their fathers; and I will send the sword after them until I have made an end of them.'"*

"Who is the wise man, that he may understand this?" Is there anyone who can explain why the land is ruined? This is a real question, and God gives the answer Himself.

"Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and they have not listened to My voice, and they have not walked in it." They had God's Word and threw it away. Instead they "walked after the stubbornness of their heart, and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them." Sin was passed down from parents to children. What we teach our children matters for generations, for good or for evil.

So God would feed them "wormwood," a very bitter plant, and give them "water of poison." Moses had used the same picture of the bitter fruit of idolatry (Deuteronomy 29:18). And He would "scatter them among the nations." That too was what Moses had warned (Deuteronomy 28:64). God was doing exactly what He said He would do.

"Until I have made an end of them" is strong language. Yet God had already promised not to make a complete end (4:27; 5:10, 18). The judgment would be thorough for that generation, but God would keep a remnant.

9:17-19 *Thus says the LORD of armies: "Consider, and summon the wailing women, that they may come; and send to the skillful women, that they may come; and let them hasten, and let them take up a wailing over us, that our eyes may run down **with** tears, and our eyelids flow **with** water. For a sound of wailing has been heard from Zion: 'How we are devastated! We are exceedingly ashamed, for we have left **the** land, for they have cast down our dwellings.'"*

"Summon the wailing women." In the ancient Near East, families hired professional mourners for funerals. These women knew the traditional songs of grief and would lead the weeping. You can still see this custom in parts of the Middle East today. God tells Judah to call them in, because a great funeral is coming, and it is their own.

"Let them take up a wailing over us, that our eyes may run down with tears." The people would need help to weep, because the grief would be so great.

Then we hear the lament from Zion: "How we are devastated! We are exceedingly ashamed, for we have left the land, for they have cast down our dwellings." The word "how" is the same word that opens the book of Lamentations (Lamentations 1:1). This is the sound of a city going into exile.

9:20-22 *For hear, O women, the word of the LORD, and let your ear receive the word of His mouth; and teach your daughters a mourning song, and each woman her neighbor a lamentation. For death has come up into our windows; it has come into our fortresses, to cut off **the** child from **the** street, young men from the open places. Speak thus, declares the LORD: "And the corpses of mankind will fall like dung on the face of the field, and like cut grain behind the reaper, and there **will be** no one who gathers **them**."*

"Hear, O women, the word of the LORD." The women were to "teach your daughters a mourning song, and each woman her neighbor a lamentation." There would be so many dead that the professional mourners would not be enough. Every woman would need to learn the songs.

"For death has come up into our windows; it has come into our fortresses." Death is pictured as a thief climbing in through the window. Walls and locks could not keep it out. It would "cut off the child from the street, young men from the open places," the places where children played and young men gathered.

"The corpses of mankind will fall like dung on the face of the field, and like cut grain behind the reaper, and there will be no one who gathers them." A reaper cut grain and left it lying in rows for others to gather. Here the bodies would lie in rows with no one to bury them. It is a terrible picture, and God gives it so that people would turn before it happened.

9:23-24 *Thus says the LORD: "Let not a wise **man** boast in his wisdom, and let not the mighty **man** boast in his might; let not a rich **man** boast in his riches; but in this let him who boasts boast: **in** having insight and knowing Me, that I **am** the LORD who does steadfast love, justice, and righteousness on the earth; for in these I delight," declares the LORD.*

Then, right after this picture of death, come two of the greatest verses in Jeremiah.

"Let not a wise man boast in his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast in his might; let not a rich man boast in his riches."

To boast is to glory in something, to find your worth and your confidence in it. God names three things people have always boasted in. Wisdom: education, intelligence, skill, being smart. Might: power, strength, military force, influence. Riches: money, property, success. Judah had all three, and all three were about to fail. Their wise men had rejected God's word (8:9). Their soldiers would fall. Their wealth would be carried to Babylon.

These are still the three things our world tells us to trust. Get smart, get strong, get rich, and you will be secure. None of them are evil in themselves. God gives wisdom, strength and wealth. But they make terrible gods. They cannot save us, and they all come to an end.

"But in this let him who boasts boast: in having insight and knowing Me."

This is what is worth boasting in: knowing God. Not just knowing about Him, but knowing Him, the way a person knows a friend or a husband knows his wife. This is a personal relationship. Jesus said eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3). Paul counted everything he had once boasted in as loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (Philippians 3:7-8).

And what kind of God is He? "That I am the LORD who does steadfast love, justice, and righteousness on the earth."

Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal, covenant love that never lets go. Justice means God does what is right and defends those who are wronged. Righteousness means He is always right in Himself and in all He does. And notice, He does these things "on the earth." God is not distant. He is at work in this world.

"For in these I delight." God does not just do these things. He loves to do them. He delights in showing mercy and doing right. If we know Him, we will start to delight in those same things. That is why knowing God and caring for the poor and the wronged go together (22:16).

Paul quotes these verses twice. In 1 Corinthians 1:31 he writes, "The one who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." In 2 Corinthians 10:17 he says it again. In Corinthians, Paul shows that God chose the foolish, the weak and the lowly so that no one could boast before Him, and that Christ Jesus became for us wisdom from God, righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:26-30). Everything we could boast in, we have in Christ. So our boasting is in Him.

What are you most tempted to boast in? Your education? Your job? Your bank account? Your strength, or your looks, or your reputation? Those can all be taken away in a day. Knowing God cannot.

9:25-26 *"Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and I will punish every circumcised **one** in **his** foreskin: on Egypt, and on Judah, and on Edom, and on the sons of Ammon, and on Moab, and on all who are cut **at the** corner, who dwell in the wilderness; for all the nations **are** uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel **are** uncircumcised of heart."*

"Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and I will punish every circumcised one in his foreskin." In other words, God would punish those who had the outward sign of circumcision but not the inward reality.

He names the nations: "on Egypt, and on Judah, and on Edom, and on the sons of Ammon, and on Moab." Several of these nations also practiced circumcision. Then "all who are cut at the corner, who dwell in the wilderness," desert tribes who trimmed the hair at their temples as a religious custom (Leviticus 19:27 forbade it to Israel).

Notice that Judah is listed right in the middle of the pagan nations. God was saying, your circumcision makes you no different from them. "For all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart." The outward sign meant nothing without a heart given to God (4:4).

That brings the chapter back to verse 24. What counts is not a mark on the body, or a membership, or a ritual. What counts is knowing God. Paul says the same: neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but a new creation (Galatians 6:15).

Summary

Jeremiah longed for endless tears to weep for his people, and in the same breath longed to escape them, because they were all adulterers and liars. Brothers cheated brothers, neighbors slandered neighbors, and people spoke peace while setting ambushes. God would refine and test them, and Jerusalem would become a heap of ruins for jackals. The land was ruined because they forsook God's law and followed the Baals their fathers taught them, so God would feed them wormwood and scatter them among the nations. God called for wailing women to teach the women of Zion songs of mourning, for death was climbing in through the windows. Then God said no one should boast in wisdom, might or riches, but only in understanding and knowing the LORD, who does steadfast love, justice and righteousness on the earth and delights in them. Finally, God said He would punish Judah along with the nations, because their circumcision was only outward and their hearts were uncircumcised.

Study Questions

1. What did Jeremiah wish for in verse 1, and what did he wish for in verse 2? How can both be true of the same person? (9:1-2)

2. What sins of the tongue are described in verses 3-8? (9:3-8)

3. What does it say about a society when no one can trust his neighbor or brother? (9:4-5)

4. According to verses 13-14, why was the land ruined? (9:13-14)

5. Why did God call for the wailing women? (9:17-21)

6. What three things does God say not to boast in? What does He say to boast in instead? (9:23-24)

7. What three things does God say He does on the earth, and what does He say about them? (9:24)

8. How does Paul use these verses in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31? What does it mean to boast in the Lord?

9. Which do you lean on most for your sense of worth or security: your wisdom, your strength, or your money? What would change if you put your confidence in knowing God instead?

10. Do you know God, or mostly know about Him? What is one way you can get to know Him better this week?

Jeremiah 10: The Idols and the Living God

Scripture

10:1-16 Hear the word which the LORD has spoken to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be dismayed at the signs of the heavens, for the nations are dismayed at them. For the statutes of the peoples, it ***is*** vanity; for a tree from a forest someone has cut down, the work of the hands of a craftsman with an axe. With silver and with gold he beautifies it; with nails and with hammers they fasten it, and it will not totter. They ***are*** like a scarecrow of a cucumber field, and they do not speak; they must surely be carried, for they do not step. Do not be afraid of them, for they do no harm, and also doing good is not in them." There is none like You, O LORD; You ***are*** great, and Your name ***is*** great in might. Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For to You it is fitting; for among all the wise of the nations and in all their kingdom ***there is*** none like You. And in one they are stupid and foolish; the instruction of vanities, it ***is*** wood. Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of a craftsman and of the hands of a refiner; violet and purple ***are*** their clothing; the work of skilled ***ones are*** all of them. And the LORD ***is the*** true God; He ***is*** a living God and an everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and nations will not endure His indignation. Thus you shall say to them: "The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens." ***He is*** the Maker of the earth by His power, the Establisher of the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens. At the sound of His giving forth, ***there is*** a roar of waters in the heavens; and He makes mists go up from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and He brings out wind from His storehouses. Every man is stupid, without knowledge; every refiner has been put to shame by the carved image, for his molten image ***is*** falsehood, and ***there is*** no breath in them. They ***are*** vanity, a work of mockeries; at the time of their punishment they will perish. Not like these ***is*** the Portion of Jacob, for He ***is*** the Former of everything, and Israel ***is*** the tribe of His inheritance; the LORD of armies ***is*** His name.

10:17-25 Gather up your bundle from the land, O you who dwell in the siege. For thus says the LORD: "Look, I am slinging out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and I will bring distress on them, so that they may find ***it***." Woe to me because of my fracture! My wound is severe. And I, I said, "Surely this ***is*** a sickness, and I will bear it." My tent has been devastated, and all my tent cords have been snapped; my sons have gone out from me, and they are not; there is no one stretching out my tent again and raising my curtains. For the shepherds have become stupid, and they have not sought the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock has been scattered. The sound of a report! Look, it is coming, and a great quaking from the land of the north, to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a habitation of jackals. I know, O LORD, that his way ***is*** not to mankind; ***it is*** not to a man who walks to direct his step. Correct me, O LORD, only with justice, not in Your anger, lest You diminish me. Pour out Your rage on the nations that have not known You, and on the clans that have not called on Your name; for they have eaten Jacob, and they have eaten him and have made an end of him, and his habitation they have made desolate.

Preview

God tells His people not to learn the ways of the nations or be frightened by signs in the sky. Then He mocks idols. A man cuts down a tree, a craftsman carves it, covers it with silver and gold and nails it down so it will not fall over. It is like a scarecrow in a cucumber patch. It cannot speak or walk, and it can do neither harm nor good. Against that picture, Jeremiah praises the LORD: there is none like Him, the true God, the living God, the everlasting King who made the earth by His power. Then the scene changes to the siege. Jerusalem must pack its bundle for exile. Jeremiah grieves as if his own tent had been torn down, and he ends with a humble prayer: a man cannot direct his own steps, so correct me, LORD, but with justice.

This chapter is about the difference between gods people make and the God who made them. We may not carve idols out of wood, but we still make gods: things we trust, fear and serve. As we read, we should ask what we fear, what we trust for our future, and whether we have let the living God direct our steps.

Study

10:1-2 *Hear the word which the LORD has spoken to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be dismayed at the signs of the heavens, for the nations are dismayed at them.*

"Hear the word which the LORD has spoken to you, O house of Israel." The message is for the whole people of God.

"Do not learn the way of the nations." The nations around Israel had their own religions, customs and ways of seeing the world. God's people were to be different. Paul gives the same warning: do not be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2).

"Do not be dismayed at the signs of the heavens, for the nations are dismayed at them." The Babylonians were famous for astrology. They watched eclipses, comets and the positions of the planets and stars, and they believed these things controlled the future. When something unusual appeared in the sky, they were afraid. God tells His people not to be afraid of the sky. The stars are not gods. He made them, and He rules them (Genesis 1:14-16). Today many people still read horoscopes and fear omens. The child of God has no reason to.

10:3-5 *For the statutes of the peoples, it **is** vanity; for a tree from a forest someone has cut down, the work of the hands of a craftsman with an axe. With silver and with gold he beautifies it; with nails and with hammers they fasten it, and it will not totter. They **are** like a scarecrow of a cucumber field, and they do not speak; they must surely be carried, for they do not step. Do not be afraid of them, for they do no harm, and also doing good is not in them."*

"For the statutes of the peoples, it is vanity." Their religious customs are empty, a breath. Then God describes how an idol is made, step by step, as Isaiah did (Isaiah 44:9-20).

First, "a tree from a forest someone has cut down." Second, it is "the work of the hands of a craftsman with an axe." Third, "with silver and with gold he beautifies it." Fourth, "with nails and

with hammers they fasten it, and it will not totter." The god has to be nailed down so it does not fall over! There is quiet mockery in every line. People make a god out of a piece of firewood and then fasten it so it will not tip.

"They are like a scarecrow of a cucumber field, and they do not speak." A scarecrow looks like a man from a distance and frightens birds, but it is just sticks and rags. Idols "do not speak." "They must surely be carried, for they do not step." The true God carries His people (Isaiah 46:3-4). Idols have to be carried by theirs.

"Do not be afraid of them, for they do no harm, and also doing good is not in them." An idol can neither hurt you nor help you. It is nothing. Paul says an idol is nothing in the world (1 Corinthians 8:4), though he also warns that demons stand behind idol worship (1 Corinthians 10:19-20). The danger of an idol is not its power, but what it does to the person who trusts it.

10:6-7 *There is none like You, O LORD; You **are** great, and Your name **is** great in might. Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For to You it is fitting; for among all the wise of the nations and in all their kingdom **there is** none like You.*

Now Jeremiah turns from the idols to the LORD, and his words become worship. "There is none like You, O LORD; You are great, and Your name is great in might."

"Who would not fear You, O King of the nations?" The idols belonged to the nations, but the LORD is King over the nations. He is not a local god of Israel. He rules all peoples. "For to You it is fitting." Fear, meaning reverence and awe, is what He rightly deserves. "Among all the wise of the nations and in all their kingdom there is none like You."

This is the right response to seeing how empty idols are. We do not just stop trusting false things. We turn and worship the true God. Revelation 15:4 echoes this verse in the song of Moses and the Lamb: who will not fear You, O Lord?

10:8-10 *And in one they are stupid and foolish; the instruction of vanities, it **is** wood. Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of a craftsman and of the hands of a refiner; violet and purple **are** their clothing; the work of skilled **ones are** all of them. And the LORD **is the** true God; He **is** a living God and an everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and nations will not endure His indignation.*

"In one they are stupid and foolish." The idol makers and worshipers are foolish, all of them together. "The instruction of vanities, it is wood." What can you learn from a block of wood? Their religion taught them nothing, because there was nothing in it.

Verse 9 describes the finest idols. "Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish," a distant port, probably in Spain, at the far west end of the known world. "Gold from Uphaz," a place we do not know for sure. "Violet and purple are their clothing," the most costly dyes, worn by kings. "The work of skilled ones are all of them." The best materials, the finest craftsmen, the royal colors, and the result is still a dead thing.

"And the LORD is the true God; He is a living God and an everlasting King." Here are three titles that answer the idols. Idols are false; He is the true God. Idols are dead; He is the living God. Idols rot and are thrown away; He is the everlasting King. "At His wrath the earth quakes, and nations will not endure His indignation." The idol cannot even stand up without nails. The LORD shakes the earth.

10:11 *Thus you shall say to them: "The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens."*

This verse is different from the rest of the chapter, and the difference matters. It is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. Aramaic was the common language of trade and government in the ancient Near East, the language that Babylonians and other peoples could understand. God gives His people a message to say to the nations in their own language.

"The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens."

That is the test of a real God: did he make the heavens and the earth? Only the LORD did. Every other god will perish from the very earth and heavens he did not make. God's people in exile would live among idol worshipers. This was their answer, ready on their lips, in a language their neighbors would understand. It reminds us that we should be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about our hope (1 Peter 3:15), in words people can understand.

10:12-13 ***He is*** *the Maker of the earth by His power, the Establisher of the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens. At the sound of His giving forth,* ***there is*** *a roar of waters in the heavens; and He makes mists go up from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and He brings out wind from His storehouses.*

Now Jeremiah describes the God who did make the heavens and the earth. "He is the Maker of the earth by His power, the Establisher of the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens." Three things are named: His power, His wisdom and His understanding. Creation shows all three (Proverbs 3:19; Romans 1:20).

He also rules the weather. "At the sound of His giving forth, there is a roar of waters in the heavens." When He speaks, the thunder rolls and the rain pours. "He makes mists go up from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and He brings out wind from His storehouses." The Canaanites said Baal sent the storm and the rain. Jeremiah says no, the LORD does. Every rain cloud, every lightning bolt and every gust of wind comes from Him. Psalm 135:7 says almost the same words.

10:14-16 *Every man is stupid, without knowledge; every refiner has been put to shame by the carved image, for his molten image **is** falsehood, and **there is** no breath in them. They **are** vanity, a work of mockeries; at the time of their punishment they will perish. Not like these **is** the Portion of Jacob, for He **is** the Former of everything, and Israel **is** the tribe of His inheritance; the LORD of armies **is** His name.*

"Every man is stupid, without knowledge." Next to the Creator, every idol maker is a fool. "Every refiner has been put to shame by the carved image." The goldsmith who made the idol will be embarrassed by it, "for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them." The living God breathed life into man (Genesis 2:7). The idol has no breath at all.

"They are vanity, a work of mockeries; at the time of their punishment they will perish." The day will come when every false god is shown up and destroyed.

"Not like these is the Portion of Jacob." What a beautiful name for God. A portion was a share of an inheritance. Other peoples had their idols as their portion. Israel's portion was God Himself (Psalm 16:5; 73:26; Lamentations 3:24). "For He is the Former of everything." The One who formed everything is the God of Israel. "And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance." He is their portion, and they are His. It goes both ways. "The LORD of armies is His name."

Verses 12-16 appear again almost word for word in 51:15-19, in the message against Babylon. The God who made all things will judge the city of idols.

10:17-18 *Gather up your bundle from the land, O you who dwell in the siege. For thus says the LORD: "Look, I am slinging out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and I will bring distress on them, so that they may find **it**."*

The scene changes suddenly from worship to war. "Gather up your bundle from the land, O you who dwell in the siege." Pack your bag. A bundle was the small sack of belongings a captive could carry on his back into exile.

"Look, I am slinging out the inhabitants of the land at this time." God would throw them out of the land the way a man throws a stone from a sling: hard and far. "I will bring distress on them, so that they may find it." They would feel the full weight of it.

10:19-21 *Woe to me because of my fracture! My wound is severe. And I, I said, "Surely this **is** a sickness, and I will bear it." My tent has been devastated, and all my tent cords have been snapped; my sons have gone out from me, and they are not; there is no one stretching out my tent again and raising my curtains. For the shepherds have become stupid, and they have not sought the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock has been scattered.*

Now Jerusalem speaks, or Jeremiah speaks for her. "Woe to me because of my fracture! My wound is severe." "Surely this is a sickness, and I will bear it." There is no escape. All they can do is endure it.

"My tent has been devastated, and all my tent cords have been snapped." Picture a family tent in a storm, cords snapped, poles down. "My sons have gone out from me, and they are not." The

children are gone, taken or killed. "There is no one stretching out my tent again." There is no one left to set it up again.

Why did this happen? "For the shepherds have become stupid, and they have not sought the LORD." The shepherds are the kings and leaders of Judah. They did not seek God, "therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock has been scattered." When leaders do not seek God, the people they lead suffer. That is a heavy warning for anyone in leadership, whether in a nation, a church or a home.

10:22 *The sound of a report! Look, it is coming, and a great quaking from the land of the north, to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a habitation of jackals.*

"The sound of a report! Look, it is coming." News is arriving. The rumble is getting closer: "a great quaking from the land of the north." The army is on the way. It will make the cities of Judah "a desolation, a habitation of jackals," as 9:11 said.

10:23-24 *I know, O LORD, that his way **is** not to mankind; **it is** not to a man who walks to direct his step. Correct me, O LORD, only with justice, not in Your anger, lest You diminish me.*

The chapter ends with a prayer. Jeremiah speaks for himself and for his people.

"I know, O LORD, that his way is not to mankind; it is not to a man who walks to direct his step." This is one of the most humble and wise statements in the book. Man does not control his own life. We make plans, but we cannot guide our own steps (Proverbs 16:9; 20:24). Judah had tried to direct its own way, trusting Egypt, then Babylon, then idols. It had ended in ruin. Jeremiah admits that only God can direct a person's path.

That is a prayer worth praying every morning. Lord, I cannot run my own life. Lead me.

"Correct me, O LORD, only with justice, not in Your anger, lest You diminish me." Jeremiah does not ask God to skip the discipline. He knows it is deserved. He asks that it be measured, "with justice," the right amount, given as a father corrects a child, not in full anger that would wipe him out. God does this for His children. He disciplines us for our good (Hebrews 12:10), and He does not deal with us as our sins deserve (Psalm 103:10).

10:25 *Pour out Your rage on the nations that have not known You, and on the clans that have not called on Your name; for they have eaten Jacob, and they have eaten him and have made an end of him, and his habitation they have made desolate.*

"Pour out Your rage on the nations that have not known You, and on the clans that have not called on Your name." Psalm 79:6-7 has almost the same words. Is this a spiteful prayer? No. Jeremiah has just asked God to correct His own people with justice. Now he asks God to deal justly with the nations who would destroy them, "for they have eaten Jacob," devoured him, "and have made an end of him."

God used Babylon to judge Judah, but Babylon was cruel and proud, and God would judge Babylon too (25:12; chapters 50-51). Jeremiah asks God to do what is right. He leaves the vengeance with God rather than taking it himself, which is exactly what Scripture tells us to do (Romans 12:19).

Summary

God told His people not to follow the ways of the nations or fear the signs in the sky. He mocked idols: a tree cut down, carved, covered with silver and gold, and nailed in place, like a scarecrow that cannot speak or walk and can do neither harm nor good. Jeremiah praised the LORD as beyond compare, the King of the nations, the true God, the living God and the everlasting King. He gave the people a message in Aramaic for the nations: gods who did not make heaven and earth will perish. The LORD made the earth by His power and wisdom and rules the storm, while idols have no breath. He is the Portion of Jacob, and Israel is His inheritance. Then Jeremiah told Jerusalem to pack for exile, because God was slinging them out of the land. The city mourned its torn tent and lost children, because its shepherds had not sought the LORD. Jeremiah confessed that a man cannot direct his own steps, asked God to correct him with justice and not in anger, and asked God to judge the nations that devoured Jacob.

Study Questions

1. What two things did God tell His people not to do in verse 2? Why were the nations afraid of signs in the sky? (10:2)

2. List the steps in making an idol in verses 3-4. What details show how foolish it is? (10:3-4)

3. Why does God compare idols to a scarecrow? (10:5)

4. What three titles does Jeremiah give the LORD in verse 10, and how does each answer the idols? (10:10)

5. What message were God's people to give the nations, and what is the test of a real God? (10:11)

6. What does it mean that the LORD is "the Portion of Jacob"? (10:16; Psalm 16:5)

7. Why were the people scattered, according to verse 21? (10:21)

8. What kinds of idols do people in our culture make and trust today? What do they have in common with the scarecrow in the cucumber field?

9. Verse 23 says it is not in man to direct his own steps. Where are you trying to direct your own life without asking God?

10. Jeremiah asked God to correct him "with justice, not in Your anger" (10:24). How have you experienced God's correction in your life? How did it help you grow?

Jeremiah 11: The Broken Covenant and the Plot at Anathoth

Scripture

11:1-17 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Hear the words of this covenant, and you shall speak them to the man of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Cursed ***is*** the man who does not hear the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out from the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Listen to My voice, and you shall do them according to all that I command you; and you shall be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to you for God,' so as to establish the oath which I swore to your fathers, to give to them a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey, as ***it is*** this day."'" And I answered and said, "Amen, O LORD." And the LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, 'Hear the words of this covenant, and you shall do them. For I surely warned your fathers in the day I brought them up from the land of Egypt, and until this day, rising early and warning, saying, "Listen to My voice." And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear, and they walked, each one, in the stubbornness of their evil heart; and I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded ***them*** to do, and they did not do ***them***.'" And the LORD said to me, "A conspiracy has been found among the man of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have returned to the iniquities of their former fathers, who refused to hear My words; and they, they have walked after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers. Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am bringing calamity to them which they will not be able to go out from; and they will cry out to Me, and I will not listen to them. And the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go, and they will cry out to the gods to whom they are burning incense, and they will surely not save them in the time of their calamity. For ***as many as*** the number of your cities your gods have been, O Judah; and ***as many as*** the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to the shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.' And you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up for them a cry and a prayer; for I will not be listening in the time of their calling to Me on account of their calamity. What ***is there*** for My beloved in My house, her doing the scheme ***with*** the many? And the flesh of holiness will pass away from you; for your evil, then you exult. 'A luxuriant olive tree, beautiful of fruit ***and*** form,' the LORD called your name. At the sound of a great tumult He has kindled a fire on it, and its branches are broken. And the LORD of armies, who planted you, has spoken calamity against you, on account of the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done for themselves, to provoke Me to anger by burning incense to Baal."

11:18-23 And the LORD made ***it*** known to me, and I knew ***it***; then You showed me their deeds. And I ***was*** like a docile lamb ***that*** is led to slaughter; and I did not know that against me they had planned plans: "Let us destroy the tree with its bread, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, and let his name not be remembered again." And O LORD of armies, who judges righteousness, who tests the kidneys and the heart, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my case. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth who are

seeking your life, saying, "You shall not prophesy in the name of the LORD, and you will not die by our hand." Therefore thus says the LORD of armies: "Look, I am punishing them; the young men will die by the sword; their sons and their daughters will die by famine; and a remnant will not belong to them, for I will bring calamity to the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment."

Preview

God sends Jeremiah through the cities of Judah with "the words of this covenant," the agreement God made with Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. Its terms were simple: listen to My voice, and you will be My people and I will be your God. Their fathers did not listen, and now Judah has gone back to the same sins, as if in a conspiracy. So God will bring disaster, and once again He tells Jeremiah not to pray for them. The beautiful olive tree God planted will be set on fire. Then the chapter turns personal. God shows Jeremiah that the men of his own hometown, Anathoth, are plotting to kill him. He had been like a trusting lamb led to the slaughter. He brings his case to God and asks God to repay them.

This chapter is about covenant faithfulness and the cost of speaking God's truth. Jeremiah's own family and neighbors turned on him. Many believers know what it feels like to be opposed by those closest to them. As we read, we should see how Jeremiah handled betrayal: he did not take revenge, he took it to God.

Study

11:1-5 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Hear the words of this covenant, and you shall speak them to the man of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Cursed **is** the man who does not hear the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out from the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Listen to My voice, and you shall do them according to all that I command you; and you shall be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to you for God,' so as to establish the oath which I swore to your fathers, to give to them a land flowing **with** milk and honey, as **it is** this day."'" And I answered and said, "Amen, O LORD."*

"Hear the words of this covenant." A covenant was a binding agreement between two parties, with promises and conditions. God's covenant with Israel was made at Mount Sinai after the exodus, and renewed by Moses on the plains of Moab in Deuteronomy.

Many think "this covenant" points to the Book of the Law found in the temple in Josiah's eighteenth year, about 622 B.C. (2 Kings 22:8-13). Josiah read it to the people and led them in renewing the covenant (2 Kings 23:1-3). Jeremiah may have gone out from town to town to press its words on the people.

"Cursed is the man who does not hear the words of this covenant." This sounds like the curses of Deuteronomy 27:26 and 28:15. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10 to show that everyone who relies on keeping the law is under a curse, because no one keeps it perfectly. That is why we need Christ, who "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13).

God had brought them "out from the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace." Egypt was like a smelting furnace for Israel, a place of hard suffering (Deuteronomy 4:20). The covenant terms were: "Listen to My voice, and you shall do them." Then, "you shall be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to you for God." That is the heart of every covenant God made with His people (Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 31:33; Revelation 21:3).

God did this "so as to establish the oath which I swore to your fathers," Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give them "a land flowing with milk and honey." The land was a gift that came from God's promise.

Jeremiah answered, "Amen, O LORD." Amen means so be it, it is true. Jeremiah agreed with God's covenant, curses included.

11:6-8 *And the LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, 'Hear the words of this covenant, and you shall do them. For I surely warned your fathers in the day I brought them up from the land of Egypt, and until this day, rising early and warning, saying, "Listen to My voice." And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear, and they walked, each one, in the stubbornness of their evil heart; and I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded* ***them*** *to do, and they did not do* ***them****.'"*

"Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem." Jeremiah was to go everywhere with this message: "Hear the words of this covenant, and you shall do them." Hearing was not enough. The covenant had to be done (James 1:22).

God says He had warned their fathers "rising early and warning," from the exodus until that day. But "they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear." They did not even lean in to hear. Instead "they walked, each one, in the stubbornness of their evil heart." So God "brought on them all the words of this covenant," meaning the curses He had warned about. God's covenant has both blessings and curses, and He keeps both.

11:9-10 *And the LORD said to me, "A conspiracy has been found among the man of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have returned to the iniquities of their former fathers, who refused to hear My words; and they, they have walked after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.*

"A conspiracy has been found among the man of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem." A conspiracy is a secret plot. It was as if the whole nation had quietly agreed to turn against God together. Josiah's reform had been on the surface. Underneath, the people were ready to go back to their idols as soon as they could.

"They have returned to the iniquities of their former fathers." They went back to the sins of the generations before them. "The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant." Both kingdoms, north and south, had broken it. The covenant was not broken by God. It was broken by them.

11:11-13 *Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am bringing calamity to them which they will not be able to go out from; and they will cry out to Me, and I will not listen to them. And the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go, and they will cry out to the gods to whom they are burning incense, and they will surely not save them in the time of their calamity. For **as many as** the number of your cities your gods have been, O Judah; and **as many as** the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to the shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.'*

"Look, I am bringing calamity to them which they will not be able to go out from." There would be no escape this time. "They will cry out to Me, and I will not listen to them."

That is a frightening statement. Does God ever refuse to hear? Proverbs 1:24-31 says there is a time when those who have refused God's call again and again will call on Him in trouble and not be answered. They will eat the fruit of their own way. This is not God being cruel. They had refused Him for years. Now they want Him only to escape the consequences, not because they want Him.

So they would go to their idols instead: "they will cry out to the gods to whom they are burning incense, and they will surely not save them." Judah had as many gods as cities, and as many altars to "the shameful thing," Baal, as there were streets in Jerusalem. Not one of them would answer.

11:14 *And you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up for them a cry and a prayer; for I will not be listening in the time of their calling to Me on account of their calamity.*

"And you, do not pray for this people." For the second time God gives this command (7:16). This time He adds, "I will not be listening in the time of their calling to Me on account of their calamity."

As we saw at 7:16, this was a word to Jeremiah about a nation whose judgment was fixed. The people would cry out to God only to get out of trouble, without turning from their sin. God would not stop the judgment, so He told His prophet not to ask Him to. It does not forbid us from praying for anyone. We are told to pray for all people (1 Timothy 2:1-4), because God wants all people to be saved.

11:15-17 *What **is there** for My beloved in My house, her doing the scheme **with** the many? And the flesh of holiness will pass away from you; for your evil, then you exult. 'A luxuriant olive tree, beautiful of fruit **and** form,' the LORD called your name. At the sound of a great tumult He has kindled a fire on it, and its branches are broken. And the LORD of armies, who planted you, has spoken calamity against you, on account of the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done for themselves, to provoke Me to anger by burning incense to Baal."*

"What is there for My beloved in My house?" God still calls Judah "My beloved." But what right did she have to be in His temple, when she was doing "the scheme with the many," plotting evil with many others? "The flesh of holiness," the holy meat of the sacrifices, could not save her. "For your evil, then you exult." They rejoiced in their sin.

"A luxuriant olive tree, beautiful of fruit and form." That is the name the LORD gave Judah. The olive tree was one of the most valuable trees in Israel. It lived for hundreds of years and gave oil

for food, light and anointing. Psalm 52:8 uses it as a picture of a righteous man. God had planted Israel as a beautiful olive tree.

"At the sound of a great tumult He has kindled a fire on it, and its branches are broken." The tumult is the noise of the invading army. The beautiful tree would be set on fire.

Paul uses this same picture of Israel as God's olive tree in Romans 11:17-24. He says some of the natural branches were broken off because of unbelief, and Gentile believers were grafted in by faith, like branches from a wild olive. But Paul says the tree is still Israel's, God's olive tree, and that God is able to graft the natural branches back in again. "All Israel will be saved," he says (Romans 11:26). The branches were broken in Jeremiah's day, and many were broken off in Paul's day. But God has not cut down the tree.

"The LORD of armies, who planted you, has spoken calamity against you." The One who planted the tree is the One who judges it. He has that right. "On account of the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done for themselves."

11:18-19 *And the LORD made **it** known to me, and I knew **it**; then You showed me their deeds. And I **was** like a docile lamb **that** is led to slaughter; and I did not know that against me they had planned plans: "Let us destroy the tree with its bread, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, and let his name not be remembered again."*

Now the chapter turns personal. This is the first of several passages in Jeremiah where he pours out his own heart to God. Many call them Jeremiah's confessions (11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18).

"And the LORD made it known to me, and I knew it; then You showed me their deeds." Jeremiah did not find out about the plot on his own. God told him.

"I was like a docile lamb that is led to slaughter." A pet lamb trusts the people who feed it, and follows them right up to the knife. Jeremiah had no idea that the people around him were planning his death. He trusted them.

Their words were chilling: "Let us destroy the tree with its bread." The tree and its fruit together, meaning kill him and everything that comes from him. "Let us cut him off from the land of the living, and let his name not be remembered again." They wanted to wipe him out completely.

We learn in verse 21 that these were "the men of Anathoth," his hometown. Verse 6 of the next chapter says even his own brothers and his father's house were part of it. This was family betrayal.

It is hard not to think of Jesus here. Isaiah 53:7 says the Servant of the LORD was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and the New Testament applies that to Jesus (Acts 8:32-35). Jesus was rejected in His hometown of Nazareth, where they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-30), and even His brothers did not believe in Him at first (John 7:5). These were Mary and Joseph's later children. Jeremiah's suffering is a picture of the greater suffering of Christ. The difference is that Jeremiah did not know the plot, and Jesus knew exactly where He was going and went willingly.

11:20 *And O LORD of armies, who judges righteousness, who tests the kidneys and the heart, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my case.*

"And O LORD of armies, who judges righteousness, who tests the kidneys and the heart, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my case."

How should we read a prayer like this? This is what Bible teachers call an imprecation, a prayer asking God to bring judgment on enemies. We find many in the Psalms.

Look first at what Jeremiah did not do. He did not plot back. He did not take revenge. He did not even confront them with violence. He took his case to God: "to You I have revealed my case." He handed it over to the Judge.

Look also at whom he asked. He prayed to the God "who judges righteousness, who tests the kidneys and the heart." In Hebrew thinking, the kidneys were the seat of the deepest feelings, and the heart was the center of thought and will. God sees all the way down. Jeremiah trusted God to judge fairly, not on rumor or hurt feelings, but on what is really there.

This is what Scripture teaches. Paul says we should not avenge ourselves but "give place to the wrath" of God (Romans 12:19). Nehemiah did the same when his enemies mocked the work (Nehemiah 4:4-5). Jeremiah was asking God to do what God had already said He would do to those who fight His word.

Jesus teaches us to go further still: to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). On the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). We live on this side of the cross, and our first prayer for those who hurt us should be for their repentance and salvation. But we can also, like Jeremiah, hand our case to God and trust Him to make it right. That frees us from carrying the burden of revenge.

11:21-23 *Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life, saying, "You shall not prophesy in the name of the LORD, and you will not die by our hand." Therefore thus says the LORD of armies: "Look, I am punishing them; the young men will die by the sword; their sons and their daughters will die by famine; and a remnant will not belong to them, for I will bring calamity to the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment."*

God answers right away. He speaks "concerning the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life." Their words were, "You shall not prophesy in the name of the LORD, and you will not die by our hand." In other words, stop preaching, or we will kill you.

Why would his own town want him silent? Perhaps because of Josiah's reform. The king had closed down the local shrines and brought all worship to Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:8-9). A town of priests like Anathoth may have lost its standing, and Jeremiah supported the covenant that did it. Or maybe they were simply ashamed of a native son who preached against the whole nation. Scripture does not say exactly why.

God's sentence: "the young men will die by the sword; their sons and their daughters will die by famine; and a remnant will not belong to them." God would bring calamity on Anathoth in "the year of their punishment." Judgment would come in God's time.

And yet, when the exiles returned years later, Ezra 2:23 lists 128 men of Anathoth among them. So God's judgment fell on the plotters, but in His mercy, some of the town's descendants came home. Later still, Jeremiah would buy a field in Anathoth as a sign of hope (chapter 32).

Summary

God told Jeremiah to proclaim the words of His covenant through Judah and Jerusalem: cursed is the one who does not obey, and the terms are to listen to God's voice so that they will be His people and He their God. Their fathers did not listen, and now Judah had joined in a conspiracy to return to the same sins, breaking the covenant. God would bring a calamity they could not escape, and their many gods would not save them. For the second time God told Jeremiah not to pray for them. The beautiful olive tree God had planted would be set on fire and its branches broken. Then God revealed that the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, were plotting to kill him while he trusted them like a lamb led to slaughter. Jeremiah brought his case to the righteous Judge and asked to see His vengeance on them. God promised to punish the men of Anathoth.

Study Questions

1. What were the main terms of God's covenant with Israel, according to verses 4-5? (11:4-5)

2. How did Jeremiah respond to the words of the covenant? (11:5)

3. What does God mean by a "conspiracy" in verse 9? (11:9-10)

4. Why would God not listen to the people's cry in the time of calamity? (11:11-14)

5. How does Paul use the picture of the olive tree in Romans 11:17-24, and what hope does he give for Israel? (11:16)

6. How did Jeremiah find out about the plot, and who was behind it? (11:18-21)

7. How does Jeremiah's experience as "a docile lamb" led "to slaughter" point to Jesus? (11:19; Isaiah 53:7)

8. What did Jeremiah do with his anger toward his enemies, and how does Romans 12:19 apply? (11:20)

9. Have you ever been opposed or hurt by people close to you because of your faith? How did you respond?

10. Is there someone you need to hand over to God instead of carrying the hurt or the wish for revenge yourself? What would it look like to pray for them this week?

Jeremiah 12: Why Does the Way of the Wicked Prosper?

Scripture

12:1-17 Righteous ***are*** You, O LORD, when I bring a case to You; nevertheless, I will speak judgments with You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? ***Why*** are all who deal treacherously ***with*** treachery at ease? You have planted them; they have also taken root; they go on; they have also produced fruit. You ***are*** near in their mouth and far from their kidneys. And You, O LORD, You know me; You see me, and You test my heart with You. Drag them away like sheep to slaughter, and set them apart for a day of killing. Until when will the land mourn, and the vegetation of every field be dried up? Because of the evil of those who dwell in it, animals and birds are swept away, for they have said, "He will not see our end." If you have run with foot soldiers and they have wearied you, and how will you compete with the horses? And in a land of peace you ***are*** trusting, and how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; even they have called out after you fully. Do not trust in them when they speak good things to you. I have forsaken My house; I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the forest; it has given forth against Me with its voice; therefore I hate it. ***Is*** My inheritance to Me a speckled bird of prey? ***Are*** the birds of prey all around against it? Go, gather every living thing of the field; bring ***them*** for food. Many shepherds have ruined My vineyard; they have trodden down My portion; they have made the portion of My desire into a wilderness of desolation. He has set it into a desolation; it mourns to Me, desolate; all the land has been made desolate, for there is no man who sets ***it*** on ***his*** heart. Over all the bare heights in the wilderness destroyers have come, for a sword of the LORD is devouring from ***one*** end of the land and to the ***other*** end of the land; there is no peace for any flesh. They have sown wheat, and they have reaped thorns; they have wearied themselves; they do not profit. And be ashamed of your produce because of the burning of the anger of the LORD. Thus says the LORD concerning all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I caused My people Israel to inherit: "Look, I am plucking them up from their ground, and the house of Judah I will pluck up from their midst. And it will be, after I have plucked them up, I will return, and I will have compassion on them, and I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land. And it will be, if they will surely learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, 'As the LORD lives,' just as they taught My people to swear by Baal, and they will be built up in the midst of My people. And if they will not listen, and I will pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying," declares the LORD.

Preview

Jeremiah has just learned that the men of his hometown want him dead. Now he brings God a question that believers have asked in every age: why do the wicked prosper? They are planted, they take root, they bear fruit, and they talk about God while their hearts are far from Him. God's answer is not what Jeremiah expected. Instead of explaining, God tells him that things will get harder, and that even his own family has betrayed him. Then God speaks of His own grief. He has forsaken His house and handed over the people He loves. The chapter ends with a surprising

promise for the nations around Israel: if they will learn to swear by the LORD's name, they too will be built up among His people.

This chapter is about honest questions and hard answers. Jeremiah does not hide his complaint from God, and God does not scold him for asking. But God does call him to keep running. As we read, we should notice that God is big enough for our questions, and that His answer is often not an explanation but a call to trust Him and keep going.

Study

12:1-2 *Righteous **are** You, O LORD, when I bring a case to You; nevertheless, I will speak judgments with You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? **Why** are all who deal treacherously **with** treachery at ease? You have planted them; they have also taken root; they go on; they have also produced fruit. You **are** near in their mouth and far from their kidneys.*

"Righteous are You, O LORD, when I bring a case to You." Jeremiah begins with faith. Before he complains, he confesses that God is righteous. He is not accusing God of doing wrong. He is coming to Him, as to a judge, with a case he does not understand.

"Nevertheless, I will speak judgments with You." In other words, let me argue this with You. "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all who deal treacherously with treachery at ease?"

This is one of the oldest questions in the Bible. Job asked it (Job 21:7). Asaph asked it in Psalm 73, where he admits he almost slipped when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. Habakkuk asked it in the same years as Jeremiah (Habakkuk 1:13). Jeremiah's own enemies at Anathoth were living comfortably while he was in danger for his life. It did not seem fair.

Jeremiah describes them like trees. "You have planted them; they have also taken root; they go on; they have also produced fruit." He even says God planted them. How can that be? God gives life and blessing to all, even to the wicked (Matthew 5:45). But that is part of what troubled Jeremiah.

"You are near in their mouth and far from their kidneys." They talked about God all the time, but in their deepest self, He was far away. Isaiah said the same, and Jesus quoted it: this people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8).

Is it wrong to ask God why? No. Jeremiah asked, and God put his question in the Bible. Many believers carry a quiet question about why evil people seem to do so well. It is better to bring it to God honestly, as Jeremiah did, than to let it eat away at our faith in silence. Asaph found his answer when he "went into the sanctuaries of God" and saw the end of the wicked (Psalm 73:17).

12:3-4 *And You, O LORD, You know me; You see me, and You test my heart with You. Drag them away like sheep to slaughter, and set them apart for a day of killing. Until when will the land mourn, and the vegetation of every field be dried up? Because of the evil of those who dwell in it, animals and birds are swept away, for they have said, "He will not see our end."*

"And You, O LORD, You know me; You see me, and You test my heart with You." Jeremiah appeals to God's knowledge of him. His enemies were far from God in their hearts. Jeremiah's heart was open before God, and he asked God to look.

"Drag them away like sheep to slaughter, and set them apart for a day of killing." In 11:19 Jeremiah had been "like a docile lamb" led to the slaughter. Now he asks God to turn it around and do to them what they planned to do to him.

How do we read this prayer? The same way we read 11:20 and the imprecations in the Psalms. Jeremiah does not take revenge. He asks God to judge. He brings his anger to the right place. He is asking for justice, not acting it out himself. God had already said He would punish the men of Anathoth (11:22-23). Jeremiah is praying in line with what God had said. As Christians, we also hand our enemies over to God (Romans 12:19), and Jesus teaches us to pray for their good as well (Luke 6:27-28).

Then Jeremiah widens the question. "Until when will the land mourn, and the vegetation of every field be dried up?" There seems to have been a drought (compare chapter 14). The animals and birds were dying "because of the evil of those who dwell in it." The land was suffering for the people's sin.

And the wicked kept on, saying, "He will not see our end." They meant either that God would not see what happens to them, or that Jeremiah would not live to see their downfall. Either way, they were sure nothing would happen.

12:5-6 *If you have run with foot soldiers and they have wearied you, and how will you compete with the horses? And in a land of peace you **are** trusting, and how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; even they have called out after you fully. Do not trust in them when they speak good things to you.*

Now God answers. And His answer is a question, maybe the last thing Jeremiah wanted to hear.

"If you have run with foot soldiers and they have wearied you, and how will you compete with the horses?" If a footrace with men has worn you out, how will you race against horses? "And in a land of peace you are trusting, and how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" The thicket of the Jordan was the thick jungle of brush along the Jordan River, where lions lived (49:19). If you stumble on safe, open ground, what will you do in the lion's den?

God was telling Jeremiah: this is only the beginning. The plot at Anathoth was the footrace. The kings, priests and armies of the coming years would be the horses. It was going to get harder, not easier.

That may sound harsh. But think about it. God did not answer Jeremiah's "why." He did not explain the prosperity of the wicked. He did something else. He called Jeremiah to get stronger, to prepare for what was ahead, to keep running. Sometimes God does not give us the explanation we ask for. He gives us Himself, and He calls us to endure. Hebrews 12:1-3 tells us to run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus, who endured the cross, so that we will not grow weary.

Then came the hardest part: "For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you." Jeremiah's own brothers were in on the plot. "Even they have called out after you fully," a phrase that may mean they raised a mob against him. "Do not trust in them when they speak good things to you." They would smile at him and plan his death.

Jesus said that a man's enemies would be those of his own household (Matthew 10:36). If you have faced rejection from family because of your faith, you are not alone. Jeremiah knew it. Jesus knew it. And God was with Jeremiah through it all.

12:7-9 *I have forsaken My house; I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the forest; it has given forth against Me with its voice; therefore I hate it.* ***Is*** *My inheritance to Me a speckled bird of prey?* ***Are*** *the birds of prey all around against it? Go, gather every living thing of the field; bring* ***them*** *for food.*

Now the speaker changes. These are God's words, and they show His own heart.

"I have forsaken My house; I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies." God calls Judah "the beloved of My soul." Even while He judges her, she is still the one He loves. This is not a judge who does not care. This is a Father handing over a child who will not stop running away. It hurts Him.

Why? "My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the forest; it has given forth against Me with its voice." Judah had turned on God and roared at Him like a lion. "Therefore I hate it." In Hebrew, to "hate" can mean to turn away from, to reject in favor of something else (Malachi 1:2-3). God set Himself against what Judah had become.

"Is My inheritance to Me a speckled bird of prey?" A strangely colored bird is attacked by other birds. Judah had made herself different from the nations, not by holiness, but by being strangely mixed, and the nations would gather around to attack. "Go, gather every living thing of the field; bring them for food." The wild animals, a picture of the nations, are invited to the feast.

12:10-13 *Many shepherds have ruined My vineyard; they have trodden down My portion; they have made the portion of My desire into a wilderness of desolation. He has set it into a desolation; it mourns to Me, desolate; all the land has been made desolate, for there is no man who sets* ***it*** *on* ***his*** *heart. Over all the bare heights in the wilderness destroyers have come, for a sword of the LORD is devouring from* ***one*** *end of the land and to the* ***other*** *end of the land; there is no peace for any flesh. They have sown wheat, and they have reaped thorns; they have wearied themselves; they do not profit. And be ashamed of your produce because of the burning of the anger of the LORD.*

"Many shepherds have ruined My vineyard." The shepherds here may be the enemy kings and their armies, who would camp in the land like shepherds grazing their flocks (6:3). They "have trodden down My portion." God's vineyard, His "portion of My desire," His prized land, would become "a wilderness of desolation."

"It mourns to Me, desolate." The land itself grieves to God. "All the land has been made desolate, for there is no man who sets it on his heart." No one cared enough to take it to heart and repent.

"A sword of the LORD is devouring from one end of the land and to the other end." It is God's sword, even though Babylon holds it. "There is no peace for any flesh." The false prophets had promised peace. There would be none.

"They have sown wheat, and they have reaped thorns." They worked hard and got nothing. That is what life looks like without God's blessing. We can work and plan and sow, but if God is against us, we reap thorns (Haggai 1:6).

12:14-15 *Thus says the LORD concerning all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I caused My people Israel to inherit: "Look, I am plucking them up from their ground, and the house of Judah I will pluck up from their midst. And it will be, after I have plucked them up, I will return, and I will have compassion on them, and I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land.*

Then, at the end of the chapter, God turns to the nations around Israel. He calls them "all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I caused My people Israel to inherit." These were nations like Edom, Moab, Ammon and the Philistines, who took advantage of Judah's fall to grab land and plunder.

"Look, I am plucking them up from their ground." God would judge them too. Babylon would conquer all of these nations. "And the house of Judah I will pluck up from their midst." This may mean that God would pull His people out from among the nations where they had been scattered.

Then comes a word of amazing grace: "after I have plucked them up, I will return, and I will have compassion on them, and I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land." God's compassion would reach even these nations. He would bring them back to their own lands. Jeremiah 48:47 and 49:6 say the same of Moab and Ammon.

12:16-17 *And it will be, if they will surely learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, 'As the LORD lives,' just as they taught My people to swear by Baal, and they will be built up in the midst of My people. And if they will not listen, and I will pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying," declares the LORD.*

Here is the condition: "if they will surely learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name," saying, "As the LORD lives." These nations once taught Israel "to swear by Baal." Now they could learn from Israel to worship the true God. If they did, "they will be built up in the midst of My people."

This is a glimpse of God's plan to bless all nations through Israel, as He promised Abraham (Genesis 12:3). Gentiles who turn to the LORD would be built up among His people. Isaiah saw the same thing: foreigners who join themselves to the LORD would be brought to His holy mountain (Isaiah 56:6-7). In Christ, Gentiles have been brought near and made fellow citizens with God's people (Ephesians 2:12-19). And in the coming kingdom, the nations will come to Jerusalem to learn God's ways (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Notice that the Gentiles are built up "in the midst of My people." They are added in. They do not replace Israel.

But there is a warning too. "If they will not listen, and I will pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying." The offer is real, and so is the judgment for those who refuse it. That is still the way of the gospel. God's door is open to every nation. But each person must choose to come in.

Remember Jeremiah's call in 1:10: to pluck up and to pull down, to build and to plant. This chapter ends with both.

Summary

Jeremiah confessed that God is righteous, then asked Him why the wicked prosper and the treacherous are at ease, planted and fruitful, with God near their lips but far from their hearts. He asked God to see his own heart and to judge his enemies, and he mourned the land dried up because of its people's evil. God answered with a question: if Jeremiah was tired from racing men, how would he race horses, and if he stumbled in a safe land, what would he do in the thicket of the Jordan? Even his own brothers had betrayed him. Then God grieved that He had forsaken His house and given the beloved of His soul to her enemies, because she had roared at Him like a lion. Shepherds would trample His vineyard, and the people would sow wheat and reap thorns. Finally, God promised to judge the evil neighbors who seized Israel's land, then to have compassion on them and bring them home, and to build them up among His people if they learned to swear by His name. Those who refused would be destroyed.

I have struggled with seeing wicked people prosper while others suffered. What carried me through was remembering that my reward is in heaven, not here on earth. Jeremiah asked God the same question. God did not scold him for asking.

Study Questions

1. What does Jeremiah say about God before he asks his question? Why is that important? (12:1)

2. What question did Jeremiah ask, and how does he describe the wicked? (12:1-2)

3. What does it mean that God was "near in their mouth and far from their kidneys"? (12:2; Matthew 15:8)

4. How did God answer Jeremiah's question? What do the footrace and the thicket of the Jordan mean? (12:5)

5. Who had betrayed Jeremiah, according to verse 6? (12:6)

6. What does God call Judah in verse 7, even while He judges her? What does that show about His heart? (12:7)

7. What did God promise the nations who would learn to swear by His name? (12:15-16)

8. Have you ever struggled with seeing wicked people prosper while you or others suffered? How does Psalm 73 or this chapter help?

9. God told Jeremiah it would get harder, not easier. How does Hebrews 12:1-3 help you keep running when you are tired?

10. Is there a "why" question you have been carrying? What would it look like to bring it to God honestly, the way Jeremiah did, and trust Him even without a full answer?

Jeremiah 13: The Linen Sash and the Wine Jars

Scripture

13:1-14 Thus the LORD said to me: "Go, and you shall buy for yourself a loincloth of linen, and you shall put it on your loins, and you shall not bring it into water." And I bought the loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and I put ***it*** on my loins. And the word of the LORD came to me a second ***time***, saying, "Take the loincloth which you bought, which ***is*** on your loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." And I went, and I hid it at Euphrates, just as the LORD had commanded me. And it was at the end of many days, and the LORD said to me, "Arise, go to Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth which I commanded you to hide there." And I went to Euphrates, and I dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it; and look, the loincloth was ruined; it was not profitable for anything. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Thus I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart, and have walked after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, let it be like this loincloth, which is not profitable for anything. For just as the loincloth clings to the loins of a man, so I have made all the house of Israel and all the house of Judah cling to Me,' declares the LORD, 'to be for Me for a people and for a name and for praise and for beauty; and they did not listen.' And you shall speak to them this word: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Every jar will be filled ***with*** wine."' And they will say to you, 'Do we not surely know that every jar will be filled ***with*** wine?' And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, I am filling all the inhabitants of this land, and the kings who sit for David on his throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, ***with*** drunkenness. And I will smash them, each one against his brother, and the fathers and the sons together," declares the LORD. "I will not spare, and I will not pity, and I will not have compassion, from ruining them."'"

13:15-27 Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, for the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God before He brings darkness, and before your feet stumble on the mountains of twilight, and you wait for light, and He sets it into deep darkness, and makes ***it*** into thick darkness. And if you will not listen to it, my soul will weep in secret places because of pride; and it will surely shed tears, and my eye will run down ***with*** tears, for the flock of the LORD has been taken captive. Say to the king and to the queen mother, "Make yourselves low, sit down, for your headdress has come down, the crown of your beauty." The cities of the Negeb have been shut up, and there is no one who opens; Judah has been taken into exile, all of it; it has been taken into exile completely. Lift up your eyes and see those who are coming from the north. Where ***is*** the flock ***that*** was given to you, the sheep of your beauty? What will you say when He appoints over you—and you, you taught them over you—close friends for head? Will not pains seize you like a woman giving birth? And if you say in your heart, "Why have these ***things*** happened to me?" In the greatness of your iniquity your skirts have been uncovered; your heels have suffered violence. Will a Cushite change his skin, and a leopard its spots? ***Then*** also you, you will be able to do good, ***you who are*** trained to do evil. And I will scatter them like chaff passing away to the wind of the wilderness. This ***is*** your lot, the portion of your measures from Me, declares the LORD, because you have forgotten Me, and you have trusted in falsehood. And also I, I will strip off your skirts over your

face, and your shame will be seen. Your adulteries and your neighings, the wickedness of your prostitution on hills in the field, I have seen your detestable things. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! You will not be clean; after how long yet?

Preview

God tells Jeremiah to buy a linen waistcloth, wear it, and then hide it in a crack in the rock by the Euphrates. Many days later Jeremiah goes back and digs it up, and it is rotten and good for nothing. God explains: He had bound Israel and Judah to Himself as closely as that cloth clings to a man, so that they would be His people, His praise and His glory. But they would not listen, so He would ruin their pride the same way. Then comes a second picture: every jar will be filled with wine, and God will fill the people with drunkenness and smash them against one another. Jeremiah pleads with them to give glory to God before the darkness falls, and he warns the king and the queen mother that their crowns will come down. The chapter ends with a hard question: can a leopard change its spots?

This chapter is about pride, and about how close God wants to be to His people. He did not want Israel at a distance. He wanted them clinging to Him. Pride pulled them away and left them rotten. As we read, we should ask where pride is keeping us from clinging to God, and whether we believe we can change ourselves without Him.

Study

13:1-2 *Thus the LORD said to me: "Go, and you shall buy for yourself a loincloth of linen, and you shall put it on your loins, and you shall not bring it into water." And I bought the loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and I put **it** on my loins.*

"Go, and you shall buy for yourself a loincloth of linen, and you shall put it on your loins." This was a cloth or sash worn around the waist, next to the body, under the outer robe. It was the piece of clothing that clung most closely to a man. Linen was what the priests wore (Leviticus 16:4), and it was a sign of purity.

"You shall not bring it into water." He was not to wash it. That detail will matter later.

This is the first of Jeremiah's acted-out messages, sometimes called sign-acts. God told His prophets at times to do real, visible things so that the people would see the message as well as hear it. Isaiah walked barefoot (Isaiah 20:2-4). Ezekiel lay on his side for many days (Ezekiel 4:4-6). Jeremiah will wear a yoke (27:2) and buy a field (32:6-15). People forget sermons. They remember pictures.

"And I bought the loincloth according to the word of the LORD." Jeremiah obeyed without asking why.

13:3-5 *And the word of the LORD came to me a second **time**, saying, "Take the loincloth which you bought, which **is** on your loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." And I went, and I hid it at Euphrates, just as the LORD had commanded me.*

Then God told him to take the cloth "and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock."

The Euphrates River was about 350 miles from Jerusalem, a long journey on foot, perhaps several weeks each way. Some Bible teachers think Jeremiah went to a place called Parah (Joshua 18:23), a few miles from Anathoth, whose name in Hebrew sounds almost the same as the Euphrates (Perath), and that the name was meant to point the people's minds to the great river. Others believe Jeremiah went all the way to the real Euphrates, since the text says it four times. The Hebrew word is the usual name of the river. Either way, the meaning is clear. The Euphrates was the river of Babylon, and the cloth hidden there points to Judah going into exile.

"And I went, and I hid it at Euphrates, just as the LORD had commanded me." Again, Jeremiah simply obeyed.

13:6-7 *And it was at the end of many days, and the LORD said to me, "Arise, go to Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth which I commanded you to hide there." And I went to Euphrates, and I dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it; and look, the loincloth was ruined; it was not profitable for anything.*

"At the end of many days," God sent Jeremiah back to dig up the cloth. "And I went to Euphrates, and I dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it; and look, the loincloth was ruined; it was not profitable for anything."

Damp ground, mold and time had rotted the linen. The cloth that once was fresh and close to Jeremiah's body was now worthless, fit only to be thrown away.

13:8-11 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Thus I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart, and have walked after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, let it be like this loincloth, which is not profitable for anything. For just as the loincloth clings to the loins of a man, so I have made all the house of Israel and all the house of Judah cling to Me,' declares the LORD, 'to be for Me for a people and for a name and for praise and for beauty; and they did not listen.'*

God explained. "Thus I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem." The cloth stood for the people. Pride was their sin, and pride would be what God brought down.

"This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart, and have walked after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, let it be like this loincloth, which is not profitable for anything." They refused God's words, followed their own hearts and worshiped idols. Their contact with Babylon and its gods would leave them rotten and useless.

Then God tells us what He had wanted. This is the heart of the chapter. "For just as the loincloth clings to the loins of a man, so I have made all the house of Israel and all the house of Judah cling to Me." The word cling is the same word used in Genesis 2:24, when a man clings to his wife. God wanted His people as close to Him as the clothing next to a man's skin.

Why? "To be for Me for a people and for a name and for praise and for beauty." God wanted Israel to be His own people, to carry His name, to bring Him praise and to show His beauty to the world. That was their purpose. Peter says the same about the church today: we are a people for God's own possession, so that we may proclaim His excellencies (1 Peter 2:9).

"And they did not listen." Four words that explain the whole tragedy.

I find this picture tender. God did not want a people at arm's length. He wanted closeness. Jesus said, "Remain in Me" (John 15:4). That is still what He wants from us. Pride pushes God away. Humility clings to Him.

13:12-14 *And you shall speak to them this word: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Every jar will be filled **with** wine."' And they will say to you, 'Do we not surely know that every jar will be filled **with** wine?' And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, I am filling all the inhabitants of this land, and the kings who sit for David on his throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, **with** drunkenness. And I will smash them, each one against his brother, and the fathers and the sons together," declares the LORD. "I will not spare, and I will not pity, and I will not have compassion, from ruining them."'"*

Now a second message. "Every jar will be filled with wine." This was probably a common saying at feasts, maybe like a toast. The people answered as if Jeremiah were stating the obvious: "Do we not surely know that every jar will be filled with wine?" Of course jars are for wine. Why bother saying it?

Then Jeremiah gave the meaning. "Look, I am filling all the inhabitants of this land," the kings on David's throne, the priests, the prophets and everyone in Jerusalem, "with drunkenness." The jars are the people. The wine is God's judgment. Drunk people stagger, lose their judgment and fight. Judah would be filled with confusion and helplessness, as if drunk on God's wrath. Jeremiah will speak of the cup of God's wrath again (25:15-17).

"And I will smash them, each one against his brother, and the fathers and the sons together." Jars knocking together break. Judah's leaders and families would turn on each other and fall together.

"I will not spare, and I will not pity, and I will not have compassion, from ruining them." These are some of the hardest words God speaks in the book. God's patience had been long. Now the time for judgment had come.

13:15-17 *Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, for the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God before He brings darkness, and before your feet stumble on the mountains of twilight, and you wait for light, and He sets it into deep darkness, and makes* ***it*** *into thick darkness. And if you will not listen to it, my soul will weep in secret places because of pride; and it will surely shed tears, and my eye will run down* ***with*** *tears, for the flock of the LORD has been taken captive.*

Even so, Jeremiah pleads once more. "Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, for the LORD has spoken." Pride again is the issue.

"Give glory to the LORD your God before He brings darkness." To give God glory here means to confess Him, to admit your sin and honor Him as the true God (Joshua 7:19). Do it now, before it is too late.

Jeremiah pictures travelers caught in the mountains as night falls. Their "feet stumble on the mountains of twilight." They "wait for light," hoping for morning, but God "sets it into deep darkness, and makes it into thick darkness." There comes a point when the light goes out.

"And if you will not listen to it, my soul will weep in secret places because of pride." Here again is the weeping prophet. He would weep alone, where no one could see, "for the flock of the LORD has been taken captive." He still calls them the LORD's flock. They belonged to God even as they went into exile.

13:18-19 *Say to the king and to the queen mother, "Make yourselves low, sit down, for your headdress has come down, the crown of your beauty." The cities of the Negeb have been shut up, and there is no one who opens; Judah has been taken into exile, all of it; it has been taken into exile completely.*

"Say to the king and to the queen mother, Make yourselves low, sit down, for your headdress has come down, the crown of your beauty." This was most likely King Jehoiachin and his mother Nehushta. Jehoiachin was only eighteen when he became king, and his mother held great influence (2 Kings 24:8). After three months, in 597 B.C., they surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:12, 15). They really did lose their crowns.

"The cities of the Negeb have been shut up." The Negeb was the dry south of Judah. Even the cities farthest from the northern invader would be closed and helpless. "Judah has been taken into exile, all of it."

13:20-22 *Lift up your eyes and see those who are coming from the north. Where* ***is*** *the flock* ***that*** *was given to you, the sheep of your beauty? What will you say when He appoints over you—and you, you taught them over you—close friends for head? Will not pains seize you like a woman giving birth? And if you say in your heart, "Why have these* ***things*** *happened to me?" In the greatness of your iniquity your skirts have been uncovered; your heels have suffered violence.*

"Lift up your eyes and see those who are coming from the north." Jeremiah speaks to Jerusalem as a shepherd responsible for the other towns. "Where is the flock that was given to you, the sheep of your beauty?" What happened to the people you were supposed to care for?

Verse 21 is hard to translate, but the point is plain. Judah had courted the Babylonians as friends and allies (2 Kings 20:12-18). Now those "close friends" would be set over her as rulers. The ones she trusted would become her masters. "Will not pains seize you like a woman giving birth?"

"And if you say in your heart, Why have these things happened to me?" God answers: "In the greatness of your iniquity your skirts have been uncovered; your heels have suffered violence." This is the language of public shame. In the ancient world, captives were sometimes led away stripped and barefoot to humiliate them (Isaiah 20:4). Jerusalem would be shamed before the nations. The reason was the greatness of her own sin.

13:23 *Will a Cushite change his skin, and a leopard its spots?* ***Then*** *also you, you will be able to do good,* ***you who are*** *trained to do evil.*

"Will a Cushite change his skin, and a leopard its spots? Then also you, you will be able to do good, you who are trained to do evil."

Cush was the land south of Egypt, in the area of modern Sudan and Ethiopia. Its people had dark skin. A Cushite cannot change his skin color, and a leopard cannot change its spots. These are simply facts of nature. The point is not that dark skin is bad. Nothing in the verse says that. Moses married a Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1), and a Cushite named Ebed-melech will be one of the heroes of this book, saving Jeremiah's life (38:7-13; 39:15-18). The point is only that some things cannot be changed from the inside by trying harder.

Judah was "trained to do evil." Sin had become a habit so deep that it was part of who they were. They could no more change themselves than a leopard could scrub off its spots.

This is true of every one of us. We cannot make ourselves good by effort. Sin is not just something we do. It is part of our nature (Romans 3:10-12; Ephesians 2:1-3). That sounds hopeless, and on our own it is. But what we cannot do, God can. He promised a new covenant in which He would write His law on our hearts (31:33), and give a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). In Christ, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The leopard cannot change its spots, but God can make a new creature.

13:24-27 *And I will scatter them like chaff passing away to the wind of the wilderness. This* ***is*** *your lot, the portion of your measures from Me, declares the LORD, because you have forgotten Me, and you have trusted in falsehood. And also I, I will strip off your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen. Your adulteries and your neighings, the wickedness of your prostitution on hills in the field, I have seen your detestable things. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! You will not be clean; after how long yet?*

"I will scatter them like chaff passing away to the wind of the wilderness." Chaff is the dry husk blown away at threshing. Judah would be blown out of the land.

"This is your lot, the portion of your measures from Me." A lot was a share measured out. This was what Judah had earned, "because you have forgotten Me, and you have trusted in falsehood."

Verses 26-27 return to the picture of Judah as an unfaithful wife. God says He will expose her shame publicly: "your shame will be seen." He names "your adulteries and your neighings," the picture from 5:8 of lustful horses, "the wickedness of your prostitution on hills in the field." These are pictures of idol worship on the high places. "I have seen your detestable things." Nothing was hidden from God.

I want to handle this picture carefully. It is strong language, and God uses it because idolatry is unfaithfulness to Him, as deeply personal as adultery in a marriage. The shame of exile would match the shame of their sin. It is not a picture of how any person should treat another, and nothing in it excuses abuse. It is God's own judgment, spoken in the language of a broken covenant.

The chapter ends with a cry. "Woe to you, O Jerusalem! You will not be clean; after how long yet?" Even here, God's question carries a longing. How long until you are clean? God wanted them clean. One day He would provide the cleansing they could not provide for themselves (Ezekiel 36:25; Zechariah 13:1).

Summary

God told Jeremiah to buy a linen waistcloth, wear it without washing it, then hide it in a crack in the rock at the Euphrates. Many days later he dug it up and found it rotten and useless. God said He would ruin Judah's pride the same way, because He had made Israel and Judah cling to Him like that cloth, to be His people, His name, His praise and His beauty, but they would not listen. Then God said every jar would be filled with wine, meaning He would fill the people and their leaders with the drunkenness of judgment and smash them against each other. Jeremiah begged them to give glory to God before darkness fell, and said he would weep in secret for their pride. He told the king and queen mother that their crowns would come down and Judah would go into exile. Their friends would become their rulers, and their shame would be exposed because of their sin. They could no more change themselves than a Cushite could change his skin or a leopard its spots. God would scatter them like chaff, and He asked how long it would be until Jerusalem was clean.

Study Questions

1. What did God tell Jeremiah to do with the linen waistcloth, and what happened to it? (13:1-7)

2. What did God say the ruined cloth meant? (13:9-10)

3. Why did God make His people cling to Him, according to verse 11? (13:11)

4. What was the meaning of the saying "Every jar will be filled with wine"? (13:12-14)

5. What did Jeremiah urge the people to do "before He brings darkness"? (13:15-16)

6. What would happen to the king and the queen mother? (13:18; 2 Kings 24:12)

7. What does the question about the leopard's spots teach about our ability to change ourselves? Who can change us? (13:23; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

8. God wanted His people to cling to Him as closely as clothing clings to the body. How close are you to God right now? What pulls you away?

9. Pride is named again and again in this chapter. Where do you see pride in your own life keeping you from listening to God?

10. Is there a habit of sin you have tried to change in your own strength and failed? What would it look like to ask God to do what you cannot?

Jeremiah 14: Drought, Prayer and False Prophets

Scripture

14:1-12 That which came ***as*** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah concerning the matters of the droughts: Judah mourns, and her gates languish; they are darkened to the ground, and the outcry of Jerusalem has gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones for water; they have come to the cisterns; they have not found water; they have returned, their vessels empty; they are ashamed and humiliated, and they have covered their head. Because of the ground ***that*** is cracked, for there has been no rain in the land, the farmers are ashamed; they have covered their head. For even the doe in the field has given birth and forsaken ***it***, for there is no grass. And wild donkeys have stood on the bare heights; they have panted for breath like jackals; their eyes have failed, for there is no vegetation. Though our iniquities testify against us, O LORD, act for the sake of Your name; for our apostasies are many; against You we have sinned. O Hope of Israel, its Savior in a time of distress, why are You like a sojourner in the land, and like a traveler ***who*** has turned aside to spend the night? Why are You like a man astounded, like a mighty man ***who*** is not able to save? And You ***are*** in our midst, O LORD, and Your name is called on us; do not leave us. Thus says the LORD concerning this people: "So they have loved to wander; their feet they have not restrained. And the LORD has not accepted them; now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins." And the LORD said to me, "Do not pray for this people for good. When they fast, I am not listening to their cry; and when they offer up a burnt offering and a grain offering, I am not accepting them; for by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence I am bringing them to an end."

14:13-22 And I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Look, the prophets are saying to them, 'You will not see a sword, and famine will not come to you, for I will give you peace of truth in this place.'" And the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I did not send them, and I did not command them, and I did not speak to them. A vision of falsehood, and divination, and a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart, they are prophesying to you. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, and I, I did not send them, and they are saying, 'Sword and famine will not be in this land': By the sword and by the famine those prophets will be consumed. And the people to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword, and ***there will be*** no one burying them—them, their wives and their sons and their daughters; and I will pour out on them their evil. And you shall say to them this word: 'Let my eyes run down ***with*** tears night and day, and let them not cease; for the virgin daughter of my people has been broken ***with*** a great breaking, a very severe wound. If I go out ***to*** the field, then look, those slain by the sword! And if I enter the city, then look, the diseases of famine! For both prophet and priest have roamed to a land, and they do not know.'" Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul abhorred Zion? Why have You struck us, and there is no healing for us? ***We*** waited for peace, and ***there was*** no good, and for a time of healing, and look, terror! We know, O LORD, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You. Do not spurn ***us*** for the sake of Your name; do not disgrace the throne of Your glory; remember, do not break Your covenant with us. Are there

among the vanities of the nations ***any*** who send rain? Or do the heavens give showers? ***Is it*** not You, He, O LORD our God? And we will wait for You, for You, You have made all these ***things***.

Preview

A severe drought has hit Judah. The nobles send their servants to the cisterns, and they come back with empty jars. The ground cracks. A doe leaves her newborn fawn because there is no grass. Wild donkeys stand on the hills gasping like jackals. Jeremiah prays for his people, confessing their sin and pleading with God, the Hope of Israel, not to act like a stranger passing through. God answers that He will not accept them, and for the third time He tells Jeremiah not to pray for this people. Jeremiah objects that the prophets are promising peace. God says those prophets are lying in His name, and they will die by the very sword and famine they deny. Jeremiah weeps, and then prays again, ending with a confession of faith: only the LORD gives rain, so we will wait for You.

This chapter shows us a prophet who would not stop praying, even when God told him the answer was no. It also shows the danger of false prophets who promise what God has not promised. As we read, we should learn how to pray in hard times: honestly, humbly, for the sake of God's name, and with our hope fixed on Him alone.

Study

14:1-6 *That which came **as** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah concerning the matters of the droughts: Judah mourns, and her gates languish; they are darkened to the ground, and the outcry of Jerusalem has gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones for water; they have come to the cisterns; they have not found water; they have returned, their vessels empty; they are ashamed and humiliated, and they have covered their head. Because of the ground **that** is cracked, for there has been no rain in the land, the farmers are ashamed; they have covered their head. For even the doe in the field has given birth and forsaken **it**, for there is no grass. And wild donkeys have stood on the bare heights; they have panted for breath like jackals; their eyes have failed, for there is no vegetation.*

This message came "concerning the matters of the droughts." The word is plural, so this may have been a long dry period, several years without proper rain. In a land that depended on the autumn and spring rains, drought meant hunger for people and death for animals.

Jeremiah paints the picture. "Judah mourns, and her gates languish." The city gates, where people usually gathered, were silent. People sat on the ground in mourning, and "the outcry of Jerusalem has gone up."

Even the rich suffered. "Their nobles have sent their little ones for water," meaning their servants. "They have come to the cisterns; they have not found water; they have returned, their vessels empty." Remember 2:13, where God called Himself "a spring of living water" and accused Judah of digging broken cisterns. Now their real cisterns were empty too. The servants came back "ashamed and humiliated," and "covered their head," a sign of grief and shame.

The ground is "cracked," and "the farmers are ashamed." They could not plant.

Then two pictures from the animal world. "Even the doe in the field has given birth and forsaken it, for there is no grass." The doe was known for caring for her young. She left her fawn because she had no milk to give. "Wild donkeys have stood on the bare heights; they have panted for breath like jackals." They stood with their noses in the air, sniffing for any hint of water. "Their eyes have failed."

God had warned in His covenant that if Israel turned to other gods, He would shut up the heavens so there would be no rain (Deuteronomy 11:16-17; 28:23-24). This drought was a covenant warning. When Elijah prayed in the days of Ahab, God sent drought to show that Baal could not give rain (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1).

14:7-9 *Though our iniquities testify against us, O LORD, act for the sake of Your name; for our apostasies are many; against You we have sinned. O Hope of Israel, its Savior in a time of distress, why are You like a sojourner in the land, and like a traveler* ***who*** *has turned aside to spend the night? Why are You like a man astounded, like a mighty man* ***who*** *is not able to save? And You* ***are*** *in our midst, O LORD, and Your name is called on us; do not leave us.*

Now Jeremiah prays, speaking for the people. This is a model prayer for a time of trouble.

"Though our iniquities testify against us, O LORD, act for the sake of Your name." He begins by admitting guilt. Their sins were witnesses in court against them. He does not ask God to act because the people deserve it. They did not. He asks God to act "for the sake of Your name," for His own reputation and His own promises. That is the strongest ground any prayer can stand on. "Our apostasies are many; against You we have sinned."

"O Hope of Israel, its Savior in a time of distress." What beautiful names for God. He is Israel's hope, and He is the One who saves in trouble. Jeremiah uses the title again in 17:13. Paul called Jesus "the hope of Israel" when he stood in chains in Rome (Acts 28:20).

"Why are You like a sojourner in the land, and like a traveler who has turned aside to spend the night?" A traveler stops for the night, but he does not care about the town. He leaves in the morning. Jeremiah asks God why He seems so distant, as if Judah were not His home.

"Why are You like a man astounded, like a mighty man who is not able to save?" Why do You act like a warrior who is stunned and helpless? Of course, Jeremiah knew God was not helpless. He was pleading with God to show His power.

Then he ends with faith: "And You are in our midst, O LORD, and Your name is called on us; do not leave us." To have God's name called on them meant they belonged to Him. Jeremiah holds God to that. That is how we can pray too. Lord, we belong to You. You promised never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

14:10 *Thus says the LORD concerning this people: "So they have loved to wander; their feet they have not restrained. And the LORD has not accepted them; now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins."*

God's answer is sobering. "So they have loved to wander; their feet they have not restrained." The people did not want to stay near God. They loved wandering after other gods and other helpers.

"And the LORD has not accepted them; now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins." Jeremiah's prayer was right in its words. But the people themselves had not changed. A prophet's prayer could not take the place of the people's own repentance. Hosea 8:13 uses some of the same words.

14:11-12 *And the LORD said to me, "Do not pray for this people for good. When they fast, I am not listening to their cry; and when they offer up a burnt offering and a grain offering, I am not accepting them; for by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence I am bringing them to an end."*

"Do not pray for this people for good." For the third time God tells Jeremiah not to pray for them (7:16; 11:14). This time He says "for good," meaning do not ask Me to spare them from the coming disaster.

"When they fast, I am not listening to their cry; and when they offer up a burnt offering and a grain offering, I am not accepting them." The people were doing religious things. They fasted. They brought sacrifices. But their hearts had not turned. Isaiah 58:3-7 shows God rejecting fasting that is only outward. God wants a changed heart, not a ritual.

"By the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence I am bringing them to an end." These three come together often in Jeremiah. They are the three great killers in a siege: war, hunger and disease.

As we saw at 7:16, this command was given to Jeremiah about a nation whose judgment was fixed. It shows how far gone they were. It also shows how Jeremiah kept praying anyway. He prays again in verses 19-22, right after being told not to. God did not rebuke him for it. Jeremiah could not stop loving his people. That is the heart of a true intercessor.

For us, the command of the New Testament is plain: pray for all people (1 Timothy 2:1). We do not have the special knowledge God gave Jeremiah about his nation. We pray for everyone, and we leave the outcome with God.

14:13-16 *And I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Look, the prophets are saying to them, 'You will not see a sword, and famine will not come to you, for I will give you peace of truth in this place.'" And the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I did not send them, and I did not command them, and I did not speak to them. A vision of falsehood, and divination, and a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart, they are prophesying to you. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, and I, I did not send them, and they are saying, 'Sword and famine will not be in this land': By the sword and by the famine those prophets will be consumed. And the people to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword, and* ***there will be*** *no one burying them —them, their wives and their sons and their daughters; and I will pour out on them their evil.*

Jeremiah answered, "Alas, Lord GOD! Look, the prophets are saying to them," and he quotes them: "You will not see a sword, and famine will not come to you, for I will give you peace of truth in this place." He seems to be making excuses for the people. They were being misled by their prophets, who claimed to speak for God.

God's answer is direct. "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I did not send them, and I did not command them, and I did not speak to them." Three times God says it. Then He tells what their message really was: "A vision of falsehood, and divination, and a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart." Divination was trying to learn the future through omens and magic, which the Law forbade (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Their message came from their own heart, not from God.

How can we tell a false prophet? Deuteronomy 18:21-22 says that if a prophet speaks in God's name and it does not come true, the LORD did not speak it. These prophets said, "Sword and famine will not be in this land." God said, "By the sword and by the famine those prophets will be consumed." Their own lives would prove them false.

And the people who listened would also die. Their bodies would be "thrown out in the streets of Jerusalem," with "no one burying them," along with their wives, sons and daughters. "I will pour out on them their evil." The people were not innocent victims of bad teachers. They chose to believe what they wanted to hear (5:31).

Jesus warned about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing, and said we will know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20). We need to test every message by God's Word (1 John 4:1). If someone tells you that God promises you comfort and safety while you live in sin, that is the voice of the false prophets of Jeremiah's day.

14:17-18 *And you shall say to them this word: 'Let my eyes run down* ***with*** *tears night and day, and let them not cease; for the virgin daughter of my people has been broken* ***with*** *a great breaking, a very severe wound. If I go out* ***to*** *the field, then look, those slain by the sword! And if I enter the city, then look, the diseases of famine! For both prophet and priest have roamed to a land, and they do not know.'"*

"Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease." God tells Jeremiah to speak this word to the people. It is God's own grief, spoken through His prophet's tears. "For the

virgin daughter of my people has been broken with a great breaking, a very severe wound." The virgin daughter is a tender name for Jerusalem, a city that had never been conquered, now crushed.

"If I go out to the field, then look, those slain by the sword! And if I enter the city, then look, the diseases of famine!" There was no safe place. Outside, the sword. Inside, starvation and sickness.

"For both prophet and priest have roamed to a land, and they do not know." The meaning may be that they wandered around confused, or that they were taken away to a foreign land they did not know. Either way, the religious leaders who had promised peace were helpless.

14:19-22 *Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul abhorred Zion? Why have You struck us, and there is no healing for us? **We** waited for peace, and **there was** no good, and for a time of healing, and look, terror! We know, O LORD, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You. Do not spurn **us** for the sake of Your name; do not disgrace the throne of Your glory; remember, do not break Your covenant with us. Are there among the vanities of the nations **any** who send rain? Or do the heavens give showers? **Is it** not You, He, O LORD our God? And we will wait for You, for You, You have made all these **things**.*

Jeremiah prays again. He could not help himself.

"Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul abhorred Zion?" He asks the hardest question honestly. "Why have You struck us, and there is no healing for us?" Then he repeats the words of 8:15: "We waited for peace, and there was no good, and for a time of healing, and look, terror!"

"We know, O LORD, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You." He confesses again, for the people and for their fathers. Daniel and Nehemiah later prayed the same way during the exile (Daniel 9:4-19; Nehemiah 1:5-11).

Then he gives God three reasons to act. "Do not spurn us for the sake of Your name." "Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory," meaning Jerusalem and the temple where God was enthroned (3:17). "Remember, do not break Your covenant with us." Jeremiah appeals to God's name, His glory and His covenant. These are the things God cares most about. He would one day answer this prayer, not by stopping the exile, but by keeping His covenant after it (31:31-37).

The chapter ends with a confession of faith. "Are there among the vanities of the nations any who send rain?" Can Baal or any idol bring rain? No. "Or do the heavens give showers?" Not even the sky can make rain on its own. "Is it not You, He, O LORD our God?" Only the LORD sends rain.

"And we will wait for You, for You, You have made all these things." When the cisterns are empty and the prophets are lying and the drought goes on, the believer waits for God. Waiting on the LORD is not doing nothing. It is trusting Him and looking to Him alone. "Those who wait for the LORD will renew power" (Isaiah 40:31). That is where Jeremiah lands, and it is where we should land too.

Summary

A severe drought struck Judah. Servants found the cisterns dry, farmers could not plant, the doe abandoned her fawn, and wild donkeys gasped on the hills. Jeremiah prayed for the people, confessing their sins and asking the Hope of Israel to act for His name's sake and not be like a stranger passing through. God answered that the people loved to wander and He would not accept them, and for the third time told Jeremiah not to pray for them, because He would not accept their fasts and offerings. Jeremiah said the prophets were promising peace. God said they were prophesying lies, visions and divination He never gave, and that they and those who listened would die by sword and famine. God told Jeremiah to weep night and day for the broken daughter of his people. Jeremiah prayed again, confessing sin and asking God not to reject Judah, for the sake of His name, His glorious throne and His covenant. He ended by confessing that no idol and no sky can send rain, only the LORD, so we will wait for Him.

Study Questions

1. How does Jeremiah describe the effects of the drought on people and animals? (14:2-6)

2. What reason does Jeremiah give God for answering his prayer in verse 7? Why is that a strong reason? (14:7)

3. What names does Jeremiah use for God in verse 8? (14:8)

4. Why did God say He would not accept the people's fasting and offerings? (14:10-12)

5. What were the false prophets telling the people, and what did God say about them? (14:13-15)

6. How can we tell a false prophet, according to Deuteronomy 18:21-22 and Matthew 7:15-20? (14:14-15)

7. What three things does Jeremiah ask God to remember in verse 21? (14:21)

8. Jeremiah kept praying for his people even after God said no. What does that teach us about love and prayer for others?

9. When you go through a dry season, spiritually or in life, where do you look first for relief? What would it mean to "wait for You" as Jeremiah did? (14:22)

10. Are there messages in our culture or even in churches that promise peace and blessing without repentance? How can you test what you hear by God's Word?

Jeremiah 15: Jeremiah's Lament and God's Answer

Scripture

15:1-9 And the LORD said to me, "Though Moses and Samuel should stand before Me, My soul ***would*** not ***be*** toward this people. Send ***them*** away from before My face, and let them go out. And it will be, when they say to you, 'Where shall we go out?' then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "***Those*** who ***are*** for death, to death; and ***those*** who ***are*** for the sword, to the sword; and ***those*** who ***are*** for the famine, to the famine; and ***those*** who ***are*** for captivity, to captivity."' And I will appoint over them four kinds, declares the LORD: the sword to kill, and the dogs to drag away, and the birds of the heavens and the animals of the earth to devour and to ruin. And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, on account of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem. For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? And who will show sympathy to you? And who will turn aside to ask about your welfare? You, you have abandoned Me, declares the LORD; you keep going backward. And I have stretched out My hand against you, and I have ruined you; I am weary of relenting. And I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork in the gates of the land; I have bereaved ***them***; I have destroyed My people; from their ways they have not turned back. Its widows have become more numerous to Me than the sand of the seas; I have brought to them, against the mother of a young man, a destroyer at noon; I have made anguish and terrors fall on her suddenly. She who bore seven has languished; she has breathed out her soul; her sun has gone down while ***it was*** still day; she has been ashamed and abashed. And their remnant I will give to the sword before their enemies," declares the LORD.

15:10-21 Woe to me, my mother, that you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land! I have not lent, and they have not lent to me, ***yet*** all of them curse me. The LORD said, "Surely I will set you free for good; surely I will cause the enemy to plead with you in a time of evil and in a time of distress. Will iron break iron from the north, and bronze? Your wealth and your treasures I will give for plunder, not for a price, and for all your sins, and in all your territories. And I will make your enemies pass into a land ***which*** you have not known; for a fire has been kindled in My anger; against you it will burn." You, You know, O LORD; remember me, and visit me, and avenge Yourself for me on those who pursue me. Do not, in the slowness of Your anger, take me away; know ***that*** I bear reproach for Your sake. Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your word became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for Your name is called on me, O LORD God of armies. I did not sit in the council of merrymakers and exult; because of Your hand I sat alone, for You filled me ***with*** indignation. Why has my pain been perpetual, and my wound incurable? It has refused to be healed. You will surely be to me like a deceptive ***stream***, waters ***that*** are not reliable. Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, then I will bring you back; before Me you will stand. And if you bring out the precious from the worthless, like My mouth you will be. They, they will return to you, and you, you shall not return to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and they will fight against you, and they will not prevail over you, for I ***am*** with you to save you and to deliver you," declares the LORD. "And I will deliver you from the hand of evil ***ones***, and I will ransom you from the palm of ruthless ***ones***."

Preview

God answers Jeremiah's prayer from chapter 14 with the hardest words yet. Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Him, He would not turn toward this people. Some are for death, some for the sword, some for famine and some for captivity, because of the sins that began under King Manasseh and never stopped. Jerusalem's widows will be more than the sand of the sea. Then Jeremiah breaks down. He wishes he had never been born. Everyone curses him. He has loved God's word and stood alone for it, and now he feels his pain will never end, and he even says that God has become like a stream that dries up. God answers him, not with comfort first, but with a call: if you return, I will restore you, and you will be My mouth. Then He renews the promise He made on the day of Jeremiah's call: I will make you a fortified wall of bronze, for I am with you.

This chapter is one of the most honest in the Bible. A faithful servant of God reaches the end of himself and says so. God does not cast him off. He corrects him, calls him back and holds him up. As we read, we should notice that it is all right to bring our deepest pain to God, and that God's answer is to bring us back to Himself and to His word.

Study

15:1 *And the LORD said to me, "Though Moses and Samuel should stand before Me, My soul **would** not **be** toward this people. Send **them** away from before My face, and let them go out.*

"Though Moses and Samuel should stand before Me, My soul would not be toward this people." Moses and Samuel were the two great intercessors of Israel's history. Moses pleaded for Israel after the golden calf, and God spared them (Exodus 32:11-14, 30-32; Numbers 14:13-20). Samuel prayed for Israel and the LORD answered (1 Samuel 7:5-9; 12:19-23). Psalm 99:6 names them together as men who called on the LORD and He answered them.

God is saying to Jeremiah, it is not that your prayers are too weak. Even the greatest intercessors could not change this. The judgment is settled. "Send them away from before My face, and let them go out."

This explains the "do not pray" commands in chapters 7, 11 and 14. The point was never that Jeremiah's prayers were wrong or useless. The point was that the nation had passed the point where judgment would be turned aside.

15:2-4 *And it will be, when they say to you, 'Where shall we go out?' then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "**Those** who **are** for death, to death; and **those** who **are** for the sword, to the sword; and **those** who **are** for the famine, to the famine; and **those** who **are** for captivity, to captivity."' And I will appoint over them four kinds, declares the LORD: the sword to kill, and the dogs to drag away, and the birds of the heavens and the animals of the earth to devour and to ruin. And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, on account of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.*

"Where shall we go out?" the people would ask. God gives Jeremiah a grim answer, four destinies: "Those who are for death, to death; and those who are for the sword, to the sword; and those who

are for the famine, to the famine; and those who are for captivity, to captivity." Some would die of disease, some in battle, some of hunger, and the rest would be carried off to Babylon.

God would also "appoint over them four kinds": the sword to kill, dogs to drag away the dead, and birds and wild animals to devour what was left. Moses had warned of all this in the curses of the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:25-26).

Then comes the reason: "on account of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem." Manasseh reigned fifty-five years, the longest reign in Judah's history, and he was the worst king Judah ever had. He rebuilt the high places, put idols in the temple, burned his own son in the fire, practiced witchcraft, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood (2 Kings 21:1-16). 2 Kings 24:3-4 says Jerusalem fell because of Manasseh's sins.

But didn't Manasseh repent? Yes, and God forgave him (2 Chronicles 33:12-16). But the nation never turned from the paths he led them down, and even Josiah's reform did not reach their hearts. The children were not punished for their father's sin while they themselves were innocent (Ezekiel 18:20). They had made his sins their own.

15:5-9 *For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? And who will show sympathy to you? And who will turn aside to ask about your welfare? You, you have abandoned Me, declares the LORD; you keep going backward. And I have stretched out My hand against you, and I have ruined you; I am weary of relenting. And I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork in the gates of the land; I have bereaved **them**; I have destroyed My people; from their ways they have not turned back. Its widows have become more numerous to Me than the sand of the seas; I have brought to them, against the mother of a young man, a destroyer at noon; I have made anguish and terrors fall on her suddenly. She who bore seven has languished; she has breathed out her soul; her sun has gone down while **it was** still day; she has been ashamed and abashed. And their remnant I will give to the sword before their enemies," declares the LORD.*

"Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? And who will show sympathy to you?" No one would come to comfort her. No one would even stop to ask how she was doing. Lamentations 1:12 echoes this: is it nothing to all who pass by?

"You, you have abandoned Me, declares the LORD; you keep going backward." Judah had not just stumbled. She kept walking away. So God "stretched out My hand against you." "I am weary of relenting." God had turned back His judgment many times. His patience had a purpose, and that purpose had been refused (Romans 2:4-5).

"I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork in the gates of the land." A winnowing fork tossed grain in the air so the wind would carry away the chaff. God would scatter His people.

"Its widows have become more numerous to Me than the sand of the seas." That phrase, "the sand of the seas," was the promise God made to Abraham about his descendants (Genesis 22:17). Now it would describe widows.

"She who bore seven has languished." A mother with seven sons was considered greatly blessed (Ruth 4:15; 1 Samuel 2:5). Now she would lose them all. "Her sun has gone down while it was still day." Her life ended in darkness at noon. It is a picture of grief that has no words.

15:10 *Woe to me, my mother, that you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land! I have not lent, and they have not lent to me,* ***yet*** *all of them curse me.*

Now Jeremiah speaks for himself, and what he says is raw. "Woe to me, my mother, that you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land!"

God's message made Jeremiah a man of strife. Everywhere he went, people fought him. He wishes he had never been born. He will say it again even more strongly in 20:14-18.

"I have not lent, and they have not lent to me, yet all of them curse me." Money lending often caused bitter fights between lenders and borrowers. Jeremiah says, I have not been involved in any of that. I have not cheated anyone. And yet "all of them curse me." He was hated, not for anything he had done wrong, but for telling the truth.

This is honest lament, the kind we find in Job 3 and many of the Psalms, and God put it in the Bible. If you have ever felt that being faithful to God has only brought you trouble, Jeremiah felt that too. Jesus told His disciples that the world would hate them because it hated Him first (John 15:18-20).

15:11-14 *The LORD said, "Surely I will set you free for good; surely I will cause the enemy to plead with you in a time of evil and in a time of distress. Will iron break iron from the north, and bronze? Your wealth and your treasures I will give for plunder, not for a price, and for all your sins, and in all your territories. And I will make your enemies pass into a land* ***which*** *you have not known; for a fire has been kindled in My anger; against you it will burn."*

The LORD answered. "Surely I will set you free for good." God would bring Jeremiah through. "Surely I will cause the enemy to plead with you in a time of evil and in a time of distress." This came true. Later King Zedekiah, the very king who let Jeremiah be thrown in a pit, came to him secretly asking for a word from God (21:1-2; 37:3, 17; 38:14). The people who cursed Jeremiah would one day beg him for help.

"Will iron break iron from the north, and bronze?" This is hard to translate. It probably means no one can break the iron from the north, Babylon. Or it may mean that Jeremiah, made strong as iron and bronze by God (1:18), could not be broken by his enemies.

Verses 13-14 speak to the nation. Their wealth and treasures would be plundered, "not for a price," given away for nothing, because of their sins. They would be taken "into a land which you have not known," for "a fire has been kindled in My anger." The same words appear again in 17:3-4.

15:15 *You, You know, O LORD; remember me, and visit me, and avenge Yourself for me on those who pursue me. Do not, in the slowness of Your anger, take me away; know **that** I bear reproach for Your sake.*

"You, You know, O LORD; remember me, and visit me, and avenge Yourself for me on those who pursue me."

Jeremiah asks God to remember him, to come to him, and to take up his cause against his persecutors. As with 11:20 and 12:3, this is not Jeremiah taking revenge. It is Jeremiah putting the matter into God's hands. He even says "avenge Yourself," because those who attacked Jeremiah were attacking God's word. It is a prayer for God to act as Judge, the same thing the souls under the altar cry in Revelation 6:10.

"Do not, in the slowness of Your anger, take me away." Jeremiah worried that God would be so patient with his enemies that they would kill him first.

"Know that I bear reproach for Your sake." He was suffering because he belonged to God. Jesus said those who are persecuted for His sake are blessed (Matthew 5:10-12). Peter said the same (1 Peter 4:14).

15:16-17 *Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your word became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for Your name is called on me, O LORD God of armies. I did not sit in the council of merrymakers and exult; because of Your hand I sat alone, for You filled me **with** indignation.*

In the middle of his lament, Jeremiah remembers his first love for God's word. "Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your word became to me a joy and the delight of my heart."

To eat God's words means to take them in completely, to make them part of yourself. Ezekiel was told to eat a scroll (Ezekiel 3:1-3), and John was too (Revelation 10:9-10). Jesus said man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Jeremiah did not just read God's words. He fed on them, and they became his joy.

Some think "Your words were found" points to the finding of the Book of the Law in Josiah's day (2 Kings 22:8). It may simply mean the words God gave him at his call (1:9).

"For Your name is called on me, O LORD God of armies." He belonged to God.

"I did not sit in the council of merrymakers and exult." Jeremiah could not join the parties and laughter of his people, knowing what was coming. "Because of Your hand I sat alone." God's hand on him set him apart, and it was lonely. "For You filled me with indignation." He was full of God's own anger against sin, and that made him unwelcome company.

Faithfulness to God sometimes means sitting alone, not out of pride, but because standing with God means we cannot stand with the crowd.

15:18 *Why has my pain been perpetual, and my wound incurable? It has refused to be healed. You will surely be to me like a deceptive **stream**, waters **that** are not reliable.*

Now comes the low point. "Why has my pain been perpetual, and my wound incurable? It has refused to be healed." Jeremiah's pain seemed to have no end.

Then he says the hardest thing: "You will surely be to me like a deceptive stream, waters that are not reliable." In the dry land of Israel, many streams, called wadis, ran with water in the rainy season and then dried up in summer. A thirsty traveler might walk for miles to a stream he remembered, only to find it dry (Job 6:15-20).

Remember 2:13. God had called Himself "a spring of living water," the One who never runs dry. Now Jeremiah, in his despair, says God has become like a dry creek bed. He had trusted God, and God seemed to have failed him.

Was Jeremiah right? No. God had not failed him, and verse 19 will show it. But this is what Jeremiah felt. And God let him say it. Many believers go through seasons of depression, grief or exhaustion when God seems far away and silent. If you are in a season like that, notice that Jeremiah did not stop talking to God. He brought even his doubt and accusation to God. Bring it to Him. He can take it. And if you are in a dark place, please do not carry it alone. Talk to a pastor, a trusted friend or a counselor too.

15:19 *Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, then I will bring you back; before Me you will stand. And if you bring out the precious from the worthless, like My mouth you will be. They, they will return to you, and you, you shall not return to them.*

"Therefore thus says the LORD: If you return, then I will bring you back; before Me you will stand."

This is God's answer, and it is wonderful. God does not comfort Jeremiah first. He calls him to repent. Jeremiah had spent chapters calling the people to "return" (3:12, 14, 22; 4:1). Now God uses the same word for Jeremiah. You have wandered too, in your despair and in what you said about Me. Come back.

And look at the promise. "Then I will bring you back." God does the restoring. "Before Me you will stand." To stand before God means to serve Him, like a servant standing before his king (1 Kings 17:1). Jeremiah was not fired. His ministry would continue.

"And if you bring out the precious from the worthless, like My mouth you will be." Jeremiah had to separate what was precious from what was worthless in his own words. Some of what he said was true and good. Some, like calling God a deceptive stream, was not. If he spoke only what was true, he would be God's mouth, His spokesman.

"They, they will return to you, and you, you shall not return to them." The people might come to Jeremiah, but he must not go over to their side. He must not soften the message to gain their approval. His job was to bring them to God's word, not to bend God's word to them.

God's answer to a discouraged servant is not that he is fine, and not that he is finished. It is a call to come back and be restored. That is still His word to us when we fall into despair or bitterness. Peter, who denied Jesus three times, was called back and restored (John 21:15-19). God does not give up on His servants.

15:20-21 *And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and they will fight against you, and they will not prevail over you, for I **am** with you to save you and to deliver you," declares the LORD. "And I will deliver you from the hand of evil **ones**, and I will ransom you from the palm of ruthless **ones**."*

Then God repeats the promise of Jeremiah's call almost word for word (1:18-19). "I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and they will fight against you, and they will not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and to deliver you."

God did not promise that the fight would stop. "They will fight against you." But they would not win. The reason is the same as on the first day: "I am with you."

"And I will deliver you from the hand of evil ones, and I will ransom you from the palm of ruthless ones." To ransom means to pay the price to set someone free. God would rescue Jeremiah from those who had him in their grip.

And God kept His word. Jeremiah was beaten, jailed, put in stocks and dropped into a muddy cistern, but he was never destroyed, and when Jerusalem fell, the Babylonians set him free (39:11-14).

The chapter that began with "Woe to me" (15:10) ends with "I am with you" (15:20). That is often how God answers our laments. He does not always change our circumstances first. He reminds us of His presence and His promises, and He calls us to stand.

Summary

God said that even if Moses and Samuel interceded, He would not turn toward this people. They would go to death, sword, famine and captivity, and be torn by dogs, birds and beasts, because Judah had kept walking in the sins of Manasseh. No one would pity Jerusalem, her widows would be more than the sand of the sea, and the mother of seven would lose them all. Then Jeremiah lamented that he had been born a man of strife whom everyone cursed. God promised to set him free and to make his enemies plead with him. Jeremiah asked God to remember him and avenge him, reminded God that he had eaten His words with joy and sat alone under His hand, and then cried that his pain was endless and that God had become to him like a deceptive stream. God answered that if Jeremiah would return, God would restore him and he would stand before Him, and if he separated the precious from the worthless, he would be God's mouth. God renewed His promise to make Jeremiah a bronze wall that his enemies could not overcome, for "I am with you to save you and to deliver you."

Study Questions

1. Why does God mention Moses and Samuel in verse 1? What does that tell us about the "do not pray" commands? (15:1)

2. Why does God name Manasseh in verse 4, and how does that fit with Manasseh's repentance in 2 Chronicles 33? (15:4)

3. What does Jeremiah wish in verse 10, and why does he feel that way? (15:10)

4. How did Jeremiah describe his love for God's words in verse 16? What does it mean to "eat" God's words? (15:16)

5. What did Jeremiah say God had become to him in verse 18? How does that compare with 2:13? (15:18; 2:13)

6. What did God call Jeremiah to do in verse 19, and what did He promise if he did? (15:19)

7. What promise from Jeremiah's call does God repeat in verses 20-21? (15:20-21; 1:18-19)

8. Have you ever felt like Jeremiah, that following God has brought you mostly trouble or loneliness? What helped you, or what might help you now?

9. Have you ever felt that God was like a dry stream to you? How does God's answer to Jeremiah in verse 19 speak to that season?

10. God told Jeremiah to separate the precious from the worthless in his words. What words have you spoken about God or others in hard times that you need to take back? What would it look like to "return" to Him today?

Jeremiah 16: Jeremiah Forbidden to Marry

Scripture

16:1-13 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "You shall not take for yourself a wife, and there shall not be to you sons and daughters in this place. For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and concerning the daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them, and concerning their fathers who fathered them in this land: Deaths of diseases they will die; they will not be lamented, and they will not be buried; they will be for dung on the surface of the ground; and by the sword and by the famine they will come to an end; and their corpses will be for food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth. For thus says the LORD: Do not enter a house of mourning, and do not go to lament, and do not show sympathy to them; for I have withdrawn My peace from this people, declares the LORD, the steadfast love and the compassions. And great and small will die in this land; they will not be buried, and they will not lament for them, and ***one*** will not cut himself, and ***one*** will not make himself bald for them. And they will not break ***bread*** for them in mourning, to comfort him for the dead, and they will not give them a cup of consolations to drink for his father and for his mother. And a house of feasting you shall not enter, to sit with them, to eat and to drink. For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Look, I am causing to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride. And it will be, when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, 'Why has the LORD spoken against us all this great evil? And what ***is*** our iniquity, and what ***is*** our sin which we have sinned against the LORD our God?' then you shall say to them, 'Because your fathers forsook Me,' declares the LORD, 'and walked after other gods, and served them, and bowed down to them; and Me they forsook, and My law they did not keep. And you, you have done evil more than your fathers; and look, you are walking, each one, after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so as not to listen to Me. And I will hurl you from this land to the land which you have not known, you and your fathers; and you will serve other gods there day and night, for I will not give you favor.'

16:14-21 Therefore look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and it will not be said again, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had banished them.' And I will bring them back to their land which I gave to their fathers. Look, I am sending for many fishermen, declares the LORD, and they will fish them out; and after that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and from the clefts of the rocks. For My eyes ***are*** on all their ways; they have not been hidden from before Me, and their iniquity has not been concealed from before My eyes. And I will repay first the double of their iniquity and their sin, because they have profaned My land with the corpses of their detestable things, and ***with*** their abominations they have filled My inheritance." O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in a day of distress, to You nations will come from the ends of the earth, and they will say, "Surely our fathers inherited falsehood, vanity, and ***there is*** nothing in them that profits." Will man make gods for himself? And they ***are*** not gods! Therefore look, I am making them know; at this time I will make them know My hand and My might, and they will know that My name ***is*** the LORD.

Preview

God tells Jeremiah not to take a wife or have children. He is not to go to funerals, and he is not to go to feasts. His whole life is to become a message. The children born in Jerusalem would die of disease, sword and famine, and no one would bury them or mourn for them. When the people ask why God is bringing such evil on them, Jeremiah is to tell them plainly: your fathers forsook the LORD, and you have done worse. Then, right in the middle of the judgment, comes a promise. One day the people of Israel will no longer swear by the God who brought them out of Egypt, but by the God who brought them back from the land of the north and from every land where He had driven them. The chapter ends with Jeremiah's prayer that the nations themselves will one day turn from their idols to the LORD.

This chapter shows us what it cost Jeremiah to be a prophet. It also shows us that God's judgment is never His last word. As we read, we should ask what God might ask us to give up so that our lives speak for Him, and we should take heart that God keeps His promises to Israel, even after the worst.

Study

16:1-2 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "You shall not take for yourself a wife, and there shall not be to you sons and daughters in this place.*

"You shall not take for yourself a wife, and there shall not be to you sons and daughters in this place."

This is the only place in the Old Testament where God tells a man not to marry. In Israel, marriage and children were seen as one of God's great blessings (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127:3-5). A man with no wife and no sons had no one to carry on his name. People would have noticed, and they would have asked why.

That was the point. Jeremiah's single life was a sermon. Every time someone asked him why he had no family, he could tell them: because the families of this city are going to die. Jeremiah was probably still young when this word came, and it meant a lonely life. He had already said that he "sat alone" (15:17). Now God made that loneliness part of his calling.

Notice the words "in this place." The reason was the coming judgment on Jerusalem, not that marriage is bad. God's Word everywhere honors marriage (Hebrews 13:4).

16:3-4 *For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and concerning the daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them, and concerning their fathers who fathered them in this land: Deaths of diseases they will die; they will not be lamented, and they will not be buried; they will be for dung on the surface of the ground; and by the sword and by the famine they will come to an end; and their corpses will be for food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth.*

God tells Jeremiah why. The sons and daughters born in this land, and their mothers and fathers, "Deaths of diseases they will die; they will not be lamented, and they will not be buried."

So many would die in the siege that there would be no one left to bury them. Their bodies would lie "for dung on the surface of the ground," and "for food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth." This was one of the curses of the covenant Moses had warned about (Deuteronomy 28:26). To bring a child into Jerusalem in those years was to bring a child into famine and war.

This is a hard passage, and it may touch some of us deeply. Some readers have longed for marriage or children and have not had them. Others are single for reasons they did not choose. Jeremiah's story does not mean that God is against you or that your life counts for less. Jeremiah's life without a family was one of the most fruitful lives in the Old Testament. Paul, too, was unmarried, and he said that a single person can serve the Lord with an undivided heart (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 32-35). Jesus Himself never married. Whatever your situation, God sees you, and He has a purpose for your life.

16:5-7 *For thus says the LORD: Do not enter a house of mourning, and do not go to lament, and do not show sympathy to them; for I have withdrawn My peace from this people, declares the LORD, the steadfast love and the compassions. And great and small will die in this land; they will not be buried, and they will not lament for them, and* ***one*** *will not cut himself, and* ***one*** *will not make himself bald for them. And they will not break* ***bread*** *for them in mourning, to comfort him for the dead, and they will not give them a cup of consolations to drink for his father and for his mother.*

"Do not enter a house of mourning, and do not go to lament, and do not show sympathy to them."

In Israel, when someone died, neighbors and friends came to the house to weep with the family. To stay away was a terrible insult. But God told Jeremiah to stay away, because "I have withdrawn My peace from this people, declares the LORD, the steadfast love and the compassions."

"Peace" here is shalom, the Hebrew word for wholeness and well-being, everything being right. "Steadfast love" is hesed, God's loyal covenant love. God was not saying He had stopped being loving. He was saying that the time of sparing them was over. The judgment had come.

The day would come when so many died that the normal ways of grieving would stop. No one would "cut himself" or "make himself bald for them." Cutting the body and shaving the head were pagan mourning customs that the Law forbade (Deuteronomy 14:1), but many in Judah did them anyway. No one would "break bread" for the mourners or bring them "a cup of consolations." There would be no funeral meal. Death would be everywhere, and grief would have no time to be spoken.

16:8-9 *And a house of feasting you shall not enter, to sit with them, to eat and to drink. For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Look, I am causing to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride.*

"And a house of feasting you shall not enter, to sit with them, to eat and to drink."

Jeremiah could not go to funerals, and he could not go to parties either. He was cut off from both the sorrows and the joys of his people. Why? Because God was "causing to cease from this place,

before your eyes and in your days, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride."

"In your days" means the people listening would live to see it. Jeremiah used this same line in 7:34, and he will use it again in 25:10. But in 33:10-11, God promises that one day the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride will be heard again. The wedding songs would stop, but not forever.

Here is something for us to think about. Jeremiah's whole life, his single state, his missing chair at the funeral, his empty seat at the feast, said one thing: God means what He says. Does the way we live say anything about what we believe?

16:10-13 *And it will be, when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, 'Why has the LORD spoken against us all this great evil? And what **is** our iniquity, and what **is** our sin which we have sinned against the LORD our God?' then you shall say to them, 'Because your fathers forsook Me,' declares the LORD, 'and walked after other gods, and served them, and bowed down to them; and Me they forsook, and My law they did not keep. And you, you have done evil more than your fathers; and look, you are walking, each one, after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so as not to listen to Me. And I will hurl you from this land to the land which you have not known, you and your fathers; and you will serve other gods there day and night, for I will not give you favor.'*

God tells Jeremiah that the people will ask, "Why has the LORD spoken against us all this great evil? And what is our iniquity, and what is our sin which we have sinned against the LORD our God?"

Can you hear it? They truly did not see what they had done wrong. That is what long years of sin do to a heart. It stops seeing.

The answer is plain. "Because your fathers forsook Me," and "walked after other gods." "And you, you have done evil more than your fathers." Each one was walking "after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so as not to listen to Me." They could not blame their fathers. They had taken their fathers' sins and gone further.

So God would "hurl you from this land to the land which you have not known." And there, God says with sad irony, "you will serve other gods there day and night." They wanted other gods. In Babylon they would have all the false gods they could stand, and none of them could help.

16:14-15 *Therefore look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and it will not be said again, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had banished them.' And I will bring them back to their land which I gave to their fathers.*

Then, without warning, the clouds break. "Therefore look, days are coming, declares the LORD." For hundreds of years, when an Israelite made a solemn oath, he said, "As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt." The exodus was the greatest rescue in their history.

But a day was coming when people would say instead, "As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had banished them." God would do a rescue so great that it would make the exodus look small.

"And I will bring them back to their land which I gave to their fathers." This is a promise about a real people and a real land. The return from Babylon in 538 B.C. was a first taste of it. But notice "from all the lands." The return from Babylon brought back a small group from one land. This promise reaches further. It points to the day when God will gather Israel from every nation on earth and bring them home for good, as Jeremiah says again in 23:7-8, and as Isaiah 11:11-12 and Ezekiel 36:24 say too. I believe this is still future, and that God will keep it to the letter. He has not cast away His people (Romans 11:1-2, 25-29). The gifts and the calling of God cannot be taken back.

16:16-18 *Look, I am sending for many fishermen, declares the LORD, and they will fish them out; and after that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and from the clefts of the rocks. For My eyes **are** on all their ways; they have not been hidden from before Me, and their iniquity has not been concealed from before My eyes. And I will repay first the double of their iniquity and their sin, because they have profaned My land with the corpses of their detestable things, and **with** their abominations they have filled My inheritance."*

Now back to judgment. "Look, I am sending for many fishermen, declares the LORD, and they will fish them out; and after that I will send for many hunters."

The fishermen and hunters are the Babylonian armies. First they would drag the people out like fish in a net. Then they would hunt down anyone who tried to hide, "from every mountain and from every hill and from the clefts of the rocks." No one would escape.

Some readers think of Jesus calling His disciples to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). That is a happy picture, but it is not what this verse means. Here the fishermen come to catch people for judgment.

"For My eyes are on all their ways." Nothing was hidden from God. "I will repay first the double of their iniquity and their sin." "Double" here likely means a full and fitting payment, judgment that matches the sin (Isaiah 40:2 uses the same idea).

Why? "They have profaned My land with the corpses of their detestable things." Their idols were dead things, like corpses, and they had filled God's land, "My inheritance," with them. The land belonged to God. Israel lived there as His tenants (Leviticus 25:23).

16:19-21 *O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in a day of distress, to You nations will come from the ends of the earth, and they will say, "Surely our fathers inherited falsehood, vanity, and* ***there is*** *nothing in them that profits." Will man make gods for himself? And they* ***are*** *not gods! Therefore look, I am making them know; at this time I will make them know My hand and My might, and they will know that My name* ***is*** *the LORD.*

Now Jeremiah prays, and it is a beautiful prayer. "O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in a day of distress." In the middle of his loneliness and all the bad news, Jeremiah runs to God.

Then he sees something wonderful. "To You nations will come from the ends of the earth." The Gentile nations, the very peoples who worshiped idols, would come to the LORD and say, "Surely our fathers inherited falsehood, vanity, and there is nothing in them that profits."

Do you see the irony? Judah was running to idols. One day the idol-worshiping nations would run away from them to Judah's God. That began when the gospel went out to the Gentiles (Acts 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9), and it will be complete in Christ's kingdom, when the nations come to Jerusalem to learn the LORD's ways (Isaiah 2:2-3; Zechariah 8:22-23).

"Will man make gods for himself? And they are not gods!" That is the whole foolishness of idolatry in two short lines. Whatever we make, we are greater than. A god you can make is no god at all.

God answers in verse 21: "I am making them know." "And they will know that My name is the LORD." Through judgment on Judah, and then through the rescue of Israel, God would make His name known to His own people and to the world. The chapter that started with no wife, no children, no funerals and no feasts ends with the whole earth knowing the LORD.

Summary

God told Jeremiah not to marry or have children in Jerusalem, because the children and parents of the city would die of disease, sword and famine, unburied and unmourned. He was not to enter a house of mourning or a house of feasting, because God had withdrawn His peace and would silence the sounds of joy and of weddings. When the people asked why, Jeremiah was to tell them that their fathers had forsaken the LORD and they had done worse, so God would hurl them into a land they did not know. Yet God promised that days were coming when Israel would swear by the LORD who brought them back from the north and from all the lands where He had scattered them, a rescue greater than the exodus. First, though, He would send fishermen and hunters to catch them, for nothing was hidden from His eyes. Jeremiah ended by calling the LORD his strength and refuge, and he saw the day when the nations would come from the ends of the earth and confess that their idols were nothing.

Study Questions

1. What three things did God tell Jeremiah not to do in this chapter? (16:2, 5, 8)

2. Why was Jeremiah not to marry or have children "in this place"? (16:3-4)

3. Why was Jeremiah not to go into a house of mourning or a house of feasting? (16:5, 9)

4. What did the people ask when they heard Jeremiah's message, and what was God's answer? (16:10-12)

5. What new oath would replace the oath about the exodus, and what does that tell us about the coming regathering? (16:14-15)

6. Who are the fishermen and hunters in verse 16, and what do they do? (16:16)

7. What did Jeremiah see the nations doing one day, and what would they confess? (16:19)

8. Jeremiah's single life became a message to his people. What does the way you live say to the people around you about what you believe?

9. Have you ever had to give up something good, a relationship, a dream or a comfort, in order to follow God? How did He meet you in it?

10. Jeremiah called the LORD "my refuge in a day of distress" (16:19). What is your day of distress right now, and how can you run to Him in it?

Jeremiah 17: The Deceitful Heart and the Sabbath

Scripture

17:1-13 The sin of Judah is written with a stylus of iron; with a point of flint ***it is*** engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of your altars, while their sons remember their altars and their Asherim beside the luxuriant tree on the high hills. O My mountain in the field, your wealth, all your treasures I will give for plunder, your high places for sin in all your territories. And you will let go, even through yourself, of your inheritance which I gave you; and I will make you serve your enemies in the land which you do not know; for you have kindled a fire in My anger; it will burn forever. Thus says the LORD: "Cursed ***is*** the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his arm, and from the LORD his heart turns aside. And he will be like a juniper in the desert plain, and he will not see when good comes; and he will dwell ***in*** parched places in the wilderness, a land of saltiness, and it is not inhabited. Blessed ***is*** the man who trusts in the LORD, and the LORD is his trust. And he will be like a tree transplanted by water, and ***that*** sends out its roots by a stream; and it will not see when heat comes, and its leaves will be luxuriant; and in a year of drought it will not be anxious, and it will not cease from producing fruit. The heart ***is*** deceitful more than everything, and it ***is*** incurable; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart; I test the kidneys, even to give to each one according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. ***As*** a partridge gathers ***a brood*** and has not laid ***it***, ***so is*** one who makes riches, and not with justice; in the middle of his days it will leave him, and at his end he will be a fool." A throne of glory, on high from the first, ***is*** the place of our sanctuary. O Hope of Israel, O LORD, all who forsake You will be ashamed; and those who turn aside from Me will be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the spring of living water, the LORD.

17:14-27 Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me, and I will be saved; for You ***are*** my praise. Look, they are saying to me, "Where ***is*** the word of the LORD? Let it come, please!" And I, I have not hurried away from ***being*** a shepherd after You, and the incurable day I have not desired; You, You know; what came out of my lips was before Your face. Do not become a terror to me; You ***are*** my refuge in a day of calamity. Let those who pursue me be put to shame, and let me not be put to shame, me; let them be dismayed, them, and let me not be dismayed, me. Bring on them a day of calamity, and break them ***with*** a double breaking. Thus the LORD said to me: "Go, and you shall stand in the Gate of the Sons of the People, by which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; and you shall say to them, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who come in through these gates. Thus says the LORD: "Take heed for your lives, and do not carry a burden on the day of the Sabbath and bring ***it*** in through the gates of Jerusalem. And you shall not bring out a burden from your houses on the day of the Sabbath, and you shall not do any work; and you shall sanctify the day of the Sabbath, just as I commanded your fathers. And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear, and they stiffened their neck so as not to listen and not to accept correction. And it will be, if you will surely listen to Me, declares the LORD, so as not to bring a burden through the gates of this city on the day of the Sabbath, and to sanctify the day of the Sabbath, so as not to do any work on it, and there will come in through the gates of this city kings and officials sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their

officials, the man of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city will remain forever. And they will come from the cities of Judah and from around Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the Shephelah, and from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offering and sacrifice, and grain offering and frankincense, and bringing a thank offering ***to*** the house of the LORD. And if you will not listen to Me to sanctify the day of the Sabbath, and not to carry a burden and come in through the gates of Jerusalem on the day of the Sabbath, and I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it will devour the fortresses of Jerusalem, and it will not be quenched."'"

Preview

Judah's sin is not written in pencil. It is carved with an iron pen on the tablet of their heart. God sets two kinds of people side by side: the man who trusts in man, who is like a dry bush in the desert, and the man who trusts in the LORD, who is like a tree planted by water that keeps bearing fruit in a year of drought. Then comes one of the best-known verses in Jeremiah: the heart is deceitful above all things, and who can know it? Only the LORD, who searches the heart. Jeremiah prays for healing and for God to stand with him against those who mock his message. The chapter ends with a sermon at the city gates about keeping the Sabbath, with a promise of blessing if they obey and fire if they do not.

This chapter goes to the root of every other problem in the book, the human heart. As we read, we should ask where our own trust is planted, and we should be honest that we cannot fully know our own hearts. Only God can, and only God can make them new.

Study

17:1-2 *The sin of Judah is written with a stylus of iron; with a point of flint* ***it is*** *engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of your altars, while their sons remember their altars and their Asherim beside the luxuriant tree on the high hills.*

"The sin of Judah is written with a stylus of iron; with a point of flint it is engraved on the tablet of their heart."

A stylus was a writing tool. An iron stylus with a hard point was used to cut letters into stone so they would last. Judah's sin was not a passing mood. It was cut deep into their hearts.

There is a sad echo here. God wrote His law on tablets of stone at Sinai (Exodus 31:18). Judah's hearts had become tablets too, but what was written there was sin. Later God will promise to write His law on their hearts instead (31:33).

It was also carved "on the horns of your altars." The horns were the corners of the altar, where the blood of the sin offering was put to make atonement (Leviticus 4:7). Their children grew up remembering "their altars and their Asherim beside the luxuriant tree on the high hills." Asherim were wooden poles set up for the goddess Asherah, a Canaanite goddess of fertility. Sin was passed down like a family heirloom.

17:3-4 *O My mountain in the field, your wealth, all your treasures I will give for plunder, your high places for sin in all your territories. And you will let go, even through yourself, of your inheritance which I gave you; and I will make you serve your enemies in the land which you do not know; for you have kindled a fire in My anger; it will burn forever.*

"O My mountain in the field" is Jerusalem, God's own mountain. All her wealth and treasures would be given "for plunder," along with "your high places for sin." High places were hilltop shrines where people offered sacrifices, often to false gods.

"You will let go, even through yourself, of your inheritance which I gave you." They would lose the land by their own doing. And they would serve their enemies "in the land which you do not know."

"You have kindled a fire in My anger; it will burn forever." These verses repeat 15:13-14 almost word for word.

17:5-6 *Thus says the LORD: "Cursed **is** the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his arm, and from the LORD his heart turns aside. And he will be like a juniper in the desert plain, and he will not see when good comes; and he will dwell **in** parched places in the wilderness, a land of saltiness, and it is not inhabited.*

Now God sets out two ways to live, as Psalm 1 does.

"Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his arm, and from the LORD his heart turns aside." In the Bible, the arm stands for strength. To make flesh your arm is to lean on human power instead of God. Judah's kings looked to Egypt to save them from Babylon (2:36-37; 37:5-7).

Notice the last part: "from the LORD his heart turns aside." Getting help from people is not the sin. The sin is a heart that turns from God and puts its whole weight on something else.

Such a man "will be like a juniper in the desert plain," a low, dry shrub. "He will not see when good comes." Even when blessing comes, he cannot take it in. He lives in "a land of saltiness," where nothing grows.

17:7-8 *Blessed **is** the man who trusts in the LORD, and the LORD is his trust. And he will be like a tree transplanted by water, and **that** sends out its roots by a stream; and it will not see when heat comes, and its leaves will be luxuriant; and in a year of drought it will not be anxious, and it will not cease from producing fruit.*

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and the LORD is his trust."

"He will be like a tree transplanted by water, and that sends out its roots by a stream." Notice the word "transplanted." This tree did not start by the water. It was moved there and planted. That is what God does with us when we come to Him by faith.

"It will not see when heat comes." The heat still comes, but the tree does not fear it. "Its leaves will be luxuriant." "In a year of drought it will not be anxious, and it will not cease from producing fruit."

The man who trusts in the LORD is not promised that there will be no drought. He is promised that his roots will find water when everything around him is dry. The difference between the bush and the tree is not the weather. It is where the roots go.

Where do your roots go? When the heat comes, what do you reach for first?

17:9 *The heart **is** deceitful more than everything, and it **is** incurable; who can know it?*

"The heart is deceitful more than everything, and it is incurable; who can know it?"

This is one of the most important verses in the Bible about human nature.

In Hebrew thinking, the heart is not only feelings. It is the center of the whole inner person: the mind, the will, the desires, and the feelings together. It is where we think, choose and love (Proverbs 4:23).

"Deceitful" comes from the same root as the name Jacob, the one who grabs the heel and tricks (Genesis 27:36). The heart is a trickster. And it is "deceitful more than everything." There is nothing in all creation more crooked than the human heart left to itself.

Who does the heart deceive? Most of all, its owner. Judah truly did not know what they had done wrong (16:10). They had been fooling themselves for so long that they believed their own story.

"And it is incurable." The word was used of a wound that will not heal (15:18; 30:12). This is the heart's condition without God. We cannot fix it with more effort, better habits or good advice. That is why the popular advice to follow your heart is so dangerous. The Bible says your heart will lie to you.

"Who can know it?" The answer is: not you, not fully. We can be wrong about our own motives. That is why David asked God to search him and know his heart (Psalm 139:23-24). Paul said that even when he knew of nothing against himself, that did not make him innocent; the Lord is the One who judges (1 Corinthians 4:4).

Is this hopeless? It would be, if the story stopped here. But Jesus said that sin comes out of the heart (Mark 7:21-23), and so the cure must start in the heart too. God promised through Jeremiah to write His law on the heart (31:33), and through Ezekiel to give a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). That is what happens when a person is born again by faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:3-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17). The heart that could not be cured is made new.

Even then, believers still fight the old ways inside them (Galatians 5:17). So let God's Word judge your heart, not the other way around (Hebrews 4:12).

17:10 *I, the LORD, search the heart; I test the kidneys, even to give to each one according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.*

"I, the LORD, search the heart; I test the kidneys."

Who can know the heart? God can. In Hebrew the kidneys stood for the deepest feelings and hidden thoughts, the way we might say "the gut." God sees all the way down.

And God does not just look. He acts on what He sees: "even to give to each one according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." What is in the heart shows up in what we do, and God judges both. Jesus says this same thing of Himself in Revelation 2:23: He searches minds and hearts and gives to each according to his deeds.

We can hide nothing from Him, so we do not need to try. We can bring Him the truth.

17:11 ***As*** *a partridge gathers* ***a brood*** *and has not laid* ***it, so is*** *one who makes riches, and not with justice; in the middle of his days it will leave him, and at his end he will be a fool."*

"As a partridge gathers a brood and has not laid it, so is one who makes riches, and not with justice." The picture was well known in that day. People believed the partridge would sit on eggs it had not laid, and when the chicks hatched, they would see it was not their mother and run off.

The man who gets rich by cheating is like that bird. His wealth was never really his. "In the middle of his days it will leave him, and at his end he will be a fool." Jesus told of a rich fool who stored up goods and died that very night (Luke 12:16-21).

17:12-13 *A throne of glory, on high from the first,* ***is*** *the place of our sanctuary. O Hope of Israel, O LORD, all who forsake You will be ashamed; and those who turn aside from Me will be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the spring of living water, the LORD.*

Jeremiah turns to praise. "A throne of glory, on high from the first, is the place of our sanctuary." The true throne of God is in heaven, and has been from the beginning.

"O Hope of Israel, O LORD, all who forsake You will be ashamed." God Himself is Israel's hope (14:8). "Those who turn aside from Me will be written in the earth." Names written in dust are soon blown away, unlike names written in God's book (Exodus 32:32; Luke 10:20).

Why? "For they have forsaken the spring of living water, the LORD." This is the same picture as 2:13. They walked away from the only spring that never runs dry. Jesus offered that living water to all who come to Him (John 4:10-14).

17:14-16 *Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me, and I will be saved; for You **are** my praise. Look, they are saying to me, "Where **is** the word of the LORD? Let it come, please!" And I, I have not hurried away from **being** a shepherd after You, and the incurable day I have not desired; You, You know; what came out of my lips was before Your face.*

"Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me, and I will be saved; for You are my praise." The man who just said the heart is incurable now asks God to heal him. Only God can do it, and when God heals, the healing is real.

"Look, they are saying to me, Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come, please!" The people mocked him. Jeremiah had been warning of judgment for years, and it had not come yet. So where is it? Peter says scoffers in the last days will say the same thing about Christ's coming (2 Peter 3:3-9). God's delay is His patience, not His forgetfulness.

"I have not hurried away from being a shepherd after You." Jeremiah had not run from his calling. "And the incurable day I have not desired." He took no pleasure in announcing disaster. "You, You know." God knew his heart.

17:17-18 *Do not become a terror to me; You **are** my refuge in a day of calamity. Let those who pursue me be put to shame, and let me not be put to shame, me; let them be dismayed, them, and let me not be dismayed, me. Bring on them a day of calamity, and break them **with** a double breaking.*

"Do not become a terror to me; You are my refuge in a day of calamity." His greatest fear was not his enemies but that God might turn against him too.

Then he prays about those who persecute him. "Let those who pursue me be put to shame, and let me not be put to shame." "Bring on them a day of calamity, and break them with a double breaking."

How should we read a prayer like this? As we saw in 11:20 and 15:15, Jeremiah is not taking revenge into his own hands. He is handing his case to God, the righteous Judge. And he is asking God to do what God had already said He would do to those who rejected His word. Under the new covenant, Jesus teaches us to go further, to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), and Paul tells us to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19). Jeremiah's prayer is honest, and it puts justice where it belongs, in God's hands.

17:19-23 *Thus the LORD said to me: "Go, and you shall stand in the Gate of the Sons of the People, by which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; and you shall say to them, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who come in through these gates. Thus says the LORD: "Take heed for your lives, and do not carry a burden on the day of the Sabbath and bring **it** in through the gates of Jerusalem. And you shall not bring out a burden from your houses on the day of the Sabbath, and you shall not do any work; and you shall sanctify the day of the Sabbath, just as I commanded your fathers. And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear, and they stiffened their neck so as not to listen and not to accept correction.*

Now a new message. God sends Jeremiah to stand "in the Gate of the Sons of the People, by which the kings of Judah come in," and in all the gates of Jerusalem.

The message was about the Sabbath. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, Saturday, which God set apart as a day of rest for Israel. It was a sign of His covenant with them (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13-17). On it they were to stop their work and rest, remembering that God had made the world and had set them free from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

"Do not carry a burden on the day of the Sabbath and bring it in through the gates of Jerusalem." On the Sabbath, farmers and merchants were carrying their goods in through the gates to sell, as on any other day. Nehemiah faced the same thing more than a hundred and fifty years later (Nehemiah 13:15-22).

"They did not listen, and they did not incline their ear, and they stiffened their neck."

17:24-27 *And it will be, if you will surely listen to Me, declares the LORD, so as not to bring a burden through the gates of this city on the day of the Sabbath, and to sanctify the day of the Sabbath, so as not to do any work on it, and there will come in through the gates of this city kings and officials sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the man of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city will remain forever. And they will come from the cities of Judah and from around Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the Shephelah, and from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offering and sacrifice, and grain offering and frankincense, and bringing a thank offering **to** the house of the LORD. And if you will not listen to Me to sanctify the day of the Sabbath, and not to carry a burden and come in through the gates of Jerusalem on the day of the Sabbath, and I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it will devour the fortresses of Jerusalem, and it will not be quenched."'"*

God sets out two paths again. If they kept the Sabbath holy, "there will come in through the gates of this city kings and officials sitting on the throne of David," and "this city will remain forever." People would come from every part of Judah to bring offerings and "a thank offering" to the house of the LORD.

But if they would not listen, "I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it will devour the fortresses of Jerusalem, and it will not be quenched." That is exactly what happened in 586 B.C. (52:13).

Why would God make so much of the Sabbath? Because it was a test of trust. If they could not stop for one day to honor God, their hearts belonged to money and work.

What does this mean for us? The Sabbath was given to Israel as a sign of the Mosaic covenant. Its heart remains: we need rest and time set apart for God. Paul says the Sabbath was a shadow, and the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17), and Hebrews 4:9-10 speaks of a rest for God's people that we enter by faith. Believers differ on how the Sabbath command applies today. Some keep Saturday, many keep Sunday, the Lord's Day, as a day of worship and rest, and others see every day as belonging to the Lord (Romans 14:5-6). Whatever our view, the heart question is the same one Judah faced: do we trust God enough to stop?

Summary

Judah's sin was engraved on their hearts and on their altars, and their children followed in it, so God would give their treasures for plunder and send them to serve their enemies. God set two men side by side: the man who trusts in man and turns from the LORD is like a dry bush in the desert, but the man who trusts in the LORD is like a tree planted by water that bears fruit even in drought. The heart is deceitful above all things and incurable, and only the LORD can search it, and He gives to each according to his deeds. A man who gets rich unjustly is like a partridge hatching eggs it did not lay. Jeremiah praised God as Israel's hope and the spring of living water, asked God to heal and save him, told how people mocked his warnings, and asked God to shame his persecutors. Then God sent him to the city gates to call the people to keep the Sabbath holy, promising that David's kings would keep entering the city if they obeyed, and fire in its gates if they did not.

Study Questions

1. How does verse 1 describe the way Judah's sin was written, and where was it written? (17:1)

2. What are the two kinds of people in verses 5-8, and what picture is given for each? (17:5-8)

3. According to verse 8, does the tree by the water avoid the heat and drought? What makes the difference? (17:8)

4. What does verse 9 say about the human heart? What is the answer to "who can know it?" (17:9-10)

5. What is the point of the picture of the partridge? (17:11)

6. What did the people say to mock Jeremiah, and how does 2 Peter 3 speak to the same kind of mocking? (17:15; 2 Peter 3:3-9)

7. What did God tell the people not to do on the Sabbath, and what would happen if they would not listen? (17:21-27)

8. When hard times come, where do your roots reach first: to people, money and your own strength, or to the LORD?

9. Can you think of a time your heart fooled you? How can God's Word help you see your own heart more truly? (Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 139:23-24)

10. Judah could not stop for one day to honor God. Is there anything in your life, work, money, or a busy schedule, that is crowding out time with Him?

Jeremiah 18: At the Potter's House

Scripture

18:1-12 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Arise, and you shall go down ***to*** the house of the potter, and there I will make you hear My words." And I went down ***to*** the house of the potter, and look, he was doing work on the wheels. And the vessel which he was making with the clay was ruined in the hand of the potter; and he would again make it another vessel, just as it was right in the eyes of the potter to make. And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Like this potter am I not able to do to you, O house of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Look, like the clay in the hand of the potter, so ***are*** you in My hand, O house of Israel. ***At*** one moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy; and that nation turns back from its evil, concerning which I had spoken against it, and I will relent concerning the calamity which I had planned to do to it. And ***at another*** moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build up and to plant; and it does the evil in My sight, so as not to listen to My voice, and I will relent concerning the good which I had said ***I would*** do good to it. And now, say, please, to the man of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, I am forming calamity against you and planning a plan against you. Turn back, please, each one from his evil way, and make your ways and your deeds good."' And they say, '***It is*** hopeless! For after our plans we will walk, and we will do, each one, the stubbornness of his evil heart.'

18:13-23 Therefore thus says the LORD: Ask, please, among the nations: Who has heard ***things*** like these? The virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing. Does the snow of Lebanon leave the rock of the field? Or are the strange, cold, flowing waters plucked up? For My people have forgotten Me; they burn incense to worthlessness, and they have made them stumble in their ways, the ancient tracks, to walk ***in*** paths, a way not built up, to make their land a horror, a perpetual hissing; everyone who passes by it will be appalled and shake his head. Like an east wind I will scatter them before the enemy; ***the*** back and not ***the*** face I will show them in the day of their disaster." And they said, "Come, and let us plan plans against Jeremiah, for law will not perish from the priest, and counsel from the wise, and word from the prophet. Come, and let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words." Pay attention to me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my opponents. Should evil be repaid in place of good? For they have dug a pit for my life. Remember my standing before You to speak good concerning them, to turn back Your rage from them. Therefore give their sons to the famine, and pour them out over the hands of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widows, and let their men be slain by death, their young men struck down by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses when You bring a raiding band on them suddenly; for they have dug a pit to capture me, and they have hidden snares for my feet. And You, O LORD, You know all their counsel against me for death. Do not make atonement for their iniquity, and do not wipe out their sin from before You; and let them be made to stumble before You; in the time of Your anger deal with them.

Preview

God sends Jeremiah down to the potter's house to watch a man at work. The clay pot spoils in the potter's hand, so he presses it down and makes it into another vessel. Then God speaks: like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. God is free to tear down a nation or to build it up, and He tells us how He deals with nations: if a nation He has warned turns from its evil, He relents of the disaster, and if a nation He meant to bless turns to evil, He relents of the good. Judah is told to turn back, and they answer, "It is hopeless!" God says even nature is more faithful than His people. Then the people plot against Jeremiah, and he cries out to God against them.

This chapter teaches two truths side by side: God is the sovereign Potter, and God truly responds to how people answer Him. As we read, we should ask whether we are soft clay in His hands, or hard clay that says "It is hopeless" and goes its own way.

Study

18:1-4 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Arise, and you shall go down **to** the house of the potter, and there I will make you hear My words." And I went down **to** the house of the potter, and look, he was doing work on the wheels. And the vessel which he was making with the clay was ruined in the hand of the potter; and he would again make it another vessel, just as it was right in the eyes of the potter to make.*

"Arise, and you shall go down to the house of the potter, and there I will make you hear My words." God sometimes taught Jeremiah by sending him to look at ordinary things. A potter's shop would have been in the lower part of the city, near water and clay.

"Look, he was doing work on the wheels." A potter's wheel in that day was two stone disks joined by a shaft. The potter turned the lower one with his feet, and shaped the clay on the upper one with his hands.

"And the vessel which he was making with the clay was ruined in the hand of the potter." Perhaps there was a stone or a lump in the clay, or it would not take the shape. So "he would again make it another vessel, just as it was right in the eyes of the potter to make."

Notice two things. The potter did not throw the clay away. He kept working with it. And the potter decided what the new vessel would be. Jeremiah watched quietly, and then God explained.

18:5-6 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Like this potter am I not able to do to you, O house of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Look, like the clay in the hand of the potter, so **are** you in My hand, O house of Israel.*

"Like this potter am I not able to do to you, O house of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Look, like the clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel."

This is the heart of the chapter. God is the Potter. Israel is the clay. God has the right and the power to shape His people as He chooses. Isaiah used the same picture (Isaiah 29:16; 45:9; 64:8), and so does Paul (Romans 9:20-21).

For Judah, this was a warning. They thought they were safe because they were God's people. But the clay does not tell the potter what to do. Judah was spoiling in God's hand, and He was free to press it down and start again.

Yet there was hope in the picture too. The potter did not give up on the clay. He made it into another vessel. God would bring Judah down, but He was not finished with Israel. The rest of Jeremiah shows that He would make them again (31:4, 28).

18:7-8 ***At*** *one moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy; and that nation turns back from its evil, concerning which I had spoken against it, and I will relent concerning the calamity which I had planned to do to it.*

Now God explains how He deals with nations. "At one moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy." These are the very words of Jeremiah's call (1:10).

"And that nation turns back from its evil, concerning which I had spoken against it, and I will relent concerning the calamity which I had planned to do to it."

The clearest example is Nineveh. Jonah preached that the city would be overthrown in forty days. The people repented, from the king down, and God relented of the disaster (Jonah 3:4-10).

What does "relent" mean? Some older Bibles say God "repents." It does not mean God made a mistake or changed His character. God does not change (Malachi 3:6), and He is not a man that He should change His mind like we do (Numbers 23:19). It means God changes what He does when people change how they stand before Him. His warnings of judgment are often a call to repent, with an unspoken unless you turn.

18:9-10 *And* ***at another*** *moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build up and to plant; and it does the evil in My sight, so as not to listen to My voice, and I will relent concerning the good which I had said* ***I would*** *do good to it.*

It works the other way too. God may speak of a nation "to build up and to plant." But if "it does the evil in My sight, so as not to listen to My voice," then "I will relent concerning the good which I had said I would do good to it."

This was a sobering word for Judah. God had promised them the land and blessing. But God's blessing was not a blank check for a people who lived in rebellion. Saul's kingdom is an example: God had given it, and then took it away when Saul would not obey (1 Samuel 15:23, 26).

Does this mean God's unconditional promises can be canceled? No. God's covenant with Abraham and His promise to David rest on God's own faithfulness, and Jeremiah will say that God would

sooner break the order of day and night than break them (31:35-37; 33:20-26). What a single generation enjoys of the blessing can be lost by sin. The promise itself stands.

18:11 *And now, say, please, to the man of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, I am forming calamity against you and planning a plan against you. Turn back, please, each one from his evil way, and make your ways and your deeds good."'*

"And now, say, please, to the man of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Notice that God says "please." He pleads.

"Look, I am forming calamity against you and planning a plan against you." The word "forming" is the word for what a potter does. God the Potter was shaping disaster for Judah.

But it was not too late. "Turn back, please, each one from his evil way, and make your ways and your deeds good."

So how do these two truths fit together? God is the sovereign Potter, who does with the clay as He pleases. And God truly calls people to turn, and truly responds when they do. Both are taught right here, in the same few verses. Christians have long discussed how God's sovereignty and human choice fit together, and good Bible teachers explain it in different ways. I will not try to settle that debate here. What this passage makes plain is that both are true. God is in control, and His call to "turn back" is real and sincere. No one can stand before God and say that he wanted to turn but God would not let him. And no one who turns to God will find that the Potter has closed His hands.

What does this mean for us? If you are in God's hands, and you feel like something has been spoiled, a marriage, a calling, a season of your life, remember that the potter did not throw the clay away. He made it into another vessel. God can do that with a broken life that turns to Him.

18:12 *And they say, 'It is hopeless! For after our plans we will walk, and we will do, each one, the stubbornness of his evil heart.'*

They answer, "It is hopeless! For after our plans we will walk, and we will do, each one, the stubbornness of his evil heart."

What an answer. God says please turn back, and they say "It is hopeless!" That sounds like despair, but read the rest. They are not saying they cannot change. They are saying they will not. "After our plans we will walk." They had decided.

This is the hard clay. It is not that God would not reshape them. It is that they would not be reshaped. Sometimes people say they are too far gone, when the truth is that they do not want to give it up. Be honest with God about which one it is.

18:13-17 *Therefore thus says the LORD: Ask, please, among the nations: Who has heard **things** like these? The virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing. Does the snow of Lebanon leave the rock of the field? Or are the strange, cold, flowing waters plucked up? For My people have forgotten Me; they burn incense to worthlessness, and they have made them stumble in their ways, the ancient tracks, to walk **in** paths, a way not built up, to make their land a horror, a perpetual hissing; everyone who passes by it will be appalled and shake his head. Like an east wind I will scatter them before the enemy; **the** back and not **the** face I will show them in the day of their disaster."*

"Ask, please, among the nations: Who has heard things like these?" Even the pagan nations did not abandon their gods, worthless as those gods were (2:10-11). But "the virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing."

"Does the snow of Lebanon leave the rock of the field?" The snow on the high peaks of Mount Lebanon was always there. The cold streams that flowed from it never ran dry. Nature is faithful. But "My people have forgotten Me."

"They burn incense to worthlessness." Their idols were nothing. And those idols "made them stumble in their ways, the ancient tracks." The "ancient tracks" are the old paths of faithfulness (6:16). They left the good road "to walk in paths, a way not built up," rough tracks that go nowhere.

The result: "to make their land a horror, a perpetual hissing." People passing by would hiss and shake their heads in shock. "Like an east wind I will scatter them." The east wind was the hot, dry wind off the desert that withered everything. And worst of all: "the back and not the face I will show them in the day of their disaster." They had turned their backs on God (2:27). Now, in their trouble, He would turn His back on them.

18:18 *And they said, "Come, and let us plan plans against Jeremiah, for law will not perish from the priest, and counsel from the wise, and word from the prophet. Come, and let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words."*

"Come, and let us plan plans against Jeremiah." Notice the irony. God was "planning a plan" against them (18:11). They answer by planning plans against His prophet.

Their reasoning: "for law will not perish from the priest, and counsel from the wise, and word from the prophet." In other words, we do not need Jeremiah. We have our priests, our wise men and our prophets. They will never fail us. Jeremiah was saying the leaders were wrong, and the leaders were sure they could not be.

"Let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words." They would attack him with lies and accusations, and they would ignore everything he said. That is how many people still deal with an unwelcome truth: attack the messenger and stop listening.

18:19-20 *Pay attention to me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my opponents. Should evil be repaid in place of good? For they have dug a pit for my life. Remember my standing before You to speak good concerning them, to turn back Your rage from them.*

Jeremiah turns to God. "Pay attention to me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my opponents." They would not listen to God's prophet. He asks God to listen to them.

"Should evil be repaid in place of good? For they have dug a pit for my life." Then a painful line: "Remember my standing before You to speak good concerning them, to turn back Your rage from them."

Jeremiah had prayed for these very people. He had stood before God and pleaded for them. And they answered him by trying to kill him. David knew this pain (Psalm 109:4-5), and so did Jesus, who did good to His people and was crucified by them.

18:21-23 *Therefore give their sons to the famine, and pour them out over the hands of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widows, and let their men be slain by death, their young men struck down by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses when You bring a raiding band on them suddenly; for they have dug a pit to capture me, and they have hidden snares for my feet. And You, O LORD, You know all their counsel against me for death. Do not make atonement for their iniquity, and do not wipe out their sin from before You; and let them be made to stumble before You; in the time of Your anger deal with them.*

Then comes one of the hardest prayers in Jeremiah. "Give their sons to the famine." "Let their wives become childless and widows." "Do not make atonement for their iniquity, and do not wipe out their sin from before You." "In the time of Your anger deal with them."

How do we read this? First, it is honest. Jeremiah has been betrayed by people he prayed for, and he tells God exactly how he feels. God put this prayer in Scripture, as He did the imprecatory psalms, the psalms that call down God's judgment on the wicked (Psalm 109; 137).

Second, he is not taking revenge. He hands the case to God, as in 11:20 and 15:15. And he asks God to do what God had already said He would do. Famine, sword and widows are the very judgments God had announced on this people (15:2, 8). Jeremiah is lining up his prayer with God's word.

Third, notice "in the time of Your anger." Jeremiah leaves the timing to God.

Even so, this is not where the Bible leaves us. Jesus, hanging on the cross, prayed for the men who put Him there, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Stephen did the same as he was stoned (Acts 7:60). We are told to bless those who persecute us and to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:14, 19). When someone has hurt you deeply, you may need to pray honestly like Jeremiah first. Tell God the truth. But then let Him have it, and ask Him for the grace to pray for them as Jesus did.

Summary

God sent Jeremiah to the potter's house, where he watched a vessel spoil in the potter's hand and be made into another vessel. God said Israel was like clay in His hand. If He warned a nation of judgment and it turned from its evil, He would relent of the disaster, and if He promised a nation good and it did evil, He would relent of the good. God told Judah He was forming disaster against them and pleaded with them to turn back, but they answered, "It is hopeless," and chose to follow their own hearts. God said even the snows of Lebanon were more faithful than His people, who had forgotten Him and left the ancient paths, so He would scatter them and turn His back on them. The leaders plotted against Jeremiah, trusting their own priests, wise men and prophets, and Jeremiah, who had prayed for them, asked God to remember and to bring on them the judgment He had spoken.

Study Questions

1. What did Jeremiah see the potter do when the vessel was spoiled? (18:3-4)

2. What did God say the potter and the clay picture? (18:6)

3. What does God say He will do if a nation He has warned turns from its evil? What if a nation He has blessed turns to evil? (18:7-10)

4. How did the people answer God's call to turn back? Were they unable to change, or unwilling? (18:11-12)

5. What does God compare to His people's unfaithfulness in verses 13-15? (18:13-15)

6. Why did the leaders feel they did not need to listen to Jeremiah? (18:18)

7. What had Jeremiah done for these people before they plotted against him? (18:20)

8. The potter did not throw the spoiled clay away. Is there a part of your life that feels spoiled? What would it look like to put it back in God's hands?

9. Have you ever said it was hopeless when the truth was that you did not want to change? What is God calling you to turn from today?

10. Jeremiah prayed honestly about people who hurt him, and Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him. Is there someone you need to hand over to God, and then begin to pray for?

Jeremiah 19: The Broken Flask

Scripture

19:1-15 Thus said the LORD: "Go, and you shall buy a potter's flask of earthenware, and ***take*** some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, and you shall go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom, which ***is at*** the entrance of the Gate of the Potsherd, and you shall proclaim there the words which I will speak to you. And you shall say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am bringing calamity on this place, which everyone who hears of it, his ears will tingle, because they have forsaken Me and have made this place foreign, and have burned incense in it to other gods whom they did not know, they and their fathers and the kings of Judah; and they have filled this place ***with*** the blood of innocent ***ones***, and they have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire ***as*** burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command, and I did not speak ***it***, and it did not come up on My heart. Therefore look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and this place will not be called again Topheth and the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will give their corpses for food to the birds of the heavens and to the animals of the earth. And I will make this city a horror and a hissing; everyone who passes by it will be appalled and will hiss because of all its wounds. And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and each one will eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them."' And you shall break the flask before the eyes of the men who go with you, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: "Thus I will break this people and this city, just as one breaks the vessel of the potter, which cannot be repaired again; and they will bury in Topheth, because ***there is*** no place to bury. Thus I will do to this place," declares the LORD, "and to its inhabitants, to make this city like Topheth. And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will be like the place of Topheth, unclean, all the houses on whose roofs they burned incense to all the host of the heavens, and poured out drink offerings to other gods."'" And Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the house of the LORD, and he said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Look, I am bringing to this city and on all its cities all the calamity which I have spoken against it, because they have stiffened their neck so as not to hear My words.'"

Preview

In chapter 18, Jeremiah watched soft clay being reshaped on the potter's wheel. Now God tells him to buy a finished clay flask, one that has been fired hard and can no longer be reshaped. He takes some of the elders and priests with him out to the valley of Hinnom, to the place called Topheth, where the people of Judah had burned their own children in the fire to Baal. There he announces that the valley will be called the valley of slaughter, and that the coming siege will be so terrible that people will eat their own children. Then he smashes the flask in front of the leaders: this is

what God will do to this people and this city, and it cannot be mended. Jeremiah returns to the temple court and repeats the message to all the people.

This is one of the darkest chapters in the book, and we will read it carefully and plainly. It shows how deep Judah's sin had gone, and how certain God's judgment was. As we read, we should remember that there comes a point when a heart has hardened so long that it no longer bends, and we should be quick to stay soft in God's hands.

Study

19:1-2 *Thus said the LORD: "Go, and you shall buy a potter's flask of earthenware, and **take** some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, and you shall go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom, which **is at** the entrance of the Gate of the Potsherd, and you shall proclaim there the words which I will speak to you.*

"Go, and you shall buy a potter's flask of earthenware." The word for flask names a narrow-necked clay jar for water. Unlike the soft clay in chapter 18, this jar had already been fired in the kiln. It was hard. If it broke, it could not be reshaped. That difference is the whole message.

Jeremiah was to bring "some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests." These were the leaders. They would be witnesses.

"You shall go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is at the entrance of the Gate of the Potsherd." The Gate of the Potsherd was likely where broken pottery was thrown out of the city into the valley below. It was a fitting place to break a jar. The valley of Hinnom ran along the south and west sides of Jerusalem, and we met it in 7:31-32.

19:3-4 *And you shall say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am bringing calamity on this place, which everyone who hears of it, his ears will tingle, because they have forsaken Me and have made this place foreign, and have burned incense in it to other gods whom they did not know, they and their fathers and the kings of Judah; and they have filled this place **with** the blood of innocent **ones**,*

"Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem." The message was for everyone, from the palace down.

"Look, I am bringing calamity on this place, which everyone who hears of it, his ears will tingle." The news would be so shocking that it would make people's ears ring. God used the same words about the fall of Shiloh in Eli's day (1 Samuel 3:11) and about Jerusalem in Manasseh's day (2 Kings 21:12).

Why? "Because they have forsaken Me and have made this place foreign." They had turned God's city into a place that belonged to foreign gods. They "burned incense in it to other gods whom they did not know." And "they have filled this place with the blood of innocent ones." That likely includes the children killed at Topheth and the innocent people Manasseh put to death (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4).

19:5 *and they have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire **as** burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command, and I did not speak **it**, and it did not come up on My heart.*

"They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command, and I did not speak it, and it did not come up on My heart."

This is the same sin we saw in 7:31. In the valley of Hinnom, at a place called Topheth, people offered their own children as burnt offerings to false gods. Here the god is Baal, the Canaanite god of storms and fertility, and in 32:35 it is Molech. Two kings of Judah, Ahaz and Manasseh, had done this with their own sons (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Josiah tried to stop it (2 Kings 23:10), but it came back.

It was the murder of children, and God hated it. Listen to how strongly He says it. "Which I did not command," "I did not speak it," and "it did not come up on My heart." God never asked for this. It never even entered His mind. The Law forbade it in the strongest terms (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). The God of Israel defends the helpless, and Jesus took children in His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16).

If this verse touches a wound for you, a child you lost, or something in your past you deeply regret, please hear this. God's anger here is against those who killed children and kept on doing it without repentance. For anyone who comes to Him in repentance, there is full forgiveness in Christ (1 John 1:9). And I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

19:6-7 *Therefore look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and this place will not be called again Topheth and the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will give their corpses for food to the birds of the heavens and to the animals of the earth.*

"This place will not be called again Topheth and the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the slaughter." Jeremiah said the same thing in 7:32. The place where they killed their children would be filled with their own dead.

"I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place." The Hebrew word for "make void" sounds like the word for the flask Jeremiah was holding. It is a wordplay: as he held up the jar, God said He would empty out all their plans. Their alliances and schemes would come to nothing.

"I will give their corpses for food to the birds of the heavens and to the animals of the earth." This was one of the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:26).

19:8-9 *And I will make this city a horror and a hissing; everyone who passes by it will be appalled and will hiss because of all its wounds. And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and each one will eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them."'*

"I will make this city a horror and a hissing; everyone who passes by it will be appalled." The ruins of Jerusalem would shock everyone who saw them.

Then comes one of the most terrible verses in the Bible. "I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and each one will eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege."

Why would God include something so awful? Because Moses had warned of exactly this, hundreds of years earlier, as one of the curses that would come if Israel broke the covenant (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57). It happened in the siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:28-29), and Lamentations says it happened in the siege of Jerusalem (Lamentations 2:20; 4:10). It shows how desperate the hunger of a long siege becomes.

There is something else here that we should not miss. These people had burned their children to Baal. Now, in the siege, their children would be lost to them in the most horrible way. Their sin came back on their own heads. God does not need to invent new punishments. Often He simply lets sin run to its end.

We will not dwell on this. It is enough to know that God's warnings are true, and that sin left unchecked leads to places no one would choose.

19:10-11 *And you shall break the flask before the eyes of the men who go with you, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: "Thus I will break this people and this city, just as one breaks the vessel of the potter, which cannot be repaired again; and they will bury in Topheth, because* ***there is*** *no place to bury.*

"And you shall break the flask before the eyes of the men who go with you." Picture the scene. The elders and priests stand in the valley. Jeremiah lifts the jar and throws it down on the rocks, and it shatters into pieces.

"Thus I will break this people and this city, just as one breaks the vessel of the potter, which cannot be repaired again."

Here is the difference from chapter 18. Soft clay can be reshaped. A fired pot, once broken, cannot be put back together. Judah had hardened in their sin year after year. Now the time for reshaping was over. The nation as it stood would be broken.

Does that mean God was finished with Israel forever? No. The rest of Jeremiah promises that God would restore His people (30:3; 31:4). But that generation, that city and that kingdom would be shattered. Restoration would come only after the breaking.

"And they will bury in Topheth, because there is no place to bury." The dead would be so many that the valley of their sin would become their cemetery.

19:12-13 *Thus I will do to this place," declares the LORD, "and to its inhabitants, to make this city like Topheth. And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will be like the place of Topheth, unclean, all the houses on whose roofs they burned incense to all the host of the heavens, and poured out drink offerings to other gods."'"*

"Thus I will do to this place," God says, "to make this city like Topheth." The whole city would become as unclean as that valley. Unclean means not fit to come near a holy God.

Why? "All the houses on whose roofs they burned incense to all the host of the heavens." The roofs of houses in Israel were flat, and people used them like porches. The people of Jerusalem climbed up there to worship the sun, moon and stars (Zephaniah 1:5; 2 Kings 23:12). The idolatry was not only at Topheth. It was in their homes.

That is a word for us. Our idols are not always in some distant valley. Sometimes they are at home, in the private places of our lives, where we think no one sees.

19:14-15 *And Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the house of the LORD, and he said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Look, I am bringing to this city and on all its cities all the calamity which I have spoken against it, because they have stiffened their neck so as not to hear My words.'"*

"And Jeremiah came from Topheth." He walked back up into the city, into "the court of the house of the LORD," and said it again to all the people.

"Look, I am bringing to this city and on all its cities all the calamity which I have spoken against it." Why? "Because they have stiffened their neck so as not to hear My words."

"Stiffened their neck" is a picture from farming. An ox that would not bow its neck to the yoke was useless for plowing. Judah would not bow to God. That one phrase sums up the whole problem of the book.

The next chapter tells us what happened when the priest in charge of the temple heard this message.

Summary

God told Jeremiah to buy a fired clay flask, take some of the elders and priests, and go out to the valley of Hinnom at the Gate of the Potsherd. There he announced a disaster that would make every ear tingle, because the people had forsaken God, filled the place with innocent blood, and burned their sons as burnt offerings to Baal, something God never commanded or even thought of. The valley would be called the valley of slaughter, their plans would come to nothing, and the siege would be so terrible that they would eat the flesh of their own children, as Moses had warned. Jeremiah broke the flask before the leaders as a sign that God would break the people and the city like a pot that cannot be mended, and that Jerusalem would become as unclean as Topheth because of the idols worshiped on its rooftops. Then he went back to the temple court and told all the people that the disaster was coming because they had stiffened their necks and would not listen.

Study Questions

1. What kind of clay vessel did God tell Jeremiah to buy, and who was to go with him? (19:1)

2. Where did Jeremiah go to give this message, and why was that place chosen? (19:2-5)

3. What three phrases does God use in verse 5 to show how much He hated child sacrifice? (19:5)

4. What would the valley be called after the judgment came? (19:6)

5. Where had Moses warned of the terrible things in verse 9, and why does that matter? (19:9; Deuteronomy 28:53-57)

6. What was the difference between the clay in chapter 18 and the flask in chapter 19? (18:4; 19:11)

7. Where did the people burn incense to the stars, and what does that tell us about their idolatry? (19:13)

8. What does it mean to stiffen your neck against God? Is there an area of your life where you have been doing that? (19:15)

9. Judah's idols were worshiped on their own rooftops. What private idols might people keep at home today, where they think no one sees?

10. God still promised to restore Israel after the breaking. If you feel broken by your own choices, how does God's faithfulness give you hope today? (1 John 1:9)

Jeremiah 20: Pashhur, the Stocks and Jeremiah's Complaint

Scripture

20:1-6 And Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest, and he ***was*** an overseer, a leader, in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. And Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and he put him in the stocks that ***were*** at the Upper Gate of Benjamin, which ***was*** in the house of the LORD. And it was on the next day, and Pashhur brought Jeremiah out from the stocks; and Jeremiah said to him, "The LORD has not called your name Pashhur, but Terror All Around. For thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they will fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes ***will be*** seeing ***it***; and all Judah I will give into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will take them into exile to Babylon, and he will strike them down with the sword. And I will give all the wealth of this city, and all its labor, and all its precious things, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies; and they will plunder them, and they will take them, and they will bring them to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, will go into captivity; and to Babylon you will come, and there you will die, and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied in falsehood.'"

20:7-18 You have enticed me, O LORD, and I was enticed; You were stronger than I, and You prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one ***is*** mocking me. For as often as I speak, I cry out; "Violence and destruction!" I proclaim; for the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and a derision all the day. And I say, "I will not remember Him, and I will not speak again in His name"; and it becomes in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding ***it*** in, and I am not able. For I have heard the whispering of many: "Terror ***is*** all around! Tell, and let us tell about him!" Every man of my peace ***is*** watching for my stumbling: "Perhaps he will be enticed, and we will prevail over him, and we will take our vengeance on him." And the LORD ***is*** with me like a ruthless mighty man; therefore my pursuers will stumble, and they will not prevail; they will be greatly ashamed, for they have not prospered, an everlasting dishonor ***that*** will not be forgotten. And O LORD of armies, who tests the righteous, who sees the kidneys and the heart, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my case. Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD; for He has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers. Cursed ***be*** the day on which I was born! The day ***on*** which my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed ***be*** the man who brought the news to my father, saying, "A son, a male, has been born to you," surely making him rejoice. And let that man be like the cities which the LORD overthrew and did not relent; and let him hear a cry in the morning and a shout of alarm at the time of noon, because he did not kill me from the womb, and my mother would have been to me my grave, and her womb pregnant forever. Why ***is*** this, ***that*** I came forth from the womb to see trouble and sorrow, and my days have come to an end in shame?

Preview

Pashhur the priest, the officer in charge of keeping order in the temple, hears Jeremiah's message from chapter 19. He has Jeremiah beaten and locked in the stocks overnight at the Upper Gate of Benjamin. When he lets him out the next morning, Jeremiah gives him a new name: Terror All Around. Pashhur and everyone in his house will go to Babylon, and there he will die. Then Jeremiah pours out the most painful prayer in the whole book. He tells God that He overpowered him, that everyone laughs at him, and that when he tries to keep quiet, God's word burns like fire in his bones. He rises to praise for a moment, then sinks lower than ever and curses the day he was born.

This chapter lets us see inside the heart of a faithful servant of God at the end of his strength. As we read, we should notice that Jeremiah is honest with God, that God's word would not let him go, and that the Bible does not hide the dark seasons of the people God uses most.

Study

20:1-2 *And Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest, and he **was** an overseer, a leader, in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. And Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and he put him in the stocks that **were** at the Upper Gate of Benjamin, which **was** in the house of the LORD.*

"Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest, and he was an overseer, a leader, in the house of the LORD." Immer was one of the old priestly families (1 Chronicles 24:14). Pashhur was something like the chief of temple security. His job was to keep order, and he decided that Jeremiah's message was a threat to it. This Pashhur is not the same man as the Pashhur in 21:1, who was the son of Malchiah.

"And Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet." The Law allowed a beating of up to forty blows as a punishment (Deuteronomy 25:2-3), and this was likely that kind of beating. Then he "put him in the stocks that were at the Upper Gate of Benjamin." The stocks were a wooden frame that held the feet, and sometimes the hands and neck, in a twisted position. It was painful and shameful. The Upper Gate of Benjamin was a busy gate on the north side of the temple, where everyone could see him and mock him.

This is the first time we read of Jeremiah being physically attacked. It would not be the last (37:15; 38:6). A priest in God's house beat God's prophet for speaking God's word.

20:3-6 *And it was on the next day, and Pashhur brought Jeremiah out from the stocks; and Jeremiah said to him, "The LORD has not called your name Pashhur, but Terror All Around. For thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they will fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes* ***will be*** *seeing* ***it****; and all Judah I will give into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will take them into exile to Babylon, and he will strike them down with the sword. And I will give all the wealth of this city, and all its labor, and all its precious things, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies; and they will plunder them, and they will take them, and they will bring them to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, will go into captivity; and to Babylon you will come, and there you will die, and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied in falsehood.'"*

"It was on the next day, and Pashhur brought Jeremiah out from the stocks." A night in the stocks did not silence Jeremiah. The first thing he did was speak.

"The LORD has not called your name Pashhur, but Terror All Around." In the Bible, a new name often tells who a person really is or what will happen to him. Pashhur had tried to frighten Jeremiah into silence. Now terror would surround Pashhur himself. "Terror All Around" (in Hebrew, Magor-missabib) was a phrase Jeremiah used often (6:25; 46:5; 49:29), and his enemies threw it back at him as a nickname (20:10).

"Look, I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your friends." Pashhur would see his friends fall by the sword, and "all Judah I will give into the hand of the king of Babylon." This is the first time in the book that Jeremiah names Babylon as the enemy from the north.

All the wealth of the city and the treasures of the kings would be carried to Babylon. And Pashhur would go too, with his whole household: "to Babylon you will come, and there you will die, and there you will be buried." Why? Because he had "prophesied in falsehood" to his friends. Pashhur was not only a priest. He was telling people that all would be well. His lies would follow him into exile. Scripture does not tell us when Pashhur was taken, but many think it was in 597 B.C., when the leading men of Jerusalem were taken with Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:14-16).

20:7 *You have enticed me, O LORD, and I was enticed; You were stronger than I, and You prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one* ***is*** *mocking me.*

Now we hear Jeremiah alone with God, after the beating and the stocks.

"You have enticed me, O LORD, and I was enticed; You were stronger than I, and You prevailed."

This is a startling thing to say to God. The word "enticed" is used of someone who is talked into something, sometimes by trickery. It is the same word used when the lying spirit was sent to entice Ahab (1 Kings 22:20-22). Jeremiah is saying, You talked me into this. You were too strong for me, and I gave in.

Is Jeremiah right? Did God deceive him? No. God had told Jeremiah from the first day that the people would fight him (1:19). But Jeremiah may have hoped it would be easier than this. He feels overpowered and used.

"I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one is mocking me." He had no friends left. The whole city laughed at him.

God allowed Jeremiah to speak this way, and He put these words in the Bible. That tells us something. God would rather have our honest pain than our polite silence. Many of the Psalms do the same (Psalm 13; 22:1-2; 88).

20:8 *For as often as I speak, I cry out; "Violence and destruction!" I proclaim; for the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and a derision all the day.*

"For as often as I speak, I cry out; Violence and destruction! I proclaim." Every time Jeremiah opened his mouth, it was bad news. He did not enjoy it. And "the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and a derision all the day."

The very thing God gave him to carry, God's word, had made him a joke. That is a lonely place to be. He was faithful, and faithfulness had brought him only shame.

20:9 *And I say, "I will not remember Him, and I will not speak again in His name"; and it becomes in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding* ***it*** *in, and I am not able.*

"And I say, I will not remember Him, and I will not speak again in His name."

Jeremiah tried to quit. He decided he would stop talking about God altogether. No more messages. No more mocking.

But listen to what happened. "It becomes in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in, and I am not able."

This is one of the great verses in the Bible about God's word. God's word was not just something Jeremiah said. It was in him, burning. When he tried to hold it in, it was like fire shut up inside him, in the deepest part of his body, his bones. He could not contain it. He was worn out from trying.

Why could he not stop? Because God's word is alive (Hebrews 4:12). It had gotten hold of him. God had put His words in his mouth on the day of his call (1:9), and Jeremiah could not get them out. Later, Peter and John told the rulers who ordered them to stop preaching that they could not stop speaking what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20). Paul said woe to him if he did not preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Notice something else. Jeremiah wanted to quit because of the pain, and the word would not let him. The very thing that hurt him also kept him going. Sometimes what holds us when we want to give up is not our feelings or our strength, but the word of God that has taken root in us.

Have you ever felt like walking away from God? Many believers have. What brought you back? For many of us, it is that we cannot get His word out of our hearts.

20:10 *For I have heard the whispering of many: "Terror **is** all around! Tell, and let us tell about him!" Every man of my peace **is** watching for my stumbling: "Perhaps he will be enticed, and we will prevail over him, and we will take our vengeance on him."*

"For I have heard the whispering of many: Terror is all around!" They used Jeremiah's own words against him as a nickname. Every time he walked by, they whispered, There goes old Terror All Around.

"Tell, and let us tell about him!" They wanted to report him and bring charges.

Worst of all, "Every man of my peace is watching for my stumbling." A "man of my peace" means a close friend, someone he trusted. Even they were watching for him to slip. "Perhaps he will be enticed, and we will prevail over him, and we will take our vengeance on him." Notice that they use the same words Jeremiah used of God in verse 7, "enticed" and "prevail." God had prevailed over Jeremiah. Now his enemies hoped to prevail over him too.

David knew the pain of a close friend's betrayal (Psalm 41:9; 55:12-14), and Jesus applied Psalm 41:9 to Judas (John 13:18).

20:11 *And the LORD **is** with me like a ruthless mighty man; therefore my pursuers will stumble, and they will not prevail; they will be greatly ashamed, for they have not prospered, an everlasting dishonor **that** will not be forgotten.*

Then, suddenly, the tone changes. "And the LORD is with me like a ruthless mighty man."

Jeremiah remembers God's promise from his call: "I am with you" (1:8, 19). The LORD stands beside him like a fierce warrior, one no enemy can stand against. "Therefore my pursuers will stumble, and they will not prevail." They hoped to prevail over him. They would not. "They will be greatly ashamed," with "an everlasting dishonor that will not be forgotten."

This is how faith works in the dark. Feelings do not change all at once. But Jeremiah turns his eyes from his enemies to God, and from his feelings to God's promises.

20:12 *And O LORD of armies, who tests the righteous, who sees the kidneys and the heart, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my case.*

"And O LORD of armies, who tests the righteous, who sees the kidneys and the heart." Jeremiah knows God sees everything, all the way to the hidden feelings and thoughts (17:10). God knew that Jeremiah's heart was true and his enemies' hearts were not.

"Let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my case." This is almost the same prayer as 11:20. As there, Jeremiah is not taking revenge. He hands his case to God, the righteous Judge, and leaves it there (Romans 12:19). Jesus calls us further, to pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), but Jeremiah's prayer still teaches us where to take our wrongs: to God.

20:13 *Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD; for He has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers.*

"Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD; for He has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers."

Jeremiah breaks into song. He was still surrounded. He had not yet been set free from his enemies. But by faith he praises God as if it were already done. "The needy" is Jeremiah himself, poor and helpless, but in God's hands.

20:14-18 *Cursed **be** the day on which I was born! The day **on** which my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed **be** the man who brought the news to my father, saying, "A son, a male, has been born to you," surely making him rejoice. And let that man be like the cities which the LORD overthrew and did not relent; and let him hear a cry in the morning and a shout of alarm at the time of noon, because he did not kill me from the womb, and my mother would have been to me my grave, and her womb pregnant forever. Why **is** this, **that** I came forth from the womb to see trouble and sorrow, and my days have come to an end in shame?*

And then, just as suddenly, he falls again, lower than ever.

"Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day on which my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!"

He curses the man who brought his father the good news, "A son, a male, has been born to you." He wishes that man had been like the cities "which the LORD overthrew and did not relent," Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-25). And he wishes he had died before birth: "my mother would have been to me my grave."

"Why is this, that I came forth from the womb to see trouble and sorrow, and my days have come to an end in shame?" That is how the chapter ends. There is no answer, no comfort, no promise. Just the question.

How should we understand this? First, notice what Jeremiah does not do. He does not curse God. He does not curse his parents. He curses the day, and the messenger, things that cannot be harmed. This is the language of deep grief, like Job's in Job 3, where Job also curses the day of his birth. It is poetry, the way a crushed heart speaks.

Second, God put this in the Bible. He did not cut it out or clean it up. That tells us that a believer can feel this low, and that God does not cast him off for it. Remember that the same God had told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you" (1:5). Jeremiah wished his birth undone, but God had planned his life before he was born, and God did not take back His purpose.

Third, the swing from praise in verse 13 to cursing in verse 14 is true to life. Many people in grief and depression know that rise and fall well. One moment you can sing. The next you wish you had never been born.

If you are in that place right now, hear this. Jeremiah's feelings were real, but they were not the last word. God kept him, and he went on serving for many more years. Bring your darkness to God, as Jeremiah did. He can bear it. And please do not carry it alone. Talk to a pastor, a trusted friend or a counselor. If you are thinking about ending your life, reach out for help today, to someone near you or to a crisis line where you live. Your life matters to God, who knew you before you were born.

Summary

Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest in charge of the temple, heard Jeremiah's message, had him beaten, and locked him in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin. The next day Jeremiah renamed him Terror All Around and told him that Judah would be given to the king of Babylon, the city's treasures carried off, and Pashhur and his household taken to Babylon to die, because he had prophesied lies. Then Jeremiah poured out his heart to God. He said God had enticed and overpowered him, that he had become a laughingstock, and that when he tried to stop speaking God's word it burned like fire shut up in his bones. Even his close friends watched for him to fall. Yet he remembered that the LORD was with him like a mighty warrior, handed his case to God, and sang praise for God's deliverance. Then he sank again and cursed the day he was born, ending with the question of why he had come from the womb only to see trouble and shame.

Study Questions

1. Who was Pashhur, and what did he do to Jeremiah? (20:1-2)

2. What new name did Jeremiah give Pashhur, and what did it mean for him? (20:3-6)

3. What did Jeremiah say God had done to him in verse 7, and how did the people treat him? (20:7-8)

4. What happened when Jeremiah tried to stop speaking God's word? (20:9)

5. What were Jeremiah's close friends doing, and what words did they use? (20:10)

6. What turned Jeremiah from complaint to praise in verses 11-13? (20:11-13; 1:8)

7. What did Jeremiah curse in verses 14-18, and what did he not curse? (20:14-18)

8. Have you ever wanted to quit following God or stop speaking about Him? What kept you going, or what could keep you going now?

9. Jeremiah went from praise to despair in the space of two verses. How can knowing that help you, or someone you love, in a hard season?

10. What would you say to a friend who told you they felt like Jeremiah in verse 18? Who could you point them to for help?

Jeremiah 21: Zedekiah's Question

Scripture

21:1-14 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, saying, "Inquire, please, of the LORD for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is waging war against us. Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all His wonders, and he will go up from us." And Jeremiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Look, I am turning back the weapons of war that ***are*** in your hand, with which you are fighting the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the wall; and I will gather them into the midst of this city. And I, I will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, and in anger and in rage and in great wrath. And I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both mankind and animals; by a great pestilence they will die. And after that," declares the LORD, "I will give Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and those who remain in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and he will strike them with the edge of the sword; he will not have pity on them, and he will not spare, and he will not have compassion."'" And to this people you shall say, "Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. He who remains in this city will die by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence; and he who goes out and falls away to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live, and his life will be to him for plunder. For I have set My face against this city for calamity and not for good,' declares the LORD. 'Into the hand of the king of Babylon it will be given, and he will burn it with fire.'" And to the house of the king of Judah: Hear the word of the LORD, O house of David, thus says the LORD: Judge justice in the morning, and deliver the one robbed from the hand of the oppressor, lest My rage go forth like fire and burn, and ***there be*** no one who quenches ***it***, because of the evil of your deeds. Look, I ***am*** against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain, declares the LORD, you who say, "Who will come down against us? And who will come into our dwelling places?" And I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds, declares the LORD; and I will kindle a fire in its forest, and it will devour all ***that is*** around it.

Preview

The book now jumps forward almost twenty years. Babylon's army has surrounded Jerusalem, and King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, sends two men to Jeremiah to ask him to pray. Perhaps the LORD will do a miracle, as He did in the old days, and the king of Babylon will go away. Jeremiah's answer is the opposite of what the king hoped. God Himself will fight against Jerusalem. The people will die of plague, sword and famine, and Zedekiah will be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar. Then God sets before the people a choice, the way of life and the way of death: stay in the city and die, or go out and surrender to the Babylonians and live. The chapter ends with a word to the royal house of David: do justice, or God's anger will burn like fire.

This chapter shows us a man who wanted God's help without wanting God's word. As we read, we should ask whether we come to God only when we are in trouble, and whether we are ready to hear His answer even when it is not the one we want.

Study

21:1-2 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, saying, "Inquire, please, of the LORD for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is waging war against us. Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all His wonders, and he will go up from us."*

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest."

Chapters 21 to 24 are not in time order with chapter 20. Chapter 21 comes from the last years of Jerusalem. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah, about 597 to 586 B.C. Babylon's army began its final siege of Jerusalem in his ninth year, about 588 B.C. (52:4), and this message most likely comes from early in that siege. It may have been placed right after chapter 20 because both chapters have a man named Pashhur. This Pashhur, the son of Malchiah, is a different man from Pashhur the son of Immer in chapter 20. He later helped throw Jeremiah into the cistern (38:1-6). Zephaniah the priest was more friendly to Jeremiah (29:29; 37:3).

"Inquire, please, of the LORD for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is waging war against us." Zedekiah wanted Jeremiah to pray and to ask God what would happen.

"Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all His wonders, and he will go up from us." Zedekiah was likely thinking of the great miracle in Hezekiah's day. When the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem, Hezekiah sent to Isaiah, Isaiah prayed, and the angel of the LORD struck down the Assyrian army in one night (2 Kings 19:1-7, 35-36). Maybe God would do it again.

But there was a big difference. Hezekiah tore his clothes, humbled himself and trusted God. Zedekiah wanted God's miracle without God's word. He had heard Jeremiah's warnings for years and had not obeyed them (37:2). Many people still pray that way. They want God to get them out of trouble, but they do not want Him to change them.

21:3-5 *And Jeremiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Look, I am turning back the weapons of war that **are** in your hand, with which you are fighting the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the wall; and I will gather them into the midst of this city. And I, I will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, and in anger and in rage and in great wrath.*

Jeremiah did not soften the message for the king. "Look, I am turning back the weapons of war that are in your hand." The weapons Judah's soldiers were using to fight the Babylonians outside the wall would be turned back. The army would be driven back inside the city, and there would be no more fighting outside.

Then the most frightening line of all: "And I, I will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm."

Those words are taken from the exodus. "With a strong hand and with an outstretched arm" God brought Israel out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 4:34; 26:8). God had used His mighty arm to fight for Israel against Pharaoh. Now He would use it to fight against them. Zedekiah hoped God would fight Babylon. Instead, God would fight Jerusalem.

"In anger and in rage and in great wrath." Three words for God's anger, piled together, to show how deep it ran. Judah had provoked Him for generations.

The hardest thing that can happen to anyone is not to have enemies against them. It is to have God against them. And the good news of the gospel is that in Christ, God is for us (Romans 8:31).

21:6-7 *And I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both mankind and animals; by a great pestilence they will die. And after that," declares the LORD, "I will give Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and those who remain in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and he will strike them with the edge of the sword; he will not have pity on them, and he will not spare, and he will not have compassion."'"*

"I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both mankind and animals; by a great pestilence they will die." A pestilence is a deadly plague. In a city under siege, with people packed together, little food and no clean water, disease spreads fast.

"And after that," those left alive from the pestilence, the sword and the famine would be given "into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon." That included "Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants." And Nebuchadnezzar "will not have pity on them, and he will not spare, and he will not have compassion."

This came true exactly. When the city fell, Zedekiah ran for it at night, was caught near Jericho, and was brought to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. There he watched his sons killed, and then his eyes were put out, and he was taken to Babylon in chains (39:4-7; 52:8-11).

21:8-10 *And to this people you shall say, "Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. He who remains in this city will die by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence; and he who goes out and falls away to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live, and his life will be to him for plunder. For I have set My face against this city for calamity and not for good,' declares the LORD. 'Into the hand of the king of Babylon it will be given, and he will burn it with fire.'"*

Now God speaks to the people. "Look, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death."

These words echo Moses. At the end of his life, Moses set before Israel life and death, blessing and curse, and told them to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19). Here God offers a choice again, but it is a strange one.

"He who remains in this city will die by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence; and he who goes out and falls away to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live." To "fall away" means to go over to the enemy, to surrender. The Chaldeans are the Babylonians.

"His life will be to him for plunder." In war, a soldier counted himself lucky to come home with plunder. Those who surrendered would come away with only one prize: their life. It was not much, but it was everything.

Why would God tell His people to surrender to their enemy? Because Babylon was God's tool of judgment, and to resist Babylon was to resist God. "I have set My face against this city for calamity and not for good." The city would be given to the king of Babylon, "and he will burn it with fire."

This message made Jeremiah sound like a traitor. The officials later used these very words to demand his death (38:2-4). But Jeremiah was not against his people. He was trying to save as many of them as he could. Sometimes the truth that saves life sounds like the worst possible news.

There is a lesson in this for us too. The way of life sometimes means giving up what we are clinging to. Jesus said that whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for His sake will find it (Matthew 16:25). Surrender to God is never defeat.

21:11-12 *And to the house of the king of Judah: Hear the word of the LORD, O house of David, thus says the LORD: Judge justice in the morning, and deliver the one robbed from the hand of the oppressor, lest My rage go forth like fire and burn, and* ***there be*** *no one who quenches* ***it****, because of the evil of your deeds.*

Next comes a word "to the house of the king of Judah." This is the royal family, "O house of David." It was not just for Zedekiah but for the whole line of kings, and it leads into the messages of chapter 22.

"Judge justice in the morning." In Israel, the king was the highest judge. People brought their cases to him, and court was held in the morning at the city gate or the palace. To judge "in the morning" means to do it first, promptly, and not let the poor wait.

"Deliver the one robbed from the hand of the oppressor." The king's job was to protect the weak from the strong. God expected His kings to do what He Himself does (Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14).

"Lest My rage go forth like fire and burn, and there be no one who quenches it, because of the evil of your deeds." Injustice was not a small matter to God. A king who let the powerful crush the poor would face God's own fire.

This still matters. Anyone who has authority, in a home, a business, a church or a government, is accountable to God for how they treat the people under them.

21:13-14 *Look, I **am** against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain, declares the LORD, you who say, "Who will come down against us? And who will come into our dwelling places?" And I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds, declares the LORD; and I will kindle a fire in its forest, and it will devour all **that is** around it.*

"Look, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain." This is Jerusalem. The city sat on hills with deep valleys around it, and it felt safe, like a fortress on a rock.

They said, "Who will come down against us? And who will come into our dwelling places?" They thought their walls and hills made them safe. Even with the Babylonian army at the gates, they still believed no one could get in.

But no wall can stand when God is against it. "I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds." God's judgment would match what they had done. "I will kindle a fire in its forest, and it will devour all that is around it." The "forest" may be the palace and the great buildings of Jerusalem, built with so much cedar that the royal palace was called the House of the Forest of Lebanon (1 Kings 7:2). When Jerusalem fell, the Babylonians burned the king's house and every great house in the city (52:13).

False security was the sin of Jerusalem from start to finish. They trusted the temple (7:4). They trusted their walls. They trusted that God would do a miracle without their repentance. Where is our security? In Christ alone, the rock that does not fall (Matthew 7:24-25).

Summary

During the final siege of Jerusalem, King Zedekiah sent Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the priest to ask Jeremiah to inquire of the LORD, hoping God would do a wonder and send Nebuchadnezzar away. Jeremiah answered that God would turn back Judah's weapons and fight against the city Himself, with the outstretched hand and strong arm that once fought for Israel at the exodus. A great plague would strike the city, and Zedekiah and the survivors would be given to Nebuchadnezzar, who would show no pity. God set before the people the way of life and the way of death: whoever stayed in the city would die, but whoever surrendered to the Chaldeans would live. God told the house of David to judge justly every morning and rescue the oppressed, or His anger would burn like fire. He was against Jerusalem, which thought no one could come against it, and He would kindle a fire that would devour it.

Study Questions

1. Who did Zedekiah send to Jeremiah, and what did he hope God would do? (21:1-2)

2. What earlier miracle might Zedekiah have been thinking of, and how was Hezekiah's attitude different from his? (21:2; 2 Kings 19:1-7)

3. What did God say He would do to Judah's weapons and to the city? (21:4-5)

4. Where do the words "outstretched hand" and "strong arm" come from, and why is it so serious that God uses them here? (21:5; Deuteronomy 26:8)

5. What was the way of life and the way of death that God set before the people? (21:8-9)

6. What did God command the house of David to do "in the morning"? (21:12)

7. What did the people of Jerusalem believe about their city, and what did God say He would do? (21:13-14)

8. Have you ever prayed for God to get you out of trouble while not wanting Him to change you? What would it look like to come to Him differently?

9. Surrender to Babylon was the way of life for Judah. What might God be asking you to surrender to Him so that you can truly live? (Matthew 16:25)

10. If you have authority over others at home, at work or in church, how are you using it to protect the weak? Is there anyone waiting on you for justice?

Jeremiah 22: Words to the Kings of Judah

Scripture

22:1-9 Thus said the LORD: "Go down ***to*** the house of the king of Judah, and you shall speak there this word, and you shall say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who come in through these gates. Thus says the LORD: "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the hand of the oppressor. And the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow do not maltreat; do not treat ***them*** violently; and innocent blood do not shed in this place. For if you indeed do this thing, and kings sitting for David on his throne will come in through the gates of this house, riding in chariots and on horses, he and his servants and his people. And if you will not listen to these words, by Myself I swear," declares the LORD, "that this house will become a ruin."'" For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah: "You ***are*** Gilead to Me, the top of Lebanon; surely I will make you a wilderness, cities ***that*** are not inhabited. And I will consecrate destroyers against you, each ***with*** his weapons, and they will cut down the choicest of your cedars, and they will cast ***them*** on the fire. And many nations will pass by this city, and they will say, each to his neighbor, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this great city?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God, and they bowed down to other gods and served them.'"

22:10-19 Do not weep for the dead, and do not show sympathy to him; indeed weep for the one who goes away, for he will not return again and see the land of his kindred. For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, who was reigning in place of Josiah his father, who went out from this place: "He will not return there again; for in the place where they have taken him into exile, there he will die, and this land he will not see again. Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness, and his upper rooms without justice; he makes his neighbor work for nothing, and his wages he does not give to him; who says, 'I will build for myself a house of ***great*** dimensions and spacious upper rooms,' and he cuts out for himself its windows, and ***it is*** paneled with cedar and painted with vermilion. Do you reign because you are competing in cedar? Your father, did he not eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well for him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not that the knowledge of Me?" declares the LORD. "For your eyes and your heart ***are on*** nothing except on your unjust gain, and on the blood of the innocent, to shed ***it***, and on oppression and on extortion, to do ***it***." Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah: "They will not mourn for him, 'Alas, my brother!' and 'Alas, sister!' They will not mourn for him, 'Alas, lord!' and 'Alas, his splendor!' ***With*** the burial of a donkey he will be buried, dragged and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

22:20-30 Go up ***to*** Lebanon and cry out, and in Bashan give forth your voice, and cry out from Abarim, for all your lovers have been broken. I spoke to you in your prosperity; you said, 'I will not listen.' This ***has been*** your way from your youth, that you have not listened to My voice. All your shepherds the wind will shepherd, and your lovers will go into captivity; for then you will be ashamed, and you will be humiliated because of all your wickedness. O you who dwell in Lebanon, nested among the cedars, how you will groan when labor pains come to you, anguish

like ***a woman*** giving birth!" "***As*** I live," declares the LORD, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, were a signet ring on My right hand, yet from there I would pull you off. And I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of those whom you dread, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will hurl you and your mother who bore you to another land, where you were not born, and there you will die. And to the land to which they lift up their soul to return, there they will not return." ***Is*** this man Coniah a despised, smashed pot, or a vessel in which there is no pleasure? Why have they been hurled, he and his offspring, and thrown to the land which they did not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the LORD: "Write this man ***down as*** childless, a man ***who*** will not prosper in his days; for no man from his offspring will prosper, sitting on the throne of David and ruling again over Judah."

Preview

God sends Jeremiah down to the king's palace with a plain message for the house of David: do justice, protect the weak, and the line of David will go on, but refuse, and this palace will become a ruin. Then come three short messages about three kings, the sons and grandson of good King Josiah. Shallum, also called Jehoahaz, was taken to Egypt and would never come back. Jehoiakim built himself a grand palace with forced labor, and he would be buried like a donkey. Coniah, also called Jehoiachin, would be pulled off like a ring from God's hand, thrown into a foreign land, and written down as if he were childless, for none of his descendants would sit on David's throne.

This chapter shows what God expects of those who rule, and what happens when leaders use their power for themselves. It also raises a question that reaches all the way to the birth of Jesus: if no son of Coniah could sit on David's throne, how could Jesus be the Son of David? As we read, we will see how carefully God kept His word.

Study

22:1-5 *Thus said the LORD: "Go down **to** the house of the king of Judah, and you shall speak there this word, and you shall say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who come in through these gates. Thus says the LORD: "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the hand of the oppressor. And the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow do not maltreat; do not treat **them** violently; and innocent blood do not shed in this place. For if you indeed do this thing, and kings sitting for David on his throne will come in through the gates of this house, riding in chariots and on horses, he and his servants and his people. And if you will not listen to these words, by Myself I swear," declares the LORD, "that this house will become a ruin."'"*

"Go down to the house of the king of Judah." The palace stood just below the temple on the hill of Jerusalem, so Jeremiah went "down" to it. The message was for the "king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David," and for his servants and people.

"Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the hand of the oppressor." This is the same call as 21:12. God names the people kings most often ignored: "the

sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow." A sojourner was a foreigner living in Israel without family land. These three had no one to defend them. "And innocent blood do not shed in this place."

If the king obeyed, "kings sitting for David on his throne will come in through the gates of this house." The line of David would go on in Jerusalem.

"And if you will not listen to these words, by Myself I swear," declares the LORD, "that this house will become a ruin." When God swears an oath, there is no one greater to swear by, so He swears by Himself (Hebrews 6:13). The palace would fall.

The message was not new. It was what God had always asked of kings (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Power is given to protect, not to take.

22:6-9 *For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah: "You **are** Gilead to Me, the top of Lebanon; surely I will make you a wilderness, cities **that** are not inhabited. And I will consecrate destroyers against you, each **with** his weapons, and they will cut down the choicest of your cedars, and they will cast **them** on the fire. And many nations will pass by this city, and they will say, each to his neighbor, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this great city?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God, and they bowed down to other gods and served them.'"*

"You are Gilead to Me, the top of Lebanon." Gilead, east of the Jordan, and the top of Mount Lebanon were known for their tall forests. The palace was built with so much cedar that it was like a forest (1 Kings 7:2). God valued it, but He would still "make you a wilderness."

"I will consecrate destroyers against you." To "consecrate" means to set apart for a holy purpose. God would set apart the Babylonian army for His work of judgment. They would "cut down the choicest of your cedars, and they will cast them on the fire." The cedar beams of the palace would burn (52:13).

Then the nations passing by would ask, "Why has the LORD done thus to this great city?" And the answer would be: "Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God, and they bowed down to other gods and served them." Moses had said the nations would ask this same question if Israel broke the covenant (Deuteronomy 29:24-26). Even the pagan world would understand why Jerusalem fell.

22:10-12 *Do not weep for the dead, and do not show sympathy to him; indeed weep for the one who goes away, for he will not return again and see the land of his kindred. For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, who was reigning in place of Josiah his father, who went out from this place: "He will not return there again; for in the place where they have taken him into exile, there he will die, and this land he will not see again.*

"Do not weep for the dead." The dead king is Josiah, killed in battle at Megiddo in 609 B.C. (2 Kings 23:29-30). The nation had mourned him deeply (2 Chronicles 35:24-25). God says, do not weep for him. He is at rest.

"Indeed weep for the one who goes away, for he will not return again." That is "Shallum the son of Josiah." Shallum was his personal name. As king he was called Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:30-34; 1 Chronicles 3:15). The people made him king after Josiah died, but after only three months, Pharaoh Neco took him away to Egypt.

"In the place where they have taken him into exile, there he will die, and this land he will not see again." So it happened (2 Kings 23:34). Josiah died with honor and was buried among his fathers. His son lived on, but as a prisoner in a foreign land. That was the sadder end.

22:13-14 *Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness, and his upper rooms without justice; he makes his neighbor work for nothing, and his wages he does not give to him; who says, 'I will build for myself a house of* ***great*** *dimensions and spacious upper rooms,' and he cuts out for himself its windows, and* ***it is*** *paneled with cedar and painted with vermilion.*

"Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness, and his upper rooms without justice."

Verse 18 tells us who this is: Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, king about 609 to 598 B.C. While Judah was paying heavy tribute to Egypt (2 Kings 23:35), Jehoiakim built himself a new palace. "He makes his neighbor work for nothing, and his wages he does not give to him." He used forced labor and did not pay his workers. The Law said to pay a hired man his wages the same day (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15). James warns rich men that the wages they held back cry out to God (James 5:4).

He said, "I will build for myself a house of great dimensions and spacious upper rooms." It had big windows, walls "paneled with cedar and painted with vermilion," a bright red paint. It was beautiful, and it was built on the backs of the poor.

22:15-17 *Do you reign because you are competing in cedar? Your father, did he not eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well for him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not that the knowledge of Me?" declares the LORD. "For your eyes and your heart* ***are on*** *nothing except on your unjust gain, and on the blood of the innocent, to shed* ***it****, and on oppression and on extortion, to do* ***it****."*

"Do you reign because you are competing in cedar?" Does having the biggest house make you a king?

Then God points him to his father. "Your father, did he not eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well for him." Josiah enjoyed the good things of life. God was not against that. But Josiah also did what was right. "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well."

Now comes one of the most important lines in Jeremiah: "Is not that the knowledge of Me?" declares the LORD.

What does it mean to know God? It is not only knowing facts about Him. It is living the way He lives, caring for the people He cares for. Josiah knew God, and it showed in how he treated the poor. Jeremiah said the same thing in 9:24: the LORD delights in steadfast love, justice and

righteousness. John says that whoever says he knows God and does not keep His commandments is a liar (1 John 2:3-4). Real knowledge of God changes how we treat people who cannot pay us back.

But Jehoiakim's "eyes and your heart are on nothing except on your unjust gain, and on the blood of the innocent." He killed the prophet Uriah for preaching what Jeremiah preached (26:20-23). His life was about getting, not giving.

22:18-19 *Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah: "They will not mourn for him, 'Alas, my brother!' and 'Alas, sister!' They will not mourn for him, 'Alas, lord!' and 'Alas, his splendor!' **With** the burial of a donkey he will be buried, dragged and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.*

"They will not mourn for him." The people would not cry "Alas, my brother!" or "Alas, lord!" over Jehoiakim. No one would miss him.

"With the burial of a donkey he will be buried, dragged and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem." A dead donkey was not buried. It was dragged outside the city and left. That was the end God announced for a king who lived for luxury.

2 Kings 24:6 says that Jehoiakim "lay down with his fathers," a phrase that often just means he died. Scripture does not tell us exactly how this word was fulfilled. He died about 598 B.C., as Babylon's army was coming against Jerusalem. Many think his body was thrown out during the siege or dug up and dishonored later. Jeremiah 36:30 repeats that his body would be thrown out to the heat by day and the frost by night. I take God at His word that it happened as He said.

22:20-23 *Go up **to** Lebanon and cry out, and in Bashan give forth your voice, and cry out from Abarim, for all your lovers have been broken. I spoke to you in your prosperity; you said, 'I will not listen.' This **has been** your way from your youth, that you have not listened to My voice. All your shepherds the wind will shepherd, and your lovers will go into captivity; for then you will be ashamed, and you will be humiliated because of all your wickedness. O you who dwell in Lebanon, nested among the cedars, how you will groan when labor pains come to you, anguish like **a woman** giving birth!"*

Now God speaks to the people of Jerusalem as a woman. "Go up to Lebanon and cry out, and in Bashan give forth your voice, and cry out from Abarim." Lebanon was in the north, Bashan in the northeast, and Abarim the mountains of Moab in the southeast. From every high place, she would cry. "For all your lovers have been broken." Her "lovers" were the allies she had trusted instead of God, Egypt and the small nations around her.

"I spoke to you in your prosperity." Judah answered, "I will not listen." When things were good, Judah would not hear God. "This has been your way from your youth." Prosperity is often more dangerous to faith than trouble.

"All your shepherds the wind will shepherd." The shepherds are the kings and leaders. The wind would blow them away like chaff.

"O you who dwell in Lebanon, nested among the cedars." Jerusalem, with its cedar palaces, felt safe like a bird in a high nest. But "how you will groan when labor pains come to you." Pain would come on her as suddenly as birth pains on a woman.

22:24-27 *"**As** I live," declares the LORD, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, were a signet ring on My right hand, yet from there I would pull you off. And I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of those whom you dread, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will hurl you and your mother who bore you to another land, where you were not born, and there you will die. And to the land to which they lift up their soul to return, there they will not return."*

"As I live," declares the LORD, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, were a signet ring on My right hand, yet from there I would pull you off."

Coniah is a short form of Jeconiah. As king he was called Jehoiachin. He reigned only three months in 597 B.C. before Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8-15).

A signet ring carried a king's seal. It was pressed into clay or wax to sign official papers. It was one of the most valuable things a king owned and never left his hand. God says, even if Coniah were that precious to Me, I would pull him off and throw him away.

"I will hurl you and your mother who bore you to another land." His mother, Nehushta, went with him into exile (2 Kings 24:12, 15; Jeremiah 13:18). "There you will die." He was held in Babylon for thirty-seven years. He was later released from prison and given a place at the king's table, but he never came home (52:31-34).

There is a beautiful turn later in Scripture. God took the signet ring off Coniah's hand. But after the exile, God said to Coniah's grandson Zerubbabel, the governor who led the return and rebuilt the temple, that He would make him like a signet ring, for God had chosen him (Haggai 2:23). God's judgment on Coniah was real, but God had not given up on David's line.

22:28-30 ***Is** this man Coniah a despised, smashed pot, or a vessel in which there is no pleasure? Why have they been hurled, he and his offspring, and thrown to the land which they did not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the LORD: "Write this man **down as** childless, a man **who** will not prosper in his days; for no man from his offspring will prosper, sitting on the throne of David and ruling again over Judah."*

"Is this man Coniah a despised, smashed pot, or a vessel in which there is no pleasure?" The people may have hoped Coniah would come back. Jeremiah answers with the picture of the broken pot from chapter 19. He is a pot no one wants.

"O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD!" Three times God calls on the land to listen. What follows is that important.

"Write this man down as childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for no man from his offspring will prosper, sitting on the throne of David and ruling again over Judah."

Coniah did have children. 1 Chronicles 3:17-18 lists seven sons. "Childless" here means childless as far as the throne goes. In the royal records, it would be as if he had no heirs. None of his sons would ever rule as king over Judah. And none did. His uncle Zedekiah reigned after him, and then the kingdom ended. Even Zerubbabel, his grandson, was a governor under Persia, not a king.

Now here is the question. God promised David that his throne would last forever (2 Samuel 7:16). Jeremiah himself says David will never lack a man to sit on the throne (33:17). Yet God cut off the royal line through Coniah. How can both be true?

The answer is in the two family lines of Jesus in the Gospels. Matthew gives the line of Joseph, Jesus' legal father. It runs from David through Solomon, down the line of the kings, and it includes "Jeconiah" (Matthew 1:6-7, 11-12). That gave Jesus the legal right to the throne through Joseph. But Jesus was not Joseph's physical son. He was born of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-25). So the curse on Coniah's offspring did not fall on Him.

Luke gives the other line, which many Bible teachers understand to be Mary's family line. It runs back to David, not through Solomon and the kings, but through another son of David, Nathan (Luke 3:31). Through Mary, Jesus is truly David's physical descendant, "the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3), without coming from Coniah at all.

Do you see how carefully God worked? Jesus had the legal right through Joseph and the blood line through Mary. The curse on Coniah stood, and the promise to David stood. Only the virgin birth could make both true. Five hundred years before Jesus was born, God had already prepared the way. Jesus will sit on David's throne and reign over the house of Jacob forever, just as the angel told Mary (Luke 1:32-33).

Summary

God sent Jeremiah to the king's palace to tell the house of David to do justice, protect the foreigner, the orphan and the widow, and shed no innocent blood, or God swore by Himself that the palace would become a ruin and be burned like a forest of cedar. The nations would see it and know it was because Judah forsook the covenant. God said not to weep for Josiah, who died, but for Shallum, also called Jehoahaz, who was taken to Egypt and would die there. He pronounced woe on Jehoiakim, who built a luxurious cedar palace with unpaid labor, unlike his father Josiah, who did justice for the poor, which is what it means to know the LORD. Jehoiakim would be buried like a donkey. Jerusalem's allies would be broken and her shepherds blown away. Coniah, also called Jehoiachin, would be pulled off like a signet ring and thrown into a foreign land with his mother to die there, and God told the land to write him down as childless, for none of his offspring would sit on David's throne. Yet God kept His promise to David through Jesus, the legal heir through Joseph and the true son of David through Mary.

Study Questions

1. What did God tell the king of Judah to do in verse 3, and who were the people he was to protect? (22:3)

2. What would the nations say when they saw Jerusalem in ruins? (22:8-9)

3. Who was Shallum, and why did God say to weep for him rather than for the dead king? (22:10-12)

4. How did Jehoiakim build his palace, and how was he different from his father Josiah? (22:13-17)

5. According to verse 16, what does it mean to know the LORD? (22:16; 9:24)

6. What does God say about Coniah and the signet ring, and how did God later use the same picture for Zerubbabel? (22:24; Haggai 2:23)

7. What does God mean by writing Coniah down as childless? How do the family lines in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show that God kept both this word and His promise to David? (22:30; Matthew 1:11-12; Luke 3:31)

8. God says that caring for the poor and needy is part of knowing Him. Who are the poor and needy around you, and how does your life show that you know God?

9. Judah would not listen in its prosperity (22:21). Do you listen to God more in good times or in hard times? Why do you think that is?

10. God worked out the line of Jesus hundreds of years ahead. How does that encourage you to trust Him with the parts of your life you cannot yet understand?

Jeremiah 23: The Righteous Branch and the False Prophets

Scripture

23:1-8 "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock of My pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd My people: "You have scattered My flock, and you have banished them, and you have not visited them. Look, I am about to visit on you the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD. "And I, I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands where I have banished them, and I will bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful, and they will multiply. And I will raise up shepherds over them, and they will shepherd them; and they will not be afraid again, and they will not be dismayed, and they will not be missing," declares the LORD. "Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign ***as*** king, and He will act prudently, and He will do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell in security; and this ***is*** His name ***by*** which one will call Him: 'The LORD Our Righteousness.' Therefore look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and they will no longer say, '***As*** the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, '***As*** the LORD lives, who brought up and who brought in the offspring of the house of Israel from a land northward and from all the lands where I had banished them'; and they will dwell on their own ground."

23:9-22 Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones have become weak; I have become like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD and because of the words of His holiness. For the land is full of adulterers; for because of a curse the land mourns; the pastures of the wilderness have dried up. And their course has become evil, and their might ***is*** not right. "For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness," declares the LORD. "Therefore their way will be to them like slippery places in the darkness; they will be pushed down, and they will fall in it; for I will bring calamity on them, the year of their punishment," declares the LORD. "And among the prophets of Samaria I saw offensiveness: they prophesied by Baal, and they caused My people Israel to err. And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: committing adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that they have not turned back, each from his evil. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah." Therefore thus says the LORD of armies concerning the prophets: "Look, I am about to make them eat wormwood, and I will make them drink water of poison; for from the prophets of Jerusalem profaneness has gone out to all the land." Thus says the LORD of armies: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has spoken: "You will have peace"'; and ***to*** everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart they have said, 'Calamity will not come on you.' For who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he may see and hear His word? Who has paid attention to His word and listened? Look, the storm of the LORD! Rage has gone out, and a whirling storm; it will whirl on the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has done and

until He has carried out the purposes of His heart. At the end of the days you will understand it ***with*** understanding. I did not send the prophets, and they, they ran; I did not speak to them, and they, they prophesied. And if they had stood in My council, then they would have made My people hear My words, and they would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.

23:23-40 Am I a God from near," declares the LORD, "and not a God from afar? Or can anyone hide himself in hiding places, and I not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD. "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsehood in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' Until when? Is there ***this*** in the heart of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, and the prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who plan to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they recount, each to his neighbor, just as their fathers forgot My name for Baal? The prophet with whom ***is*** a dream, let him recount a dream; and ***he*** with whom ***is*** My word, let him speak My word ***in*** truth. What ***has*** the straw ***to do*** with the grain?" declares the LORD. "Is not My word thus, like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer ***that*** shatters rock? Therefore look, I ***am*** against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who steal My words, each from his neighbor. Look, I ***am*** against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who take their tongue and declare a declaration. Look, I ***am*** against those who prophesy dreams of falsehood," declares the LORD, "and they recount them, and they cause My people to err by their falsehoods and by their recklessness; and I, I did not send them, and I did not command them, and they surely do not benefit this people," declares the LORD. "And if this people or the prophet or a priest asks you, saying, 'What ***is*** the burden of the LORD?' and you shall say to them, 'What burden? And I will abandon you,' declares the LORD. And the prophet and the priest and the people who says, 'The burden of the LORD,' and I will punish that man and his house. Thus you shall say, each to his neighbor and each to his brother: 'What has the LORD answered?' and 'What has the LORD spoken?' And the burden of the LORD you shall not remember again, for the burden will be to each man his own word, and you have overturned the words of the living God, the LORD of armies, our God. Thus you shall say to the prophet: 'What has the LORD answered you?' and 'What has the LORD spoken?' And if you say, 'The burden of the LORD,' therefore thus says the LORD: 'Because you have said this word, "The burden of the LORD," and I sent to you, saying, "You shall not say, 'The burden of the LORD,'" therefore look, I, I will surely forget you, and I will abandon you and the city which I gave to you and to your fathers, away from My face. And I will put on you an everlasting reproach and an everlasting shame which will not be forgotten.'"

Preview

God pronounces woe on the shepherds who scattered His flock. Then He makes one of the greatest promises in the Old Testament. He will gather His sheep from every land and raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will do justice, whose name will be "The LORD Our Righteousness." The rest of the chapter turns to the false prophets, who live wicked lives, tell sinners that all will be well, and pass off their own dreams as God's word. God says His word is like fire and like a hammer that shatters rock.

This chapter sets the true King beside the false shepherds, and the true word beside the false. As we read, we should rejoice in Jesus Christ, the righteous Branch, and we should test every voice that claims to speak for God by the Word God has given.

Study

23:1-2 *"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock of My pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd My people: "You have scattered My flock, and you have banished them, and you have not visited them. Look, I am about to visit on you the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD.*

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock of My pasture!" In the Bible, kings and leaders are often called shepherds. Notice whose flock it is: "the flock of My pasture." The sheep never belonged to the kings. They belonged to God.

"You have scattered My flock, and you have banished them, and you have not visited them." To "visit" here means to look after, to care for. They did not care for the sheep.

So God says, "Look, I am about to visit on you the evil of your deeds." It is a play on the same word. You did not visit My sheep with care, so I will visit you with judgment. Ezekiel 34 says the same at more length.

23:3-4 *"And I, I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands where I have banished them, and I will bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful, and they will multiply. And I will raise up shepherds over them, and they will shepherd them; and they will not be afraid again, and they will not be dismayed, and they will not be missing," declares the LORD.*

"And I, I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands where I have banished them." The remnant is the part of God's people who survive the judgment. The shepherds scattered them, but God takes the blame on Himself: "where I have banished them." The gathering will be His work too.

"And I will raise up shepherds over them, and they will shepherd them; and they will not be afraid again." After the return from Babylon, God did raise up good leaders such as Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But "they will not be afraid again" and "from all the lands" reach beyond that. The full keeping of this promise waits for the day when Christ reigns and Israel is gathered from every nation, as the next verses show.

23:5 *"Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign **as** king, and He will act prudently, and He will do justice and righteousness in the land.*

"Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and I will raise up for David a righteous Branch."

This is one of the great promises of the Messiah, the Anointed One, the King God promised from David's line. In Greek the same word is Christ.

Why a Branch? After chapter 22, David's family tree looked like a stump. Isaiah had said that a shoot would come out from the stump of Jesse, David's father (Isaiah 11:1). Zechariah later uses "the Branch" as a name for the Messiah (Zechariah 3:8; 6:12).

He is "a righteous Branch." That is the opposite of the kings we just read about. Jehoiakim built his house "without righteousness" (22:13). This King will be righteous through and through.

"And He will reign as king," a real King on David's throne. "He will act prudently," that is, wisely and with success, the same word Isaiah 52:13 uses of the Servant of the LORD.

"And He will do justice and righteousness in the land." This is exactly what God asked of David's sons in 22:3, and what they refused to do. The Branch will do it.

Who is this King? The New Testament answers plainly. Jesus is the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). The angel told Mary that God would give Him the throne of David His father, and that of His kingdom there would be no end (Luke 1:32-33).

23:6 *In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell in security; and this **is** His name **by** which one will call Him: 'The LORD Our Righteousness.'*

"In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell in security."

Notice both names, Judah and Israel. The two kingdoms had been split since about 930 B.C. In the days of the Branch, both will be saved and both will live in safety. Ezekiel 37:15-22 pictures the two sticks of Judah and Israel joined as one nation under one King.

Has that happened yet? Not fully. At His first coming Jesus was rejected and crucified, and He did not set up His kingdom then. But He is coming again. After the Tribulation, He will return in glory, and "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). He will reign on the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6), and Israel will at last "dwell in security." I believe this means what it says: a real King over a real, gathered Israel in their own land, not a promise taken from Israel and given to the church. Gentile believers share in the blessing of Israel's Messiah (Romans 11:17-18), but Israel's promises remain Israel's.

"And this is His name by which one will call Him." That name is "The LORD Our Righteousness."

In Hebrew this is YHWH Tsidqenu. The King from David's line is called by God's own name, "The LORD." Isaiah said the child to be born would be called Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6). Only God the Son, who became a man, can be both David's son and David's Lord (Matthew 22:41-45).

There may be a wordplay here too. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, had a name that means the LORD is my righteousness. But he was not righteous at all. God says, the true King will be what Zedekiah's name only claimed.

And what does "Our Righteousness" mean? Righteousness is being right with God, meeting His holy standard. None of us can do that on our own (Romans 3:10, 23). Judah could not make itself

right (17:9). So God promises a King who will not only be righteous Himself, but will be our righteousness. He gives His righteousness to those who trust Him.

That is what the gospel says. Paul writes that Christ Jesus became to us righteousness from God (1 Corinthians 1:30). God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are made right with God by faith in Christ, not by our own goodness (Philippians 3:9).

So this name is a promise for Israel in the future kingdom, and it is good news for every believer now. If you trust Jesus, your righteousness before God is not your record. It is His. Can you say, with Israel one day, "The LORD Our Righteousness"?

23:7-8 *Therefore look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and they will no longer say, '**As** the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, '**As** the LORD lives, who brought up and who brought in the offspring of the house of Israel from a land northward and from all the lands where I had banished them'; and they will dwell on their own ground."*

"They will no longer say," God says, "As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt." This repeats the promise of 16:14-15. A day will come when Israel will swear by the God "who brought up and who brought in the offspring of the house of Israel from a land northward and from all the lands where I had banished them."

Here it comes right after the promise of the righteous Branch. The great regathering of Israel and the reign of the Messiah belong together. "And they will dwell on their own ground." That is a promise about the land God gave Abraham, and I believe God will keep it to the letter.

23:9-10 *Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones have become weak; I have become like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD and because of the words of His holiness. For the land is full of adulterers; for because of a curse the land mourns; the pastures of the wilderness have dried up. And their course has become evil, and their might **is** not right.*

Now the chapter turns to the false prophets. "Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones have become weak." Jeremiah is crushed. "I have become like a drunken man." He staggers, not from wine, but "because of the LORD and because of the words of His holiness."

"For the land is full of adulterers." That was true in marriage and in faithfulness to God. "Because of a curse the land mourns; the pastures of the wilderness have dried up." The drought of chapter 14 was the covenant curse at work.

23:11-12 *"For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness," declares the LORD. "Therefore their way will be to them like slippery places in the darkness; they will be pushed down, and they will fall in it; for I will bring calamity on them, the year of their punishment," declares the LORD.*

"For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their wickedness." The very men who should have led people to God were defiled, and they brought their sin right into the temple.

"Therefore their way will be to them like slippery places in the darkness." "They will be pushed down, and they will fall in it." Their fall would come in "the year of their punishment."

23:13-15 *"And among the prophets of Samaria I saw offensiveness: they prophesied by Baal, and they caused My people Israel to err. And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: committing adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that they have not turned back, each from his evil. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah." Therefore thus says the LORD of armies concerning the prophets: "Look, I am about to make them eat wormwood, and I will make them drink water of poison; for from the prophets of Jerusalem profaneness has gone out to all the land."*

God compares the prophets of the north and the south. "Among the prophets of Samaria I saw offensiveness: they prophesied by Baal." The northern prophets openly served Baal.

But "among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: committing adultery and walking in falsehood." Jerusalem's prophets claimed to speak for the LORD, and they lived in sin. That was worse, because they did it in God's name.

"They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that they have not turned back." By telling sinners that all was well, they made it easier for them to keep sinning. "All of them have become to Me like Sodom." (Genesis 19).

So God would "make them eat wormwood," a bitter plant, "and I will make them drink water of poison." Why? "For from the prophets of Jerusalem profaneness has gone out to all the land." Their poison had spread everywhere, and now they would drink it themselves.

23:16-17 *Thus says the LORD of armies: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has spoken: "You will have peace"'; and* ***to*** *everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart they have said, 'Calamity will not come on you.'*

"Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you," filling people with empty hopes.

"They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD." That is the test of a true prophet. Does the message come from God's mouth, or from the speaker's own heart?

And what did they say? "The LORD has spoken: You will have peace." And to those living in stubborn sin they said, "Calamity will not come on you." Paul warned that a time would come when people would not put up with sound teaching but would gather teachers to tickle their ears (2 Timothy 4:3-4). A message that promises peace without repentance is not from God.

23:18-20 *For who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he may see and hear His word? Who has paid attention to His word and listened? Look, the storm of the LORD! Rage has gone out, and a whirling storm; it will whirl on the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has done and until He has carried out the purposes of His heart. At the end of the days you will understand it **with** understanding.*

"For who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he may see and hear His word?" The picture is God's throne room, where He makes His plans (1 Kings 22:19). The false prophets had never been there.

"Look, the storm of the LORD! Rage has gone out, and a whirling storm." The false prophets promised peace. God promised a storm.

"At the end of the days you will understand it with understanding." The people did not understand then. But looking back, after the fall of Jerusalem, they would see that Jeremiah had been right.

23:21-22 *I did not send the prophets, and they, they ran; I did not speak to them, and they, they prophesied. And if they had stood in My council, then they would have made My people hear My words, and they would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.*

"I did not send the prophets, and they, they ran." "I did not speak to them, and they, they prophesied."

"And if they had stood in My council, then they would have made My people hear My words, and they would have turned them back from their evil way." Here is another test. A true word from God calls people away from sin. A false word leaves them comfortable in it.

That is a good test for anything we hear today. Does it agree with God's Word and call me to turn from sin and follow Christ, or does it only tell me what I want to hear?

23:23-24 *Am I a God from near," declares the LORD, "and not a God from afar? Or can anyone hide himself in hiding places, and I not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.*

"Am I a God from near," declares the LORD, "and not a God from afar?" The false prophets treated God like a small local god, close by and easy to manage. But God is far above us, and nothing escapes Him.

"Or can anyone hide himself in hiding places, and I not see him?" "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" God is everywhere present. There is no place to hide from Him (Psalm 139:7-12).

23:25-28 *"I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsehood in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' Until when? Is there **this** in the heart of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, and the prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who plan to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they recount, each to his neighbor, just as their fathers forgot My name for Baal? The prophet with whom **is** a dream, let him recount a dream; and **he** with whom **is** My word, let him speak My word **in** truth. What **has** the straw **to do** with the grain?" declares the LORD.*

"I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsehood in My name." They kept saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" God did speak in dreams at times (Numbers 12:6). But these men made up their dreams, or took their own thoughts and called them visions. They were "the prophets of the deceit of their own heart."

Their goal? To "make My people forget My name by their dreams," "just as their fathers forgot My name for Baal." False teaching does not always deny God openly. Sometimes it just buries His name.

"The prophet with whom is a dream, let him recount a dream; and he with whom is My word, let him speak My word in truth." Let each be seen for what it is. "What has the straw to do with the grain?" Straw looks like grain, but it cannot feed anyone. Only God's word nourishes.

23:29 *"Is not My word thus, like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer **that** shatters rock?*

"Is not My word thus, like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that shatters rock?"

Here are two pictures of the power of God's Word. Like fire, it burns away what is false. Jeremiah knew that fire in his own bones (20:9). Like a hammer, it breaks hard hearts that nothing else can break. God's Word is strong and it does its work (Isaiah 55:11; Hebrews 4:12).

Opinions and feelings cannot change a heart. The Word of God can.

23:30-32 *Therefore look, I **am** against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who steal My words, each from his neighbor. Look, I **am** against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who take their tongue and declare a declaration. Look, I **am** against those who prophesy dreams of falsehood," declares the LORD, "and they recount them, and they cause My people to err by their falsehoods and by their recklessness; and I, I did not send them, and I did not command them, and they surely do not benefit this people," declares the LORD.*

Three times God says, "Look, I am against the prophets." He is against those "who steal My words, each from his neighbor," borrowing phrases to sound real. He is against those "who take their tongue and declare a declaration," who use the solemn words "declares the LORD" for their own ideas. And He is against "those who prophesy dreams of falsehood," who "cause My people to err by their falsehoods and by their recklessness."

23:33-40 *"And if this people or the prophet or a priest asks you, saying, 'What **is** the burden of the LORD?' and you shall say to them, 'What burden? And I will abandon you,' declares the LORD. And the prophet and the priest and the people who says, 'The burden of the LORD,' and I will punish that man and his house. Thus you shall say, each to his neighbor and each to his brother: 'What has the LORD answered?' and 'What has the LORD spoken?' And the burden of the LORD you shall not remember again, for the burden will be to each man his own word, and you have overturned the words of the living God, the LORD of armies, our God. Thus you shall say to the prophet: 'What has the LORD answered you?' and 'What has the LORD spoken?' And if you say, 'The burden of the LORD,' therefore thus says the LORD: 'Because you have said this word, "The burden of the LORD," and I sent to you, saying, "You shall not say, 'The burden of the LORD,'" therefore look, I, I will surely forget you, and I will abandon you and the city which I gave to you and to your fathers, away from My face. And I will put on you an everlasting reproach and an everlasting shame which will not be forgotten.'"*

The chapter ends with a wordplay. The Hebrew word massa means a burden, a heavy load. It was also used for a prophet's message, an oracle, a heavy word from God (Isaiah 13:1).

The people had turned this into a joke. They would ask Jeremiah, "What is the burden of the LORD?" mocking him. God gives Jeremiah the answer: "What burden? And I will abandon you." You are the burden, and I will throw you off.

So God forbade the use of the phrase. Instead, they were to ask simply, "What has the LORD answered?" and "What has the LORD spoken?" They had worn out the words of God with mockery, and "you have overturned the words of the living God."

If they kept saying it, God would "surely forget you," abandon the city, and "put on you an everlasting reproach and an everlasting shame which will not be forgotten."

The lesson for us is simple. We must not treat God's Word lightly or turn holy things into jokes. When we come to Scripture, the right question is the humble one: what has the LORD spoken?

Summary

God pronounced woe on the shepherds who scattered His flock and promised to gather the remnant Himself from all the lands. He promised to raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who would do justice, in whose days Judah would be saved and Israel live in safety, and whose name would be "The LORD Our Righteousness." That King is Jesus Christ. Then Jeremiah, heartbroken, exposed the false prophets of Jerusalem, who lived in adultery and lies and promised peace to those who despised God. God had not sent them. They told their own dreams and stole words from one another, but God's word is like fire and a hammer. Because the people mocked the "burden of the LORD," God would cast them off with an everlasting shame.

Study Questions

1. Who are the shepherds in verses 1-2, and what had they done to God's flock? (23:1-2)

2. What did God promise to do for the remnant of His flock? (23:3-4)

3. What four things does verse 5 say about the righteous Branch? (23:5)

4. What is the Branch's name, and why does that name point to who Jesus is? (23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30)

5. What did the false prophets tell people who were living in sin, and why was that so dangerous? (23:14, 17)

6. What two tests of a true prophet do verses 16 and 22 give? (23:16, 22)

7. What two pictures does God use for His word in verse 29, and what do they teach? (23:28-29)

8. Jesus is "The LORD Our Righteousness." Are you trusting in your own goodness to be right with God, or in His? How would you explain the difference to a friend? (2 Corinthians 5:21)

9. What voices in your life, teachers, books, media or friends, tell you what you want to hear? How can you test them against God's Word?

10. When have you seen God's Word work like a hammer in your own heart, breaking something hard? What part of His Word do you need to let do that now?

Jeremiah 24: Two Baskets of Figs

Scripture

24:1-10 The LORD showed me, and look, two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD, after Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had taken into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, and the officials of Judah, and the craftsmen, and the smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them ***to*** Babylon. One basket ***had*** very good figs, like the early figs; and the other basket ***had*** very bad figs, which cannot be eaten because of badness. And the LORD said to me, "What are you seeing, Jeremiah?" And I said, "Figs; the good figs ***are*** very good, and the bad ***are*** very bad, which cannot be eaten because of badness." And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Like these good figs, so I will regard the exiles of Judah, whom I have sent from this place ***to*** the land of the Chaldeans, for good. And I will set My eye on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; and I will build them up and not tear ***them*** down, and I will plant them and not pluck ***them*** up. And I will give them a heart to know Me, that I ***am*** the LORD; and they will be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to them for God; for they will return to Me with all their heart. And like the bad figs which cannot be eaten because of badness'—for thus says the LORD—'so I will make Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. And I will make them into a terror, into an evil to all the kingdoms of the earth, into a reproach and into a byword, into a taunt and into a curse, in all the places where I will banish them. And I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until they are finished from upon the ground which I gave to them and to their fathers.'"

Preview

After King Jehoiachin, here called Jeconiah, and the leading men of Judah are carried off to Babylon in 597 B.C., the LORD shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs set in front of the temple. One basket holds very good figs, the other figs so rotten they cannot be eaten. God explains: the good figs are the exiles in Babylon. He will watch over them for good, bring them back, and give them a heart to know Him. The bad figs are King Zedekiah, his officials, the people left in Jerusalem, and those who ran to Egypt. They will become a horror and a curse among the nations, and the sword, famine and plague will finish them.

This chapter turned the thinking of the people in Jerusalem upside down. They thought the exiles were the ones God had rejected, and that those left at home were the lucky ones. God says the opposite. As we read, we should remember that God does not judge by how things look, and that sometimes the hardest road is where He is doing His best work in us.

Study

24:1 *The LORD showed me, and look, two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD, after Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had taken into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, and the officials of Judah, and the craftsmen, and the smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them **to** Babylon.*

"The LORD showed me, and look, two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD."

This was a vision, or perhaps real baskets that God used to teach Jeremiah. Baskets of first fruits were brought to the temple as offerings (Deuteronomy 26:2), so the setting fits. God often taught His prophets by showing them ordinary things, an almond branch and a boiling pot (1:11-13), a potter's wheel (18:2-3), and now two baskets of fruit.

The time is given carefully. It was "after Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had taken into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah." Jeconiah is the same king as Coniah (22:24) and Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8). He reigned three months and was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C.

With him went "the officials of Judah, and the craftsmen, and the smiths." Nebuchadnezzar took the leaders and the skilled workers, the men who could make weapons and lead a revolt (2 Kings 24:14-16). The prophet Ezekiel was taken in this group too (Ezekiel 1:1-2). Nebuchadnezzar left behind Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, as a king who would serve him (2 Kings 24:17). So this vision comes early in Zedekiah's reign, about 597 B.C. or soon after.

24:2-3 *One basket **had** very good figs, like the early figs; and the other basket **had** very bad figs, which cannot be eaten because of badness. And the LORD said to me, "What are you seeing, Jeremiah?" And I said, "Figs; the good figs **are** very good, and the bad **are** very bad, which cannot be eaten because of badness."*

"One basket had very good figs, like the early figs." The first figs of the season ripened in early summer and were prized as the best (Isaiah 28:4; Hosea 9:10). "And the other basket had very bad figs, which cannot be eaten because of badness."

"And the LORD said to me, What are you seeing, Jeremiah?" God asked him the same question at his call (1:11, 13). God wanted Jeremiah to look carefully and say what he saw, so that the lesson would sink in.

Jeremiah answered, "Figs; the good figs are very good, and the bad are very bad." There was nothing in between. No basket of so-so figs. The difference was total.

24:4-5 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Like these good figs, so I will regard the exiles of Judah, whom I have sent from this place **to** the land of the Chaldeans, for good.*

"Like these good figs, so I will regard the exiles of Judah, whom I have sent from this place to the land of the Chaldeans, for good."

This would have shocked the people of Jerusalem. After 597 B.C., those left in the city were proud of it. They thought the exiles were the sinners God had thrown away, and that they themselves were the good ones God had kept. Ezekiel tells us they said of the exiles, in effect, they are far from the LORD, and the land has been given to us (Ezekiel 11:15).

God says, no. The exiles are the good figs.

Why? Were the exiles better people? Not by nature. Many of them had sinned as much as anyone. The difference was in what God would do with them. Notice the words, "whom I have sent." God did not lose them. He sent them. The exile was His discipline, and through it He would do them good. The book of Daniel shows us some of these exiles, Daniel and his three friends, who were taken in 605 B.C. and stayed faithful to God in Babylon.

That is a comfort to anyone going through a hard season. It is not always the person in the easy place who is closest to God. Sometimes God sends us into a hard place "for good." Hebrews 12:10-11 says God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness, and that it later yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

24:6 *And I will set My eye on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; and I will build them up and not tear **them** down, and I will plant them and not pluck **them** up.*

"And I will set My eye on them for good." God's eye would be on them. He would watch over them like a shepherd. In 21:10 God said He had set His face against Jerusalem "for calamity and not for good." Now He sets His eye on the exiles for good.

"And I will bring them back to this land." This came true when Cyrus king of Persia let the Jews go home in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4).

"And I will build them up and not tear them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up." These are the words of Jeremiah's call (1:10). The tearing down was for Jerusalem. For the exiles, God now promises the building and planting.

24:7 *And I will give them a heart to know Me, that I **am** the LORD; and they will be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to them for God; for they will return to Me with all their heart.*

"And I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD."

This is the most important promise in the chapter. Remember what we learned in 17:9. The heart is deceitful and incurable. The people could not change their own hearts. So God promises to do it. He will give them a heart to know Him.

To know God here means more than knowing facts about Him. It means a real relationship of trust and obedience. In 22:16 we saw that knowing God shows itself in doing justice for the poor.

"And they will be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to them for God." This is the heart of God's covenant, said again and again in the Bible (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12). It will be said once more

in the new covenant (31:33), and at the very end of the Bible, when God lives with His people in the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:3).

"For they will return to Me with all their heart." Not a half-hearted return, as in Josiah's day (3:10), but a whole one.

Did this happen when the exiles came back? In part. After the exile, Israel never again fell into the open worship of idols as before. But the full gift of a new heart for the whole nation is still ahead. It is the promise of the new covenant (31:31-34) and of Ezekiel 36:26-27, and it will be complete when Israel turns to her Messiah at His return (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26-27). For each of us, this is what God does when we are born again. He gives a new heart that knows Him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

24:8-10 *And like the bad figs which cannot be eaten because of badness'—for thus says the LORD —'so I will make Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. And I will make them into a terror, into an evil to all the kingdoms of the earth, into a reproach and into a byword, into a taunt and into a curse, in all the places where I will banish them. And I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until they are finished from upon the ground which I gave to them and to their fathers.'"*

"And like the bad figs which cannot be eaten because of badness," God says, "so I will make Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt."

The bad figs were the people who stayed in Jerusalem with Zedekiah and refused to listen to God, and the Jews who had fled to Egypt. Some had gone to Egypt in Jehoahaz's day (2 Kings 23:34), and later a larger group fled there after Jerusalem fell, against God's clear word (chapters 42 to 44).

"I will make them into a terror, into an evil to all the kingdoms of the earth, into a reproach and into a byword, into a taunt and into a curse." A byword is a name people use as a warning, the way we might say someone's name to mean a disaster. That was the curse Moses had warned of (Deuteronomy 28:37).

"And I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until they are finished from upon the ground which I gave to them and to their fathers." Zedekiah's Jerusalem would be destroyed in 586 B.C. Those who went to Egypt would die there (44:27-28).

What made them bad figs? They stayed in the land, but they did not turn to God. They trusted in their own plans. Zedekiah knew God's word through Jeremiah and would not obey it (37:2). Being in the right place did not make them right with God.

There is a lesson here for us. It is easy to look at others and decide who is blessed and who is not by how things look on the outside. One person has health and money and an easy life. Another is going through loss and hardship. We assume the first is closer to God. But God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The question is not where you are, but whether you have turned to Him.

And there is hope even here. Not every person left in Jerusalem was lost. Jeremiah himself stayed in Jerusalem, and so did faithful people like Ebed-melech (39:15-18). God judges nations and groups, but He also knows each person who trusts Him.

Summary

After Nebuchadnezzar took King Jeconiah, the officials and the craftsmen to Babylon in 597 B.C., the LORD showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs before the temple, one very good and one too rotten to eat. God said the good figs were the exiles He had sent to Babylon for their good. He would set His eye on them, bring them back to the land, build and plant them, and give them a heart to know Him, so that they would be His people and He their God, and they would return to Him with all their heart. The bad figs were Zedekiah, his officials, those left in Jerusalem and those living in Egypt. God would make them a horror and a curse among the nations and send the sword, famine and plague until they were destroyed from the land He had given their fathers.

Study Questions

1. When did Jeremiah see the two baskets of figs, and who had just been taken to Babylon? (24:1)

2. How does Jeremiah describe the two baskets? (24:2-3)

3. Who were the good figs, and what five things did God promise to do for them? (24:5-7)

4. What does it mean that God would give them "a heart to know Me"? How does that connect with 17:9 and 31:33? (24:7)

5. Who were the bad figs, and what would happen to them? (24:8-10)

6. Why would this message have surprised the people left in Jerusalem? (24:5; Ezekiel 11:15)

7. Notice the words "whom I have sent" (24:5). How does knowing that God sent them change the way we see the exile?

8. Have you ever been in a hard place that God later used for your good? What did He teach you there? (Hebrews 12:10-11)

9. Do you ever judge who is blessed by God by how things look on the outside? What does 1 Samuel 16:7 say about that?

10. Has God given you a new heart that knows Him? If so, how is it showing in your life? If you are not sure, what would it look like to return to Him with all your heart today?

Jeremiah 25: Seventy Years and the Cup of Wrath

Scripture

25:1-14 The word which came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah; it ***was*** the first year of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, the king of Judah, and until this day, these twenty-three years, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, and you have not listened. And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending, and you have not listened, and you have not inclined your ear to hear, saying, 'Turn back, please, each one from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the ground which the LORD gave to you and to your fathers from long ago and until forever. And do not walk after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will not do harm to you.' And you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "so as to provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, for harm to you. Therefore thus says the LORD of armies: 'Because you have not listened to My words, look, I am about to send, and I will take all the clans of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations around; and I will utterly destroy them, and I will make them into a horror and into a hissing and into everlasting ruins. And I will destroy from them the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of a bridegroom and the sound of a bride, the sound of millstones and the light of a lamp. And all this land will become a ruin, a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it will be, when seventy years are completed, I will visit on the king of Babylon and on that nation,' declares the LORD, 'their iniquity, and on the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it into everlasting desolations. And I will bring on that land all My words which I have spoken against it, all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings will make servants of them, even of them; and I will repay them according to their deeds and according to the work of their hands.'"

25:15-29 For thus said the LORD, the God of Israel, to me: "Take this cup of the wine of rage from My hand, and you shall make all the nations to whom I am sending you drink it. And they will drink, and they will stagger, and they will act like madmen because of the sword which I am about to send among them." And I took the cup from the hand of the LORD, and I made all the nations drink to whom the LORD sent me: Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and its kings, its officials, to make them into a ruin, into a horror, into a hissing, and into a curse, as ***it is*** this day; Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and his servants and his officials and all his people; and all the mixed people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon and Gaza and Ekron and the remnant of Ashdod; Edom and Moab and the sons of Ammon; and all the kings of Tyre and all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland which ***is*** beyond the sea; and Dedan and Tema and Buz, and all who are cut ***at the*** corner; and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed people who dwell in the wilderness; and all the kings of Zimri and all the kings of Elam and all the kings of Media; and all the kings of the north,

the near and the far, each to his brother, and all the kingdoms of the earth which ***are*** on the face of the ground; and the king of Sheshach will drink after them. "And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Drink, and be drunk, and vomit, and fall, and you will not rise, because of the sword which I am about to send among you."' And it will be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: "You will surely drink. For look, on the city over which My name is called I am beginning to do harm, and you, will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth," declares the LORD of armies.'

25:30-38 And you, you shall prophesy to them all these words, and you shall say to them, 'The LORD will roar from on high, and from the dwelling of His holiness He will give forth His voice; He will surely roar against His pasture; a shout like those who tread ***grapes*** He will sing out to all the inhabitants of the earth. An uproar has come to the end of the earth, for the LORD ***has*** a controversy with the nations; He is entering into judgment with all flesh; the wicked He has given to the sword,' declares the LORD." Thus says the LORD of armies: "Look, calamity is going out from nation to nation, and a great storm will be roused from the remotest parts of the earth. And the slain of the LORD will be in that day from the end of the earth and to the end of the earth; they will not be mourned, and they will not be gathered, and they will not be buried; they will become dung on the face of the ground. Wail, O shepherds, and cry out; and roll yourselves ***in ashes***, O nobles of the flock; for your days for slaughter have been completed, and your scatterings, and you will fall like a desirable vessel. And refuge will perish from the shepherds, and escape from the nobles of the flock. The sound of the outcry of the shepherds and the wailing of the nobles of the flock! For the LORD is destroying their pasture. And the pastures of peace will be devastated because of the burning of the anger of the LORD. He has left His lair like the young lion; for their land has become a waste because of the burning of the oppressor and because of the burning of His anger."

Preview

This message comes from a turning point in history, 605 B.C., the year Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon. Jeremiah has been preaching for twenty-three years, and the people have not listened. So God names the enemy from the north at last: Nebuchadnezzar, "My servant," will come against Judah and the nations around it, and they will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. After that, God will judge Babylon itself. Then God hands Jeremiah a cup filled with the wine of His wrath and sends him to make the nations drink it, starting with Jerusalem and ending with Babylon. The chapter closes with the LORD roaring like a lion against the whole earth and the shepherds of the nations wailing.

This chapter is the hinge of the book. It sums up the first twenty-five chapters and looks ahead to the words against the nations in chapters 46 to 51. It also gives one of the clearest time prophecies in the Bible, the seventy years, which Daniel later read and prayed over. As we read, we should notice that God rules the nations, that His word comes true to the year, and that His judgment begins with His own people.

Study

25:1-2 *The word which came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah; it **was** the first year of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying,*

"In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah; it was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon."

That was 605 B.C., one of the great years of ancient history. That spring, Nebuchadnezzar, then crown prince of Babylon, defeated Pharaoh Neco's Egyptian army at Carchemish on the Euphrates (46:2). Babylon became the ruling power of the whole region. Nebuchadnezzar marched south, and that same year he took the first captives from Jerusalem, Daniel among them (Daniel 1:1-6). His father died, and he went home to take the throne.

This is also the year God told Jeremiah to write his messages on a scroll (36:1-2).

25:3-7 *"From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, the king of Judah, and until this day, these twenty-three years, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, and you have not listened. And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending, and you have not listened, and you have not inclined your ear to hear, saying, 'Turn back, please, each one from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the ground which the LORD gave to you and to your fathers from long ago and until forever. And do not walk after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will not do harm to you.' And you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "so as to provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, for harm to you.*

"From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, the king of Judah, and until this day, these twenty-three years, the word of the LORD has come to me." Jeremiah's call came in 627 B.C. (1:2). Counting both ends, that is twenty-three years to 605 B.C.

"I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, and you have not listened." For twenty-three years Jeremiah had preached faithfully, and he had very little to show for it. And he was not alone. God had sent "all His servants the prophets," men such as Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Uriah (26:20).

Their message was simple. "Turn back, please, each one from his evil way." If they turned, they would "dwell on the ground which the LORD gave to you and to your fathers." If they stopped serving idols, "I will not do harm to you."

"And you have not listened to Me." Notice what God says they did by their idols: they provoked Him "for harm to you."

Twenty-three years of faithful preaching to people who would not listen. If you have served God for a long time without seeing much fruit, Jeremiah understands. God measures faithfulness, not results.

25:8-9 *Therefore thus says the LORD of armies: 'Because you have not listened to My words, look, I am about to send, and I will take all the clans of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations around; and I will utterly destroy them, and I will make them into a horror and into a hissing and into everlasting ruins.*

"Because you have not listened to My words, look, I am about to send, and I will take all the clans of the north." For years Jeremiah had spoken of disaster "from the north" (1:14; 4:6; 6:1). Now God names it: "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant."

Why would God call a pagan king "My servant"? Nebuchadnezzar did not worship the LORD, at least not yet (Daniel 4:34-37). But God was using him to carry out His judgment, just as He later called Cyrus His anointed (Isaiah 45:1). God rules over kings who do not even know Him. Their armies march where He sends them (Proverbs 21:1).

God would bring Babylon "against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations around."

25:10-11 *And I will destroy from them the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of a bridegroom and the sound of a bride, the sound of millstones and the light of a lamp. And all this land will become a ruin, a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*

"I will destroy from them the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of a bridegroom and the sound of a bride." We heard this in 7:34 and 16:9. Then two new sounds: "the sound of millstones and the light of a lamp." Every home ground grain each morning for bread, and every home lit a lamp at night. When those stopped, it meant no one lived there. The land would be empty.

"And all this land will become a ruin, a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years."

Here is one of the most precise time prophecies in the Bible. Babylon would rule for seventy years. When were the seventy years?

The most common answer counts from 605 B.C., when Babylon took control of the region and carried off the first captives, to 538 B.C., when Cyrus of Persia, who had conquered Babylon the year before, let the Jews go home (Ezra 1:1-4). That is about seventy years, and the first exiles reached Judah about 537 or 536 B.C. Another way of counting runs from the burning of the temple in 586 B.C. to the finishing of the new temple in 516 B.C., exactly seventy years. Both show God keeping His word.

2 Chronicles 36:21 adds a reason for the number. The land would "accept its Sabbaths." The Law said Israel was to let the land rest every seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-7), and warned that if they

did not, God would remove them so the land could have its rest (Leviticus 26:34-35). They had ignored that law for centuries.

Many years later, Daniel, an old man in Babylon, read this prophecy. He "understood in the scrolls the number of the years" that God had spoken to Jeremiah, "to complete for the ruins of Jerusalem seventy years" (Daniel 9:2). Daniel saw that the seventy years were nearly over, and he did not sit back. He prayed and confessed his people's sin (Daniel 9:3-19). God's promises do not make prayer unnecessary. They give us something to pray for.

25:12-14 *And it will be, when seventy years are completed, I will visit on the king of Babylon and on that nation,' declares the LORD, 'their iniquity, and on the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it into everlasting desolations. And I will bring on that land all My words which I have spoken against it, all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings will make servants of them, even of them; and I will repay them according to their deeds and according to the work of their hands.'"*

"And it will be, when seventy years are completed, I will visit on the king of Babylon and on that nation," declares the LORD, "their iniquity." Babylon was God's tool, but it was not innocent. It did its work with pride and cruelty, and God would judge it for that (Isaiah 10:5-15 says the same of Assyria).

This came true in 539 B.C., when the armies of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus took Babylon. Daniel 5 tells of that night.

"I will make it into everlasting desolations." Babylon did not become a ruin all at once. It was taken without a great battle and slowly faded over the following centuries until it was empty. Chapters 50 and 51 say more about Babylon's fall, and many Bible teachers see in them a final fulfillment still to come, the fall of the Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18.

"All that is written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations." This likely points to the scroll written that same year (36:2), and to the messages against the nations now gathered in chapters 46 to 51. (In the old Greek translation, those chapters come right here, after 25:13.)

"For many nations and great kings will make servants of them, even of them." The nation that enslaved others would itself be enslaved.

25:15-16 *For thus said the LORD, the God of Israel, to me: "Take this cup of the wine of rage from My hand, and you shall make all the nations to whom I am sending you drink it. And they will drink, and they will stagger, and they will act like madmen because of the sword which I am about to send among them."*

"Take this cup of the wine of rage from My hand, and you shall make all the nations to whom I am sending you drink it."

The cup is a common picture in the Bible of God's judgment. A person given the cup has to drink it all, and it makes him stagger like a drunk (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17). "They will drink, and they

will stagger, and they will act like madmen because of the sword." War and defeat would leave the nations reeling.

Did Jeremiah really carry a cup to every nation? Most likely this was a vision, or an acted sign in Jerusalem before the nations' messengers (27:3). Either way, the message was carried out by Jeremiah's words.

This cup leads us to the Garden of Gethsemane. On the night before He died, Jesus prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me" (Luke 22:42). What cup? The cup of God's wrath against sin. Jesus drank it all on the cross, in our place, so that everyone who trusts Him will never have to drink it (Romans 5:9). That is the gospel.

25:17-26 *And I took the cup from the hand of the LORD, and I made all the nations drink to whom the LORD sent me: Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and its kings, its officials, to make them into a ruin, into a horror, into a hissing, and into a curse, as* ***it is*** *this day; Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and his servants and his officials and all his people; and all the mixed people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon and Gaza and Ekron and the remnant of Ashdod; Edom and Moab and the sons of Ammon; and all the kings of Tyre and all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland which* ***is*** *beyond the sea; and Dedan and Tema and Buz, and all who are cut* ***at the*** *corner; and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed people who dwell in the wilderness; and all the kings of Zimri and all the kings of Elam and all the kings of Media; and all the kings of the north, the near and the far, each to his brother, and all the kingdoms of the earth which* ***are*** *on the face of the ground; and the king of Sheshach will drink after them.*

"And I took the cup from the hand of the LORD, and I made all the nations drink." The list starts at home: "Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and its kings." Then it moves outward: Egypt to the south; the mixed peoples and Uz; the Philistine cities on the coast; Edom, Moab and Ammon across the Jordan; Tyre and Sidon to the north and their island colonies; the desert tribes of Arabia such as Dedan, Tema and Buz; then Zimri, Elam and Media far to the east; and "all the kingdoms of the earth."

"All who are cut at the corner" were desert tribes who trimmed the hair at their temples, something the Law forbade Israel (Leviticus 19:27).

"And the king of Sheshach will drink after them." Sheshach is a code name for Babylon. It is formed by a Hebrew letter game called atbash, where the first letter of the alphabet is swapped for the last, the second for the next to last, and so on. 51:41 uses Sheshach and Babylon side by side. Babylon, who handed the cup to everyone else, would drink last.

What does this long list teach us? That God is not a local god. He rules every nation on earth, and every nation is answerable to Him (Acts 17:26).

25:27-29 *"And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Drink, and be drunk, and vomit, and fall, and you will not rise, because of the sword which I am about to send among you."' And it will be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: "You will surely drink. For look, on the city over which My name is called I am beginning to do harm, and you, will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth," declares the LORD of armies.'*

"Drink, and be drunk, and vomit, and fall, and you will not rise." The judgment would be total.

"If they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink," God says, "You will surely drink." No nation could refuse God's judgment.

Then comes a sobering principle. "For look, on the city over which My name is called I am beginning to do harm, and you, will you indeed go unpunished?" If God did not spare Jerusalem, His own city, how could the pagan nations think they would escape?

Peter says the same thing to the church. It is "the time for the judgment to begin from the house of God," and if it begins with us, what will the end be for those who do not obey the gospel (1 Peter 4:17)? God's people are not exempt from His discipline. And God's patience with the world does not mean He will never judge it.

25:30-31 *And you, you shall prophesy to them all these words, and you shall say to them, 'The LORD will roar from on high, and from the dwelling of His holiness He will give forth His voice; He will surely roar against His pasture; a shout like those who tread **grapes** He will sing out to all the inhabitants of the earth. An uproar has come to the end of the earth, for the LORD **has** a controversy with the nations; He is entering into judgment with all flesh; the wicked He has given to the sword,' declares the LORD."*

"The LORD will roar from on high." God is pictured as a lion roaring before it springs (Amos 1:2; Joel 3:16). "He will surely roar against His pasture." The pasture is His own land and flock.

"A shout like those who tread grapes He will sing out to all the inhabitants of the earth." In the vineyard, workers shouted as they trampled the grapes in the winepress. Here the shout is of God treading out judgment. Revelation 14:19-20 and 19:15 use this same picture for the judgment at Christ's return.

"For the LORD has a controversy with the nations." A controversy is a lawsuit, a case at court. God is bringing charges. "He is entering into judgment with all flesh."

25:32-33 *Thus says the LORD of armies: "Look, calamity is going out from nation to nation, and a great storm will be roused from the remotest parts of the earth. And the slain of the LORD will be in that day from the end of the earth and to the end of the earth; they will not be mourned, and they will not be gathered, and they will not be buried; they will become dung on the face of the ground.*

"Look, calamity is going out from nation to nation, and a great storm will be roused from the remotest parts of the earth." The judgment would spread like a storm across the world.

"And the slain of the LORD will be in that day from the end of the earth and to the end of the earth." These words reach beyond Babylon's wars. Babylon never ruled the ends of the earth. Like many prophecies, this one had a near fulfillment in Jeremiah's day and points ahead to the final day of the LORD, the time when God judges the whole earth at the end of the Tribulation and Christ returns (Revelation 19:11-21). The dead would be so many that "they will not be mourned, and they will not be gathered, and they will not be buried."

25:34-38 *Wail, O shepherds, and cry out; and roll yourselves **in ashes**, O nobles of the flock; for your days for slaughter have been completed, and your scatterings, and you will fall like a desirable vessel. And refuge will perish from the shepherds, and escape from the nobles of the flock. The sound of the outcry of the shepherds and the wailing of the nobles of the flock! For the LORD is destroying their pasture. And the pastures of peace will be devastated because of the burning of the anger of the LORD. He has left His lair like the young lion; for their land has become a waste because of the burning of the oppressor and because of the burning of His anger."*

"Wail, O shepherds, and cry out." The shepherds are the kings and rulers of the nations. "Your days for slaughter have been completed." "You will fall like a desirable vessel," like a beautiful jar that shatters when dropped.

"The sound of the outcry of the shepherds and the wailing of the nobles of the flock! For the LORD is destroying their pasture." "The pastures of peace will be devastated because of the burning of the anger of the LORD."

"He has left His lair like the young lion." The lion has come out of hiding. God's patience has ended, and He has risen to act.

This is a hard chapter, but it carries a clear message for us. God is patient. He sent prophets for twenty-three years and more. But His patience has an end, and His word comes true to the year. The good news is that the cup of wrath does not have to be ours. Jesus drank it. Have you put your trust in Him?

Summary

In 605 B.C., the fourth year of Jehoiakim and the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah reminded Judah that for twenty-three years he and the other prophets had called them to turn back, and they had not listened. So God would bring Nebuchadnezzar, His servant, against Judah and the nations around it, silence every sound of life, and make the nations serve the king of Babylon seventy years. After seventy years God would punish Babylon and make it a desolation. God gave Jeremiah the cup of the wine of His wrath to make the nations drink, starting with Jerusalem and Judah and going out to Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, Arabia, Elam and Media, with Babylon, called Sheshach, drinking last. If God began with His own city, no nation would go unpunished. The LORD would roar like a lion against the whole earth and bring His lawsuit against all flesh, and the shepherds of the nations would wail as He destroyed their pastures.

Study Questions

1. What year was this message given, and why was that year so important? (25:1)

2. How long had Jeremiah been preaching, and how had the people responded? (25:3-7)

3. Why does God call Nebuchadnezzar "My servant"? What does that teach us about God's rule over the nations? (25:9)

4. How long would the nations serve the king of Babylon, and what would happen after that? (25:11-12)

5. What did Daniel do when he read this prophecy in Jeremiah? (Daniel 9:2-3)

6. What is the cup in verse 15, and who drinks it first and last? (25:15-18, 26)

7. What principle does verse 29 teach, and how does Peter use the same idea? (25:29; 1 Peter 4:17)

8. Jesus prayed about a cup in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). How does this chapter help you understand what He drank on the cross for you?

9. Jeremiah served faithfully for twenty-three years with few results. Where in your life do you need to keep being faithful even when you do not see fruit?

10. Daniel read God's promises and then prayed. Which promise of God could you begin praying over this week?

Jeremiah 26: Jeremiah on Trial for His Life

Scripture

26:1-15 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the court of the house of the LORD, and you shall speak to all the cities of Judah who come to bow down ***in*** the house of the LORD all the words which I have commanded you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. Perhaps they will listen and turn back, each one from his evil way, and I will relent concerning the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds. And you shall say to them, "Thus says the LORD: 'If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I am sending to you, even rising early and sending, and you have not listened, and I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make into a curse for all the nations of the earth.'"'" And the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. And it was, when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded ***him*** to speak to all the people, and the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You will surely die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house will be like Shiloh, and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people assembled to Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. And the officials of Judah heard these things, and they came up from the house of the king ***to*** the house of the LORD, and they sat at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD. And the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, saying, "A sentence of death ***belongs*** to this man, for he has prophesied against this city, just as you have heard with your own ears." And Jeremiah said to all the officials and to all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words which you have heard. And now, make your ways and your deeds good, and listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent concerning the calamity which He has spoken against you. And I, look, I ***am*** in your hand; do to me as ***is*** good and as ***is*** right in your eyes. Only, you must surely know that if you put me to death, you ***are*** putting innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on its inhabitants; for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

26:16-24 And the officials and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, "There ***is*** no sentence of death for this man, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God." And men from the elders of the land arose, and they said to all the assembly of the people, saying, "Micah the Morashtite was prophesying in the days of Hezekiah the king of Judah, and he said to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: "Zion will be plowed ***as*** a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the house high places of a forest."' Did Hezekiah the king of Judah and all Judah indeed put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the face of the LORD, and the LORD relented concerning the calamity which He had spoken against them? And we are about to do great harm against ourselves." And also ***there*** was a man prophesying in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah. And King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, and the king sought to put him to death; and Uriah heard, and he was afraid, and he fled, and he went ***to*** Egypt. And

King Jehoiakim sent men ***to*** Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and men with him, to Egypt. And they brought Uriah out from Egypt, and they brought him to King Jehoiakim, and he struck him with the sword, and he threw his corpse into the graves of the sons of the people. Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so as not to give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.

Preview

This chapter goes back to the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign and tells what happened after the temple sermon of chapter 7. God sends Jeremiah to the temple court with a warning: if the people will not listen, God will make His house like Shiloh. The priests, the prophets and the crowd seize him and shout, "You will surely die!" The king's officials come up and hold a trial at the New Gate. Jeremiah does not back down. He tells them that he is in their hands, but if they kill him, they will bring innocent blood on themselves. The officials and the people declare him innocent, and some of the elders remind everyone that King Hezekiah did not kill the prophet Micah for preaching the same kind of message. Then the chapter tells of another prophet, Uriah, who preached the same message, fled to Egypt, and was brought back and killed by King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah was spared because a man named Ahikam stood with him.

This chapter marks the start of the second half of Jeremiah, which has more stories about the prophet's life. As we read, we should notice the cost of speaking God's truth, the courage it takes, and the way God protects His servants, sometimes through one faithful friend.

Study

26:1-3 *In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the court of the house of the LORD, and you shall speak to all the cities of Judah who come to bow down* ***in*** *the house of the LORD all the words which I have commanded you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. Perhaps they will listen and turn back, each one from his evil way, and I will relent concerning the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.*

"In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah." That was about 609 B.C., soon after Josiah died at Megiddo and Pharaoh Neco put Jehoiakim on the throne. This is the same occasion as the temple sermon in chapter 7. Chapter 7 gives the sermon. Chapter 26 gives the trial that followed.

"Stand in the court of the house of the LORD." On a feast day, people from "all the cities of Judah" would come to worship. Jeremiah was to give them "all the words which I have commanded you to speak to them; do not hold back a word."

That is a hard command. It would have been easy to soften the message, leave out the part about the temple, and keep the crowd friendly. God said, do not hold back a word. Paul could say the same of his ministry: he did not hold back from declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

Why send such a hard message? "Perhaps they will listen and turn back, each one from his evil way, and I will relent concerning the calamity." This is the principle of 18:7-8. God's warning came with an open door. He wanted them to turn.

26:4-6 *And you shall say to them, "Thus says the LORD: 'If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I am sending to you, even rising early and sending, and you have not listened, and I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make into a curse for all the nations of the earth.'"'"*

"If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to listen to the words of My servants the prophets," then "I will make this house like Shiloh."

Shiloh was where the tabernacle stood in the days of the judges. God let it be destroyed after the Philistines captured the ark (7:12-14; 1 Samuel 4). To compare the temple in Jerusalem to Shiloh was to say that God's house would be destroyed. "And this city I will make into a curse for all the nations of the earth."

To the people who believed the temple could never fall (7:4), this sounded like blasphemy.

26:7-9 *And the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. And it was, when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded* ***him*** *to speak to all the people, and the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You will surely die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house will be like Shiloh, and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people assembled to Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.*

"The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD."

When he finished, "the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, You will surely die!" Notice who led the attack: the religious leaders. The priests served in the temple, and the prophets here were the false prophets who kept promising peace (23:17). Jeremiah's message threatened their place, their income and their pride.

"Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD?" they asked. He had said, "This house will be like Shiloh, and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant." To them, his message was false prophecy, and the Law said a false prophet must die (Deuteronomy 18:20). But they never asked the real question: was it true?

"And all the people assembled to Jeremiah in the house of the LORD." A mob formed around him.

Six hundred years later, the same thing happened to Jesus. He was accused of speaking against the temple (Mark 14:57-58). The chief priests stirred up the crowd. And Stephen was stoned after being charged with speaking against "this holy place" (Acts 6:13).

26:10-11 *And the officials of Judah heard these things, and they came up from the house of the king* ***to*** *the house of the LORD, and they sat at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD. And the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, saying, "A sentence of death* ***belongs*** *to this man, for he has prophesied against this city, just as you have heard with your own ears."*

"The officials of Judah heard these things, and they came up from the house of the king to the house of the LORD." The palace was below the temple, so they "came up." These officials were the king's royal council, the men who served as judges in important cases.

"They sat at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD." In Israel, courts were held at a city gate (Deuteronomy 21:19; Ruth 4:1). The officials sat down to hear the case.

The priests and prophets brought the charge: "A sentence of death belongs to this man, for he has prophesied against this city, just as you have heard with your own ears." Notice the charge. Not that he lied, but that he prophesied "against this city." To them, speaking against Jerusalem was treason.

26:12-13 *And Jeremiah said to all the officials and to all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words which you have heard. And now, make your ways and your deeds good, and listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent concerning the calamity which He has spoken against you.*

Jeremiah gave his defense, and it is short. "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words which you have heard."

He did not deny what he said. He did not soften it. He simply said who sent him. If the message was against the city, it was because God was against the city's sin.

Then, even on trial for his life, he preached again. "And now, make your ways and your deeds good, and listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent concerning the calamity." He was more concerned about their lives than about his own.

26:14-15 *And I, look, I* ***am*** *in your hand; do to me as* ***is*** *good and as* ***is*** *right in your eyes. Only, you must surely know that if you put me to death, you* ***are*** *putting innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on its inhabitants; for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."*

"And I, look, I am in your hand; do to me as is good and as is right in your eyes."

Jeremiah did not beg, threaten or run. He put himself in their hands, because he knew he was first in God's hands.

"Only, you must surely know that if you put me to death, you are putting innocent blood on yourselves and on this city." To kill an innocent man was a grave sin that brought guilt on the whole land (Deuteronomy 19:10). "For in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

This takes a kind of courage that only comes from God. Jesus told His disciples that when they were brought before rulers, they should not worry about what to say, for the Spirit would give them the words (Matthew 10:18-20). Peter and John faced the same council that condemned Jesus and said they had to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

26:16 *And the officials and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, "There **is** no sentence of death for this man, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God."*

"And the officials and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, There is no sentence of death for this man, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God."

What a turnaround. The crowd that had shouted "You will surely die!" (26:8) now joined the officials in declaring Jeremiah innocent. The officials saw what the priests would not: he had spoken in the name of the LORD.

Crowds change quickly. The crowd that shouted "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday shouted "Crucify Him" a few days later (Mark 11:9; 15:13). It is God's approval that matters, not the crowd's.

26:17-19 *And men from the elders of the land arose, and they said to all the assembly of the people, saying, "Micah the Morashtite was prophesying in the days of Hezekiah the king of Judah, and he said to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: "Zion will be plowed **as** a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the house high places of a forest."' Did Hezekiah the king of Judah and all Judah indeed put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the face of the LORD, and the LORD relented concerning the calamity which He had spoken against them? And we are about to do great harm against ourselves."*

"Men from the elders of the land arose." These were older leaders, perhaps from the towns of Judah, who knew their history. They reminded everyone of a case from about a hundred years earlier.

"Micah the Morashtite was prophesying in the days of Hezekiah the king of Judah." Micah came from Moresheth, a town in the lowlands of Judah. He had said, "Zion will be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the house high places of a forest." Those are the very words of Micah 3:12.

This is a rare and valuable moment in the Old Testament: one prophet's book quoted word for word by people a century later. It shows that Micah's words were known, written down and respected as God's word.

"Did Hezekiah the king of Judah and all Judah indeed put him to death?" No. "Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the face of the LORD?" He did, and "the LORD relented concerning the calamity." The elders' point was clear: a good king listens to a hard word and repents, and God spares. A foolish king kills the prophet.

"And we are about to do great harm against ourselves." To kill Jeremiah would be to bring judgment on their own heads.

26:20-23 *And also **there** was a man prophesying in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah. And King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, and the king sought to put him to death; and Uriah heard, and he was afraid, and he fled, and he went **to** Egypt. And King Jehoiakim sent men **to** Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and men with him, to Egypt. And they brought Uriah out from Egypt, and they brought him to King Jehoiakim, and he struck him with the sword, and he threw his corpse into the graves of the sons of the people.*

Now the story turns dark. "And also there was a man prophesying in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim." Kiriath-jearim was a town about eight miles west of Jerusalem, where the ark had once stayed for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2). This is the only place in the Bible we read of this Uriah.

"He prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah." He preached the same message Jeremiah did.

"And King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, and the king sought to put him to death." "And Uriah heard, and he was afraid, and he fled, and he went to Egypt."

But Jehoiakim would not let him go. He "sent men to Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achbor." Jehoiakim had been put on the throne by Pharaoh, so Egypt was friendly and handed Uriah over. Elnathan appears again in 36:12, 25, where he begged the king not to burn Jeremiah's scroll. People are not always simple.

"They brought Uriah out from Egypt, and they brought him to King Jehoiakim, and he struck him with the sword, and he threw his corpse into the graves of the sons of the people." The king killed God's prophet with his own sword, or by his order, and threw the body into the common burial ground, denying him even an honorable grave.

Why is this story here? It shows how real the danger to Jeremiah was. Jehoiakim was not like Hezekiah. He killed prophets. It also shows the "innocent blood" Jehoiakim shed (22:17). And it reminds us that faithfulness to God does not always end in rescue in this life. Uriah was faithful, and he died for it. Hebrews 11 speaks of believers who were rescued and believers who were killed by the sword, and says the world was not worthy of them (Hebrews 11:33-38). Jesus said Jerusalem killed the prophets God sent to her (Matthew 23:37).

Was Uriah wrong to flee? Scripture does not say. Jesus told His disciples that when they were persecuted in one city, they could flee to another (Matthew 10:23). Fleeing was not a sin. But Uriah could not outrun the king. Jeremiah stayed, and God protected him. In the end, both were in God's hands.

26:24 *Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so as not to give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.*

"Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so as not to give him into the hand of the people to put him to death."

Ahikam was one of the officials Josiah had sent to the prophetess Huldah when the Book of the Law was found (2 Kings 22:12-14). His father Shaphan was the scribe who read that book to Josiah. This was a family that loved God's word. Ahikam's son Gedaliah would later protect Jeremiah too, after Jerusalem fell (39:14; 40:5-6).

God had promised Jeremiah, "I am with you to deliver you" (1:8). Here God kept that promise through one man with courage and influence. Sometimes God protects His people by a miracle. Often He does it through a faithful friend who stands up at the right time.

Is there someone who needs you to be their Ahikam? Someone standing alone for what is right, who needs one person to stand with them?

Summary

At the start of Jehoiakim's reign, God sent Jeremiah to the temple court to speak every word He commanded, in the hope that the people would turn, and to warn that if they would not listen, God would make the temple like Shiloh and the city a curse. The priests, the prophets and the people seized him and said he must die. The king's officials came up and held court at the New Gate, where the priests and prophets charged him with prophesying against the city. Jeremiah answered that the LORD had sent him, called them again to change their ways, and told them that he was in their hands but that killing him would bring innocent blood on them. The officials and the people declared him innocent, and some elders reminded them that Hezekiah had not killed Micah for prophesying that Zion would be plowed like a field, but had feared the LORD, and the LORD relented. Yet King Jehoiakim had the prophet Uriah, who preached the same message, brought back from Egypt and killed with the sword. Jeremiah was spared because Ahikam the son of Shaphan stood with him.

Study Questions

1. When was this message given, and what earlier chapter tells the same sermon? (26:1; 7:1-15)

2. What did God tell Jeremiah not to do, and why did He send this message? (26:2-3)

3. Who seized Jeremiah, and what did they say should happen to him? (26:7-9)

4. How did Jeremiah defend himself before the officials? (26:12-15)

5. What did the elders remember about Micah and King Hezekiah, and what was their point? (26:17-19)

6. What happened to the prophet Uriah? (26:20-23)

7. Who protected Jeremiah, and what do we know about his family? (26:24; 2 Kings 22:12)

8. God told Jeremiah not to hold back a word. Are there parts of God's Word you are tempted to leave out or soften when you talk with others? Why?

9. Uriah was faithful and was killed. Jeremiah was faithful and was spared. How do you hold on to God's goodness when faithful people suffer?

10. Ahikam stood with Jeremiah when it was dangerous. Who in your life might need you to stand with them right now?

Jeremiah 27: The Yoke of Babylon

Scripture

27:1-11 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus said the LORD to me: "Make for yourself fetters and yoke-bars, and you shall put them on your neck. And you shall send them to the king of Edom and to the king of Moab and to the king of the sons of Ammon and to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon, by the hand of the messengers who have come ***to*** Jerusalem to Zedekiah the king of Judah. And you shall command them ***to go*** to their masters, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Thus you shall say to your masters: 'I, I made the earth, mankind and the animals which ***are*** on the face of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I give it to whom it is right in My eyes. And now I, I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and also the living things of the field I have given to him to serve him. And all the nations will serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his own land comes, also it; and many nations and great kings will make him serve. And it will be, the nation and the kingdom which will not serve him, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck in the yoke of the king of Babylon, with the sword and with the famine and with the pestilence I will punish that nation,' declares the LORD, 'until I have consumed them by his hand. And you, do not listen to your prophets and to your diviners and to your dreams and to your soothsayers and to your sorcerers, who are saying to you, saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." For they are prophesying falsehood to you, so as to remove you far from your ground, and I will drive you out, and you will perish. And the nation which will bring its neck into the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let it remain on its own ground,' declares the LORD, 'and it will till it and dwell in it.'"'"

27:12-22 And to Zedekiah the king of Judah I spoke according to all these words, saying, "Bring your necks into the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, just as the LORD has spoken concerning the nation which will not serve the king of Babylon? And do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, saying, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon,' for they are prophesying falsehood to you. For I have not sent them," declares the LORD, "and they are prophesying falsely in My name, so that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you." And to the priests and to all this people I spoke, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Do not listen to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you, saying, "Look, the articles of the house of the LORD will now shortly be brought back from Babylon," for they are prophesying falsehood to you. Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a ruin? And if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them entreat, please, the LORD of armies, that the articles which remain in the house of the LORD and ***in*** the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may not go ***to*** Babylon. For thus says the LORD of armies concerning the pillars and concerning the sea and concerning the stands and concerning the rest of the articles which remain in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon did not take when he took Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem;

for thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, concerning the articles which remain ***in*** the house of the LORD and ***in*** the house of the king of Judah and ***in*** Jerusalem: "They will be brought to Babylon, and there they will be until the day I visit them," declares the LORD. "And I will bring them up, and I will bring them back to this place."'"

Preview

Messengers from five nations, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, have come to Jerusalem to meet with King Zedekiah. They are planning a revolt against Babylon. God tells Jeremiah to make a yoke, the wooden bar that goes over the neck of an ox, and to wear it, and to send a message back with the messengers to their kings. The LORD made the earth and gives it to whomever He chooses, and He has given these lands to Nebuchadnezzar, His servant. Any nation that bows its neck under Babylon's yoke will stay in its land. Any nation that refuses will be destroyed. Jeremiah gives the same word to Zedekiah and to the priests and people: do not listen to the prophets who say the temple treasures will soon come back from Babylon. The rest will be carried off too, and only later, in God's time, brought home.

This chapter teaches us that God rules the nations, and that sometimes the way of faith is to accept the hard thing God has sent instead of fighting it. As we read, we should ask whether we are fighting a yoke God has put on us for a season, and whether we are listening to voices that tell us only what we want to hear.

Study

27:1 *In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,*

"In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD."

This verse has puzzled readers for a long time. Everything else in the chapter names Zedekiah, not Jehoiakim (27:3, 12). And 28:1 says these events happened "in that year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah, in the fourth year." The Hebrew text and the SLB read Jehoiakim here, but a few Hebrew manuscripts and some old translations read Zedekiah. Most Bible teachers think an early copyist repeated the words of 26:1 by mistake. Others suggest the word first came to Jeremiah under Jehoiakim and was acted out under Zedekiah. Either way, the setting of the chapter is clear from the rest of it: Zedekiah's fourth year, about 593 B.C.

"The beginning of the reign" can mean the early part of a king's reign, not only his first year. That is how 28:1 can speak of the beginning of Zedekiah's reign and his fourth year together.

27:2-4 *Thus said the LORD to me: "Make for yourself fetters and yoke-bars, and you shall put them on your neck. And you shall send them to the king of Edom and to the king of Moab and to the king of the sons of Ammon and to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon, by the hand of the messengers who have come **to** Jerusalem to Zedekiah the king of Judah. And you shall command them **to go** to their masters, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Thus you shall say to your masters:*

"Make for yourself fetters and yoke-bars, and you shall put them on your neck." A yoke was a heavy wooden bar laid across the necks of a pair of oxen, held on by leather straps or ropes, so they could pull a plow or a cart. To wear a yoke meant to serve someone else.

So Jeremiah walked around Jerusalem with a yoke on his neck. It was another acted message, like the linen sash (13:1-11) and the broken flask (19:1-11). People could not miss it.

Then God told him to "send them to the king of Edom and to the king of Moab and to the king of the sons of Ammon and to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon." These were the small nations around Judah. Their messengers had "come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah the king of Judah." Why? Most likely to plan a revolt against Babylon together. Egypt was probably urging them on. A new Pharaoh, Psammetichus II, came to the throne about this time.

Jeremiah was to send a message to their kings through their own messengers. Imagine those diplomats, there for secret talks, being handed a prophet's yoke and a message from the God of Israel.

27:5 *'I, I made the earth, mankind and the animals which **are** on the face of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I give it to whom it is right in My eyes.*

"I, I made the earth, mankind and the animals which are on the face of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I give it to whom it is right in My eyes."

This is the foundation of the whole message. The LORD is not just the God of Israel. He made the whole earth. Because He made it, it belongs to Him, and He can give it to whomever He pleases.

That was a bold thing to say to pagan kings who each believed in their own gods. Daniel said the same to Nebuchadnezzar himself: the Most High rules over the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He wills (Daniel 4:17, 25). Paul told the men of Athens that God made every nation and set the times and boundaries of their lands (Acts 17:24-26).

For us, this is a great comfort. No ruler, no election and no war is outside God's hand. He sets up kings and takes them down (Daniel 2:21).

27:6-7 *And now I, I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and also the living things of the field I have given to him to serve him. And all the nations will serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his own land comes, also it; and many nations and great kings will make him serve.*

"And now I, I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant." As in 25:9, God calls Nebuchadnezzar "My servant," because God was using him. "And also the living things of the field I have given to him." Even the wild animals were under his rule. That is the language of Genesis 1:28, the rule God gave Adam. Daniel 2:38 says the same of Nebuchadnezzar.

"And all the nations will serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his own land comes." Babylon's rule had a time limit. It would last a few generations and then come to an end, just as 25:11-12 said. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. His son Evil-merodach followed him (52:31), and within about twenty-three years of Nebuchadnezzar's death, Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C.

"And many nations and great kings will make him serve." Babylon, the great master, would itself become a servant.

27:8 *And it will be, the nation and the kingdom which will not serve him, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck in the yoke of the king of Babylon, with the sword and with the famine and with the pestilence I will punish that nation,' declares the LORD, 'until I have consumed them by his hand.*

"The nation and the kingdom which will not serve him, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck in the yoke of the king of Babylon," God would punish "with the sword and with the famine and with the pestilence," "until I have consumed them by his hand."

This is the hard part of the message. To resist Babylon was to resist God's judgment. God had decided to use Babylon. Fighting Babylon would only make it worse.

27:9-11 *And you, do not listen to your prophets and to your diviners and to your dreams and to your soothsayers and to your sorcerers, who are saying to you, saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." For they are prophesying falsehood to you, so as to remove you far from your ground, and I will drive you out, and you will perish. And the nation which will bring its neck into the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let it remain on its own ground,' declares the LORD, 'and it will till it and dwell in it.'"'"*

"And you, do not listen to your prophets and to your diviners and to your dreams and to your soothsayers and to your sorcerers."

The pagan nations had their own ways of trying to know the future. Diviners read omens, such as the livers of sacrificed animals. Soothsayers and sorcerers practiced magic. The Law of Moses forbade all of these (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Every one of them was telling their kings the same thing: "You shall not serve the king of Babylon."

"For they are prophesying falsehood to you." The result would be the opposite of what they promised. "I will drive you out, and you will perish."

"And the nation which will bring its neck into the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let it remain on its own ground." Submission would mean survival. They would stay in their land and farm it.

Why would God say this? Because the judgment was coming either way. The only question was whether they would accept it and live, or fight it and die. Sometimes God's way of mercy is to tell us not to fight the discipline He has sent.

27:12-15 *And to Zedekiah the king of Judah I spoke according to all these words, saying, "Bring your necks into the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, just as the LORD has spoken concerning the nation which will not serve the king of Babylon? And do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, saying, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon,' for they are prophesying falsehood to you. For I have not sent them," declares the LORD, "and they are prophesying falsely in My name, so that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you."*

Now Jeremiah turns to Judah's own king. He told King Zedekiah, "Bring your necks into the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live."

"Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence?" That is the cry of a man who wanted them to live. Ezekiel said the same thing, from Babylon: why will you die, O house of Israel (Ezekiel 18:31)? God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (Ezekiel 18:32).

"And do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you," God says. They were saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." Judah had prophets just like the nations did, and they were saying the same things as the pagan diviners. That is a sobering thought. A prophet in God's own temple can sound exactly like a pagan sorcerer if he is not speaking God's word.

"For I have not sent them," declares the LORD, "and they are prophesying falsely in My name." They used God's name, but God had not sent them (23:21).

27:16-17 *And to the priests and to all this people I spoke, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Do not listen to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you, saying, "Look, the articles of the house of the LORD will now shortly be brought back from Babylon," for they are prophesying falsehood to you. Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a ruin?*

"And to the priests and to all this people I spoke." Now Jeremiah speaks to the religious leaders and the crowd.

The false prophets were saying, "Look, the articles of the house of the LORD will now shortly be brought back from Babylon." When Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin in 597 B.C., he also took

gold vessels and treasures from the temple (2 Kings 24:13). The false prophets promised these would soon come home. It was a message of quick recovery: the trouble will be over soon.

"For they are prophesying falsehood to you. Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a ruin?"

How many people today want to hear that their trouble will be over soon, without any change of heart? It is the most popular sermon there is.

27:18 *And if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them entreat, please, the LORD of armies, that the articles which remain in the house of the LORD and* ***in*** *the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may not go* ***to*** *Babylon.*

"And if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them entreat, please, the LORD of armies."

Here is a test. A true prophet does not only speak to people for God. He also speaks to God for people. Jeremiah prayed for his people (18:20). If these men were true prophets, let them pray that the things still in Jerusalem would not be taken too.

But they were not praying. They were only promising. False teachers are often long on promises and short on prayer.

27:19-22 *For thus says the LORD of armies concerning the pillars and concerning the sea and concerning the stands and concerning the rest of the articles which remain in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon did not take when he took Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem; for thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, concerning the articles which remain* ***in*** *the house of the LORD and* ***in*** *the house of the king of Judah and* ***in*** *Jerusalem: "They will be brought to Babylon, and there they will be until the day I visit them," declares the LORD. "And I will bring them up, and I will bring them back to this place."'"*

"Concerning the pillars and concerning the sea and concerning the stands and concerning the rest of the articles which remain in this city." These were the great bronze works Solomon had made for the temple: the two bronze pillars at the entrance, called Jachin and Boaz, the "sea," a huge bronze basin for the priests' washing, and the bronze stands that held smaller basins (1 Kings 7:15-39).

Nebuchadnezzar had not taken them in 597 B.C., when "he took Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon." The false prophets said the treasures already taken would soon come back. God said the opposite: what was left would be taken too.

"They will be brought to Babylon, and there they will be until the day I visit them." That came true in 586 B.C., when the Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the sea and the stands and carried the bronze to Babylon (52:17-23).

But look at the last line. "And I will bring them up, and I will bring them back to this place." Even here, there is hope. God would bring back the temple vessels in His own time. And He did. When Cyrus let the Jews return, he gave back thousands of the gold and silver articles Nebuchadnezzar had taken (Ezra 1:7-11).

Here is the difference between the false prophets and the true one. The false prophets said: it will all come back soon, no need to change. Jeremiah said: more will be lost first, but God will bring it back in His time. The false hope was quick and empty. The true hope was slow and sure.

That is often how God works with us. We want the quick way out. God gives us the true way through.

Summary

Messengers from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon came to Jerusalem to meet with Zedekiah, most likely to plan a revolt against Babylon. God told Jeremiah to make a yoke, wear it, and send a message to their kings: the LORD made the earth and gives it to whomever He chooses, and He had given these lands to Nebuchadnezzar, His servant. All nations would serve Nebuchadnezzar, his son and his grandson until Babylon's own time came. Any nation that refused his yoke would be destroyed by sword, famine and plague, but any nation that served him would stay in its land. They were not to listen to their prophets, diviners and sorcerers. Jeremiah told Zedekiah the same thing and asked why he and his people should die. He told the priests and people not to believe the prophets who said the temple vessels would soon return from Babylon. If they were true prophets, they should pray that the rest would not be taken. God said the pillars, the sea, the stands and the other vessels would be carried to Babylon too, and stay there until the day He would bring them back.

Study Questions

1. What did God tell Jeremiah to make and wear, and what did it stand for? (27:2)

2. Who had come to Jerusalem, and what were they likely planning? (27:3)

3. On what basis does God say He can give the earth to whomever He chooses? (27:5)

4. What would happen to the nations that served Nebuchadnezzar, and to those that refused? (27:8, 11)

5. What were the false prophets in Jerusalem promising about the temple articles? (27:16)

6. What test did Jeremiah give for whether these men were true prophets? (27:18)

7. What did God say would happen to the articles still in Jerusalem, and what hope did He give at the end? (27:21-22; Ezra 1:7-11)

8. God sometimes calls His people to accept a hard season instead of fighting it. Is there a yoke in your life right now that you are fighting? What might God be teaching you through it?

9. Why do you think messages of quick recovery without repentance are so popular? Where do you hear them today?

10. A true prophet prayed for the people as well as speaking to them. Who is someone you speak to about God, and how often do you speak to God about them?

Jeremiah 28: Hananiah the False Prophet

Scripture

28:1-17 And it was in that year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet who ***was*** from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the LORD, before the eyes of the priests and all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, saying, 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two more years I am bringing back to this place all the articles of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon took from this place and brought ***to*** Babylon. And Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon, I am bringing back to this place,' declares the LORD, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'" And Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet before the eyes of the priests and before the eyes of all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD; and Jeremiah the prophet said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD carry out your words which you have prophesied, by bringing back the articles of the house of the LORD and all the exiles from Babylon to this place. Nevertheless, listen, please, to this word which I am speaking in your ears and in the ears of all the people: The prophets who were before me and before you from long ago, and they prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence. The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes, the prophet whom the LORD has sent in truth will be known." And Hananiah the prophet took the yoke-bar from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, and he broke it. And Hananiah said before the eyes of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Thus I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon within two more years from the neck of all the nations.'" And Jeremiah the prophet went his way. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke-bar from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Go, and you shall say to Hananiah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "You have broken yoke-bars of wood, and you will make in place of them yoke-bars of iron." For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "A yoke of iron I have put on the neck of all these nations, to serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and they will serve him; and also the living things of the field I have given to him."'" And Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen, please, Hananiah: the LORD has not sent you, and you, you have made this people trust in falsehood. Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to send you away from the face of the ground. This year you ***will*** die, for you have spoken rebellion against the LORD.'" And Hananiah the prophet died in that year, in the seventh month.

Preview

In the same year as chapter 27, while Jeremiah is still wearing the yoke, a prophet named Hananiah stands up in the temple in front of the priests and the people. He announces, in the name of the LORD, that God has broken the yoke of Babylon, and within two years the temple vessels, King Jeconiah and all the exiles will come home. Jeremiah answers, "Amen! May the LORD do so!" He wishes it were true. But he reminds everyone that a prophet who promises peace will be known as a true prophet only when his word comes to pass. Hananiah grabs the yoke from Jeremiah's neck and breaks it. Jeremiah walks away. Later God sends him back with a word: you

have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place there will be a yoke of iron. And because Hananiah has made the people trust in a lie, he will die that very year. Two months later, he does.

This chapter is a showdown between a true prophet and a false one. As we read, we should notice how gently and honestly Jeremiah speaks, how God's word is tested by whether it comes true, and how serious it is to speak lies in God's name.

Study

28:1 *And it was in that year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet who **was** from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the LORD, before the eyes of the priests and all the people, saying,*

"And it was in that year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month." Zedekiah's fourth year was about 593 B.C. The fifth month on Israel's calendar fell in our July or August. This is the same year as the meeting of the nations in chapter 27, and Jeremiah is still wearing the yoke.

"Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet who was from Gibeon." Gibeon was a town about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was one of the cities given to the priests (Joshua 21:17). The book calls Hananiah "the prophet" six times in this chapter. He was known and respected as a prophet. But that did not make him one.

He spoke "in the house of the LORD, before the eyes of the priests and all the people." He chose the most public place he could find.

28:2-4 *"Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, saying, 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two more years I am bringing back to this place all the articles of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon took from this place and brought **to** Babylon. And Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon, I am bringing back to this place,' declares the LORD, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'"*

"Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel." Hananiah used the very same words Jeremiah used. He sounded exactly like a true prophet.

"I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon." He spoke as if it were already done.

"Within two more years I am bringing back to this place all the articles of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon took from this place." This was the same false promise Jeremiah had warned about in 27:16.

"And Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon, I am bringing back." Jeconiah, also called Jehoiachin, had been taken in 597 B.C. Many in Jerusalem still thought of him as the true king. Hananiah's message was a political one too. It said, in effect, the Babylonian period is almost over, the old king will be back, and Zedekiah's revolt plans will succeed.

Two years. It was specific, it was hopeful, and it was exactly what everyone wanted to hear. God had said seventy years (25:11). Hananiah said two.

28:5-6 *And Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet before the eyes of the priests and before the eyes of all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD; and Jeremiah the prophet said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD carry out your words which you have prophesied, by bringing back the articles of the house of the LORD and all the exiles from Babylon to this place.*

"And Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet before the eyes of the priests and before the eyes of all the people."

What would you expect Jeremiah to say? Perhaps an angry rebuttal. Instead he said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD carry out your words which you have prophesied."

Jeremiah was not being sarcastic. He meant it. He loved his people, and he did not want them to suffer. If only it were true! He took no pleasure in judgment (17:16). He would have loved to see the exiles come home in two years.

That tells us something about Jeremiah's heart. He was not a gloomy man who enjoyed bad news. He wished he could preach peace. But wishing does not make a thing true.

That is a good word for us. We can long for good things for people, even for those who oppose us, and still not pretend that a lie is true.

28:7-9 *Nevertheless, listen, please, to this word which I am speaking in your ears and in the ears of all the people: The prophets who were before me and before you from long ago, and they prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence. The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes, the prophet whom the LORD has sent in truth will be known."*

"Nevertheless, listen, please, to this word which I am speaking in your ears and in the ears of all the people."

Jeremiah gave them a principle from history. "The prophets who were before me and before you from long ago, and they prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence." The true prophets of the past, men like Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah, mostly warned of judgment. Their message called people to repent.

"The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes, the prophet whom the LORD has sent in truth will be known."

This is the test Moses gave in Deuteronomy 18:21-22. If a prophet speaks in the LORD's name and the thing does not happen, the LORD has not spoken it. A message of judgment can be turned aside by repentance, as Jonah's was at Nineveh (18:7-8). But a prophet who promises peace to an unrepentant people has only one way to be proved right: it must happen. Let us wait and see, Jeremiah says. Time will tell who God has sent.

Jeremiah did not say that no prophet ever speaks peace. He himself will speak wonderful words of peace and restoration in chapters 30 to 33. But a promise of peace without repentance stands against the whole witness of the prophets, and it carries a heavy burden of proof.

28:10-11 *And Hananiah the prophet took the yoke-bar from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, and he broke it. And Hananiah said before the eyes of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Thus I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon within two more years from the neck of all the nations.'" And Jeremiah the prophet went his way.*

"And Hananiah the prophet took the yoke-bar from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, and he broke it."

This was Hananiah's own acted message. He matched Jeremiah's sign with one of his own. In front of everyone, he snapped the wooden bar.

"Thus says the LORD," he said. "Thus I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon within two more years from the neck of all the nations."

It was dramatic. It was powerful. The crowd must have been stirred. And it was a lie.

"And Jeremiah the prophet went his way."

That is one of the most striking lines in the chapter. Jeremiah did not argue. He did not try to win the crowd back. He did not make up an answer. He simply walked away and waited for God to speak.

There is great wisdom in that. When we do not have a word from God, it is better to be quiet than to say something of our own. Jeremiah knew the difference between his own opinions and God's word, and he would not mix them up. Sometimes the most faithful thing to do is to wait.

28:12-14 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke-bar from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Go, and you shall say to Hananiah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "You have broken yoke-bars of wood, and you will make in place of them yoke-bars of iron." For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "A yoke of iron I have put on the neck of all these nations, to serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and they will serve him; and also the living things of the field I have given to him."'"*

"And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke-bar." The Hebrew does not say how long Jeremiah waited. But God did speak.

"Go, and you shall say to Hananiah." Notice that Jeremiah went to Hananiah directly.

"You have broken yoke-bars of wood, and you will make in place of them yoke-bars of iron."

By breaking the wooden yoke, Hananiah had not broken Babylon's power. He had made things worse. A wooden yoke can be broken. An iron yoke cannot. By leading the people to resist Babylon, false prophets like Hananiah were setting them up for a much harder bondage. When Zedekiah finally rebelled, Babylon came back and destroyed the city.

"A yoke of iron I have put on the neck of all these nations, to serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and they will serve him." Moses had warned that if Israel would not serve the LORD with joy, they would serve their enemies under "a yoke of iron" (Deuteronomy 28:47-48).

There is a lesson for us here. When we try to throw off God's discipline in our own way, we often end up in something heavier. Jesus offers a different yoke. He said to come to Him, all who are weary and burdened, and He would give rest. "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). The way out of the iron yoke is not breaking it ourselves, but coming to Him.

28:15-16 *And Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen, please, Hananiah: the LORD has not sent you, and you, you have made this people trust in falsehood. Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to send you away from the face of the ground. This year you **will** die, for you have spoken rebellion against the LORD.'"*

"Listen, please, Hananiah: the LORD has not sent you, and you, you have made this people trust in falsehood."

This was the real crime. Hananiah did not just make a mistake. He led a whole nation to trust in a lie. That trust would cost thousands of lives when they rebelled against Babylon.

"Look, I am about to send you away from the face of the ground." There is a wordplay here. Hananiah claimed the LORD had sent him, but God had not "sent" him. Now God would "send" him away, off the face of the earth.

"This year you will die, for you have spoken rebellion against the LORD." The Law said a prophet who spoke in God's name what God had not commanded, or who spoke rebellion against the LORD, must die (Deuteronomy 13:5; 18:20). The words "spoken rebellion" are the same words used in Deuteronomy 13:5.

28:17 *And Hananiah the prophet died in that year, in the seventh month.*

"And Hananiah the prophet died in that year, in the seventh month."

Verse 1 told us this happened in the fifth month. Hananiah died two months later.

He had promised that the yoke of Babylon would be broken in two years. He did not live two more months. Jeremiah's word came true almost at once, and it proved which of them God had sent. By Moses' test, Jeremiah was a true prophet and Hananiah a false one.

This is a sobering end. God takes it very seriously when anyone speaks lies in His name. James says that not many should become teachers, because teachers will be judged more strictly (James 3:1). Anyone who teaches God's Word, a pastor, a Bible study leader, a parent, carries a weight of responsibility. We must be careful to say only what God has said.

It is also a comfort. God's word always comes true in the end. False voices may be loud, confident and popular for a while, like Hananiah was. But they will not last. God's word stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

How do we tell a true voice from a false one today? We test it against Scripture (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1). Does it agree with the whole of God's Word? Does it call people to repentance and faith in Christ? Or does it tell them only what they want to hear?

Summary

In the fifth month of Zedekiah's fourth year, the prophet Hananiah from Gibeon told Jeremiah, in the temple before the priests and people, that the LORD had broken the yoke of Babylon and that within two years the temple vessels, King Jeconiah and all the exiles would return. Jeremiah answered, "Amen! May the LORD do so!" but reminded them that the prophets before them had warned of war and disaster, and a prophet of peace would be known as sent by God only when his word came true. Hananiah took the yoke from Jeremiah's neck and broke it, announcing that God would break Nebuchadnezzar's yoke within two years, and Jeremiah went his way. Then the LORD sent Jeremiah back to tell Hananiah that he had broken a wooden yoke but would bring an iron one in its place, for God had put an iron yoke on all the nations to serve Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah told Hananiah that the LORD had not sent him, that he had made the people trust in a lie, and that he would die that year for speaking rebellion against the LORD. Hananiah died two months later.

Study Questions

1. When did this happen, and where did Hananiah give his message? (28:1)

2. What did Hananiah promise would happen within two years? (28:2-4)

3. How did Jeremiah first respond to Hananiah's prophecy, and what does that show about his heart? (28:6)

4. What test did Jeremiah give for a prophet who prophesies peace? Where does that test come from? (28:8-9; Deuteronomy 18:21-22)

5. What did Hananiah do to Jeremiah's yoke, and what did Jeremiah do next? (28:10-11)

6. What did God mean by saying the wooden yoke would be replaced by a yoke of iron? (28:13-14)

7. Why did Hananiah die, and how soon? (28:15-17)

8. Jeremiah walked away and waited for God to speak. When have you been tempted to answer with your own opinion instead of waiting for God? What might it look like to wait?

9. Is there discipline in your life you have tried to throw off your own way? How does Jesus' offer of His easy yoke speak to you? (Matthew 11:28-30)

10. Hananiah's message was popular and confident. How can you test the teaching you hear against Scripture this week? (Acts 17:11)

Jeremiah 29: Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles

Scripture

29:1-14 And these ***are*** the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders of the exiles, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, after Jeconiah the king and the queen mother and the court officials, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen and the smiths had gone out from Jerusalem, by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah the king of Judah sent to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, to Babylon, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and dwell ***in them***, and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and father sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there, and do not diminish. And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.' For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Do not let your prophets who ***are*** in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to your dreams which you are dreaming. For they are prophesying falsely to you in My name; I did not send them,' declares the LORD. For thus says the LORD: 'When seventy years for Babylon are completed, I will visit you, and I will carry out on you My good word, to bring you back to this place. For I, I know the plans which I am planning concerning you,' declares the LORD, 'plans of welfare and not for calamity, to give you a latter end and a hope. And you will call on Me, and you will come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find ***Me***, when you seek Me with all your heart. And I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will turn back your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have banished you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.'

29:15-23 Because you have said, 'The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,' for thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your brothers who did not go out with you into exile; thus says the LORD of armies: 'Look, I am about to send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and I will make them like the rotten figs which cannot be eaten because of badness. And I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and I will make them into a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, into a curse and into a horror and into a hissing and into a reproach among all the nations where I have banished them, because they have not listened to My words,' declares the LORD, 'which I sent to them by My servants the prophets, rising early and sending; and you did not listen,' declares the LORD. And you, hear the word of the LORD, all the exiles whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying falsehood to you in My name: 'Look, I am about to give them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and he will strike them down before your eyes. And a curse will be taken from them by all the exiles of Judah who ***are*** in Babylon, saying, "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire," because

they have done folly in Israel, and they have committed adultery with the wives of their neighbors, and they have spoken a word in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I ***am*** the one who knows, and a witness,' declares the LORD."

29:24-32 And to Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall speak, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, saying, 'Because you, you have sent letters in your own name to all the people who ***are*** in Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, "The LORD has made you priest in place of Jehoiada the priest, to be overseers ***in*** the house of the LORD for every man who is mad and who prophesies, and you shall put him into the stocks and into the iron collar. And now, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah the Anathothite, who is prophesying to you? For therefore he has sent to us ***in*** Babylon, saying, 'It ***will be*** long; build houses and dwell ***in them***, and plant gardens and eat their produce.'"' " And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Send to all the exiles, saying, 'Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: "Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I, I did not send him, and he has made you trust in falsehood, therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his offspring; he will not have a man dwelling among this people, and he will not look on the good which I am doing for My people,' declares the LORD, 'for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD.'"' "

Preview

Jeremiah writes a letter to the Jews who were carried off to Babylon with King Jeconiah in 597 B.C. False prophets among them are saying the exile will be over soon. Jeremiah tells them the opposite: settle down. Build houses, plant gardens, marry and have children, and seek the welfare of Babylon, the city where God has sent you, and pray for it. The exile will last seventy years. But God has not forgotten them. He knows the plans He has for them, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give them a future and a hope. When they seek Him with all their heart, they will find Him, and He will bring them home. The letter also names false prophets in Babylon, and the chapter ends with God's word against Shemaiah, who wanted Jeremiah locked up.

This chapter holds one of the most loved verses in the Bible, 29:11. As we read, we will look carefully at what it meant for the people it was first written to, and then at how we can rightly take comfort in it today. We should also ask how we can live faithfully in a place that is not our home.

Study

29:1-3 *And these **are** the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders of the exiles, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, after Jeconiah the king and the queen mother and the court officials, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen and the smiths had gone out from Jerusalem, by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah the king of Judah sent to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, to Babylon, saying,*

"These are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders of the exiles, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people."

They had been taken "after Jeconiah the king and the queen mother and the court officials, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen and the smiths had gone out from Jerusalem." That was the deportation of 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:12-16). These were the good figs of chapter 24.

The letter was carried "by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah the king of Judah sent to Nebuchadnezzar." Jeremiah sent his letter with these royal envoys. Elasah was probably a brother of Ahikam, who had saved Jeremiah's life (26:24).

This letter was likely written a few years after 597 B.C., early in Zedekiah's reign, about the same time as chapters 27 and 28.

29:4 *"Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:*

"Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon."

Notice who sent them. Not Nebuchadnezzar. "Whom I have sent." Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers marched them there, but the LORD was the One behind it. The exile was His discipline, not His defeat. If God sent them, then God was with them there.

29:5-6 *'Build houses and dwell **in them**, and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and father sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there, and do not diminish.*

"Build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their produce." These are not words for a short stay. You do not build a house and plant a garden if you expect to leave in two years. You do it when you are staying.

"Take wives and father sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands." Think three generations ahead. "Multiply there, and do not diminish." God wanted His people to grow, not shrink, even in exile.

Some exiles were living out of their bags, waiting to go home any day. Jeremiah told them to unpack.

29:7 *And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.'*

"And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare."

The word "welfare" is shalom, which means peace, well-being, wholeness. Babylon was the enemy. And God tells them to seek the shalom of Babylon and to pray for it.

Why? First, because God had sent them there. Second, because their own welfare was tied to the city's. If Babylon had peace, they would have peace.

They were not to become Babylonians. They were not to worship Babylon's gods. Daniel and his friends show us how that looks. They served the king faithfully and worked for the good of the kingdom, but they would not bow to idols or stop praying to the LORD (Daniel 1:8; 3:16-18; 6:10).

This verse speaks to believers today. Peter calls Christians "sojourners and exiles" in this world (1 Peter 2:11). Our true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). But while we are here, we are to do good to our neighbors and our cities, live honorably among unbelievers (1 Peter 2:12), and pray for those in authority, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We do not withdraw from the world, and we do not become like it.

How are you seeking the good of the place where God has put you? Have you prayed for your town, your neighbors, your leaders this week?

29:8-9 *For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Do not let your prophets who **are** in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to your dreams which you are dreaming. For they are prophesying falsely to you in My name; I did not send them,' declares the LORD.*

"Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to your dreams which you are dreaming." There were false prophets in Babylon too, just like Hananiah in Jerusalem. They were telling the exiles the trouble would be over soon.

"For they are prophesying falsely to you in My name; I did not send them."

29:10 *For thus says the LORD: 'When seventy years for Babylon are completed, I will visit you, and I will carry out on you My good word, to bring you back to this place.*

"When seventy years for Babylon are completed, I will visit you, and I will carry out on you My good word, to bring you back to this place."

Here is the timeline, the same one Jeremiah gave in 25:11-12. Seventy years "for Babylon," that is, for Babylon's rule. Most of the people reading this letter would die in Babylon. Their children or

grandchildren would go home. That came true when Cyrus decreed their return in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1).

29:11 *For I, I know the plans which I am planning concerning you,' declares the LORD, 'plans of welfare and not for calamity, to give you a latter end and a hope.*

"For I, I know the plans which I am planning concerning you," declares the LORD, "plans of welfare and not for calamity, to give you a latter end and a hope."

This is one of the most loved verses in the Bible, printed on cards and plaques. To understand it rightly, we need to read it where God put it.

First, who was it written to? To a whole community of exiles in Babylon. The word "you" here is plural. It was God's promise to His people as a nation.

Second, what was the setting? It came right after verse 10: seventy years in Babylon. God's "plans of welfare" did not mean they would go home next week. It meant most of them would grow old and die in a foreign land, and God would still be good to them. It meant God had not abandoned them.

Third, what were the plans? "Welfare" is shalom again, the same word as verse 7. God would give them peace and well-being, "and not for calamity." "To give you a latter end and a hope." The latter end means the outcome, the future. God was not finished with Israel. Their story would not end in Babylon.

So what does this verse mean for us today?

It does not promise that every believer will have health, wealth, success or an easy road. It is not a promise that God will give us whatever we have planned for ourselves. Notice whose plans they are: "the plans which I am planning." They are God's plans, not ours.

But we can rightly take comfort in it, because it shows us the heart of God. The same God who would not abandon His people in Babylon does not abandon His people now. For every believer in Christ, God's plans are good, even in hard seasons. Paul says God works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28), and that good is to make us like His Son (Romans 8:29). Our "latter end and a hope" is sure: an inheritance kept in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3-4), and a future with Christ that no exile can take away.

So when you read Jeremiah 29:11, read it in Babylon. Read it in the hard place. That is where it was written. It does not say the hard place will end tomorrow. It says God knows what He is doing, His plans for His people are good, and He has a future for them. That is a promise worth holding on to.

29:12-13 *And you will call on Me, and you will come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find **Me**, when you seek Me with all your heart.*

"And you will call on Me, and you will come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you."

God's plan of welfare would not happen without prayer. It would come as His people turned back to Him. Daniel did exactly this when he read Jeremiah's prophecy. He prayed and confessed the sin of his people (Daniel 9:2-3).

"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart."

Moses had said this very thing, long before. If Israel was scattered among the nations for their sin, and from there they sought the LORD with all their heart and soul, they would find Him (Deuteronomy 4:27-29).

"With all your heart." Judah's problem had always been a divided heart (3:10). In exile, cut off from the temple and the land, they would learn to seek God Himself.

This is a promise for anyone who truly seeks God. He is not hiding from those who come to Him honestly. Jesus said, "seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7). If you are seeking God with all your heart, you will find Him.

29:14 *And I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will turn back your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have banished you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.'*

"And I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and I will turn back your captivity." To "turn back your captivity" means to restore their fortunes, to bring them home and make things right.

"And I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have banished you." Notice "from all the nations." In Jeremiah's day, most exiles were in Babylon, though some were in Egypt and other lands. The return under Cyrus brought back some of them. But like 16:15 and 23:8, this promise reaches further. God will gather Israel from every nation in the last days, and bring them home for good, when Christ returns.

29:15-19 *Because you have said, 'The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,' for thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your brothers who did not go out with you into exile; thus says the LORD of armies: 'Look, I am about to send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and I will make them like the rotten figs which cannot be eaten because of badness. And I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and I will make them into a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, into a curse and into a horror and into a hissing and into a reproach among all the nations where I have banished them, because they have not listened to My words,' declares the LORD, 'which I sent to them by My servants the prophets, rising early and sending; and you did not listen,' declares the LORD.*

The exiles had said, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon." The exiles were proud of their own prophets, who were telling them that the exile would be short.

So God tells them what is about to happen to "the king who sits on the throne of David," Zedekiah, and to "your brothers who did not go out with you into exile." "I am about to send on them the

sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and I will make them like the rotten figs which cannot be eaten because of badness." This is the picture of chapter 24.

Why? "Because they have not listened to My words." And then God turns to the exiles: "and you did not listen." The exiles had not listened either.

29:20-23 *And you, hear the word of the LORD, all the exiles whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying falsehood to you in My name: 'Look, I am about to give them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and he will strike them down before your eyes. And a curse will be taken from them by all the exiles of Judah who **are** in Babylon, saying, "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire," because they have done folly in Israel, and they have committed adultery with the wives of their neighbors, and they have spoken a word in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I **am** the one who knows, and a witness,' declares the LORD."*

"Hear the word of the LORD, all the exiles." Now God names two false prophets in Babylon: "Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah." This Zedekiah is a different man from the king.

"I am about to give them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and he will strike them down before your eyes." Why would Nebuchadnezzar kill them? Probably because their message was stirring up hope of revolt. A prophet who promised that Babylon's yoke would soon be broken was a political danger to Babylon.

Their death would become a byword, a curse the exiles would use: "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire." Burning was a known Babylonian punishment. God delivered three faithful men from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (Daniel 3). These two had no such deliverance.

What was their sin? Not only false prophecy. "They have committed adultery with the wives of their neighbors." Their lives matched their lies. Jesus said we would know false prophets by their fruit (Matthew 7:15-20).

"And I am the one who knows, and a witness." They may have hidden their sins from people. They could not hide them from God.

29:24-28 *And to Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall speak, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, saying, 'Because you, you have sent letters in your own name to all the people who* ***are*** *in Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, "The LORD has made you priest in place of Jehoiada the priest, to be overseers* ***in*** *the house of the LORD for every man who is mad and who prophesies, and you shall put him into the stocks and into the iron collar. And now, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah the Anathothite, who is prophesying to you? For therefore he has sent to us* ***in*** *Babylon, saying, 'It* ***will be*** *long; build houses and dwell* ***in them****, and plant gardens and eat their produce.'"'"*

"And to Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall speak." Shemaiah was in Babylon. He had heard about Jeremiah's letter and was furious. So he wrote letters of his own "to all the people who are in Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest." Zephaniah had taken the place of the overseer of the temple, the job Pashhur had held (20:1).

Shemaiah wrote, "The LORD has made you priest in place of Jehoiada the priest, to be overseers in the house of the LORD for every man who is mad and who prophesies." "You shall put him into the stocks and into the iron collar."

"And now, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah the Anathothite?" Shemaiah's complaint was that Jeremiah had told the exiles, "It will be long; build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their produce." He wanted Jeremiah locked up.

Notice what he calls Jeremiah: "mad." People who speak God's truth have often been called crazy. Festus told Paul he was out of his mind (Acts 26:24). Some said of Jesus Himself that He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21).

29:29-32 *And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Send to all the exiles, saying, 'Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: "Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I, I did not send him, and he has made you trust in falsehood, therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his offspring; he will not have a man dwelling among this people, and he will not look on the good which I am doing for My people,' declares the LORD, 'for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD.'"'"*

"And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet." Zephaniah did not lock Jeremiah up. He read him the letter. Zephaniah seems to have been more open to Jeremiah than others (21:1; 37:3).

Then God gave Jeremiah a word for all the exiles about Shemaiah. God had not sent him, and he had made the people trust in a lie, as Hananiah had (28:15). So God would punish him and his offspring. None of his descendants would live among the people, and he himself would not see "the good which I am doing for My people," the return from exile. Why? "For he has spoken rebellion against the LORD," the same charge God brought against Hananiah (28:16).

There is a sad lesson here. Shemaiah wanted the exiles to have hope. But he wanted a false hope, a quick one. Because he rejected God's true hope, he and his family would have no share in it.

Summary

Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon by the hand of envoys Zedekiah sent to Nebuchadnezzar. God told the exiles, whom He Himself had sent, to build houses, plant gardens, raise families, and seek the welfare of Babylon and pray for it, for in its welfare they would have welfare. They were not to listen to the false prophets among them. After seventy years for Babylon, God would bring them back, for He knew His plans for them, plans of welfare and not of calamity, to give them a future and a hope. When they sought Him with all their heart, they would find Him, and He would gather them from all the nations. But the king and people still in Jerusalem would be like rotten figs. The false prophets Ahab and Zedekiah, who lied and committed adultery, would be roasted in the fire by Nebuchadnezzar, and Shemaiah, who demanded that Jeremiah be put in the stocks, would not see the good God would do for His people.

Study Questions

1. To whom did Jeremiah send this letter, and who carried it? (29:1-3)

2. Who does God say sent the exiles to Babylon? Why does that matter? (29:4)

3. What did God tell the exiles to do in Babylon, and why would that have been hard to hear? (29:5-7)

4. How long would the exile last, and what would God do when it was over? (29:10)

5. Who was Jeremiah 29:11 first written to, and what was their situation? What did God promise them? (29:10-11)

6. What does God promise to those who seek Him with all their heart? Where did Moses say the same thing? (29:13; Deuteronomy 4:29)

7. What did Shemaiah want done to Jeremiah, and why? (29:26-28)

8. How can you seek the welfare of your town or city and pray for it, as the exiles were told to do for Babylon? (29:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2)

9. How would you explain Jeremiah 29:11 to a friend who thinks it promises an easy life? How can it still comfort them in a hard season?

10. Are you seeking God with all your heart, or with a divided heart? What would it look like to seek Him wholeheartedly this week?

Jeremiah 30: The Time of Jacob's Trouble

Scripture

30:1-11 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, saying, 'Write for yourself all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For look, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'and I will turn back the captivity of My people Israel and Judah,' says the LORD, 'and I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers, and they will possess it.'" And these ***are*** the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah: "For thus says the LORD: 'A sound of trembling we have heard, of dread, and ***there is*** no peace. Ask, please, and see whether a male gives birth. Why have I seen every man ***with*** his hands on his loins like ***a woman*** giving birth, and all faces turned to paleness? Alas! For that day ***is*** great, so that ***there is*** none like it; and it ***is*** a time of distress for Jacob, and from it he will be saved. And it will be in that day,' declares the LORD of armies, 'I will break his yoke from your neck, and your fetters I will tear apart; and strangers will no longer make him serve. And they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. And you, do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' declares the LORD, 'and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for look, I am about to save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity; and Jacob will return and be undisturbed and be at ease, and ***there will be*** none who terrifies ***him***. For I ***am*** with you,' declares the LORD, 'to save you; for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have scattered you; only of you I will not make a full end; and I will discipline you in justice, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.'

30:12-24 For thus says the LORD: 'Your fracture ***is*** incurable; your wound ***is*** severe. There is none who pleads your cause, for ***your*** sore; remedies of healing there are none for you. All your lovers have forgotten you; they do not seek you; for with the blow of an enemy I have struck you, ***with*** the correction of a cruel one, because of the greatness of your iniquity; your sins are numerous. Why do you cry out over your fracture? Your pain ***is*** incurable. Because of the greatness of your iniquity, your sins are numerous; I have done these ***things*** to you. Therefore all who devour you will be devoured, and all your opponents, all of them, will go into captivity; and those who plunder you will become plunder, and all who despoil you I will make into spoil. For I will bring up healing for you, and from your wounds I will heal you,' declares the LORD, 'for they have called you an outcast: "She ***is*** Zion; there is none who seeks her."' Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to turn back the captivity of the tents of Jacob, and on his dwellings I will have compassion; and the city will be rebuilt on its mound, and the citadel will dwell on its proper place. And thanksgiving will go out from them, and the sound of those who make merry; and I will multiply them, and they will not diminish; and I will make them honored, and they will not be insignificant. And his sons will be as long ago, and his congregation will be established before Me; and I will punish all who oppress him. And his noble one will be from him, and his ruler will come out from his midst; and I will bring him near, and he will draw near to Me; for who is he, this one who has pledged his heart to draw near to Me?' declares the LORD. 'And you will be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to you for God.'" Look, the storm of the LORD! Rage has gone out, a sweeping storm; it will whirl on the head of the wicked. The burning of the anger of the LORD will not turn

back until He has done and until He has carried out the purposes of His heart. At the end of the days you will understand it.

Preview

Chapter 30 opens the part of Jeremiah often called the Book of Comfort (chapters 30 to 33). God tells Jeremiah to write down a book of promises: He will bring both Israel and Judah back to their land. But first comes a day of terror so great that there is none like it, "a time of distress for Jacob," and from it Jacob will be saved. God will break the yoke from His people's neck, and they will serve the LORD their God and David their king. Their wound looks incurable, but God will heal it, rebuild the city, and bring a ruler from among them near to Himself.

This chapter looks far beyond the return from Babylon to the last days. As we read, we will see what Scripture teaches about the coming time of Jacob's trouble, and take heart that God disciplines His people but does not make a full end of them.

Study

30:1-3 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, saying, 'Write for yourself all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For look, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'and I will turn back the captivity of My people Israel and Judah,' says the LORD, 'and I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers, and they will possess it.'"*

"Write for yourself all the words which I have spoken to you in a book."

Why write them down? Because many of these promises would not be fulfilled for a long time, and God wanted them kept.

"I will turn back the captivity of My people Israel and Judah." Notice both names again. The north had been in exile since 722 B.C., and Judah was going now. God promises to restore both, as one people.

"And I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers, and they will possess it." This is a promise about a real land, the land God gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 15:18; 17:8).

Scripture does not date this chapter. Many think it comes from the last years before Jerusalem fell, around the time of chapters 32 and 33, which are dated to Zedekiah's tenth year.

30:4-6 *And these **are** the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah: "For thus says the LORD: 'A sound of trembling we have heard, of dread, and **there is** no peace. Ask, please, and see whether a male gives birth. Why have I seen every man **with** his hands on his loins like **a woman** giving birth, and all faces turned to paleness?*

"These are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah."

"A sound of trembling we have heard, of dread, and there is no peace." The scene opens with terror.

"Ask, please, and see whether a male gives birth." Of course not. "Why have I seen every man with his hands on his loins like a woman giving birth, and all faces turned to paleness?"

Picture strong men bent over like a woman in hard labor, their faces white with fear. The prophets often use birth pains for the terror of the day of the LORD (Isaiah 13:6-8). Jesus used it too when He spoke of the troubles before His return as "the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:8).

30:7 *Alas! For that day **is** great, so that **there is** none like it; and it **is** a time of distress for Jacob, and from it he will be saved.*

"Alas! For that day is great, so that there is none like it; and it is a time of distress for Jacob, and from it he will be saved."

This is one of the key verses in the Old Testament about the last days. Older Bibles call it the time of Jacob's trouble.

First, it is "that day," a specific time. "That day" is how the prophets speak of the day of the LORD, the time when God steps into history to judge the world and rescue His people (Isaiah 2:12; Joel 2:1-2; Zephaniah 1:14-15).

Second, it is "great, so that there is none like it." That was not true even of 586 B.C. Daniel describes the same time: "a time of distress such as has not been since there was a nation until that time," and at that time his people will escape (Daniel 12:1). Jesus spoke of the same thing: a great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be (Matthew 24:21).

Third, it is "a time of distress for Jacob." Jacob, renamed Israel, is the father of the twelve tribes (Genesis 32:28). This trouble is focused on the nation of Israel, not the church.

Fourth, "from it he will be saved." Israel will go through it and come out of it.

So when is it? I believe, with many Bible teachers, that this time of Jacob's trouble is the coming seven-year Tribulation, the seventieth week of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27). Before the Tribulation begins, Christ will come for His church and catch up believers to meet Him in the air. That is the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Jesus promised to keep His church from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world (Revelation 3:10), and Paul says God has not appointed us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Then the Tribulation will come on the earth. It will be a time of judgment on the world and great distress for Israel (Matthew 24; Revelation 6-19).

But God will not let it destroy Israel. A great many Jewish people will turn to their Messiah. Zechariah says that God will pour out on the house of David and on Jerusalem a spirit of grace, and they will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him (Zechariah 12:10). At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus Christ will return visibly to the earth (Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 19:11-16),

rescue His people, and set up His kingdom. Paul says, "all Israel will be saved," for the Deliverer will come from Zion (Romans 11:26). That is how Jacob "will be saved" from it.

Other Bible teachers read this verse differently. Some see it only as the fall of Babylon or the Babylonian crisis in Jeremiah's day. Others see it as the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, or apply it to the church. But the words "none like it" and the rescue that follows point beyond anything that has happened yet. And what follows, the yoke broken forever, "David their king," and a people never again terrified (30:8-10), has not happened yet.

What does this mean for us? The world is heading toward a time of judgment, and God keeps His promises to Israel even through the worst. If God will not abandon Jacob, He will not abandon anyone who belongs to Him. For the believer in Christ, our hope is not to go through the wrath, but to be with the Lord, who will come for us (John 14:1-3).

30:8-9 *And it will be in that day,' declares the LORD of armies, 'I will break his yoke from your neck, and your fetters I will tear apart; and strangers will no longer make him serve. And they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.*

"And it will be in that day," declares the LORD of armies, "I will break his yoke from your neck, and your fetters I will tear apart."

Remember chapters 27 and 28, when Hananiah broke Jeremiah's yoke and promised freedom in two years. Here, "in that day," God Himself will break the yoke. This freedom is real, and it comes in God's time.

"And strangers will no longer make him serve." Israel will never again be ruled by foreign powers.

"And they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them."

They will still serve, but now the right Master.

Who is "David their king"? David had been dead about four hundred years.

Most Bible teachers understand "David" here as the Messiah, the great Son of David, Jesus Christ. In 23:5 God promised to raise up "for David a righteous Branch." Hosea and Ezekiel speak the same way (Hosea 3:5; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25). The Messiah is called by the name of His great ancestor. The angel told Mary that God would give Jesus "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32).

Some Bible teachers, within the same premillennial view, believe that David himself will be raised from the dead and serve as a prince under Christ in the kingdom. Scripture does say the Old Testament saints will be raised (Daniel 12:2). But whichever way we take it, the King of that kingdom is Jesus.

30:10-11 *And you, do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' declares the LORD, 'and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for look, I am about to save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity; and Jacob will return and be undisturbed and be at ease, and* ***there will be*** *none who terrifies* ***him****. For I* ***am*** *with you,' declares the LORD, 'to save you; for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have scattered you; only of you I will not make a full end; and I will discipline you in justice, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.'*

"And you, do not fear, O My servant Jacob," declares the LORD, "and do not be dismayed, O Israel."

After the terror of verses 5-7, God speaks tenderly. He calls Israel "My servant."

"For look, I am about to save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity." "And Jacob will return and be undisturbed and be at ease, and there will be none who terrifies him." That will be fully true in the kingdom.

"For I am with you," declares the LORD, "to save you." The same promise God made to Jeremiah at his call (1:8, 19), He now makes to the whole nation.

"For I will make a full end of all the nations where I have scattered you; only of you I will not make a full end."

This is a remarkable promise, and history bears it out. The great empires that conquered Israel are gone: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. But the Jewish people are still here. God has kept them, just as He said.

"And I will discipline you in justice, and I will by no means leave you unpunished." God would not pretend their sin did not matter. He would discipline them "in justice," in the right measure, a father's discipline, not a final rejection (Hebrews 12:6). God has not cast away His people (Romans 11:1-2).

30:12-15 *For thus says the LORD: 'Your fracture* ***is*** *incurable; your wound* ***is*** *severe. There is none who pleads your cause, for* ***your*** *sore; remedies of healing there are none for you. All your lovers have forgotten you; they do not seek you; for with the blow of an enemy I have struck you,* ***with*** *the correction of a cruel one, because of the greatness of your iniquity; your sins are numerous. Why do you cry out over your fracture? Your pain* ***is*** *incurable. Because of the greatness of your iniquity, your sins are numerous; I have done these* ***things*** *to you.*

Now the tone changes. "Your fracture is incurable; your wound is severe."

Remember 17:9: the heart "is incurable." Here the whole nation has a wound no doctor can heal.

"There is none who pleads your cause."

"All your lovers have forgotten you; they do not seek you." Their "lovers" were the allies they had trusted instead of God, especially Egypt (22:20).

"For with the blow of an enemy I have struck you." This is God speaking. The wound came from His hand, "because of the greatness of your iniquity; your sins are numerous."

"Why do you cry out over your fracture?" God is being honest. "I have done these things to you," because of your sin.

This is hard to hear. But it is the start of healing to admit the truth. As long as Judah blamed others, there was no cure. When we stop making excuses and own our sin, we are ready for God's healing.

30:16-17 *Therefore all who devour you will be devoured, and all your opponents, all of them, will go into captivity; and those who plunder you will become plunder, and all who despoil you I will make into spoil. For I will bring up healing for you, and from your wounds I will heal you,' declares the LORD, 'for they have called you an outcast: "She **is** Zion; there is none who seeks her."'*

"Therefore all who devour you will be devoured." And here is the turn. You would expect, therefore I will destroy you. Instead God turns on those who devoured them.

"All your opponents, all of them, will go into captivity; and those who plunder you will become plunder." The nations God used to discipline Israel, but who did it with cruelty and pride, would be judged in turn.

"For I will bring up healing for you, and from your wounds I will heal you," declares the LORD.

Do you see it? In verse 12 the wound is "incurable." In verse 17 God says, "I will heal you." What no one else can heal, God can. What is impossible for man is possible with God (Luke 18:27).

Why would God do it? "For they have called you an outcast: She is Zion; there is none who seeks her." The nations mocked Jerusalem as a city nobody cared about. God cared.

That is the gospel for us too. Our wound of sin is incurable by any human remedy. But Peter says of Jesus, "by whose wound you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

30:18-20 *Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to turn back the captivity of the tents of Jacob, and on his dwellings I will have compassion; and the city will be rebuilt on its mound, and the citadel will dwell on its proper place. And thanksgiving will go out from them, and the sound of those who make merry; and I will multiply them, and they will not diminish; and I will make them honored, and they will not be insignificant. And his sons will be as long ago, and his congregation will be established before Me; and I will punish all who oppress him.*

"Look, I am about to turn back the captivity of the tents of Jacob, and on his dwellings I will have compassion."

"And the city will be rebuilt on its mound." Ancient cities were often rebuilt on the ruins of earlier cities, so over time they sat on a hill of rubble called a tell. Jerusalem would rise again on its own ruins.

"And thanksgiving will go out from them, and the sound of those who make merry." The joy silenced in 7:34 and 16:9 comes back.

"I will multiply them, and they will not diminish; and I will make them honored, and they will not be insignificant."

The rebuilding after the return from Babylon was a beginning of this. But the full joy, the honor, and the end of all oppression wait for the kingdom of Christ.

30:21-22 *And his noble one will be from him, and his ruler will come out from his midst; and I will bring him near, and he will draw near to Me; for who is he, this one who has pledged his heart to draw near to Me?' declares the LORD. 'And you will be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to you for God.'"*

"And his noble one will be from him, and his ruler will come out from his midst."

Israel's ruler will not be a foreigner set over them by some empire. He will be one of their own. That fits the Messiah, who came from the tribe of Judah and the family of David (Hebrews 7:14).

"And I will bring him near, and he will draw near to Me." In Israel, only the priests could come near to God in the temple. When King Uzziah tried to burn incense in the holy place, God struck him with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). But this ruler will be brought near by God Himself.

"For who is he, this one who has pledged his heart to draw near to Me?" Who would dare risk his life to come near to God? Only one whom God invites. This points to a Ruler who is also a Priest: David's Lord is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4), and Hebrews says that is Jesus (Hebrews 5:5-6; 7:1-17). Zechariah 6:13 speaks of the Branch who will be a priest on His throne.

"And you will be to Me for a people, and I, I will be to you for God." Here is the heart of the covenant again (24:7; 31:33). Through this Priest-King, God and His people will be together at last.

30:23-24 *Look, the storm of the LORD! Rage has gone out, a sweeping storm; it will whirl on the head of the wicked. The burning of the anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has done and until He has carried out the purposes of His heart. At the end of the days you will understand it.*

"Look, the storm of the LORD! Rage has gone out, a sweeping storm; it will whirl on the head of the wicked." These words repeat 23:19-20 almost exactly. There they were aimed at the false prophets in Jerusalem. Here they are aimed at the wicked who oppress Israel.

"The burning of the anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has done and until He has carried out the purposes of His heart." God will finish what He has begun, both His judgment and His restoration.

"At the end of the days you will understand it." "The end of the days" is how the prophets speak of the last days (Isaiah 2:2; Daniel 10:14). We still wait for part of it, but God will carry out the purposes of His heart.

Summary

God told Jeremiah to write His words in a book, for days were coming when He would bring Israel and Judah back to their land. First would come a day of terror, so great there would be none like it, the time of distress for Jacob, and Jacob would be saved out of it. I believe this is the coming Tribulation, after Christ takes His church, with Israel rescued at His return. In that day God would break Israel's yoke, and they would serve the LORD their God and David their king, the Messiah. God would make a full end of the nations where He scattered Israel, but not of Israel, whom He would discipline in justice. Their wound was incurable, yet He would heal them, rebuild Jerusalem, restore their joy, and bring their ruler near to Himself.

Study Questions

1. What did God tell Jeremiah to do with His words, and what did He promise to Israel and Judah? (30:2-3)

2. What picture does God use in verse 6 to show the terror of that day? (30:5-6)

3. What four things does verse 7 say about "that day"? (30:7)

4. How do Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21 help us understand the time of Jacob's trouble? (30:7)

5. Who is "David their king" in verse 9, and how does 23:5 help us understand it? (30:9; 23:5)

6. What does God promise about the nations where Israel was scattered, and about Israel itself? (30:11)

7. In verses 12-15 the wound is incurable. What does God promise in verse 17, and why? (30:12-17)

8. God disciplined Israel "in justice" but would not make a full end of them. How have you seen God's discipline work for your good, without Him giving up on you? (30:11; Hebrews 12:6)

9. Israel's healing began with admitting its own sin. Is there anything you need to stop excusing and bring honestly to God?

10. Jesus promised to come for His people (John 14:1-3). How does that hope change the way you face the troubles in the world today?

Jeremiah 31: The New Covenant

Scripture

31:1-14 At that time, declares the LORD, I will be God to all the clans of Israel, and they, they will be a people to Me. Thus says the LORD: The people of the survivors of the sword found favor in the wilderness, going to give him rest, Israel. From afar the LORD appeared to me: And ***with*** an everlasting love I have loved you; therefore I have drawn you ***with*** steadfast love. Again I will build you, and you will be built, O virgin of Israel; again you will adorn yourself ***with*** your tambourines, and you will go out in the dance of those making merry. Again you will plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; planters will plant, and they will put ***them*** to common use. For there is a day ***when*** watchmen will call out on the mountain of Ephraim, "Arise, and let us go up ***to*** Zion, to the LORD our God." For thus says the LORD: Cry out ***with*** gladness for Jacob, and shout for joy at the head of the nations; proclaim, praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, Your people, the remnant of Israel." Look, I am bringing them from the land of ***the*** north, and I will gather them from the remotest parts of ***the*** earth; among them ***are the*** blind and ***the*** lame, ***the*** pregnant and ***the one*** giving birth together; a great assembly, they will return here. With weeping they will come, and with supplications I will bring them; I will make them walk to torrents of water, on a straight path; they will not stumble on it; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim, he ***is*** My firstborn. Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare ***it*** in the coastlands from afar, and say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and He will keep him as a shepherd ***keeps*** his flock." For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and He has redeemed him from the hand of ***one*** stronger than he. And they will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, and they will stream to the goodness of the LORD, for grain and for new wine and for fresh oil, and for the young of the flock and the herd; and their soul will be like a watered garden, and they will not languish again anymore. Then ***the*** virgin will rejoice in the dance, and young men and old ***men*** together; and I will turn their mourning into joy, and I will comfort them, and I will make them glad from their sorrow. And I will saturate the soul of the priests ***with*** fatness, and My people will be satisfied ***with*** My goodness, declares the LORD.

31:15-26 Thus says the LORD: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping of bitterness; Rachel is weeping over her sons; she refuses to be comforted over her sons, because they are not. Thus says the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they will return from the land of ***the*** enemy. And there is hope for your latter end, declares the LORD, and ***the*** sons will return to their own territory. I have certainly heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: "You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like a calf ***that was*** not trained; bring me back, and let me return, for You ***are*** the LORD my God. For after my turning, I repented; and after my being instructed, I slapped ***my*** thigh; I was ashamed, and also I was humiliated, for I bore the reproach of my youth." ***Is*** Ephraim a dear son to Me? Or a child of delights? For as often as I speak against him, I certainly remember him still; therefore My inward parts are in a tumult for him; I will surely have compassion on him, declares the LORD. Set up road markers for yourself; make guideposts for yourself; set your heart to the highway, the way ***which*** you went. Return, O virgin of Israel; return to these your cities. Until when will you waver, O apostate daughter? For the LORD has created a new ***thing*** in

the earth: a female will surround a man. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Again they will say this word in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I turn back their captivity: "May the LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness, O mountain of holiness." And Judah and all its cities will dwell in it together, farmers, and they will set out with ***the*** flock. For I have saturated the weary soul, and every soul that has languished I have filled. On this I awoke, and I looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.

31:27-40 Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah ***with*** the seed of mankind and the seed of animals. And it will be, just as I kept watch over them to pluck up and to pull down and to tear down and to destroy and to do harm, so I will keep watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD. In those days they will not say again, "Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and ***the*** teeth of sons will be blunt." But each man will die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be blunt. Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took hold of their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, in that they, they broke My covenant, and I, I was a husband over them, declares the LORD. For this ***is*** the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put My law in their inward part, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be God to them, and they, they will be a people to Me. And they will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for all of them will know Me, from the least of them and to the greatest of them, declares the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will not remember again. Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day, the statutes of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea, and its waves roar; the LORD of armies ***is*** His name: If these statutes depart from before Me, declares the LORD, also the seed of Israel will cease from being a nation before Me all the days. Thus says the LORD: If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be searched out, also I, I will reject all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD. Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and the city will be built for the LORD from the tower of Hananel ***to*** the Gate of the Corner. And the measuring line will go out again in front of it over the hill of Gareb, and it will turn toward Goah. And all the valley of the corpses and of the fat ashes, and all the fields to the wadi of Kidron, to the corner of the Gate of the Horses toward the east, ***will be*** holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up, and it will not be torn down again forever.

Preview

This chapter is the heart of Jeremiah's book of comfort (chapters 30 to 33). Chapter 30 ended with the time of Jacob's trouble. Now God promises what comes after it. He has loved Israel with "an everlasting love," and He will gather the scattered tribes, the blind and the lame among them, and bring them home. Rachel weeps for her children, but God tells her to stop, because they will return. Ephraim comes home in repentance, and God says His heart yearns for him. Then comes the best-known promise in Jeremiah: "a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," in which God will write His law on their hearts and remember their sin no more. The chapter ends with God's oath that Israel will last as long as the sun and the moon.

Jesus took the cup at the Last Supper and called it the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). So this chapter is about Israel's future, and it is also about what God has done for every believer through Christ. As we read, we should ask whether God's law is written on our own hearts, and whether we know the joy of sins forgiven and never brought up again.

Study

31:1 *At that time, declares the LORD, I will be God to all the clans of Israel, and they, they will be a people to Me.*

"At that time" points back to "the end of the days" (30:24). God will be "God to all the clans of Israel," not just Judah. The northern tribes had been carried off by Assyria in 722 B.C., more than a hundred years before. Many thought of them as lost for good. God did not.

"They, they will be a people to Me." This is the covenant promise God gave at the exodus (Exodus 6:7), and it comes back in verse 33.

31:2-3 *Thus says the LORD: The people of the survivors of the sword found favor in the wilderness, going to give him rest, Israel. From afar the LORD appeared to me: And **with** an everlasting love I have loved you; therefore I have drawn you **with** steadfast love.*

"The people of the survivors of the sword found favor in the wilderness." God reminds them of the exodus. Israel escaped Pharaoh's sword and found grace in the desert. He would do it again for the survivors of Babylon's sword.

"With an everlasting love I have loved you; therefore I have drawn you with steadfast love." The word for steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love that will not let go.

Why did God bring them back? Not because they earned it. They had refused to listen for forty years. He brought them back because His love does not end. That is the same reason He saves anyone (Ephesians 2:4-5). His love comes first, and it draws us to Him.

31:4-6 *Again I will build you, and you will be built, O virgin of Israel; again you will adorn yourself **with** your tambourines, and you will go out in the dance of those making merry. Again you will plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; planters will plant, and they will put **them** to common use. For there is a day **when** watchmen will call out on the mountain of Ephraim, "Arise, and let us go up **to** Zion, to the LORD our God."*

"Again I will build you." What judgment tore down, God would build, as He told Jeremiah at his call (1:10). The nation once called an unfaithful wife (3:1-3) is now called "O virgin of Israel," clean and restored. Tambourines and dancing would come back, and they would plant vineyards "on the mountains of Samaria" and live long enough to enjoy the fruit.

Then watchmen on "the mountain of Ephraim," in the north, will call, "Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God." Ever since Jeroboam set up his golden calves about 930 B.C., the northern tribes had refused to worship in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:26-30). One day north and south will worship together at Zion.

31:7-9 *For thus says the LORD: Cry out **with** gladness for Jacob, and shout for joy at the head of the nations; proclaim, praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, Your people, the remnant of Israel." Look, I am bringing them from the land of **the** north, and I will gather them from the remotest parts of **the** earth; among them **are the** blind and **the** lame, **the** pregnant and **the one** giving birth together; a great assembly, they will return here. With weeping they will come, and with supplications I will bring them; I will make them walk to torrents of water, on a straight path; they will not stumble on it; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim, he **is** My firstborn.*

"Save, O LORD, Your people, the remnant of Israel." A remnant is the part left after judgment, the faithful people God keeps for Himself.

"I will gather them from the remotest parts of the earth." Notice who comes: "the blind and the lame, the pregnant and the one giving birth together." The weakest are not left behind (Isaiah 40:11). "With weeping they will come," tears of repentance and of joy together.

"For I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim, he is My firstborn." Ephraim, Joseph's son, was the leading tribe of the north and here stands for all the northern tribes. The tribes that seemed lost were still God's children (Exodus 4:22).

31:10-11 *Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare **it** in the coastlands from afar, and say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and He will keep him as a shepherd **keeps** his flock." For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and He has redeemed him from the hand of **one** stronger than he.*

The nations are told to listen. "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and He will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock." The scattering was God's judgment, and the gathering will be His grace.

"For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and He has redeemed him from the hand of one stronger than he." To redeem is to buy back, the work of the go'el, the kinsman-redeemer, the close relative who bought back a family member's land or freedom (Leviticus 25:25, 47-49). Babylon was stronger than Israel. God was stronger than Babylon. He is our Redeemer too, and the price He paid for us was the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

31:12-14 *And they will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, and they will stream to the goodness of the LORD, for grain and for new wine and for fresh oil, and for the young of the flock and the herd; and their soul will be like a watered garden, and they will not languish again anymore. Then **the** virgin will rejoice in the dance, and young men and old **men** together; and I will turn their mourning into joy, and I will comfort them, and I will make them glad from their sorrow. And I will saturate the soul of the priests **with** fatness, and My people will be satisfied **with** My goodness, declares the LORD.*

"They will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion." Grain, new wine, oil and flocks would fill the land, and "their soul will be like a watered garden, and they will not languish again anymore." "I will turn their mourning into joy."

Has this happened? In part, when exiles returned after 538 B.C. But "they will not languish again anymore" did not come true then. Jerusalem suffered again under Greece and Rome. I believe the full meaning waits for the day when Christ reigns and Israel is gathered for good (Amos 9:14-15).

31:15 *Thus says the LORD: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping of bitterness; Rachel is weeping over her sons; she refuses to be comforted over her sons, because they are not.*

"A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping of bitterness; Rachel is weeping over her sons; she refuses to be comforted over her sons, because they are not."

Rachel was Jacob's beloved wife, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin (Genesis 35:16-19), so she is pictured as the mother of the nation. Ramah was a town in Benjamin, about five miles north of Jerusalem, where the Babylonians later gathered the captives in chains before marching them off (40:1). Jeremiah pictures Rachel weeping as her children are led away.

Six hundred years later, King Herod killed the boys of Bethlehem, trying to kill the newborn King, and Matthew says this word of Jeremiah was then fulfilled (Matthew 2:16-18). Rachel's tomb was on the way to Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19), and once again mothers wept for children who "are not." The same grief had come back, and Jesus had come into the middle of it. And just as Jeremiah's next verse tells Rachel to stop weeping because her children will return, the Child Herod tried to kill escaped, and He would bring His people the true return.

If you have lost a child, this verse does not hurry you. God put a mother's grief into His word and did not call it weak. And I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

31:16-17 *Thus says the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they will return from the land of **the** enemy. And there is hope for your latter end, declares the LORD, and **the** sons will return to their own territory.*

"Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears." God does not mock Rachel's grief. He answers it: "they will return from the land of the enemy," and "there is hope for your latter end." Hope does not deny the loss. It looks past it. For the believer, our hope rests on Christ, who rose and will raise all who belong to Him, so we grieve, but not as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

31:18-20 *I have certainly heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: "You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like a calf **that was** not trained; bring me back, and let me return, for You **are** the LORD my God. For after my turning, I repented; and after my being instructed, I slapped **my** thigh; I was ashamed, and also I was humiliated, for I bore the reproach of my youth." **Is** Ephraim a dear son to Me? Or a child of delights? For as often as I speak against him, I certainly remember him still; therefore My inward parts are in a tumult for him; I will surely have compassion on him, declares the LORD.*

Now we hear Ephraim pray. "You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like a calf that was not trained." A young ox fights the yoke until it learns. "Bring me back, and let me return, for You are the LORD my God." Even his repentance he asks God to give him. He slapped his thigh in grief, ashamed of "the reproach of my youth."

God's answer is one of the tenderest verses in the Old Testament. "Is Ephraim a dear son to Me? Or a child of delights?" As often as God spoke against him, "I certainly remember him still; therefore My inward parts are in a tumult for him; I will surely have compassion on him."

Jesus told of a father who saw his son coming a long way off and ran to him (Luke 15:20). That is God's heart here. If you have wandered, the Father is not waiting to shame you. He is longing for you to come home.

31:21-22 *Set up road markers for yourself; make guideposts for yourself; set your heart to the highway, the way **which** you went. Return, O virgin of Israel; return to these your cities. Until when will you waver, O apostate daughter? For the LORD has created a new **thing** in the earth: a female will surround a man.*

"Set up road markers for yourself." Exiles marching to Babylon should mark the road, because they would walk it back. "Return, O virgin of Israel."

"For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth: a female will surround a man." This is one of the hardest lines in Jeremiah, and teachers read it in different ways. Many think Israel, pictured as a woman, will now cling to the LORD, when before she ran from Him. Others see a reversal so new that the weak will protect the strong. Some in the early church saw the virgin birth of Christ in it. The word "created" is the word of Genesis 1:1, used for what only God can do. Whatever the exact picture, God is doing something new.

31:23-26 *Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Again they will say this word in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I turn back their captivity: "May the LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness, O mountain of holiness." And Judah and all its cities will dwell in it together, farmers, and they will set out with **the** flock. For I have saturated the weary soul, and every soul that has languished I have filled. On this I awoke, and I looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.*

People will again bless Jerusalem: "May the LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness, O mountain of holiness." Farmers and shepherds will live in peace, "for I have saturated the weary soul." Jesus makes the same offer to the weary (Matthew 11:28).

"On this I awoke, and I looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me." It seems God gave Jeremiah this message in a dream while he slept. For a prophet with so few pleasant words to carry, this one was sweet.

31:27-28 *Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah **with** the seed of mankind and the seed of animals. And it will be, just as I kept watch over them to pluck up and to pull down and to tear down and to destroy and to do harm, so I will keep watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD.*

God will fill the empty land "with the seed of mankind and the seed of animals." Then He uses the words of Jeremiah's call. "Just as I kept watch over them to pluck up and to pull down," "so I will keep watch over them to build and to plant." God watched over His words of judgment, and they came true (1:12). He will watch over His words of blessing with the same care.

31:29-30 *In those days they will not say again, "Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and **the** teeth of sons will be blunt." But each man will die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be blunt.*

"Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of sons will be blunt." People used this saying to complain that they were punished for their parents' sins (Ezekiel 18:2-4). God says that excuse will end. "Each man will die for his own iniquity." Sin's results pass down through families, but each person answers to God for his own sin. The new covenant, which comes next, is personal in the same way.

31:31-32 *Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took hold of their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, in that they, they broke My covenant, and I, I was a husband over them, declares the LORD.*

"Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

A covenant is a binding agreement in which God commits Himself to His people. The old covenant is the one God made at Mount Sinai, "the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took hold of their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt." God led them like a father holding a small child's hand.

"They, they broke My covenant, and I, I was a husband over them." The trouble was never on God's side. The Law was holy and good (Romans 7:12), but it was written on stone, outside of them, and it could not change their hearts (Hebrews 8:7-8).

Notice who this covenant is made with: the house of Israel and the house of Judah, north and south, the whole nation.

31:33 *For this **is** the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put My law in their inward part, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be God to them, and they, they will be a people to Me.*

Here is what is new. "I will put My law in their inward part, and on their heart I will write it." At Sinai God wrote on tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18). Now He would write on hearts. It is not a different law. It is God's same holy will, now inside, so that His people want to do what He commands. Ezekiel says God will give a new heart and put His Spirit within them (Ezekiel 36:26-27), and Paul says the Spirit writes "not on tablets of stone but on fleshy tablets of heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

"And I will be God to them, and they, they will be a people to Me." The goal of every covenant God made is a relationship. He wants a people who belong to Him.

31:34 *And they will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for all of them will know Me, from the least of them and to the greatest of them, declares the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will not remember again.*

"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for all of them will know Me, from the least of them and to the greatest of them." Under the old covenant, many were born into Israel but did not know God. In the new covenant every member knows the LORD personally. There are still teachers (Ephesians 4:11), but no member needs to be told to start knowing God.

"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will not remember again." The word "for" shows that this is the foundation of the rest. Because God forgives, a new heart and a real knowing of God are possible. God does not forget the way we forget. He chooses never to bring our sin up again.

How can a holy God do that? Only because Someone paid for it. On the night before He died, Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). Hebrews 8:8-12 quotes this whole passage, and Hebrews 10:17-18 says that where sins are forgiven like this, there is no longer any offering for sin. The animal sacrifices covered sin until Christ's one sacrifice took it away (Hebrews 10:4, 10).

So how does a covenant made with Israel and Judah touch us? I believe it works this way. The new covenant was made with Israel, and Christ's blood put it into effect. Believers in the church today, Jews and Gentiles alike, share in its spiritual blessings now: forgiveness, the Holy Spirit within, a heart that knows God. Paul calls himself a minister of a new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6). Gentiles are wild olive branches grafted into the tree (Romans 11:17), sharing in Israel's spiritual things (Romans 15:27). But the tree is still Israel's. The church has not replaced Israel, and the national fulfillment of this covenant is still future. When Christ returns, Israel will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn (Zechariah 12:10), and Paul says that "all Israel will be saved," quoting God's promise to take away their sins (Romans 11:26-27). Then the whole nation will know the LORD.

Teachers who read prophecy the way I do explain this in slightly different ways. Most say what I have said: one new covenant, made with Israel, shared by the church now, and fulfilled for the nation later. Some older teachers spoke of two new covenants, one for Israel and one for the church, and a few held that the church has no part in it. Others, outside this view, teach that the church is now the Israel of this promise. I believe the plain words of verse 31, "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," mean what they say, and that Gentile believers share in the blessing by grace.

Do you know the Lord, and not just about Him? If your trust is in Christ, God has written His law on your heart and promised never to bring your sin up again. That is the best news in this book.

31:35-37 *Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day, the statutes of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea, and its waves roar; the LORD of armies **is** His name: If these statutes depart from before Me, declares the LORD, also the seed of Israel will cease from being a nation before Me all the days. Thus says the LORD: If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be searched out, also I, I will reject all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD.*

Now God swears by His creation. He is the One "who gives the sun for light by day, the statutes of the moon and the stars for light by night." "If these statutes depart from before Me," then "the seed of Israel will cease from being a nation before Me all the days." Israel will last as long as the sun comes up.

"If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be searched out," only then will God "reject all the seed of Israel for all that they have done." God knows everything they have done, and He still will not cast them off.

This is why I cannot accept the idea that God is finished with Israel. Paul asked, "did God reject His people?" and answered, "May it not be!" (Romans 11:1). "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). The Jewish people have been scattered and hunted for two thousand years, and they are still here. Many see in that a living sign of this promise. And if God will not break His word to Israel after all they did, He will not break His word to you (Philippians 1:6).

31:38-40 *Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and the city will be built for the LORD from the tower of Hananel **to** the Gate of the Corner. And the measuring line will go out again in front of it over the hill of Gareb, and it will turn toward Goah. And all the valley of the corpses and of the fat ashes, and all the fields to the wadi of Kidron, to the corner of the Gate of the Horses toward the east, **will be** holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up, and it will not be torn down again forever.*

"The city will be built for the LORD," from "the tower of Hananel to the Gate of the Corner" (Nehemiah 3:1; 2 Kings 14:13). Gareb and Goah are places we can no longer find on a map.

Then a surprise. "All the valley of the corpses and of the fat ashes," most likely the valley of Hinnom, where children were burned and the dead were thrown (7:31-32), "will be holy to the LORD." The most defiled place around Jerusalem will be made holy. That is what God does with sinners too (1 Corinthians 6:11).

"It will not be plucked up, and it will not be torn down again forever." Jerusalem was rebuilt after the exile, and Nehemiah names the tower of Hananel and the Horse Gate (Nehemiah 3:1, 28). But Rome destroyed the city again in A.D. 70. So "forever" points beyond Nehemiah to the kingdom of Christ, when Jerusalem will dwell in security and never be destroyed again (Zechariah 14:10-11).

Summary

God promised to be God to all the clans of Israel, because He had loved them with an everlasting love. He would bring them home from the ends of the earth with the blind and the lame among them, and turn their mourning into joy. Rachel wept in Ramah for her children, words Matthew

saw fulfilled when Herod killed the boys of Bethlehem, but God told her to stop weeping, for her children would return. Ephraim came home repenting, and God said His heart yearned for His dear son. Then God promised a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the one they broke at Sinai: He would write His law on their hearts, they would all know Him, and He would forgive their sin and remember it no more. Jesus put that covenant into effect by His blood, believers share its blessings now, and Israel will receive it as a nation when Christ returns. God swore that Israel would last as long as the sun and the moon, and that Jerusalem would be holy to the LORD forever.

Study Questions

1. Why does God say He brings Israel back? What kind of love does He name? (31:3)

2. Who is among those God gathers home, and what does that show about Him? (31:8-9)

3. Who was Rachel, and why is she pictured weeping in Ramah? How does Matthew use this verse? (31:15; Matthew 2:16-18)

4. What does Ephraim confess in his prayer, and how does God answer him? (31:18-20)

5. What was the saying about sour grapes, and what does God put in its place? (31:29-30)

6. With whom does God make the new covenant, and how is it different from the covenant at Sinai? (31:31-33)

7. What are the promises of the new covenant? Which one is the foundation of the others? (31:33-34)

8. What did Jesus say about the new covenant at the Last Supper, and how do believers share in it today? (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:8-12)

9. What does God compare Israel's future to in verses 35-37? What does that teach you about His faithfulness to you?

10. God's heart yearned for Ephraim when he came home (31:20). Is there an area of your life where you have been fighting God's yoke like an untrained calf? What would it look like to come home today?

Jeremiah 32: Jeremiah Buys a Field

Scripture

32:1-15 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah the king of Judah; that ***was*** the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. And then the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which ***was in*** the house of the king of Judah, where Zedekiah the king of Judah had shut him up, saying, "Why are you prophesying, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it; and Zedekiah the king of Judah will not escape from the hand of the Chaldeans, for he will certainly be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and his mouth will speak with his mouth, and his eyes will see his eyes; and he will lead Zedekiah ***to*** Babylon, and there he will be until I visit him," declares the LORD. "Though you fight with the Chaldeans, you will not succeed"'?" And Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Look, Hanamel the son of Shallum, your uncle, is coming to you, saying, "Buy for yourself my field which ***is*** in Anathoth, for the right of the redemption ***is*** yours, to buy ***it***."' And Hanamel the son of my uncle came to me according to the word of the LORD, to the court of the guard, and he said to me, 'Buy, please, my field which ***is*** in Anathoth, which ***is*** in the land of Benjamin; for the right of the possession ***is*** yours, and the redemption ***is*** yours; buy ***it*** for yourself.' And I knew that it ***was*** the word of the LORD. And I bought the field which ***was*** in Anathoth from Hanamel the son of my uncle, and I weighed out to him the silver, approximately 7 ounces (seventeen shekels) of silver. And I wrote in the document, and I sealed ***it***, and I had witnesses testify, and I weighed out the silver on scales. And I took the document of the purchase, the sealed ***one***, the commandment and the statutes, and the open ***one***; and I gave the document of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, before the eyes of Hanamel my uncle, and before the eyes of the witnesses who wrote in the document of the purchase, before the eyes of all the Jews who were sitting in the court of the guard. And I commanded Baruch before their eyes, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Take these documents, this document of the purchase, both the sealed ***one*** and this open document, and put them in an earthenware vessel, so that they may remain many days." For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land."'

32:16-25 And I prayed to the LORD after I had given the document of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, saying, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Look, You, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great strength and by Your outstretched arm; nothing is too difficult for You, who shows steadfast love to thousands, and repays the iniquity of ***the*** fathers into the bosom of their sons after them; the great, the mighty God, the LORD of armies ***is*** His name; great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes ***are*** open on all the ways of the sons of mankind, to give to each man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds; who performed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt until this day, and in Israel and among mankind; and You have made for Yourself a name, as ***at*** this day. And You brought out Your people Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and with wonders, and with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terror; and You gave them this land, which You swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey. And they came in and took possession of it, and they did not listen

to Your voice, and in Your law they did not walk; all that You commanded them to do, they did not do; and You have caused all this calamity to meet them. Look, the siege mounds have come ***to*** the city to capture it, and the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it, because of the sword and the famine and the pestilence; and what You spoke has happened, and look, You are seeing ***it***. And You, You have said to me, O Lord GOD, "Buy for yourself the field with silver, and have witnesses testify," and the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans!'"

32:26-44 And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Look, I ***am*** the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me? Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am giving this city into the hand of the Chaldeans and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. And the Chaldeans who are fighting against this city will come, and they will set this city on fire with fire, and they will burn it, and the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to Baal and poured out drink offerings to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger. For the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have been only doing evil in My eyes from their youth; for the sons of Israel have only been provoking Me to anger by the work of their hands, declares the LORD. For this city has been to Me ***a cause*** of My anger and of My rage from the day that they built it and until this day, to remove it from before My face, because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah which they have done to provoke Me to anger, they, their kings, their officials, their priests and their prophets, and the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned to Me ***the*** back and not ***the*** face; and ***I was*** teaching them, rising early and teaching, and they were not listening to receive discipline. And they put their detestable things in the house on which My name is called, to make it unclean. And they built the high places of Baal which ***are*** in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to make their sons and their daughters pass through to Molech, which I did not command them, and it did not come up on My heart, to do this abomination, so as to cause Judah to sin.' And now therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you are saying, 'It has been given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence': 'Look, I am gathering them from all the lands where I have banished them in My anger and in My rage and in great wrath; and I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in security. And they will be a people to Me, and I, I will be God to them. And I will give them one heart and one way, to fear Me all the days, for good to them and to their sons after them. And I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn back from after them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their heart, so as not to turn aside from Me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all My heart and with all My soul. For thus says the LORD: "Just as I have brought all this great calamity to this people, so I, I am bringing on them all the good which I, I am speaking concerning them. And the field will be bought in this land of which you are saying, 'It ***is*** a desolation, without man and animal; it has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans.' They will buy fields for silver, and write in the document, and seal ***it***, and have witnesses testify, in the land of Benjamin and in the surroundings of Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah and in the cities of the hill country and in the cities of the Shephelah and in the cities of the Negeb; for I will turn back their captivity," declares the LORD.'"

Preview

It is 587 B.C., the year before Jerusalem falls. The Babylonian army has the city surrounded, and Jeremiah is a prisoner in the court of the guard because he keeps saying the city will fall. Then God tells him that his cousin Hanamel will come and ask him to buy the family field at Anathoth, land that is already behind enemy lines. Jeremiah buys it, signs the deed before witnesses, and has Baruch seal the papers in a clay jar, because God has said, "Houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land." Then Jeremiah prays. He begins with "nothing is too difficult for You," and he ends by honestly asking why God would tell him to buy a field in a land about to be lost. God answers with Jeremiah's own words: "is anything too difficult for Me?" The city will burn for its sins, but God will bring His people back and make an everlasting covenant with them.

This chapter is about faith that acts on God's promise when everything you can see says the opposite. Jeremiah put his money where God's word was. As we read, we should ask what God has promised us that we find hard to believe, and whether we are willing to act on it.

Study

32:1-2 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah the king of Judah; that **was** the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. And then the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which **was in** the house of the king of Judah,*

"In the tenth year of Zedekiah the king of Judah; that was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar." That is 587 B.C. The siege had begun about a year before (39:1), and the city would fall the next summer.

"Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard." This was an open courtyard by the palace where prisoners were kept under watch. Chapters 37 and 38 tell how he got there. Chapter 32 is placed here, out of time order, because it belongs with the promises of chapters 30 to 33.

32:3-5 *where Zedekiah the king of Judah had shut him up, saying, "Why are you prophesying, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it; and Zedekiah the king of Judah will not escape from the hand of the Chaldeans, for he will certainly be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and his mouth will speak with his mouth, and his eyes will see his eyes; and he will lead Zedekiah **to** Babylon, and there he will be until I visit him," declares the LORD. "Though you fight with the Chaldeans, you will not succeed"'?"*

Zedekiah had locked him up because of his message. "Look, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it." Zedekiah himself "will not escape," but would meet Nebuchadnezzar face to face, "his eyes will see his eyes," and be taken to Babylon, "until I visit him."

The king did not want the truth. He wanted Jeremiah quiet. Many people still deal with God's word that way. They do not argue with it. They just try to lock it away where they do not have to hear it.

32:6-8 *And Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Look, Hanamel the son of Shallum, your uncle, is coming to you, saying, "Buy for yourself my field which **is** in Anathoth, for the right of the redemption **is** yours, to buy **it**."' And Hanamel the son of my uncle came to me according to the word of the LORD, to the court of the guard, and he said to me, 'Buy, please, my field which **is** in Anathoth, which **is** in the land of Benjamin; for the right of the possession **is** yours, and the redemption **is** yours; buy **it** for yourself.' And I knew that it **was** the word of the LORD.*

God tells Jeremiah ahead of time that his cousin Hanamel will come and say, "Buy for yourself my field which is in Anathoth, for the right of the redemption is yours." Anathoth was Jeremiah's hometown, a few miles north of Jerusalem (1:1).

Under the Law, land was not to be sold out of a family for good. If a man had to sell, his nearest relative had the right and the duty to buy it back and keep it in the family (Leviticus 25:25). That relative was the go'el, the redeemer. Boaz did the same for Naomi's land (Ruth 4:1-10).

Hanamel came, just as God said. "And I knew that it was the word of the LORD." From a human point of view this was a terrible deal. The land was under Babylonian control. Hanamel may have just wanted his money while money still meant something. But Jeremiah saw God's hand in it.

32:9-12 *And I bought the field which **was** in Anathoth from Hanamel the son of my uncle, and I weighed out to him the silver, approximately 7 ounces (seventeen shekels) of silver. And I wrote in the document, and I sealed **it**, and I had witnesses testify, and I weighed out the silver on scales. And I took the document of the purchase, the sealed **one**, the commandment and the statutes, and the open **one**; and I gave the document of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, before the eyes of Hanamel my uncle, and before the eyes of the witnesses who wrote in the document of the purchase, before the eyes of all the Jews who were sitting in the court of the guard.*

Jeremiah paid "seventeen shekels of silver," about seven ounces, weighed out on scales, because coins were not yet in common use. He did everything by the book. He signed the deed, sealed it, called witnesses and weighed the silver.

There were two copies, "the sealed one" and "the open one." The sealed copy was rolled up and closed with clay seals so no one could change it. The open copy could be read at any time. If anyone questioned the open one, the sealed one could be broken open in court.

Here we meet "Baruch the son of Neriah," Jeremiah's faithful scribe. A scribe was a trained writer who drew up documents and copied texts. Archaeologists have found clay seal impressions, called bullae, from Jeremiah's time, small lumps of clay pressed with a man's seal to close a document. One of them bears the name of Berechiah son of Neriah the scribe, Berechiah being the long form of Baruch. Scholars debate whether that piece is genuine, but bullae like it show exactly how deeds like Jeremiah's were sealed.

32:13-15 *And I commanded Baruch before their eyes, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Take these documents, this document of the purchase, both the sealed* ***one*** *and this open document, and put them in an earthenware vessel, so that they may remain many days." For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land."'*

"Put them in an earthenware vessel, so that they may remain many days." A clay jar kept papers safe for a long time. The Dead Sea Scrolls were kept that way for about two thousand years. Jeremiah was telling everyone watching that this deed would be needed long after the siege, when his family came back.

Then the reason: "Houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land."

Every eye in that courtyard knew the Babylonians were outside the wall. Land in Judah was worth nothing. But Jeremiah bought it anyway, in public, with witnesses. His purchase was a sermon. Faith is not only believing in your head. It is acting on God's word. Abraham bought a burial field in Canaan when he owned nothing else of the land God had promised him (Genesis 23). Jeremiah did the same in the land's darkest hour.

32:16-17 *And I prayed to the LORD after I had given the document of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, saying, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Look, You, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great strength and by Your outstretched arm; nothing is too difficult for You,*

After the deal was done, Jeremiah prayed. "Ah, Lord GOD!" Where the SLB prints "Lord GOD," the Hebrew has Adonai, Lord or Master, followed by God's name YHWH. Jeremiah speaks to God as his Master and as the covenant God of Israel.

He starts with creation. "You, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great strength and by Your outstretched arm; nothing is too difficult for You."

Why start there? Because that is where faith stands when circumstances say no. If God made the heavens and the earth from nothing, then a siege, an empire and a field behind enemy lines are not too hard for Him. God asked Abraham the same thing when Sarah laughed at the promise of a son: "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). The angel told Mary that with God nothing will be impossible (Luke 1:37).

Notice too that Jeremiah prays this before he knows how it will work out. He did not see the return from exile. He was taken to Egypt, and Scripture never tells us that he came back. But he trusted the God who made everything to keep what He had said. When your situation looks hopeless, begin where Jeremiah began. Remind yourself who God is. Nothing is too difficult for Him.

32:18-19 *who shows steadfast love to thousands, and repays the iniquity of **the** fathers into the bosom of their sons after them; the great, the mighty God, the LORD of armies **is** His name; great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes **are** open on all the ways of the sons of mankind, to give to each man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds;*

Jeremiah goes on praising God's character. He is the God "who shows steadfast love to thousands, and repays the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their sons after them." These are words from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5-6). God's mercy is wide, and His justice is real. Children who follow their parents' sins share in their judgment (31:29-30).

"Great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open on all the ways of the sons of mankind, to give to each man according to his ways." God sees everything and judges fairly. Nothing escapes His notice, good or evil (Hebrews 4:13).

32:20-23 *who performed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt until this day, and in Israel and among mankind; and You have made for Yourself a name, as **at** this day. And You brought out Your people Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and with wonders, and with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terror; and You gave them this land, which You swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing **with** milk and honey. And they came in and took possession of it, and they did not listen to Your voice, and in Your law they did not walk; all that You commanded them to do, they did not do; and You have caused all this calamity to meet them.*

Jeremiah remembers the exodus. God "performed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt," brought Israel out "with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm," and gave them "a land flowing with milk and honey," just as He swore to their fathers.

"And they did not listen to Your voice." That one line sums up Israel's history. God kept every promise. They broke every command. "And You have caused all this calamity to meet them." Jeremiah does not blame God for the siege. He says plainly that it is the just result of their sin.

32:24-25 *Look, the siege mounds have come **to** the city to capture it, and the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it, because of the sword and the famine and the pestilence; and what You spoke has happened, and look, You are seeing **it**. And You, You have said to me, O Lord GOD, "Buy for yourself the field with silver, and have witnesses testify," and the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans!'"*

Now Jeremiah tells God what he sees. "Look, the siege mounds have come to the city to capture it." Siege mounds were ramps of earth piled against a wall so soldiers and battering rams could reach the top. "What You spoke has happened, and look, You are seeing it."

Then the honest question. "And You, You have said to me, O Lord GOD, Buy for yourself the field with silver, and have witnesses testify, and the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans!"

Jeremiah obeyed first and asked questions after. He was not doubting God's power. He had just praised it. He was trying to understand God's plan. That is not unbelief. It is the honest prayer of a

man who obeys and still wants to understand. God is not offended when we bring Him our questions with a heart that trusts Him (Psalm 62:8).

32:26-27 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Look, I **am** the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?*

God's answer begins with Jeremiah's own words turned into a question. "Look, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"

"The God of all flesh" means the God of every living person. Babylon's king and soldiers were flesh, and so were Judah's people and Jeremiah himself (Numbers 16:22). All of them were in His hand.

Jeremiah had said "nothing is too difficult for You" (32:17). God says, in effect, did you mean it? He does not scold Jeremiah. He invites him to rest on the truth he had just prayed. Sometimes the words we pray are truer than we know, and God calls us to stand on them. Jesus said the same thing about salvation: with men it is impossible, "but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Is there anything in your life that seems too hard for God, a marriage, a prodigal child, an addiction, a sin you cannot break? Hear His question. Is anything too difficult for Me? The answer is no.

32:28-29 *Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am giving this city into the hand of the Chaldeans and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. And the Chaldeans who are fighting against this city will come, and they will set this city on fire with fire, and they will burn it, and the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to Baal and poured out drink offerings to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger.*

First, God confirms the bad news. The Chaldeans will capture the city, "set this city on fire with fire," and burn "the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to Baal." Flat roofs were used for living space, and people had turned them into altars to false gods (19:13). Baal was the Canaanite storm and fertility god. The very houses where they worshiped idols would burn.

32:30-34 *For the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have been only doing evil in My eyes from their youth; for the sons of Israel have only been provoking Me to anger by the work of their hands, declares the LORD. For this city has been to Me **a cause** of My anger and of My rage from the day that they built it and until this day, to remove it from before My face, because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah which they have done to provoke Me to anger, they, their kings, their officials, their priests and their prophets, and the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned to Me **the** back and not **the** face; and **I was** teaching them, rising early and teaching, and they were not listening to receive discipline. And they put their detestable things in the house on which My name is called, to make it unclean.*

God explains why. Israel and Judah "have been only doing evil in My eyes from their youth." The whole nation was guilty: "their kings, their officials, their priests and their prophets, and the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

"They have turned to Me the back and not the face." It is a picture of someone who will not even look at the person speaking to him. And God had kept "rising early and teaching," but "they were not listening to receive discipline."

"They put their detestable things in the house on which My name is called." They set up idols inside God's own temple, as in Manasseh's day (2 Kings 21:4-7; Jeremiah 7:30).

32:35 *And they built the high places of Baal which **are** in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to make their sons and their daughters pass through to Molech, which I did not command them, and it did not come up on My heart, to do this abomination, so as to cause Judah to sin.'*

"They built the high places of Baal which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to make their sons and their daughters pass through to Molech." High places were hilltop or raised altars, often for idols. Molech was a god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:7), and to "pass through" to him meant to give a child to be burned as an offering. This is the same horror Jeremiah exposed at Topheth (7:31; 19:5).

God's words are the same as in 7:31: "which I did not command them, and it did not come up on My heart." God never wanted this. He forbade it in the Law (Leviticus 18:21). It was the murder of children, and it was the worst of Judah's sins. As in chapter 7, if this touches a wound in your life, know that there is full forgiveness in Christ for all who turn to Him (1 John 1:9).

32:36-38 *And now therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you are saying, 'It has been given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence': 'Look, I am gathering them from all the lands where I have banished them in My anger and in My rage and in great wrath; and I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in security. And they will be a people to Me, and I, I will be God to them.*

"And now therefore." After all that sin, we expect the final word to be judgment. But God turns. "Look, I am gathering them from all the lands where I have banished them in My anger." "I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in security."

"And they will be a people to Me, and I, I will be God to them." The covenant promise again (31:33). The judgment is real, but it is not God's last word.

32:39-41 *And I will give them one heart and one way, to fear Me all the days, for good to them and to their sons after them. And I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn back from after them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their heart, so as not to turn aside from Me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all My heart and with all My soul.*

"I will give them one heart and one way, to fear Me all the days." To fear God is to hold Him in reverent awe, to take Him seriously. A divided heart was Israel's problem. God will give an undivided one.

"And I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn back from after them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their heart, so as not to turn aside from Me." This is the

new covenant of 31:31-34 again. God commits Himself never to stop doing them good, and He puts His fear in their heart so they will not turn away. The covenant is kept on both sides, because God works on both sides.

"I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all My heart and with all My soul." Nowhere else in the Bible does God say He does something with all His heart and all His soul. He is wholehearted about restoring His people.

32:42-44 *For thus says the LORD: "Just as I have brought all this great calamity to this people, so I, I am bringing on them all the good which I, I am speaking concerning them. And the field will be bought in this land of which you are saying, 'It **is** a desolation, without man and animal; it has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans.' They will buy fields for silver, and write in the document, and seal **it**, and have witnesses testify, in the land of Benjamin and in the surroundings of Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah and in the cities of the hill country and in the cities of the Shephelah and in the cities of the Negeb; for I will turn back their captivity," declares the LORD.'"*

"Just as I have brought all this great calamity to this people, so I, I am bringing on them all the good." God's word of judgment came true to the letter. His word of blessing would too.

"And the field will be bought in this land." Now Jeremiah knew why he bought the field. Fields would be bought again, with deeds signed and sealed and witnessed, all over the land: in Benjamin, around Jerusalem, in the hill country, in the Shephelah, the low hills to the west, and in the Negeb, the dry south. "For I will turn back their captivity."

Jeremiah's deed was a small piece of clay-sealed paper in a jar. But it was a promise from God that the exile would end. And it did. After seventy years the exiles came home (Ezra 1). Jeremiah did not live to see it, but his faith was not wasted. Our acts of faith are never wasted either, even when we do not see the result in our lifetime (Hebrews 11:13).

Summary

In the tenth year of Zedekiah, with Babylon's army around Jerusalem and Jeremiah locked in the court of the guard, God told Jeremiah to buy his cousin Hanamel's field in Anathoth by the right of redemption. Jeremiah paid seventeen shekels, signed and sealed the deed before witnesses, and gave both copies to Baruch to keep in a clay jar, because God said that houses and fields would again be bought in the land. Then Jeremiah prayed, praising the Creator for whom nothing is too difficult, remembering the exodus and Israel's disobedience, and honestly asking why God told him to buy a field in a city about to fall. God answered, "is anything too difficult for Me?" He confirmed that the Chaldeans would burn the city because of its idolatry and the sacrifice of children to Molech, but He promised to gather His people, give them one heart, make an everlasting covenant with them, plant them in the land with all His heart and soul, and see fields bought again throughout Judah.

Study Questions

1. Where was Jeremiah when this happened, and why had Zedekiah put him there? (32:2-5)

2. What was the "right of the redemption," and why did it fall to Jeremiah? (32:7-8; Leviticus 25:25)

3. How did Jeremiah make the purchase legal and lasting? Why put the deed in a clay jar? (32:10-14)

4. What did God say the purchase meant? (32:15)

5. How did Jeremiah begin his prayer, and why start there? (32:17)

6. What honest question did Jeremiah bring to God at the end of his prayer? (32:24-25)

7. How did God answer him, and what did God say He would do for His people? (32:27, 37-41)

8. What does God say He will do "with all My heart and with all My soul"? What does that show you about Him? (32:41)

9. Is there something in your life that seems too difficult for God? What would it look like to pray Jeremiah's words about it today?

10. Jeremiah bought a field he would never farm because God promised a future. What is one step of faith God may be asking you to take, even if you do not see the result in your lifetime?

Jeremiah 33: The Promise to David Renewed

Scripture

33:1-13 And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, and he ***was*** still shut up in the court of the guard, saying, "Thus says the LORD who made it, the LORD who formed it to establish it, the LORD ***is*** His name: 'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and inaccessible things which you have not known.' For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah which are pulled down because of the siege mounds and because of the sword: 'They are coming to fight with the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the corpses of the men whom I have struck down in My anger and in My rage, and ***for*** whom I have hidden My face from this city on account of all their evil. Look, I am bringing to it health and healing, and I will heal them, and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth. And I will turn back the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel, and I will build them as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will forgive all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me. And it will be to Me a name of joy, for praise and for beauty, to all the nations of the earth who will hear all the good which I am doing for them; and they will be in dread, and they will tremble over all the good and over all the peace which I am doing for it.' Thus says the LORD: 'Again there will be heard in this place, of which you are saying, "It ***is*** desolate, without man and without animal," in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolated, without man and without inhabitant and without animal, the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of ***the*** bridegroom and the sound of ***the*** bride, the sound of those saying, "Give thanks to the LORD of armies, for the LORD ***is*** good, for His steadfast love ***is*** forever," ***of those*** bringing a thank offering ***to*** the house of the LORD. For I will turn back the captivity of the land as at the first,' says the LORD. Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Again there will be in this place, which is desolate, without man and even animal, and in all its cities, a pasture of shepherds making ***the*** flock lie down. In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the surroundings of Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, the flock will again pass by the hands of ***one who*** counts ***them***,' says the LORD.

33:14-26 'Look, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'and I will carry out the good word which I have spoken to the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause to sprout for David a Branch of righteousness, and He will do justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell in security; and this ***is what*** one will call her: "The LORD Our Righteousness."' For thus says the LORD: '***There*** will not be cut off for David a man sitting on the throne of the house of Israel; and for the priests, the Levites, ***there*** will not be cut off a man from before Me offering up a burnt offering and burning a grain offering and making a sacrifice all the days.'" And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'If you can break My covenant of the day and My covenant of the night, so that daytime and night will not be in their time, also My covenant with David My servant can be broken, so that ***there will*** not be for him a son reigning on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. As the host of the heavens cannot be counted and

the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the seed of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.'" And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Have you not seen what this people have spoken, saying, 'The two clans which the LORD chose, He has rejected them'? And they spurn My people, from ***their*** being a nation again before them. Thus says the LORD: 'If My covenant ***with*** daytime and night ***is*** not, ***if*** I have not made the statutes of heaven and earth, also the seed of Jacob and David My servant I will reject, from taking from his seed rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will turn back their captivity, and I will have compassion on them.'"

Preview

Jeremiah is still locked in the court of the guard, and the city is still under siege, when God speaks to him "a second time." God invites him, "Call to Me, and I will answer you," and then tells him great things he did not know. The houses torn down to strengthen the walls will be filled with the dead, but God will bring health and healing, cleanse His people, and forgive all their sins. The streets that went silent will hear weddings again, and the temple will hear songs of thanks. Then God renews His promise to David. He will raise up for David "a Branch of righteousness," David will never lack a man on his throne, and the Levites will never lack a man to serve. These promises are as sure as day and night.

This chapter closes the book of comfort. It points straight to Jesus, the Son of David, who will reign on David's throne. As we read, we should notice how often God says "I will," and ask whether we are calling on Him as He invites us to.

Study

33:1-3 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, and he **was** still shut up in the court of the guard, saying, "Thus says the LORD who made it, the LORD who formed it to establish it, the LORD **is** His name: 'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and inaccessible things which you have not known.'*

"The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, and he was still shut up in the court of the guard." This is the same year as chapter 32, about 587 B.C. Walls could hold Jeremiah, but they could not keep God's word out.

God names Himself as "the LORD who made it, the LORD who formed it to establish it." The One who planned the future and is forming it is the One who speaks.

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and inaccessible things which you have not known."

This is an invitation, and a promise with it. The word for "inaccessible" describes something fenced off or fortified, like a walled city no one can get into. These are things Jeremiah could never figure out on his own. Only God could open them to him. And God did, in the verses that follow, showing him a future beyond the siege.

Is this a promise that God will tell us secret things if we pray? Not in the sense of new revelation. That promise was made to a prophet, and God gave him words that are now in our Bibles. But the heart of the verse is true for every believer. God invites His people to call on Him, and He answers (Psalm 50:15). He shows us in His word things we could never find out by ourselves (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). When you are shut in by trouble, the first thing to do is call to Him.

33:4-5 *For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah which are pulled down because of the siege mounds and because of the sword: 'They are coming to fight with the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the corpses of the men whom I have struck down in My anger and in My rage, and **for** whom I have hidden My face from this city on account of all their evil.*

First, the hard truth. The defenders had torn down houses, even the houses of the kings, to get stones to strengthen the wall against "the siege mounds" (Isaiah 22:10). It would not help. Those houses would be filled "with the corpses of the men whom I have struck down in My anger." God had "hidden My face from this city on account of all their evil." God does not hide the cost of sin before He speaks of grace.

33:6-8 *Look, I am bringing to it health and healing, and I will heal them, and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth. And I will turn back the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel, and I will build them as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will forgive all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me.*

"Look, I am bringing to it health and healing, and I will heal them." In 8:22 Jeremiah asked, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Here is the answer. God Himself will heal.

"I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth." He will turn back the captivity "of Judah and the captivity of Israel," both kingdoms, "and I will build them as at the first."

"I will cleanse them from all their iniquity," "and I will forgive all their iniquities." Three words for sin appear here: iniquity, the crookedness of sin; sinning, missing the mark; and transgressing, rebelling against God. God forgives all of it. This is the new covenant promise again (31:34). Healing for a nation begins with forgiveness from God. So does healing for a person (1 John 1:9).

33:9 *And it will be to Me a name of joy, for praise and for beauty, to all the nations of the earth who will hear all the good which I am doing for them; and they will be in dread, and they will tremble over all the good and over all the peace which I am doing for it.'*

"It will be to Me a name of joy, for praise and for beauty, to all the nations of the earth." Jerusalem, once a byword of shame, will bring God praise before the world.

"They will be in dread, and they will tremble over all the good." The nations will be shaken, not by what God does to His people in judgment, but by how much good He does for them. Grace on this scale is frightening to those who have not known it.

33:10-11 *Thus says the LORD: 'Again there will be heard in this place, of which you are saying, "It **is** desolate, without man and without animal," in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolated, without man and without inhabitant and without animal, the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of **the** bridegroom and the sound of **the** bride, the sound of those saying, "Give thanks to the LORD of armies, for the LORD **is** good, for His steadfast love **is** forever," **of those** bringing a thank offering **to** the house of the LORD. For I will turn back the captivity of the land as at the first,' says the LORD.*

"Again there will be heard in this place" the sounds that had stopped. Jeremiah had warned that God would silence "the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride" (7:34; 16:9; 25:10). Now God promises that those sounds will return.

And there will be "the sound of those saying, Give thanks to the LORD of armies, for the LORD is good, for His steadfast love is forever." This was the song of Israel's worship (Psalm 136:1). "The LORD of armies" is a title that means God commands all the hosts of heaven and earth.

This began to come true. When the returned exiles laid the foundation of the second temple about 536 B.C., they sang this very song (Ezra 3:10-11). Weddings came back to Jerusalem. But the full joy waits for the day when Christ reigns. The Bible ends with a wedding, the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).

33:12-13 *Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Again there will be in this place, which is desolate, without man and even animal, and in all its cities, a pasture of shepherds making **the** flock lie down. In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the surroundings of Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, the flock will again pass by the hands of **one who** counts **them**,' says the LORD.*

A land described as "desolate, without man and even animal," will again have "a pasture of shepherds making the flock lie down." All over Judah, from the hill country to the Shephelah and the Negeb, the flocks will "pass by the hands of one who counts them." A shepherd counted his sheep as they came through the gate at night, touching each one, to be sure none was lost. Peace will be so real that shepherds can count their flocks in the open again. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep by name and loses none of them (John 10:3, 28).

33:14-16 *'Look, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'and I will carry out the good word which I have spoken to the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause to sprout for David a Branch of righteousness, and He will do justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell in security; and this **is what** one will call her: "The LORD Our Righteousness."'*

"Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "I will carry out the good word which I have spoken to the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah." God is about to repeat a promise He already made in 23:5-6.

"I will cause to sprout for David a Branch of righteousness, and He will do justice and righteousness in the land." David's family tree had been cut down to a stump. The kings had

failed. But from that stump a new shoot would sprout (Isaiah 11:1). "Branch" became a name for the Messiah, God's anointed King (Zechariah 3:8; 6:12).

That King is Jesus. He was born of David's line (Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:3). He is the only King who always did what is just and right. Today He reigns at the Father's right hand, and when He returns He will rule the earth in righteousness (Isaiah 9:7; Revelation 19:11).

"In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell in security; and this is what one will call her: The LORD Our Righteousness." In 23:6 this is the King's name. Here it is the city's name. The city will carry the name of its King, because His righteousness will be its own. That is also how God makes sinners right with Him. We have no righteousness of our own that can stand before God, but in Christ we receive His (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9).

33:17-18 *For thus says the LORD: '**There** will not be cut off for David a man sitting on the throne of the house of Israel; and for the priests, the Levites, **there** will not be cut off a man from before Me offering up a burnt offering and burning a grain offering and making a sacrifice all the days.'"*

"There will not be cut off for David a man sitting on the throne of the house of Israel." God had promised David a house, a throne and a kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

But wait. After 586 B.C. no son of David sat on a throne in Jerusalem. Did God break His word? No. He kept the line alive. Jehoiachin's descendant Zerubbabel led the return, and the line went on to Joseph and Mary. The angel told Mary that the Lord God will give her Son "the throne of David His father," and "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus is the Man on David's throne forever. He sits at the Father's right hand now, and He will reign from Jerusalem in His kingdom after He returns (Matthew 25:31; Revelation 20:4-6).

"And for the priests, the Levites, there will not be cut off a man from before Me offering up a burnt offering and burning a grain offering and making a sacrifice all the days." The Levites were the tribe set apart to serve at God's sanctuary, and the priests were the sons of Aaron within that tribe. A burnt offering was wholly burned to God, and a grain offering was a gift of flour, oil and incense.

How is this kept, when Christ's one sacrifice ended the need for sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:10-18)? Bible teachers answer in different ways. Many who read prophecy as I do believe Ezekiel's picture of a future temple, where the Levites and the sons of Zadok serve (Ezekiel 40-48; 44:15), shows how God will keep this promise in Christ's kingdom. Those offerings would be memorials looking back to the cross, much as the Lord's Supper does for us now, not a return to it. Other teachers see the promise kept in Christ, our great High Priest who "holds the priesthood permanently" (Hebrews 7:24), and in believers, whom Peter calls "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Both sides agree that no offering will ever add to what Christ finished on the cross.

33:19-22 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'If you can break My covenant of the day and My covenant of the night, so that daytime and night will not be in their time, also My covenant with David My servant can be broken, so that* ***there will*** *not be for him a son reigning on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. As the host of the heavens cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the seed of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.'"*

God backs His promise with an oath. "If you can break My covenant of the day and My covenant of the night, so that daytime and night will not be in their time," then "also My covenant with David My servant can be broken." Can anyone stop the sun from rising? No. Then no one can stop God's promise to David.

"As the host of the heavens cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the seed of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me." These are the words God used for Abraham's descendants (Genesis 22:17). God's promises do not shrink when His people do.

Every sunrise is a reminder that God keeps His word. The next time you see one, remember that the same God has made promises to you in Christ, and every one of them is "yes" in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20).

33:23-26 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Have you not seen what this people have spoken, saying, 'The two clans which the LORD chose, He has rejected them'? And they spurn My people, from* ***their*** *being a nation again before them. Thus says the LORD: 'If My covenant* ***with*** *daytime and night* ***is*** *not,* ***if*** *I have not made the statutes of heaven and earth, also the seed of Jacob and David My servant I will reject, from taking from his seed rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will turn back their captivity, and I will have compassion on them.'"*

"Have you not seen what this people have spoken," saying, "The two clans which the LORD chose, He has rejected them"? The two clans are most likely Israel and Judah, the two kingdoms, though some think they are the line of Jacob and the line of David. People looking at the ruins were saying God was finished with His people. Some may have been Judah's neighbors, others Judah's own discouraged people.

God answers with the same oath as before. If He has not made "the statutes of heaven and earth," then He will reject "the seed of Jacob and David My servant." But He has made them, and He holds them in place. So He will not reject His people. He will take rulers from David's line "over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

"For I will turn back their captivity, and I will have compassion on them." People still say that God has rejected Israel. God's answer has not changed (Romans 11:1-2).

Summary

While Jeremiah was still shut up in the court of the guard, God told him, "Call to Me, and I will answer you," and showed him great things he had not known. The houses torn down to

strengthen the wall would be filled with the dead, but God would bring healing and peace, bring back both Judah and Israel, and cleanse and forgive all their sins, so that Jerusalem would bring Him praise before the nations. The sounds of joy, weddings and thanksgiving would return to the empty streets, and shepherds would count their flocks again. Then God renewed His promise: He would raise up for David a Branch of righteousness who would do justice in the land, and Jerusalem would be called "The LORD Our Righteousness." David would never lack a man on his throne, a promise kept in Jesus, and the Levites would never lack a man to serve before God. God swore that these covenants were as sure as day and night, and that He would never reject the seed of Jacob and David.

Study Questions

1. Where was Jeremiah when this word came, and what did God invite him to do? (33:1-3)

2. What did God promise to bring to the ruined city? (33:6-8)

3. What sounds would be heard again in Jerusalem, and when did this begin to come true? (33:10-11; Ezra 3:10-11)

4. Who is the "Branch of righteousness," and what will He do? (33:15; 23:5)

5. What name will Jerusalem be given, and how does that name apply to believers today? (33:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

6. How has God kept His promise that David would never lack a man on his throne? (33:17; Luke 1:32-33)

7. What does God compare His covenant with David to, and why? (33:20-21, 25-26)

8. What were people saying about the "two clans," and how did God answer them? (33:24-26)

9. God said, "Call to Me, and I will answer you." What is shutting you in right now, and have you called to Him about it?

10. Every sunrise reminds us that God keeps His covenants (33:20). Which of God's promises do you most need to hold on to this week?

Jeremiah 34: Freedom Promised and Broken

Scripture

34:1-7 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of ***the*** earth ***under*** the rule of his hand and all the peoples were fighting against Jerusalem and against all its cities, saying, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Go, and you shall speak to Zedekiah the king of Judah, and you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Look, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire. And you, you will not escape from his hand, for you will certainly be captured, and into his hand you will be given; and your eyes will see the eyes of the king of Babylon, and his mouth will speak with your mouth, and you will go ***to*** Babylon.' Nevertheless hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah: Thus says the LORD concerning you: 'You will not die by the sword. In peace you will die; and as ***with*** the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they will burn for you; and "Alas, lord!" they will mourn for you. For I, I have spoken a word, declares the LORD.'" And Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah the king of Judah in Jerusalem, and the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for they, they remained among the cities of Judah, cities of fortification.

34:8-22 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who ***were*** in Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty to them, for each man to let go his male slave and each man his female slave, the Hebrew ***man*** and the Hebrew ***woman***, free, so that no man should make them serve, a Jew his brother. And all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant obeyed, to let go each man his male slave and each man his female slave free, so as not to make them serve again; and they obeyed, and they let ***them*** go. And they turned back afterward, and they brought back the male slaves and the female slaves whom they had let go free, and they subjugated them as male slaves and as female slaves. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'I, I made a covenant with your fathers on the day I brought them out from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves, saying, "At the end of seven years you shall let go each man his brother, the Hebrew, who has been sold to you; and he shall serve you six years, and you shall let him go free from with you." And your fathers did not listen to Me, and they did not incline their ear. And you, you turned back today, and you did what is right in My eyes, by proclaiming liberty each man to his neighbor; and you made a covenant before Me in the house on which My name is called. And you turned back, and you profaned My name, and you brought back each man his male slave and each man his female slave whom you had let go free to their desire, and you subjugated them to be male slaves and female slaves to you. Therefore thus says the LORD: You, you have not listened to Me by proclaiming liberty each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor. Look, I am proclaiming liberty to you, declares the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you into a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And I will make the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not carried out the words of the covenant which they made before Me, ***like*** the calf which they cut in two and passed between its pieces, the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officials and the priests and

all the people of the land who passed between the pieces of the calf; and I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life, and their corpse will be food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth. And Zedekiah the king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has gone up from you. Look, I am commanding, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city, and they will fight against it, and they will capture it, and they will burn it with fire; and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.'"

Preview

Nebuchadnezzar's army is fighting against Jerusalem, and only two other fortified cities of Judah are still standing, Lachish and Azekah. God sends Jeremiah to tell King Zedekiah that the city will burn and that he will be taken to Babylon, though he will not die by the sword. Then comes a story of a promise made and broken. In the crisis, Zedekiah and the people made a covenant before God in the temple to set free their Hebrew slaves, as the Law of Moses required. They did it. Then, when the danger seemed to pass, they took the slaves back. God answers with bitter irony: since you would not proclaim liberty to your brothers, I am proclaiming liberty to you, to the sword, the pestilence and the famine.

This chapter is about keeping our word to God when the pressure is off. It is easy to make promises in a crisis. As we read, we should think about any promise we made to God when we were desperate and then quietly took back.

Study

34:1-3 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of* ***the*** *earth* ***under*** *the rule of his hand and all the peoples were fighting against Jerusalem and against all its cities, saying, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Go, and you shall speak to Zedekiah the king of Judah, and you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Look, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire. And you, you will not escape from his hand, for you will certainly be captured, and into his hand you will be given; and your eyes will see the eyes of the king of Babylon, and his mouth will speak with your mouth, and you will go* ***to*** *Babylon.'*

"Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of the earth under the rule of his hand and all the peoples were fighting against Jerusalem." Babylon's army included soldiers from all the nations it ruled. It was the whole known world against one small city.

God's message to Zedekiah is direct. "I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire. And you, you will not escape from his hand." "Your eyes will see the eyes of the king of Babylon," face to face, and Zedekiah would be taken to Babylon. This happened just as God said (39:5-7).

34:4-5 *Nevertheless hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah: Thus says the LORD concerning you: 'You will not die by the sword. In peace you will die; and as **with** the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they will burn for you; and "Alas, lord!" they will mourn for you. For I, I have spoken a word, declares the LORD.'"*

"Nevertheless hear the word of the LORD." There was a word of mercy too. "You will not die by the sword. In peace you will die." The people would light fires in his honor, as they did for "the former kings," and mourn him with "Alas, lord!" These fires were not cremation but a custom of burning spices to honor a king who died (2 Chronicles 16:14).

How does this fit with what happened to Zedekiah? He was blinded and taken to Babylon in chains (39:7), and he died in prison there (52:11). Some Bible teachers believe this promise was fulfilled in part: he did not die in battle, and the exiles may have mourned him when he died. Others think this kinder end depended on his surrender, which God offered him again and again (38:17-18), and he refused it. Either way, God's word came true, and the king's own choices shaped how he ended.

34:6-7 *And Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah the king of Judah in Jerusalem, and the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for they, they remained among the cities of Judah, cities of fortification.*

Jeremiah delivered the message while the Babylonians fought "against Lachish and against Azekah; for they, they remained among the cities of Judah, cities of fortification." Lachish was about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem, and Azekah about eleven miles north of it. These were the last strongholds left.

Archaeologists digging at Lachish in the 1930s found a group of letters written in ink on broken pieces of pottery, called the Lachish letters. They come from these last days before the fall. In one, an officer tells his commander at Lachish that they are watching for the signal fires of Lachish but can no longer see those of Azekah. It seems Azekah had already fallen. Those few lines bring this verse to life.

34:8-10 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who **were** in Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty to them, for each man to let go his male slave and each man his female slave, the Hebrew **man** and the Hebrew **woman**, free, so that no man should make them serve, a Jew his brother. And all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant obeyed, to let go each man his male slave and each man his female slave free, so as not to make them serve again; and they obeyed, and they let **them** go.*

"After King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were in Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty to them," Each man would "let go his male slave and each man his female slave, the Hebrew man and the Hebrew woman, free."

What kind of slavery was this? It was not the race-based slavery of later centuries, where people were kidnapped and owned for life. The Law forbade kidnapping a man to sell him, on pain of

death (Exodus 21:16). An Israelite who fell into debt could sell himself, or be sold, to work for another Israelite. The Law set hard limits on it. He was to serve six years and go free in the seventh (Exodus 21:2). He was not to be ruled harshly (Leviticus 25:39-43). When he left, his master was to send him off with gifts from his flock, his grain and his wine, and remember that Israel had been slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 15:12-15). It was a way to pay off debt and get a fresh start.

But Judah had ignored these limits. Masters kept their Hebrew brothers for life. Now, with the enemy at the gate, everyone agreed to obey. "And they obeyed, and they let them go." Why then? Maybe from real fear of God. Maybe because freed slaves would help defend the walls, or because masters could not feed them in the siege. The text does not say.

34:11 *And they turned back afterward, and they brought back the male slaves and the female slaves whom they had let go free, and they subjugated them as male slaves and as female slaves.*

"And they turned back afterward, and they brought back the male slaves and the female slaves whom they had let go free, and they subjugated them."

What changed? Verse 21 tells us that the Babylonian army had "gone up from you." Chapter 37 explains that Pharaoh's army marched out of Egypt, and the Babylonians lifted the siege for a while to meet it (37:5). The danger seemed past, and the masters grabbed their slaves back.

Imagine being one of those slaves. You walk out free. A few weeks later the man who released you comes and drags you back. It was cruel, and God saw it.

34:12-14 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'I, I made a covenant with your fathers on the day I brought them out from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves, saying, "At the end of seven years you shall let go each man his brother, the Hebrew, who has been sold to you; and he shall serve you six years, and you shall let him go free from with you." And your fathers did not listen to Me, and they did not incline their ear.*

God reminds them where it started. "I, I made a covenant with your fathers on the day I brought them out from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves." Israel itself had been a nation of slaves. God set them free, and He required them to set their own brothers free.

"At the end of seven years you shall let go each man his brother, the Hebrew." "Brother" is the key word. A Hebrew slave was family, not property. "And your fathers did not listen to Me." This law had been ignored for generations.

34:15-16 *And you, you turned back today, and you did what is right in My eyes, by proclaiming liberty each man to his neighbor; and you made a covenant before Me in the house on which My name is called. And you turned back, and you profaned My name, and you brought back each man his male slave and each man his female slave whom you had let go free to their desire, and you subjugated them to be male slaves and female slaves to you.*

"And you, you turned back today, and you did what is right in My eyes." God noticed their obedience. They had made their covenant "before Me in the house on which My name is called," in the temple.

"And you turned back, and you profaned My name." To profane is to treat something holy as common. They had sworn by God's name. Breaking their oath dragged His name through the dirt. Twice we read "you turned back": once toward God, then away again.

This is a warning for all of us. Many people make vows in a crisis. Lord, if You get me through this, I will change. The crisis passes, and the old life comes back. God takes our promises seriously, even the ones we forget (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).

34:17 *Therefore thus says the LORD: You, you have not listened to Me by proclaiming liberty each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor. Look, I am proclaiming liberty to you, declares the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you into a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.*

"You, you have not listened to Me by proclaiming liberty each man to his brother." So God turns their own word on them. "Look, I am proclaiming liberty to you, declares the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine."

It is a terrible kind of freedom. They would be free from God's protection, released into the hands of death. When we refuse to give others the mercy God commands, we cut ourselves off from His mercy (Matthew 18:32-35; James 2:13).

How different is the liberty Jesus brings! When He read in the synagogue at Nazareth, He announced that the Spirit had anointed Him "to proclaim release to captives" (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1). He sets free all who come to Him from the slavery of sin.

34:18-20 *And I will make the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not carried out the words of the covenant which they made before Me,* ***like*** *the calf which they cut in two and passed between its pieces, the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officials and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the pieces of the calf; and I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life, and their corpse will be food for the birds of the heavens and for the animals of the earth.*

"The calf which they cut in two and passed between its pieces." When they made the covenant, they had cut a calf in half and walked between the halves. That was an ancient way of making a solemn oath. It meant: may I be cut in pieces like this animal if I break my word. When God made His covenant with Abraham, God alone passed between the pieces, as a smoking oven and a flaming torch (Genesis 15:9-17). He put the whole weight of that promise on Himself.

Judah's leaders, "the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officials and the priests and all the people of the land," walked between the pieces and broke their oath. Now God would hold them to it. They would be given to their enemies, and "their corpse will be food for the birds of the heavens."

34:21-22 *And Zedekiah the king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has gone up from you. Look, I am commanding, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city, and they will fight against it, and they will capture it, and they will burn it with fire; and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.'"*

"And Zedekiah the king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies," into the hand of "the army of the king of Babylon which has gone up from you." The Babylonians had pulled back for a time, but it was only a pause.

"Look, I am commanding, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city." The Babylonians thought they were following their own king's orders. In fact they were following God's. "And they will capture it, and they will burn it with fire." That is what happened in 586 B.C.

The people thought the danger had passed, so they went back on their promise. The danger came back. A pause in God's judgment is not the end of it. It is His patience, giving time to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

Summary

While Nebuchadnezzar's army fought against Jerusalem, Lachish and Azekah, God told Zedekiah that the city would burn and that he would be taken to Babylon, though he would not die by the sword. In the crisis Zedekiah and the people made a covenant in the temple to free their Hebrew slaves, as the Law required, and they did it. But when the Babylonian army withdrew for a time, they took the slaves back. God reminded them that He had brought their fathers out of slavery and commanded them to release their Hebrew brothers after six years. Because they had profaned His name and broken the covenant they made by walking between the pieces of a calf, God proclaimed a "liberty" of His own: freedom to the sword, pestilence and famine. He would bring the Babylonians back, and they would capture the city and burn it.

Study Questions

1. What message did God give Zedekiah about the city and about the king himself? (34:2-5)

2. Which cities of Judah were still standing, and what do the Lachish letters add to this picture? (34:7)

3. What covenant did Zedekiah and the people make, and what did they do at first? (34:8-10)

4. How did the Law of Moses limit Hebrew servitude? (34:14; Exodus 21:2; Deuteronomy 15:12-15)

5. Why did the people take their slaves back? (34:11, 21; 37:5)

6. What does it mean that they "profaned" God's name? (34:16)

7. What "liberty" did God proclaim to them, and why? (34:17)

8. What did it mean to pass between the pieces of a calf, and how is Genesis 15 different? (34:18; Genesis 15:9-17)

9. Have you ever made a promise to God in a crisis and then gone back on it when the pressure eased? What would it look like to make it right?

10. Jesus came "to proclaim release to captives" (Luke 4:18). Is there someone you are holding in debt, bitterness or control whom God is asking you to set free?

Jeremiah 35: The Faithful Rechabites

Scripture

35:1-11 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, saying, "Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak with them, and bring them ***to*** the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink." And I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons and all the house of the Rechabites, and I brought them ***into*** the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which ***was*** beside the chamber of the officials, which ***was*** above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold. And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full ***of*** wine, and cups, and I said to them, "Drink wine." And they said, "We will not drink wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall not drink wine, you and your sons, forever. And a house you shall not build, and seed you shall not sow, and a vineyard you shall not plant, and it shall not be yours; for in tents you shall dwell all your days, so that you may live many days on the face of the ground where you are sojourning.' And we have listened to the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, not to drink wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, and our daughters, and not to build houses for our dwelling; and vineyard and field and seed will not be ours. And we have dwelt in tents, and we have obeyed, and we have done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. And it came about, when Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up against the land, that we said, 'Come, and let us go ***to*** Jerusalem because of the army of the Chaldeans and because of the army of Syria.' And we have dwelt in Jerusalem."

35:12-19 And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Go, and say to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, 'Will you not receive discipline, to listen to My words? declares the LORD. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, have been carried out, and they have not drunk until this day, for they have obeyed the commandment of their father. And I, I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, and you have not listened to Me. And I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending, saying, "Turn back, please, each man from his evil way, and make your deeds good, and do not walk after other gods to serve them, and dwell on the ground which I gave to you and to your fathers"; and you have not inclined your ear, and you have not listened to Me. For the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have carried out the commandment of their father which he commanded them, and this people has not listened to Me. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of armies, the God of Israel: Look, I am bringing to Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the calamity which I have spoken against them, because I spoke to them, and they did not listen, and I called to them, and they did not answer.'" And to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Because you have listened to the commandment of Jonadab your father, and you have kept all his commandments, and you have done according to all that he commanded you, therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: ***There*** will not be cut off for Jonadab the son of Rechab a man standing before Me all the days.'"

Preview

This chapter goes back in time about ten years, to the days of King Jehoiakim. God tells Jeremiah to bring a family called the Rechabites into a room in the temple and set wine before them. They refuse. Their ancestor Jonadab had told them, about two hundred and forty years earlier, never to drink wine, build houses or plant fields, but to live in tents, and they had obeyed him all that time. God uses them as an object lesson. A family kept the word of a human father for generations, but Judah would not keep the word of the living God, though He had spoken to them again and again. God promises judgment to Judah and a lasting blessing to the Rechabites.

This chapter is about faithfulness. It is not mainly about wine. It is about whether we listen to the voice we owe the most. As we read, we should ask whether we take God's word as seriously as some people take the traditions of their families.

Study

35:1-2 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, saying, "Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak with them, and bring them* ***to*** *the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink."*

"In the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah." Jehoiakim reigned about 609 to 598 B.C. Verse 11 shows this happened near the end of his reign, when raiders from Babylon and Syria were attacking Judah (2 Kings 24:1-2), about 599 or 598 B.C. The chapter is placed here, out of time order, as a contrast with the broken covenant of chapter 34.

"Go to the house of the Rechabites." House here means family. God told Jeremiah to bring them to the temple, "into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink." The temple had side rooms around its courts for priests, Levites and storage.

God was not tempting them to sin. He knew what they would do. He was setting up a lesson for everyone watching.

35:3-5 *And I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons and all the house of the Rechabites, and I brought them* ***into*** *the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which* ***was*** *beside the chamber of the officials, which* ***was*** *above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold. And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full* ***of*** *wine, and cups, and I said to them, "Drink wine."*

Jeremiah brought the whole family, led by "Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah" (a different Jeremiah), to "the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God." This room was next to the officials' room and above that of "Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold," one of the high temple officers (52:24). This was a public place, near important men.

"And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine, and cups, and I said to them, Drink wine." A prophet of God, in God's house, offering wine. It would have been easy for them to say yes.

35:6-7 *And they said, "We will not drink wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall not drink wine, you and your sons, forever. And a house you shall not build, and seed you shall not sow, and a vineyard you shall not plant, and it shall not be yours; for in tents you shall dwell all your days, so that you may live many days on the face of the ground where you are sojourning.'*

"We will not drink wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us." They did not argue or make a scene. They simply explained.

Who was Jonadab? He lived in the days of King Jehu of Israel, about 841 B.C. He rode with Jehu when Jehu wiped out the worship of Baal from the northern kingdom (2 Kings 10:15-23). He was a man zealous for the LORD. The Rechabites seem to have been part of the Kenites, the family of Moses' father-in-law, who had joined Israel long before (Judges 1:16; 1 Chronicles 2:55).

Jonadab commanded them: no wine, no houses, no seed, no vineyard, "for in tents you shall dwell all your days, so that you may live many days." Scripture does not tell us why. Many think he wanted his family to stay apart from the soft, Baal-worshiping city life he had fought against, and to live simply as strangers in the land. That was Jonadab's rule for his family. God never commanded it for all Israel.

35:8-11 *And we have listened to the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, not to drink wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, and our daughters, and not to build houses for our dwelling; and vineyard and field and seed will not be ours. And we have dwelt in tents, and we have obeyed, and we have done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. And it came about, when Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up against the land, that we said, 'Come, and let us go **to** Jerusalem because of the army of the Chaldeans and because of the army of Syria.' And we have dwelt in Jerusalem."*

"We have listened to the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us." The whole family obeyed, "we, our wives, our sons, and our daughters." For about two hundred and forty years they had kept his word.

Then they explain why they are in Jerusalem at all. "When Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came up against the land," they said, "Come, and let us go to Jerusalem," "because of the army of the Chaldeans and because of the army of Syria." They had moved into the city for safety. Notice that they were flexible where they could be, living within city walls for a while in an emergency. But they would not break the clear command.

35:12-14 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: Go, and say to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, 'Will you not receive discipline, to listen to My words? declares the LORD. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, have been carried out, and they have not drunk until this day, for they have obeyed the commandment of their father. And I, I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, and you have not listened to Me.*

Now God speaks to Judah. "Will you not receive discipline, to listen to My words?" To receive discipline means to accept correction and learn from it.

"The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, have been carried out." Then the contrast. "And I, I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, and you have not listened to Me."

Do you see the point? Jonadab was a man. He was long dead. He spoke once. His family obeyed for generations. God is the living Creator. He spoke again and again, "rising early," eager to warn them. And His own people would not listen. If a human father's word can be kept that faithfully, how much more should we keep the word of our Father in heaven (Hebrews 12:9)?

35:15-16 *And I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending, saying, "Turn back, please, each man from his evil way, and make your deeds good, and do not walk after other gods to serve them, and dwell on the ground which I gave to you and to your fathers"; and you have not inclined your ear, and you have not listened to Me. For the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have carried out the commandment of their father which he commanded them, and this people has not listened to Me.*

God sums up the message of all His prophets. "Turn back, please, each man from his evil way, and make your deeds good, and do not walk after other gods to serve them, and dwell on the ground which I gave to you and to your fathers."

That is the whole message of Jeremiah in one sentence. Turn from evil. Do good. Worship God alone. Live in the land He gave you. It was not complicated. It was not hidden. "And you have not inclined your ear, and you have not listened to Me."

"For the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have carried out the commandment of their father which he commanded them, and this people has not listened to Me." The comparison is painful. A small, wandering family put the whole nation to shame.

35:17 *Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of armies, the God of Israel: Look, I am bringing to Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the calamity which I have spoken against them, because I spoke to them, and they did not listen, and I called to them, and they did not answer.'"*

"Therefore." God brings "all the calamity which I have spoken against them, because I spoke to them, and they did not listen, and I called to them, and they did not answer."

God's judgment was not sudden or unfair. He spoke, they did not listen. He called, they did not answer. When people finally face judgment, it will not be because God was silent, but because they would not hear (John 3:19).

35:18-19 *And to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Because you have listened to the commandment of Jonadab your father, and you have kept all his commandments, and you have done according to all that he commanded you, therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel:* ***There*** *will not be cut off for Jonadab the son of Rechab a man standing before Me all the days.'"*

Then Jeremiah turns to the Rechabites with a word of blessing. "Because you have listened to the commandment of Jonadab your father, and you have kept all his commandments," "There will not be cut off for Jonadab the son of Rechab a man standing before Me all the days."

To "stand before" God is a phrase used for serving Him, the way priests and prophets stood before the LORD (15:19; 1 Kings 17:1). God honored their faithfulness with a lasting place before Him. Scripture does not tell us exactly how this was kept in later years, but God promised it, and He keeps His word.

Does this mean all Christians must refuse wine? This passage does not teach that. God praised the Rechabites for obeying their father's rule, not because the rule was a law for everyone. Scripture warns strongly against drunkenness (Proverbs 20:1; Ephesians 5:18), and many believers choose not to drink at all for good reasons. Believers differ on this, and each should act in love toward others (Romans 14:21). But the lesson of this chapter is obedience. God honors those who honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30).

Think about the power of one faithful father. Jonadab's choice shaped his family for two hundred and forty years. What we teach and model in our homes matters long after we are gone.

Summary

In the days of Jehoiakim, God told Jeremiah to bring the Rechabite family into a room in the temple and offer them wine. They refused, because their ancestor Jonadab, a man zealous for the LORD in Jehu's day, had commanded them never to drink wine, build houses or plant crops, but to live in tents, and for about two hundred and forty years they had obeyed him. They had only come into Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Syrian raiders. God used them as a lesson for Judah: the Rechabites kept the word of a human father, but Judah would not listen to the living God, though He had sent prophet after prophet, rising early, to call them to turn from evil. So God would bring on Judah all the calamity He had spoken. But He promised the Rechabites that Jonadab would never lack a man to stand before Him.

Study Questions

1. When did this event happen, and why were the Rechabites living in Jerusalem? (35:1, 11)

2. What did Jeremiah offer the Rechabites, and how did they answer? (35:5-6)

3. Who was Jonadab the son of Rechab, and what did he command his family? (35:6-7; 2 Kings 10:15-16)

4. How long had the family obeyed him, and who in the family obeyed? (35:8-10)

5. What contrast does God draw between the Rechabites and the people of Judah? (35:14-16)

6. What is the message of all the prophets, summed up in verse 15? (35:15)

7. Why does God say He is bringing calamity on Judah? (35:17)

8. What promise did God give the Rechabites, and what does it mean to "stand before" Him? (35:19)

9. What traditions or rules from your family do you keep without thinking? Do you keep God's word that faithfully?

10. Jonadab's example shaped his family for generations. What do you want your children or the people who come after you to learn from your faithfulness?

Jeremiah 36: The King Burns the Scroll

Scripture

36:1-10 And it came about in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, ***that*** this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Take for yourself a scroll of a book, and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah and concerning all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, and until this day. Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I am planning to do to them, so that they may turn back, each man from his evil way, and I will forgive their iniquity and their sin." And Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him on a scroll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, "I ***am*** shut up; I am not able to go ***into*** the house of the LORD. And you, you shall go, and you shall read aloud in the scroll which you have written from my mouth the words of the LORD in the ears of the people ***in*** the house of the LORD on a day of fasting; and also in the ears of all Judah who are coming from their cities you shall read them aloud. Perhaps their supplication will fall before the LORD, and they will turn back, each man from his evil way; for great ***is*** the anger and the rage which the LORD has spoken against this people." And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet had commanded him, reading aloud in the book the words of the LORD ***in*** the house of the LORD. And it came about in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, in the ninth month, ***that*** they proclaimed a fast before the LORD, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who were coming from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem. And Baruch read aloud in the book the words of Jeremiah ***in*** the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, ***at*** the entrance of the New Gate of the house of the LORD, in the ears of all the people.

36:11-19 And Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD from the book, and he went down ***to*** the house of the king, to the chamber of the scribe; and look, all the officials were sitting there: Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the officials. And Micaiah told them all the words which he had heard when Baruch read aloud in the book in the ears of the people. And all the officials sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying, "The scroll in which you have read aloud in the ears of the people, take it in your hand and come." And Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand, and he came to them. And they said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it aloud in our ears." And Baruch read ***it*** aloud in their ears. And it came about, when they heard all the words, they were in dread, each man toward his neighbor; and they said to Baruch, "We will certainly tell the king all these words." And they asked Baruch, saying, "Tell us, please, how did you write all these words from his mouth?" And Baruch said to them, "From his mouth he called out all these words to me, and I was writing on the book with ink." And the officials said to Baruch, "Go, hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and let no man know where you ***are***."

36:20-32 And they went in to the king ***into*** the court, and they had deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe; and they told all the words in the ears of the king. And the king

sent Jehudi to fetch the scroll, and he fetched it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe; and Jehudi read it aloud in the ears of the king and in the ears of all the officials who were standing beside the king. And the king was sitting ***in*** the winter house in the ninth month, and the brazier ***was*** burning before him. And it came about, when Jehudi had read aloud three columns and four, he would tear it with the knife of the scribe and throw ***it*** into the fire that ***was*** in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed on the fire that ***was*** on the brazier. And they were not afraid, and they did not tear their garments, the king and all his servants who heard all these words. And also Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made entreaty to the king not to burn the scroll, and he did not listen to them. And the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of the king and Seraiah the son of Azriel and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; and the LORD hid them. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch had written from the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, "Return, take for yourself another scroll, and write on it all the former words which were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned. And concerning Jehoiakim the king of Judah you shall say, 'Thus says the LORD: You, you have burned this scroll, saying, "Why have you written on it, saying, 'The king of Babylon will certainly come, and he will destroy this land, and he will cause man and animal to cease from it'?" Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the king of Judah: ***There*** will not be for him ***one*** sitting on the throne of David, and his corpse will be thrown out to the heat by day and to the frost by night. And I will visit their iniquity on him and on his seed and on his servants; and I will bring on them and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem and on the men of Judah all the calamity which I have spoken against them, and they did not listen.'" And Jeremiah took another scroll, and he gave it to Baruch the son of Neriah, the scribe; and he wrote on it from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim the king of Judah had burned in the fire; and again many words like them were added to them.

Preview

In 605 B.C., the year Babylon became master of the region, God tells Jeremiah to write down every message He has given him for twenty-three years. Jeremiah dictates, and his scribe Baruch writes it all on a scroll. Because Jeremiah is barred from the temple, Baruch reads it there to the crowds on a day of fasting. A young man hears it and runs to the royal officials, who have Baruch read it to them. They are shaken and know the king must hear it, so they tell Baruch and Jeremiah to hide. Then King Jehoiakim sits by his fire in the winter house while the scroll is read. Every few columns, he cuts them off with a knife and throws them into the fire, until the whole scroll is gone. He shows no fear at all. God simply tells Jeremiah to write it again, and more words are added.

This chapter shows how God's word was written, and what happens when a man tries to destroy it. The king burned the scroll, but the word of God outlived him. As we read, we should ask how we respond when God's word cuts across our plans: with fear and repentance, or with a knife.

Study

36:1-3 *And it came about in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah,* ***that*** *this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Take for yourself a scroll of a book, and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah and concerning all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, and until this day. Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I am planning to do to them, so that they may turn back, each man from his evil way, and I will forgive their iniquity and their sin."*

"In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah." That is 605 B.C., the year Nebuchadnezzar crushed Egypt at Carchemish and Babylon took control of the land (46:2). It is also the year Jeremiah announced the seventy years of exile (25:1, 11).

"Take for yourself a scroll of a book, and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you," "from the days of Josiah, and until this day." That covered about twenty-three years of preaching, from 627 B.C. (25:3). A scroll was a long strip of papyrus or leather sheets joined together, written in columns and rolled up.

Why write it down? "Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I am planning to do to them, so that they may turn back, each man from his evil way, and I will forgive their iniquity and their sin." Even now, God's purpose in warning was mercy. He warns so that He may forgive (2 Peter 3:9).

36:4-7 *And Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him on a scroll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, "I* ***am*** *shut up; I am not able to go* ***into*** *the house of the LORD. And you, you shall go, and you shall read aloud in the scroll which you have written from my mouth the words of the LORD in the ears of the people* ***in*** *the house of the LORD on a day of fasting; and also in the ears of all Judah who are coming from their cities you shall read them aloud. Perhaps their supplication will fall before the LORD, and they will turn back, each man from his evil way; for great* ***is*** *the anger and the rage which the LORD has spoken against this people."*

"And Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD." This is how much of our book of Jeremiah came to be. God gave the words to Jeremiah, Jeremiah spoke them, and Baruch wrote them down. The Holy Spirit guided the whole process, so that what was written is God's word (2 Peter 1:21).

"I am shut up; I am not able to go into the house of the LORD." Jeremiah was not in prison yet. He seems to have been banned from the temple, probably after the trouble over his temple sermon and the stocks (20:1-2; 26:8-11). So Baruch would read the scroll "on a day of fasting," when crowds from all Judah filled the temple courts.

"Perhaps their supplication will fall before the LORD." Jeremiah still hoped they would repent. The word "perhaps" appears twice in this passage. God's servants keep hoping as long as God gives time.

36:8-10 *And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet had commanded him, reading aloud in the book the words of the LORD* ***in*** *the house of the LORD. And it came about in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, in the ninth month,* ***that*** *they proclaimed a fast before the LORD, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who were coming from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem. And Baruch read aloud in the book the words of Jeremiah* ***in*** *the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court,* ***at*** *the entrance of the New Gate of the house of the LORD, in the ears of all the people.*

"And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet had commanded him." Baruch was faithful. It took courage to stand up and read words the king would hate.

The fast came "in the fifth year of Jehoiakim," "in the ninth month," about December of 604 B.C. Babylonian records tell us that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Philistine city of Ashkelon about that same time, so the fast may have been called in fear of Babylon.

Baruch read the scroll "in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court," near "the New Gate." Shaphan was the royal scribe who had read the newly found Book of the Law to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-10). His family stood with Jeremiah. His son Ahikam had saved Jeremiah's life (26:24), and his grandson Gedaliah would later care for him (39:14). Archaeologists digging in the City of David found a clay seal impression bearing the name of Gemariah son of Shaphan, a small reminder that these were real men.

36:11-13 *And Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD from the book, and he went down* ***to*** *the house of the king, to the chamber of the scribe; and look, all the officials were sitting there: Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the officials. And Micaiah told them all the words which he had heard when Baruch read aloud in the book in the ears of the people.*

"Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD from the book." He went straight down to the palace, to the scribe's room, where "all the officials were sitting." The names are listed: Elishama the scribe, Delaiah, Elnathan the son of Achbor, his own father Gemariah, and others.

Elnathan is interesting. He was the man Jehoiakim had sent to Egypt to bring back the prophet Uriah to be killed (26:22-23). Yet in this chapter he pleads with the king not to burn the scroll (36:25). People are not always what we expect, and the word of God can move hard hearts.

36:14-16 *And all the officials sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying, "The scroll in which you have read aloud in the ears of the people, take it in your hand and come." And Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand, and he came to them. And they said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it aloud in our ears." And Baruch read* ***it*** *aloud in their ears. And it came about, when they heard all the words, they were in dread, each man toward his neighbor; and they said to Baruch, "We will certainly tell the king all these words."*

The officials sent "Jehudi the son of Nethaniah" to bring Baruch with the scroll. They said, "Sit down, please, and read it aloud in our ears." They wanted to hear it for themselves.

"When they heard all the words, they were in dread, each man toward his neighbor." They looked at each other in fear. They knew this was serious. "We will certainly tell the king all these words."

This is the right response to God's word: fear and taking it seriously. It is the response Josiah had when he heard the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:11-13). The tragedy is that these men had the right response, but not the power to make the king share it.

36:17-19 *And they asked Baruch, saying, "Tell us, please, how did you write all these words from his mouth?" And Baruch said to them, "From his mouth he called out all these words to me, and I was writing on the book with ink." And the officials said to Baruch, "Go, hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and let no man know where you* ***are****."*

"Tell us, please, how did you write all these words from his mouth?" They wanted to be sure it came from Jeremiah and was not Baruch's own work.

"From his mouth he called out all these words to me, and I was writing on the book with ink." Simple and honest. The words were Jeremiah's, given by God, and Baruch only wrote them down.

"Go, hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and let no man know where you are." The officials knew Jehoiakim. He had already killed one prophet (26:23). They protected God's messengers before they went to the king. Sometimes God's protection comes through people of influence who quietly do the right thing.

36:20-21 *And they went in to the king* ***into*** *the court, and they had deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe; and they told all the words in the ears of the king. And the king sent Jehudi to fetch the scroll, and he fetched it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe; and Jehudi read it aloud in the ears of the king and in the ears of all the officials who were standing beside the king.*

The officials left the scroll in "the chamber of Elishama the scribe" and went to tell the king. Perhaps they hoped to soften the blow. But the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi "read it aloud in the ears of the king and in the ears of all the officials who were standing beside the king." There was no escaping it. The king heard God's word, every line of it.

36:22-23 *And the king was sitting **in** the winter house in the ninth month, and the brazier **was** burning before him. And it came about, when Jehudi had read aloud three columns and four, he would tear it with the knife of the scribe and throw **it** into the fire that **was** in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed on the fire that **was** on the brazier.*

"And the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, and the brazier was burning before him." It was December, cold and rainy in Jerusalem. A brazier was a metal pan or pot of burning coals used to heat a room.

"And it came about, when Jehudi had read aloud three columns and four, he would tear it with the knife of the scribe and throw it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed on the fire."

Picture it. The king did not burst into rage and tear the whole scroll at once. He listened. Then every three or four columns, he reached out with a scribe's knife, the small blade used to trim reed pens and cut writing sheets, sliced off the part just read, and dropped it into the coals. Column by column, God's word burned. It was cold, calm, deliberate contempt.

Compare his father. When Josiah heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in grief and sought the LORD (2 Kings 22:11-13). Josiah tore his clothes. Jehoiakim tore the scroll.

People still cut out the parts of God's word they do not like. Some do it openly, saying the Bible is out of date. Others do it quietly, skipping the parts that confront their sin. But cutting the words out of the Book does not cut them out of reality. God's word stands whether we accept it or not (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35).

36:24-26 *And they were not afraid, and they did not tear their garments, the king and all his servants who heard all these words. And also Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made entreaty to the king not to burn the scroll, and he did not listen to them. And the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of the king and Seraiah the son of Azriel and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; and the LORD hid them.*

"And they were not afraid, and they did not tear their garments, the king and all his servants who heard all these words." Tearing garments was a sign of grief and repentance. There was none. The king's inner circle followed his lead.

Not everyone. "Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made entreaty to the king not to burn the scroll, and he did not listen to them." It is worth noticing who stood up. Three men spoke up in the king's own room. It did not change the king, but God recorded their names.

Then Jehoiakim ordered three men to "seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; and the LORD hid them." Scripture does not say how. It just says that God did it. The king could burn a scroll, but he could not find God's servants when God hid them.

36:27-29 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch had written from the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, "Return, take for yourself another scroll, and write on it all the former words which were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned. And concerning Jehoiakim the king of Judah you shall say, 'Thus says the LORD: You, you have burned this scroll, saying, "Why have you written on it, saying, 'The king of Babylon will certainly come, and he will destroy this land, and he will cause man and animal to cease from it'?"*

"Return, take for yourself another scroll, and write on it all the former words which were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned."

God was not shaken. He simply ordered a second copy. All the king's effort came to nothing. God's word cannot be destroyed by fire. Over the centuries, kings and empires have burned Bibles, and the Bible has outlived every one of them.

God also gave a word for Jehoiakim personally. The king had asked, in effect, why have you written that "The king of Babylon will certainly come"? He was angry, not at sin, but at the warning.

36:30-31 *Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the king of Judah: **There** will not be for him **one** sitting on the throne of David, and his corpse will be thrown out to the heat by day and to the frost by night. And I will visit their iniquity on him and on his seed and on his servants; and I will bring on them and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem and on the men of Judah all the calamity which I have spoken against them, and they did not listen.'"*

"There will not be for him one sitting on the throne of David." His son Jehoiachin did reign, but only for three months before he was taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8-15). He never truly sat on the throne, and no son of Jehoiakim ever ruled again after him (22:30).

"And his corpse will be thrown out to the heat by day and to the frost by night." Jeremiah had also said Jehoiakim would have "the burial of a donkey" (22:19). 2 Kings 24:6 says only that he "lay down with his fathers," which means he died. Scripture does not tell us exactly what happened to his body, but God's word about him stands. The man who threw God's word into the fire would himself be thrown out.

"I will visit their iniquity on him and on his seed and on his servants." Judgment would fall on the king, his family, his officials and the whole nation, "and they did not listen."

36:32 *And Jeremiah took another scroll, and he gave it to Baruch the son of Neriah, the scribe; and he wrote on it from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim the king of Judah had burned in the fire; and again many words like them were added to them.*

"And Jeremiah took another scroll, and he gave it to Baruch the son of Neriah, the scribe; and he wrote on it from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim the king of Judah had burned in the fire; and again many words like them were added to them."

The king's fire did not shrink God's word. It grew. The new scroll held everything the old one did, and more. That is God's way. When men try to silence His word, He speaks more.

This verse also tells us how our book of Jeremiah grew. The words were written, rewritten, and added to over Jeremiah's lifetime, all under God's hand. You hold in your Bible what a king tried to burn. Read it with the fear that Josiah had, not the contempt of Jehoiakim.

Summary

In 605 B.C., God told Jeremiah to write down every word He had given him since the days of Josiah, hoping Judah would repent so He could forgive. Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote, and because Jeremiah was barred from the temple, Baruch read the scroll there on a fast day in December 604 B.C. Micaiah the son of Gemariah heard it and told the officials, who had Baruch read it to them. Shaken, they asked how it was written, told Baruch and Jeremiah to hide, and reported to the king. As Jehudi read the scroll to Jehoiakim by the fire in his winter house, the king cut off every few columns with a scribe's knife and burned it, showing no fear, though three officials begged him not to. He ordered Baruch and Jeremiah arrested, but the LORD hid them. God told Jeremiah to write the scroll again, announced that Jehoiakim would have no son on David's throne and that his corpse would be thrown out, and Jeremiah dictated a new scroll with many more words added.

Study Questions

1. When did God tell Jeremiah to write the scroll, and what was God's purpose? (36:1-3)

2. How was the scroll written, and who read it in the temple? Why could Jeremiah not go himself? (36:4-8)

3. How did the officials respond when they heard the scroll? (36:16-19)

4. What did King Jehoiakim do as the scroll was read? Describe the scene. (36:22-23)

5. How was Jehoiakim's response different from his father Josiah's when he heard God's word? (36:24; 2 Kings 22:11)

6. Who pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, and did it work? (36:25)

7. What did God do for Baruch and Jeremiah, and what did He tell Jeremiah to do next? (36:26-28)

8. What happened to the second scroll? What does this teach about God's word? (36:32)

9. Are there parts of God's word that you are tempted to cut out or skip because they confront you? What would it look like to take them seriously instead?

10. Baruch and three officials stood up for God's word at personal risk. Where might God be asking you to speak up for the truth, even if it does not change the outcome?

Jeremiah 37: Jeremiah Arrested and Imprisoned

Scripture

37:1-10 And King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned in place of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah. And he did not listen, he and his servants and the people of the land, to the words of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet. And King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Pray, please, for us to the LORD our God." And Jeremiah was coming in and going out among the people, and they had not put him ***into*** the house of imprisonment. And the army of Pharaoh had come out from Egypt; and the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report of them, and they withdrew from Jerusalem. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Thus you shall say to the king of Judah who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Look, the army of Pharaoh which came out to you for help is going to return to its own land, Egypt. And the Chaldeans will return, and they will fight against this city, and they will capture it, and they will burn it with fire."' Thus says the LORD: 'Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will certainly go away from us," for they will not go away. For even if you had struck down all the army of ***the*** Chaldeans who are fighting with you, and there remained among them men pierced through, each man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.'"

37:11-21 And it came about, when the army of the Chaldeans had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of the army of Pharaoh, that Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go ***to*** the land of Benjamin, to receive a portion from there among the people. And he was at the Gate of Benjamin, and a captain of the guard ***was*** there, and his name ***was*** Irijah the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are falling away to the Chaldeans." And Jeremiah said, "A lie! I am not falling away to the Chaldeans." And he did not listen to him; and Irijah seized Jeremiah, and he brought him to the officials. And the officials were angry at Jeremiah, and they struck him, and they put him ***in*** the house of the fetters, the house of Jonathan the scribe; for they had made it into the house of imprisonment. For Jeremiah had come into the house of the cistern and into the vaults, and Jeremiah remained there many days. And King Zedekiah sent and took him, and the king asked him in his house in secret, and he said, "Is there a word from the LORD?" And Jeremiah said, "There is." And he said, "Into the hand of the king of Babylon you will be given." And Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What have I sinned against you and against your servants and against this people, that you have put me into the house of imprisonment? And where ***are*** your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land'? And now listen, please, my lord the king; please let my supplication fall before you, and do not send me back ***to*** the house of Jonathan the scribe, so that I will not die there." And King Zedekiah commanded, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard, and they gave him a round loaf of bread daily from the street of the bakers, until all the bread from the city was finished. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

Preview

Now the book moves forward to the last two years of Jerusalem under King Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar put on the throne. The Babylonian army has the city under siege, but news comes that Pharaoh's army is marching out of Egypt, and the Babylonians pull back. Jerusalem breathes again. Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to pray, but God's answer is that Egypt will turn back and Babylon will return and burn the city. Even if Judah defeated the whole Babylonian army and only wounded men were left, they would get up and burn it. In the break, Jeremiah tries to leave the city on family business, but a guard accuses him of deserting to the enemy. The officials beat him and throw him into a dungeon. Zedekiah has him brought out secretly and asks, "Is there a word from the LORD?" There is, and it has not changed. Jeremiah asks not to be sent back to die, and the king moves him to the court of the guard with a daily loaf of bread.

This chapter shows a king who wanted to hear from God but would not obey Him, and a prophet who would not change God's word to save himself. As we read, we should ask whether we want God's word, or only a word that agrees with us.

Study

37:1-2 *And King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned in place of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah. And he did not listen, he and his servants and the people of the land, to the words of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet.*

"And King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned in place of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah." Coniah is Jehoiachin, who reigned three months and was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. (22:24; 2 Kings 24:8-17). Nebuchadnezzar put Josiah's son Mattaniah on the throne and renamed him Zedekiah.

The Babylonian Chronicle, a set of clay tablets that record the main events of each year of the kings of Babylon, describes this very event. It says that in 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city of Judah, captured it, seized its king, and appointed a king of his own choice. It is one of the clearest outside witnesses to the history in our Bibles.

"And he did not listen, he and his servants and the people of the land, to the words of the LORD." That is the summary of Zedekiah's whole reign, about 597 to 586 B.C.

37:3-5 *And King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Pray, please, for us to the LORD our God." And Jeremiah was coming in and going out among the people, and they had not put him* ***into*** *the house of imprisonment. And the army of Pharaoh had come out from Egypt; and the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report of them, and they withdrew from Jerusalem.*

"Pray, please, for us to the LORD our God." Zedekiah sent Jehucal and the priest Zephaniah to ask Jeremiah to pray. Zephaniah had brought a similar request before (21:1-2). Notice that Zedekiah says "the LORD our God." He wanted God's help, but he did not want to obey God.

At this time "Jeremiah was coming in and going out among the people," not yet in prison. "And the army of Pharaoh had come out from Egypt." This was Pharaoh Hophra (44:30), who reigned about 589 to 570 B.C. Zedekiah had turned to Egypt for help against Babylon (Ezekiel 17:15). When the Babylonians heard Egypt was coming, "they withdrew from Jerusalem" to meet them. To the people inside, it looked like rescue. This is the same pause that tempted the masters to take back their slaves (34:11, 21).

37:6-8 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Thus you shall say to the king of Judah who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Look, the army of Pharaoh which came out to you for help is going to return to its own land, Egypt. And the Chaldeans will return, and they will fight against this city, and they will capture it, and they will burn it with fire."'*

God's word did not bend to the good news. "Look, the army of Pharaoh which came out to you for help is going to return to its own land, Egypt. And the Chaldeans will return, and they will fight against this city, and they will capture it, and they will burn it with fire."

Zedekiah wanted Jeremiah to pray that the danger would go away for good. God said it would not. Prayer is not a way to get God to approve our plans. It is where we come to learn His.

37:9-10 *Thus says the LORD: 'Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will certainly go away from us," for they will not go away. For even if you had struck down all the army of **the** Chaldeans who are fighting with you, and there remained among them men pierced through, each man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.'"*

"Do not deceive yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans will certainly go away from us." The most dangerous lies are the ones we tell ourselves.

Then God gives a stunning picture. "For even if you had struck down all the army of the Chaldeans who are fighting with you, and there remained among them men pierced through, each man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire." Suppose you won the war, and all that was left of Babylon was a camp full of wounded men. Those wounded men would get up and burn Jerusalem anyway.

The point is not Babylon's strength. It is God's decree. The city would fall because God had said so, not because Babylon was strong. When God has spoken, no human strength can overturn it (Proverbs 21:30).

37:11-13 *And it came about, when the army of the Chaldeans had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of the army of Pharaoh, that Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go **to** the land of Benjamin, to receive a portion from there among the people. And he was at the Gate of Benjamin, and a captain of the guard **was** there, and his name **was** Irijah the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are falling away to the Chaldeans."*

While the Babylonian army was away, Jeremiah "went out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin, to receive a portion from there among the people." He was going home toward

Anathoth, probably to settle a share of family property. This may be connected to the field he would later buy from his cousin (32:6-9), though that came later.

At "the Gate of Benjamin," the north gate of the city, "a captain of the guard" named "Irijah the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah" stopped him. Some think his grandfather was the false prophet Hananiah who opposed Jeremiah (28:1-17), but Scripture does not say.

"You are falling away to the Chaldeans." Irijah accused Jeremiah of deserting to the enemy. It was not a crazy charge on the surface. Jeremiah had been telling people to surrender to Babylon (21:9), and some had already deserted (38:19). But it was false.

37:14-16 *And Jeremiah said, "A lie! I am not falling away to the Chaldeans." And he did not listen to him; and Irijah seized Jeremiah, and he brought him to the officials. And the officials were angry at Jeremiah, and they struck him, and they put him **in** the house of the fetters, the house of Jonathan the scribe; for they had made it into the house of imprisonment. For Jeremiah had come into the house of the cistern and into the vaults, and Jeremiah remained there many days.*

"A lie! I am not falling away to the Chaldeans." Jeremiah told the truth, "and he did not listen to him."

"And the officials were angry at Jeremiah, and they struck him, and they put him in the house of the fetters, the house of Jonathan the scribe." These officials were not the same men who protected Baruch and Jeremiah under Jehoiakim (36:19). Those men had gone into exile in 597 B.C. or lost their places. The new officials were hostile.

"For Jeremiah had come into the house of the cistern and into the vaults, and Jeremiah remained there many days." A private house had been turned into a prison, and Jeremiah was put in an underground cell or pit, dark and damp. He was no longer young, after almost forty years of ministry, and he suffered for a crime he did not commit.

Jesus told us that His servants would be falsely accused (Matthew 5:11-12). Jeremiah is one of many in Scripture who suffered for the truth. If you are suffering unfairly for doing right, you stand in good company (1 Peter 2:19-21).

37:17 *And King Zedekiah sent and took him, and the king asked him in his house in secret, and he said, "Is there a word from the LORD?" And Jeremiah said, "There is." And he said, "Into the hand of the king of Babylon you will be given."*

"And King Zedekiah sent and took him, and the king asked him in his house in secret, and he said, Is there a word from the LORD?"

This is a sad and revealing scene. The king was afraid of his officials, so he met the prophet in secret. He knew Jeremiah spoke for God. He wanted a word. Maybe he hoped Jeremiah, after weeks in the dungeon, would be ready to say something nicer.

"And Jeremiah said, There is." Then, in one sentence, he gave it. "Into the hand of the king of Babylon you will be given."

Think about the courage of that answer. Jeremiah was a prisoner, weak, at the king's mercy. One kind word could have bought his freedom. He told the truth anyway. A faithful servant of God does not shape the message to please the one who holds power over him (Galatians 1:10).

37:18-20 *And Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What have I sinned against you and against your servants and against this people, that you have put me into the house of imprisonment? And where **are** your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land'? And now listen, please, my lord the king; please let my supplication fall before you, and do not send me back **to** the house of Jonathan the scribe, so that I will not die there."*

Then Jeremiah asks a fair question. "What have I sinned against you and against your servants and against this people, that you have put me into the house of imprisonment?" He had done nothing wrong.

"And where are your prophets who prophesied to you," saying, "The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land"? The false prophets had promised peace. Now Babylon had come. Their words had failed, and Jeremiah's had come true. Yet he was the one in prison.

"Please let my supplication fall before you, and do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the scribe, so that I will not die there." Jeremiah was not too proud to ask for mercy. He spoke respectfully to the king, "my lord the king," even though the king was weak and wrong. Standing firm on God's word did not make him rude (Romans 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17).

37:21 *And King Zedekiah commanded, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard, and they gave him a round loaf of bread daily from the street of the bakers, until all the bread from the city was finished. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.*

Zedekiah did that much. He "commanded, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard." The court of the guard was an open courtyard near the palace, still a prison but far better than the pit. And they gave him "a round loaf of bread daily from the street of the bakers, until all the bread from the city was finished."

Bakers in ancient cities often worked on the same street. Each day a loaf was sent to Jeremiah. God kept him alive through the siege, even as food ran out, just as He fed Elijah by the brook (1 Kings 17:2-6). God had promised Jeremiah at his call, "I am with you to deliver you" (1:8), and He kept that promise one loaf at a time.

"And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard." This is where he was when he bought the field (32:2) and when God told him "Call to Me" (33:1). Some of the greatest promises in his book were given to him in this prison yard.

Summary

Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar made king in place of Coniah, did not listen to the LORD, but he sent to Jeremiah asking for prayer when Pharaoh's army came out of Egypt and the Babylonians lifted the siege. God answered that Egypt would go home and the Chaldeans would come back and

burn the city, and that even wounded men would rise up to do it. During the break, Jeremiah tried to go to the land of Benjamin, but a captain named Irijah accused him of deserting to the Chaldeans. The officials beat him and threw him into a dungeon in the house of Jonathan the scribe, where he stayed many days. Zedekiah brought him out in secret and asked if there was a word from the LORD. Jeremiah said there was: the king would be given into the hand of the king of Babylon. Jeremiah asked what he had done wrong, where the false prophets were now, and pleaded not to be sent back to die. Zedekiah moved him to the court of the guard and gave him a loaf of bread each day until the bread in the city ran out.

Study Questions

1. Who made Zedekiah king, and what does verse 2 say about his reign? (37:1-2)

2. Why did the Babylonians withdraw from Jerusalem for a time? (37:5)

3. What did God say would happen even if Judah defeated the whole Babylonian army? What does that teach? (37:10)

4. Why did Jeremiah try to leave the city, and what was he accused of? (37:12-13)

5. What did the officials do to Jeremiah, and where did they put him? (37:15-16)

6. What did Zedekiah ask Jeremiah in secret, and how did Jeremiah answer? (37:17)

7. What questions did Jeremiah ask the king, and what did he ask for? (37:18-20)

8. How did God provide for Jeremiah during the siege? (37:21)

9. Zedekiah wanted a word from God but would not obey it. Have you ever asked God for guidance while hoping He would approve what you had already decided?

10. Jeremiah could have softened God's message to win his freedom. Is there a place in your life where you are tempted to soften the truth to please someone who has power over you?

Jeremiah 38: Jeremiah in the Cistern

Scripture

38:1-13 And Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words which Jeremiah was speaking to all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'He who remains in this city will die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; and he who goes out to the Chaldeans will live, and his life will be to him for plunder, and he will live.' Thus says the LORD: 'This city will certainly be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.'" And the officials said to the king, "Please let this man be put to death, because he is making slack the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking to them according to these words; for this man is not seeking welfare for this people, but rather calamity." And King Zedekiah said, "Look, he ***is*** in your hand; for the king is not able ***to do*** anything against you." And they took Jeremiah, and they threw him into the cistern of Malchiah the son of the king, which ***was*** in the court of the guard; and they let down Jeremiah with ropes. And in the cistern ***there was*** no water, but mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud. And Ebed-melech the Cushite, a man, a court official, and he ***was*** in the house of the king, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern; and the king ***was*** sitting in the Gate of Benjamin. And Ebed-melech went out from the house of the king, and he spoke to the king, saying, "My lord the king, these men have done evil ***in*** all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have thrown into the cistern; and he will die in his place because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city." And the king commanded Ebed-melech the Cushite, saying, "Take with you from here thirty men, and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies." And Ebed-melech took the men with him, and he went ***into*** the house of the king, to ***a place*** under the storehouse, and he took from there worn-out pieces of cloth and worn-out rags, and he let them down to Jeremiah into the cistern with ropes. And Ebed-melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put, please, the worn-out pieces of cloth and the rags under your armpits, under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so. And they drew out Jeremiah with the ropes, and they brought him up from the cistern; and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

38:14-28 And King Zedekiah sent, and he took Jeremiah the prophet to himself, to the third entrance which ***was*** in the house of the LORD; and the king said to Jeremiah, "I am asking you a thing; do not hide anything from me." And Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, will you not certainly put me to death? And if I counsel you, you will not listen to me." And King Zedekiah swore to Jeremiah in secret, saying, "***As*** the LORD lives, who made for us this life, I will not put you to death, and I will not give you into the hand of these men who are seeking your life." And Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of armies, the God of Israel: 'If you will certainly go out to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your soul will live, and this city will not be burned with fire; and you will live, you and your house. And if you will not go out to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will burn it with fire; and you, you will not escape from their hand.'" And King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am anxious about the Jews who have fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they give me into their hand, and they deal wantonly with me." And Jeremiah said, "They will not give ***you***.

Listen, please, to the voice of the LORD in what I am speaking to you, so that it may go well with you, and your soul may live. And if you are refusing to go out, this ***is*** the word which the LORD has shown me: And look, all the women who are left in the house of the king of Judah ***are*** being brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon, and they ***are*** saying, 'They misled you and prevailed over you, the men of your peace; your feet are sunk in the mire; they have turned backward.' And all your wives and your sons they ***are*** bringing out to the Chaldeans, and you, you will not escape from their hand, for by the hand of the king of Babylon you will be captured, and this city you will burn with fire." And Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Let no man know of these words, and you will not die. And if the officials hear that I have spoken with you, and they come to you and say to you, 'Tell us, please, what you said to the king; do not hide ***it*** from us, and we will not put you to death; and what did the king say to you?' then you shall say to them, 'I was making my supplication fall before the king, not to send me back ***to*** the house of Jonathan to die there.'" And all the officials came to Jeremiah, and they asked him, and he told them according to all these words which the king had commanded; and they kept silent from him, for the matter had not been heard. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was captured. And it came about, when Jerusalem was captured,

Preview

Four powerful officials hear Jeremiah telling the people that those who stay in the city will die and those who go out to the Babylonians will live. They demand his death, and weak King Zedekiah hands him over. They lower Jeremiah into an empty cistern, where he sinks into the mud and is left to starve. Then an unlikely hero steps in: Ebed-melech, a foreign court official from Cush. He goes to the king, gets permission, gathers men and old rags, and gently pulls Jeremiah out. Zedekiah then meets Jeremiah secretly once more. Jeremiah tells him plainly that if he surrenders he and the city will live, and if he does not, the city will burn and he will be captured. The king is afraid, not of God, but of what people will do to him. He asks Jeremiah to keep their talk secret, and Jeremiah stays in the court of the guard until the city falls.

This chapter shows two kinds of fear. Zedekiah feared men and lost everything. Ebed-melech feared God more than men and did the right thing at real risk. As we read, we should ask whose opinion shapes our choices.

Study

38:1-3 *And Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words which Jeremiah was speaking to all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'He who remains in this city will die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; and he who goes out to the Chaldeans will live, and his life will be to him for plunder, and he will live.' Thus says the LORD: 'This city will certainly be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.'"*

Four officials are named: Shephatiah, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah. Jucal is the Jehucal whom Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah in 37:3, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah was sent in 21:1. Archaeologists working in the City of David

have found clay seal impressions bearing the names Jehucal son of Shelemiah and Gedaliah son of Pashhur. Many believe these are the very men named here.

They heard Jeremiah's message: "He who remains in this city will die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; and he who goes out to the Chaldeans will live." "His life will be to him for plunder." In war, plunder is what a soldier carries off from the battle. Jeremiah was saying that anyone who surrendered would escape with his life, and that would be his prize.

Why would God tell them to surrender? Because the city's fall was God's judgment, and fighting it was fighting God. Surrender was the way to accept His judgment and live (21:8-10).

38:4-5 *And the officials said to the king, "Please let this man be put to death, because he is making slack the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking to them according to these words; for this man is not seeking welfare for this people, but rather calamity." And King Zedekiah said, "Look, he* ***is*** *in your hand; for the king is not able* ***to do*** *anything against you."*

"Please let this man be put to death, because he is making slack the hands of the men of war who remain in this city." To weaken the hands meant to drain their courage. From a military point of view, they had a point. Jeremiah's words were bad for morale.

One of the Lachish letters, written in these same months, uses this same phrase. An officer complains that certain words from Jerusalem were weakening the hands of the people. The language of this chapter is the language of those very days.

"For this man is not seeking welfare for this people, but rather calamity." That was false. Jeremiah was the one man trying to save them. He had begged God for them and wept over them (9:1; 14:7-9). The officials called the truth treason.

"And King Zedekiah said, Look, he is in your hand; for the king is not able to do anything against you." It is one of the weakest things a king ever said. He knew Jeremiah was right. He handed him over anyway. Pilate did much the same with Jesus. He knew He was innocent, washed his hands, and gave Him to the crowd (Matthew 27:24-26).

38:6 *And they took Jeremiah, and they threw him into the cistern of Malchiah the son of the king, which* ***was*** *in the court of the guard; and they let down Jeremiah with ropes. And in the cistern* ***there was*** *no water, but mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.*

"And they took Jeremiah, and they threw him into the cistern" of Malchiah the son of the king, "which was in the court of the guard; and they let down Jeremiah with ropes. And in the cistern there was no water, but mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud."

A cistern was a pit cut into rock and plastered to store rainwater. Many were shaped like a bottle, narrow at the top and wide below, so there was no climbing out. In a siege, this one had gone dry except for the mud at the bottom.

They did not kill him with the sword. They left him to die of hunger and cold in the dark, so no one could say they had shed his blood. Jeremiah's own prayers describe the feeling of being in the pit (Lamentations 3:52-55 may look back on this). Joseph was thrown into a dry pit by his brothers (Genesis 37:24). Jeremiah was thrown into one by his own nation's leaders.

38:7-9 *And Ebed-melech the Cushite, a man, a court official, and he **was** in the house of the king, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern; and the king **was** sitting in the Gate of Benjamin. And Ebed-melech went out from the house of the king, and he spoke to the king, saying, "My lord the king, these men have done evil **in** all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have thrown into the cistern; and he will die in his place because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city."*

"And Ebed-melech the Cushite, a man, a court official, and he was in the house of the king, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern."

Ebed-melech's name means servant of the king. He was a Cushite, from the land south of Egypt along the upper Nile, today Sudan and part of Ethiopia. He was a foreigner. The word for court official sometimes means a eunuch, and many think he was one. Either way, he was an outsider with little standing.

The king was "sitting in the Gate of Benjamin," holding court. Ebed-melech went out from the palace and spoke to him in public, in front of everyone. "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet." He named the evil out loud. He also pointed out that Jeremiah "will die in his place because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city."

Think of the risk. The men he was accusing were the most powerful officials in Jerusalem. The king had just handed Jeremiah over to them. A foreign servant had every reason to keep quiet. He spoke anyway. When the leaders of God's people did nothing, a foreigner did what was right.

38:10-13 *And the king commanded Ebed-melech the Cushite, saying, "Take with you from here thirty men, and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies." And Ebed-melech took the men with him, and he went **into** the house of the king, to **a place** under the storehouse, and he took from there worn-out pieces of cloth and worn-out rags, and he let them down to Jeremiah into the cistern with ropes. And Ebed-melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put, please, the worn-out pieces of cloth and the rags under your armpits, under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so. And they drew out Jeremiah with the ropes, and they brought him up from the cistern; and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.*

The king changed his mind as quickly as before. "Take with you from here thirty men, and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies." Thirty men would be enough to protect the rescue from the officials if they tried to stop it.

Then we see Ebed-melech's kindness. He went to a storeroom under the palace and took "worn-out pieces of cloth and worn-out rags." He let them down with the ropes and said, "Put, please, the worn-out pieces of cloth and the rags under your armpits, under the ropes." Jeremiah was weak

and starving. The ropes would have cut into him as they hauled him out of the deep mud. Ebed-melech thought of that.

"And they drew out Jeremiah with the ropes, and they brought him up from the cistern."

This is a small detail, but it says a lot. Ebed-melech did not just do the right thing. He did it with care. Courage and kindness belong together. When we help someone in a pit, we should think about how to lift them without hurting them more (Galatians 6:1-2). God did not forget this man. In 39:15-18 He sends him a personal promise.

38:14-16 *And King Zedekiah sent, and he took Jeremiah the prophet to himself, to the third entrance which **was** in the house of the LORD; and the king said to Jeremiah, "I am asking you a thing; do not hide anything from me." And Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, will you not certainly put me to death? And if I counsel you, you will not listen to me." And King Zedekiah swore to Jeremiah in secret, saying, "**As** the LORD lives, who made for us this life, I will not put you to death, and I will not give you into the hand of these men who are seeking your life."*

Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah again, this time to "the third entrance which was in the house of the LORD," a private place. "I am asking you a thing; do not hide anything from me."

Jeremiah was honest about his fear. "If I tell you, will you not certainly put me to death? And if I counsel you, you will not listen to me." He knew the king.

"And King Zedekiah swore to Jeremiah in secret, saying, As the LORD lives, who made for us this life, I will not put you to death, and I will not give you into the hand of these men who are seeking your life." Zedekiah swore by the living God, the Giver of life. He believed in God enough to swear by Him. He did not trust Him enough to obey.

38:17-18 *And Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of armies, the God of Israel: 'If you will certainly go out to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your soul will live, and this city will not be burned with fire; and you will live, you and your house. And if you will not go out to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will burn it with fire; and you, you will not escape from their hand.'"*

Then Jeremiah gave the clearest choice in the whole book. "If you will certainly go out to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your soul will live, and this city will not be burned with fire; and you will live, you and your house."

"And if you will not go out," "this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will burn it with fire; and you, you will not escape from their hand."

Even this late, God offered mercy. Surrender meant life for the king, his family and the city. Refusing meant death and fire. The choice was in Zedekiah's hands. God always puts the choice plainly before us (Deuteronomy 30:19).

38:19-20 *And King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am anxious about the Jews who have fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they give me into their hand, and they deal wantonly with me." And Jeremiah said, "They will not give* ***you****. Listen, please, to the voice of the LORD in what I am speaking to you, so that it may go well with you, and your soul may live.*

"I am anxious about the Jews who have fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they give me into their hand, and they deal wantonly with me." There it is. The king was afraid of being mocked and mistreated by his own people who had already surrendered. He was more afraid of humiliation than of God.

"They will not give you," Jeremiah answered. "Listen, please, to the voice of the LORD in what I am speaking to you, so that it may go well with you, and your soul may live." Notice the tenderness in that "please." Jeremiah was not gloating. He was pleading with the king to save his life.

"The trembling of man sets a snare," says Proverbs 29:25, "and he who trusts in the LORD will be set on high." Zedekiah is that proverb in a single life.

38:21-23 *And if you are refusing to go out, this* ***is*** *the word which the LORD has shown me: And look, all the women who are left in the house of the king of Judah* ***are*** *being brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon, and they* ***are*** *saying, 'They misled you and prevailed over you, the men of your peace; your feet are sunk in the mire; they have turned backward.' And all your wives and your sons they* ***are*** *bringing out to the Chaldeans, and you, you will not escape from their hand, for by the hand of the king of Babylon you will be captured, and this city you will burn with fire."*

If he refused, Jeremiah said, God had shown him a picture. The women left in the palace would be led out to the Babylonian officers, singing a taunt: "They misled you and prevailed over you, the men of your peace; your feet are sunk in the mire; they have turned backward."

"The men of your peace" were his trusted friends and advisers. They had pushed him into this war, and they would desert him. "Your feet are sunk in the mire" is a bitter reversal. The king let Jeremiah sink in the mud. Now the king himself would be stuck, with no one to pull him out.

"All your wives and your sons they are bringing out to the Chaldeans," and "this city you will burn with fire." The Babylonians would set the fire, but God says Zedekiah would be the one who burned the city, by his refusal. Our choices have consequences for the people who depend on us.

38:24-27 *And Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Let no man know of these words, and you will not die. And if the officials hear that I have spoken with you, and they come to you and say to you, 'Tell us, please, what you said to the king; do not hide* ***it*** *from us, and we will not put you to death; and what did the king say to you?' then you shall say to them, 'I was making my supplication fall before the king, not to send me back* ***to*** *the house of Jonathan to die there.'" And all the officials came to Jeremiah, and they asked him, and he told them according to all these words which the king had commanded; and they kept silent from him, for the matter had not been heard.*

"Let no man know of these words, and you will not die." Zedekiah's main concern was secrecy. He told Jeremiah what to say if the officials asked: "I was making my supplication fall before the king, not to send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there."

The officials did come, and Jeremiah "told them according to all these words which the king had commanded." Was this a lie? Jeremiah had made that very request before (37:20), and he likely made it again here. What he said was true, but it was not the whole conversation. He did not owe the men who threw him into a pit a full report of the king's private talk. Bible teachers differ on how to judge this. Some see it as a fair keeping of a confidence. Others see it as a half-truth that the Bible simply records without praising. Scripture does not comment on it.

38:28 *And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was captured. And it came about, when Jerusalem was captured,*

"And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was captured." God kept His servant alive through the whole siege.

The last words, "And it came about, when Jerusalem was captured," begin a sentence that runs on into chapter 39. Chapter breaks were added much later, and here the story flows straight into the fall of the city.

Summary

Four officials heard Jeremiah telling the people that whoever stayed in the city would die and whoever surrendered would live. They demanded his death for weakening the soldiers' hands, and Zedekiah said he could do nothing against them. They lowered Jeremiah into a muddy cistern to die. Ebed-melech the Cushite, a foreign court official, went to the king at the Gate of Benjamin and spoke up, and the king sent him with thirty men to rescue Jeremiah. Ebed-melech let down old rags so the ropes would not hurt him and pulled him out. Then Zedekiah met Jeremiah secretly in the temple and swore not to kill him. Jeremiah told him that if he surrendered, he and his family and the city would live, but if not, the city would burn and he would not escape. Zedekiah said he feared the Jews who had deserted. Jeremiah pleaded with him to obey, and warned of the women's taunt that his friends had left his feet sunk in the mire. The king asked Jeremiah to keep their talk secret, and Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guard until Jerusalem was captured.

Study Questions

1. What message were the officials angry about, and what did they say Jeremiah was doing? (38:2-4)

2. What did Zedekiah say when the officials asked for Jeremiah's death? (38:5)

3. Describe the cistern and what happened to Jeremiah there. (38:6)

4. Who was Ebed-melech, and what risk did he take? (38:7-9)

5. How did Ebed-melech show kindness as well as courage in the rescue? (38:11-13)

6. What choice did Jeremiah put before Zedekiah? (38:17-18)

7. What was Zedekiah really afraid of, and how did Jeremiah answer him? (38:19-20; Proverbs 29:25)

8. What picture did Jeremiah give of the king's feet, "your feet are sunk in the mire"? (38:22)

9. Ebed-melech spoke up when powerful people were doing wrong. Is there someone in a "pit" today whom God may be asking you to help, and how can you do it with care?

10. Zedekiah knew the truth but feared people more than God. Where do you feel the pull of the fear of man, and what would trusting God look like there?

Jeremiah 39: The Fall of Jerusalem

Scripture

39:1-10 In the ninth year of Zedekiah the king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and all his army came to Jerusalem, and they besieged it. In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth ***day*** of the month, the city was broken into. And all the officials of the king of Babylon came in, and they sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon. And it came about, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled, and they went out at night from the city ***by*** the way of the garden of the king, through the gate between the two walls; and he went out ***by*** the way of the Arabah. And the army of ***the*** Chaldeans pursued after them, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and they seized him, and they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon ***at*** Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he spoke judgments with him. And the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; and all the nobles of Judah the king of Babylon slaughtered. And the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded, and he bound him with bronze fetters to bring him ***to*** Babylon. And the house of the king and the house of the people the Chaldeans burned with fire, and the walls of Jerusalem they broke down. And the rest of the people who remained in the city, and those falling away who had fallen away to him, and the rest of the people who remained, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards took into exile ***to*** Babylon. And some of the poor people who had nothing, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards left in the land of Judah, and he gave them vineyards and fields on that day.

39:11-18 And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon commanded concerning Jeremiah by the hand of Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards, saying, "Take him, and set your eyes on him, and do not do anything harmful to him; but just as he says to you, so do with him." And Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards sent, and Nebushazban the Rab-saris, and Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the chiefs of the king of Babylon; and they sent, and they fetched Jeremiah from the court of the guard, and they gave him over to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, to bring him out to the house; and he remained among the people. And to Jeremiah the word of the LORD had come while he was shut up in the court of the guard, saying, "Go, and say to Ebed-melech the Cushite, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am bringing My words against this city for calamity and not for good, and they will happen before you on that day. And I will deliver you on that day," declares the LORD, "and you will not be given into the hand of the men before whom you are afraid. For I will certainly rescue you, and by the sword you will not fall; and your life will be to you for plunder, for you have trusted in Me," declares the LORD.'"

Preview

For forty years Jeremiah warned that it would happen, and now it does. After a siege of about a year and a half, the Babylonians break through Jerusalem's wall in the summer of 586 B.C. Their officers take their seats in the city gate. King Zedekiah and his soldiers flee by night, but they are caught near Jericho and brought to Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah's sons are killed in front of him,

he is blinded and taken to Babylon in chains. The palace and houses are burned, the walls torn down, and most of the people taken into exile. Only the poorest are left, and they are given fields and vineyards. In the middle of the ruin, Nebuchadnezzar himself orders that Jeremiah be treated well, and he is placed in the care of Gedaliah. The chapter ends by looking back to a promise God gave Ebed-melech, the man who pulled Jeremiah from the cistern: "I will certainly rescue you," "for you have trusted in Me."

This is one of the darkest days in Israel's history. It shows that God's warnings are not empty and His word comes true. It also shows that, even in judgment, God keeps those who trust Him. As we read, we should take God's word as seriously as this chapter shows we must.

Study

39:1-2 *In the ninth year of Zedekiah the king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and all his army came to Jerusalem, and they besieged it. In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth **day** of the month, the city was broken into.*

"In the ninth year of Zedekiah the king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and all his army came to Jerusalem, and they besieged it." That was January of 588 B.C. A siege meant surrounding a city, cutting off food and supplies, and slowly starving it until it gave up or the walls were broken.

"In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was broken into." That was July of 586 B.C. The siege lasted about a year and a half, with the short break when Egypt's army came (37:5). By the end there was no bread left in the city (38:9; 52:6).

These dates were burned into Israel's memory. After the exile, the Jews still kept fasts in the fourth month and the tenth month to remember these days (Zechariah 8:19).

39:3 *And all the officials of the king of Babylon came in, and they sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon.*

"And all the officials of the king of Babylon came in, and they sat in the Middle Gate." In that world, the city gate was where leaders held court and made decisions. When the conquerors sat in Jerusalem's gate, it was a sign that they now ruled the city. Jeremiah had said this would happen at his call: they would "set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem" (1:15).

The names are given carefully. "Nergal-sar-ezer" is most likely Neriglissar, who later became king of Babylon himself (about 560 to 556 B.C.). "Rab-saris" and "Rab-mag" are titles for high Babylonian officers, the first something like chief official, the second a high office whose exact meaning is uncertain. These names fit what we know of the Babylonian court.

39:4-5 *And it came about, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled, and they went out at night from the city* ***by*** *the way of the garden of the king, through the gate between the two walls; and he went out* ***by*** *the way of the Arabah. And the army of* ***the*** *Chaldeans pursued after them, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and they seized him, and they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon* ***at*** *Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he spoke judgments with him.*

"When Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them," "they fled." At night they slipped out "by the way of the garden of the king, through the gate between the two walls," at the southeast corner of the city, and headed toward "the Arabah," the Jordan valley, likely hoping to cross the river and escape east.

"And the army of the Chaldeans pursued after them, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho." He got only about fifteen miles. They brought him "to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath," Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters in Syria, about two hundred miles north. "And he spoke judgments with him." Zedekiah had sworn loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar in God's name and broken his oath (2 Chronicles 36:13; Ezekiel 17:15-19). Now he was judged for it.

Jeremiah had told him in plain words, "you, you will not escape from their hand" (38:18). He did not escape. Running from God's word never works.

39:6-7 *And the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; and all the nobles of Judah the king of Babylon slaughtered. And the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded, and he bound him with bronze fetters to bring him* ***to*** *Babylon.*

"And the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; and all the nobles of Judah the king of Babylon slaughtered. And the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded, and he bound him with bronze fetters to bring him to Babylon."

This is one of the saddest passages in the Bible. I will not add to what it says. The last thing Zedekiah saw was the death of his sons.

It is exactly what God had warned. Jeremiah told Zedekiah, "your eyes will see the eyes of the king of Babylon," and that he would go to Babylon (34:3; 32:4). Ezekiel, in Babylon, said of him, "I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; and he shall not see it" (Ezekiel 12:13). How could both be true? Zedekiah saw Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, and he arrived in Babylon blind.

Zedekiah asked for God's word many times. He never obeyed it. Hearing God's word is not enough. We must do what it says (James 1:22).

39:8-10 *And the house of the king and the house of the people the Chaldeans burned with fire, and the walls of Jerusalem they broke down. And the rest of the people who remained in the city, and those falling away who had fallen away to him, and the rest of the people who remained, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards took into exile* ***to*** *Babylon. And some of the poor people who had nothing, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards left in the land of Judah, and he gave them vineyards and fields on that day.*

"And the house of the king and the house of the people the Chaldeans burned with fire, and the walls of Jerusalem they broke down." The palace burned, and the houses of the city with it. Chapter 52 adds that the temple itself was burned about a month later (52:12-13). The walls that had stood for centuries were pulled down. They would lie in ruins until Nehemiah rebuilt them about 445 B.C.

"Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards" took into exile the rest of the people in the city and those who had deserted to Babylon. This was the third and largest deportation, after those of 605 and 597 B.C.

"And some of the poor people who had nothing, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards left in the land of Judah, and he gave them vineyards and fields on that day."

There is a strange justice here. The rich had oppressed the poor and kept their slaves when God told them to let them go (34:11). Now the rich were in chains on the road to Babylon, and the poor, who had nothing, were given fields and vineyards. God sees the poor, and He does not forget them (Psalm 9:18).

39:11-14 *And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon commanded concerning Jeremiah by the hand of Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards, saying, "Take him, and set your eyes on him, and do not do anything harmful to him; but just as he says to you, so do with him." And Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards sent, and Nebushazban the Rab-saris, and Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the chiefs of the king of Babylon; and they sent, and they fetched Jeremiah from the court of the guard, and they gave him over to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, to bring him out to the house; and he remained among the people.*

"And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon commanded concerning Jeremiah." The king of Babylon himself gave orders: "Take him, and set your eyes on him, and do not do anything harmful to him; but just as he says to you, so do with him."

How did Nebuchadnezzar know about Jeremiah? Scripture does not tell us. Deserters who had gone over to the Babylonians surely reported that Jeremiah told the city to surrender (38:2, 19). Whatever the means, God was keeping His promise. On the day He called Jeremiah, God said, "they will fight against you, and they will not prevail against you, for I am with you" (1:19). The kings of Judah threw him into prison. The king of Babylon set him free.

They "fetched Jeremiah from the court of the guard, and they gave him over to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan." This was the family that had protected Jeremiah before (26:24).

Gedaliah would soon be made governor over the land (40:5). "And he remained among the people." Jeremiah chose to stay with the poor in the ruined land.

Chapter 40 tells us that Jeremiah was later found in chains among the captives at Ramah and set free there. It seems he was released from the court of the guard, then caught up with the other prisoners in the confusion, and freed again when Nebuzaradan found him. We will look at that in the next chapter.

39:15-18 *And to Jeremiah the word of the LORD had come while he was shut up in the court of the guard, saying, "Go, and say to Ebed-melech the Cushite, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am bringing My words against this city for calamity and not for good, and they will happen before you on that day. And I will deliver you on that day," declares the LORD, "and you will not be given into the hand of the men before whom you are afraid. For I will certainly rescue you, and by the sword you will not fall; and your life will be to you for plunder, for you have trusted in Me," declares the LORD.'"*

Now the writer goes back a little in time. "To Jeremiah the word of the LORD had come while he was shut up in the court of the guard." This was a word for Ebed-melech, the Cushite who had pulled Jeremiah out of the cistern (38:7-13).

"Look, I am bringing My words against this city for calamity and not for good, and they will happen before you on that day." Ebed-melech would see the city fall. "And I will deliver you on that day," "and you will not be given into the hand of the men before whom you are afraid."

Ebed-melech was afraid. He had made enemies of powerful officials. He may have feared the Babylonians too. God spoke to his fear personally.

"For I will certainly rescue you, and by the sword you will not fall; and your life will be to you for plunder, for you have trusted in Me."

Notice the reason. "For you have trusted in Me." Ebed-melech was a foreigner. He was not from Israel's priests or princes. But he believed God and acted on it, when the leaders of Jerusalem did not. And God saved him, while the king and nobles fell.

This is the way God has always saved people, Jew or Gentile. It is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Ebed-melech is a small picture of the gospel going to the nations, much like the Ethiopian official who believed in Jesus centuries later (Acts 8:26-39). God sees the one who trusts Him, even when a whole city falls around him.

Summary

Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged Jerusalem in Zedekiah's ninth year and broke into the city in his eleventh year, in July of 586 B.C. Babylonian officials sat in the Middle Gate as the new rulers. Zedekiah and his soldiers fled by night toward the Jordan, but they were caught in the plains of Jericho and brought to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. There Zedekiah's sons and the nobles of Judah were killed before his eyes, and he was blinded and taken to Babylon in chains. The Chaldeans burned the palace and the houses, broke down the walls and took the people into exile, leaving

only the poorest, to whom they gave fields and vineyards. Nebuchadnezzar ordered that Jeremiah be cared for, and he was given to Gedaliah and stayed among the people. Earlier, while Jeremiah was still in the court of the guard, God had sent word to Ebed-melech that He would rescue him on the day the city fell, because he had trusted in the LORD.

Study Questions

1. How long did the siege of Jerusalem last, and when was the city broken into? (39:1-2)

2. What did it mean that the Babylonian officials sat in the Middle Gate? How did this fulfill 1:15? (39:3)

3. Where did Zedekiah try to go, and where was he caught? (39:4-5)

4. How did the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel about Zedekiah both come true? (39:6-7; 32:4; Ezekiel 12:13)

5. What happened to the city, the people, and the poor of the land? (39:8-10)

6. What did Nebuchadnezzar command about Jeremiah, and how did this fulfill God's promise at Jeremiah's call? (39:11-12; 1:19)

7. What did God promise Ebed-melech, and why? (39:16-18)

8. Zedekiah heard God's word many times but never obeyed it. Why is hearing not enough? (James 1:22)

9. Ebed-melech was afraid, and God spoke to his fear. What fear would you like to bring to God today?

10. God saved Ebed-melech "for you have trusted in Me." Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ? What difference does that make when the world around you is falling apart?

Jeremiah 40: Gedaliah at Mizpah

Scripture

40:1-16 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the chief of ***the*** bodyguards had set him free from Ramah, when he took him, and he ***was*** bound with chains in the midst of all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken into exile to Babylon. And the chief of ***the*** bodyguards took Jeremiah, and he said to him, "The LORD your God spoke this calamity against this place. And the LORD has brought ***it***, and He has done just as He spoke, for you sinned against the LORD and did not listen to His voice, and this thing has happened to you. And now, look, I have set you free today from the chains which ***are*** on your hand. If it is good in your eyes to come with me ***to*** Babylon, come, and I will set my eye on you; and if it is displeasing in your eyes to come with me ***to*** Babylon, refrain. See, all the land ***is*** before you; to ***what is*** good and to ***what is*** right in your eyes to go there, go." And ***while*** he ***was*** still not returning, ***he said***, "And return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him in the midst of the people; or to any ***place*** right in your eyes to go, go." And the chief of ***the*** bodyguards gave him a food allowance and a present, and he let him go. And Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah, and he dwelt with him in the midst of the people who remained in the land. And all the commanders of the forces who ***were*** in the field, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam over the land, and that he had entrusted to him men and women and little ones, and some of the poor of the land, of those who had not been taken into exile to Babylon. And they came to Gedaliah, to Mizpah: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men. And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, swore to them and to their men, saying, "Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you. And I, look, I am dwelling at Mizpah to stand before the Chaldeans who will come to us; and you, gather wine and summer fruit and oil, and put ***them*** in your vessels, and dwell in your cities which you have seized." And also all the Jews who ***were*** in Moab and among the sons of Ammon and in Edom, and who ***were*** in all the lands, heard that the king of Babylon had given a remnant to Judah, and that he had appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. And all the Jews returned from all the places where they had been driven, and they came ***to*** the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, to Mizpah; and they gathered wine and summer fruit, very much. And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who ***were*** in the field came to Gedaliah, to Mizpah. And they said to him, "Do you really know that Baalis the king of the sons of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to strike you ***and take your*** life?" And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them. And Johanan the son of Kareah said to Gedaliah in secret at Mizpah, saying, "Let me go, please, and let me strike Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know. Why should he strike you ***and take your*** life, and all Judah who have gathered to you be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish?" And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, "Do not do this thing, for you are speaking falsehood concerning Ishmael."

Preview

Jerusalem has fallen. Jeremiah is found in chains among the captives at Ramah, waiting to be marched to Babylon, and Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian commander, sets him free. The pagan general even explains to Jeremiah why Jerusalem fell: the LORD did what He said, because the people sinned. Jeremiah is given a choice, and he chooses to stay in the land with Gedaliah, whom Babylon has made governor at Mizpah. Soldiers who had scattered in the countryside come in, and Gedaliah promises them that if they serve Babylon and work the land, it will go well. Jews come back from Moab, Ammon and Edom, and the harvest that year is plentiful. For a moment there is hope. But Johanan warns Gedaliah that the king of Ammon has sent Ishmael to kill him. Gedaliah will not believe it.

This chapter is a short season of peace after disaster. It shows God's care for the poor remnant left in the land, and it also shows how a good man's trust can be blind to danger. As we read, we should think about how to be kind and trusting without being naive.

Study

40:1 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the chief of **the** bodyguards had set him free from Ramah, when he took him, and he **was** bound with chains in the midst of all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken into exile to Babylon.*

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards had set him free from Ramah." This opening line seems to introduce the whole section of chapters 40 to 44, Jeremiah's ministry after the fall. The actual word from God does not come until 42:7.

"He was bound with chains in the midst of all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken into exile to Babylon." Ramah was a town about five miles north of Jerusalem, where the captives were gathered before the long march. This is the Ramah of 31:15, where Rachel weeps for her children. Jeremiah had been freed from the court of the guard (39:14), but in the confusion he seems to have been swept up with the other prisoners. There, in chains, the prophet waited with his people.

40:2-3 *And the chief of **the** bodyguards took Jeremiah, and he said to him, "The LORD your God spoke this calamity against this place. And the LORD has brought **it**, and He has done just as He spoke, for you sinned against the LORD and did not listen to His voice, and this thing has happened to you.*

"The LORD your God spoke this calamity against this place. And the LORD has brought it, and He has done just as He spoke, for you sinned against the LORD and did not listen to His voice."

What a strange sermon. A Babylonian general, a pagan, preaches Jeremiah's own message back to him. He had probably heard from deserters what Jeremiah had been saying. Even he could see that the God of Israel had done exactly what He said He would.

It is a sad irony. The kings, priests and prophets of Judah would not admit that their sin brought this judgment. A foreign soldier said it plainly. Sometimes outsiders see the truth about God's people more clearly than God's people do (Romans 2:24).

40:4-6 *And now, look, I have set you free today from the chains which **are** on your hand. If it is good in your eyes to come with me **to** Babylon, come, and I will set my eye on you; and if it is displeasing in your eyes to come with me **to** Babylon, refrain. See, all the land **is** before you; to **what is** good and to **what is** right in your eyes to go there, go." And **while** he **was** still not returning, **he said**, "And return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him in the midst of the people; or to any **place** right in your eyes to go, go." And the chief of **the** bodyguards gave him a food allowance and a present, and he let him go. And Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah, and he dwelt with him in the midst of the people who remained in the land.*

"Now, look, I have set you free today from the chains which are on your hand." Then Nebuzaradan gave Jeremiah a choice. "If it is good in your eyes to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will set my eye on you." In Babylon he would be cared for. Or he could stay. "See, all the land is before you."

"Return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him in the midst of the people." Gedaliah came from the godly family of Shaphan, the scribe who served Josiah. His father Ahikam had saved Jeremiah's life years before (26:24).

Nebuzaradan gave him "a food allowance and a present, and he let him go."

"And Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah, and he dwelt with him in the midst of the people who remained in the land." Mizpah was a town about eight miles north of Jerusalem. Samuel had gathered Israel there to pray and repent (1 Samuel 7:5-6). With Jerusalem in ruins, it became the new center of Judah.

Why would Jeremiah choose to stay? Babylon offered comfort and safety. He chose the ruined land and the poor people. Jeremiah's heart was with God's people and God's land. He had bought a field in that land as a sign that God would bring His people back (32:15). He would not leave it now. Moses made a similar choice, choosing to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy Egypt's treasures (Hebrews 11:24-26).

40:7-8 *And all the commanders of the forces who **were** in the field, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam over the land, and that he had entrusted to him men and women and little ones, and some of the poor of the land, of those who had not been taken into exile to Babylon. And they came to Gedaliah, to Mizpah: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men.*

"And all the commanders of the forces who were in the field," Judah's soldiers who had scattered into the countryside when the army broke up, heard that Gedaliah had been made governor over "men and women and little ones, and some of the poor of the land."

They came to Mizpah. The names are listed: "Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah," and others. Pay attention to the first two names, Ishmael and Johanan. They will shape the next three chapters.

40:9-10 *And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, swore to them and to their men, saying, "Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you. And I, look, I am dwelling at Mizpah to stand before the Chaldeans who will come to us; and you, gather wine and summer fruit and oil, and put **them** in your vessels, and dwell in your cities which you have seized."*

"Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you." This was Jeremiah's message, the word God had given for years (27:11-12; 29:7). Gedaliah believed it.

He promised to stand between them and the Babylonians. "I, look, I am dwelling at Mizpah to stand before the Chaldeans who will come to us." He would represent them. Their job was to "gather wine and summer fruit and oil, and put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities." The war was over. It was time to farm.

Gedaliah was a good leader in a hard place. He did not try to fight a war that God had said would fail. He tried to help a broken people live and rebuild under God's judgment. There is wisdom in accepting what God has allowed and working faithfully within it.

40:11-12 *And also all the Jews who **were** in Moab and among the sons of Ammon and in Edom, and who **were** in all the lands, heard that the king of Babylon had given a remnant to Judah, and that he had appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. And all the Jews returned from all the places where they had been driven, and they came **to** the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, to Mizpah; and they gathered wine and summer fruit, very much.*

"All the Jews who were in Moab and among the sons of Ammon and in Edom, and who were in all the lands, heard that the king of Babylon had given a remnant to Judah." People who had fled from the war to the countries east of the Jordan came home.

"And they gathered wine and summer fruit, very much." The summer of 586 B.C. had seen the burning of Jerusalem. That autumn brought a big harvest. God was showing kindness to the poor

remnant, a small sign that He had not abandoned them. Even in judgment, God remembers mercy (Habakkuk 3:2).

40:13-16 *And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who **were** in the field came to Gedaliah, to Mizpah. And they said to him, "Do you really know that Baalis the king of the sons of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to strike you **and take your** life?" And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them. And Johanan the son of Kareah said to Gedaliah in secret at Mizpah, saying, "Let me go, please, and let me strike Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know. Why should he strike you **and take your** life, and all Judah who have gathered to you be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish?" And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, "Do not do this thing, for you are speaking falsehood concerning Ishmael."*

Then the warning. Johanan and the commanders came to Gedaliah and asked if he knew that Baalis, the king of Ammon, had sent Ishmael to kill him. Ammon, east of the Jordan, had joined plots against Babylon before (27:3), and its king may have wanted to stop Judah from settling down under Babylon. Ishmael was of the royal family of David (41:1), and he may have resented a governor who was not a king's son.

"And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them."

Johanan pressed him in private. "Let me go, please, and let me strike" Ishmael, "and no one will know." He had a good reason: if Gedaliah were killed, "all Judah who have gathered to you" would be scattered, "and the remnant of Judah perish."

Gedaliah refused. "Do not do this thing, for you are speaking falsehood concerning Ishmael."

Was Gedaliah right to refuse? He was right not to approve a secret murder on a rumor. That would have been wrong. But he was wrong to ignore the warning completely. He could have taken care, set guards, or questioned Ishmael. He was a good man whose trust became blindness. Jesus told His disciples to "be shrewd as the serpents and innocent as the doves" (Matthew 10:16). Gedaliah was innocent as a dove, but not shrewd as a serpent. The next chapter shows what it cost him and everyone with him.

Summary

After Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah was found in chains among the captives at Ramah, and Nebuzaradan the Babylonian commander set him free, telling him that the LORD had brought this calamity because the people sinned and did not listen. Nebuzaradan let Jeremiah choose between coming to Babylon under his care and staying in the land, and Jeremiah went to Gedaliah, the new governor at Mizpah, to live among the poor who remained. The scattered army commanders came to Gedaliah, and he promised them that if they served Babylon and worked the land, it would go well with them. Jews who had fled to Moab, Ammon and Edom came home, and they gathered a great harvest. But Johanan warned Gedaliah that the king of Ammon had sent Ishmael to kill him, and offered to kill Ishmael first. Gedaliah refused and would not believe the warning.

Study Questions

1. Where was Jeremiah found, and what condition was he in? (40:1)

2. What did Nebuzaradan say about why Jerusalem fell? Why is it striking that he said it? (40:2-3)

3. What choice did Nebuzaradan give Jeremiah, and what did Jeremiah choose? (40:4-6)

4. Who was Gedaliah, and what family did he come from? (40:5; 26:24)

5. What did Gedaliah promise the commanders, and how did it match Jeremiah's message? (40:9-10; 29:7)

6. Who came back to Judah, and what kind of harvest did they have? (40:11-12)

7. What warning did Johanan give Gedaliah, and what did he offer to do? (40:13-15)

8. Was Gedaliah right or wrong in how he answered Johanan? What would have been wise? (40:16; Matthew 10:16)

9. Jeremiah chose to stay with the poor in a ruined land instead of a comfortable life in Babylon. Where might God be asking you to stay with hurting people rather than choose comfort?

10. How can you be kind and trusting toward people while still being wise about real danger?

Jeremiah 41: The Murder of Gedaliah

Scripture

41:1-18 And it was in the seventh month ***that*** Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed of the kingship, and the chiefs of the king, and ten men with him, came to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah; and they ate bread there together at Mizpah. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah arose, and the ten men who were with him, and they struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword; and he killed him whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land. And all the Jews who were with him, with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war, Ishmael struck. And it was on the second day of the killing of Gedaliah, and no one knew, and men came from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, eighty men, shaven of beard and torn of clothes and cutting themselves, and a grain offering and frankincense ***were*** in their hand, to bring ***to*** the house of the LORD. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, going along and weeping as he went; and it was, as he met them, ***that*** he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam." And it was, when they came into the midst of the city, ***that*** Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slaughtered them ***and threw them*** into the midst of the cistern, he and the men who ***were*** with him. And ten men were found among them, and they said to Ishmael, "Do not kill us, for we have hidden treasures in the field: wheat and barley and oil and honey." And he refrained, and he did not kill them in the midst of their brothers. And the cistern where Ishmael threw all the corpses of the men whom he had struck along with Gedaliah, it ***is the one*** which King Asa made because of Baasha the king of Israel; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it ***with the*** slain. And Ishmael took captive all the remnant of the people who ***were*** at Mizpah, the daughters of the king and all the people who remained at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the chief of ***the*** bodyguards had entrusted to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah took them captive, and he went to cross over to the sons of Ammon. And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who ***were*** with him heard ***of*** all the evil which Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done. And they took all the men, and they went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and they found him by the great waters which ***are*** in Gibeon. And it was, when all the people who ***were*** with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who ***were*** with him, ***that*** they rejoiced. And all the people whom Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned around, and they returned and went to Johanan the son of Kareah. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped with eight men from before Johanan, and he went to the sons of Ammon. And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who ***were*** with him took all the remnant of the people whom he had brought back from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after he had struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam: men, men of war, and women and little ones and eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon. And they went, and they dwelt in Geruth Chimham, which ***is*** beside Bethlehem, to go to enter Egypt, from before the Chaldeans, for they were afraid of them, for Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land.

Preview

The warning Gedaliah would not believe comes true. In the seventh month, Ishmael, a man of the royal family, comes to Mizpah with ten men, and they share a meal with Gedaliah. Then they rise up and kill him, along with the Jews and the Babylonian soldiers who were with him. The next day, a group of pilgrims from the north arrives on the way to bring offerings to the ruined temple, and Ishmael kills most of them too. He takes the rest of the people at Mizpah captive, including the king's daughters, and heads for Ammon. Johanan and the commanders go after him and catch him at Gibeon. The captives run to Johanan, but Ishmael escapes. Then Johanan and the people, afraid that Babylon will punish them all for Gedaliah's murder, start south toward Egypt.

This is a hard chapter to read. It tells of treachery and the killing of innocent people, and I will not dwell on the details. The study handles them briefly. It shows how quickly hate and pride can destroy what God was rebuilding, and it also prepares us for the choice the remnant will face in the next chapter. If you have lost someone to violence, this chapter may touch a deep wound. God sees it, and He does not treat it lightly.

Study

41:1-3 *And it was in the seventh month **that** Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed of the kingship, and the chiefs of the king, and ten men with him, came to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah; and they ate bread there together at Mizpah. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah arose, and the ten men who were with him, and they struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword; and he killed him whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land. And all the Jews who were with him, with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war, Ishmael struck.*

"And it was in the seventh month," about October. The year is not given; most likely it was only a few months after Jerusalem fell, though some place it a few years later. It was then that "Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed of the kingship," came to Mizpah with ten men. He was of the royal family of David. He may have thought the throne, or at least the leadership, should be his, and he may have hated Gedaliah for serving Babylon. Baalis the king of Ammon was behind him (40:14).

"And they ate bread there together at Mizpah." In that culture, to share a meal was to make a bond of trust and friendship. Gedaliah opened his table to the man he had been warned about.

"And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah arose, and the ten men who were with him, and they struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword; and he killed him whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land." They also killed "all the Jews who were with him" and the Babylonian soldiers there.

This was a betrayal at the table. David wrote of a friend who ate his bread and lifted up his heel against him (Psalm 41:9), and Jesus applied that verse to Judas, who ate with Him and then betrayed Him (John 13:18). Gedaliah, a good man, was murdered by a man who had just eaten at his table. We cannot always prevent betrayal. But God sees it, and He will judge it.

The Jews never forgot this day. After the exile they kept a fast in the seventh month (Zechariah 7:5; 8:19), and to this day many Jews keep a fast in that month called the Fast of Gedaliah. With his death, the last hope of a settled Jewish community in the land after the fall came to an end.

41:4-7 *And it was on the second day of the killing of Gedaliah, and no one knew, and men came from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, eighty men, shaven of beard and torn of clothes and cutting themselves, and a grain offering and frankincense* ***were*** *in their hand, to bring* ***to*** *the house of the LORD. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, going along and weeping as he went; and it was, as he met them,* ***that*** *he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam." And it was, when they came into the midst of the city,* ***that*** *Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slaughtered them* ***and threw them*** *into the midst of the cistern, he and the men who* ***were*** *with him.*

"On the second day of the killing of Gedaliah, and no one knew," eighty men came from the north, "from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria." These were towns of the old northern kingdom. They came "shaven of beard and torn of clothes and cutting themselves," signs of deep mourning, most likely for the fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple. They carried "a grain offering and frankincense," "to bring to the house of the LORD." The temple was in ruins, but they still came to worship at the place where it had stood.

It is a moving picture. People from the north, from the land of the old golden calves, were coming to mourn for God's house and to worship. It shows that faith was still alive in some hearts.

Ishmael went out to meet them, "weeping as he went," pretending to share their grief. He said, "Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam." When they came into the city, he killed them and threw their bodies into a cistern.

Why would he do this? Scripture does not explain. Perhaps he wanted to keep the murder of Gedaliah secret, or to rob them. Whatever his reason, it was pure evil, the killing of worshipers on their way to God. The text does not hide that such things happen in this world. If you have lost someone to violence, know that God does not shrug at it. He hates the shedding of innocent blood (Proverbs 6:16-17), and one day He will set every wrong right (Revelation 21:4).

41:8-9 *And ten men were found among them, and they said to Ishmael, "Do not kill us, for we have hidden treasures in the field: wheat and barley and oil and honey." And he refrained, and he did not kill them in the midst of their brothers. And the cistern where Ishmael threw all the corpses of the men whom he had struck along with Gedaliah, it* ***is the one*** *which King Asa made because of Baasha the king of Israel; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it* ***with the*** *slain.*

"And ten men were found among them, and they said to Ishmael, Do not kill us, for we have hidden treasures in the field: wheat and barley and oil and honey." In wartime, farmers hid their food in pits in the fields. Ishmael spared these ten for the sake of the food. His greed was stronger than his rage.

"The cistern where Ishmael threw all the corpses," the writer adds, was the one "which King Asa made because of Baasha the king of Israel." About three hundred years earlier, King Asa of Judah fortified Mizpah against Baasha of Israel (1 Kings 15:22). The great cistern dug to protect the city in war became a grave for innocent worshipers.

41:10 *And Ishmael took captive all the remnant of the people who **were** at Mizpah, the daughters of the king and all the people who remained at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the chief of **the** bodyguards had entrusted to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah took them captive, and he went to cross over to the sons of Ammon.*

"And Ishmael took captive all the remnant of the people who were at Mizpah, the daughters of the king and all the people who remained at Mizpah." The king's daughters were the women of Zedekiah's household left behind in Judah. Jeremiah and Baruch were probably among the captives too, since they were living at Mizpah with Gedaliah.

These were the people "whom Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards had entrusted to Gedaliah." Ishmael headed east "to cross over to the sons of Ammon," back to the king who sent him.

41:11-15 *And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who **were** with him heard **of** all the evil which Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done. And they took all the men, and they went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and they found him by the great waters which **are** in Gibeon. And it was, when all the people who **were** with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who **were** with him, **that** they rejoiced. And all the people whom Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned around, and they returned and went to Johanan the son of Kareah. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped with eight men from before Johanan, and he went to the sons of Ammon.*

"Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him heard of all the evil which Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done." Johanan, who had warned Gedaliah, now acted. He gathered the men and went after Ishmael.

"They found him by the great waters which are in Gibeon." Gibeon was a few miles from Mizpah, and its great pool is mentioned in David's day (2 Samuel 2:13).

"When all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him," "they rejoiced." They "turned around, and they returned and went to Johanan." The captives were free.

But "Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped with eight men from before Johanan." He had come with ten men, and Scripture does not say what became of the other two. Ishmael got away, and Scripture never mentions him again. Evil men do not always face justice in this life. But no one escapes the judgment of God (Hebrews 9:27).

41:16-18 *And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who **were** with him took all the remnant of the people whom he had brought back from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after he had struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam: men, men of war, and women and little ones and eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon. And they went, and they dwelt in Geruth Chimham, which **is** beside Bethlehem, to go to enter Egypt, from before the Chaldeans, for they were afraid of them, for Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land.*

Johanan took "all the remnant of the people," "men, men of war, and women and little ones and eunuchs." Eunuchs were palace officials.

"And they went, and they dwelt in Geruth Chimham, which is beside Bethlehem, to go to enter Egypt." Geruth Chimham seems to have been a lodging place near Bethlehem. Its name may go back to Chimham, the son of Barzillai, whom David honored (2 Samuel 19:37-40). It was on the road south toward Egypt.

Why go to Egypt? "From before the Chaldeans, for they were afraid of them." The Babylonian governor had been murdered, and Babylonian soldiers with him. The people feared that Babylon would punish them all for it, whether they were guilty or not.

Their fear was understandable. But notice what they did not do yet: they did not ask God. They had already decided where to go. In the next chapter they will ask Jeremiah to pray, but their hearts are already set on Egypt. That is a danger for us too. It is easy to make our plans in fear and then ask God to bless them, instead of asking Him first.

Summary

In the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, a man of the royal family, came to Mizpah with ten men and ate with Gedaliah. Then they rose up and killed him, along with the Jews and Babylonian soldiers who were with him. The next day, eighty mourning pilgrims from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria came by on their way to bring offerings to the house of the LORD. Ishmael pretended to weep with them, lured them into the city and killed them, sparing only ten who offered him hidden stores of food, and filled the cistern King Asa had made with the bodies. He took the rest of the people of Mizpah captive, including the king's daughters, and set out for Ammon. Johanan and the commanders pursued him and found him at the great waters of Gibeon. The captives ran to Johanan, but Ishmael escaped to Ammon with eight men. Johanan and the people then stopped near Bethlehem on the way to Egypt, because they were afraid the Babylonians would punish them for Gedaliah's murder.

Study Questions

1. Who was Ishmael, and what did he do at Mizpah? (41:1-3)

2. Why was killing Gedaliah after sharing a meal such a betrayal? How does this connect to Psalm 41:9 and John 13:18?

3. Who were the eighty men from the north, and what were they doing? (41:5)

4. How did Ishmael deceive the pilgrims? (41:6-7)

5. What did the ten men who were spared offer Ishmael, and what does that show about him? (41:8)

6. Where did Ishmael try to take the captives, and how were they rescued? (41:10-14)

7. Why did Johanan and the people start toward Egypt? (41:16-18)

8. What did the remnant fail to do before setting out for Egypt? (41:17-18)

9. This chapter tells of great evil done to innocent people. How does it help you to know that God sees and will one day judge all wrongs? (Revelation 21:4)

10. Have you ever made a plan out of fear and then asked God to bless it? What would it look like to ask Him first?

Jeremiah 42: The Remnant Asks for a Word

Scripture

42:1-12 And all the commanders of the forces approached, and Johanan the son of Kareah and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the small even to the great, and they said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Let our supplication fall, please, before you, and pray for us to the LORD your God, for all this remnant; for we are left a few out of many, just as your eyes see us; so that the LORD your God may declare to us the way in which we should go, and the thing which we should do." And Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard. Look, I am about to pray to the LORD your God according to your words; and it will be ***that*** every word which the LORD answers you I will tell you; I will not withhold a word from you." And they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be against us a witness true and faithful, if we do not do so according to every word with which the LORD your God sends you to us. Whether good or whether bad, to the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, we will listen, so that it may go well for us, for we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God." And it was at the end of ten days, and the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. And he called Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who ***were*** with him, and all the people from the small even to the great, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to make your supplication fall before Him: 'If you will indeed dwell in this land, then I will build you up and not tear ***you*** down, and I will plant you and not pluck ***you*** up; for I relent concerning the calamity which I have done to you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not be afraid of him,' declares the LORD, 'for I ***am*** with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. And I will give you compassion, and he will have compassion on you and bring you back to your ground.'

42:13-22 And if you are saying, 'We will not dwell in this land,' so as not to listen to the voice of the LORD your God, saying, 'No, but we will go ***to*** the land of Egypt, where we will not see war, and we will not hear the sound of a trumpet, and we will not be hungry for bread; and there we will dwell,' then now, therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'If you really set your faces to go ***to*** Egypt, and you go to sojourn there, then it will be ***that*** the sword of which you are afraid will overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine about which you are anxious will cling close after you there ***in*** Egypt; and there you will die. And it will be ***that*** all the men who have set their faces to go ***to*** Egypt to sojourn there will die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; and there will not be for them a survivor and an escapee from before the calamity which I am bringing on them.' For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Just as My anger and My rage were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so My rage will be poured out on you when you go ***to*** Egypt; and you will become a sworn curse and a horror and a curse and a reproach, and you will not see this place again.' The LORD has spoken to you, O remnant of Judah: 'Do not go ***to*** Egypt.' Know for certain that I have warned you today. For you have led ***yourselves*** astray at ***the cost of*** your souls; for you sent me to the LORD your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the LORD our God, and according to all that the LORD our God says, so tell us, and we will do ***it***.' And I have told you today, and you have not listened to the voice of the LORD your God, even to all with which He has sent me to you. And

now, know for certain that by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence you will die in the place to which you desire to go to sojourn."

Preview

The remnant has stopped near Bethlehem on the way to Egypt. Before going on, the commanders and all the people come to Jeremiah and ask him to pray, so that the LORD will show them the way to go. They swear that they will obey whatever God says, "whether good or whether bad." Jeremiah promises to pray and to hold nothing back. Ten days later God answers. If they stay in the land, He will build them up and plant them, and they need not fear the king of Babylon, because God is with them. But if they go to Egypt to escape war and hunger, the very sword and famine they fear will follow them there, and they will die. Jeremiah then tells them plainly that he can see they have already made up their minds, and that they deceived themselves when they asked.

This chapter is about asking God for guidance when our hearts are already set. It is possible to say all the right words, "we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God," and not mean them. As we read, we should ask whether we truly want God's will, or only His approval of ours.

Study

42:1-3 *And all the commanders of the forces approached, and Johanan the son of Kareah and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the small even to the great, and they said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Let our supplication fall, please, before you, and pray for us to the LORD your God, for all this remnant; for we are left a few out of many, just as your eyes see us; so that the LORD your God may declare to us the way in which we should go, and the thing which we should do."*

"All the commanders of the forces approached, and Johanan the son of Kareah and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the small even to the great." Everyone came, from the least to the greatest. Jezaniah seems to be the same man called Azariah the son of Hoshaiah in 43:2.

"Let our supplication fall, please, before you, and pray for us to the LORD your God." Notice they say "your God," not "our God." It may be a small thing, but it hints at distance. They wanted Jeremiah's God to give them an answer.

"For we are left a few out of many." It was true. The nation had been reduced to a small, frightened group. They asked "that the LORD your God may declare to us the way in which we should go, and the thing which we should do." On the surface, it was the right prayer.

42:4-6 *And Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard. Look, I am about to pray to the LORD your God according to your words; and it will be **that** every word which the LORD answers you I will tell you; I will not withhold a word from you." And they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be against us a witness true and faithful, if we do not do so according to every word with which the LORD your God sends you to us. Whether good or whether bad, to the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, we will listen, so that it may go well for us, for we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God."*

"I have heard." Jeremiah agreed to pray. "Every word which the LORD answers you I will tell you; I will not withhold a word from you." He would give them God's whole answer, not just the parts they wanted.

Then the people made a solemn vow. "May the LORD be against us a witness true and faithful, if we do not do so according to every word with which the LORD your God sends you to us." "Whether good or whether bad, to the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, we will listen."

It is a beautiful promise. They called God as a witness against themselves. They said they would obey even if they did not like the answer. Now they said "our God." These are words every believer should be able to say: Lord, whatever You say, I will do.

But words are cheap. The test of a promise like this comes when God's answer is not what we want. Jesus told of a son who said, "I will, sir," and did not go (Matthew 21:28-31).

42:7-9 *And it was at the end of ten days, and the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. And he called Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who **were** with him, and all the people from the small even to the great, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to make your supplication fall before Him:*

"And it was at the end of ten days, and the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah."

Ten days. Jeremiah did not answer at once. He did not give his own opinion and call it God's word. He waited until God spoke. False prophets always had a quick answer (23:21). True prophets waited on God.

Those ten days must have been hard for the people, frightened of Babylon and eager to move. But waiting is often part of God's guidance. God's timing is not ours, and His answers are worth waiting for (Psalm 27:14; Isaiah 40:31).

Jeremiah called all of them together, "from the small even to the great," and spoke in the name of "the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me."

42:10-12 *'If you will indeed dwell in this land, then I will build you up and not tear* ***you*** *down, and I will plant you and not pluck* ***you*** *up; for I relent concerning the calamity which I have done to you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not be afraid of him,' declares the LORD, 'for I* ***am*** *with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. And I will give you compassion, and he will have compassion on you and bring you back to your ground.'*

"If you will indeed dwell in this land, then I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up." These are the words of Jeremiah's call (1:10). For forty years God had been plucking up and tearing down. Now He offered to build and plant, right there in the ruined land.

"For I relent concerning the calamity which I have done to you." To relent here means that God turns from judgment to mercy. It does not mean God had done wrong. It means His heart was moved, and He was ready to stop the punishment and begin to bless (18:7-8).

"Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not be afraid of him," "for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand." That was exactly their fear (41:18), and God spoke right to it. "I will give you compassion, and he will have compassion on you." God would move the heart of Babylon's king to show them mercy.

This was a wonderful offer. Stay, trust Me, and I will protect you and rebuild you. All they had to do was stay where God had put them. Often the hardest thing God asks is not to go somewhere, but to stay and trust Him where we are.

42:13-17 *And if you are saying, 'We will not dwell in this land,' so as not to listen to the voice of the LORD your God, saying, 'No, but we will go* ***to*** *the land of Egypt, where we will not see war, and we will not hear the sound of a trumpet, and we will not be hungry for bread; and there we will dwell,' then now, therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'If you really set your faces to go* ***to*** *Egypt, and you go to sojourn there, then it will be* ***that*** *the sword of which you are afraid will overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine about which you are anxious will cling close after you there* ***in*** *Egypt; and there you will die. And it will be* ***that*** *all the men who have set their faces to go* ***to*** *Egypt to sojourn there will die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence; and there will not be for them a survivor and an escapee from before the calamity which I am bringing on them.'*

Then the warning. Suppose they said, "We will not dwell in this land," and instead said, "we will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war, and we will not hear the sound of a trumpet, and we will not be hungry for bread." Egypt looked safe. It was far from Babylon, rich in grain, and at peace.

But God said, "the sword of which you are afraid will overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine about which you are anxious will cling close after you there in Egypt; and there you will die."

The very things they ran from would follow them. You cannot outrun God's hand by moving to another country. Jonah tried to flee from God by ship, and God's storm found him at sea (Jonah 1:3-4).

Egypt had always been a trap for Israel. God brought them out of Egypt and told them never to go back that way (Deuteronomy 17:16). Isaiah warned, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help" (Isaiah 31:1). Jeremiah had warned that Egypt would fail them (2:18, 36; 37:7). Going back to Egypt was a way of undoing the exodus. It meant trusting in Pharaoh rather than in the LORD.

"There will not be for them a survivor and an escapee." This was not God being cruel. It was God telling them plainly, in advance, where their road led.

42:18-19 *For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Just as My anger and My rage were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so My rage will be poured out on you when you go **to** Egypt; and you will become a sworn curse and a horror and a curse and a reproach, and you will not see this place again.' The LORD has spoken to you, O remnant of Judah: 'Do not go **to** Egypt.' Know for certain that I have warned you today.*

"Just as My anger and My rage were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so My rage will be poured out on you when you go to Egypt." They had seen what happened to Jerusalem. The same would happen to them if they disobeyed. "You will become a sworn curse and a horror and a curse and a reproach, and you will not see this place again."

"The LORD has spoken to you, O remnant of Judah," and His word was, "Do not go to Egypt." There it is in five words. It could not be clearer.

"Know for certain that I have warned you today." Jeremiah wanted them to understand that they could never say they did not know. God had given them a clear word.

42:20-22 *For you have led **yourselves** astray at **the cost of** your souls; for you sent me to the LORD your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the LORD our God, and according to all that the LORD our God says, so tell us, and we will do **it**.' And I have told you today, and you have not listened to the voice of the LORD your God, even to all with which He has sent me to you. And now, know for certain that by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence you will die in the place to which you desire to go to sojourn."*

Then Jeremiah says something that must have stunned them. "For you have led yourselves astray at the cost of your souls." It seems Jeremiah could already see in their faces what they were going to do. "You sent me to the LORD your God," saying, "Pray for us to the LORD our God, and according to all that the LORD our God says, so tell us, and we will do it."

"And I have told you today, and you have not listened to the voice of the LORD your God." Their hearts were already set on Egypt. They had asked for God's word hoping He would agree with them. When He did not, they would not obey.

"Now, know for certain that by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence you will die in the place to which you desire to go to sojourn."

This is one of the clearest warnings in the Bible about asking for God's will when we have already decided. We can deceive ourselves. We can pray long prayers and make sincere-sounding promises while our minds are already made up. God is not fooled (Galatians 6:7). The heart is deceitful (17:9), and only an honest willingness to obey makes our asking real. Jesus said that if anyone is willing to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God (John 7:17).

Summary

The commanders and all the remnant, from the least to the greatest, asked Jeremiah to pray to the LORD and show them the way to go, and they swore with God as their witness that they would obey whatever He said, good or bad. Jeremiah promised to pray and to hold nothing back. After ten days the word of the LORD came. If they stayed in the land, God would build them up and plant them, relenting from the calamity He had brought; they should not fear the king of Babylon, for God was with them and would make him show them compassion. But if they went to Egypt to escape war and hunger, the sword and famine they feared would follow them there, and none would escape. "Do not go to Egypt," the LORD said. Then Jeremiah told them that they had deceived themselves when they sent him to pray, because they had already made up their minds not to listen, and they would die in the place they wanted to go.

Study Questions

1. What did the people ask Jeremiah to do, and what did they promise? (42:2-6)

2. What did Jeremiah promise them in return? (42:4)

3. How long did Jeremiah wait for God's answer? What does that teach about true prophets and about guidance? (42:7)

4. What did God promise if they stayed in the land? Where have we heard these words before? (42:10-12; 1:10)

5. Why did Egypt look safe to the people? (42:14)

6. What did God say would happen if they went to Egypt? (42:15-17)

7. Why was going back to Egypt such a serious thing for Israel? (Deuteronomy 17:16; Isaiah 31:1)

8. What did Jeremiah say the people had done when they asked him to pray? (42:20-21)

9. Have you ever asked God for guidance when you had already made up your mind? How can you tell whether you truly want His will?

10. God asked the remnant to stay and trust Him in a hard place. Is there a situation you want to run from where God may be asking you to stay and trust Him?

Jeremiah 43: The Flight to Egypt

Scripture

43:1-13 And it was, when Jeremiah had finished speaking to all the people all the words of the LORD their God, with which the LORD their God had sent him to them, all these words, ***that*** Azariah the son of Hoshaiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the arrogant men said, saying to Jeremiah, "You are speaking falsehood. The LORD our God has not sent you to say, 'You must not go ***to*** Egypt to sojourn there.' For Baruch the son of Neriah is inciting you against us, so as to give us into the hand of the Chaldeans, to kill us and to take us into exile ***to*** Babylon." And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not listen to the voice of the LORD, to dwell in the land of Judah. And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned from all the nations where they had been driven, to sojourn in the land of Judah: the men and the women and the little ones and the daughters of the king, and every soul whom Nebuzaradan the chief of ***the*** bodyguards had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah; and they went ***to*** the land of Egypt, for they did not listen to the voice of the LORD; and they came as far as Tahpanhes. And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, "Take large stones in your hand, and hide them in the mortar in the brick terrace which ***is*** at the entrance of the house of Pharaoh in Tahpanhes, before the eyes of Jewish men. And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am about to send, and I will take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I will set his throne above these stones which I have hidden, and he will spread his canopy over them. And he will come and strike the land of Egypt: those who ***are*** for death, to death; and those who ***are*** for captivity, to captivity; and those who ***are*** for the sword, to the sword. And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt, and he will burn them and take them captive; and he will pick clean the land of Egypt just as the shepherd picks clean his garment, and he will go out from there in peace. And he will break the sacred pillars of Beth-shemesh, which ***is*** in the land of Egypt, and the houses of the gods of Egypt he will burn with fire."'"

Preview

The remnant had sworn to obey whatever God said. Now they hear it, and they call Jeremiah a liar. "The LORD our God has not sent you," they say, and they blame Baruch for turning him against them. Then Johanan and the commanders take everyone, the men, the women, the children, the king's daughters, and Jeremiah and Baruch too, and go down to Egypt, against the word of the LORD. They stop at Tahpanhes, a border city in the Nile delta. There God gives Jeremiah one more acted message. He buries large stones in front of Pharaoh's building and announces that Nebuchadnezzar, God's servant, will set his throne on those very stones. The Egypt they ran to for safety will itself be struck by Babylon, and its gods will burn.

This chapter shows where self-deception leads. The people who asked for God's word refused it, and they dragged God's faithful servants along with them into disobedience. As we read, we should notice how quickly a promise to obey can turn into calling God's messenger a liar and ask how we respond when God's word goes against our plans.

Study

43:1-3 *And it was, when Jeremiah had finished speaking to all the people all the words of the LORD their God, with which the LORD their God had sent him to them, all these words, **that** Azariah the son of Hoshaiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the arrogant men said, saying to Jeremiah, "You are speaking falsehood. The LORD our God has not sent you to say, 'You must not go **to** Egypt to sojourn there.' For Baruch the son of Neriah is inciting you against us, so as to give us into the hand of the Chaldeans, to kill us and to take us into exile **to** Babylon."*

Jeremiah finished "speaking to all the people all the words of the LORD their God." He did not leave anything out (42:4).

Then "Azariah the son of Hoshaiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the arrogant men" spoke up. The writer calls them what they were: arrogant, proud men. "You are speaking falsehood." "The LORD our God has not sent you to say," they went on, "You must not go to Egypt to sojourn there."

Ten days earlier they had sworn, with God as their witness, that they would obey "whether good or whether bad" (42:5-6). Now, when the answer was not what they wanted, they said God had not spoken at all.

This is what pride does. It cannot admit it was wrong, so it attacks the messenger. People today do the same. When a clear word of Scripture crosses their plans, it is easier to say that God does not really mean it than to obey it.

They did not stop there. "For Baruch the son of Neriah is inciting you against us, so as to give us into the hand of the Chaldeans." They could not deny that Jeremiah was a true prophet. He had been proven right over and over. So they said Baruch was manipulating him. It is an old trick: when you cannot attack the leader, attack the man beside him. Baruch had been faithful for twenty years, and he paid for it with slander.

43:4-7 *And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not listen to the voice of the LORD, to dwell in the land of Judah. And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned from all the nations where they had been driven, to sojourn in the land of Judah: the men and the women and the little ones and the daughters of the king, and every soul whom Nebuzaradan the chief of **the** bodyguards had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah; and they went **to** the land of Egypt, for they did not listen to the voice of the LORD; and they came as far as Tahpanhes.*

"And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not listen to the voice of the LORD, to dwell in the land of Judah."

They took "all the remnant of Judah," even those who had come back from the nations to live in the land (40:11-12). The list is heartbreaking: "the men and the women and the little ones and the daughters of the king," everyone Nebuzaradan had left with Gedaliah, "and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah."

Jeremiah and Baruch did not go willingly. They were taken. The prophet who had warned them not to go was forced to go with them. Why would they take him? Perhaps they feared what he might say behind them, or wanted a prophet with them in case they needed one. Scripture does not say. Jeremiah went because his people went, even into their disobedience. He did not abandon them.

"And they went to the land of Egypt, for they did not listen to the voice of the LORD; and they came as far as Tahpanhes." The writer says it again: they did not listen. That is the whole story of Judah's last days.

Tahpanhes was a fortress city on Egypt's northeastern border, in the eastern Nile delta, the first major Egyptian city on the road from Judah. It had a royal building there.

This is a dark moment in Israel's history. About nine hundred years earlier, God had brought Israel up out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Now the last of Judah walked back into Egypt on their own, against His word. It was as if they were undoing the exodus. Moses had warned that this would be one of the curses of a broken covenant (Deuteronomy 28:68).

43:8-10 *And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, "Take large stones in your hand, and hide them in the mortar in the brick terrace which* ***is*** *at the entrance of the house of Pharaoh in Tahpanhes, before the eyes of Jewish men. And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am about to send, and I will take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I will set his throne above these stones which I have hidden, and he will spread his canopy over them.*

"And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes." God was not left behind in Judah. He spoke to His prophet in Egypt too.

"Take large stones in your hand, and hide them in the mortar in the brick terrace which is at the entrance of the house of Pharaoh in Tahpanhes, before the eyes of Jewish men." The house of Pharaoh was probably a royal government building or palace used when the king visited. In front of it was a paved brick area. Jeremiah was to bury large stones under the pavement while Jewish men watched.

Then he was to explain. "Look, I am about to send, and I will take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I will set his throne above these stones which I have hidden, and he will spread his canopy over them."

God calls Nebuchadnezzar "My servant" (25:9; 27:6). The pagan king did not know God, but God was using him to carry out His judgment. A canopy was the royal tent or awning set over a king's throne when he sat in judgment. Nebuchadnezzar would come to this very spot and sit in judgment on Egypt.

The people had run to Egypt to get away from Nebuchadnezzar. God said that Nebuchadnezzar would follow them there. There is no hiding place from God's word.

43:11-13 *And he will come and strike the land of Egypt: those who **are** for death, to death; and those who **are** for captivity, to captivity; and those who **are** for the sword, to the sword. And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt, and he will burn them and take them captive; and he will pick clean the land of Egypt just as the shepherd picks clean his garment, and he will go out from there in peace. And he will break the sacred pillars of Beth-shemesh, which **is** in the land of Egypt, and the houses of the gods of Egypt he will burn with fire."'"*

"And he will come and strike the land of Egypt: those who are for death, to death; and those who are for captivity, to captivity; and those who are for the sword, to the sword." These are the same words God used about Jerusalem (15:2). Egypt would get the same judgment the refugees had run from.

"I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt." Egypt was full of great temples. God would burn them. "He will pick clean the land of Egypt just as the shepherd picks clean his garment." A shepherd living outdoors would pick his cloak clean of lice and burrs. Nebuchadnezzar would pick Egypt clean that easily, "and he will go out from there in peace," unharmed.

"And he will break the sacred pillars of Beth-shemesh, which is in the land of Egypt." Beth-shemesh means house of the sun. This was most likely the city the Greeks called Heliopolis, the city of the sun, known in the Bible as On (Genesis 41:45), a center for worship of the sun god. It was famous for its tall stone obelisks, which are probably the "sacred pillars" here.

Did it happen? A broken Babylonian tablet tells of a campaign by Nebuchadnezzar against Egypt in his thirty-seventh year, about 568 or 567 B.C. Scripture does not give us the details, but God's word was clear, and Egypt did not escape Babylon's power. Ezekiel also prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would strike Egypt (Ezekiel 29:19-20).

This is a lesson for us. The remnant trusted Egypt to protect them. Egypt could not even protect itself. When we run from God to anything else for safety, money, people or places, we run to something that cannot hold us. Only God is a true refuge (Psalm 46:1).

Summary

When Jeremiah finished giving them God's answer, Azariah, Johanan and the arrogant men accused him of lying and said Baruch was turning him against them to hand them over to Babylon. So Johanan and the commanders took the whole remnant of Judah, men, women, children, the king's daughters, and even Jeremiah and Baruch, and went down to Egypt, because they did not listen to the voice of the LORD. They came to Tahpanhes. There God told Jeremiah to bury large stones in the brick pavement at the entrance of Pharaoh's building while Jewish men watched, and to announce that God would bring Nebuchadnezzar, His servant, who would set his throne and royal canopy over those stones. Nebuchadnezzar would strike Egypt with death, captivity and the sword, burn the temples of Egypt's gods, pick the land clean as a shepherd picks his cloak, and break the sacred pillars of Beth-shemesh.

Study Questions

1. How did Azariah and Johanan respond to God's word through Jeremiah? How did this compare with their promise in 42:5-6? (43:2)

2. Whom did they blame, and why do you think they blamed him? (43:3)

3. Who was taken to Egypt? Did Jeremiah and Baruch go willingly? (43:5-6)

4. Why does the writer keep repeating that "they did not listen"? (43:4, 7)

5. What did God tell Jeremiah to do with the large stones, and what did it mean? (43:9-10)

6. Why does God call Nebuchadnezzar "My servant"? (43:10; 25:9)

7. What would happen to Egypt and its gods? (43:11-13)

8. Why was going back to Egypt such a sad turn in Israel's history? (Deuteronomy 28:68)

9. When God's word goes against your plans, are you more likely to change your plans or to question the word? Think of a specific time.

10. The remnant ran to Egypt for safety. What "Egypts" are you tempted to trust instead of God, and what would it look like to make Him your refuge? (Psalm 46:1)

Jeremiah 44: The Queen of Heaven in Egypt

Scripture

44:1-14 The word which came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who were dwelling in the land of Egypt, who were dwelling in Migdol and in Tahpanhes and in Memphis and in the land of Pathros, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'You, you have seen all the calamity which I brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and look, they ***are*** a ruin this day, and there is no inhabitant in them, because of their evil which they did to provoke Me to anger, by going to burn incense, to serve other gods whom they had not known, they, you, and your fathers. And I sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending, saying, "Do not, please, do this thing of abomination which I hate." And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear to turn from their evil, so as not to burn incense to other gods. And My rage and My anger were poured out, and it burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they became a ruin, a desolation, as ***at*** this day.' And now, thus says the LORD, the God of armies, the God of Israel: 'Why are you doing great evil against your souls, to cut off for yourselves man and woman, child and nursing infant, from the midst of Judah, so as not to leave for yourselves a remnant, by provoking Me to anger with the works of your hands, by burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt, where you have come to sojourn, so as to cut yourselves off, and so as to become a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? Have you forgotten the evil deeds of your fathers, and the evil deeds of the kings of Judah, and the evil deeds of his wives, and your evil deeds, and the evil deeds of your wives, which they did in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? They have not been made contrite to this day, and they have not feared, and they have not walked in My law and in My statutes which I set before you and before your fathers.' Therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Look, I am about to set My face against you for harm, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to go ***to*** the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they will all be consumed in the land of Egypt; they will fall by the sword; by the famine they will be consumed; from the small even to the great, by the sword and by the famine they will die; and they will become a sworn curse, a horror, and a curse, and a reproach. And I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, just as I punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. And there will not be an escapee and a survivor for the remnant of Judah who have gone to sojourn there in the land of Egypt, even to return ***to*** the land of Judah, to which they are lifting up their soul to return to dwell there; for they will not return, except escapees.'"

44:15-30 And all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, and all the women who were standing by, a great assembly, and all the people who were dwelling in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, "The word which you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not listening to you. For we will certainly do every thing that has gone out from our mouth, to burn incense to the queen of the heavens and to pour out drink offerings to her, just as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and we were satisfied ***with*** bread, and we were well, and calamity we did not see. And since we ceased to burn incense to the queen of the heavens and to pour out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything, and by the sword and by the famine

we have been consumed. And when we were burning incense to the queen of the heavens and pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made cakes for her to form her image and to pour out drink offerings to her?" And Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men and to the women and to all the people who had answered him ***with*** a word, saying, "The incense which you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them, and did it not come up on His heart? And the LORD was no longer able to bear ***it***, because of the evil of your deeds, because of the abominations which you did; and your land has become a ruin and a horror and a curse, without an inhabitant, as ***at*** this day. Because you burned incense, and because you sinned against the LORD and did not listen to the voice of the LORD, and in His law and in His statutes and in His testimonies you did not walk, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as ***at*** this day." And Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who ***are*** in the land of Egypt. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, saying: 'You and your wives, you have both spoken with your mouth and fulfilled ***it*** with your hands, saying, "We will certainly perform our vows which we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of the heavens and to pour out drink offerings to her." You will certainly carry out your vows, and you will certainly perform your vows.' Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who dwell in the land of Egypt: 'Look, I have sworn by My great name,' says the LORD, 'that My name will no longer be called on by the mouth of any man of Judah, saying, "***As*** the Lord GOD lives," in all the land of Egypt. Look, I am watching over them for harm and not for good; and every man of Judah who ***is*** in the land of Egypt will be consumed by the sword and by the famine until they come to an end. And the escapees of ***the*** sword will return from the land of Egypt ***to*** the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah who went to the land of Egypt to sojourn there will know whose word will be established, Mine or theirs. And this ***will be*** the sign to you,' declares the LORD, 'that I am about to punish you in this place, so that you may know that My words will certainly be established against you for harm.' Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to give Pharaoh Hophra the king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who seek his life, just as I gave Zedekiah the king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, his enemy and the one who sought his life.'"

Preview

This is the last recorded message of Jeremiah's long ministry, given to the Jews living all over Egypt. He reminds them of what they have seen: Jerusalem and the cities of Judah lie in ruins because the people burned incense to other gods and would not listen to the prophets. Yet in Egypt they are doing the same thing. God warns that the remnant in Egypt will be consumed, with only a few escaping to return. Then the people answer, and their answer is shocking. They will not listen. They will keep burning incense to the queen of heaven, because when they served her, they say, they had plenty, and since they stopped, everything has gone wrong. The women insist their husbands approved. Jeremiah tells them that their idolatry is the very reason disaster came. God says, then go ahead and keep your vows, but His name will no longer be on their lips in Egypt, and they will learn whose word stands, His or theirs.

This chapter shows how far a hard heart can go. After all that had happened, these people looked at the ruins of Jerusalem and drew exactly the wrong lesson. As we read, we should ask how we explain the troubles in our lives, and whether we are willing to see our own sin in them.

Study

44:1 *The word which came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who were dwelling in the land of Egypt, who were dwelling in Migdol and in Tahpanhes and in Memphis and in the land of Pathros, saying,*

"The word which came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who were dwelling in the land of Egypt, who were dwelling in Migdol and in Tahpanhes and in Memphis and in the land of Pathros."

Some time had passed since the flight of chapter 43, perhaps several years. Jews had spread across Egypt. Migdol and Tahpanhes were border towns in the northeast. Memphis was the old capital near modern Cairo. Pathros was Upper Egypt, the long southern valley of the Nile. God's word reached them everywhere they went.

A century later, a Jewish colony on the island of Elephantine in far southern Egypt left letters showing that they had built a temple to the LORD there, and that some of them also honored other gods alongside Him. The mixed worship Jeremiah condemns here seems to have lasted a long time.

44:2-6 *"Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'You, you have seen all the calamity which I brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and look, they **are** a ruin this day, and there is no inhabitant in them, because of their evil which they did to provoke Me to anger, by going to burn incense, to serve other gods whom they had not known, they, you, and your fathers. And I sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending, saying, "Do not, please, do this thing of abomination which I hate." And they did not listen, and they did not incline their ear to turn from their evil, so as not to burn incense to other gods. And My rage and My anger were poured out, and it burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they became a ruin, a desolation, as **at** this day.'*

"You, you have seen all the calamity which I brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and look, they are a ruin this day." These people were eyewitnesses. They had seen the burned temple and the empty cities.

Why did it happen? "Because of their evil which they did to provoke Me to anger, by going to burn incense, to serve other gods whom they had not known." Burning incense was a common act of worship, offered to the LORD in the temple, but offered by Judah to idols.

God had warned them, "rising early and sending" His prophets, with a plea that shows His heart: "Do not, please, do this thing of abomination which I hate." God did not just command. He begged them. But "they did not listen." So "My rage and My anger were poured out,"

History was the proof. If they would only look at Jerusalem, they would know the cost of idolatry.

44:7-10 *And now, thus says the LORD, the God of armies, the God of Israel: 'Why are you doing great evil against your souls, to cut off for yourselves man and woman, child and nursing infant, from the midst of Judah, so as not to leave for yourselves a remnant, by provoking Me to anger with the works of your hands, by burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt, where you have come to sojourn, so as to cut yourselves off, and so as to become a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? Have you forgotten the evil deeds of your fathers, and the evil deeds of the kings of Judah, and the evil deeds of his wives, and your evil deeds, and the evil deeds of your wives, which they did in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? They have not been made contrite to this day, and they have not feared, and they have not walked in My law and in My statutes which I set before you and before your fathers.'*

"Why are you doing great evil against your souls?" God asks. Their idolatry was not hurting God as much as it was destroying themselves. It would "cut off for yourselves man and woman, child and nursing infant," until no remnant was left.

"Have you forgotten the evil deeds of your fathers, and the evil deeds of the kings of Judah, and the evil deeds of his wives, and your evil deeds, and the evil deeds of your wives?" God names five groups: the fathers, the kings, the kings' wives, the people, and their wives. Solomon's foreign wives had led him into idolatry long before (1 Kings 11:4-8). Women are named here because, as the chapter will show, they led in worshiping the queen of heaven, with their husbands' consent.

"They have not been made contrite to this day." To be contrite is to be crushed in heart over sin. Even after the destruction of their nation, they were not sorry. God wants a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17), and they had none.

44:11-14 *Therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: 'Look, I am about to set My face against you for harm, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to go **to** the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they will all be consumed in the land of Egypt; they will fall by the sword; by the famine they will be consumed; from the small even to the great, by the sword and by the famine they will die; and they will become a sworn curse, a horror, and a curse, and a reproach. And I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, just as I punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. And there will not be an escapee and a survivor for the remnant of Judah who have gone to sojourn there in the land of Egypt, even to return **to** the land of Judah, to which they are lifting up their soul to return to dwell there; for they will not return, except escapees.'"*

"Look, I am about to set My face against you for harm." To set one's face is to fix one's purpose. "They will all be consumed in the land of Egypt," "from the small even to the great," by sword and famine.

"And I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, just as I punished Jerusalem." They ran to Egypt to escape what happened to Jerusalem. It would happen to them there.

"For they will not return, except escapees." The people longed to go home someday, "to which they are lifting up their soul to return." But only a few would. Running from God's will cost them the very thing they most wanted.

44:15-16 *And all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, and all the women who were standing by, a great assembly, and all the people who were dwelling in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, "The word which you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not listening to you.*

Now the people answer. It was "a great assembly," the men who knew their wives were burning incense to other gods, the women standing by, and the Jews of Pathros. Perhaps this was a festival gathering.

"The word which you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not listening to you."

This is open rebellion. Earlier, Judah's leaders had at least pretended. In chapter 42 they asked Jeremiah to pray and swore to obey. In chapter 43 they said Jeremiah was lying. Now they say it to his face: we know you speak in the LORD's name, and we will not listen. The heart that refuses God's word long enough will finally refuse it openly.

44:17-19 *For we will certainly do every thing that has gone out from our mouth, to burn incense to the queen of the heavens and to pour out drink offerings to her, just as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and we were satisfied **with** bread, and we were well, and calamity we did not see. And since we ceased to burn incense to the queen of the heavens and to pour out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything, and by the sword and by the famine we have been consumed. And when we were burning incense to the queen of the heavens and pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made cakes for her to form her image and to pour out drink offerings to her?"*

"For we will certainly do every thing that has gone out from our mouth, to burn incense to the queen of the heavens and to pour out drink offerings to her."

The queen of heaven was most likely Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess known in Canaan as Astarte, a goddess of love and fertility linked with the planet Venus. Jeremiah had seen whole families in Jerusalem baking cakes for her (7:18). A drink offering was wine poured out as an act of worship.

Then their argument. When we served her, "we were satisfied with bread, and we were well, and calamity we did not see." "And since we ceased to burn incense to the queen of the heavens," "we have lacked everything, and by the sword and by the famine we have been consumed."

When did they stop? Most likely during King Josiah's reform about 622 B.C., when he removed the idols from the land (2 Kings 23:4-14). After that came Josiah's death in battle, the years of Babylonian pressure, and finally the fall. These people looked at that history and concluded that the problem was not their idolatry. The problem was that they had stopped worshiping the goddess.

That is exactly backward. The disaster came because they never really turned to God. Josiah's reform cleaned the outside, but the people's hearts never changed (3:10), and they went right back to their idols after he died. Yet they blamed the one short season of obedience for their troubles.

This is how idolatry thinks. It looks at good times and gives the credit to the idol, and it looks at hard times and blames God. People still do this. When life is hard, they decide that things were better before they started following God, and they go back to the old ways. But God's discipline is not proof that He failed. It is proof that He loves us enough to correct us (Hebrews 12:6, 11).

"Was it without our husbands that we made cakes for her to form her image?" The women answered too. They baked cakes shaped like the goddess, and their husbands had approved. Under the Law, a husband could cancel a wife's vow (Numbers 30:6-8). These husbands had not. The whole household was in it together.

44:20-23 *And Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men and to the women and to all the people who had answered him **with** a word, saying, "The incense which you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them, and did it not come up on His heart? And the LORD was no longer able to bear **it**, because of the evil of your deeds, because of the abominations which you did; and your land has become a ruin and a horror and a curse, without an inhabitant, as **at** this day. Because you burned incense, and because you sinned against the LORD and did not listen to the voice of the LORD, and in His law and in His statutes and in His testimonies you did not walk, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as **at** this day."*

Jeremiah answered "all the people, to the men and to the women." "The incense which you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem," "did not the LORD remember them, and did it not come up on His heart?" God saw every offering they made to the goddess.

"And the LORD was no longer able to bear it, because of the evil of your deeds." God's patience had been long, but it had an end.

"Because you burned incense, and because you sinned against the LORD and did not listen to the voice of the LORD," "therefore this calamity has happened to you." Jeremiah gave them the true explanation. The disaster did not come because they stopped serving the goddess. It came because they served her.

44:24-25 *And Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who **are** in the land of Egypt. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, saying: 'You and your wives, you have both spoken with your mouth and fulfilled **it** with your hands, saying, "We will certainly perform our vows which we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of the heavens and to pour out drink offerings to her." You will certainly carry out your vows, and you will certainly perform your vows.'*

Then Jeremiah spoke to "all the people and to all the women." "You and your wives, you have both spoken with your mouth and fulfilled it with your hands." They had vowed to keep burning incense to the queen of heaven, and they were doing it.

Then God says something chilling. "You will certainly carry out your vows, and you will certainly perform your vows." This is not permission. It is God handing them over to the choice they insisted on. There comes a point when God says, in effect, have it your way. Paul describes the

same thing: when people exchange the truth of God for a lie, God gives them over to what they want (Romans 1:24-25). It is one of the most fearful judgments there is.

44:26-28 *Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who dwell in the land of Egypt: 'Look, I have sworn by My great name,' says the LORD, 'that My name will no longer be called on by the mouth of any man of Judah, saying, "**As** the Lord GOD lives," in all the land of Egypt. Look, I am watching over them for harm and not for good; and every man of Judah who **is** in the land of Egypt will be consumed by the sword and by the famine until they come to an end. And the escapees of **the** sword will return from the land of Egypt **to** the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah who went to the land of Egypt to sojourn there will know whose word will be established, Mine or theirs.*

"Look, I have sworn by My great name," says the LORD, that "My name will no longer be called on by the mouth of any man of Judah," saying, "As the Lord GOD lives," "in all the land of Egypt."

They had mixed the worship of the LORD with the worship of the goddess. They still swore by the LORD's name. God says that will end. They would no longer use His name at all, because they would be gone. "I am watching over them for harm and not for good." The God who watches over His word to do it (1:12) would now watch over His word of judgment.

"And the escapees of the sword will return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number." A small remnant would survive and go home. God's mercy is never completely shut off.

"And all the remnant of Judah who went to the land of Egypt to sojourn there will know whose word will be established, Mine or theirs." That is the question of the whole chapter, and in a way the whole book of Jeremiah. The people had their word, their vows to the goddess. God had His. Which one would stand? History has answered. The queen of heaven is gone. The word of the LORD stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

44:29-30 *And this **will be** the sign to you,' declares the LORD, 'that I am about to punish you in this place, so that you may know that My words will certainly be established against you for harm.' Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am about to give Pharaoh Hophra the king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who seek his life, just as I gave Zedekiah the king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, his enemy and the one who sought his life.'"*

God gives them a sign so they will know. "Look, I am about to give Pharaoh Hophra the king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who seek his life, just as I gave Zedekiah the king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon."

Hophra was the pharaoh who had marched out to help Jerusalem and then turned back (37:5). He was the very protector the refugees were counting on. Ancient history tells us that about 570 B.C., Hophra's own army rebelled and made one of his generals, Amasis, king in his place, and that Hophra was later killed. The king they trusted would fall just as Zedekiah had.

And there the record of Jeremiah's ministry ends, in Egypt, among people who would not listen. Scripture does not tell us how or when he died. He was faithful to the very end, speaking God's word to people who rejected it, as he had done for more than forty years. God never measured him

by his results. He measured him by his faithfulness. That is how He measures us too (Matthew 25:21).

Summary

God spoke through Jeremiah to the Jews living throughout Egypt, reminding them that Jerusalem and Judah lay in ruins because of the incense they burned to other gods and their refusal to listen to His prophets. Yet in Egypt they were doing the same, and God warned that the remnant there would be consumed by sword and famine, with only a few escaping home. The people answered openly that they would not listen. They vowed to keep burning incense and pouring drink offerings to the queen of heaven, saying they had plenty when they served her and had lacked everything since they stopped, and the women said their husbands had approved. Jeremiah answered that their idolatry was the very reason the calamity came. God told them to go ahead and keep their vows, swore that His name would no longer be called on by any man of Judah in Egypt, and said they would learn whose word would stand, His or theirs. As a sign, He would give Pharaoh Hophra into the hand of his enemies, just as He had given Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar.

I have been tempted to blame God for hard times, but deep down I knew it was not Him. It was me. My own choices brought the trouble. Jeremiah 44 shows people blaming obedience for their pain. Honesty starts when I own my part.

Study Questions

1. Where were the Jews living in Egypt, and what did God remind them of? (44:1-2)

2. What plea had God sent through His prophets, and how did the people respond? (44:4-5)

3. What did God mean by asking, "Why are you doing great evil against your souls?" (44:7-8)

4. Which groups did God name in verse 9, and why might the wives be named?

5. What reason did the people give for worshiping the queen of heaven? (44:17-18)

6. How did Jeremiah explain the real cause of their calamity? (44:21-23)

7. What did God mean when He told them to go ahead and perform their vows? (44:25; Romans 1:24-25)

8. What sign did God give that His word would stand? (44:29-30)

9. Have you ever blamed God, or obedience to Him, for hard times that actually came from sin? How does Hebrews 12:6, 11 help you see hard times differently?

10. God asked, "whose word will be established, Mine or theirs?" (44:28). In what area of your life are you tempted to trust your own word over God's?

Jeremiah 45: A Word to Baruch

Scripture

45:1-5 The word which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words on a scroll from the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah the king of Judah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning you, O Baruch: 'You said, "Woe to me now! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and rest I have not found."' Thus you shall say to him: 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, what I have built I am about to tear down, and what I have planted I am about to pluck up, and all the land itself. And you, you are seeking great things for yourself; do not seek ***them***. For look, I am about to bring calamity on all flesh," declares the LORD, "and I will give you your life as plunder in all the places where you go."'"

Preview

This is the shortest chapter in Jeremiah, five verses, and it is a personal word from God to one man, Jeremiah's scribe Baruch. It goes back to 605 B.C., the year Baruch wrote down Jeremiah's first scroll (chapter 36). Writing out all those words of judgment wore him down. He cried, "Woe to me now!" God answered him gently and honestly. God Himself was about to tear down what He had built. In a time like that, Baruch should not seek great things for himself. But God promised him something better than greatness: his life, wherever he went.

The chapter is placed here, after the long story of Jerusalem's fall and the flight to Egypt, as if to show that God kept His promise. Baruch lived through all of it. As we read, we should think about our own ambitions, and whether we are content with what God has promised us.

Study

45:1 *The word which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words on a scroll from the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah the king of Judah, saying,*

"The word which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words on a scroll from the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah the king of Judah."

The fourth year of Jehoiakim was 605 B.C. "These words" are the words of the first scroll, the one the king later burned (36:1-4). So this chapter belongs in time right after 36:8. Why is it placed here? Jeremiah's book is arranged mostly by subject. This chapter closes the long section on Jeremiah's own life and sufferings (chapters 26 to 45). Placed after Jerusalem's fall and the flight to Egypt, it reminds us that God's promise to Baruch came true. Baruch was with Jeremiah in Egypt (43:6), alive, just as God said.

Baruch is one of the most faithful helpers in the Bible. He wrote the scroll, read it in the temple at risk to himself, hid from the king, wrote it again, kept Jeremiah's deed (32:12), and was slandered

and dragged to Egypt (43:3, 6). As we saw in chapter 32, clay seal impressions from that time show how scribes like him sealed their documents. Behind many great servants of God stand faithful helpers whose names we barely know.

45:2-3 *"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning you, O Baruch: 'You said, "Woe to me now! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and rest I have not found."'*

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning you, O Baruch." Think of that. The God of Israel had a word just for Baruch. God saw his scribe as clearly as He saw kings and nations.

"You said, Woe to me now! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and rest I have not found."

Why was Baruch so upset? He had just spent long days writing out twenty-three years of warnings of judgment on his own people. Word after word of disaster, famine, sword and exile. It was heavy work. And he could see what it would cost him. To stand with Jeremiah was to be hated with Jeremiah.

"The LORD has added sorrow to my pain." Baruch felt that God was piling it on. He was weary and could not rest. His words sound a lot like Jeremiah's own laments (15:10; 20:18).

God did not rebuke Baruch for feeling this. He knew what Baruch had said. God hears our complaints, even the ones we only say under our breath. And He answers.

45:4 *Thus you shall say to him: 'Thus says the LORD: "Look, what I have built I am about to tear down, and what I have planted I am about to pluck up, and all the land itself.*

"Thus you shall say to him," God told Jeremiah. "Look, what I have built I am about to tear down, and what I have planted I am about to pluck up, and all the land itself."

This is God's answer, and it starts with God's own sorrow. These are the words of Jeremiah's call (1:10), but now God speaks of tearing down what He Himself had built and planted. God had built Israel as a nation and planted them in the land (Exodus 15:17). Now He was about to uproot it. It was not easy for God either.

In other words, Baruch, you are in pain. But look at what I am doing. I am tearing down the nation I built with My own hands. Baruch's sorrow was real, but it was small next to God's. God grieves over judgment. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11).

There is comfort here. When we suffer because we stand with God, we are sharing in something that grieves God's own heart. We are not alone in it.

45:5 *And you, you are seeking great things for yourself; do not seek **them**. For look, I am about to bring calamity on all flesh," declares the LORD, "and I will give you your life as plunder in all the places where you go."'"*

"And you, you are seeking great things for yourself; do not seek them."

Here is the heart of Baruch's trouble. He wanted great things. We do not know exactly what. Baruch came from a notable family. His brother Seraiah later served as an officer of King Zedekiah (51:59). Baruch was a trained scribe, educated and capable. He may have hoped to rise to a high position in the royal court, as other scribes did. Instead he was tied to the most hated man in Jerusalem, writing out messages of doom. His career was going nowhere, and he felt it.

God said plainly, do not seek them. Why? "For look, I am about to bring calamity on all flesh." When the whole nation is about to fall, this is no time to build a name for yourself. Whatever position he gained would soon be ash.

That word is for us too. It is not wrong to work hard or to do well. But to seek great things for ourselves, our own name, our own comfort, our own success, as the goal of life, is to build on sand. Everything in this world is passing away (1 John 2:17). Jesus said to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). He also said that whoever wants to be great must be the servant of all (Mark 10:43-45). Baruch's greatness was in being a faithful servant. That is greatness in God's eyes.

Then God gives the promise. "And I will give you your life as plunder in all the places where you go."

In war, plunder is what a soldier carries away from the battle. God was saying that when everything else was lost, Baruch would carry away his life. He would not get a high office. He would not get comfort. But he would get his life, wherever he went: through Jehoiakim's anger, the siege, the fall, the murder of Gedaliah, and the flight to Egypt. God made the same promise to Ebed-melech (39:18).

It may not sound like much. But it is a great deal. God did not promise Baruch an easy life. He promised to keep him. And God kept His word.

Many believers find themselves where Baruch was, faithful but weary, giving their lives to work no one notices, while others seem to rise. If that is you, hear God's word to Baruch. Do not seek great things for yourself. Seek Him. He sees you, He knows your name, and He will keep you. And in Christ, He gives far more than our lives as plunder. He gives eternal life, which no calamity can touch (John 10:28).

Summary

In 605 B.C., while Baruch was writing Jeremiah's first scroll, he cried out that the LORD had added sorrow to his pain and that he was weary and could find no rest. God sent Jeremiah to answer him personally. God said that He Himself was about to tear down what He had built and pluck up what He had planted, the whole land. In such a time Baruch should not seek great things for himself, because God was about to bring calamity on all flesh. But God promised Baruch that He would give him his life as plunder wherever he went. The chapter is placed after the fall of Jerusalem and the flight to Egypt, showing that God kept His promise to His faithful servant.

Study Questions

1. When was this word given to Baruch, and what was he doing at the time? (45:1; 36:1-4)

2. What did Baruch say in his complaint? (45:3)

3. Why do you think writing the scroll was so hard for Baruch?

4. What did God say He Himself was about to do? How does that put Baruch's sorrow in a new light? (45:4)

5. What did God tell Baruch not to do, and why? (45:5)

6. What did God promise Baruch, and how did He keep that promise? (45:5; 43:6)

7. What other person in Jeremiah received the same promise of "your life as plunder"? (39:18)

8. Baruch served faithfully in the background. Who are the faithful helpers in your church or family whose work often goes unseen? How could you thank them?

9. What "great things" have you been seeking for yourself? How does Matthew 6:33 change the way you think about them?

10. Are you weary in serving God right now? What would it mean for you to rest in God's promise to keep you, even if you never receive the recognition you hoped for?

Jeremiah 46: Against Egypt

Scripture

46:1-12 That which came ***as*** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. Of Egypt: concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco the king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon struck in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah the king of Judah: "Set in order shield and body shield, and draw near for battle! Harness the horses, and mount the steeds; and take your stand with helmets; polish the spears; put on the armor! Why have I seen them terrified, turned back backward? And their mighty men are crushed, and they have fled ***in*** flight, and they have not turned back; terror ***is*** from all around, declares the LORD. Let not the swift flee, and let not the mighty man escape; to the north, beside the river Euphrates, they have stumbled and fallen. Who ***is*** this ***that*** rises like the Nile, ***whose*** waters surge like the rivers? Egypt rises like the Nile, and like the rivers ***its*** waters surge; and he has said, 'I will rise, I will cover ***the*** earth; I will destroy a city and the inhabitants in it.' Go up, O horses, and drive madly, O chariotry, and let the mighty men go out: Cush and Put, who handle the shield, and Ludim, who handle ***and*** bend the bow. And that day ***is*** for the Lord GOD of armies, a day of vengeance, to avenge Himself on His adversaries; and the sword will devour and be satisfied, and it will drink its fill of their blood; for a sacrifice ***is*** for the Lord GOD of armies in the land of the north by the river Euphrates. Go up ***to*** Gilead and take balm, O virgin, daughter of Egypt; in vain you have multiplied remedies; there is no healing for you. Nations have heard your dishonor, and your outcry has filled the earth; for mighty man has stumbled against mighty man; together they have fallen, both of them."

46:13-28 The word which the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon to strike the land of Egypt: "Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol, and proclaim in Memphis and in Tahpanhes; say, 'Take your stand and prepare yourself, for the sword has devoured around you.' Why has your mighty one been swept away? He has not stood, for the LORD has pushed him down. He has multiplied the one who stumbles; also each man has fallen on his neighbor; and they said, 'Arise, and let us return to our people and to the land of our kindred, from before the sword of the oppressor.' They called out there, 'Pharaoh the king of Egypt ***is*** a noise; he has let the appointed time pass by.' ***As*** I live, declares the King, the LORD of armies ***is*** His name, surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, he will come. Make for yourself baggage for exile, O inhabitant, daughter of Egypt, for Memphis will become a horror, and it will be laid waste, without an inhabitant. Egypt ***is*** a very beautiful heifer; a gadfly from the north is coming, is coming. Also her hired soldiers in her midst ***are*** like calves of the stall, for they also have turned, they have fled together; they have not stood, for the day of their disaster has come on them, the time of their punishment. Her sound goes like the serpent, for they go with an army, and with axes they come to her, like cutters of wood. They have cut down her forest, declares the LORD, for it will not be searched; for they are more numerous than the locust, and there is no number to them. The daughter of Egypt has been put to shame; she has been given into the hand of the people of the north. The LORD of armies, the God of Israel, says: Look, I am about to punish Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh and Egypt and her gods and her kings, and Pharaoh and those who trust in him. And I will give them into the hand of

those who seek their life, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants; and afterward it will dwell as ***in*** the days of old, declares the LORD. And you, do not fear, O My servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for look, I am about to save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity; and Jacob will return and be undisturbed and be at ease, and ***there will be*** none who terrifies ***him***. You, do not fear, O My servant Jacob, declares the LORD, for I ***am*** with you; for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, and of you I will not make a full end; and I will discipline you in justice, and I will by no means leave you unpunished."

Preview

With this chapter Jeremiah turns from Judah to the nations around her. God had called him "a prophet to the nations" (1:5), and chapters 46 to 51 hold those messages. They begin with Egypt, the nation Judah kept running to for help. The first poem looks back on the great battle at Carchemish in 605 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar crushed Pharaoh Neco's army on the Euphrates River. Egypt rose like the Nile in flood, and it fell. The second poem looks ahead to the day Nebuchadnezzar would come into Egypt itself. Then the chapter ends with a promise to Egypt and a tender word to Israel: "do not fear, O My servant Jacob."

This chapter is about trusting the wrong strength. Judah's leaders trusted Egypt, and the remnant fled there after Jerusalem fell (chapters 42 to 44). God showed them that Egypt's army, its river, its gods and its king could not stand when He moved against them. As we read, we should ask what we lean on when trouble comes, and whether it is something God can bring down in a day.

Study

46:1-2 *That which came **as** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. Of Egypt: concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco the king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon struck in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah the king of Judah:*

"That which came as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations." This is the heading for chapters 46 to 51. In the Hebrew text these words against the nations come near the end of the book. In the old Greek translation they come in the middle, after 25:13.

Why does God speak about nations that would never hear Jeremiah preach? Because He is not a local god of one small people. He is the Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25). The nations were accountable to Him for their pride, their cruelty and their idols, and these messages also told Judah that the powers they feared or trusted were in God's hand.

The first message is dated. It concerns "the army of Pharaoh Neco the king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish." Carchemish was a city on the upper Euphrates, in what is now the border of Turkey and Syria. There, "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim," 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt. This is the same Neco who had killed good King Josiah at Megiddo four years earlier (2 Kings 23:29). After Carchemish, Egypt never again ruled the lands north of its border (2 Kings 24:7).

46:3-6 *"Set in order shield and body shield, and draw near for battle! Harness the horses, and mount the steeds; and take your stand with helmets; polish the spears; put on the armor! Why have I seen them terrified, turned back backward? And their mighty men are crushed, and they have fled* ***in*** *flight, and they have not turned back; terror* ***is*** *from all around, declares the LORD. Let not the swift flee, and let not the mighty man escape; to the north, beside the river Euphrates, they have stumbled and fallen.*

The poem opens like a war film. We hear the officers shouting orders to the Egyptian army: "Set in order shield and body shield, and draw near for battle!" "Harness the horses." "Polish the spears; put on the armor!" Everything is ready. Egypt looked unbeatable.

Then, in one verse, the scene changes. "Why have I seen them terrified, turned back backward?" The mighty men are crushed, and they run without looking back. "Terror is from all around, declares the LORD." That phrase was one of Jeremiah's own sayings (6:25; 20:10). Now it falls on Egypt.

"Let not the swift flee, and let not the mighty man escape." The fastest runners and the strongest soldiers could not get away. "To the north, beside the river Euphrates, they have stumbled and fallen." Strength and speed mean nothing when God has decided the outcome. "The race is not to the swift" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

46:7-9 *Who* ***is*** *this* ***that*** *rises like the Nile,* ***whose*** *waters surge like the rivers? Egypt rises like the Nile, and like the rivers* ***its*** *waters surge; and he has said, 'I will rise, I will cover* ***the*** *earth; I will destroy a city and the inhabitants in it.' Go up, O horses, and drive madly, O chariotry, and let the mighty men go out: Cush and Put, who handle the shield, and Ludim, who handle* ***and*** *bend the bow.*

"Who is this that rises like the Nile?" Every year the Nile flooded and covered the land of Egypt. Egypt's whole life depended on that flood. So the picture fit. Egypt's army surged north like the river in flood season, boasting, "I will rise, I will cover the earth; I will destroy a city and the inhabitants in it."

Verse 9 calls out the troops: horses, chariots, and soldiers from Cush and Put, who carried the shield. Cush was the land south of Egypt along the Nile (Ethiopia and Sudan today). Put was most likely in Libya. Egypt hired soldiers from many nations. It looked like an army that could flood the world. It was about to dry up.

46:10 *And that day* ***is*** *for the Lord GOD of armies, a day of vengeance, to avenge Himself on His adversaries; and the sword will devour and be satisfied, and it will drink its fill of their blood; for a sacrifice* ***is*** *for the Lord GOD of armies in the land of the north by the river Euphrates.*

This is the key verse of the first poem. "That day is for the Lord GOD of armies, a day of vengeance, to avenge Himself on His adversaries." The battle at Carchemish was not only Babylon against Egypt. It was the LORD's day. Nebuchadnezzar won because God gave him the victory (27:6).

"For a sacrifice is for the Lord GOD of armies in the land of the north by the river Euphrates." The prophets sometimes picture a battlefield as a great sacrifice (Isaiah 34:6; Zephaniah 1:7). It is a

sobering picture. God's justice is real, and the nations that set themselves against Him will answer for it.

Why would God take vengeance on Egypt? Scripture gives at least part of the answer. Egypt had killed Josiah, carried Jehoahaz away, and set Jehoiakim on Judah's throne (2 Kings 23:29-35). God's vengeance is not a temper. It is justice from the One who sees everything.

46:11-12 *Go up **to** Gilead and take balm, O virgin, daughter of Egypt; in vain you have multiplied remedies; there is no healing for you. Nations have heard your dishonor, and your outcry has filled the earth; for mighty man has stumbled against mighty man; together they have fallen, both of them."*

"Go up to Gilead and take balm, O virgin, daughter of Egypt." Gilead, east of the Jordan, was famous for its healing balm. Jeremiah had asked about Judah, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" (8:22). Now he tells Egypt to go and get some. It will not help. "In vain you have multiplied remedies; there is no healing for you."

Egypt was famous for its doctors and its medicines. But no medicine could heal a wound that God had given. "Mighty man has stumbled against mighty man; together they have fallen." The soldiers were running so hard they fell over each other.

46:13-17 *The word which the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon to strike the land of Egypt: "Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol, and proclaim in Memphis and in Tahpanhes; say, 'Take your stand and prepare yourself, for the sword has devoured around you.' Why has your mighty one been swept away? He has not stood, for the LORD has pushed him down. He has multiplied the one who stumbles; also each man has fallen on his neighbor; and they said, 'Arise, and let us return to our people and to the land of our kindred, from before the sword of the oppressor.' They called out there, 'Pharaoh the king of Egypt **is** a noise; he has let the appointed time pass by.'*

The second poem looks ahead. It concerns "the coming of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon to strike the land of Egypt." Egypt had lost at Carchemish, but it still felt safe at home behind its deserts and the Nile. Now Babylon would come to Egypt itself.

"Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol, and proclaim in Memphis and in Tahpanhes." These are the very towns where the Jews who fled after Gedaliah's murder settled (43:7; 44:1). They thought Egypt was the safe place. God said the sword was coming there too.

"Why has your mighty one been swept away? He has not stood, for the LORD has pushed him down." The hired soldiers would say to one another, "Arise, and let us return to our people," and go home. They called Pharaoh "a noise; he has let the appointed time pass by." All talk and no action. Egypt had promised Judah help more than once, and its help never came when it mattered (37:5-7).

46:18-19 ***As*** *I live, declares the King, the LORD of armies* ***is*** *His name, surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, he will come. Make for yourself baggage for exile, O inhabitant, daughter of Egypt, for Memphis will become a horror, and it will be laid waste, without an inhabitant.*

"As I live, declares the King, the LORD of armies is His name." Pharaoh called himself a god and a king. But the true King is the LORD.

"Surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, he will come." Mount Tabor rises alone above the plain of Galilee, and Mount Carmel stands high over the sea. You cannot miss them. In the same way, the conqueror God sends would tower over Egypt.

"Make for yourself baggage for exile." Pack your bags. Memphis, the old capital, "will become a horror, and it will be laid waste, without an inhabitant."

46:20-24 *Egypt* ***is*** *a very beautiful heifer; a gadfly from the north is coming, is coming. Also her hired soldiers in her midst* ***are*** *like calves of the stall, for they also have turned, they have fled together; they have not stood, for the day of their disaster has come on them, the time of their punishment. Her sound goes like the serpent, for they go with an army, and with axes they come to her, like cutters of wood. They have cut down her forest, declares the LORD, for it will not be searched; for they are more numerous than the locust, and there is no number to them. The daughter of Egypt has been put to shame; she has been given into the hand of the people of the north.*

Jeremiah piles up pictures. "Egypt is a very beautiful heifer," a fine young cow, sleek and proud. Egyptians worshiped a sacred bull, which makes the picture sharper. "A gadfly from the north is coming," a stinging fly that would send the heifer running.

Egypt's hired soldiers were "like calves of the stall," fattened and soft. When the day came, "they have fled together; they have not stood."

"Her sound goes like the serpent." Egypt would hiss and slither away while the enemy came with axes "like cutters of wood," cutting down her forest. The invaders would be "more numerous than the locust." "The daughter of Egypt has been put to shame; she has been given into the hand of the people of the north."

46:25-26 *The LORD of armies, the God of Israel, says: Look, I am about to punish Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh and Egypt and her gods and her kings, and Pharaoh and those who trust in him. And I will give them into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants; and afterward it will dwell as* ***in*** *the days of old, declares the LORD.*

God names His targets: "Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh and Egypt and her gods and her kings." Amon was the chief god of Egypt, and Thebes, far up the Nile, was the center of his worship. God was judging Egypt's gods as He had at the exodus (Exodus 12:12). He also names "those who trust in him." That pointed straight at the Jews who had run to Egypt for safety.

Then comes a surprise. "And afterward it will dwell as in the days of old, declares the LORD." After the judgment, Egypt would be lived in again. God's judgment on Egypt was real, but it was not the end of Egypt.

This is the first of several promises of restoration in these chapters. God makes them to Egypt, Moab, Ammon and Elam (46:26; 48:47; 49:6; 49:39). They show us God's heart. He judges because He is just, but He takes no pleasure in destroying anyone (Ezekiel 33:11). Isaiah saw a day when Egypt would know the LORD and worship Him, and God would say, "Blessed be My people Egypt" (Isaiah 19:25). Egypt did recover and is still a nation today. I believe the fullest answer to these promises comes in the kingdom of the Messiah, when people from every nation will worship the LORD (Zechariah 14:16).

46:27-28 *And you, do not fear, O My servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for look, I am about to save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity; and Jacob will return and be undisturbed and be at ease, and* ***there will be*** *none who terrifies* ***him****. You, do not fear, O My servant Jacob, declares the LORD, for I* ***am*** *with you; for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, and of you I will not make a full end; and I will discipline you in justice, and I will by no means leave you unpunished."*

The chapter ends with a word to Israel, nearly the same as 30:10-11. "And you, do not fear, O My servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for look, I am about to save you from afar."

Why put this here? Because if God could bring down Egypt, the people of Judah might think He would wipe them out too. He would not. "I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, and of you I will not make a full end."

That is a remarkable promise. The great empires of Jeremiah's day, Assyria, Babylon and the rest, are gone. Israel is still here. God has kept His word to Jacob for more than twenty-five hundred years.

But the promise is honest too. "I will discipline you in justice, and I will by no means leave you unpunished." God's love for His people does not mean He ignores their sin. It means He disciplines them so they will not be lost. The same is true for believers today. "Whom the Lord loves He disciplines" (Hebrews 12:6). His discipline is proof that we belong to Him.

Summary

Jeremiah 46 begins the words against the nations with Egypt. The first poem describes Pharaoh Neco's army marching out like the Nile in flood and then fleeing in terror at Carchemish on the Euphrates in 605 B.C. It was the LORD's day of vengeance, and no balm could heal Egypt's wound. The second poem warns that Nebuchadnezzar would come into Egypt itself, to Migdol, Memphis and Tahpanhes, where the Jews had fled for safety. Egypt, the beautiful heifer, would be stung by a fly from the north, and God would punish Amon of Thebes, Pharaoh and all who trusted in him. Yet afterward Egypt would be lived in again. The chapter closes by telling Jacob not to fear: God would make a full end of the nations, but not of Israel, though He would discipline them in justice.

Study Questions

1. Where and when was Pharaoh Neco's army defeated? (46:2)

2. What picture does Jeremiah use for Egypt's army marching out? (46:7-8)

3. Whose day was the battle, according to verse 10? (46:10)

4. Why did Jeremiah tell Egypt to go to Gilead for balm, and would it help? (46:11)

5. Which Egyptian towns are named in verse 14, and why does that matter for the Jews who fled there? (46:14; 44:1)

6. What did the soldiers say about Pharaoh? (46:17)

7. What promise does God give Egypt after its judgment? (46:26)

8. What does God promise Jacob, and what does He say He will not do? (46:27-28)

9. Judah kept trusting Egypt for help instead of God. What are you tempted to lean on when trouble comes?

10. God said He would discipline Israel "in justice" but would never make a full end of them (46:28). How have you seen God's discipline as a sign of His love in your own life? (Hebrews 12:6)

Jeremiah 47: Against the Philistines

Scripture

47:1-7 That which came ***as*** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh struck Gaza. "Thus says the LORD: Look, waters are rising from the north, and they will become an overflowing torrent, and they will overflow a land and its fullness, a city and those who dwell in it; and the men will cry out, and every inhabitant of the land will wail. From the sound of the stamping of the hooves of his stallions, from the rattling of his chariotry, the din of his wheels, fathers have not turned back to ***their*** sons, from slackness of hands, on account of the day that is coming to devastate all the Philistines, to cut off for Tyre and for Sidon every survivor ***who*** helps; for the LORD is devastating the Philistines, the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor. Baldness has come to Gaza; Ashkelon has been silenced, O remnant of their valley; until when will you cut yourself? Alas, O sword of the LORD, until when will you not be quiet? Gather yourself into your sheath; rest and be still. How can you be quiet, and the LORD has commanded it? Against Ashkelon and against the coast of the sea, there He has appointed it."

Preview

This short chapter is God's word against the Philistines, Israel's old enemies on the coast. Jeremiah sees a flood rising from the north and pouring over their land. The noise of horses and chariots is so terrifying that fathers run without turning back for their own children. Gaza and Ashkelon, two of the great Philistine cities, sit in mourning. Then Jeremiah cries out to the sword of the LORD to stop and rest, and answers his own cry: how can it rest, when the LORD has given it a job to do?

This chapter is about the sword of the LORD. It is hard to read, and Jeremiah himself found it hard. But it shows us that God's judgments are not random. He appoints them, He aims them, and He stops them when His purpose is done. As we read, we should ask how we think about God's justice, and whether we have learned to grieve over judgment even when we know it is right.

Study

47:1 *That which came **as** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh struck Gaza.*

"Concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh struck Gaza." The Philistines were a sea people who came from Caphtor, most likely the island of Crete (Amos 9:7). They settled on the southern coast of Canaan in five main cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath. They fought Israel through the days of the judges, Saul and David. Goliath was a Philistine.

Which Pharaoh struck Gaza, and when? Scripture does not tell us. It may have been Neco, around the time he killed Josiah in 609 B.C., or a later Pharaoh. The note is there to date the message. Jeremiah spoke it while Gaza still stood strong, before anyone attacked it.

47:2-4 *"Thus says the LORD: Look, waters are rising from the north, and they will become an overflowing torrent, and they will overflow a land and its fullness, a city and those who dwell in it; and the men will cry out, and every inhabitant of the land will wail. From the sound of the stamping of the hooves of his stallions, from the rattling of his chariotry, the din of his wheels, fathers have not turned back to* ***their*** *sons, from slackness of hands, on account of the day that is coming to devastate all the Philistines, to cut off for Tyre and for Sidon every survivor* ***who*** *helps; for the LORD is devastating the Philistines, the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor.*

"Look, waters are rising from the north." Babylon is the flood, the same picture Jeremiah used for Egypt in the last chapter (46:7-8). This time it is a real enemy rising like a river until it becomes "an overflowing torrent" that covers the land and "a city and those who dwell in it."

Then Jeremiah gives one of the saddest pictures in the book. The sound of hooves, the rattle of chariots and the rumble of wheels would be so terrifying that "fathers have not turned back to their sons, from slackness of hands." Their hands would go limp with fear. Men who should have grabbed their children would run for their own lives.

Is God pleased by that? No. Jeremiah is describing what war does to people. When a nation rejects God and depends on its own strength, there is nothing left when that strength fails. Fear takes over, and even love for children is overwhelmed.

The day would "cut off for Tyre and for Sidon every survivor who helps." Tyre and Sidon, the Phoenician cities up the coast, were allies of the Philistines. Their help would be cut off.

"For the LORD is devastating the Philistines, the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor." Notice who does it. Babylon was the tool, but the LORD was the One acting. The Babylonian records tell that Nebuchadnezzar took Ashkelon in 604 B.C., not long after Carchemish, and the Philistines disappear from history as a people after the exile.

47:5 *Baldness has come to Gaza; Ashkelon has been silenced, O remnant of their valley; until when will you cut yourself?*

"Baldness has come to Gaza; Ashkelon has been silenced." Shaving the head was a sign of mourning in the ancient world (16:6). Gaza would mourn, and Ashkelon, once a busy port, would go silent.

"Until when will you cut yourself?" The pagan nations cut their own bodies in grief and in worship (1 Kings 18:28). God forbade Israel to do it (Deuteronomy 14:1). The Philistines would cut themselves in despair, but their gods could not hear them.

Many of us have known grief that seemed to have no bottom. The Philistines grieved without hope. We do not have to. Paul tells believers that we do not grieve "just as also the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Our hope is in a living God who hears.

47:6-7 *Alas, O sword of the LORD, until when will you not be quiet? Gather yourself into your sheath; rest and be still. How can you be quiet, and the LORD has commanded it? Against Ashkelon and against the coast of the sea, there He has appointed it."*

Now comes a cry. "Alas, O sword of the LORD, until when will you not be quiet? Gather yourself into your sheath; rest and be still."

Who is speaking? It may be the Philistines, begging for the killing to stop. It may be Jeremiah himself. Many teachers think it is Jeremiah, and that fits what we know of him. He did not enjoy announcing judgment, even on Israel's enemies. He wept over Moab (48:31-32), and he wept over his own people (9:1). Here he begs the sword to stop.

Then the answer: "How can you be quiet, and the LORD has commanded it? Against Ashkelon and against the coast of the sea, there He has appointed it."

The sword cannot rest because God has given it a task. But notice the word "appointed." The sword is aimed. It goes where God sends it and does what God commands, and no more. God's judgment is never out of control.

This teaches us two things. First, we should not take God's judgments lightly or speak of them with pleasure. Jeremiah grieved. So should we. Second, we can trust that God's judgments are measured. He is not cruel. He is just.

For anyone who belongs to Christ, there is more good news. The sword of God's justice fell on Jesus at the cross. "He was pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5). The judgment we deserved was carried by Him, and now "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Summary

Jeremiah 47 is the LORD's word against the Philistines, given before Pharaoh struck Gaza. Babylon would rise from the north like a flood and overflow the Philistine land. The noise of the horses and chariots would terrify the people so much that fathers would not turn back for their children. Tyre and Sidon would lose their helpers, and the remnant of Caphtor would be devastated. Gaza would shave its head in mourning, and Ashkelon would fall silent. Jeremiah cried to the sword of the LORD to go back into its sheath and rest, but it could not, because the LORD had commanded it and appointed it against Ashkelon and the coast.

Study Questions

1. When was this message given? (47:1)

2. What picture does Jeremiah use for the army from the north? (47:2)

3. Why would fathers not turn back for their sons? (47:3)

4. Which cities were allies of the Philistines, and what would happen to their help? (47:4)

5. Where did the Philistines come from? (47:4; Amos 9:7)

6. What were the signs of mourning in Gaza and Ashkelon? (47:5)

7. What did the speaker ask the sword of the LORD to do? (47:6)

8. Why could the sword not rest? (47:7)

9. Jeremiah grieved over judgment on Israel's enemies. How do you feel when you hear of judgment falling on people who have done wrong? What does Jeremiah's example teach you?

10. The sword of God's justice fell on Jesus at the cross for those who believe (Isaiah 53:5; Romans 8:1). How does knowing this change the way you think about God's judgment?

Jeremiah 48: Against Moab

Scripture

48:1-10 Of Moab. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Woe to Nebo, for it has been devastated! Kiriathaim has been put to shame; it has been captured; the stronghold has been put to shame, and it is shattered. There is no longer praise of Moab; in Heshbon they have planned calamity against her: 'Come, and let us cut her off from ***being*** a nation.' Also, O Madmen, you will be silenced; the sword will go after you. The sound of an outcry from Horonaim: devastation and great destruction! Moab has been broken; her little ones have made an outcry heard. For ***on*** the ascent of Luhith with weeping, weeping goes up; for on the descent of Horonaim they have heard the distresses of the outcry of destruction. Flee, save your lives, and let them be like a juniper in the wilderness. For because of your trusting in your works and in your treasures, you also will be captured; and Chemosh will go out into exile, his priests and his officials together. And a destroyer will come to every city, and a city will not escape; and the valley will perish, and the plain will be destroyed, as the LORD has said. Give a wing to Moab, for she will surely go out flying; and her cities will become a horror, without an inhabitant in them. Cursed ***is*** he who does the work of the LORD with slackness, and cursed ***is*** he who withholds his sword from blood.

48:11-25 Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has been undisturbed on his lees, and he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, and into exile he has not gone; therefore his taste has remained in him, and his aroma has not been changed. Therefore, look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will send to him tilters, and they will tilt him, and his vessels they will empty, and their jars they will smash. And Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh, just as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their trust. How do you say, 'We ***are*** mighty men, and men of strength for battle'? Moab has been devastated, and he has gone up ***into*** her cities, and the choicest of his young men have gone down to the slaughter, declares the King, the LORD of armies ***is*** His name. The disaster of Moab ***is*** near to come, and his calamity has hastened exceedingly. Show sympathy to him, all who ***are*** around him, and all who know his name; say, 'How the staff of strength is broken, the rod of splendor!' Come down from glory and sit in thirst, O inhabitant, daughter of Dibon; for the destroyer of Moab has come up against you; he has ruined your strongholds. Stand by the road and watch, O inhabitant of Aroer; ask him who flees and her who escapes; say, 'What has happened?' Moab has been put to shame, for it has been shattered. Wail and cry out! Declare at the Arnon that Moab has been devastated. And judgment has come to the land of the plain, to Holon and to Jahaz and upon Mephaath, and upon Dibon and upon Nebo and upon Beth-diblathaim, and upon Kiriathaim and upon Beth-gamul and upon Beth-meon, and upon Kerioth and upon Bozrah and upon all the cities of the land of Moab, the far and the near. The horn of Moab has been cut off, and his arm has been broken, declares the LORD.

48:26-39 Make him drunk, for he has magnified himself against the LORD; and Moab will wallow in his vomit, and he also will become a laughingstock. And was not Israel a laughingstock to you? Or was he found among thieves, that as often as your words ***were*** about him you shook yourself? Abandon cities and dwell in the rock, O inhabitants of Moab, and be like a dove ***that*** makes a nest in the sides of the mouth of a ravine. We have heard the pride of Moab, very proud: his haughtiness and his pride and his arrogance and the loftiness of his heart. I, I know his fury,

declares the LORD, and ***it is*** not right; his empty boasts, they have done ***what is*** not right. Therefore over Moab I will wail, and for Moab, all of it, I will cry out; for the men of Kir-heres one will moan. More than the weeping of Jazer I will weep for you, O vine of Sibmah; your tendrils passed over ***the*** sea; they reached as far as the sea of Jazer; upon your summer fruit and upon your grape harvest a destroyer has fallen. And joy and rejoicing have been removed from the garden land and from the land of Moab; and wine from wine-presses I have made to cease; no one will tread ***with*** shouting; the shouting ***is*** no shouting. From the outcry of Heshbon as far as Elealeh, as far as Jahaz, they have given their voice, from Zoar as far as Horonaim, ***to*** Eglath-shelishiyah; for also the waters of Nimrim will become desolations. And I will put an end for Moab, declares the LORD, to him who offers up ***on*** a high place and him who burns incense to his gods. Therefore my heart moans for Moab like flutes, and my heart moans for the men of Kir-heres like flutes; therefore the abundance ***that*** he made has perished. For every head ***is*** baldness, and every beard ***is*** clipped; on all hands ***are*** gashes, and on ***the*** loins sackcloth. On all the roofs of Moab and in her open places, all of it ***is*** lamentation; for I have broken Moab like a vessel in which there is no pleasure, declares the LORD. How it has been shattered! They have wailed! How Moab has turned ***his*** back, ashamed! And Moab will become a laughingstock and a terror to all around him.

48:40-47 For thus says the LORD: Look, like the eagle he will swoop, and he will spread his wings toward Moab. Kerioth has been captured, and the strongholds have been seized; and the heart of the mighty men of Moab will be in that day like the heart of a woman in labor. And Moab will be destroyed from ***being*** a people, for he has magnified himself against the LORD. Terror and pit and snare ***are*** upon you, O inhabitant of Moab, declares the LORD. He who flees from before the terror will fall into the pit, and he who climbs up from the pit will be caught in the snare; for I will bring upon her, upon Moab, the year of their punishment, declares the LORD. In the shadow of Heshbon those who flee have stood without strength; for a fire has gone out from Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and it has consumed the forehead of Moab and the scalp of the sons of uproar. Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh has perished; for your sons have been taken into captivity, and your daughters into captivity. And I will turn back the captivity of Moab at the end of the days, declares the LORD." Thus far ***is*** the judgment of Moab.

Preview

Moab gets more space than any nation in these chapters except Babylon. Moab lay east of the Dead Sea, and its people came from Lot, Abraham's nephew. Jeremiah walks through its towns one by one, Nebo, Heshbon, Dibon, Aroer, Kerioth and many more, and in every one there is weeping. Moab had lived at ease for centuries, trusting in its riches and its god Chemosh, and laughing at Israel's troubles. Now its pride would be broken. Much of this chapter echoes Isaiah 15 and 16, and some lines go all the way back to Numbers 21 and 24.

This chapter is about pride, and about God's tears. The word pride comes up again and again in verse 29. Yet the LORD Himself says, "over Moab I will wail." Judgment does not make God cold. And the chapter ends with a promise that God will turn back Moab's captivity in the latter days. As we read, we should ask where pride has taken root in us, and whether we see that God grieves even when He judges.

Study

48:1-2 *Of Moab. Thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Woe to Nebo, for it has been devastated! Kiriathaim has been put to shame; it has been captured; the stronghold has been put to shame, and it is shattered. There is no longer praise of Moab; in Heshbon they have planned calamity against her: 'Come, and let us cut her off from **being** a nation.' Also, O Madmen, you will be silenced; the sword will go after you.*

"Woe to Nebo, for it has been devastated!" Nebo here is a town, near the mountain where Moses looked over the promised land before he died (Deuteronomy 34:1). Kiriathaim and "the stronghold," Moab's fortified towns, are put to shame.

"There is no longer praise of Moab." Moab had been known and admired. Now its name would be a byword. In Heshbon, a city on Moab's northern edge, the enemy plotted, "Come, and let us cut her off from being a nation."

Who were the Moabites? They came from Lot's older daughter (Genesis 19:37). Israel was told not to attack them on the way to Canaan (Deuteronomy 2:9), but Moab's king hired Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22), and Moab fought Israel off and on for centuries. Yet Ruth, the great-grandmother of David, was a Moabitess (Ruth 4:13-17), and she is named in the family line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). God's grace has always reached beyond Israel.

48:3-6 *The sound of an outcry from Horonaim: devastation and great destruction! Moab has been broken; her little ones have made an outcry heard. For **on** the ascent of Luhith with weeping, weeping goes up; for on the descent of Horonaim they have heard the distresses of the outcry of destruction. Flee, save your lives, and let them be like a juniper in the wilderness.*

"The sound of an outcry from Horonaim: devastation and great destruction!" The poem moves from town to town like a messenger running with bad news. "Moab has been broken; her little ones have made an outcry heard." People go up "the ascent of Luhith with weeping" and down "the descent of Horonaim," crying all the way.

"Flee, save your lives, and let them be like a juniper in the wilderness." A juniper was a small bush in the desert, scraggly and alone. That was what Moab's refugees would look like, scattered across the wilderness.

48:7-9 *For because of your trusting in your works and in your treasures, you also will be captured; and Chemosh will go out into exile, his priests and his officials together. And a destroyer will come to every city, and a city will not escape; and the valley will perish, and the plain will be destroyed, as the LORD has said. Give a wing to Moab, for she will surely go out flying; and her cities will become a horror, without an inhabitant in them.*

Here is why. "Because of your trusting in your works and in your treasures, you also will be captured." Moab trusted in what it had built and what it owned.

"And Chemosh will go out into exile, his priests and his officials together." Chemosh was Moab's national god. Solomon even built a high place for him near Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7). In those days,

conquerors often carried off the idols of the nations they beat. Chemosh would be packed up and hauled away like luggage. A god who needs to be carried cannot carry you (Isaiah 46:1-4).

The destroyer would come to every town, valley and plain. "Give a wing to Moab, for she will surely go out flying." Moab would need wings to escape.

48:10 *Cursed **is** he who does the work of the LORD with slackness, and cursed **is** he who withholds his sword from blood.*

This is a hard verse. "Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness, and cursed is he who withholds his sword from blood."

Who is this said to? It is spoken to the army God was sending against Moab. In this judgment they were God's tools, and God told them to do the job fully. It is the same lesson Saul failed to learn when he spared what God told him to destroy (1 Samuel 15). The verse is not a command for anyone today to take up the sword. God gave it for this one judgment, on this one nation, at this one time.

There is a principle under it, though, that does speak to us. God's work should never be done halfway. Paul says, "whatever you do, work from the soul, as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). Whatever God has given you to do, do it with your whole heart.

48:11-13 *Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has been undisturbed on his lees, and he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, and into exile he has not gone; therefore his taste has remained in him, and his aroma has not been changed. Therefore, look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will send to him tilters, and they will tilt him, and his vessels they will empty, and their jars they will smash. And Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh, just as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their trust.*

This is one of the most vivid pictures in Jeremiah. "Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has been undisturbed on his lees." When wine was made, it was left to settle, and the dregs, called lees, sank to the bottom. To make good wine, the winemaker poured it carefully "from vessel to vessel," leaving the dregs behind each time. Wine left on its lees too long got thick and harsh.

Moab had never been poured out. "Into exile he has not gone." Moab had not suffered the way Israel had, so "his taste has remained in him, and his aroma has not been changed." Easy times had left Moab proud and unchanged.

So God would send "tilters," men who tip the jars, and they would empty Moab's vessels and smash its jars. Moab would finally be poured out.

There is a lesson here for us. Ease is not always a blessing. Some of the deepest change in our lives comes when God pours us "from vessel to vessel" through hard times. Zephaniah warned of people who were "thickening on their dregs" and said God would neither do good nor evil (Zephaniah 1:12). Comfort can make us careless with God.

"And Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh, just as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their trust." Bethel was where Jeroboam set up a golden calf (1 Kings 12:28-29). Israel trusted it, and it did not save them from Assyria. Chemosh would fail Moab the same way.

48:14-17 *How do you say, 'We **are** mighty men, and men of strength for battle'? Moab has been devastated, and he has gone up **into** her cities, and the choicest of his young men have gone down to the slaughter, declares the King, the LORD of armies **is** His name. The disaster of Moab **is** near to come, and his calamity has hastened exceedingly. Show sympathy to him, all who **are** around him, and all who know his name; say, 'How the staff of strength is broken, the rod of splendor!'*

"How do you say" that you are "mighty men, and men of strength for battle"? Moab's soldiers bragged. But "the choicest of his young men have gone down to the slaughter, declares the King, the LORD of armies is His name." The nations had their kings, but there is one King over them all.

"Show sympathy to him, all who are around him." The nearby peoples are told to mourn for Moab: "How the staff of strength is broken, the rod of splendor!" The staff and rod were signs of a ruler's power. Moab's power was snapped like a stick.

48:18-20 *Come down from glory and sit in thirst, O inhabitant, daughter of Dibon; for the destroyer of Moab has come up against you; he has ruined your strongholds. Stand by the road and watch, O inhabitant of Aroer; ask him who flees and her who escapes; say, 'What has happened?' Moab has been put to shame, for it has been shattered. Wail and cry out! Declare at the Arnon that Moab has been devastated.*

"Come down from glory and sit in thirst, O inhabitant, daughter of Dibon." Dibon was one of Moab's chief cities. Its people would come down from their proud heights and sit in the dust.

"Stand by the road and watch, O inhabitant of Aroer; ask him who flees and her who escapes." Aroer sat on the edge of the Arnon gorge, Moab's northern border. The people there would see the refugees streaming past and ask what had happened. The answer comes back: "Moab has been put to shame, for it has been shattered. Wail and cry out!"

48:21-25 *And judgment has come to the land of the plain, to Holon and to Jahaz and upon Mephaath, and upon Dibon and upon Nebo and upon Beth-diblathaim, and upon Kiriathaim and upon Beth-gamul and upon Beth-meon, and upon Kerioth and upon Bozrah and upon all the cities of the land of Moab, the far and the near. The horn of Moab has been cut off, and his arm has been broken, declares the LORD.*

"And judgment has come to the land of the plain." Jeremiah lists eleven towns, then adds "all the cities of the land of Moab, the far and the near." No town would be missed.

"The horn of Moab has been cut off, and his arm has been broken." A horn was a picture of strength, like the horns of a bull. The arm was the power to fight. Both would be gone.

48:26-28 *Make him drunk, for he has magnified himself against the LORD; and Moab will wallow in his vomit, and he also will become a laughingstock. And was not Israel a laughingstock to you? Or was he found among thieves, that as often as your words **were** about him you shook yourself? Abandon cities and dwell in the rock, O inhabitants of Moab, and be like a dove **that** makes a nest in the sides of the mouth of a ravine.*

"Make him drunk, for he has magnified himself against the LORD." Being made drunk is a picture of God's judgment, the cup of His wrath (25:15-17). Moab would stagger and "wallow in his vomit," and he would become "a laughingstock."

Then God gives one of Moab's sins. "And was not Israel a laughingstock to you?" Moab had mocked Israel and shaken its head at Israel's troubles. The mockery would come back on Moab. God takes it personally when people laugh at the suffering of His people (Zephaniah 2:8-10).

"Abandon cities and dwell in the rock." The people would flee to the cliffs "like a dove" that nests in the side of a ravine.

48:29-30 *We have heard the pride of Moab, very proud: his haughtiness and his pride and his arrogance and the loftiness of his heart. I, I know his fury, declares the LORD, and **it is** not right; his empty boasts, they have done **what is** not right.*

"We have heard the pride of Moab, very proud: his haughtiness and his pride and his arrogance and the loftiness of his heart." Four words in a row for pride. Isaiah said nearly the same thing (Isaiah 16:6). Moab's pride was famous.

"I, I know his fury, declares the LORD, and it is not right; his empty boasts." Moab's boasting was empty.

Pride was Moab's root sin, and it is still a deadly sin. Many teachers see it as Satan's sin (1 Timothy 3:6), and it is often the first step toward a fall. "Before breaking is pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit" (Proverbs 16:18). And "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

48:31-33 *Therefore over Moab I will wail, and for Moab, all of it, I will cry out; for the men of Kir-heres one will moan. More than the weeping of Jazer I will weep for you, O vine of Sibmah; your tendrils passed over **the** sea; they reached as far as the sea of Jazer; upon your summer fruit and upon your grape harvest a destroyer has fallen. And joy and rejoicing have been removed from the garden land and from the land of Moab; and wine from wine-presses I have made to cease; no one will tread **with** shouting; the shouting **is** no shouting.*

Now listen to who is weeping. "Therefore over Moab I will wail, and for Moab, all of it, I will cry out." The LORD Himself speaks, and the prophet feels it with Him. "More than the weeping of Jazer I will weep for you, O vine of Sibmah."

Moab was famous for its vineyards. Its vines spread so far that "your tendrils passed over the sea." But a destroyer had fallen on the summer fruit and the grape harvest. "Joy and rejoicing have been removed." No one would tread the grapes with shouting at harvest time anymore.

This is one of the most important things in this chapter. God judges Moab, and He weeps over Moab. He is not a cold judge who enjoys punishing people. Jesus showed the same heart when He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). God judges sin because He is holy, and He grieves over sinners because He is love.

48:34-36 *From the outcry of Heshbon as far as Elealeh, as far as Jahaz, they have given their voice, from Zoar as far as Horonaim,* ***to*** *Eglath-shelishiyah; for also the waters of Nimrim will become desolations. And I will put an end for Moab, declares the LORD, to him who offers up* ***on*** *a high place and him who burns incense to his gods. Therefore my heart moans for Moab like flutes, and my heart moans for the men of Kir-heres like flutes; therefore the abundance* ***that*** *he made has perished.*

The cry spreads across the land: from Heshbon to Elealeh and Jahaz, from Zoar to Horonaim. "The waters of Nimrim will become desolations." The springs would dry up.

"I will put an end for Moab, declares the LORD, to him who offers up on a high place and him who burns incense to his gods." A high place was a hilltop shrine for worship, usually of idols. Moab's false worship would end.

"Therefore my heart moans for Moab like flutes." Flutes were played at funerals in that culture (Matthew 9:23). The prophet's heart played a funeral song for Moab.

48:37-39 *For every head* ***is*** *baldness, and every beard* ***is*** *clipped; on all hands* ***are*** *gashes, and on* ***the*** *loins sackcloth. On all the roofs of Moab and in her open places, all of it* ***is*** *lamentation; for I have broken Moab like a vessel in which there is no pleasure, declares the LORD. How it has been shattered! They have wailed! How Moab has turned* ***his*** *back, ashamed! And Moab will become a laughingstock and a terror to all around him.*

These are the signs of mourning in the ancient world: shaved heads, clipped beards, cuts on the hands, and sackcloth, a rough cloth made of goat's hair worn in grief. "On all the roofs of Moab and in her open places, all of it is lamentation."

"I have broken Moab like a vessel in which there is no pleasure." It is the picture of the potter again (18:4; 19:10-11). Moab would be broken like a useless jar.

"How Moab has turned his back, ashamed!" Moab, who laughed at Israel, would become "a laughingstock and a terror to all around him."

48:40-42 *For thus says the LORD: Look, like the eagle he will swoop, and he will spread his wings toward Moab. Kerioth has been captured, and the strongholds have been seized; and the heart of the mighty men of Moab will be in that day like the heart of a woman in labor. And Moab will be destroyed from* ***being*** *a people, for he has magnified himself against the LORD.*

"Like the eagle he will swoop, and he will spread his wings toward Moab." The eagle is Nebuchadnezzar, swift and strong (Ezekiel 17:3). The strongholds would be taken, and the hearts of Moab's mighty men would be "like the heart of a woman in labor," full of pain and fear they could not stop.

"And Moab will be destroyed from being a people, for he has magnified himself against the LORD." This came true. Nebuchadnezzar's armies subdued Moab in the years after Jerusalem fell, and in time the Moabites disappeared as a separate people.

48:43-44 *Terror and pit and snare **are** upon you, O inhabitant of Moab, declares the LORD. He who flees from before the terror will fall into the pit, and he who climbs up from the pit will be caught in the snare; for I will bring upon her, upon Moab, the year of their punishment, declares the LORD.*

"Terror and pit and snare are upon you." Isaiah used these same words (Isaiah 24:17-18). In Hebrew they sound alike: pachad, pachat, pach. The picture is of an animal running from a hunter. "He who flees from before the terror will fall into the pit, and he who climbs up from the pit will be caught in the snare." There would be no way out.

Sin does that. It promises escape and then closes every door. The only real way out is to turn to God (1 Corinthians 10:13).

48:45-46 *In the shadow of Heshbon those who flee have stood without strength; for a fire has gone out from Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and it has consumed the forehead of Moab and the scalp of the sons of uproar. Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh has perished; for your sons have been taken into captivity, and your daughters into captivity.*

"A fire has gone out from Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon." These lines are taken from an old song in Numbers 21:28-29, sung when Israel defeated Sihon, the Amorite king who had taken land from Moab. The words that once marked Moab's defeat long ago are used again. History was repeating itself.

"It has consumed the forehead of Moab," words that echo Balaam's prophecy of a star from Jacob who would "shatter the corners of Moab" (Numbers 24:17). Many see that star as the Messiah.

"Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh has perished." Moab's sons and daughters would go into captivity.

48:47 *And I will turn back the captivity of Moab at the end of the days, declares the LORD." Thus far **is** the judgment of Moab.*

After all of that, the last word is mercy. "And I will turn back the captivity of Moab at the end of the days, declares the LORD."

To "turn back the captivity" means to restore, to bring back what was lost. "At the end of the days" points to the last days, the time of the Messiah's kingdom. The Moabites are gone as a people today, but this promise stands. In the kingdom, people from Moab's land will worship the true God. When Christ reigns, people "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" will be there (Revelation 5:9).

This is how God's justice and mercy fit together. He judges pride and sin, and the judgment is real. But His last word to Moab is not "woe." It is "I will turn back." If God had mercy for Moab, the nation that hired Balaam and mocked Israel, there is mercy for anyone who comes to Him.

Summary

Jeremiah 48 is God's long word against Moab, the people descended from Lot who lived east of the Dead Sea. Town after town would be devastated, and the roads would be full of weeping refugees. Moab trusted in its works and its treasures, and its god Chemosh would go into exile. Like wine left on its lees, Moab had lived at ease and never been poured out, so God would send men to tip its jars and smash them. Moab had mocked Israel, and now Moab would become a laughingstock. Its sin was pride, named four times over. Yet the LORD Himself wailed and wept for Moab, and its people would mourn on every roof. Terror, pit and snare would leave no escape. But the chapter ends with a promise: God would turn back the captivity of Moab in the latter days.

Study Questions

1. What two things did Moab trust in? (48:7)

2. What would happen to Chemosh, Moab's god? (48:7, 13)

3. Explain the picture of wine on its lees. What did it say about Moab? (48:11-12)

4. What had Moab done to Israel that God remembered? (48:27)

5. How many words for pride are used in verse 29? What does that tell us? (48:29)

6. Who weeps over Moab in verses 31 to 36? (48:31-32, 36)

7. What three things would catch Moab, one after another? (48:43-44)

8. What does God promise Moab at the end of the chapter, and when? (48:47)

9. Moab was "at ease from his youth" and became proud and careless. How has God used hard times to change you in ways easy times never did?

10. God wept over a nation He was judging (48:31-32). How does that change how you think about God, and how you treat people who are far from Him?

Jeremiah 49: Against Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor and Elam

Scripture

49:1-13 Of the sons of Ammon. Thus says the LORD: "Has Israel no sons? Or has he no heir? Why has Milcom dispossessed Gad, and ***why*** has his people dwelt in its cities? Therefore, look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will make a shout of battle heard against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon; and it will become a mound of desolation, and her daughters will be burned with fire; and Israel will dispossess those who dispossessed him, says the LORD. Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai has been devastated! Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah; gird on sackcloth; mourn and run to and fro among the walls; for Milcom will go into exile, his priests and his officials together. Why do you boast in the valleys? Your valley is flowing, O backsliding daughter, who trusts in her treasures, ***saying***, 'Who will come against me?' Look, I am about to bring terror upon you, declares the Lord GOD of armies, from all who ***are*** around you; and you will be driven out, each man before him, and there will be none who gathers the fugitive. And afterward I will turn back the captivity of the sons of Ammon, declares the LORD." Of Edom. Thus says the LORD of armies: "Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from those who understand? Has their wisdom been corrupted? Flee, turn back, go deep to dwell, O inhabitants of Dedan; for I have brought the disaster of Esau upon him, the time ***that*** I punish him. If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? If thieves ***came*** in the night, they would destroy ***only*** their sufficiency. For I, I have stripped Esau bare; I have uncovered his hiding places, and he will not be able to hide himself; his seed has been devastated, and his brothers and his neighbors, and he is no more. Leave your fatherless; I, I will keep ***them*** alive; and your widows, let them trust in Me. For thus says the LORD: Look, those whose judgment was not to drink the cup will certainly drink ***it***; and are you the one who will be altogether exempt from punishment? You will not be exempt from punishment, for you will certainly drink ***it***. For by Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, that Bozrah will become a horror, a reproach, a ruin, and a curse; and all her cities will become everlasting ruins.

49:14-27 I have heard a report from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations: 'Gather together and come against her, and rise up for battle!' For look, I have made you small among the nations, despised among mankind. Your terribleness has deceived you, the arrogance of your heart, O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill; though you make your nest high like the eagle, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD. And Edom will become a horror; everyone who passes by her will be appalled and will hiss at all her wounds. Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and her neighbors, says the LORD, no man will dwell there, and no son of man will sojourn in her. Look, like a lion he will go up from the thicket of the Jordan to the ever-flowing pasture; for in a moment I will make him run from her; and whoever is chosen, I will appoint over her. For who ***is*** like Me? And who will summon Me? And who ***is*** this shepherd who will stand before Me? Therefore hear the counsel of the LORD which He has counseled against Edom, and His purposes which He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: surely the little ones of the flock will drag them away; surely he will make their pasture desolate over them. From the sound of their fall the earth has shaken; ***there is*** an

outcry; at the Red Sea its sound has been heard. Look, like the eagle he will go up and swoop, and he will spread his wings over Bozrah; and the heart of the mighty men of Edom will be in that day like the heart of a woman in labor." Of Damascus. "Hamath has been put to shame, and Arpad, for they have heard a bad report; they have melted away; in the sea ***there is*** anxiety; it is not able to be quiet. Damascus has grown slack; she has turned to flee, and panic has taken hold ***of her***; distress and pains have seized her, like a woman giving birth. How has the city of praise not been forsaken, the town of my joy! Therefore her young men will fall in her open places, and all the men of war will be silenced in that day, declares the LORD of armies. And I will kindle a fire on the wall of Damascus, and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad."

49:28-39 Of Kedar and of the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon struck. Thus says the LORD: "Arise, go up against Kedar, and devastate the sons of the east. Their tents and their flocks they will take; their tent curtains and all their equipment and their camels they will carry off for themselves; and they will call out against them, 'Terror ***is*** from all around!' Flee, wander far away, go deep to dwell, O inhabitants of Hazor, declares the LORD; for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has counseled counsel against you, and he has purposed a purpose against you. Arise, go up against a nation at ease, which dwells in security, declares the LORD; it has no doors and no bar; they dwell alone. And their camels will become spoil, and the multitude of their livestock plunder; and I will scatter to every wind those who are clipped at the corner ***of the hair***, and from all its sides I will bring their disaster, declares the LORD. And Hazor will become a habitation of jackals, a desolation forever; no man will dwell there, and no son of man will sojourn in her." That which came ***as*** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: Look, I am about to break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might. And I will bring upon Elam four winds from the four ends of the heavens, and I will scatter them to all these winds; and there will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not come. And I will shatter Elam before their enemies and before those who seek their life; and I will bring calamity upon them, the burning of My anger, declares the LORD; and I will send the sword after them until I have made an end of them. And I will set My throne in Elam, and I will destroy from there king and officials, declares the LORD. And it will be at the end of the days ***that*** I will turn back the captivity of Elam, declares the LORD."

Preview

This chapter holds five short messages against Judah's neighbors. Ammon, east of the Jordan, had moved into Israel's land. Edom, south of the Dead Sea, lived high in the rocks and thought no one could reach it. Damascus, the capital of Syria, would melt with fear. Kedar and Hazor, desert tribes of the east, lived in tents and felt safe because no one cared about them. And Elam, far to the east beyond Babylon, would be scattered to the four winds. Each nation had something it trusted in: land, wisdom, high places, distance. None of it would hold when God moved.

This chapter is about God's justice and God's mercy reaching every nation. Ammon and Elam receive promises that God will turn back their captivity. Edom receives none. In the middle of Edom's judgment, God says a tender word about its orphans and widows. As we read, we should

ask where we have felt safe from God, and whether we have seen how His mercy reaches even into His judgments.

Study

49:1-2 *Of the sons of Ammon. Thus says the LORD: "Has Israel no sons? Or has he no heir? Why has Milcom dispossessed Gad, and* ***why*** *has his people dwelt in its cities? Therefore, look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will make a shout of battle heard against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon; and it will become a mound of desolation, and her daughters will be burned with fire; and Israel will dispossess those who dispossessed him, says the LORD.*

"Of the sons of Ammon." The Ammonites, like the Moabites, came from Lot (Genesis 19:38). They lived east of the Jordan, around their capital Rabbah, where the city of Amman, Jordan, stands today.

"Has Israel no sons? Or has he no heir? Why has Milcom dispossessed Gad?" When Assyria carried the northern tribes away in 722 B.C., Ammon moved into the land of Gad, the tribe east of the Jordan. God asks, did they think Israel had no one to inherit its land? The land was Israel's by God's gift.

Milcom, also called Molech, was the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:7). Children were burned in the fire to Molech (32:35). Ammon was a cruel nation, and Amos says they ripped open pregnant women "in order to enlarge their territory" (Amos 1:13).

So God would raise a shout of battle against Rabbah, and it would become "a mound of desolation." The towns around it, her "daughters," would be burned. "And Israel will dispossess those who dispossessed him." What Ammon took would be given back.

49:3-5 *Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai has been devastated! Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah; gird on sackcloth; mourn and run to and fro among the walls; for Milcom will go into exile, his priests and his officials together. Why do you boast in the valleys? Your valley is flowing, O backsliding daughter, who trusts in her treasures,* ***saying****, 'Who will come against me?' Look, I am about to bring terror upon you, declares the Lord GOD of armies, from all who* ***are*** *around you; and you will be driven out, each man before him, and there will be none who gathers the fugitive.*

"Wail, O Heshbon." Heshbon had passed back and forth between Moab and Ammon. "Milcom will go into exile, his priests and his officials together," the same words used of Chemosh (48:7). The gods of the nations could not even save themselves.

"Why do you boast in the valleys?" Ammon's land was well watered and fruitful. She was a "backsliding daughter, who trusts in her treasures," saying, "Who will come against me?" That question is the voice of every proud heart. The answer was God. "Look, I am about to bring terror upon you, declares the Lord GOD of armies." They would be driven out, "and there will be none who gathers the fugitive."

49:6 *And afterward I will turn back the captivity of the sons of Ammon, declares the LORD."*

"And afterward I will turn back the captivity" of the Ammonites, "declares the LORD." Here is another promise of mercy after judgment, like the ones to Egypt and Moab (46:26; 48:47).

Ammon disappeared as a separate people long ago, much like Moab. But God's word does not fail. I believe this promise, like the one to Moab, will see its fullest answer when the Messiah reigns and the nations come to worship Him.

49:7-8 *Of Edom. Thus says the LORD of armies: "Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from those who understand? Has their wisdom been corrupted? Flee, turn back, go deep to dwell, O inhabitants of Dedan; for I have brought the disaster of Esau upon him, the time* ***that*** *I punish him.*

"Of Edom." The Edomites came from Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 25:30). They lived in the rugged mountains south and east of the Dead Sea. Though they were Israel's close relatives, they were bitter enemies. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, Edom cheered and helped (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 10-14).

"Is there no longer wisdom in Teman?" Teman was a leading region of Edom, famous for its wise men. One of Job's friends, Eliphaz, was a Temanite (Job 2:11). But all their wisdom would not help them see what was coming. Worldly wisdom cannot protect a nation that has set itself against God (1 Corinthians 1:20).

"Flee, turn back, go deep to dwell, O inhabitants of Dedan." Dedan, a trading people to the southeast, was told to get away and hide, "for I have brought the disaster of Esau upon him."

49:9-11 *If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? If thieves* ***came*** *in the night, they would destroy* ***only*** *their sufficiency. For I, I have stripped Esau bare; I have uncovered his hiding places, and he will not be able to hide himself; his seed has been devastated, and his brothers and his neighbors, and he is no more. Leave your fatherless; I, I will keep* ***them*** *alive; and your widows, let them trust in Me.*

Much of Edom's message is shared with the little book of Obadiah (Obadiah 1-9). "If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings?" Even thieves take only what they want and leave the rest. But God says, "I, I have stripped Esau bare; I have uncovered his hiding places." Nothing would be left.

Then, right in the middle of the judgment, comes this: "Leave your fatherless; I, I will keep them alive; and your widows, let them trust in Me."

Do not miss this verse. God was bringing judgment on Edom, and yet He stops to speak about the orphans and widows, the people who could not help themselves. He would care for them. Scripture calls God "A father of the fatherless and a judge of widows" (Psalm 68:5). Even in His judgment, God sees the weak. If you feel alone and unprotected, you can bring that to Him. He invites the helpless to trust in Him.

49:12-13 *For thus says the LORD: Look, those whose judgment was not to drink the cup will certainly drink **it**; and are you the one who will be altogether exempt from punishment? You will not be exempt from punishment, for you will certainly drink **it**. For by Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, that Bozrah will become a horror, a reproach, a ruin, and a curse; and all her cities will become everlasting ruins.*

"Look, those whose judgment was not to drink the cup will certainly drink it." The cup is God's wrath (25:15-29). Who are "those whose judgment was not to drink the cup"? Most likely God means His own people Judah. If God did not spare Judah, His covenant people, how could Edom think it would be "altogether exempt from punishment"? Peter says something similar: judgment begins with the house of God, and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel (1 Peter 4:17)?

"For by Myself I have sworn." There is no one greater to swear by. Bozrah, a chief city of Edom, would become "a horror, a reproach, a ruin, and a curse," and its cities "everlasting ruins."

49:14-16 *I have heard a report from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations: 'Gather together and come against her, and rise up for battle!' For look, I have made you small among the nations, despised among mankind. Your terribleness has deceived you, the arrogance of your heart, O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill; though you make your nest high like the eagle, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.*

"I have heard a report from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations." God was calling the nations to war against Edom.

"Your terribleness has deceived you, the arrogance of your heart, O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock." Edom's cities were built high in the cliffs, with steep, narrow passes. They felt that no army could reach them. "Though you make your nest high like the eagle, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD."

Pride deceives us. It makes us think we are safe when we are not. Edom's mountains could keep out armies, but they could not keep out God. Is there a place in your life where you feel too strong or too high to need Him? That is the most dangerous place to be.

49:17-18 *And Edom will become a horror; everyone who passes by her will be appalled and will hiss at all her wounds. Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and her neighbors, says the LORD, no man will dwell there, and no son of man will sojourn in her.*

"Edom will become a horror; everyone who passes by her will be appalled." It would be "Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah," a place where no one lives.

This came true. Edom was overrun in the years after Jerusalem fell, and by Malachi's day, about 430 B.C., God could say He had made Esau's "mountains a waste" (Malachi 1:3). Some Edomites moved west into southern Judah and were later called Idumeans. Herod the Great came from them. After the Roman wars of the first century A.D., they vanish from history.

49:19-22 *Look, like a lion he will go up from the thicket of the Jordan to the ever-flowing pasture; for in a moment I will make him run from her; and whoever is chosen, I will appoint over her. For who **is** like Me? And who will summon Me? And who **is** this shepherd who will stand before Me? Therefore hear the counsel of the LORD which He has counseled against Edom, and His purposes which He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: surely the little ones of the flock will drag them away; surely he will make their pasture desolate over them. From the sound of their fall the earth has shaken; **there is** an outcry; at the Red Sea its sound has been heard. Look, like the eagle he will go up and swoop, and he will spread his wings over Bozrah; and the heart of the mighty men of Edom will be in that day like the heart of a woman in labor."*

"Look, like a lion he will go up from the thicket of the Jordan." The thick brush along the Jordan River was home to lions in those days (12:5). The conqueror would come up like a lion and scatter Edom's flock.

"For who is like Me? And who will summon Me? And who is this shepherd who will stand before Me?" No ruler, no shepherd of any nation, can stand against God or call Him to court.

"The little ones of the flock will drag them away." Even the weakest of the enemy would be enough. "From the sound of their fall the earth has shaken," and the cry would be heard as far as the Red Sea.

Then the eagle again, "he will spread his wings over Bozrah," as he did over Moab (48:40). Edom's warriors would be "like the heart of a woman in labor."

Notice that Edom gets no promise of restoration. Egypt, Moab, Ammon and Elam do, but not Edom. Obadiah ends the same way: Edom would be cut off forever (Obadiah 10, 18), and the kingdom would belong to the LORD (Obadiah 21). Edom's hatred of its brother Jacob ran so deep, and so long, that it stands in Scripture as a picture of those who set themselves against God's people to the end. Scripture does not tell us every reason for the difference, and I will not guess beyond what it says.

49:23-27 *Of Damascus. "Hamath has been put to shame, and Arpad, for they have heard a bad report; they have melted away; in the sea **there is** anxiety; it is not able to be quiet. Damascus has grown slack; she has turned to flee, and panic has taken hold **of her**; distress and pains have seized her, like a woman giving birth. How has the city of praise not been forsaken, the town of my joy! Therefore her young men will fall in her open places, and all the men of war will be silenced in that day, declares the LORD of armies. And I will kindle a fire on the wall of Damascus, and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad."*

"Of Damascus." Damascus was the capital of Aram, the land we call Syria. Hamath and Arpad were cities to its north. When they heard the bad news, "they have melted away." The people of Damascus would panic, "like a woman giving birth."

"How has the city of praise not been forsaken, the town of my joy!" This may be the voice of a citizen of Damascus, mourning the city he loved.

"And I will kindle a fire on the wall of Damascus, and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad." Amos used almost the same words (Amos 1:4). Ben-hadad was the name of several kings of Damascus, enemies of Israel in the days of Ahab and Elisha (1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 6:24).

Damascus had already been conquered by Assyria in 732 B.C. (2 Kings 16:9), but it rose again. Now it would fall to Babylon. There is no promise of restoration in this short message, but Damascus still stands today, one of the oldest lived-in cities in the world. And it was on the road to Damascus that the risen Jesus met Saul of Tarsus and changed his life (Acts 9:3-6).

49:28-29 *Of Kedar and of the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon struck. Thus says the LORD: "Arise, go up against Kedar, and devastate the sons of the east. Their tents and their flocks they will take; their tent curtains and all their equipment and their camels they will carry off for themselves; and they will call out against them, 'Terror **is** from all around!'*

"Of Kedar and of the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon struck." Kedar was an Arab tribe descended from Ishmael (Genesis 25:13). They were desert people who lived in black goat-hair tents and raised camels and flocks (Song of Songs 1:5; Isaiah 21:16-17). This Hazor is not the old Canaanite city in Galilee. Here the name seems to mean the unwalled Arab settlements of the desert.

"Arise, go up against Kedar, and devastate the sons of the east." Their tents, flocks, camels and goods would be carried off. The cry would go up, "Terror is from all around!" The Babylonian records tell of a raid by Nebuchadnezzar against the Arabs about 599 B.C.

49:30-33 *Flee, wander far away, go deep to dwell, O inhabitants of Hazor, declares the LORD; for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has counseled counsel against you, and he has purposed a purpose against you. Arise, go up against a nation at ease, which dwells in security, declares the LORD; it has no doors and no bar; they dwell alone. And their camels will become spoil, and the multitude of their livestock plunder; and I will scatter to every wind those who are clipped at the corner **of the hair**, and from all its sides I will bring their disaster, declares the LORD. And Hazor will become a habitation of jackals, a desolation forever; no man will dwell there, and no son of man will sojourn in her."*

"Flee, wander far away, go deep to dwell, O inhabitants of Hazor." Nebuchadnezzar "has counseled counsel against you." He had a plan.

"Arise, go up against a nation at ease, which dwells in security." These people had "no doors and no bar; they dwell alone." They had no city walls because they thought no one would bother to attack them. They were far away and poor by the world's standards. But distance does not put anyone out of God's reach.

"Those who are clipped at the corner of the hair" describes a custom of some desert tribes who trimmed the hair at the temples (9:26; 25:23). They would be scattered "to every wind." Hazor would become "a habitation of jackals, a desolation forever."

49:34-36 *That which came **as** the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: Look, I am about to break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might. And I will bring upon Elam four winds from the four ends of the heavens, and I will scatter them to all these winds; and there will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not come.*

The last message in the chapter is dated "at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah," about 597 B.C. Elam was a land far to the east of Babylon, in the southwest of what is now Iran. Its chief city was Susa, where Daniel once saw a vision (Daniel 8:2) and where Nehemiah and Esther later lived (Nehemiah 1:1; Esther 1:2).

"Look, I am about to break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might." Elam was known for its bowmen (Isaiah 22:6). God would break the very thing they were best at.

"And I will bring upon Elam four winds from the four ends of the heavens." Elam's people would be scattered so widely that "there will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not come."

49:37-38 *And I will shatter Elam before their enemies and before those who seek their life; and I will bring calamity upon them, the burning of My anger, declares the LORD; and I will send the sword after them until I have made an end of them. And I will set My throne in Elam, and I will destroy from there king and officials, declares the LORD.*

"I will bring calamity upon them, the burning of My anger." God would send the sword after them "until I have made an end of them."

"And I will set My throne in Elam, and I will destroy from there king and officials." God would show that He, not Elam's kings, rules there. Elam was later swallowed up by the Persian Empire, and Susa became a Persian royal city. God's throne is over every land, even those that do not know Him yet.

49:39 *And it will be at the end of the days **that** I will turn back the captivity of Elam, declares the LORD."*

"And it will be at the end of the days that I will turn back the captivity of Elam, declares the LORD."

Here is the last promise of restoration in these chapters, given to a far-off nation that never troubled Israel the way Moab and Edom did. It shows that God's purposes reach to the ends of the earth.

We get a small taste of it in the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached and the Holy Spirit came, the crowd in Jerusalem included "Parthians and Medes and Elamites" (Acts 2:9). People from Elam heard the gospel in their own language. But Jeremiah says the full turning back comes "at the end of the days," and I believe that points to the kingdom of the Messiah, when He reigns over all the earth and the nations come to Him.

Summary

Jeremiah 49 brings God's word to five nations. Ammon had taken Gad's land, and its god Milcom would go into exile, but afterward God would turn back Ammon's captivity. Edom, proud of its wisdom in Teman and its cities high in the rocks, would be stripped bare and brought down like an eagle from its nest, and would lie like Sodom and Gomorrah, yet God promised to keep its orphans alive and invited its widows to trust Him. Damascus would melt with fear, and fire would consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad. Kedar and Hazor, the desert peoples who lived without walls, would lose their tents and camels to Nebuchadnezzar. Elam, far to the east, would have its bow broken and be scattered to the four winds, but in the latter days God would turn back the captivity of Elam.

Study Questions

1. What had Ammon done to the land of Gad? (49:1)

2. What promise does God give Ammon after its judgment? (49:6)

3. What was Teman known for, and why did it fail Edom? (49:7)

4. What did God say about Edom's orphans and widows? (49:11)

5. Why did Edom feel safe, and what did God say to that? (49:16)

6. Why did Kedar and Hazor think no one would attack them? (49:31)

7. What would God break in Elam, and what would He set there? (49:35, 38)

8. When will God turn back the captivity of Elam? (49:39; Acts 2:9)

9. Edom felt safe in its high places, and Kedar felt safe because it was far away. Where are you tempted to feel safe without God?

10. In the middle of judgment, God stopped to care for orphans and widows (49:11). Who are the fatherless and widows around you, and how can you show them God's care?

Jeremiah 50: Against Babylon

Scripture

50:1-10 The word which the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of ***the*** Chaldeans, by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet: Declare among the nations, and proclaim, and lift up a standard; proclaim, do not hide ***it***; say, "Babylon has been captured; Bel has been put to shame; Marduk has been shattered; her images have been put to shame; her idols have been shattered." For a nation has come up against her from ***the*** north; it will make her land into a horror, and ***there*** will not be an inhabitant in it; from man even to beast they have wandered off, they have gone. In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the sons of Israel will come, they and the sons of Judah together; going on and weeping they will go, and the LORD their God they will seek. ***For*** Zion they will ask, ***with*** their faces ***toward*** the way hither: "Come!" And they will join themselves to the LORD ***in*** an everlasting covenant ***that*** will not be forgotten. My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to wander; ***on*** the mountains they have turned them away; from mountain to hill they have gone; they have forgotten their resting place. All who found them have devoured them; and their adversaries have said, "We are not guilty, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of righteousness, and the hope of their fathers, the LORD." Wander away from the midst of Babylon, and from the land of ***the*** Chaldeans go out, and be like male goats before the flock. For look, I am about to stir up and bring up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from a land of ***the*** north; and they will set themselves in array against her; from there she will be captured. Its arrows ***are*** like a skillful mighty man ***who*** does not return empty. And ***the*** Chaldeans will become spoil; all who spoil her will be satisfied, declares the LORD.

50:11-20 Because you rejoice, because you exult, O plunderers of My inheritance, because you skip about like a heifer threshing, and you neigh like the mighty ***horses***, your mother has been greatly ashamed; she who bore you has been abashed. Look, the last of the nations ***is*** a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert plain. Because of the wrath of the LORD she will not be inhabited, and she will be a desolation, all of her; everyone who passes by Babylon will be appalled and will hiss because of all her wounds. Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all ***you*** who bend a bow; shoot at her; do not spare an arrow, for she has sinned against the LORD. Shout against her all around; she has given her hand; her towers have fallen; her walls have been torn down. For it ***is*** the vengeance of the LORD; take vengeance on her; just as she has done, do to her. Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who wields a sickle at the time of harvest; from before the sword of the oppressor each one will turn to his people, and each one will flee to his land. Israel ***is*** a scattered sheep; lions have driven ***him*** away. The first, the king of Assyria, devoured him; and this last, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, has gnawed his bones. Therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am about to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria. And I will bring Israel back to his pasture, and he will graze ***on*** the Carmel and the Bashan, and in the hill country of Ephraim and the Gilead his soul will be satisfied. In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the iniquity of Israel will be sought, and ***there*** will be none, and the sins of Judah, and they will not be found; for I will forgive those whom I leave as a remnant."

50:21-32 Against the land of Merathaim, go up against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod; slay and devote ***them*** to destruction after them, declares the LORD, and do according to all that I have commanded you. A sound of battle ***is*** in the land, and great destruction. How the hammer of all the earth has been cut down and broken! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! I set a snare for you, and you were also captured, O Babylon, and you yourself did not know; you were found and also seized, because you engaged in strife against the LORD. The LORD has opened His treasury, and He has brought out the weapons of His indignation; for it ***is*** a work for the Lord GOD of armies in the land of ***the*** Chaldeans. Come against her from ***the*** end; open her granaries; pile her up like heaps, and devote her to destruction; let ***there*** not be a remnant for her. Slay all her young bulls; let them go down to the slaughter. Woe on them! For their day has come, the time of their punishment. The sound of fugitives and escapees from the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of His temple! Summon archers against Babylon, all who bend a bow; encamp against her all around; let ***there*** not be an escape for her; repay her according to her deed; according to all that she has done, do to her; for she has acted proudly against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel. Therefore her young men will fall in her open places, and all her men of war will be silenced in that day, declares the LORD. Look, I ***am*** against you, O arrogance, declares the Lord GOD of armies, for your day has come, the time ***when*** I will punish you. And arrogance will stumble and fall, and ***there*** will be none to raise him up; and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it will devour all around him.

50:33-46 Thus says the LORD of armies: "The sons of Israel ***are*** oppressed, and the sons of Judah together; and all their captors have held fast to them; they have refused to let them go." Their Redeemer ***is*** strong; the LORD of armies ***is*** His name; He will surely plead their case, so as to give rest to the earth and to bring disquiet to the inhabitants of Babylon. A sword against the Chaldeans, declares the LORD, and against the inhabitants of Babylon, and against her officials, and against her wise ***ones***! A sword against the empty talkers, and they will become fools! A sword against her mighty men, and they will be shattered! A sword against his horses and against his chariotry, and against all the mixed people who ***are*** in her midst, and they will become women! A sword against her treasures, and they will be plundered! A drought against her waters, and they will become dry! For it ***is*** a land of carved images, and in the terrors they act like madmen. Therefore desert creatures will dwell with hyenas, and daughters of the ostrich will dwell in her; and she will not be inhabited again forever, and she will not be settled until generation and generation. Like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and her neighbors, declares the LORD, no man will dwell there, and no son of man will sojourn in her. Look, a people is coming from ***the*** north, and a great nation, and many kings will be stirred up from the remotest parts of the earth. Bow and javelin they will grasp; they ***are*** cruel, and they will not have compassion; their sound ***is*** like the sea ***that*** roars, and on horses they will ride, set in array like a man for the battle against you, O daughter of Babylon. The king of Babylon has heard the report of them, and his hands have gone limp; distress has seized him, anguish like the ***woman*** giving birth. Look, like a lion he will go up from the thicket of the Jordan to the ever-flowing pasture; for in a moment I will make them run from her; and whoever is chosen, I will appoint over her. For who ***is*** like Me? And who will summon Me? And who ***is*** this shepherd who will stand before Me? Therefore hear the counsel of the LORD which He has counseled against Babylon, and His purposes which He has purposed against the land of ***the*** Chaldeans: surely the little ones of the

flock will drag them away; surely he will make ***their*** pasture desolate over them. At the sound of "Babylon has been captured!" the earth has shaken, and an outcry among the nations has been heard.

Preview

For most of his life Jeremiah told Judah to submit to Babylon. God had given Nebuchadnezzar the nations for seventy years, and fighting him was fighting God (27:6-8). Now, in chapters 50 and 51, the longest of the words against the nations, God turns to Babylon itself. The hammer of the whole earth would be broken. A nation from the north would come against her, her gods Bel and Marduk would be shamed, and her land would become a desert. At the same time, the people of Israel and Judah would come out of her, weeping and seeking the LORD, and join themselves to Him in an everlasting covenant.

This chapter is about the end of the proud and the return of the forgiven. Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C., just as God said, but the chapter reaches further than that night, to the final Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18 and to a day when Israel's sin will be searched for and not found. As we read, we should ask whether we are trusting in a world that God has said will fall, and whether we have come home to the Redeemer who is strong.

Study

50:1-3 *The word which the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of **the** Chaldeans, by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet: Declare among the nations, and proclaim, and lift up a standard; proclaim, do not hide **it**; say, "Babylon has been captured; Bel has been put to shame; Marduk has been shattered; her images have been put to shame; her idols have been shattered." For a nation has come up against her from **the** north; it will make her land into a horror, and **there** will not be an inhabitant in it; from man even to beast they have wandered off, they have gone.*

"The word which the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet." The Chaldeans were the people who ruled Babylon in Jeremiah's day (see the Background).

"Declare among the nations." The news would be shouted from nation to nation: "Babylon has been captured; Bel has been put to shame; Marduk has been shattered." Marduk was the chief god of Babylon. Bel means lord, and it was one of his titles. Babylon thought its god had made it great. The true God would shame him.

"For a nation has come up against her from the north." All through Jeremiah, the enemy from the north was Babylon (1:14; 4:6). Now Babylon would face its own enemy from the north. The Medes, from the mountains north and east of Babylon, joined with the Persians under Cyrus, and they took the city in 539 B.C. (Daniel 5:30-31).

50:4-5 *In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the sons of Israel will come, they and the sons of Judah together; going on and weeping they will go, and the LORD their God they will seek.* ***For*** *Zion they will ask,* ***with*** *their faces* ***toward*** *the way hither: "Come!" And they will join themselves to the LORD* ***in*** *an everlasting covenant* ***that*** *will not be forgotten.*

Here is the heart of the chapter. "In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the sons of Israel will come, they and the sons of Judah together; going on and weeping they will go, and the LORD their God they will seek."

First, Israel and Judah come "together." The kingdom had been split since about 930 B.C. God says they will come back as one people (Ezekiel 37:15-22).

Second, they come weeping. These are tears of repentance. They are seeking God, not only going home.

Third, "they will join themselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten." This is the new covenant God promised in 31:31-34 and 32:40.

When was this fulfilled? In part, when the exiles came home after Cyrus' decree in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1). But only a remnant came, mostly from Judah, and the nation did not turn to the LORD with all its heart. The full answer is still ahead. I believe it comes in the last days, when God gathers Israel from every land and pours out on them "a spirit of grace and supplications," and they look on Him whom they pierced and mourn (Zechariah 12:10). Then, as Paul says, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). God has not finished with Israel.

50:6-7 *My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to wander;* ***on*** *the mountains they have turned them away; from mountain to hill they have gone; they have forgotten their resting place. All who found them have devoured them; and their adversaries have said, "We are not guilty, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of righteousness, and the hope of their fathers, the LORD."*

"My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have caused them to wander." The shepherds were Judah's kings, priests and false prophets (23:1-2). They led the people up into the mountains, the high places where idols were worshiped, and the sheep "have forgotten their resting place," which was God Himself.

Their enemies said, "We are not guilty, because they have sinned against the LORD." Judah had sinned, but Babylon did not destroy Judah to serve God. It did it out of greed and cruelty, and it would answer for that. God can use a nation as His tool and still judge it for its own evil (Isaiah 10:5-12).

Jesus is "the good shepherd" (John 10:11), who leads His lost sheep home.

50:8-10 *Wander away from the midst of Babylon, and from the land of **the** Chaldeans go out, and be like male goats before the flock. For look, I am about to stir up and bring up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from a land of **the** north; and they will set themselves in array against her; from there she will be captured. Its arrows **are** like a skillful mighty man **who** does not return empty. And **the** Chaldeans will become spoil; all who spoil her will be satisfied, declares the LORD.*

"Wander away from the midst of Babylon, and from the land of the Chaldeans go out, and be like male goats before the flock." The male goats walked out in front when a flock was moved. God's people were to be the first ones out.

God would bring "an assembly of great nations from a land of the north," and the Chaldeans would become spoil.

50:11-13 *Because you rejoice, because you exult, O plunderers of My inheritance, because you skip about like a heifer threshing, and you neigh like the mighty **horses**, your mother has been greatly ashamed; she who bore you has been abashed. Look, the last of the nations **is** a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert plain. Because of the wrath of the LORD she will not be inhabited, and she will be a desolation, all of her; everyone who passes by Babylon will be appalled and will hiss because of all her wounds.*

"Because you rejoice, because you exult, O plunderers of My inheritance." Babylon had plundered God's people and danced over it "like a heifer threshing." A threshing heifer ate as she worked and grew fat and frisky.

"Your mother has been greatly ashamed." The mother is the land or city of Babylon itself. The great empire would become "the last of the nations," a wilderness and "a dry land." "Everyone who passes by Babylon will be appalled and will hiss because of all her wounds." Jerusalem had heard the same words (19:8).

50:14-16 *Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all **you** who bend a bow; shoot at her; do not spare an arrow, for she has sinned against the LORD. Shout against her all around; she has given her hand; her towers have fallen; her walls have been torn down. For it **is** the vengeance of the LORD; take vengeance on her; just as she has done, do to her. Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who wields a sickle at the time of harvest; from before the sword of the oppressor each one will turn to his people, and each one will flee to his land.*

"Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all you who bend a bow." The armies are called to surround the city. "Do not spare an arrow, for she has sinned against the LORD."

"For it is the vengeance of the LORD; take vengeance on her; just as she has done, do to her." This is a principle we see all through Scripture. God repays nations in kind.

"Cut off the sower from Babylon." Even the farmers would be gone.

50:17-18 *Israel **is** a scattered sheep; lions have driven **him** away. The first, the king of Assyria, devoured him; and this last, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, has gnawed his bones. Therefore thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: "Look, I am about to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria.*

"Israel is a scattered sheep; lions have driven him away. The first, the king of Assyria, devoured him; and this last, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, has gnawed his bones."

Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. Babylon finished the job on Judah. First one lion, then another. But God says, "Look, I am about to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria." Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., and Babylon's turn would come too. No lion is stronger than the Shepherd of Israel.

50:19-20 *And I will bring Israel back to his pasture, and he will graze **on** the Carmel and the Bashan, and in the hill country of Ephraim and the Gilead his soul will be satisfied. In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the iniquity of Israel will be sought, and **there** will be none, and the sins of Judah, and they will not be found; for I will forgive those whom I leave as a remnant."*

"And I will bring Israel back to his pasture." Carmel, Bashan, Ephraim and Gilead were some of the richest grazing lands in Israel, both west and east of the Jordan. God would bring His sheep back to all of it, and "his soul will be satisfied."

Then comes one of the most beautiful promises in Jeremiah. "In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the iniquity of Israel will be sought, and there will be none, and the sins of Judah, and they will not be found; for I will forgive those whom I leave as a remnant."

Think about that. Someone searches for Israel's sins, and they cannot be found. The sins were great, and this whole book lists them. They cannot be found because God has forgiven them. This is the same promise as the new covenant: "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will not remember again" (31:34).

How can a holy God do that? Only through a sacrifice that truly takes sin away. The animal sacrifices could not do it (Hebrews 10:4). Jesus did. He poured out His blood for the new covenant (Luke 22:20), and everyone who trusts in Him is forgiven completely. "As the east is far from the west, He has removed our transgressions far from us" (Psalm 103:12).

The "remnant" are those God preserves and brings back. It is the people of Israel who turn to Him. I believe this promise will be fulfilled for the nation of Israel in the last days (Romans 11:26-27). And the same forgiveness is offered right now to every person, Jew or Gentile, who comes to God through Christ. If you have been carrying guilt for something you did long ago, hear this verse. When God forgives, He does not keep a file.

50:21-24 *Against the land of Merathaim, go up against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod; slay and devote **them** to destruction after them, declares the LORD, and do according to all that I have commanded you. A sound of battle **is** in the land, and great destruction. How the hammer of all the earth has been cut down and broken! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! I set a snare for you, and you were also captured, O Babylon, and you yourself did not know; you were found and also seized, because you engaged in strife against the LORD.*

"Against the land of Merathaim, go up against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod." These names are wordplays. Merathaim was a name for a region of southern Babylonia, and in Hebrew it sounds like double rebellion. Pekod was a people of eastern Babylonia (Ezekiel 23:23), and the name sounds like punishment.

"Slay and devote them to destruction." To devote to destruction (the Hebrew word herem) was to hand something over to God completely in judgment. God was turning Babylon over to judgment.

"How the hammer of all the earth has been cut down and broken!" Babylon had smashed nations like a blacksmith's hammer. Now the hammer itself was broken. "I set a snare for you, and you were also captured, O Babylon, and you yourself did not know." Daniel 5 tells of that night. Belshazzar was feasting, drinking from the cups taken from God's temple, when the city fell.

50:25-28 *The LORD has opened His treasury, and He has brought out the weapons of His indignation; for it **is** a work for the Lord GOD of armies in the land of **the** Chaldeans. Come against her from **the** end; open her granaries; pile her up like heaps, and devote her to destruction; let **there** not be a remnant for her. Slay all her young bulls; let them go down to the slaughter. Woe on them! For their day has come, the time of their punishment. The sound of fugitives and escapees from the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of His temple!*

"The LORD has opened His treasury, and He has brought out the weapons of His indignation." This time His weapons were the armies of the Medes and Persians (51:11).

"Open her granaries; pile her up like heaps." The city's stored riches would be emptied. "Slay all her young bulls," her young warriors. "For their day has come, the time of their punishment."

"The sound of fugitives and escapees from the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of His temple!" Babylon had burned God's house in Jerusalem (52:13). God had not forgotten it.

50:29-32 *Summon archers against Babylon, all who bend a bow; encamp against her all around; let **there** not be an escape for her; repay her according to her deed; according to all that she has done, do to her; for she has acted proudly against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel. Therefore her young men will fall in her open places, and all her men of war will be silenced in that day, declares the LORD. Look, I **am** against you, O arrogance, declares the Lord GOD of armies, for your day has come, the time **when** I will punish you. And arrogance will stumble and fall, and **there** will be none to raise him up; and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it will devour all around him.*

"Repay her according to her deed; according to all that she has done, do to her; for she has acted proudly against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel." Babylon's sin was pride against God Himself. Nebuchadnezzar learned that lesson personally when God humbled him (Daniel 4:30-37). Belshazzar, who ruled Babylon on the night it fell, did not learn it (Daniel 5:22-23).

"Look, I am against you, O arrogance." God calls Babylon by the name of its sin: Arrogance. "And arrogance will stumble and fall, and there will be none to raise him up." Pride always falls in the end.

50:33-34 *Thus says the LORD of armies: "The sons of Israel **are** oppressed, and the sons of Judah together; and all their captors have held fast to them; they have refused to let them go." Their Redeemer **is** strong; the LORD of armies **is** His name; He will surely plead their case, so as to give rest to the earth and to bring disquiet to the inhabitants of Babylon.*

"The sons of Israel are oppressed, and the sons of Judah together; and all their captors have held fast to them; they have refused to let them go." It sounds like Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1-2).

But "Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of armies is His name; He will surely plead their case." The Redeemer, go'el in Hebrew, was the close relative who stepped in to buy back a family member who had been sold or to rescue him from trouble (Leviticus 25:47-49; Ruth 4). God is Israel's next of kin, and He would plead their case and win.

Jesus is the Redeemer for all who trust Him. He bought us back, "not with perishable things, silver or gold," but with His own precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). When it feels like the things that hold you will never let go, remember that your Redeemer is strong.

50:35-38 *A sword against the Chaldeans, declares the LORD, and against the inhabitants of Babylon, and against her officials, and against her wise **ones**! A sword against the empty talkers, and they will become fools! A sword against her mighty men, and they will be shattered! A sword against his horses and against his chariotry, and against all the mixed people who **are** in her midst, and they will become women! A sword against her treasures, and they will be plundered! A drought against her waters, and they will become dry! For it **is** a land of carved images, and in the terrors they act like madmen.*

This is the song of the sword. "A sword against the Chaldeans." The sword comes against every part of her, even her "empty talkers," the fortune-tellers of Babylon. Her famous wise men could not save her (Daniel 2:2).

"A drought against her waters, and they will become dry!" Babylon depended on the Euphrates River and its canals.

"For it is a land of carved images, and in the terrors they act like madmen." This is the root of it all: idols. A nation that worships the work of its own hands will end up acting like a madman.

50:39-40 *Therefore desert creatures will dwell with hyenas, and daughters of the ostrich will dwell in her; and she will not be inhabited again forever, and she will not be settled until generation and generation. Like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and her neighbors, declares the LORD, no man will dwell there, and no son of man will sojourn in her.*

"Therefore desert creatures will dwell with hyenas, and daughters of the ostrich will dwell in her; and she will not be inhabited again forever." It would be "Like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah," the same words Isaiah used (Isaiah 13:19-20).

Was this fulfilled in 539 B.C.? Not fully. Cyrus took Babylon with little fighting and left the city standing. It went on as a city under the Persians and Greeks, and declined slowly over the centuries until it was a ruin. It was never destroyed in a single sudden overthrow like Sodom.

So I believe these words reach beyond 539 B.C. to the Babylon of the last days. In Revelation 17 and 18, John sees "Babylon the Great" (Revelation 17:5), the proud city and system that rules the kings of the earth during the Tribulation, the seven years of judgment that come after Christ takes His church to Himself and before He returns to reign. That Babylon falls "in one hour" (Revelation 18:10), and Revelation uses many of Jeremiah's words to describe it. Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled in part when Cyrus came, and it will be fulfilled completely when God judges the final Babylon.

50:41-43 *Look, a people is coming from **the** north, and a great nation, and many kings will be stirred up from the remotest parts of the earth. Bow and javelin they will grasp; they **are** cruel, and they will not have compassion; their sound **is** like the sea **that** roars, and on horses they will ride, set in array like a man for the battle against you, O daughter of Babylon. The king of Babylon has heard the report of them, and his hands have gone limp; distress has seized him, anguish like the **woman** giving birth.*

"Look, a people is coming from the north, and a great nation." These words were first spoken about Babylon coming against Jerusalem (6:22-24). Now, almost line for line, they describe the nation coming against Babylon. "They are cruel, and they will not have compassion." Babylon had shown no mercy, and none would be shown to her.

"The king of Babylon has heard the report of them, and his hands have gone limp." Daniel 5:6 describes Belshazzar's terror when he saw the handwriting on the wall: his face went pale and his knees knocked together.

50:44-46 *Look, like a lion he will go up from the thicket of the Jordan to the ever-flowing pasture; for in a moment I will make them run from her; and whoever is chosen, I will appoint over her. For who **is** like Me? And who will summon Me? And who **is** this shepherd who will stand before Me? Therefore hear the counsel of the LORD which He has counseled against Babylon, and His purposes which He has purposed against the land of **the** Chaldeans: surely the little ones of the flock will drag them away; surely he will make **their** pasture desolate over them. At the sound of "Babylon has been captured!" the earth has shaken, and an outcry among the nations has been heard.*

Verses 44 to 46 repeat the words spoken against Edom (49:19-21), now aimed at Babylon. The conqueror comes up "like a lion" from the thicket of the Jordan. "For who is like Me? And who will summon Me? And who is this shepherd who will stand before Me?"

No king can stand before God. "At the sound of" Babylon's capture "the earth has shaken, and an outcry among the nations has been heard."

The lesson for us is plain. Every empire that sets itself up against God will fall, no matter how strong it looks. We should not put our hope in any of them. Our hope is in the King whose kingdom will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

Summary

Jeremiah 50 is God's word against Babylon. A nation from the north would capture the city and shame Bel and Marduk. In those days Israel and Judah would come together, weeping and seeking the LORD, and join themselves to Him in an everlasting covenant. Babylon had gnawed Israel's bones after Assyria devoured him, and God would punish Babylon as He punished Assyria, bring Israel back to its pastures, and forgive the remnant so fully that their sins would be searched for and not found. The hammer of all the earth would be broken for its pride and for burning God's temple. Israel's Redeemer is strong. A sword would come against every part of Babylon, a land of idols, until it lay like Sodom and Gomorrah. Babylon fell in 539 B.C., and the prophecy reaches forward to the final Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18.

Study Questions

1. Which gods of Babylon would be put to shame? (50:2)

2. How would Israel and Judah come back, and what would they seek? (50:4-5)

3. Who caused God's people to wander like lost sheep? (50:6)

4. What two kings are compared to lions, and what did each do? (50:17)

5. What will happen when someone searches for Israel's sins? Why? (50:20; 31:34)

6. What is a redeemer, and what does God promise as Israel's Redeemer? (50:34)

7. What was the root sin of Babylon, named in verses 29 to 32 and 38? (50:29, 31-32, 38)

8. How was this prophecy fulfilled in 539 B.C., and what part points to Revelation 17 and 18? (50:39-40; Revelation 18:10)

9. God promises that when He forgives, the sins will not be found (50:20). Is there something you have confessed to God but still carry? What does this verse say to you?

10. Babylon looked like it would last forever. What powers or systems in our world are you tempted to trust or fear, and how does this chapter change that?

Jeremiah 51: The Fall of Babylon

Scripture

51:1-14 Thus says the LORD: Look, I am about to stir up against Babylon and against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai a destroying wind. And I will send strangers to Babylon, and they will winnow her, and they will empty her land; for they will be against her from all around in the day of calamity. Let not the one who bends bend his bow, and let him not lift himself up in his armor; and do not spare her young men; devote all her army to destruction. And the slain will fall in the land of ***the*** Chaldeans, and those pierced through in her streets. For Israel and Judah ***are*** not forsaken by his God, by the LORD of armies; for their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel. Flee from the midst of Babylon, and save each one his life; do not be destroyed in her iniquity; for it ***is*** a time of vengeance for the LORD; He is about to repay a recompense to her. Babylon ***was*** a cup of gold in the hand of the LORD, making all the earth drunk; from her wine nations have drunk; therefore nations act like madmen. Suddenly Babylon has fallen, and she has been broken; wail over her; take balm for her pain; perhaps she will be healed. "We healed Babylon, and she was not healed; leave her, and let us go each one to his land; for her judgment has reached to the heavens, and it has been lifted up to the clouds. The LORD has brought forth our righteousnesses; come, and let us recount in Zion the work of the LORD our God." Sharpen the arrows; fill the shields; the LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of Media, for His purpose against Babylon, to destroy her; for it ***is*** the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of His temple. Against the walls of Babylon lift up a standard; strengthen the watch; station watchmen; prepare those lying in ambush; for the LORD has both purposed and done that which He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. O you who dwell on many waters, great in treasures, your end has come, the cubit of your cutting off. The LORD of armies has sworn by Himself: "Surely I will fill you ***with*** men like the locust, and they will sing a shout over you."

51:15-26 ***He is*** the Maker of the earth by His power, the Establisher of the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens. At the sound of His giving forth, ***there is*** a roar of waters in the heavens; and He makes mists go up from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and He brings out wind from His storehouses. Every man is stupid, without knowledge; every refiner has been put to shame by the carved image, for his molten image ***is*** falsehood, and ***there is*** no breath in them. They ***are*** vanity, a work of mockeries; at the time of their punishment they will perish. Not like these ***is*** the Portion of Jacob, for He ***is*** the Former of everything, and the tribe of His inheritance; the LORD of armies ***is*** His name. You ***are*** My war club, weapons of war; and with you I smash nations, and with you I destroy kingdoms; and with you I smash horse and its rider, and with you I smash chariot and its rider; and with you I smash man and woman, and with you I smash old ***man*** and youth, and with you I smash young man and virgin; and with you I smash shepherd and his flock, and with you I smash farmer and his team, and with you I smash governors and prefects. And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of the Chaldeans for all their evil which they have done in Zion before your eyes, declares the LORD. Look, I ***am*** against you, O destroying mountain, declares the LORD, which destroys all the earth; and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will roll you down from

the crags, and I will make you a mountain of burning. And they will not take from you a stone for a corner, and a stone for foundations, for you will be everlasting desolations, declares the LORD.

51:27-44 Lift up a standard in the land; blow a trumpet among the nations; consecrate nations against her; summon against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz; appoint an official against her; bring up horses like bristly locusts. Consecrate nations against her: the kings of Media, her governors and all her prefects, and all the land of his dominion. And the land has quaked and writhed, for the plans of the LORD have stood against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a horror without inhabitant. The mighty men of Babylon have ceased to fight; they have remained in the strongholds; their might has dried up; they have become women; they have set her dwellings on fire; her bars have been broken. Runner runs to meet runner, and announcer to meet announcer, to announce to the king of Babylon that his city has been captured from ***the*** end, and the fords have been seized, and the reed marshes they have burned with fire, and the men of war are terrified. For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon ***is*** like a threshing floor at the time ***when*** it is trodden; yet a little ***while***, and the time of the harvest will come for her. "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me; he has confused me; he has set me down ***as*** an empty vessel; he has swallowed me like the sea monster; he has filled his belly with my delicacies; he has rinsed me out." "My violence and my flesh ***be*** upon Babylon," the inhabitant of Zion will say; and "My blood ***be*** upon the inhabitants of the Chaldeans," Jerusalem will say. Therefore thus says the LORD: Look, I am about to plead your case, and I will avenge your vengeance; and I will dry up her sea, and I will make her spring dry. And Babylon will become heaps, a habitation of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant. Together like young lions they will roar; they will growl like the cubs of lions. When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunk, so that they may exult, and they will sleep an everlasting sleep and not wake up, declares the LORD. I will bring them down like lambs to slaughter, like rams with male goats. How Sheshach has been captured, and the praise of all the earth has been seized! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! The sea has come up over Babylon; with the tumult of its waves she has been covered. Her cities have become a horror, a dry land and a desert plain, a land ***where*** no man will dwell in them, and a son of man will not pass through them. And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out what he has swallowed from his mouth; and nations will not stream to him again; also the wall of Babylon has fallen.

51:45-64 Come out from her midst, O My people, and save each one his life from the burning of the anger of the LORD. And lest your heart grow faint and you fear at the report which is heard in the land: and the report will come in ***one*** year, and after it, in ***another*** year, the report, and violence ***will be*** in the land, ruler against ruler. Therefore look, days are coming, and I will punish the carved images of Babylon; and all her land will be ashamed, and all her slain will fall in her midst. And ***the*** heavens and ***the*** earth and all that ***is*** in them will shout for joy over Babylon; for from the north the devastators will come to her, declares the LORD. Also Babylon ***is*** to fall, O slain of Israel; also for Babylon the slain of all the earth have fallen. O escapees from the sword, go, do not stand still; remember the LORD from afar, and let Jerusalem come up on your heart. "We are ashamed, for we have heard reproach; disgrace has covered our faces, for strangers have come into the sanctuaries of the house of the LORD." Therefore look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will punish her carved images, and through all her land the fatally wounded will

groan. Though Babylon should go up to the heavens, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, from Me devastators will come to her, declares the LORD. The sound of an outcry from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of ***the*** Chaldeans! For the LORD is about to devastate Babylon, and He will destroy from her a great sound; and their waves will roar like many waters; the uproar of their voice is given forth. For a devastator has come against her, against Babylon, and her mighty men will be captured; their bows have been shattered; for the LORD ***is*** a God of recompenses; He will surely repay. And I will make drunk her officials and her wise ***ones***, her governors and her prefects and her mighty men; and they will sleep an everlasting sleep and not wake up, declares the King, the LORD of armies ***is*** His name. Thus says the LORD of armies: The walls of Babylon, the broad ***one***, will be utterly laid bare, and her high gates will be burned with fire; and peoples will labor for emptiness, and nations for fire, and they will grow weary. The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah ***to*** Babylon in the fourth year of his reign; and Seraiah ***was*** an official of ***the*** resting place. And Jeremiah wrote all the calamity which would come to Babylon in one scroll, all these words which are written concerning Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "When you come ***to*** Babylon, then you will see, and you will read aloud all these words, and you will say, 'O LORD, You Yourself have spoken concerning this place, to cut it off, so that ***there*** will not be an inhabitant in it, from man even to beast, for it will be everlasting desolations.' And it will be, when you finish reading aloud this scroll, you will tie a stone to it, and you will throw it into the midst of the Euphrates, and you will say, 'Thus Babylon will sink, and she will not rise because of the calamity which I am about to bring upon her; and they will grow weary.'" Thus far ***are*** the words of Jeremiah.

Preview

The message against Babylon goes on. God would stir up a destroying wind, the kings of Media, to winnow Babylon like grain. Babylon had been a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making the nations drunk, and now it would fall suddenly and not be healed. The LORD, the Maker of the earth, is not like the idols of Babylon. He had used Babylon as His war club, and now He would roll that destroying mountain down from its crags. Again and again God calls His people to come out of her and to remember Jerusalem. The chapter ends with a scene from Zedekiah's fourth year: Jeremiah wrote these words on a scroll, sent it to Babylon with Seraiah, and told him to read it, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. "Thus Babylon will sink."

This chapter is about where we belong. Babylon was rich, strong and proud, and many of the exiles were tempted to settle into it for good. God told them it would fall, and they were not to be caught in its judgment. Revelation uses this chapter's words for the final Babylon of the last days. As we read, we should ask whether our hearts are at home in a world that is passing away, or whether we are remembering the LORD from afar.

Study

51:1-4 *Thus says the LORD: Look, I am about to stir up against Babylon and against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai a destroying wind. And I will send strangers to Babylon, and they will winnow her, and they will empty her land; for they will be against her from all around in the day of calamity. Let not the one who bends bend his bow, and let him not lift himself up in his armor; and do not spare her young men; devote all her army to destruction. And the slain will fall in the land of* ***the*** *Chaldeans, and those pierced through in her streets.*

"I am about to stir up against Babylon and against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai a destroying wind." Leb-kamai is a code name. It means the heart of those who rise against Me, and it is formed by an old Hebrew letter code (swapping the first letter of the alphabet for the last, and so on) that turns it into the word for Chaldea.

"I will send strangers to Babylon, and they will winnow her." Winnowing was tossing grain into the wind so the chaff blew away. Babylon would be blown away like chaff.

51:5-6 *For Israel and Judah* ***are*** *not forsaken by his God, by the LORD of armies; for their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel. Flee from the midst of Babylon, and save each one his life; do not be destroyed in her iniquity; for it* ***is*** *a time of vengeance for the LORD; He is about to repay a recompense to her.*

"For Israel and Judah are not forsaken by his God, by the LORD of armies." Their land was "full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel," yet God had not forsaken them. That is grace.

"Flee from the midst of Babylon, and save each one his life; do not be destroyed in her iniquity." God's people were not to be swept away in Babylon's judgment. Revelation gives the same call about the final Babylon: "Come out of her, My people, so that you may not share in her sins" (Revelation 18:4).

For us, it means we live in the world but are not of it (John 17:15-16). We refuse to share in its sins.

51:7-10 *Babylon* ***was*** *a cup of gold in the hand of the LORD, making all the earth drunk; from her wine nations have drunk; therefore nations act like madmen. Suddenly Babylon has fallen, and she has been broken; wail over her; take balm for her pain; perhaps she will be healed. "We healed Babylon, and she was not healed; leave her, and let us go each one to his land; for her judgment has reached to the heavens, and it has been lifted up to the clouds. The LORD has brought forth our righteousnesses; come, and let us recount in Zion the work of the LORD our God."*

"Babylon was a cup of gold in the hand of the LORD, making all the earth drunk." Babylon was beautiful and rich, like a golden cup. But the wine in it was God's judgment, and the nations staggered from it (25:15-17). Revelation pictures the final Babylon as a woman "holding a golden cup in her hand full of abominations" (Revelation 17:4).

"Suddenly Babylon has fallen, and she has been broken." Revelation echoes this as well: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great" (Revelation 18:2).

"Take balm for her pain; perhaps she will be healed." But the answer comes back: "We healed Babylon, and she was not healed; leave her." No one could help her.

Then God's people speak: "The LORD has brought forth our righteousnesses; come, and let us recount in Zion the work of the LORD our God." God would vindicate His people, and they would go home and tell it.

51:11-14 *Sharpen the arrows; fill the shields; the LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of Media, for His purpose **is** against Babylon, to destroy her; for it **is** the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of His temple. Against the walls of Babylon lift up a standard; strengthen the watch; station watchmen; prepare those lying in ambush; for the LORD has both purposed and done that which He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. O you who dwell on many waters, great in treasures, your end has come, the cubit of your cutting off. The LORD of armies has sworn by Himself: "Surely I will fill you **with** men like the locust, and they will sing a shout over you."*

"Sharpen the arrows; fill the shields; the LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of Media." Here Jeremiah names the nation, as Isaiah had named the Medes (Isaiah 13:17) and even Cyrus himself (Isaiah 45:1). Ezra uses the same words when he says the LORD "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" (Ezra 1:1).

"For it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of His temple." God had not forgotten what Babylon did to His house.

"O you who dwell on many waters, great in treasures, your end has come." Babylon sat on the Euphrates and its canals. Revelation calls the final Babylon "the great prostitute who sits on the many waters" (Revelation 17:1), and explains that the waters are peoples and nations (Revelation 17:15).

51:15-19 ***He is** the Maker of the earth by His power, the Establisher of the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens. At the sound of His giving forth, **there is** a roar of waters in the heavens; and He makes mists go up from the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and He brings out wind from His storehouses. Every man is stupid, without knowledge; every refiner has been put to shame by the carved image, for his molten image **is** falsehood, and **there is** no breath in them. They **are** vanity, a work of mockeries; at the time of their punishment they will perish. Not like these **is** the Portion of Jacob, for He **is** the Former of everything, and the tribe of His inheritance; the LORD of armies **is** His name.*

These verses repeat 10:12-16 almost word for word. They remind us who is doing all this. "He is the Maker of the earth by His power, the Establisher of the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding He stretched out the heavens."

By contrast, "Every man is stupid, without knowledge." The idol maker is put to shame by his own work, "for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them."

"Not like these is the Portion of Jacob, for He is the Former of everything." The LORD is Israel's portion, their share and inheritance, and Israel is "the tribe of His inheritance."

Why put this hymn in the middle of a prophecy of war? Because when the world shakes, we need to remember who made it.

51:20-24 *You **are** My war club, weapons of war; and with you I smash nations, and with you I destroy kingdoms; and with you I smash horse and its rider, and with you I smash chariot and its rider; and with you I smash man and woman, and with you I smash old **man** and youth, and with you I smash young man and virgin; and with you I smash shepherd and his flock, and with you I smash farmer and his team, and with you I smash governors and prefects. And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of the Chaldeans for all their evil which they have done in Zion before your eyes, declares the LORD.*

"You are My war club, weapons of war; and with you I smash nations, and with you I destroy kingdoms." Who is the war club? Bible teachers give different answers. Many think it is Babylon, which God had used to smash the nations (50:23 calls it "the hammer of all the earth"). Others think it is Cyrus, the next club God would use, or Israel, just named in verse 19. The repeated "with you I smash" sounds like a list of what Babylon had done to the world.

If it is Babylon, the point is sharp. God used Babylon as His tool, but that did not excuse Babylon's cruelty. "And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of the Chaldeans for all their evil which they have done in Zion before your eyes."

51:25-26 *Look, I **am** against you, O destroying mountain, declares the LORD, which destroys all the earth; and I will stretch out My hand against you, and I will roll you down from the crags, and I will make you a mountain of burning. And they will not take from you a stone for a corner, and a stone for foundations, for you will be everlasting desolations, declares the LORD.*

"Look, I am against you, O destroying mountain." In Scripture a mountain can be a picture of a kingdom (Daniel 2:35). Babylon had crushed the whole earth. Now God would "roll you down from the crags" and make it "a mountain of burning," like a burned-out volcano.

"And they will not take from you a stone for a corner, and a stone for foundations." Babylon would never be built again as a great city.

Daniel saw another stone, cut out without hands, that becomes a great mountain filling the earth (Daniel 2:34-35, 44). That is the kingdom of the Messiah. Babylon would be a burnt mountain, but Christ's kingdom will fill the earth.

51:27-32 *Lift up a standard in the land; blow a trumpet among the nations; consecrate nations against her; summon against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz; appoint an official against her; bring up horses like bristly locusts. Consecrate nations against her: the kings of Media, her governors and all her prefects, and all the land of his dominion. And the land has quaked and writhed, for the plans of the LORD have stood against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a horror without inhabitant. The mighty men of Babylon have ceased to fight; they have remained in the strongholds; their might has dried up; they have become women; they have set her dwellings on fire; her bars have been broken. Runner runs to meet runner, and announcer to meet announcer, to announce to the king of Babylon that his city has been captured from **the** end, and the fords have been seized, and the reed marshes they have burned with fire, and the men of war are terrified.*

"Lift up a standard in the land; blow a trumpet among the nations." The nations are called to war. Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz were peoples in the mountains north of Babylon, in what is now eastern Turkey and Armenia. "Consecrate nations against her: the kings of Media."

"The mighty men of Babylon have ceased to fight; they have remained in the strongholds." Babylon's soldiers would lose heart.

"Runner runs to meet runner." Messengers from different parts of the city race to tell the king "that his city has been captured." "The fords have been seized," the river crossings taken. Daniel 5 tells us that Belshazzar was feasting that night. He did not know the city was falling until the hand wrote on the wall.

51:33-35 *For thus says the LORD of armies, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon **is** like a threshing floor at the time **when** it is trodden; yet a little **while**, and the time of the harvest will come for her. "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me; he has confused me; he has set me down **as** an empty vessel; he has swallowed me like the sea monster; he has filled his belly with my delicacies; he has rinsed me out." "My violence and my flesh **be** upon Babylon," the inhabitant of Zion will say; and "My blood **be** upon the inhabitants of the Chaldeans," Jerusalem will say.*

"The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while, and the time of the harvest will come for her."

Then Jerusalem speaks. "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me." He had emptied her, "swallowed me like the sea monster," filled his belly with her good things, "he has rinsed me out."

"My violence and my flesh be upon Babylon," the inhabitant of Zion says. Jerusalem asks God to bring on Babylon the violence it had suffered. It is the cry of a victim asking God for justice. God answers it in the next verse.

51:36-40 *Therefore thus says the LORD: Look, I am about to plead your case, and I will avenge your vengeance; and I will dry up her sea, and I will make her spring dry. And Babylon will become heaps, a habitation of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant. Together like young lions they will roar; they will growl like the cubs of lions. When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunk, so that they may exult, and they will sleep an everlasting sleep and not wake up, declares the LORD. I will bring them down like lambs to slaughter, like rams with male goats.*

"Look, I am about to plead your case, and I will avenge your vengeance." The believer does not need to take revenge. Paul says the same: leave room for God's wrath, for vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19).

"I will dry up her sea, and I will make her spring dry." Babylon's waters, its river and canals, were its life and its defense. They would fail.

"When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunk." God would make their feast their last. "They will sleep an everlasting sleep and not wake up." This is what happened on the night Babylon fell. Belshazzar held "a great feast" for a thousand of his nobles (Daniel 5:1). "In that night Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed" (Daniel 5:30).

51:41-44 *How Sheshach has been captured, and the praise of all the earth has been seized! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! The sea has come up over Babylon; with the tumult of its waves she has been covered. Her cities have become a horror, a dry land and a desert plain, a land **where** no man will dwell in them, and a son of man will not pass through them. And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out what he has swallowed from his mouth; and nations will not stream to him again; also the wall of Babylon has fallen.*

"How Sheshach has been captured, and the praise of all the earth has been seized!" Sheshach is the same letter code as Leb-kamai, a name for Babel, Babylon.

"The sea has come up over Babylon." Here the sea is a picture of the armies flooding over the city like waves.

"And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out what he has swallowed from his mouth." Babylon's god had "swallowed" the nations' treasures, including the holy articles from God's temple. God would make him spit them out. This happened when Cyrus brought out "the vessels of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out from Jerusalem and had put in the house of his gods" and sent them home with the exiles (Ezra 1:7).

51:45-50 *Come out from her midst, O My people, and save each one his life from the burning of the anger of the LORD. And lest your heart grow faint and you fear at the report which is heard in the land: and the report will come in* ***one*** *year, and after it, in* ***another*** *year, the report, and violence* ***will be*** *in the land, ruler against ruler. Therefore look, days are coming, and I will punish the carved images of Babylon; and all her land will be ashamed, and all her slain will fall in her midst. And* ***the*** *heavens and* ***the*** *earth and all that* ***is*** *in them will shout for joy over Babylon; for from the north the devastators will come to her, declares the LORD. Also Babylon* ***is*** *to fall, O slain of Israel; also for Babylon the slain of all the earth have fallen. O escapees from the sword, go, do not stand still; remember the LORD from afar, and let Jerusalem come up on your heart.*

"Come out from her midst, O My people, and save each one his life from the burning of the anger of the LORD." Again the call to leave. When the way home opened, many exiles stayed where they had done well, but God wanted their hearts in Zion.

"Lest your heart grow faint and you fear at the report which is heard in the land." Rumors would come year after year, "ruler against ruler." God told them ahead of time, so they would not lose heart. Jesus did the same when He told His disciples of wars and reports of wars, "do not be alarmed" (Matthew 24:6).

"The heavens and the earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon." Revelation says the same about the final Babylon: "Rejoice over her, O heaven" (Revelation 18:20).

"O escapees from the sword, go, do not stand still; remember the LORD from afar, and let Jerusalem come up on your heart." This is a precious word. Far away in Babylon, the exiles were to keep the LORD and Jerusalem in their hearts. Daniel did this, praying three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10). Wherever you are, however far you feel from God, you can remember Him from afar. He has not forgotten you.

51:51-53 *"We are ashamed, for we have heard reproach; disgrace has covered our faces, for strangers have come into the sanctuaries of the house of the LORD." Therefore look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will punish her carved images, and through all her land the fatally wounded will groan. Though Babylon should go up to the heavens, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, from Me devastators will come to her, declares the LORD.*

"We are ashamed, for we have heard reproach; disgrace has covered our faces, for strangers have come into the sanctuaries of the house of the LORD."

God answers their shame: "Therefore look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will punish her carved images."

"Though Babylon should go up to the heavens, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, from Me devastators will come to her." This reminds us of the tower of Babel, built in the same land, when men said they would build a tower "in the heavens" (Genesis 11:4). God always brings that pride down.

51:54-58 *The sound of an outcry from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of **the** Chaldeans! For the LORD is about to devastate Babylon, and He will destroy from her a great sound; and their waves will roar like many waters; the uproar of their voice is given forth. For a devastator has come against her, against Babylon, and her mighty men will be captured; their bows have been shattered; for the LORD **is** a God of recompenses; He will surely repay. And I will make drunk her officials and her wise **ones**, her governors and her prefects and her mighty men; and they will sleep an everlasting sleep and not wake up, declares the King, the LORD of armies **is** His name. Thus says the LORD of armies: The walls of Babylon, the broad **one**, will be utterly laid bare, and her high gates will be burned with fire; and peoples will labor for emptiness, and nations for fire, and they will grow weary.*

"For the LORD is a God of recompenses; He will surely repay." He is patient, but He does not forget.

Again comes the picture of the last feast, when her officials "will sleep an everlasting sleep and not wake up."

"The walls of Babylon, the broad one, will be utterly laid bare, and her high gates will be burned with fire." Babylon's walls were famous for being so wide that chariots could drive along the top. They would not save her.

"Peoples will labor for emptiness, and nations for fire, and they will grow weary." All the work and wealth poured into Babylon would end in smoke (Habakkuk 2:13). Anything built without God will not last. Only what is done for Him will stand (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

51:59-60 *The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah **to** Babylon in the fourth year of his reign; and Seraiah **was** an official of **the** resting place. And Jeremiah wrote all the calamity which would come to Babylon in one scroll, all these words which are written concerning Babylon.*

Now Jeremiah tells a story from earlier years. "The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign." That was about 594 or 593 B.C., seven years before Jerusalem fell.

Seraiah was the brother of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe. They had the same father and grandfather (32:12). He was "an official of the resting place," the officer who arranged where the king's party would stop and stay on the journey.

"And Jeremiah wrote all the calamity which would come to Babylon in one scroll." At the very time Jeremiah was telling Judah to serve Babylon (chapters 27 and 28), he wrote down Babylon's doom. Both messages were true. Babylon would rule for seventy years, and then it would fall (25:11-12).

51:61-64 *And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "When you come **to** Babylon, then you will see, and you will read aloud all these words, and you will say, 'O LORD, You Yourself have spoken concerning this place, to cut it off, so that **there** will not be an inhabitant in it, from man even to beast, for it will be everlasting desolations.' And it will be, when you finish reading aloud this scroll, you will tie a stone to it, and you will throw it into the midst of the Euphrates, and you will say, 'Thus Babylon will sink, and she will not rise because of the calamity which I am about to bring upon her; and they will grow weary.'" Thus far **are** the words of Jeremiah.*

"When you come to Babylon, then you will see, and you will read aloud all these words." Seraiah was to read it there and pray: "O LORD, You Yourself have spoken concerning this place, to cut it off."

"When you finish reading aloud this scroll, you will tie a stone to it, and you will throw it into the midst of the Euphrates." "Thus Babylon will sink, and she will not rise."

This was an acted prophecy, like the linen sash (chapter 13) and the broken flask (chapter 19). In Revelation, a mighty angel does almost the same thing over the final Babylon. He throws a great millstone into the sea and says, "Thus with violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will by no means be found any longer" (Revelation 18:21).

"Thus far are the words of Jeremiah." This note marks the end of Jeremiah's own words. Chapter 52 was added by another hand, as the Background explains.

It is fitting that Jeremiah's words end here. He began his ministry being told he was "over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down" (1:10). His last words are about the fall of the greatest kingdom of his day. The God who tore down would build and plant again.

Summary

Jeremiah 51 continues God's word against Babylon. God would stir up the kings of Media like a destroying wind. Israel and Judah were not forsaken, and God's people were told to flee so they would not share in Babylon's judgment. Babylon had been a golden cup in the LORD's hand, but she would fall suddenly and not be healed. The LORD, the Maker of the earth and the Portion of Jacob, is not like her idols. He had used Babylon as His war club, and He would repay her for what she did to Zion. The city would be taken while her leaders feasted, and Bel would give up what he had swallowed. The exiles were to remember the LORD from afar. In Zedekiah's fourth year Jeremiah sent these words with Seraiah, who was to read them, tie a stone to the scroll and sink it in the Euphrates: Babylon would sink and not rise. Here the words of Jeremiah end.

Study Questions

1. Whom did God say He would stir up against Babylon? (51:1, 11)

2. Were Israel and Judah forsaken? What were they told to do? (51:5-6)

3. What does it mean that Babylon was "a cup of gold in the hand of the LORD"? (51:7)

4. How is the LORD different from the idols of Babylon? (51:15-19)

5. What would God bring out of Bel's mouth, and how was this fulfilled? (51:44; Ezra 1:7)

6. What were the exiles told to remember while they were far away? (51:50)

7. What did Seraiah do with the scroll, and what did it mean? (51:61-64)

8. How does Revelation use the words of this chapter for the final Babylon? (51:7-8, 45, 63-64; Revelation 18:2, 4, 21)

9. God told His people to come out of Babylon so they would not share in her sins (51:6, 45). In what ways does the world around you pull you to settle in and share its ways?

10. The exiles were told to "remember the LORD from afar" (51:50). When God has felt far away, what has helped you remember Him?

Jeremiah 52: Jerusalem Falls and Jehoiachin Is Released

Scripture

52:1-11 Zedekiah ***was*** a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother ***was*** Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For because of the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His face. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. And it was in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and they encamped against it, and they built a siege wall against it all around. And the city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month, and the famine was severe in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled, and they went out from the city by night ***by*** the way of the gate between the two walls, which ***was*** by the garden of the king, and the Chaldeans ***were*** against the city all around; and they went ***by*** the way of the Arabah. And the army of ***the*** Chaldeans pursued after the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. And they seized the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon ***at*** Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he spoke judgments with him. And the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; and also all the officials of Judah he slaughtered at Riblah. And the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded, and he bound him with bronze fetters; and the king of Babylon brought him ***to*** Babylon, and he put him ***in*** the house of punishments until the day of his death.

52:12-23 And in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month, it ***was*** the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards, ***who*** stood before the king of Babylon, came into Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem; and every house of the great ***one*** he burned with fire. And all the walls of Jerusalem all around, all the army of ***the*** Chaldeans who ***were*** with the chief of the bodyguards broke down. And some of the poor of the people, and the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the craftsmen, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards carried into exile. And some of the poor of the land Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards left as vinedressers and as plowmen. And the pillars of bronze which ***belonged*** to the house of the LORD, and the stands, and the sea of bronze which ***was*** in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and they carried all their bronze ***to*** Babylon. And the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the bowls and the dishes and all the articles of bronze with which they ministered, they took. And the basins and the firepans and the bowls and the pots and the lampstands and the dishes and the cups, what ***was*** gold, gold, and what ***was*** silver, silver, the chief of the bodyguards took. The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls which ***were*** under the stands, which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD: there was no weight for their bronze, all these articles. And the pillars: approximately 27 feet (eighteen cubits) ***was*** the height of the one pillar, and a line of approximately 18 feet (twelve cubits) would go around it; and its thickness ***was*** approximately 3 inches (four fingers); ***it was*** hollow. And a capital on it ***was*** bronze; and the

height of the one capital ***was*** approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), and a network and pomegranates ***were*** on the capital all around, the whole ***was*** bronze; and like these ***belonged*** to the second pillar, and pomegranates. And the pomegranates were ninety-six toward the side; all the pomegranates ***were*** one hundred on the network all around.

52:24-34 And the chief of the bodyguards took Seraiah the head priest and Zephaniah the second priest and the three keepers of the threshold. And from the city he took one eunuch who was an overseer over the men of war, and seven men of those who saw the face of the king, who were found in the city, and the scribe of the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the midst of the city. And Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards took them and brought them to the king of Babylon ***at*** Riblah. And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. And Judah went into exile from its ground. This ***is*** the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile: in ***the*** seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three Jews; in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem, eight hundred thirty-two souls; in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards carried into exile Jews, seven hundred forty-five souls; all the souls ***were*** four thousand and six hundred. And it was in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth of the month, Evil-merodach the king of Babylon, in the year of his kingship, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, and he brought him out from the house of the prison. And he spoke good things with him, and he set his throne above the throne of the kings who ***were*** with him in Babylon. And he changed the clothes of his prison, and he ate bread before him continually all the days of his life. And his allowance, a continual allowance, was given to him from the king of Babylon, the portion of a day in its day, until the day of his death, all the days of his life.

Preview

The words of Jeremiah ended with 51:64. This last chapter was added by another hand, and it is nearly the same as 2 Kings 24:18 to 25:30. It tells once more how Jerusalem fell: Zedekiah's evil reign, the long siege, the famine, the breach in the wall, the king's capture and the death of his sons, the burning of the temple, the breaking up of its bronze, the death of the leaders, and the people taken into exile. It gives the numbers of three deportations. Then, more than twenty-five years later, it ends with a small light in the dark: Jehoiachin, the king who had been taken to Babylon as a young man, is brought out of prison and given a seat at the king's table.

Why tell the fall again? Because it proves that every word Jeremiah spoke came true. For forty years the people called him a traitor and a liar. This chapter is God's answer. As we read, we should ask whether we are taking God's warnings seriously, and whether we see that even after judgment, God was keeping His promise to David.

Study

52:1-3 *Zedekiah **was** a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother **was** Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For because of the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His face. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.*

"Zedekiah was a son of twenty-one years when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem," from about 597 to 586 B.C. His mother was "Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah." This is a different Jeremiah, not the prophet. Zedekiah was a son of Josiah and a full brother of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31).

"And he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done." The book has shown us Zedekiah up close. He was not a monster, but he was weak. He asked Jeremiah for God's word more than once, and even protected him (37:17-21; 38:14-16), but he was afraid of his officials and never obeyed (38:5, 19). Knowing God's will and not doing it is still disobedience (James 4:17).

"For because of the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His face." Behind the armies of Babylon stood the LORD. The exile was His judgment for the sins Jeremiah had named for forty years.

"And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon." Zedekiah had sworn loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar in God's name (2 Chronicles 36:13; Ezekiel 17:13-19). He broke his oath, hoping Egypt would help him. God had told him plainly to serve Babylon and live (27:12).

52:4-7 *And it was in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and they encamped against it, and they built a siege wall against it all around. And the city came under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month, and the famine was severe in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled, and they went out from the city by night **by** the way of the gate between the two walls, which **was** by the garden of the king, and the Chaldeans **were** against the city all around; and they went **by** the way of the Arabah.*

"In the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came." That was in the winter of 588 B.C. The day was remembered for generations, and after the exile the Jews kept a fast on it (Zechariah 8:19). The Babylonians built a siege wall all around the city, so that no one could get in or out.

The siege lasted about a year and a half, "until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah." Then, "In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month," in the summer of 586 B.C., "the famine was severe in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land." Lamentations shows us what that hunger was like (Lamentations 4:4-10). We will come to it there.

"And the city was broken into." The wall was breached. That night the soldiers fled "by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the garden of the king," most likely near the southeast corner of the city, and headed for the Arabah, the Jordan valley.

52:8-11 *And the army of **the** Chaldeans pursued after the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. And they seized the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon **at** Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he spoke judgments with him. And the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; and also all the officials of Judah he slaughtered at Riblah. And the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded, and he bound him with bronze fetters; and the king of Babylon brought him **to** Babylon, and he put him **in** the house of punishments until the day of his death.*

"And the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him." They brought him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, in the land of Hamath in Syria, where the king of Babylon had his headquarters, and "he spoke judgments with him." Zedekiah was put on trial for breaking his oath.

"And the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; and also all the officials of Judah he slaughtered at Riblah. And the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded, and he bound him with bronze fetters." This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. The last thing Zedekiah ever saw was the death of his sons. I will not add to it.

Jeremiah had pleaded with him. If he surrendered, "your soul will live, and this city will not be burned with fire; and you will live, you and your house" (38:17). He would not listen. Ezekiel had said of him, "I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans; and he shall not see it, and he shall die there" (Ezekiel 12:13). He was brought there blind.

Jeremiah adds a line that Kings does not: he was put "in the house of punishments until the day of his death." Zedekiah died a prisoner in Babylon. God's word had also said he would not die by the sword but "In peace you will die" and be mourned (34:4-5). Scripture does not tell us more about his last years.

Zedekiah's story warns us. He heard God's word many times. He was even curious about it. But hearing is not the same as obeying (James 1:22).

52:12-14 *And in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month, it **was** the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards, **who** stood before the king of Babylon, came into Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem; and every house of the great **one** he burned with fire. And all the walls of Jerusalem all around, all the army of **the** Chaldeans who **were** with the chief of the bodyguards broke down.*

"And in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month, it was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar," Nebuzaradan, "the chief of the bodyguards," came to Jerusalem. That was in August of 586 B.C., about a month after the wall was broken. Kings gives the seventh of the month

(2 Kings 25:8). He may have arrived on the seventh and set the fire on the tenth, or one of the numbers may have been changed in copying.

"And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem." Solomon's temple had stood nearly four hundred years. The people had said, "The temple of the LORD" (7:4), as if it could never fall. It fell. The Jews still remember the day with a fast.

"And all the walls of Jerusalem all around" were broken down. A city without walls was a city without protection. Nehemiah would rebuild them about 140 years later (Nehemiah 6:15).

52:15-16 *And some of the poor of the people, and the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the craftsmen, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards carried into exile. And some of the poor of the land Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards left as vinedressers and as plowmen.*

Nebuzaradan carried into exile "some of the poor of the people, and the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the craftsmen." Those who had gone over to Babylon were taken too.

"And some of the poor of the land Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards left as vinedressers and as plowmen." The poor, who had been oppressed by the rich for years (5:28; 34:8-11), were left to care for the land. Chapters 39 to 41 tell what happened to them under Gedaliah.

52:17-23 *And the pillars of bronze which **belonged** to the house of the LORD, and the stands, and the sea of bronze which **was** in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and they carried all their bronze **to** Babylon. And the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the bowls and the dishes and all the articles of bronze with which they ministered, they took. And the basins and the firepans and the bowls and the pots and the lampstands and the dishes and the cups, what **was** gold, gold, and what **was** silver, silver, the chief of the bodyguards took. The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls which **were** under the stands, which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD: there was no weight for their bronze, all these articles. And the pillars: approximately 27 feet (eighteen cubits) **was** the height of the one pillar, and a line of approximately 18 feet (twelve cubits) would go around it; and its thickness **was** approximately 3 inches (four fingers); **it was** hollow. And a capital on it **was** bronze; and the height of the one capital **was** approximately 7.5 feet (five cubits), and a network and pomegranates **were** on the capital all around, the whole **was** bronze; and like these **belonged** to the second pillar, and pomegranates. And the pomegranates were ninety-six toward the side; all the pomegranates **were** one hundred on the network all around.*

Now the temple's treasures are listed: "the pillars of bronze," "the stands, and the sea of bronze," which the Chaldeans broke into pieces and carried to Babylon, with the pots, shovels, snuffers, bowls and dishes used in the temple service, and the articles of gold and silver.

"The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls which were under the stands, which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD: there was no weight for their bronze." No one even tried to weigh it. The account of how Solomon made them is in 1 Kings 7:15-47.

The pillars were about 27 feet high and 18 feet around, hollow, with bronze walls about 3 inches thick. On top of each was a bronze capital about 7.5 feet high, decorated with network and a hundred pomegranates.

Why give so much detail? Because these were the glory of the temple, and the people had trusted in them. Jeremiah had told the false prophets that the rest of these very articles would be carried off to Babylon (27:19-22). He was right. But he also said God would bring them back "to this place" one day (27:22). God keeps both His warnings and His promises (Ezra 1:7-11).

52:24-27 *And the chief of the bodyguards took Seraiah the head priest and Zephaniah the second priest and the three keepers of the threshold. And from the city he took one eunuch who was an overseer over the men of war, and seven men of those who saw the face of the king, who were found in the city, and the scribe of the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the midst of the city. And Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards took them and brought them to the king of Babylon **at** Riblah. And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. And Judah went into exile from its ground.*

"And the chief of the bodyguards took Seraiah the head priest and Zephaniah the second priest and the three keepers of the threshold." This Seraiah is not Baruch's brother (51:59). He was the high priest, and he was an ancestor of Ezra the scribe (Ezra 7:1). Zephaniah the priest had carried messages between the king and Jeremiah (21:1; 37:3).

Nebuzaradan also took the officer over the soldiers, seven of the king's advisers, the army's scribe, and sixty other men. These were the leaders who had pushed the rebellion. They were brought to Riblah, "And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death."

"And Judah went into exile from its ground." Those simple words close the history of the kingdom of Judah. Moses had warned that if Israel turned from the LORD, they would be torn from the land (Deuteronomy 28:63-64). It came true.

52:28-30 *This **is** the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile: in **the** seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three Jews; in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem, eight hundred thirty-two souls; in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguards carried into exile Jews, seven hundred forty-five souls; all the souls **were** four thousand and six hundred.*

These verses are not in 2 Kings. They give the numbers of three deportations under Nebuchadnezzar:

- "In the seventh year," 3,023 Jews. This was 597 B.C., when Jehoiachin was taken.
- "In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar," 832 people from Jerusalem. This was 586 B.C., the fall of the city.
- "In the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar," 745 more, taken by Nebuzaradan, about 582 B.C., perhaps after the murder of Gedaliah (chapter 41).

"All the souls were four thousand and six hundred."

These numbers are much smaller than the 10,000 named in 2 Kings 24:14 for 597 B.C. How do we explain that? The years differ by one too. Kings counts 597 B.C. as Nebuchadnezzar's eighth year (2 Kings 24:12) and 586 B.C. as his nineteenth (52:12), while these verses say seventh and eighteenth. Many think this list follows the Babylonian way of counting a king's years, and comes from a different record. It may count only the men of Judah, or only the heads of families, or only one group taken at a certain time, while Kings gives the whole number. Scripture does not tell us which. What is clear is that the exile was real, and that it happened in waves, just as Jeremiah said.

52:31-34 *And it was in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth of the month, Evil-merodach the king of Babylon, in the year of his kingship, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, and he brought him out from the house of the prison. And he spoke good things with him, and he set his throne above the throne of the kings who **were** with him in Babylon. And he changed the clothes of his prison, and he ate bread before him continually all the days of his life. And his allowance, a continual allowance, was given to him from the king of Babylon, the portion of a day in its day, until the day of his death, all the days of his life.*

The book ends with a surprise. "In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth of the month, Evil-merodach the king of Babylon, in the year of his kingship, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, and he brought him out from the house of the prison."

That was about 560 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had died, and his son Evil-merodach released Jehoiachin at the start of his reign. Kings gives the twenty-seventh day (2 Kings 25:27). The order may have been given on one day and carried out on another. To "lift up the head" meant to raise someone to honor, as Pharaoh did for his cupbearer in Joseph's day (Genesis 40:13).

"And he spoke good things with him, and he set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon." Jehoiachin was given new clothes, a place at the king's table "all the days of his life," and a daily allowance "until the day of his death."

Why end here? After all the fire and ashes, the last thing the book shows us is a son of David alive and honored. Jehoiachin had been taken to Babylon at eighteen (2 Kings 24:8). Now he was about fifty-five. The line of David had not been wiped out.

Jeremiah had said that none of Jehoiachin's offspring would prosper "sitting on the throne of David and ruling again over Judah" (22:30). Yet his grandson Zerubbabel led the exiles home (Ezra 3:2; Matthew 1:12). And Jeremiah had also passed on God's promise that David would never lack "a man sitting on the throne of the house of Israel" (33:17). How do those fit together? Matthew traces Jesus' legal line as the son of Joseph through Jehoiachin, while many teachers believe Luke traces His physical line through Mary, back to David's son Nathan (Luke 3:31). Jesus is the rightful heir to David's throne, and the angel told Mary that God would give Him "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32).

So the book that tore down ends with a hint of building up. A king of David's line sat at a table in Babylon, eating bread every day by another king's kindness. One day the Son of David will sit on His own throne and reign in righteousness, the "righteous Branch" Jeremiah promised (23:5). And everyone who trusts Him, like a prisoner brought out and given a seat at the King's table, will be welcomed at His table (Revelation 19:9).

Summary

Jeremiah 52, added after Jeremiah's own words ended, tells again how Jerusalem fell. Zedekiah did evil and rebelled against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city from the tenth month of Zedekiah's ninth year until famine left no bread in his eleventh year. The wall was broken, and Zedekiah fled but was caught in the plains of Jericho. At Riblah his sons and the officials of Judah were killed before his eyes, and he was blinded and kept in prison in Babylon until he died. Nebuzaradan burned the temple, the palace and the houses of Jerusalem, broke down the walls, and carried the people away, leaving the poorest to farm the land. The bronze pillars, stands and sea were broken up and taken to Babylon with the temple vessels, and the chief priest and the leaders were put to death at Riblah. Three deportations took 4,600 people. In the thirty-seventh year of his exile, about 560 B.C., Jehoiachin was released by Evil-merodach and given a place at the king's table for the rest of his life.

Study Questions

1. How old was Zedekiah when he became king, and how did he rule? (52:1-2)

2. Why did all this happen to Jerusalem and Judah, according to verse 3? (52:3)

3. How long did the siege last, and what was the condition of the city at the end? (52:4-6)

4. What happened to Zedekiah and his sons? Which prophecies did this fulfill? (52:8-11; 38:17; Ezekiel 12:13)

5. What did Nebuzaradan burn, and whom did he leave in the land? (52:13, 16)

6. What happened to the bronze pillars and the temple articles? What had Jeremiah said about them? (52:17-23; 27:19-22)

7. How many people were taken in the three deportations? (52:28-30)

8. What happened to Jehoiachin in the thirty-seventh year of his exile? (52:31-34)

9. Zedekiah asked for God's word many times but never obeyed it. Is there something God has made clear to you that you have not yet done?

10. The book ends with a son of David alive and honored in Babylon. How does that encourage you to trust God's promises when everything around you seems to have fallen?

Overview of Lamentations

Lamentations is a short book of five poems that comes right after Jeremiah in our English Bibles. In the Hebrew Bible it is placed among the Writings, and its Hebrew title is its first word, Ekah, which means "How!" It is a cry of shock and grief. The English name comes from the old Greek and Latin titles, which mean laments or songs of mourning.

Jeremiah spent forty years warning that Jerusalem would fall. Lamentations is written in the ashes after it did. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians broke through the walls, burned the temple of the LORD, tore down the city and carried its people away. The book does not tell that story in order, the way Jeremiah 52 and 2 Kings 25 do. It shows us what it felt like: the empty streets, the hungry children, the priests and elders dying, the enemy laughing, and the shame of knowing it was all deserved.

The theme of Lamentations is honest grief brought to God, and hope that rises from the middle of it. The book never pretends that sin is small or that judgment is easy to bear. It says plainly that the LORD did this, and that He was right to do it (1:18). Yet at the very center of the book, in the middle of its darkest poem, the writer remembers who God is:

Lamentations 3:22-23 (SLB)

"The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end. ***They are*** new in the mornings; great ***is*** Your faithfulness."

Lamentations has 5 chapters and 154 verses. Each chapter is one poem. Here is its structure:

The First Poem: The City in Mourning (chapter 1)

- Lamentations 1: The Lonely City

The Second Poem: The LORD's Anger (chapter 2)

- Lamentations 2: The Lord's Anger Against Zion

The Third Poem: Hope in the Middle of Suffering (chapter 3)

- Lamentations 3: Hope in the Day of Affliction

The Fourth Poem: The Siege Remembered (chapter 4)

- Lamentations 4: The Gold Grown Dim

The Fifth Poem: A Prayer for Restoration (chapter 5)

- Lamentations 5: Remember, O LORD

The poems are carefully built. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 each have 22 verses, and each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters. A poem built that way is called an acrostic. Chapter 3 is a triple acrostic: it has 66 verses, and each group of three verses begins with the same letter, from the first letter to the last. Chapter 5 also has 22 verses, but it is not an

acrostic. Why write grief in such careful order? One reason may be to help people learn the poems by heart. Another may be to say that the sorrow is being poured out completely, from A to Z, with nothing held back. And it may be that the writer was holding his grief inside a frame, because grief without any shape can swallow a person whole. When the last poem breaks the pattern, it is as if the writer has nothing left but a raw prayer.

Where this book points to Christ: the New Testament does not quote Lamentations directly, so we should be careful. But the book helps us understand Jesus in several ways. Jesus wept over the same city as He came near it (Luke 19:41), and He warned that it would be destroyed again, as it was in A.D. 70. The man of chapter 3, who suffers under the rod of God's wrath and gives his cheek to the one who strikes him (3:1, 30), is a picture of the Suffering Servant, who was "despised and rejected by men, a man of pains" (Isaiah 53:3), and whose face was struck (Matthew 26:67). Many believers have also heard in Jerusalem's cry, "Look and see if there is pain like my pain" (1:12), a picture of Christ on the cross. The difference is important. Jerusalem suffered for her own sins. Jesus suffered for ours. Because He bore God's anger for us, the hope of 3:22-23 is ours: the LORD's compassions never end.

Background of Lamentations

Author: The book does not name its writer. Jewish and Christian tradition have long held that it was Jeremiah, and that is how most of our Bibles have presented it. There are good reasons for that view. Jeremiah saw Jerusalem fall with his own eyes (Jeremiah 39). He was the prophet who wept for his people (Jeremiah 9:1), and he wrote laments before: "Jeremiah lamented over Josiah," and those laments were written down (2 Chronicles 35:25). Lamentations also shares many words and pictures with the book of Jeremiah, such as eyes running down with tears, the "daughter of my people" (Lamentations 2:11; Jeremiah 8:21), and the young and the virgins falling. The old Greek translation begins the book with a line saying that Jeremiah sat weeping and spoke this lament over Jerusalem. Some scholars think the poems came from one or more other writers who lived through the fall, and some date parts of the book later. The book itself does not say, so we cannot be certain. This study follows the long-held view, as the SLB introduction does, and nothing in the book stands against it.

Who it was written to: First to the survivors of Jerusalem's fall, both those left in the ruined land of Judah and those taken to Babylon. The poems gave them words for their grief, words they could pray to God. They were also written for every generation of God's people after them who would face loss, judgment, or a season when God seems far away.

Setting: The ruins of Jerusalem after 586 B.C. The siege had lasted about a year and a half. Famine had filled the city (2 Kings 25:3; Jeremiah 52:6). The temple, the palace and the houses were burned, the walls were torn down, and King Zedekiah was blinded and taken to Babylon (Jeremiah 52:8-14). Those left behind were poor, hungry and ruled by foreigners (Lamentations 5).

When it was written: Soon after Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C., while the memory was still raw. The poems speak as if the burning of the city were very recent, and they say nothing of the return from exile in 538 B.C. Most conservative scholars date the book between 586 B.C. and about 575 B.C.

How it was used: The Jews have long read Lamentations aloud on the fast that remembers the burning of the temple, the Ninth of Av, in the summer. Zechariah mentions fasts in the fourth and fifth months that the people kept to mourn the fall of the city (Zechariah 7:3-5; 8:19).

Purpose: Lamentations was written to put Jerusalem's grief into words before God, to confess honestly that the city fell because of its sin, just as God had warned through Moses and the prophets (Deuteronomy 28; Jeremiah 7), and to hold on to the LORD's faithfulness in the dark. It teaches us that grief is not unbelief. We can bring our tears, our questions and even our complaints to God. And it teaches us that God's mercy is greater than our ruin. The book does not end with everything fixed. It ends with a prayer: "Cause us to return, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us return" (5:21). That is where hope begins.

Lamentations 1: The Lonely City

Scripture

1:1-11 How she sits alone, the city great with people! She has become like a widow, great among the nations; a princess among the provinces, she has become forced labor! Weeping, she weeps in the night, and her tears ***are*** on her cheek; ***there is*** no comforter for her from all her lovers; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. Judah has gone into exile from affliction and from abundance of servitude; she dwells among the nations; she has not found a resting place; all her pursuers have overtaken her between the narrow places. The roads of Zion ***are*** mourning, without those who come ***to the*** appointed feast; all her gates ***are*** desolate; her priests ***are*** groaning; her virgins ***are*** grieved; and she, it is bitter to her. Her adversaries have become the head; her enemies are at ease; for the LORD has caused her grief because of the multitude of her transgressions; her little ones have gone ***into*** captivity before the adversary. And all her splendor has gone out from the daughter of Zion; her officials have become like deer ***that*** have not found pasture, and they have gone without strength before a pursuer. Jerusalem has remembered, ***in*** the days of her affliction and her wanderings, all her precious things which were from days of antiquity, when her people fell into the hand of an adversary, and ***there was*** no helper for her; adversaries saw her; they laughed at her downfall. Jerusalem has sinned a sin; therefore she has become a filthy thing; all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself also groans, and she has turned backward. Her uncleanness ***was*** on her skirts; she did not remember her end; and she has come down astonishingly; ***there is*** no comforter for her. "See, O LORD, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself!" The adversary has spread out his hand over all her precious things; for she has seen nations enter her sanctuary, ***those*** whom You commanded ***that*** they will not come into the assembly of Yours. All her people ***are*** groaning, seeking bread; they have given their precious things for food to restore ***the*** soul. "See, O LORD, and look, for I have become despised."

1:12-22 "Not to you, all who pass by on the road? Look and see if there is pain like my pain, which has been dealt to me, with which the LORD has caused grief in the day of the burning of His anger. From on high He has sent fire into my bones, and He has mastered it; He has spread out a net for my feet; He has turned me backward; He has made me desolate, faint all the day. The yoke of my transgressions has been bound on by His hand; they are woven together; they have come up on my neck; He has made my strength stumble; the Lord has given me into the hands ***of those whom*** I am not able to rise ***against***. The Lord has rejected all my mighty ones in my midst; He has proclaimed an appointed time against me to break my young men; the Lord has trodden a winepress for the virgin daughter of Judah. Over these ***things*** I am weeping; my eye, my eye is running down ***with*** water; for a comforter is far from me, one who restores my soul; my sons are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed." Zion has spread out her hands; ***there is*** no comforter for her; the LORD has commanded concerning Jacob ***that*** those around him ***be*** his adversaries; Jerusalem has become an impure thing among them. "Righteous ***is*** He, the LORD, for I have rebelled ***against*** His mouth. Hear, please, all the peoples, and see my pain; my virgins and my young men have gone into captivity. I called to my lovers; they themselves deceived me; my priests and my elders perished in the city, for they sought food for themselves, that they might

restore their soul. See, O LORD, for distress ***is*** mine; my inward parts are in turmoil; my heart is overturned within me, for I have surely rebelled; from outside the sword has bereaved; in the house ***it is*** like death. They have heard that I am groaning; ***there is*** no comforter for me; all my enemies have heard of my calamity; they rejoice that You Yourself have done ***it***; You have brought the day ***which*** You proclaimed, and let them be like me. Let all their evil come before You, and deal with them just as You have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groanings ***are*** many, and my heart ***is*** faint."

Preview

The first poem opens with a cry: "How she sits alone, the city great with people!" Jerusalem, once full of crowds and honored among the nations, sits like a widow weeping in the night. Her friends have betrayed her, her children have gone into captivity, her feasts are silent, and enemies have walked into the holy place. In the first half of the poem a narrator describes her. In the second half Jerusalem herself speaks, asking everyone who passes by to look and see if there is any pain like hers. Again and again we hear the same sad words: there is "no comforter for her."

This chapter is about grief that tells the truth. Jerusalem does not blame anyone else. She says, "Righteous is He, the LORD, for I have rebelled against His mouth." Her pain is real, and she brings it to God. As we read, we should ask whether we have learned to grieve honestly before God, and whether we know the Comforter Jerusalem could not find.

Study

1:1-2 *How she sits alone, the city great with people! She has become like a widow, great among the nations; a princess among the provinces, she has become forced labor! Weeping, she weeps in the night, and her tears* ***are*** *on her cheek;* ***there is*** *no comforter for her from all her lovers; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.*

"How she sits alone, the city great with people!" The word how is the Hebrew title of the book, Ekah. It is the cry of someone who cannot believe what he is seeing. Jerusalem had been full of people at the feasts. Now it was nearly empty.

"She has become like a widow, great among the nations." A widow in that world was one of the most helpless people there was. She had lost her husband, her protector and often her income. Jerusalem was not truly a widow, because the LORD, her Husband, was still alive (Isaiah 54:5). But she felt like one. God had stepped back, and she was alone.

"A princess among the provinces, she has become forced labor!" The city that once ruled others now served.

"Weeping, she weeps in the night." Nights are often the hardest time for grieving people. "And her tears are on her cheek." No one wipes them away. "There is no comforter for her from all her lovers." Her lovers were the nations and false gods she had trusted instead of the LORD, such as Egypt (Jeremiah 2:36-37). Now "all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies."

Have you ever been let down by the very people you leaned on? Jerusalem leaned on the wrong things, and they left her. The LORD is the only one who never deals treacherously with His people.

1:3-4 *Judah has gone into exile from affliction and from abundance of servitude; she dwells among the nations; she has not found a resting place; all her pursuers have overtaken her between the narrow places. The roads of Zion **are** mourning, without those who come **to the** appointed feast; all her gates **are** desolate; her priests **are** groaning; her virgins **are** grieved; and she, it is bitter to her.*

"Judah has gone into exile from affliction and from abundance of servitude." The people were taken away after long suffering. "She dwells among the nations; she has not found a resting place." Moses had warned of this: among the nations they would find no rest (Deuteronomy 28:65).

"The roads of Zion are mourning, without those who come to the appointed feast." Three times a year the roads to Jerusalem had been crowded with families going up to worship (Deuteronomy 16:16). Now the roads were empty, and Jeremiah pictures the roads themselves as mourners.

"Her priests are groaning; her virgins are grieved." The priests had no temple to serve in. The young women had no weddings to look forward to (Jeremiah 7:34).

1:5-6 *Her adversaries have become the head; her enemies are at ease; for the LORD has caused her grief because of the multitude of her transgressions; her little ones have gone **into** captivity before the adversary. And all her splendor has gone out from the daughter of Zion; her officials have become like deer **that** have not found pasture, and they have gone without strength before a pursuer.*

"Her adversaries have become the head; her enemies are at ease." Moses had said that if Israel obeyed, they would be the head and not the tail, and if they disobeyed, the enemy would be the head (Deuteronomy 28:13, 44). That happened.

And here is why: "for the LORD has caused her grief because of the multitude of her transgressions." This is the first time the poem names the cause. It was not bad luck or bad politics. It was sin, and it was the LORD who brought the grief.

"Her little ones have gone into captivity before the adversary." Even the children were taken.

"And all her splendor has gone out from the daughter of Zion." Daughter of Zion is a tender name for Jerusalem and its people. Her leaders were "like deer that have not found pasture," too weak to run from the hunter.

1:7 *Jerusalem has remembered,* ***in*** *the days of her affliction and her wanderings, all her precious things which were from days of antiquity, when her people fell into the hand of an adversary, and* ***there was*** *no helper for her; adversaries saw her; they laughed at her downfall.*

"Jerusalem has remembered, in the days of her affliction and her wanderings, all her precious things which were from days of antiquity." In her misery, Jerusalem remembers how good things used to be. Memory can be a hard thing in grief. We remember what we had, and the loss feels even deeper.

"When her people fell into the hand of an adversary, and there was no helper for her; adversaries saw her; they laughed at her downfall." Enemies like Edom watched and laughed (Psalm 137:7). Being mocked while you suffer adds shame to pain.

1:8-9 *Jerusalem has sinned a sin; therefore she has become a filthy thing; all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself also groans, and she has turned backward. Her uncleanness* ***was*** *on her skirts; she did not remember her end; and she has come down astonishingly;* ***there is*** *no comforter for her. "See, O LORD, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself!"*

"Jerusalem has sinned a sin; therefore she has become a filthy thing." The Hebrew repeats the word for emphasis: she sinned greatly. "All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness." The picture is of a woman exposed and shamed in public. It means Jerusalem's sin and disgrace were laid open for all the nations to see. The prophets used this picture for Judah's unfaithfulness to God (Jeremiah 13:22-26).

"Her uncleanness was on her skirts; she did not remember her end." She never stopped to think where her sin would lead. That is how sin works. It does not let us think about the end. Moses had said, "If only they were wise," then "they would understand their end!" (Deuteronomy 32:29).

Then for the first time Jerusalem cries out to God: "See, O LORD, my affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself!" This is the right direction. When we are in trouble because of our own sin, the place to turn is still to God.

1:10-11 *The adversary has spread out his hand over all her precious things; for she has seen nations enter her sanctuary,* ***those*** *whom You commanded* ***that*** *they will not come into the assembly of Yours. All her people* ***are*** *groaning, seeking bread; they have given their precious things for food to restore* ***the*** *soul. "See, O LORD, and look, for I have become despised."*

"The adversary has spread out his hand over all her precious things." The Babylonians took the treasures of the temple (Jeremiah 52:17-23).

"For she has seen nations enter her sanctuary, those whom You commanded that they will not come into the assembly of Yours." Pagan soldiers walked into the holy place, where only priests could go. Moses had said that Ammonites and Moabites could not even enter the assembly of the LORD (Deuteronomy 23:3). Now foreigners were trampling God's house.

"All her people are groaning, seeking bread; they have given their precious things for food to restore the soul." During the siege people traded their jewelry and treasures for a little food, just to stay alive.

"See, O LORD, and look, for I have become despised." Again she turns to God.

1:12 *"Not to you, all who pass by on the road? Look and see if there is pain like my pain, which has been dealt to me, with which the LORD has caused grief in the day of the burning of His anger.*

Now Jerusalem speaks to the people walking by on the road. "Not to you, all who pass by on the road? Look and see if there is pain like my pain, which has been dealt to me, with which the LORD has caused grief in the day of the burning of His anger."

That is her question: does this mean nothing to you? People walked past the ruins of Jerusalem and kept going. She begs them to stop and look.

Many believers have heard in these words a picture of Jesus on the cross, as people passed by and mocked Him (Matthew 27:39). Lamentations does not say that, and the first meaning is Jerusalem's own pain. But the picture fits. On the cross Jesus suffered "in the day of the burning of His anger," not for His own sin, but for ours. There was no pain like His pain.

1:13-15 *From on high He has sent fire into my bones, and He has mastered it; He has spread out a net for my feet; He has turned me backward; He has made me desolate, faint all the day. The yoke of my transgressions has been bound on by His hand; they are woven together; they have come up on my neck; He has made my strength stumble; the Lord has given me into the hands* ***of those whom*** *I am not able to rise* ***against****. The Lord has rejected all my mighty ones in my midst; He has proclaimed an appointed time against me to break my young men; the Lord has trodden a winepress for the virgin daughter of Judah.*

Jerusalem describes what God did to her. "From on high He has sent fire into my bones." "He has spread out a net for my feet," like a hunter. "He has made me desolate, faint all the day."

"The yoke of my transgressions has been bound on by His hand." This is a powerful picture. Her own sins were tied together like the straps of a yoke and laid on her neck. Sin is never as free as it looks. It ends up as a heavy yoke. Jesus offers a different yoke, one that is easy and light (Matthew 11:29-30).

"The Lord has rejected all my mighty ones." Her soldiers were crushed. "The Lord has trodden a winepress for the virgin daughter of Judah." Grapes were trodden in a winepress until the juice ran out. It is a picture of judgment (Isaiah 63:3; Revelation 14:19-20).

1:16-17 *Over these **things** I am weeping; my eye, my eye is running down **with** water; for a comforter is far from me, one who restores my soul; my sons are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed." Zion has spread out her hands; **there is** no comforter for her; the LORD has commanded concerning Jacob **that** those around him **be** his adversaries; Jerusalem has become an impure thing among them.*

"Over these things I am weeping; my eye, my eye is running down with water." The repeated "my eye" shows how deep the grief was. "For a comforter is far from me, one who restores my soul." A comforter is someone who stays beside you in sorrow and helps your soul recover.

"My sons are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed."

Then the narrator speaks again: "Zion has spread out her hands; there is no comforter for her." Spreading out the hands is the gesture of a person begging for help. No one came.

Five times in this chapter we read that Jerusalem had no comforter (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21). Isaiah heard God say, "Comfort, comfort My people" (Isaiah 40:1). Jesus promised His followers "another Helper," the Holy Spirit, who would be with them forever (John 14:16). God is "the Father of compassions and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). If you are in a season where it feels like no one comforts you, Jerusalem's cry is in the Bible for you, and so is God's answer. He is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).

1:18-19 *"Righteous **is** He, the LORD, for I have rebelled **against** His mouth. Hear, please, all the peoples, and see my pain; my virgins and my young men have gone into captivity. I called to my lovers; they themselves deceived me; my priests and my elders perished in the city, for they sought food for themselves, that they might restore their soul.*

This may be the most important verse in the chapter. "Righteous is He, the LORD, for I have rebelled against His mouth."

Jerusalem does not accuse God. She says He was right. She had rebelled against His word. This is true confession. David prayed the same way: "Against You, You alone, I have sinned" (Psalm 51:4). Real repentance does not make excuses. It agrees with God about our sin.

"Hear, please, all the peoples, and see my pain; my virgins and my young men have gone into captivity." The young people, the future of the nation, were gone.

"I called to my lovers; they themselves deceived me." The allies she trusted did nothing. "My priests and my elders perished in the city, for they sought food for themselves." Even the leaders died of hunger.

1:20-22 *See, O LORD, for distress **is** mine; my inward parts are in turmoil; my heart is overturned within me, for I have surely rebelled; from outside the sword has bereaved; in the house **it is** like death. They have heard that I am groaning; **there is** no comforter for me; all my enemies have heard of my calamity; they rejoice that You Yourself have done **it**; You have brought the day **which** You proclaimed, and let them be like me. Let all their evil come before You, and deal with them just as You have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groanings **are** many, and my heart **is** faint."*

"See, O LORD, for distress is mine; my inward parts are in turmoil." She feels sick with grief. "For I have surely rebelled." Again she confesses. "From outside the sword has bereaved; in the house it is like death." Outside the walls, the sword. Inside the houses, famine and disease. Nowhere was safe.

"They have heard that I am groaning; there is no comforter for me; all my enemies have heard of my calamity; they rejoice that You Yourself have done it."

Then she asks God to judge her enemies: "Let all their evil come before You, and deal with them just as You have dealt with me." Is that wrong? She is not taking revenge. She is asking God, the righteous Judge, to deal with those who did evil, as He had dealt with her. God had already promised to do that (Jeremiah 50:15, 29). The book of Jeremiah ends with that promise. It is right to leave justice in God's hands (Romans 12:19).

The poem ends with these words: "for my groanings are many, and my heart is faint." There is no tidy ending. The grief is still there. But it is grief spoken to God, and that is the beginning of hope.

Summary

Lamentations 1 is the first of five poems over fallen Jerusalem. The city that was once full of people sits alone like a widow, weeping in the night, with no comforter among all her lovers. Judah has gone into exile, the roads to the feasts are empty, the priests groan, and the enemy has become the head, because the LORD brought grief on her for her many sins. Foreign nations entered the sanctuary, and the people traded their treasures for bread. Jerusalem then speaks for herself, asking all who pass by to see if there is any pain like hers. God has sent fire into her bones and bound the yoke of her sins on her neck. She weeps with no one to comfort her, yet she confesses, "Righteous is He, the LORD, for I have rebelled against His mouth." She asks God to see her distress and to deal with her enemies as He has dealt with her.

Study Questions

1. What two pictures does verse 1 use for Jerusalem? (1:1)

2. Who were Jerusalem's "lovers," and what did they do? (1:2, 19)

3. Why had the LORD caused her grief? (1:5)

4. What did Jerusalem fail to remember? (1:9)

5. What did Jerusalem ask those passing by on the road? (1:12)

6. What was bound on Jerusalem's neck like a yoke? (1:14)

7. How many times does the chapter say there was no comforter? Find each one. (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21)

8. What does Jerusalem confess about the LORD in verse 18? (1:18)

9. Jerusalem's sin led to her ruin, yet she said God was right. When you suffer because of your own choices, is it hard to agree with God? Why?

10. When you have felt that no one could comfort you, how has God comforted you? How could you comfort someone else in that place? (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Lamentations 2: The Lord's Anger Against Zion

Scripture

2:1-10 How the Lord covers the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He has thrown from heaven ***to*** earth the splendor of Israel, and He has not remembered the footstool of His feet in the day of His anger. The Lord has swallowed up, and He has not spared, all the settlements of Jacob; He has torn down in His wrath the fortifications of the daughter of Judah; He has made ***them*** touch the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes. He has cut off in the heat of anger every horn of Israel; He has turned His right hand backward from before the enemy; and He has burned in Jacob like a fire of flame ***that*** has consumed all around. He has bent His bow like an enemy; His right hand has taken a stand like an opponent; and He has killed all the delights of ***the*** eye in the tent of the daughter of Zion; He has poured out His rage like fire. The Lord has become like an enemy; He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has ruined its fortifications; and He has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation. And He has treated His booth violently like a garden; He has ruined His appointed place; the LORD has caused appointed feast and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion; and He has spurned in the indignation of His anger king and priest. The Lord has rejected His altar; He has repudiated His sanctuary; He has delivered up into the hand of an enemy the walls of her palaces; they have given forth a voice in the house of the LORD as in ***the*** day of an appointed feast. The LORD has planned to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He has stretched out a measuring line; He has not turned back His hand from swallowing up; and He has caused rampart and wall to mourn; together they have languished. Her gates have sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and He has broken her bars; her king and her princes ***are*** among the nations; there is no law; also her prophets have not found a vision from the LORD. The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground; they are silent; they have made dust go up on their head; they have girded on sackcloth; the virgins of Jerusalem have brought down their head to the ground.

2:11-22 My eyes have failed with tears; my inward parts are in turmoil; my liver has been poured out to the ground over the brokenness of the daughter of my people, because child and nursing infant faint in the open places of a town. To their mothers they say, "Where ***are*** grain and wine?" as they faint like the fatally wounded in the open places of a city, as their soul pours itself out into the bosom of their mothers. What shall I testify for you? What shall I liken to you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I make equal to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your brokenness ***is*** great like the sea; who will heal you? Your prophets have seen for you worthlessness and insipid ***things***; and they have not uncovered your iniquity to turn back your captivity; and they have seen for you oracles of worthlessness and enticements. All who pass by ***the*** road have clapped ***their*** hands at you; they have hissed, and they have shaken their head at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city of which they said, 'The perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth'?" All your enemies have opened their mouth against you; they have hissed, and they have gnashed ***their*** teeth; they have said, "We have swallowed ***her*** up! Surely this ***is*** the day that we have waited for; we have found ***it***; we have seen ***it***!" The LORD has done what He purposed; He has fulfilled His word which He commanded from days of old; He has torn down, and He has not spared; and He has caused an enemy to rejoice over you; He has lifted up the horn of your

opponents. Their heart has cried out to the Lord. O wall of the daughter of Zion, send down tears like a torrent by day and night; do not give yourself rest; do not let the pupil of your eye be still. Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord; lift up your hands to Him for the life of your children, who are faint from hunger at the head of all ***the*** streets. See, O LORD, and look! To whom have You dealt severely like this? Shall women eat their fruit, the children of ***their*** tender care? Shall priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord? Youth and old ***man*** have lain down on the ground ***in the*** streets; my virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword; You have killed ***them*** in the day of Your anger; You have slaughtered; You have not spared. You have summoned, as ***in the*** day of an appointed feast, my terrors from all around; and there was not in the day of the anger of the LORD an escapee and a survivor; those whom I tended and I reared, my enemy has made an end of them.

Preview

The second poem looks at the fall of Jerusalem from a hard angle. It was not only Babylon that did this. It was the Lord. He covered Zion with a cloud in His anger, tore down her walls, rejected His own altar and let the enemy shout in His temple. The king and princes were gone, there was no law, and the prophets had no vision. Then the poet breaks down. His eyes fail with tears as he sees little children fainting from hunger in the streets and dying in their mothers' arms. He calls Zion to cry out to the Lord day and night for the lives of her children, and the poem ends with a raw prayer: "See, O LORD, and look!"

This chapter is about facing God's anger honestly. It is one of the hardest chapters in the Bible to read. It does not soften what happened or pretend that God was not involved. But it also does not turn away from God. It pours out its heart to Him. As we read, we should ask what we do with our pain when we know God has allowed it, and whether we will still lift our hands to Him.

Study

2:1-2 *How the Lord covers the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He has thrown from heaven **to** earth the splendor of Israel, and He has not remembered the footstool of His feet in the day of His anger. The Lord has swallowed up, and He has not spared, all the settlements of Jacob; He has torn down in His wrath the fortifications of the daughter of Judah; He has made **them** touch the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.*

"How the Lord covers the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger!" The poem begins with the same cry as chapter 1. A cloud had once been the sign of God's presence and glory over Israel (Exodus 40:34). Now a cloud of anger covers the city.

"He has thrown from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel." Jerusalem's glory was cast down like a star falling from the sky.

"He has not remembered the footstool of His feet in the day of His anger." The footstool of God's feet was the ark of the covenant and the temple where it stood (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 132:7). God was thought of as enthroned above the ark. Even His own footstool was not spared.

"The Lord has swallowed up, and He has not spared, all the settlements of Jacob." Every village in the land was destroyed. "He has profaned the kingdom and its princes." To profane is to treat something holy as common. David's kingdom, chosen by God, was brought low.

2:3-5 *He has cut off in the heat of anger every horn of Israel; He has turned His right hand backward from before the enemy; and He has burned in Jacob like a fire of flame* ***that*** *has consumed all around. He has bent His bow like an enemy; His right hand has taken a stand like an opponent; and He has killed all the delights of* ***the*** *eye in the tent of the daughter of Zion; He has poured out His rage like fire. The Lord has become like an enemy; He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has ruined its fortifications; and He has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.*

"He has cut off in the heat of anger every horn of Israel." The horn was a picture of strength. "He has turned His right hand backward from before the enemy;" God's right hand had fought for Israel in the past (Exodus 15:6). Now He drew it back.

"He has bent His bow like an enemy." This is the startling truth of this poem. "The Lord has become like an enemy; He has swallowed up Israel." The poet does not say God became their enemy in every way. He says "like an enemy." God was still their God. But in judgment He acted against them as an enemy would.

Why would God do that? Because He had warned them for centuries. Moses had said that if they rejected Him, He would walk against them (Leviticus 26:23-24). Love that never disciplines is not love at all (Hebrews 12:6-8). God's anger here is the anger of a holy God whose people had turned against Him again and again.

2:6-7 *And He has treated His booth violently like a garden; He has ruined His appointed place; the LORD has caused appointed feast and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion; and He has spurned in the indignation of His anger king and priest. The Lord has rejected His altar; He has repudiated His sanctuary; He has delivered up into the hand of an enemy the walls of her palaces; they have given forth a voice in the house of the LORD as in* ***the*** *day of an appointed feast.*

"He has treated His booth violently like a garden." The temple was torn down as easily as a farmer tears down a garden shed after harvest. "He has ruined His appointed place." "The LORD has caused appointed feast and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion." The great feasts and the Sabbath, God's gifts to His people, were no longer kept.

"He has spurned in the indignation of His anger king and priest." Both of Israel's leaders were rejected.

"The Lord has rejected His altar; He has repudiated His sanctuary." Think how shocking this was. The people believed the temple could never fall (Jeremiah 7:4). Now God Himself had rejected it. "They have given forth a voice in the house of the LORD as in the day of an appointed feast." Once the temple rang with songs at the feasts. Now it rang with the shouts of Babylonian soldiers.

A building is not holy in itself. God's presence makes a place holy. When His people made His house a den of robbers, He let it be torn down (Jeremiah 7:11-14).

2:8-9 *The LORD has planned to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He has stretched out a measuring line; He has not turned back His hand from swallowing up; and He has caused rampart and wall to mourn; together they have languished. Her gates have sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and He has broken her bars; her king and her princes **are** among the nations; there is no law; also her prophets have not found a vision from the LORD.*

"The LORD has planned to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He has stretched out a measuring line." A builder uses a measuring line to build. Here God uses it to tear down, carefully and thoroughly. It was not an accident. It was planned.

"Her gates have sunk into the ground." The great city gates lay in the rubble. "Her king and her princes are among the nations." Zedekiah was blind in Babylon. "There is no law." There were no priests to teach God's law. "Also her prophets have not found a vision from the LORD." Heaven seemed silent. That may be the hardest thing of all, when God seems to say nothing.

2:10 *The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground; they are silent; they have made dust go up on their head; they have girded on sackcloth; the virgins of Jerusalem have brought down their head to the ground.*

"The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground; they are silent." The old men, the wisest in the city, have nothing to say. They throw dust on their heads and wear sackcloth, the signs of deep mourning (Job 2:12). "The virgins of Jerusalem have brought down their head to the ground." Young and old alike sit in grief.

Sometimes there are no words. When Job's friends first came, they sat with him seven days and said nothing (Job 2:13). That silence was the best thing they did. When someone is crushed by grief, we do not always need to explain. Sometimes we just need to sit with them.

2:11-12 *My eyes have failed with tears; my inward parts are in turmoil; my liver has been poured out to the ground over the brokenness of the daughter of my people, because child and nursing infant faint in the open places of a town. To their mothers they say, "Where **are** grain and wine?" as they faint like the fatally wounded in the open places of a city, as their soul pours itself out into the bosom of their mothers.*

Now the poet's own heart breaks. "My eyes have failed with tears; my inward parts are in turmoil; my liver has been poured out to the ground." In Hebrew the inner organs stood for the deepest feelings. He is saying, I am undone.

Why? "Because child and nursing infant faint in the open places of a town." The children were starving. They say to their mothers, "Where are grain and wine?" They asked their mothers for food, and there was none to give. They fainted in the streets "like the fatally wounded," and their lives slipped away "into the bosom of their mothers."

This is one of the most painful passages in Scripture, and I do not want to rush past it or say more than it says. Children suffer in war and famine, and they did in Jerusalem. They had not chosen the sins of their parents and leaders, but they paid for them. The poet does not explain it away. He weeps.

That is the first thing we should learn here. When children suffer, the right response is grief, not a quick answer. God Himself is not cold toward children. Jesus was indignant when His disciples tried to keep the children away, and He said, "Permit the little children to come to Me" (Mark 10:14). And I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

If you have lost a child, or watched a child suffer, these verses may be very hard to read. You are not alone in that grief. The Bible puts tears like these on its pages so we know God sees them. And God promises a day when He "will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer" (Revelation 21:4).

2:13 *What shall I testify for you? What shall I liken to you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I make equal to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your brokenness **is** great like the sea; who will heal you?*

"What shall I testify for you? What shall I liken to you, O daughter of Jerusalem?" The poet wants to comfort Zion, but he cannot find anything to compare to her pain. When we comfort someone, we sometimes say, I know how you feel, someone else went through this too. But he could not think of anyone. "For your brokenness is great like the sea; who will heal you?"

That question hangs in the air. Who will heal you? The answer comes later in the book and in the rest of Scripture. Only the LORD can heal what He has broken (Hosea 6:1).

2:14 *Your prophets have seen for you worthlessness and insipid **things**; and they have not uncovered your iniquity to turn back your captivity; and they have seen for you oracles of worthlessness and enticements.*

"Your prophets have seen for you worthlessness and insipid things." Insipid means tasteless or flat, like whitewash. The false prophets of Jerusalem had said, peace, peace, when there was no peace (Jeremiah 6:14; 14:13). "They have not uncovered your iniquity to turn back your captivity."

That is the job of a true prophet and of every faithful preacher: to uncover sin so that people can repent and be restored. The false prophets told the people what they wanted to hear. If they had told the truth, the city might have been spared. Teaching that never names sin is not kindness. It is cruelty dressed up as comfort (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

2:15-16 *All who pass by **the** road have clapped **their** hands at you; they have hissed, and they have shaken their head at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city of which they said, 'The perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth'?" All your enemies have opened their mouth against you; they have hissed, and they have gnashed **their** teeth; they have said, "We have swallowed **her** up! Surely this **is** the day that we have waited for; we have found **it**; we have seen **it**!"*

"All who pass by the road have clapped their hands at you; they have hissed, and they have shaken their head." These were gestures of scorn. "Is this the city of which they said," they mocked, "The perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth"? Those words come from the psalms about Zion (Psalm 48:2; 50:2). The world mocked Jerusalem with her own praises.

"All your enemies have opened their mouth against you." They gloated: "We have swallowed her up! Surely this is the day that we have waited for." Edom and others had waited for this day, and they celebrated it.

2:17 *The LORD has done what He purposed; He has fulfilled His word which He commanded from days of old; He has torn down, and He has not spared; and He has caused an enemy to rejoice over you; He has lifted up the horn of your opponents.*

"The LORD has done what He purposed; He has fulfilled His word which He commanded from days of old." Here is the key to the chapter. What happened was not random. God had warned Israel through Moses nearly nine hundred years earlier that if they turned away, these things would come (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Then He warned them again through prophet after prophet. "He has torn down, and He has not spared."

This verse cuts both ways. It is sobering, because it means God's warnings are real. But it is also a comfort. If God kept His word about judgment, He will also keep His word about mercy. The same God who said He would tear down also said He would never reject His people completely (Leviticus 26:44). His word stands both ways.

2:18-19 *Their heart has cried out to the Lord. O wall of the daughter of Zion, send down tears like a torrent by day and night; do not give yourself rest; do not let the pupil of your eye be still. Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord; lift up your hands to Him for the life of your children, who are faint from hunger at the head of all* ***the*** *streets.*

"Their heart has cried out to the Lord." Then the poet urges the city: "O wall of the daughter of Zion, send down tears like a torrent by day and night; do not give yourself rest."

"Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord." This is the turning point of the chapter. The poet does not tell Zion to stop crying, or to hold it together. He tells her to take her tears to God. Pour it all out, like water from a jar, before His face.

"Lift up your hands to Him for the life of your children, who are faint from hunger at the head of all the streets." Pray for the children.

This is a word for us. When our hearts are breaking, the place to go is God. "Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8). And when the children around us are in danger, in body or in soul, we lift up our hands for them. Parents and grandparents, keep praying for your children.

2:20-22 *See, O LORD, and look! To whom have You dealt severely like this? Shall women eat their fruit, the children of* ***their*** *tender care? Shall priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord? Youth and old* ***man*** *have lain down on the ground* ***in the*** *streets; my virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword; You have killed* ***them*** *in the day of Your anger; You have slaughtered; You have not spared. You have summoned, as* ***in the*** *day of an appointed feast, my terrors from all around; and there was not in the day of the anger of the LORD an escapee and a survivor; those whom I tended and I reared, my enemy has made an end of them.*

Zion answers by praying. "See, O LORD, and look! To whom have You dealt severely like this?"

She asks God to see how terrible the siege had become. Hunger had driven mothers to things too awful to name, the very thing Moses had warned would happen in a siege (Deuteronomy 28:53), and priests and prophets had been killed in the sanctuary. These verses are not given to shock us. They are given to show how complete the ruin was when God's people rejected Him for so long, and how desperately Zion needed God to look.

"Youth and old man have lain down on the ground in the streets; my virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword." "You have killed them in the day of Your anger; You have slaughtered; You have not spared."

"Those whom I tended and I reared, my enemy has made an end of them." The poem ends with a mother's grief for the children she raised.

That is where this poem stops, with no answer yet. It is honest. Sometimes our prayers are like that, raw and unfinished. But notice that it is a prayer. Zion did not stop talking to God. In the next chapter, out of the deepest darkness, hope will come.

Summary

Lamentations 2 says plainly that the Lord Himself brought Jerusalem down in His anger. He covered Zion with a cloud, forgot His footstool, swallowed up the villages of Jacob, and acted like an enemy against His own people. He tore down His temple like a garden booth, rejected His altar, ended the feasts and Sabbaths, and spurned king and priest. He measured the wall to destroy it, and the gates sank into the ground. There was no law and no vision. The poet's eyes failed with tears as children fainted from hunger in their mothers' arms, and he could find nothing to compare to Zion's broken state. The false prophets had never uncovered her sin. Passersby mocked and enemies gloated, but the LORD had done what He said long ago. The poet urged Zion to pour out her heart like water before the Lord for the life of her children, and the poem ends with Zion asking the LORD to see what had happened.

Study Questions

1. What is the "footstool of His feet," and what happened to it? (2:1)

2. What does it mean that the Lord became "like an enemy"? (2:4-5)

3. What happened to the temple, the feasts and the Sabbath? (2:6-7)

4. What was missing in Jerusalem according to verse 9? (2:9)

5. Why did the poet's eyes fail with tears? (2:11-12)

6. What had the false prophets failed to do? (2:14)

7. What does verse 17 say about why all this happened? (2:17)

8. What did the poet tell Zion to do in the night? (2:18-19)

9. The poet told Zion to "pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord" (2:19). What would it look like for you to pour out your heart to God this week?

10. Who are the children you can lift up your hands for in prayer? How can you pray for them by name?

Lamentations 3: Hope in the Day of Affliction

Scripture

3:1-21 I ***am*** the man ***who*** has seen affliction by the rod of His fury. He has driven me, and He has made ***me*** walk ***in*** darkness and not ***in*** light. Surely against me He turns back; He turns His hand all the day. He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; He has broken my bones. He has built against me, and He has surrounded ***me with*** poison and hardship. In dark places He has made me dwell, like the dead of antiquity. He has walled up behind me, and I will not go out; He has made my bronze fetter heavy. Also when I cry out and I cry for help, He has shut out my prayer. He has walled up my ways with hewn ***stone***; He has made my paths crooked. He ***is*** to me a bear lying in wait, a lion in hiding places. He has turned aside my ways, and He has torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate. He has bent His bow, and He has set me up like the target for the arrow. He has brought into my kidneys the sons of His quiver. I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their taunt song all the day. He has sated me with bitter things; He has made me drink wormwood. And He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in ashes. And You have cast off my soul from peace; I have forgotten good. And I said, "My endurance has perished, and my hope from the LORD." Remember my affliction and my homelessness, the wormwood and the poison. My soul surely remembers, and it bows down within me. This I bring back to my heart; therefore I will wait.

3:22-42 The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end. ***They are*** new in the mornings; great ***is*** Your faithfulness. "The LORD ***is*** my portion," says my soul; "therefore I will wait for Him." Good ***is*** the LORD to those who wait for Him, to the soul ***that*** seeks Him. Good ***it is*** that ***one*** should wait, and silently, for the salvation of the LORD. Good ***it is*** for the man that he should bear a yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone, and let him be silent, for He has laid ***it*** on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust; perhaps there is hope. Let him give ***his*** cheek to the one who strikes him; let him be sated with reproach. For the Lord will not reject forever. For though He has caused grief, then He will have compassion according to the greatness of His steadfast loves. For He has not afflicted from His heart, and ***has not*** grieved the sons of man. To crush under his feet all the prisoners of ***the*** earth, to turn aside the justice of a man before the face of the Most High, to subvert a man in his case at law, the Lord has not seen ***it***. Who ***is*** this ***who*** has said ***something***, and it has come to be, ***when*** the Lord has not commanded ***it***? From the mouth of the Most High do not the evils and the good go forth? Why should a living man complain, a man over his sins? Let us search our ways, and let us examine ***them***, and let us return to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with ***our*** palms to God in the heavens. We have transgressed, and we have rebelled; You have not forgiven.

3:43-66 You have covered Yourself with anger, and You have pursued us; You have killed; You have not spared. You have covered Yourself with a cloud, from prayer passing through. Scouring and refuse You have made us in the midst of the peoples. All our enemies have opened their mouth against us. Terror and a pit have come to us, devastation and brokenness. My eye runs down ***with*** streams of water over the brokenness of the daughter of my people. My eye has poured out, and it will not cease, without stopping, until the LORD looks down and sees from heaven. My eye deals severely with my soul because of all the daughters of my city. My enemies

have surely hunted me like the bird, without cause. They have silenced my life in the pit, and they have thrown a stone on me. Waters have overflowed over my head; I said, "I have been cut off." I called on Your name, O LORD, from a pit of lowest parts. You heard my voice; do not hide Your ear to my relief, to my cry for help. You drew near on the day ***when*** I called on You; You said, "Do not fear." You have conducted, O Lord, the cases of my soul; You have redeemed my life. You have seen, O LORD, my oppression; judge my judgment. You have seen all their vengeance, all their plans against me. You have heard their reproach, O LORD, all their plans against me, the lips of those who rise against me and their muttering against me all the day. Their sitting and their rising, look! I ***am*** their mocking song. You will repay to them recompense, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. You will give to them a covering of heart; Your curse ***be*** on them. You will pursue ***them*** in anger, and You will destroy them from under the heavens of the LORD.

Preview

The third poem is the center of Lamentations, and it is built with the most care: 66 verses, three for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the first two poems the city spoke. Here one man speaks: "I am the man who has seen affliction." For eighteen verses he describes how God Himself seems to have turned against him. Then, in verse 21, he brings one thing back to his heart, and from the bottom of the pit come some of the most loved words in the Bible: "His compassions do not come to an end. They are new in the mornings; great is Your faithfulness."

This chapter is about hope that does not depend on feelings. The man's circumstances do not change in the middle of the poem. What changes is what he remembers about God. As we read, we should ask what we bring back to our hearts when everything is dark.

Study

3:1-3 *I **am** the man **who** has seen affliction by the rod of His fury. He has driven me, and He has made **me** walk **in** darkness and not **in** light. Surely against me He turns back; He turns His hand all the day.*

"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His fury." Who is this man? Many think it is Jeremiah himself; others think he speaks for the whole nation. Both may be true.

He does not name God in these first verses. He just says He and His. "He has made me walk in darkness and not in light." "He turns His hand all the day." This is how deep grief and depression often feel. It is not only that bad things happen. It feels as if God Himself is against you, and it goes on "all the day."

3:4-6 *He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; He has broken my bones. He has built against me, and He has surrounded **me with** poison and hardship. In dark places He has made me dwell, like the dead of antiquity.*

"He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; He has broken my bones." Grief takes a toll on the body. "He has built against me," the word used of siege walls. "In dark places He has made me dwell, like the dead of antiquity." He feels as good as buried and forgotten.

3:7-9 *He has walled up behind me, and I will not go out; He has made my bronze fetter heavy. Also when I cry out and I cry for help, He has shut out my prayer. He has walled up my ways with hewn* ***stone****; He has made my paths crooked.*

"He has walled up behind me, and I will not go out; He has made my bronze fetter heavy." He feels trapped and chained.

Then the hardest line: "Also when I cry out and I cry for help, He has shut out my prayer." Have you ever felt that your prayers hit the ceiling? This man felt it too, and his words are in the Bible. God did not edit them out.

3:10-13 *He* ***is*** *to me a bear lying in wait, a lion in hiding places. He has turned aside my ways, and He has torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate. He has bent His bow, and He has set me up like the target for the arrow. He has brought into my kidneys the sons of His quiver.*

"He is to me a bear lying in wait, a lion in hiding places." The God who had been his Shepherd now feels like a wild animal. "He has set me up like the target for the arrow," and the arrows, "the sons of His quiver," have gone deep into his kidneys, which in Hebrew thinking stood for the deepest feelings.

3:14-18 *I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their taunt song all the day. He has sated me with bitter things; He has made me drink wormwood. And He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in ashes. And You have cast off my soul from peace; I have forgotten good. And I said, "My endurance has perished, and my hope from the LORD."*

"I have become a laughingstock to all my people," as Jeremiah was (Jeremiah 20:7). "He has made me drink wormwood," a very bitter plant. "He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in ashes."

"And You have cast off my soul from peace; I have forgotten good." For the first time he speaks to God as You. He cannot remember what good felt like. At the bottom he says his endurance and his hope from the LORD have perished.

Why are verses this dark in the Bible? Because God knew His people would go through times like this. David cried, "How long will You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1). Jesus Himself cried on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

If you are in a dark place like this, hear me: feeling forsaken is not the same as being forsaken. You are allowed to tell God exactly how you feel. Do not stop at verse 18. Keep reading. And please do not carry it alone. Talk to a pastor, a trusted friend or a counselor. If you are thinking about ending your life, reach out for help today, to someone near you or to a crisis line where you live. Your life matters to God.

3:19-20 *Remember my affliction and my homelessness, the wormwood and the poison. My soul surely remembers, and it bows down within me.*

"Remember my affliction and my homelessness, the wormwood and the poison. My soul surely remembers, and it bows down within me." He cannot stop going over his pain, and it crushes him. That is where most of us live when we suffer.

3:21 *This I bring back to my heart; therefore I will wait.*

"This I bring back to my heart; therefore I will wait."

This is the turning point of the whole book. Nothing outside has changed. Jerusalem is still in ruins, and the man is still in pain. But he has been remembering his affliction, and now he chooses to remember something else.

We cannot always choose our feelings, but we can choose what we bring back to our hearts.

3:22-23 *The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end.* ***They are*** *new in the mornings; great* ***is*** *Your faithfulness.*

"The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end."

Slow down and take this in, phrase by phrase.

"The steadfast loves of the LORD." The Hebrew word is hesed, steadfast love. It is God's covenant love, the love that keeps its promises and will not let go. It is the word God used of Himself when He passed before Moses: "great in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). Here the word is plural, "loves." God's steadfast love does not come once. It comes again and again, in act after act.

"For we are not finished." Some translations read, we are not consumed. Jerusalem was burned, but the people of God were not wiped out. A remnant was still alive, not because they deserved it, but because of the LORD's steadfast love. If God had given them only what they deserved, there would have been no one left to write this poem.

"For His compassions do not come to an end." The word for compassions, rachamim, comes from the Hebrew word for a mother's womb. It is the tender, deep love a mother has for the child she carried. God's compassion is like that, and it never runs out. We run out of patience. God does not run out of compassion.

"They are new in the mornings." Every morning there is a fresh supply. Think of the manna in the wilderness. God gave it new every morning, enough for that day (Exodus 16:21). You do not have to store up God's compassion for tomorrow. It will be new when tomorrow comes.

"Great is Your faithfulness." Notice that he turns and speaks to God directly. A few verses ago he said, "You have cast off my soul from peace" (3:17). Now he says, "great is Your faithfulness." It is the same God, the same pain, and the same man. What changed was what he remembered.

God's faithfulness means He is always true to His word and to His people. The man in the pit looked at the ruins all around him and said, God is faithful. That is faith.

How does this help us today? Some mornings we wake up with yesterday's burdens still on us. This verse does not promise that every morning will be easy. It promises that every morning God's compassions will be new. And for those who belong to Christ, every one of those mercies comes to us through the cross. Because He bore God's anger in our place, God's compassions toward us will never come to an end.

3:24 *"The LORD **is** my portion," says my soul; "therefore I will wait for Him."*

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul; "therefore I will wait for Him."

A portion was a share of the inheritance. When Israel divided the land, the priests received no land, because the LORD said, "I am your portion and your inheritance" (Numbers 18:20). The man has lost home, city and peace, but the LORD is his portion. If everything else is gone and you still have God, you still have everything that matters. (See Psalm 73:26.)

"Therefore I will wait for Him." Hope in Scripture is not wishful thinking. It is waiting with confidence for God to keep His word.

3:25-26 *Good **is** the LORD to those who wait for Him, to the soul **that** seeks Him. Good **it is** that **one** should wait, and silently, for the salvation of the LORD.*

"Good is the LORD to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him." Three verses in a row begin with the Hebrew word for good (3:25, 26, 27).

"Good it is that one should wait, and silently, for the salvation of the LORD." Waiting silently does not mean we never cry out. This whole book is crying out. It means we stop fighting God and trust Him to act in His time. "Those who wait for the LORD will renew power" (Isaiah 40:31).

Waiting is hard, but some of God's best work in us happens in the waiting. If you are waiting on God right now, this verse is for you.

3:27-30 *Good **it is** for the man that he should bear a yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone, and let him be silent, for He has laid **it** on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust; perhaps there is hope. Let him give **his** cheek to the one who strikes him; let him be sated with reproach.*

"Good it is for the man that he should bear a yoke in his youth." A yoke was the wooden frame placed on an ox for work. Hardship learned young can shape a person for good.

"Let him sit alone, and let him be silent, for He has laid it on him." "Let him put his mouth in the dust; perhaps there is hope." To put the mouth in the dust was to bow all the way down. Notice the honest "perhaps." He does not pretend to know the outcome, but he humbles himself and hopes.

"Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him; let him be sated with reproach." Jesus taught His followers to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39), and He lived this verse, when He was struck and did not strike back (1 Peter 2:23).

3:31-33 *For the Lord will not reject forever. For though He has caused grief, then He will have compassion according to the greatness of His steadfast loves. For He has not afflicted from His heart, and **has not** grieved the sons of man.*

Now the poet gives three reasons for hope. Each begins with "For."

"For the Lord will not reject forever." The rejection Jerusalem was feeling was real, but it was not final. God's discipline has an end. "For a moment is in His anger, life is in His favor; in the evening weeping lodges, and at the morning, a shout of joy" (Psalm 30:5).

"For though He has caused grief, then He will have compassion according to the greatness of His steadfast loves." The poet does not deny that God caused the grief. He says it plainly. But he also says what comes after: compassion. And the measure of that compassion is "the greatness of His steadfast loves." Not the size of our sin. Not the size of our pain. The greatness of His love.

"For He has not afflicted from His heart, and has not grieved the sons of man." This is one of the most comforting verses in the Old Testament. It means God does not bring suffering because He enjoys it. He disciplines when He must, but His heart is toward mercy. God says the same through Ezekiel: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Why does this matter? When we suffer, we may think God is cruel, or that He likes to see us hurt. These verses say no. Even when He allows or sends hard things, His heart is not in the hurting. His heart is in the healing. He disciplines us as a loving father does, for our good (Hebrews 12:10-11). "As a father has compassion on his sons, the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:13).

The cross shows us God's heart most clearly. He did not spare His own Son (Romans 8:32), because He loved us and would not leave us under judgment.

3:34-36 *To crush under his feet all the prisoners of **the** earth, to turn aside the justice of a man before the face of the Most High, to subvert a man in his case at law, the Lord has not seen **it**.*

"To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the justice of a man," "to subvert a man in his case at law, the Lord has not seen it." The last line can be read as a question, does the Lord not see it, or as saying He does not approve of it. Either way, God sees every injustice.

3:37-39 *Who **is** this **who** has said **something**, and it has come to be, **when** the Lord has not commanded **it**? From the mouth of the Most High do not the evils and the good go forth? Why should a living man complain, a man over his sins?*

"From the mouth of the Most High do not the evils and the good go forth?" Nothing happens outside God's rule. "Evils" here does not mean that God makes people sin. He tempts no one

(James 1:13). It means calamities, as Isaiah says God "makes peace and creates calamity" (Isaiah 45:7).

"Why should a living man complain, a man over his sins?" If we are alive, we have received more mercy than we deserve. This is not a rule against honest lament. The whole book is honest lament. It is a warning against bitterness that blames God for what our sin has brought.

3:40-42 *Let us search our ways, and let us examine **them**, and let us return to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with **our** palms to God in the heavens. We have transgressed, and we have rebelled; You have not forgiven.*

"Let us search our ways, and let us examine them, and let us return to the LORD." Now the poet speaks for all of them. This is the right response: look at our lives honestly, and turn back to God. "Let us lift up our heart with our palms," the heart with the hands.

"We have transgressed, and we have rebelled; You have not forgiven." They confess, yet the ruin is still around them. Sometimes the results of sin go on after we repent. That does not mean God has not heard.

3:43-47 *You have covered Yourself with anger, and You have pursued us; You have killed; You have not spared. You have covered Yourself with a cloud, from prayer passing through. Scouring and refuse You have made us in the midst of the peoples. All our enemies have opened their mouth against us. Terror and a pit have come to us, devastation and brokenness.*

"You have covered Yourself with a cloud, from prayer passing through." Their prayers felt blocked again, and the nations treated them as "Scouring and refuse." Even after the great words of verses 22 to 33, the grief returns. Hope does not erase grief in a moment. It holds us while the grief comes in waves.

3:48-51 *My eye runs down **with** streams of water over the brokenness of the daughter of my people. My eye has poured out, and it will not cease, without stopping, until the LORD looks down and sees from heaven. My eye deals severely with my soul because of all the daughters of my city.*

"My eye runs down with streams of water over the brokenness of the daughter of my people," words that sound just like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 9:1). He will weep "until the LORD looks down and sees from heaven." The tears themselves are a prayer aimed at heaven.

3:52-54 *My enemies have surely hunted me like the bird, without cause. They have silenced my life in the pit, and they have thrown a stone on me. Waters have overflowed over my head; I said, "I have been cut off."*

"They have silenced my life in the pit, and they have thrown a stone on me." This sounds very much like Jeremiah's own story, when his enemies threw him into a muddy cistern (Jeremiah 38:6). "Waters have overflowed over my head." He thought it was the end.

3:55-58 *I called on Your name, O LORD, from a pit of lowest parts. You heard my voice; do not hide Your ear to my relief, to my cry for help. You drew near on the day* ***when*** *I called on You; You said, "Do not fear." You have conducted, O Lord, the cases of my soul; You have redeemed my life.*

"I called on Your name, O LORD, from a pit of lowest parts." "You drew near on the day when I called on You." God came near and told him not to fear. That memory gives him confidence now. Remembering what God has done before keeps hope alive (Jonah 2:2). "You have redeemed my life."

3:59-63 *You have seen, O LORD, my oppression; judge my judgment. You have seen all their vengeance, all their plans against me. You have heard their reproach, O LORD, all their plans against me, the lips of those who rise against me and their muttering against me all the day. Their sitting and their rising, look! I* ***am*** *their mocking song.*

"You have seen, O LORD, my oppression; judge my judgment." He asks God to take up his case. God has heard all their plans and mocking, "all the day."

3:64-66 *You will repay to them recompense, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. You will give to them a covering of heart; Your curse* ***be*** *on them. You will pursue* ***them*** *in anger, and You will destroy them from under the heavens of the LORD.*

"You will repay to them recompense, O LORD, according to the work of their hands." Like many psalms, this is a prayer for God's justice. The poet does not take revenge. He hands his enemies to God. Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44), and we pray for their salvation first. But it is not wrong to ask God to deal with evil that goes unrepented, because vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19).

The poem that began in affliction ends with confidence that God sees, hears and will judge rightly. The darkness is still there, but the man is no longer alone in it.

Summary

Lamentations 3, the center of the book, is the prayer of a man who has seen affliction under the rod of God's anger. For eighteen verses he says God has walled him in, shut out his prayer, attacked him like a bear and a lion, and filled him with bitterness until his hope is gone. Then he brings one thing back to his heart: the steadfast loves of the LORD, whose compassions do not come to an end and are new in the mornings, for great is His faithfulness. The LORD is his portion, and he will wait for Him. The Lord will not reject forever, He will have compassion after grief, and He does not afflict from His heart. The poet calls the people to search their ways and return to the LORD, weeps until God looks down, remembers how God heard him from the pit, and asks God to judge his enemies.

Study Questions

1. How does the man describe what God has done to him in verses 1 to 18? Which picture stands out to you? (3:1-18)

2. What did he say had happened to his hope? (3:18)

3. What did he bring back to his heart, and what changed? (3:21-23)

4. What do the words steadfast love and compassions mean? How often are they new? (3:22-23)

5. What does it mean that "The LORD is my portion"? (3:24; Numbers 18:20)

6. What three reasons for hope are given in verses 31 to 33? (3:31-33)

7. What did the poet call the people to do in verses 40 and 41? (3:40-41)

8. What did God say to the poet when he called from the pit? (3:55-57)

9. Have you ever felt that God had shut out your prayer (3:8)? What helped you keep going, or what could help you now?

10. Lamentations 3:22-23 says God's compassions are new in the mornings. What would change in your day if you began it by bringing that truth back to your heart?

Lamentations 4: The Gold Grown Dim

Scripture

4:1-11 How the gold is dimmed, the fine gold is changed! The stones of holiness lie scattered at the head of all ***the*** streets. The precious sons of Zion, who were weighed with pure gold, how they are considered as jars of earthenware, the work of the hands of a potter! Even jackals draw out a breast; they nurse their young; the daughter of my people ***has become*** cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of a nursing infant has cleaved to its palate in thirst; children have asked for bread; there is no one breaking ***it*** for them. Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those brought up on crimson have embraced ash heaps. And the iniquity of the daughter of my people has become greater than the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown as in a moment, and hands did not twist on it. Her nobles were brighter than snow; they were more dazzling than milk; they were redder ***in*** bone than corals; their polishing ***was*** sapphire. Their appearance is darker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin has shriveled on their bone; it has become dry like wood. Better were the slain of a sword than the slain of hunger, who flow away, pierced through, from ***lack of*** the produce of the field. The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they have become food for them in the brokenness of the daughter of my people. The LORD has completed His rage; He has poured out the burning of His anger; and He has kindled a fire in Zion, and it has consumed her foundations.

4:12-22 The kings of the earth did not believe, all the inhabitants of the world, that opponent and enemy would come into the gates of Jerusalem. Because of the sins of her prophets ***and*** the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of righteous ***ones***, they wandered ***as*** blind ***men*** in the streets; they were defiled with the blood, without ***anyone*** being able ***to*** touch their garments. "Depart! Unclean!" they called out to them. "Depart! Depart! Do not touch!" For they fled; also they wandered; they said among the nations, "They will not again sojourn." The face of the LORD has scattered them; He will not again regard them; they did not lift up the face of priests, and elders they did not favor. Still our eyes fail for our help, ***in*** futility; in our watchtower we have watched for a nation ***that*** will not save. They hunted our steps from walking in our open places; our end drew near; our days were completed; for our end had come. Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of heaven; on the mountains they hotly pursued us; in the wilderness they lay in wait for us. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was captured in their pits, of whom we had said, "In his shadow we will live among the nations." Exult and rejoice, O daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz; also to you the cup will pass; you will become drunk, and you will strip yourself naked. Your iniquity is finished, O daughter of Zion; He will not again take you into exile; He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins.

Preview

The fourth poem looks back on the siege and compares what Jerusalem was with what it became. Gold has grown dim. The precious sons of Zion are treated like cheap clay pots. Those who once ate fine food sit on ash heaps, and nobles who looked healthy and strong are now so thin no one knows them. The poet says plainly why: the sins of the prophets and priests who shed innocent

blood. Then he remembers the last days of the siege, watching for help from a nation that would not save, the king captured as he fled, and the enemy hunting them in the hills. The poem ends with a word to Edom, who rejoiced at Jerusalem's fall, and a word of hope to Zion: "Your iniquity is finished."

This chapter is about how far a people can fall when they turn from God, and about the false hopes we lean on. Judah trusted its leaders, its allies and its king, and all of them failed. As we read, we should ask where we have placed our hope, and whether we have learned that only the LORD can save.

Study

4:1-2 *How the gold is dimmed, the fine gold is changed! The stones of holiness lie scattered at the head of all* ***the*** *streets. The precious sons of Zion, who were weighed with pure gold, how they are considered as jars of earthenware, the work of the hands of a potter!*

"How the gold is dimmed, the fine gold is changed!" Gold does not rust or tarnish easily. For gold to grow dim is a picture of something that should never happen. "The stones of holiness lie scattered at the head of all the streets." These may be the stones of the temple, thrown down into the streets. Or the poet may mean the people themselves, as the next verse does.

"The precious sons of Zion, who were weighed with pure gold, how they are considered as jars of earthenware, the work of the hands of a potter!" God's people had been precious to Him, worth their weight in gold. Now the nations treated them like cheap clay pots to be smashed and thrown away (Jeremiah 19:10-11).

Sin always does this. It takes what God made precious and makes it look worthless. But God never stops seeing the worth of His people. Even here, He calls them "precious."

4:3-5 *Even jackals draw out a breast; they nurse their young; the daughter of my people* ***has become*** *cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of a nursing infant has cleaved to its palate in thirst; children have asked for bread; there is no one breaking* ***it*** *for them. Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those brought up on crimson have embraced ash heaps.*

"Even jackals draw out a breast; they nurse their young." Wild animals care for their young. "The daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness." The ostrich was known for leaving its eggs in the sand and seeming not to care (Job 39:13-16).

"The tongue of a nursing infant has cleaved to its palate in thirst; children have asked for bread; there is no one breaking it for them."

This verse is hard to read, and it should be. In the siege, mothers had no milk and no bread to give. The point of the poem is not that every mother stopped loving her child. It is that the famine was so terrible that even what is most natural, a mother feeding her baby, became impossible. The children suffered for the sins of the adults around them.

God's own heart is the opposite of this cruelty. He asks, "Will a woman forget her nursing child?" and answers, "Even these will forget, and I, I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15). If you carry the grief of a child you lost, or a child you could not help, God has not forgotten that child, and He has not forgotten you. I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

"Those who ate delicacies are desolate in the streets; those brought up on crimson have embraced ash heaps." Crimson cloth was the clothing of the wealthy. The rich were now digging through garbage.

4:6 *And the iniquity of the daughter of my people has become greater than the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown as in a moment, and hands did not twist on it.*

"And the iniquity of the daughter of my people has become greater than the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown as in a moment."

How could Jerusalem's sin be greater than Sodom's? Because Jerusalem had so much more. She had the law, the temple, the covenant and the prophets. Sodom never had any of that. Jesus said the same about the towns that saw His miracles and did not repent: it would be "more tolerable" for Sodom in the day of judgment than for them (Matthew 11:24). "To whom much was given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

And Sodom's end came "as in a moment." Jerusalem's suffering dragged on for a year and a half of siege. In a way, a quick end would have been kinder.

4:7-9 *Her nobles were brighter than snow; they were more dazzling than milk; they were redder **in** bone than corals; their polishing **was** sapphire. Their appearance is darker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin has shriveled on their bone; it has become dry like wood. Better were the slain of a sword than the slain of hunger, who flow away, pierced through, from **lack of** the produce of the field.*

"Her nobles were brighter than snow; they were more dazzling than milk." Jerusalem's leading men had been healthy and handsome, their faces glowing. "Their appearance is darker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin has shriveled on their bone." Hunger had changed them so much that their own neighbors did not know them.

"Better were the slain of a sword than the slain of hunger." Those who died quickly by the sword were better off than those who wasted away slowly from famine.

4:10-11 *The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they have become food for them in the brokenness of the daughter of my people. The LORD has completed His rage; He has poured out the burning of His anger; and He has kindled a fire in Zion, and it has consumed her foundations.*

"The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children." This is the worst thing the book records, and I will not add to it. It is the curse Moses warned of if Israel turned from God and was besieged (Deuteronomy 28:56-57), and Jeremiah had warned of it too (Jeremiah 19:9). Notice the word "compassionate." These were not monsters. They were loving mothers driven past all

limits by starvation. The verse shows how far the siege broke the people. It does not approve of what it reports.

Why is this in the Bible? Not to shock us. It shows the full weight of what happens when a people rejects God for generation after generation and He finally lets them have what they chose. It tells us that God's warnings are not empty.

"The LORD has completed His rage; He has poured out the burning of His anger; and He has kindled a fire in Zion, and it has consumed her foundations." The judgment was complete.

If this verse is painful to you, that is the right response. And if you carry guilt or grief from something terrible in your own past, hear this: there is no sin so dark that the blood of Jesus cannot wash it away for anyone who comes to Him (1 John 1:7).

4:12-13 *The kings of the earth did not believe, all the inhabitants of the world, that opponent and enemy would come into the gates of Jerusalem. Because of the sins of her prophets* ***and*** *the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of righteous* ***ones,***

"The kings of the earth did not believe, all the inhabitants of the world, that opponent and enemy would come into the gates of Jerusalem." Jerusalem had stood for centuries. God had saved it from Assyria in a single night (2 Kings 19:35). No one thought it could fall.

"Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of righteous ones." Here the poet names the leaders. The prophets and priests, the very men who should have led the people to God, had killed the righteous. They tried to kill Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:8), and a king put the prophet Uriah to death (Jeremiah 26:23). Jesus wept over the same city as the one "killing the prophets and stoning those sent to her" (Matthew 23:37).

Leaders who claim to speak for God carry a heavier responsibility (James 3:1). When they lead God's people astray, the damage spreads to everyone.

4:14-16 *they wandered* ***as*** *blind* ***men*** *in the streets; they were defiled with the blood, without* ***anyone*** *being able* ***to*** *touch their garments. "Depart! Unclean!" they called out to them. "Depart! Depart! Do not touch!" For they fled; also they wandered; they said among the nations, "They will not again sojourn." The face of the LORD has scattered them; He will not again regard them; they did not lift up the face of priests, and elders they did not favor.*

"They wandered as blind men in the streets; they were defiled with the blood." The priests and prophets, once honored, now staggered through the streets like blind men, stained with the blood they had shed.

"Depart! Unclean!" the people cried out to them. "Depart! Depart! Do not touch!" That was the cry the Law gave to a leper, who had to warn others away (Leviticus 13:45). The holy men had become like lepers, and even the nations would not let them stay: "They will not again sojourn."

"The face of the LORD has scattered them; He will not again regard them." They had not honored God, and now no one honored them. "They did not lift up the face of priests, and elders they did not favor."

4:17-19 *Still our eyes fail for our help,* ***in*** *futility; in our watchtower we have watched for a nation* ***that*** *will not save. They hunted our steps from walking in our open places; our end drew near; our days were completed; for our end had come. Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of heaven; on the mountains they hotly pursued us; in the wilderness they lay in wait for us.*

Now the poet speaks for everyone. "Still our eyes fail for our help, in futility; in our watchtower we have watched for a nation that will not save."

During the siege they kept watching for Egypt to come and rescue them. An Egyptian army did come once, and the Babylonians pulled back for a short time, but Egypt went home and the siege went on (Jeremiah 37:5-8). They watched for help from the wrong place.

"They hunted our steps from walking in our open places; our end drew near; our days were completed." "Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of heaven; on the mountains they hotly pursued us." There was nowhere to hide.

What are we watching for? Many of us put our hope in leaders, in money, in health or in other people, and they fail us. "Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who has no deliverance" (Psalm 146:3).

4:20 *The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was captured in their pits, of whom we had said, "In his shadow we will live among the nations."*

"The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was captured in their pits, of whom we had said," "In his shadow we will live among the nations."

The anointed of the LORD here is King Zedekiah. Kings of David's line were anointed with oil when they took the throne. The people called him "the breath of our nostrils," as if their life depended on him. They hoped that under his protection they could survive among the nations. But he was captured as he fled (Jeremiah 52:8-11).

Zedekiah was a weak and faithless king, and still the people's hope was in him. That hope failed. But God had promised a different Anointed One, the Messiah, the true Son of David, a righteous Branch who "will reign as king" and "do justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5). Jesus is the Anointed One whose shadow truly shelters His people, and He will never be captured or fail.

4:21-22 *Exult and rejoice, O daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz; also to you the cup will pass; you will become drunk, and you will strip yourself naked. Your iniquity is finished, O daughter of Zion; He will not again take you into exile; He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins.*

The poem ends with two short words.

To Edom: "Exult and rejoice, O daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz." Edom laughed and cheered when Jerusalem fell (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 12). The poet says, go ahead and celebrate for now. "Also to you the cup will pass." Edom would drink the cup of God's judgment too (Jeremiah 49:12). "He will uncover your sins."

To Zion: "Your iniquity is finished, O daughter of Zion; He will not again take you into exile."

This is the first clear word of hope for the nation in this poem. The punishment for Jerusalem's sin would come to an end. God would not keep sending her into exile. Isaiah heard the same comfort, that "her service has been completed" (Isaiah 40:2).

Yet Jerusalem was destroyed again in A.D. 70, and the Jewish people were scattered for centuries. How do we understand this? The punishment of the Babylonian exile did end, and the people came home in 538 B.C. I believe the fullest meaning waits for the day God plants Israel in their land and "they will not be plucked up again from upon their land" (Amos 9:15), when they turn to the Messiah and He reigns in Zion.

Summary

Lamentations 4 compares Jerusalem before and after the siege. The gold has grown dim, and the precious sons of Zion are treated like clay pots. Infants thirst and children ask for bread with no one to give it, and the rich lie on ash heaps. Jerusalem's sin was greater than Sodom's, and her suffering lasted longer. Her nobles became unrecognizable from hunger, and those who died by the sword were better off than those who died by famine. Even compassionate mothers were driven to the unthinkable, as the LORD poured out His anger. No one believed Jerusalem could fall, but the sins of her prophets and priests, who shed the blood of the righteous, brought it down, and they wandered like lepers. The people watched in vain for a nation to save them, and their king, the anointed of the LORD, was captured. Edom would drink the cup of judgment too, but Zion's punishment would be finished.

Study Questions

1. What has happened to the gold and to the precious sons of Zion? (4:1-2)

2. How does the poet compare the people with jackals and ostriches? (4:3)

3. Why was Jerusalem's sin greater than Sodom's? (4:6; Matthew 11:24)

4. Why did the poet say those killed by the sword were better off? (4:9)

5. Whose sins does verse 13 name, and what had they done? (4:13)

6. What did the people watch for during the siege, and what happened? (4:17; Jeremiah 37:5-8)

7. Who is "the anointed of the LORD" in verse 20, and what happened to him? (4:20; 52:8-9)

8. What does God say to Edom, and what does He say to Zion? (4:21-22)

9. The people kept watching for a nation that could not save them (4:17). What are you tempted to watch and wait for, instead of the LORD?

10. God called His people "precious" even when the nations treated them as worthless (4:2). How does knowing your worth to God help when others treat you as if you do not matter?

Lamentations 5: Remember, O LORD

Scripture

5:1-10 Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our reproach. Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our houses to foreigners. We have become fatherless ones, and there is no father; our mothers ***are*** like widows. Our water we have drunk for money; our wood comes for a price. On our neck we have been pursued; we have become weary, and no rest has been given to us. ***To*** Egypt we have given a hand, ***and to*** Assyria, to be satisfied ***with*** bread. Our fathers sinned, and they are no more; and we have borne their iniquities. Slaves have ruled over us; there is no one rescuing ***us*** from their hand. With our life we bring in our bread, because of the sword of the wilderness. Our skin has grown hot like an oven because of the burning heat of hunger.

5:11-22 They have humiliated women in Zion, virgins in the cities of Judah. Princes have been hanged by their hand; the faces of elders have not been honored. Young men have lifted a mill, and youths have staggered under the wood. Old ***men*** have ceased from the gate, young men from their music. The joy of our heart has ceased; our dancing has been changed into mourning. The crown of our head has fallen; woe now to us, for we have sinned! Because of this our heart has become faint; because of these ***things*** our eyes have grown dim, because of the mountain of Zion, which ***is*** desolate; foxes have prowled on it. You, O LORD, will sit forever; Your throne ***is*** to generation and generation. Why do You forget us perpetually, ***and*** abandon us for length of days? Cause us to return, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us return; renew our days as of old. Unless You have utterly rejected us; You have been angry against us exceedingly.

Preview

The last poem is a prayer. It has 22 verses like chapters 1, 2 and 4, but it is not an acrostic. The careful pattern is gone, and what is left is a plain cry to God from the people who remained in the ruined land. "Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us." They list their troubles: their land in the hands of strangers, orphans and widows everywhere, paying for their own water, working like slaves, hunger, women abused, princes hanged, young men forced to grind at the mill, no music, no dancing. They confess, "woe now to us, for we have sinned!" Then they lift their eyes to the throne of the LORD that lasts forever, and ask Him to bring them back.

This chapter is about praying when there is no answer yet. The book does not end with everything fixed. It ends with an honest question. As we read, we should ask whether we are willing to bring God our hardest prayers, and whether we can trust His throne when we cannot yet see His hand.

Study

5:1 *Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our reproach.*

"Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our reproach." The poem begins with three requests: remember, look and see. The people do not doubt that God knows. They ask Him to act on what He knows.

To ask God to remember is not to remind Him of something He forgot. In Scripture, when God remembers, He acts. He remembered Noah and sent the wind (Genesis 8:1). He remembered His covenant and sent Moses (Exodus 2:24). This is a prayer for God to move.

5:2-4 *Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our houses to foreigners. We have become fatherless ones, and there is no father; our mothers **are** like widows. Our water we have drunk for money; our wood comes for a price.*

"Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our houses to foreigners." The land God gave to Israel as an inheritance was now owned by others.

"We have become fatherless ones, and there is no father; our mothers are like widows." So many men had died in the war that the land was full of orphans and widows. It may also mean they felt like orphans, with no king and no protector.

"Our water we have drunk for money; our wood comes for a price." They had to pay their conquerors for water from their own wells and wood from their own forests. Everyday life had become a burden.

5:5-6 *On our neck we have been pursued; we have become weary, and no rest has been given to us. **To** Egypt we have given a hand, **and to** Assyria, to be satisfied **with** bread.*

"On our neck we have been pursued; we have become weary, and no rest has been given to us." They were driven like animals with a yoke on their necks, with no rest.

"To Egypt we have given a hand, and to Assyria, to be satisfied with bread." To give the hand meant to make a pact. Over the years Judah had made deals with Egypt and Assyria, the great powers, hoping to survive (Jeremiah 2:18, 36). It never worked. They looked for bread in the wrong places.

5:7 *Our fathers sinned, and they are no more; and we have borne their iniquities.*

"Our fathers sinned, and they are no more; and we have borne their iniquities."

Is this complaint fair? There is truth in it. The sins of Manasseh and the generations before had piled up (2 Kings 24:3-4), and their children lived with the results. Sin always hurts the next generation.

But this is not the whole truth, and the people know it. In verse 16 they will say, "we have sinned!" They were not innocent victims of their fathers' sins. They had kept on in the same ways. God says

plainly that each person is responsible for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:20), and He promised a day when people would no longer blame their fathers for their troubles (Jeremiah 31:29-30).

For us the lesson is two-sided. We may carry real wounds from the sins of parents or others before us. God sees that. But we cannot hide behind them. We are each called to own our own sin and turn to God. And when we do, the chain can be broken.

5:8-10 *Slaves have ruled over us; there is no one rescuing **us** from their hand. With our life we bring in our bread, because of the sword of the wilderness. Our skin has grown hot like an oven because of the burning heat of hunger.*

"Slaves have ruled over us." The officials who now governed them may have been servants of the Babylonian king, men of low rank given power over Judah. "There is no one rescuing us from their hand."

"With our life we bring in our bread, because of the sword of the wilderness." Going out to the fields to gather food was dangerous, because raiders roamed the countryside. "Our skin has grown hot like an oven because of the burning heat of hunger." Hunger burned in them like a fever.

5:11 *They have humiliated women in Zion, virgins in the cities of Judah.*

"They have humiliated women in Zion, virgins in the cities of Judah."

This verse speaks of the abuse of women by the conquering soldiers. Scripture says it in a few words, and so will I. It was a terrible evil, and it is one of the cruelest things done in war in every age. The women of Zion were not to blame for what was done to them. The poem lists it among the griefs of the nation because God saw it and counted it as a deep wrong.

If you or someone you love has suffered this kind of harm, please hear this: it was not your fault, and the shame belongs to the one who did it, not to you. God is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18). He sees what was done in secret, and He is the Judge who will set it right. If you are carrying this alone, please talk with someone you trust, a pastor, a counselor or a friend, and let them walk with you.

5:12-14 *Princes have been hanged by their hand; the faces of elders have not been honored. Young men have lifted a mill, and youths have staggered under the wood. Old **men** have ceased from the gate, young men from their music.*

"Princes have been hanged by their hand; the faces of elders have not been honored." The leaders were killed and their bodies hung up in shame, and the old men, who should have been respected, were treated with contempt.

"Young men have lifted a mill, and youths have staggered under the wood." Grinding grain at the mill was slaves' work, often done by women or prisoners (Judges 16:21). The young men were forced to do it, and boys staggered under heavy loads of firewood.

"Old men have ceased from the gate, young men from their music." The city gate was where the elders sat to judge and talk. It was empty. The young men no longer played their music. All the ordinary joys of life were gone.

5:15-16 *The joy of our heart has ceased; our dancing has been changed into mourning. The crown of our head has fallen; woe now to us, for we have sinned!*

"The joy of our heart has ceased; our dancing has been changed into mourning." David once sang, "You have turned my mourning into dancing for me" (Psalm 30:11). Here it is the other way around. Dancing had turned into mourning.

"The crown of our head has fallen; woe now to us, for we have sinned!" The crown is their glory: their king, their city, their temple. It has fallen. And now comes the confession, plain and simple. We have sinned. This is the only place in the poem where they say it, and it is the key to everything. They did not only suffer because of their fathers. They suffered because of their own sin. Restoration begins with confession (1 John 1:9).

5:17-18 *Because of this our heart has become faint; because of these **things** our eyes have grown dim, because of the mountain of Zion, which **is** desolate; foxes have prowled on it.*

"Because of this our heart has become faint; because of these things our eyes have grown dim, because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate; foxes have prowled on it."

Mount Zion was the place where God had put His name. The temple courts had been full of worshipers and priests. Now wild foxes or jackals wandered over the ruins. It was a picture of total desolation, and it broke their hearts.

5:19 *You, O LORD, will sit forever; Your throne **is** to generation and generation.*

"You, O LORD, will sit forever; Your throne is to generation and generation."

Here is the turning point of the prayer. Everything on earth had fallen: the city, the temple, the king, the people. But the LORD's throne had not fallen. Zedekiah's throne was gone. David's city was rubble. Babylon's throne would fall too. But the LORD sits forever. The psalms say the same: "You, LORD, sit forever" (Psalm 102:12).

That is where hope stands when everything else is gone. Not on our circumstances, not on our leaders, not even on our feelings, but on the throne of God, which never moves. If your world has fallen apart, this is the verse to hold. God is still on His throne. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

5:20 *Why do You forget us perpetually, **and** abandon us for length of days?*

"Why do You forget us perpetually, and abandon us for length of days?"

Right after praising God's eternal throne, they ask the honest question. If You reign forever, why have You forgotten us so long? Faith and questions sit side by side. The psalms ask the same thing (Psalm 13:1). It is not unbelief to ask God why. It is faith that still talks to Him.

God did not forget them. He had already told them through Jeremiah that the exile would last seventy years and that He would bring them back (Jeremiah 29:10). But to people living in the ruins, it felt like forever.

5:21 *Cause us to return, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us return; renew our days as of old.*

"Cause us to return, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us return; renew our days as of old."

This is the heart of the prayer. Notice the order. "Cause us to return," and then "let us return." They know they cannot turn back to God on their own. They ask God to turn them, and then they will turn. Repentance is a gift of God's grace (2 Timothy 2:25). Ephraim prayed the same way in Jeremiah: "bring me back, and let me return" (Jeremiah 31:18).

"Renew our days as of old." They ask not only for return to the land, but for the old relationship with God. God answered this prayer. In 538 B.C. He brought the exiles home, and the temple was rebuilt by 516 B.C. And He promised a greater renewal through the new covenant, when He would give His people a new heart (Jeremiah 31:33). In Christ, God answers this prayer for every person who turns to Him. He turns us, and we return.

5:22 *Unless You have utterly rejected us; You have been angry against us exceedingly.*

"Unless You have utterly rejected us; You have been angry against us exceedingly."

The book ends here, on an honest note. Some translate it as a question: or have You utterly rejected us? Either way, it is the fear that is left after the prayer. The people have asked God to bring them back, and they still do not know how He will answer.

Why would God let the book end like this? Because real prayer does not always end with a neat answer. Sometimes we pray, and we have to wait. Lamentations gives us permission to bring God our fears and to leave them with Him unresolved.

For many centuries, when this book has been read aloud in the synagogue, the reader has gone back after verse 22 and read verse 21 again, so that the last words heard are the prayer for return. That is a good instinct. The fear is real, but it is not the last word.

And we know the rest of the story. God did not utterly reject His people. Paul asks, "did God reject His people?" and answers, "May it not be!" (Romans 11:1). He brought them back from Babylon, and He sent His Son, who bore the full weight of God's anger on the cross so that we would never be rejected. Jesus cried out as one forsaken (Matthew 27:46) so that all who trust in Him could be received. For everyone in Christ, the answer to verse 22 is no. You have not been rejected. You have been brought home.

Summary

Lamentations 5 is a prayer from the survivors in Judah, asking the LORD to remember what had happened to them. Their land and houses belonged to strangers, they were like orphans and widows, they paid for their own water and wood, and they had looked to Egypt and Assyria for

bread. They bore the sins of their fathers, were ruled by slaves, risked their lives for food and burned with hunger. Women were humiliated, princes hanged, elders dishonored, and young men forced to grind at the mill, while all joy and dancing ceased. They confessed, "woe now to us, for we have sinned!" as foxes prowled over desolate Mount Zion. Then they lifted their eyes to the LORD, whose throne lasts forever, asked why He had forgotten them so long, and prayed, "Cause us to return, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us return; renew our days as of old," ending with the honest fear that He might have utterly rejected them.

Study Questions

1. What three things do the people ask God to do in verse 1? (5:1)

2. What had happened to their land, their homes and their families? (5:2-3)

3. Where had they looked for bread and help? (5:6)

4. What did they say about their fathers' sins, and what did they confess about their own? (5:7, 16)

5. What happened to the joy and dancing of the people? (5:14-15)

6. What truth about the LORD do they hold on to in verse 19? (5:19)

7. What do they ask God to do in verse 21, and why do they ask Him to turn them first? (5:21)

8. How does the book end, and how does the rest of Scripture answer it? (5:22; Romans 11:1)

9. When everything around you has fallen apart, what does it mean to you that the LORD sits on His throne forever (5:19)?

10. The people prayed, "Cause us to return, O LORD, to Yourself, and let us return" (5:21). Is there an area of your life where you need to ask God to turn you back to Him?

Conclusion

Jeremiah and Lamentations take us through the darkest days in the Old Testament. For forty years Jeremiah stood before kings, priests and crowds and told them the truth: turn back to the LORD, or Babylon will come. They mocked him, beat him, jailed him and threw him into a cistern. Then everything he said came true. The temple burned, the walls fell, the king was blinded and the people were carried away. Lamentations lets us sit in the ashes and hear the grief of those who were left. Neither book pretends that sin is small. Both say plainly that the city fell because God's people would not listen, and that the LORD was right (Lamentations 1:18).

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, these books show us a God who keeps His word in both directions. He kept His word of judgment to the last detail. He also kept His word of mercy. The exile lasted seventy years, just as He said, and the people came home. He judged the nations around Judah, and still promised to turn back the captivity of Egypt, Moab, Ammon and Elam. He brought down Babylon, the hammer of the whole earth. And He made promises that reach beyond the return from Babylon to the last days, when He will gather Israel from every land, forgive their sin so fully that it cannot be found (Jeremiah 50:20), and set the righteous Branch of David on the throne.

At the center of it all is the new covenant. "Look, days are coming, declares the LORD, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31). God promised to write His law on their hearts and to remember their sin no more. On the night before He died, Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem and could only warn. Jesus wept over the same city and then gave His life for sinners. The Son of David that Jeremiah promised is Jesus Christ, and He is coming again to reign.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and give you a faith that holds in the dark. Jeremiah obeyed God when no one listened, and God kept him, just as He promised on the day He called him (Jeremiah 1:8). The man in the pit in Lamentations 3 had lost everything, and still he said, "The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end. They are new in the mornings; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). Those mercies come to us through the cross, where Jesus bore the anger we deserved. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God.

Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow in God's Word and seek Him with all your heart, as He promised you will find Him when you do (Jeremiah 29:13).

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The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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