**Jeremiah Commentary**

**Jeremiah Chapter 1**

Jer 1:1

**“The words of Jeremiah.”** Jeremiah likely prophesied into his late 50s or even his 60s. He started in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah (Jer. 1:2), and Josiah reigned 31 years (2 Kings 22:1). He prophesied through Zedekiah’s 11th year and the fall of Jerusalem, so by that time he had been prophesying for some 40 years (about 18 during the reign of King Josiah, 3 months during the reign of King Jehoahaz, 11 years during the reign of King Jehoiakim, 3 months during the reign of King Jehoiachin, and eleven years during the reign of King Zedekiah). Jeremiah started prophesying when he was a youth, likely in his mid to late teens (Jer. 1:6). So by the fall of Jerusalem he would have been in his mid to late 50s. He almost certainly wrote Lamentations, which he would have had to have written after the fall of Jerusalem (see the REV introduction to Lamentations), and then after that, he went to Egypt where he disappears from history—he apparently died there.

**“the son of Hilkiah.”** Nothing is known for certain about this Hilkiah except he was a priest in Anathoth, a city of priests in the tribal territory of Benjamin. However, it is possible and even likely that Hilkiah and thus Jeremiah were descendants of Abiathar (1 Kings 2:26), who was the High Priest during David’s time, but was removed by Solomon because he supported Adonijah (2 Kings 1:7), who was fomenting a rebellion against Solomon (1 Kings 1:5-7).

**“Anathoth.”** It was one of the 48 cities allotted to the Levites in Israel, and was in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 21:18). It is likely that it is modern-day Anata, a town three miles north of Jerusalem. The priests there did not like the prophecies of Jeremiah and at some point planned to kill him (Jer. 11:21).

Jer 1:2

**“in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.”** The thirteenth year of Josiah was likely 627 BC. Josiah reigned 31 years (2 Kings 22:1). Jeremiah used Nisan dating; he counted Nisan as the first month of the year. Jeremiah had prophesied for some 40 years by the time Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon (about 18 during the reign of King Josiah, 3 months during the reign of King Jehoahaz, 11 years during the reign of King Jehoiakim, 3 months during the reign of King Jehoiachin, and some 11 years during the reign of King Zedekiah). Jeremiah started prophesying when he was a youth, likely in his mid to late teens (Jer. 1:6). So by the time Jerusalem was destroyed, he would have been in his mid-50s.

Jeremiah lived in a time when politics and people were going downhill. Josiah had been a good king (2 Kings 22:2). But then Jehoahaz did evil in the eyes of Yahweh (2 Kings 23:31-32), and all the rest of the kings of Judah did evil as well. Thus Jeremiah is a great example of how Christians should be in dark times.

Jer 1:5

**“womb.”** The Hebrew does not have a specific word for “womb,” and so uses a more general term sometimes translated as “belly” but which can refer to the womb in the proper context, such as here.

**“I have appointed you.”** The Hebrew uses the word “given” which explains some English translations that do not use “appoint,” but because the Hebrew word is often understood as “appoint,” that translation is good here and generally accepted in the English versions.

**“a prophet to the nations.”** Although the great majority of Jeremiah’s prophecies were to the people of the Kingdom of Judah (the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been carried away before his lifetime), Jeremiah did prophesy to the nations, especially in Jeremiah 46-51.

Jer 1:6

**“I do not know how to speak.”** Jeremiah could speak, but he is telling God that he does not know how to handle that kind of huge speaking responsibility, to be a prophet not only to Israel, but to the nations. Jeremiah eventually did prophesy to the nations as well as to Judah. For example, he prophesied to Egypt (Jer. 46:2ff), the Philistines (Jer. 47:1ff); Moab (Jer. 48:1ff); Ammon (Jer. 49:1ff); Edom (Jer. 49:7ff); Damascus (Jer. 49:23); Kedar and Hazor (Jer. 49:28ff); and Babylon (Jer. 50ff).

Jer 1:8

**“Do not be afraid of their faces.”** Although some English versions translate the Hebrew as “Don’t be afraid of them,” we humans pay attention to the face and how a person looks when they speak. The ungodly men whom Jeremiah would speak to would have fierce faces that could tend to frighten young Jeremiah. Of course, Jeremiah could also be afraid of their words and threats, but that would be naturally included in the look on their faces.

**“to deliver you.”** God promised to deliver Jeremiah, but Jeremiah had to endure some horrible suffering in his stand for God. Of course, the final delivering is Jeremiah’s resurrection from the dead, at which time he will be richly rewarded. Faithful people can look forward to that no matter what the circumstances in life are (cf. Paul, 2 Tim. 4:8).

Jer 1:9

**“Then Yahweh reached out his hand and touched my mouth.”** From this we know that Yahweh personally appeared to Jeremiah, just like He had done to people before this and would do for people after this (see commentary on Acts 7:55).

Jer 1:10

**“this day I have set you over the nations and over kingdoms.”** Believers with the gift of holy spirit have spiritual power and are fellow workers with God (2 Cor. 6:1), helping God to carry out His work on earth. God did not need to give this authority and power to believers, but He did, and He commands us to use that power and guides us as to when and where. He did the same thing for Jesus Christ, who said, “I am not able to do anything on my own” (John 5:30). Jesus walked by revelation and was given power by God, and spirit-filled believers are to do that too.

[For more on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Jer 1:11

**“I see a branch.”** The Hebrew word translated as “branch” is maqqel (#4731 מַקֵּל) and it can also be translated as “rod,” or “staff.” The staff could be used for support or for defense or as an offensive weapon if need be.

**“an almond tree.”** The almond tree was the first tree to bud and bloom in the spring, and so it became symbolic of a watchman. Just as the almond “watched” for spring, i.e., let people know spring was coming, so God would watch over His word to make sure it came to pass. Anathoth has long been one of the places where almond trees were abundantly planted and grown.

Jer 1:15

**“the north.”** God told Jeremiah very early in his ministry that disaster was coming to Judah and Jerusalem from the north, and God said that many times (cf. Jer. 1:14-15; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 46:20, 24). The immediate enemy from the north turned out to be Babylon, and the result of the Babylonian attack was the destruction of the cities of Judah, the burning of the Temple, and the carrying away of the people of Judah to Babylon in an event known as the Babylonian Captivity. As it turned out, however, in Israel’s history there were other enemies from the north as well.

**“they will each set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem.”** That the thrones of the enemy would be set up at the gates implies conquest and rule. Rulers would often sit in the gate of a city to be available to the citizens, but also to find out what was happening in the city and thus rule over it.

Jer 1:16

**“worshiped.”** Or “bowed down to.” See commentary on 1 Chronicles 29:20.

Jer 1:17

**“tuck your cloak under your belt.”** The literal Hebrew is “belt up your loins.” This refers to the custom of a man tying up his long clothing so he could move more quickly. In this context, it is equivalent to “prepare for battle” or “get ready for work or action.” Jeremiah had tough opposition, so he had to be prepared to do what God asked. See commentary on 2 Kings 4:29.

**“Do not be dismayed at them, lest I make you dismayed before them.”** This seems like a threat, but that would be totally out of character for God. Rather, it is a warning meant in love to help Jeremiah. If Jeremiah showed up before the elders but lost his composure—became dismayed because of them—then God says he will be dismayed in his heart and head and unable to complete the task God is telling him to do. It is not that God would “make” Jeremiah dismayed, it would be that failure of doing the job God sent him to do would make him dismayed in the presence of those elders.

A similar thing happened to Ezekiel, who started out as a young prophet. God appeared to him and gave him a message for the elders of Judah in the Captivity (Ezek. 2:3-5). God told Ezekiel not to be afraid or dismayed at their faces (Ezek. 2:6). But Ezekiel became afraid. He went to the elders as he was told to do, but sat among them for seven days overwhelmed by them and without speaking the message God gave him to speak (Ezek. 3:15). God had to come to Ezekiel and warn him that if he did not speak and people died, He would require their blood at Ezekiel’s hands (Ezek. 3:18). God moved powerfully to encourage Ezekiel, and apparently Ezekiel did speak to the elders, although that is not specifically stated in the Bible.

Jer 1:18

**“against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land.”** Basically, Jeremiah ended up being against everyone, an example of how almost an entire society can be against God and the people who take a stand for him. Usually, the ruling classes stand against God because in their minds they have so much to lose if they do things God’s way, but the people support God. In this case, however, the people withstood Jeremiah’s message and that was likely because in this case they too had a lot to lose. If Babylon conquered Judah and Jerusalem, they would lose almost everything. Any property they had would be taken from them, and their family would likely be broken up and sent to different places. Nobody wanted to hear Jeremiah’s prophecy about the destruction of Judah and how what caused it was ignoring and defying God’s commandments.

**Jeremiah Chapter 2**

Jer 2:2

**“in the ears of Jerusalem.”** The phrase “in the ears of” is used elsewhere in the Bible, and is sometimes translated “in the hearing of.” In this case, God wanted Jeremiah to announce his message to all the people in Jerusalem, so “in the ears of Jerusalem” means to all the people in Jerusalem. “Jerusalem” is being put by the figure of speech metonymy for all the people of Jerusalem.

**“your love as a bride.”** The covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:3-8), often referred to as “the Old Covenant,” is here referred to as a marriage covenant. When Israel broke the covenant over and over, God finally divorced her (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8).

**“through a land *that was* not sown.”** The land where Israel wandered for 40 years after leaving Egypt was not a good land for farming, and so it was not sown with seed to grow crops.

Jer 2:3

**“Israel was set apart to Yahweh.”** In this context, the Hebrew word *qodesh* (#06944 קֹדֶשׁ), which is often translated as “holy,” has its basic meaning of “set apart.” Israel was set apart for her husband, Yahweh.

**“the firstfruits of his harvest.”** Although God intended to take a harvest from all the earth—all the people of earth would be invited to be saved—Israel was considered God’s firstfruits because He took them to Himself, and the firstfruits of the harvest was always given to God (Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Lev. 2:12, 14; 23:10; Deut. 18:2-5).

**“devoured it.”** The Hebrew is more properly “ate it” but in this context, the semantic range of the Hebrew allows for “devour” (cf. ASV, CJB, KJV, NET, NIV). The idea is that anyone who attacked or harmed Israel was guilty before God and would bring evil upon themselves.

Jer 2:4

**“and all the families of the house of Israel!”** By this time, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been carried away by Assyria (2 King 17:6), but before that occurred, many Israelites moved south into Judah (2 Chron. 11:13-17).

Jer 2:5

**“walked after.”** In this context, the phrase “walked after” meant to become a vassal and serve.[[1]](#footnote-21957) Judah was serving idols.

**“worthlessness.”** The Hebrew word is a noun, and it is hard to bring into English. It was used as a derogatory term that referred to idols. Many different phrases have been used to attempt to bring the meaning into English (e.g., “walked after vanity, and are become vain” (ASV); “walking after what is false, have become false” (BBE); “go after nothings and become themselves nothings” (CJB); “went after delusion and were deluded” (JPS); “so far as to follow Futility and become futile themselves” (NJB). It is a nice touch to spell Futility with a capital “F” because it points to the fact that God was speaking of an actual idol).

The meaning of the phrase is well picked up in the somewhat expanded version, the NET: “They paid allegiance to worthless idols, and so became worthless to me.” That the idolaters became worthless to God can literally be seen to be true, because people burn worthless things in the garbage, and God will burn up worthless people in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Satan wants as many people to die in the Lake of Fire as possible, so he propounds the message that “everyone is valuable,” so people will feel valuable in and of themselves and not turn to God to acquire value. But the Bible does not say that people are inherently valuable. People who deny and defy God and do not get saved are indeed worthless to God, which is why God will burn them up.

[For more on people being totally annihilated, burned up completely, in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Jer 2:7

**“enjoy.”** The Hebrew is literally, “eat,” but “eat” is often used metaphorically for the more complete idea of “enjoy,” and that is the case here in Jeremiah 2:7.

**“you defiled my land.”** Land can be defiled physically and spiritually (which then leads to physical defilement)(Lev. 18:24-25).

Jer 2:8

**“Where is Yahweh?”** The priests quit being concerned that Yahweh was not making Himself known as He so often did in Israel’s history, and furthermore, they stopped asking Yahweh for guidance and direction.

**“And those who handle the law.”** That is, the priests and Levites. It is the priests and Levites who handle the Law. In this case, the priests and Levites do not know God and thus do not really know the Law or God’s will for the people.

**“shepherds.”** The Hebrew reads “shepherds,” and in this case, it refers to the rulers, who were the shepherds over the people. The Old Testament often refers to kings and leaders as shepherds (cf. Jer. 2:8; 6:3; 10:21; 12:10; 23:1-4; 49:19; 50:6; Ezek. 34:1-10, 23; 37:24; Zech. 10:2-3). Similarly, the verb, “to shepherd” was used for ruling (cf. 2 Sam. 5:2). In the New Testament, “shepherds” usually refers to the pastors over the people in the Church, but that is not its use here.

It is interesting that Micah 5:2, foretelling the birth of the Messiah, says he will “rule” his God’s people, but when Matthew quotes Micah 5:2, he uses the word “shepherd” (Matt. 2:6).

**“the prophets prophesied by Baal.”** The Hebrew text reads, “the Baal,” not just “Baal,” and therefore “the Baal” refers to the Canaanite storm and fertility god who was worshiped by the Judeans and therefore was the well-known Baal among them. That Baal was called “the Baal” shows that the worship of Baal among the prophets was not a passing knowledge but an entrenched relationship. The prophets who were supposed to follow Yahweh had turned to Baal as their source of information, thus they “prophesied by Baal.”

**“walked after things that do not profit.”** This refers to following (and thus worshiping) pagan idols, and is perhaps a second reference to Baal. The reason the verse ends with “things that do not profit” seems to be to make a wordplay in Hebrew that would catch people’s attention. The name for the god Baal is *ba*’*al* (בַּעַל) while the verb “do not profit” is spelled *ya*’*al* (יַעַל). So the people prophesied by *ba’al* and walked after *ya’al*. People reading the Hebrew text would catch the nuance (and perhaps learn from the reproof as well), and the Hebrews were fond of puns and wordplays.

Jer 2:9

**“bring a case against you.”** The Hebrew word translated “case” is *riv* (sometimes spelled *ruv*) (#07378 רִיב ,רוּב), and it often refers to a lawsuit, as it does here. God had a good basis for a lawsuit since Judah had broken her covenant with God. Earlier, Yahweh had a “case,” a lawsuit against Israel (Hos. 4:1).

Jer 2:10

**“Cross over to the coastlands of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar.”** God challenges the Israelites to see if they can find a nation that has abandoned their gods like Israel has abandoned Yahweh. He challenges them to look to the west and to the east. The island of Cyprus was west of Israel, not just on the west coast of Israel, but across some of the Mediterranean Sea to the west. In contrast, Kedar was a territory that was in the northeast of Arabia (cf. Jer. 49:28).

Jer 2:11

**“Glory.”** Here used as a name for God. The people substituted “no profit” (i.e., idols) for their Glory, God.

**“for that *thing* which does not profit.”** The subject is singular, for that thing that does not (or cannot) profit. The reference is likely to Baal.

Jer 2:12

**“Be appalled at this, O heavens.”** Jeremiah 2:12 is about the reaction of the heavens to Judah’s abandonment of Yahweh. Occasionally the heavens are called upon by God to be a witness to things on earth, which makes sense because they “see” everything and are always there (cf. Deut. 30:19). The heavens and earth were witnesses to Israel’s apostasy (Isa. 1:2).

**“and shudder.”** The sin of Judah was so great the heavens shuddered at the sight.

Jer 2:13

**“living water.”** “Living water” was water that was used for ritual cleansing from sin and impurity. Living water came from God, and thus included rainwater, well water, and water from a flowing river or stream. Water that sat in a cistern was not living water.

In this case, the “living water” also includes not only physical water, but alludes to the gift of holy spirit that God gives to his people and the blessings that come with it. In contrast, the “cisterns” that people carve out for themselves are worthless. They contain no actual living water and they don’t bring the blessings that come with God’s gift of holy spirit. A number of verses equate water with the spirit (e.g., Isa. 44:3; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; 23:15). Without God and the blessings of spirit, the land becomes “dry and thirsty” (Ezek. 19:13).

[For more on living water, see commentary on Num. 19:17.]

Jer 2:15

**“The young lions.”** Lions are fierce foes (e.g., Jer. 4:7). The lion is a good illustration here because the lion was one of the symbols of Assyria,[[2]](#footnote-12314) and it was Assyria that attacked Israel and carried its people away captive (2 Kings 17:6), and that is the threat to Judah in the book of Jeremiah. Judah will be carried away like Israel was if they do not repent and return to Yahweh. As for the Israelites (the Northern Kingdom), they never returned to their native land, but were replaced by what are now called the Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24-34).

However, here in Jeremiah 2, “Israel” is used for Judah (there were many people from Israel in Judah) with the word Israel also bringing to mind what happened to “Israel,” the Northern Kingdom of Israel (cf. Jer. 4:1 where “Israel” clearly applies only to the Southern Kingdom, Judah). Long before the Babylonian Captivity, the Assyrians, after destroying the Northern Kingdom of Israel and carrying away its people, came south and attacked Judah and devastated it (2 Kings 18:13). So Judah knew what it was like to sin and suffer the consequences for it.

Jer 2:16

**“Memphis.”** Egypt had been a long-time foe of Israel and Judah and had wanted to control them. Egyptians had often attacked Israel and Judah and had a presence there (e.g., 1 Kings 14:25-26). Memphis, an important city in Egypt, had once been the country’s capital.

**“Tahpanhes.”** Tahpanhes was a border city in Egypt. It was on the east part of the Nile Delta and bordered the Sinai peninsula. So it was in a position to harass Israel and be a place from which attacks on Israel could be initiated. Here, Memphis and Tahpanhes are two militarily important cities that are put by synecdoche for the cities and armies of Egypt. It was not just these two cities that caused Judah trouble, but the Egyptian army as a whole.

Jer 2:18

**“to drink.”** To eat or drink of something was to partake of it, to become related to it in some way. In this context, drinking the waters of the Nile was a way of expressing getting involved with Egyptian religion and the worship of Egyptian gods. Eating and drinking were common ways of expressing being involved with something (see commentary on John 6:54).

**“the water of the Nile?”** The word “Nile” is literally “Shihor,” which likely refers to the Nile itself, or it could refer to a branch of the Nile (see commentary on 1 Chron. 13:5). “To drink the water of the Nile” meant to participate in the lifestyle of the Egyptians, especially the worship of their gods.

**“the *Euphrates* River.”** In this context, “the River” is the Euphrates River. The Euphrates River ran through the Assyrian Empire, and here it stood for participating in the lifestyle of the pagan Assyrians, especially the worship of their gods.

Jer 2:19

**“Your own wickedness will correct you.”** It is a consistent theme throughout Scripture that evil people bring evil upon themselves (see commentary on Prov. 1:18). But at every level, from ignorance to evil, people are supposed to learn from their mistakes and misdeeds.

Jer 2:20

**“you have broken.”** Although the Masoretic Hebrew text is pointed to read “I have broken,” the Septuagint and Vulgate read “you” which fits the context better, and Keil and Delitzsch refer to this as an Aramaism and give grammatical and contextual reasons why “you” is correct.[[3]](#footnote-16918) Here Israel is compared to an ox or donkey that has rebelled against its owner, broken its bonds, and ran off to do whatever it wanted.

**“your yoke and burst your bonds.”** Here God uses the figure of speech hypocatastasis to portray Israel as a rebellious ox who breaks his yoke and breaks the ropes or bonds that tie him to the plow to refer to Israel. The image is not perfect, but it does portray that Israel was in a committed and mutual relationship with God, but that Israel rebelled. The relationship in mind is the covenant that Israel made with God on Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:3-8).

[For more on the figure hypocatastasis, and how it differs from a metaphor, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“spread yourself.”** The definition “spread” is given in some Hebrew and Aramaic lexicons.[[4]](#footnote-31252) The BDB[[5]](#footnote-17605) was more opaque, only daring to use the Latin: *in sensu obsceno*, which means “in an obscene sense.” God is being very graphic and not pulling any punches in letting the people of Judah know exactly how He felt about their idolatry. Judah was in a marriage covenant with God, but she was spreading herself spiritually by committing adultery with other gods, and physically because the people were involved in the ritual sex connected with the worship of those gods.

**“prostituting yourself..”** Ritual sex was often part of the worship of pagan gods. The people of Israel committed spiritual adultery and physical adultery right along with it.

Jer 2:21

**“a choice vine.”** Here God uses the figure of speech hypocatastasis to represent Israel as a “choice vine,” literally “a Soreq vine.” “This vine was a high-quality red grape grown in the Wadi al-Sarar between Jerusalem and the sea.”[[6]](#footnote-28407) That God planted Israel as a Soreq vine implied His special love for her but also her responsibility to produce good fruit for God.

[For more on the figure hypocatastasis, and how it differs from a metaphor, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“wholly of pure seed.”** Bringing in the idea of the vine and the seed makes a literal translation difficult. The idea is that Judah was a specifically chosen “vine” (i.e., people) and was of “pure” seed—it had not been somehow polluted or crossbred. The Hebrew word translated as “pure” is more literally “faithful,” and using the word “faithful” to represent “pure” brings out the fact that the people were faithful to God when God brought them out of Egypt, at which time He made the covenant with them at Sinai, which is generally referred to as the “Old Covenant.” That was the formal beginning of the nation of Israel.

Jer 2:23

**“in the valley.”** This “valley” is almost certainly the “Valley of Hinnom” (which in Hebrew is *ge hinnom*, and in Greek became Gehenna). It is where child sacrifices occurred (Jer. 7:31; 19:5).

Jer 2:25

**“Spare your feet from becoming bare.”** In other words, don’t run after foreign gods, causing your shoes to wear off your feet.

**“and your throat from thirst.”** In other words, don’t run after other gods, causing you to become parched with thirst. The takeaway message is do not run after other gods.

**“foreign *gods*.”** The Hebrew is just “foreigners,” but it refers to foreign gods, which is in the REV text for clarity.

Jer 2:27

**“to wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave birth to me.’”** There is a powerful irony here. The Israelites were confused and in error as to who was their God and Creator. It was not the male and female gods of the pagan nations, it was Yahweh, the God of Israel. So too, here in Jeremiah 2:27, Jeremiah reverses the roles of the gods and goddesses as if he were confused. The “wood” was a pole, and in the Canaanite pantheon it was an Asherah pole and represented the female deity, not the “father.” Similarly, the “stone” was usually a standing stone or a stone idol and represented the male deity, not the mother who “gave birth to me.” So Jeremiah purposely reverses the roles of the gods and goddesses to mock the confusion that existed among the Judeans, with the hopes that his satire and irony would wake them up to the error they were in.

The idols are simply called “wood” and “stone” to lessen their credibility and wake people up to the fact that these idols were, in fact, just wood and stone.

Jer 2:28

**“for according to the number of your cities are your gods.”** This is almost certainly hyperbole, an exaggeration, because there were not that many major gods that were worshiped in Judah. On the other hand, however, it was very common to worship the same god in different ways with different ceremonies and sacrifices. It was also common to believe slightly different things about them, i.e., what they did, their history and ancestry, etc., so in a sense the gods were different.

Jer 2:29

**“argue your case.”** This is the same word that is used in Jeremiah 2:9, and it refers to a lawsuit or legal case. The reason that the people wanted to bring a case against Yahweh is unstated, but Yahweh likely did not mean it in a literal way, that the people wanted to sue God, but rather that the people were upset with God and His rules. Unbelievers today find themselves in the same place. They think God is unfair and narrow-minded.

Jer 2:30

**“Your own sword has devoured your prophets.”** The godless people of Judah killed the prophets God had sent to correct them and direct them in the way that would lead to a good life here on earth and everlasting life in the future. Right in Jerusalem while Jeremiah was there, King Jehoiakim killed the prophet Uriah the son of Shemaiah who was from Kiriath-jearim (Jer. 26:20-23).

Jer 2:31

**“Have I been a wilderness to Israel?”** God is asking if He has been like a wilderness in that a wilderness is hard to live in. It is difficult and inhospitable.

Jer 2:32

**“Can a virgin forget her jewelry, or a bride her *wedding* sash?”** The point God is making is that a young woman will not forget the things she wore that declared her to be a married woman. This was even more the case in the ancient world, when girls married very early and did not “sleep around” before they married. And furthermore, when they married, they left their own family and moved in with the husband and became part of his family, clan, and tribe, and her children were part of his tribe, not her birth tribe. Thus the marriage of a woman in biblical times involved a total change of location and identity, so no wonder she could not forget what she wore that introduced her to that change and a new identity. It was against that backdrop that God says of His bride, Judah, that she married Him but now has forgotten Him for countless days.

Jer 2:33

**“you direct your course to seek love.”** The woman, Judah, is married to God! Yet she ignores that marriage and is off running around and trying to seek other “lovers,” other gods. Also, given the Canaanite pantheon and practices, it is likely that the worship of pagan gods also involved sex or ritual sex.

Jer 2:34

**“the blood of the souls of the innocent poor.”** In this context, “poor” can have the literal meaning of “poor,” or it can have the meaning of “disadvantaged, downtrodden, afflicted.” The “innocent poor” who were killed could be prophets (Jer. 26:20-23), poor people who lost the means to survive, and also even child sacrifice (Jer. 7:31). The sacrifice of children is mentioned in Jeremiah 7:31 and in Jeremiah 19:5.

**“You did not find them breaking in.”** The Law of Moses allowed a person to defend his person and property and kill a person who was in the process of breaking into his home (Exod. 22:2-3). But the innocent people who these Judeans killed were not breaking into a home, they were innocent.

**“But in spite of all these things.”** This is a place where the verse break was put in the wrong place; the verse continues in the next verse.

Jer 2:36

**“You will be ashamed of Egypt also as you were ashamed of Assyria.”** The point of the verse is that Judah had changed what and how they worshiped depending on who they admired, but the fact is that the nations they admired (in this case Egypt) were as unstable as Judah thought Assyria was. The “rock” was Yahweh. Judah should follow Him and not change.

Jer 2:37

**“with your hands on your head.”** This was a sign of grief. Judah would find out to their grief and shame that other nations were fickle and unreliable, and their gods could not really help Judah.

**Jeremiah Chapter 3**

Jer 3:2

**“like an Arab in the desert.”** This refers to the custom of some of the Bedouin Arabs who robbed for a living. For millennia the Bedouin Arabs have been known to lie in wait for travelers and then rob them. Pliny the Elder wrote about them some 2,000 years ago (*Natural History*, vi. 28) and many books on the culture and customs of the Bible Lands from the 1800s and 1900s mention the fact.

Jeremiah compares the people of Judah and Jerusalem (and Israel, although Israel had been gone for over 100 years) to an Arab in the desert. Just as the Arab waits for unsuspecting travelers to rob, Judah sits and waits for more idol gods to satisfy her lust.

Jer 3:3

**“Therefore the showers have been withheld​​.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10). (See commentary on Lev. 18:25).

**“latter rain.”** This is the rain that falls at the end of the rainy season which brings the grain to maturity. Without it, the grain will not mature and there will be no harvest. See commentary on James 5:7.

**“forehead of a prostitute.”** A descriptive metaphor for bold, shameless, committed to sin. The people of Judah were committed to their sin and had no desire to repent.

Jer 3:5

**“Behold.”** God now answers the people.

Jer 3:6

**“has prostituted herself there.”** This phrase is both literal and figurative. It was common to have Asherah poles on the hills and under the trees (1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; Jer. 17:2), and Asherah was the female consort of the god Baal and was worshiped, among other ways, by “sacred prostitution.” So while the worshipers worshiped the Asherah by literal prostitution, in their hearts they turned away from their covenant with God and thus figuratively played the prostitute against Him by being with other gods.

Jer 3:7

**“I said.”** The Hebrew word is “said,” although many commentators assume that God is talking to Himself, and thus translate the phrase as “I thought.” While that may be possible, and in some contexts the Hebrew “said” can mean “said to myself,” it is also possible that God actually “said” something about this situation to His council of spirits.

[For more on God’s council of spirits, see commentary on Gen. 1:26.]

**“she will return to me.”** This would be a logical assumption. Sin has consequences, and wise people learn from their mistakes. The cruelty and consequences of sexual sin that is part of most ancient idol worship, along with the lack of the blessings of God the people experienced in day-to-day life, should have been enough consequence that the people of Israel and Judah would have come to their senses and returned to God, but they were hard-headed (“the forehead of a prostitute,” Jer. 3:3) and would not return.

This verse in Jeremiah shows that people have the free will ability to disobey God and do what they want to in spite of His will and desire. God is not in control of what people do on earth.

[For more on God not being in control of what happens on this earth, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Jer 3:8

**“She saw.”** The “she” is Judah. The people of Judah saw Israel’s sin and destruction. Although the Masoretic Hebrew text reads “I saw,” that seems to be a copyist’s error; one Hebrew manuscript, along with the Septuagint and Aramaic texts read “she,” which fits the context.

**“sent her away.”** The country of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and the people of Israel were deported to Assyria (2 Kings 17:5). However, when the Assyrian army tried to conquer the country of Judah, the godly Hezekiah was king and they were defeated by a miracle (2 Kings 19:35-36).

**“divorce.”** Israel sinned so egregiously that God divorced her (cf. Isa. 50:1).

Jer 3:9

**“took her prostitution lightly.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “the lightness of her prostitution,” but we would express that as she “took it lightly” or in other words, “it mattered very little to her.” Judah was like Israel in that her idolatry and sexual sin mattered little to her, and just as Israel was deported to Assyria, eventually Judah was deported to Babylon, and even after Judah was allowed to return to their homeland during the Persian empire, after they were deported to Babylon there never has been a time when there were as many Jews in Israel as there were scattered abroad. Sadly, much of the modern world is in the same position today. Israel and Judah experienced ruin from Yahweh because they abandoned Him, and people today can expect the same thing.

**“stones and with trees.”** The pagan idols were made of stone and wood. People today have to be cautious about the same thing. It is easy to make something made of rock (or minerals) or wood or other materials into an idol. People who have a “lucky hat” have an idol made of cloth, and people who think that plastic prayer hands on the dashboard of a car keep them from being in a wreck also have an idol. Spiritual help comes from God, and if we want His blessing we live godly lives and pray hard. It is fine to have objects that remind us of God or remind us to pray, but we are never to think that spiritual help comes because of the object. Never rely on wood and stone for any help—it is an offense to the One who created those materials.

God says that when you turn to wood and stone objects for help you are committing adultery with them. God is to be our Lover, and when we forsake Him, no matter how innocently or ignorantly, and turn to other things for spiritual help, it hurts Him and affects the blessings we receive from Him.

Jer 3:10

**“her treacherous sister, Judah.”** Here in Jeremiah 3:10, Israel and Judah are referred to as sisters. It was common to refer to cities and nations as being female (see commentary on Isaiah 1:8).

Jer 3:12

**“toward the north.”** Israel had been carried away from their homeland to Assyria, which was north of the land of Israel, so God instructed Jeremiah to speak his prophecy to the north. Although this prophecy is still not fulfilled, it will be, and Israel will return to the Promised Land in the Millennial Kingdom (Jer. 3:18; Ezek. 37:15-28).

[For more on the Millennial Messianic Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.]

Jer 3:13

**“scattered your favors.”** The Hebrew is literally, scattered your roads, where “roads” has the common use of way of being. In this case, God is using it euphemistically to play down the idolatry and sexual sin of His people by simply saying they had scattered their “road” to strangers (see commentary on Jer. 3:6).

Jer 3:15

**“I will give you shepherds *who are* after my heart.”** When Christ reigns on earth as king, he will have people who help him rule who are godly and righteous and will take care of God’s people, (see commentary on Jer. 23:4). The twelve apostles will be among those rulers (Matt. 19:28). When Christ sets up his kingdom on earth, he will be assisted in governing the earth by people who have been faithful to him.

[For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 3:16

**“it will not be made again.”** Jeremiah 3:16 tells us what ultimately happened or will happen to the ark of the covenant that Moses made (Exod. 25:10-22; 37:1-9). Furthermore, it says that there will not be another ark made for the Temple in the Millennial Kingdom (the Messianic Kingdom on earth). At some point, the ark that Moses had made for the Tent of Meeting was destroyed—or it will be destroyed if it is still buried somewhere, which is very unlikely.

In the future Millennial Kingdom, there will be a Temple (Ezek. 40:1-43:27), but it will not have an ark of the covenant inside of it. We know that because Jeremiah 3:16 tells us that the ark will not come to mind or be remembered at that time. The last biblical record of the ark of the covenant is before Babylon conquered Jerusalem, and that, along with the fact that when the Persians conquered Babylon the ark was not returned to Jerusalem with the other treasures from Solomon’s Temple (Ezra 1:7-11), tells us that the ark was most likely destroyed during the Babylonian Captivity; it was likely melted down for its gold.

Supporting evidence that there will not be an ark of the covenant in the Millennial Temple comes from reading and comparing the building of Moses’ Tent of Meeting and Solomon’s Temple with the Millennial Temple. The ark of the covenant is mentioned in connection with both Moses’ Tent and Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 8:20-21; 2 Chron. 5:2-7), but no ark is mentioned in the Millennial Temple. The obvious reason for Ezekiel not having any information about an ark in the Millennial Temple is what Jeremiah 3:16 says: one will not be built for it.

The ark of the covenant played a significant role in the Old Testament, with the phrase “ark of the covenant” occurring over 40 times. There is a very good reason that an “ark” was necessary under the Old Covenant but not under the New Covenant. The ark of the “covenant” contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, which were the very heart of the Old Covenant that God made with Israel (Exod. 25:16; 40:20; Deut. 10:5). Moses’ stone tablets had to be put somewhere, so they were placed into the “ark” of the covenant. The Hebrew word translated “ark” means “chest,” “coffin” or “box,” and the English word “ark” comes from the Latin *arca*, meaning “chest.” Thus, the “ark of the covenant” could have legitimately been called “the box of the covenant.” It was because the words of the covenant were placed in the “box” that it was called “the ark (box) of the covenant,” or we might even nuance the genitive to be “the ark that contains the covenant.”

But Israel did not keep the “Old Covenant” that they had made with God, so God said He would make a New Covenant with them (Jer. 31:31-34). But whereas the Old Covenant was written on stone tablets that had to be put somewhere, the New Covenant will be written on people’s hearts (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Heb. 8:10-12), and those hearts cannot be put in a box. Therefore, under the New Covenant, there is no need for a box and there will not be an “ark of the covenant” in the Millennial Temple.

The ark of God was vital under the Old Covenant for different reasons. One of them was that it contained the Ten Commandments, the “words” of the covenant (the Ten Commandments are actually called “the ten words” in the Hebrew text; cf. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). However, it was also where God dwelt and where He met Israel. Under the Old Covenant, God said He dwelt between the cherubim and over the gold cover of the ark, which was the “mercy seat” (1 Sam. 4:4; Ps. 80:1; cf. Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89). In the Millennial Kingdom, however, the city of Jerusalem itself will be called, “The Throne of Yahweh” (Jer. 3:17); Yahweh will reign from Jerusalem (Isa. 24:23), through His Son, our Messiah, over the whole earth (Dan. 7:13-14).

A quick overview of the ark of the covenant and where God met His people is as follows: Moses built a Tent of Meeting that had an ark, a box, that contained the words of the covenant. God dwelt over that ark, between the cherubim. Solomon brought that ark into his Temple, and it was there until the Babylonian Captivity. In 586 BC, the Babylonians burned the Temple down and the ark disappeared from history.

Then, between approximately 600 BC to 575 BC, God gave Ezekiel, who lived in Babylon, a series of visions about the glory of God. Those visions were related to the ark because that was where God dwelt. Before the Temple was burned down and the ark disappeared, when the Israelites were greatly sinning against God, God showed Ezekiel that the glory of God had left the Temple, then left Jerusalem. First, God’s glory moved to the threshold of the Temple, then to the East Gate of the Temple, then it left the city of Jerusalem and went to the Mount of Olives (Ezek. 10:4, 19; 11:23).

Later, after Solomon’s Temple was burned down, God showed Ezekiel a vision of a new Temple (Ezek. 40-43), which we know as the Millennial Temple. That new Temple did not have an “ark of the covenant,” but the vision God gave to Ezekiel showed the glory of God returning into the Millennial Temple from the east, entering the Temple through the east gate, and filling the entire Temple (Ezek. 43:1, 4, 5; 44:5).

There is no doubt that God gave Ezekiel the vision of the Millennial Temple to give His people hope that He would one day again dwell among them in His Temple. But the Jews did not wait for the Millennial Temple. When they returned from the Babylonian Captivity, they built another Temple that we refer to as “the Second Temple,” or “Herod’s Temple.” When the Romans burned that Temple down in AD 70, however, the Jews again found themselves without a Temple and without a place of worship.

Although the Millennial Temple was yet to be built (and is still in our future), God intensified the hope He gave His people by giving the apostle John a vision of a New Jerusalem, the Everlasting City. It will be about 1,380 miles (2,220 kilometers) long, wide, and high (Rev. 21:16), and shaped like a pyramid, no doubt with the throne of God and Jesus at the top and the river of life flowing out from the throne (Rev. 22:1-3). The river of life flowing out from the throne and then down over the city is an amplification of what will happen in the Millennial Kingdom when the river of life will flow from the Millennial Temple and down Mount Zion to the east and to the west (Ezek. 47:1-9; Zech. 14:8). The New Jerusalem, the Everlasting City, will not have an ark of the covenant in it, indeed, it will not even have a Temple (Rev. 21:22). Instead of living in a Temple, God will live among His people (Rev. 21-22).

When God gave Ezekiel the vision of His glory leaving Solomon’s Temple before it was burned down, it is worth noting that He never said where the glory went after it went to the mountain “east” of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives (Ezek. 11:23). Furthermore, when the glory returns to the new Millennial Temple, God never says where it comes from except to say it comes from the “east” (Ezek. 43:1). Significantly, Jesus Christ ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:9-12), and will return to the Mount of Olives when he returns to earth (Zech. 14:4). Then during his kingdom, he will enter the Temple to offer sacrifices through the east gate of the Temple (Ezek. 46:11-12). Did God somehow honor His Son by associating him with His glory? It seems a distinct possibility.

[For more information about the future Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 3:17

**“The throne of Yahweh.”** Yahweh will reign through His Son and king, Jesus.

Jer 3:23

**“are a deception.”** The Hebrew word for “deception” is *sheqer* (#08267 שֶׁקֶר), and it means lie, deception, fraud. The people went up on the mountains to worship their idols (idol temples and worship sites were often on the top of mountains, just like Solomon built worship sites, likely small temples, for Moloch and for Chemosh on the Mount of Olives, the only mountain in Israel east of Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7). The worship, the blessings, and the answers to prayer that people got from their false gods were all a lie.

**“that tumult.”** The idol worship, the sex and even orgies, and sacrifice that was part of idol worship was just a lot of empty noise to God, just a tumult.

Jer 3:24

**“Shameful Thing.”** It is clear from the text that this wording does not just mean, “your shameful practices,” but rather is being used as a euphemism for the name of an idol god. Due to the fact that the god in mind was a god of human sacrifice, and because Jeremiah 11:13 refers to Baal as “that shameful god … Baal,” we know this is a reference to Baal.

**Jeremiah Chapter 4**

Jer 4:5

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Jer 4:7

**“A lion has gone up from his thicket.”** In this context, the “lion” refers to Nebuchadnezzar and the nation of Babylon. Powerful animals like lions or bulls are often used to refer to powerful people, especially wicked leaders and officials—people with power in society. This is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication, see commentary on Rev. 20:2).

Jer 4:10

**“Then I said,”** The speaker switches from Yahweh to Jeremiah.

Jer 4:11

**“A hot wind.”** This “hot wind” was the “east wind,” a wind that usually came off the desert and was hot, dry, unrelenting, and very uncomfortable (cf. Jer. 13:24; 18:17; Hos. 13:15; Jon. 4:8).

Jer 4:12

**“a wind too strong for that.”** A wind too strong to do anything good like winnowing the grain or cleansing the threshing floor of chaff and other unwanted material is coming upon Judah and Jerusalem due to their sin. In this verse, the “wind” is metaphorical for the Babylonian enemy.

Jer 4:15

**“Dan...Ephraim.”** These places are north of Judah. The Babylonian enemy will come from the north, so places north of Judah will see it first.

Jer 4:16

**“Besiegers.”** The verb is used in Isaiah 1:8 in reference to besieging a city. Although the verb can be used in a positive sense, such as “watch,” “watch over,” or “protect,” it can also be used in a negative sense, as is the case here in Jeremiah 4:16.

Jer 4:17

**“Like guards *guarding* a field, they are against her from all around *her*.”** The illustration seems somewhat out of place because the guards guard the field to protect it, but these attackers surround the city to attack it. So the illustration correctly conveys the idea that the attackers surround the city, but the reasons for surrounding the field or city are different. The guards surround the field to keep people out, while the army surrounds the city to keep people in and make the victory complete.

Jer 4:19

**“My bowels, my bowels!”** The speaker switches from God to Jeremiah. In the biblical culture, the bowels and abdominal organs were the seat of emotion. In this case, Judah had sinned and now Babylon was going to come and attack it. The death and destruction would be horrible in the extreme, and Jeremiah was very upset about it. It is a common occurrence that when a person is greatly upset their bowels are in turmoil and they are uncomfortable and cannot eat. Occasionally in difficult times a person will not even be able to control their bowels and either have diarrhea or defecate in their clothes.

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Jer 4:21

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet. The shofar was blown to call people to battle.

Jer 4:22

**“For my people are fools.”** The speaker switches from Jeremiah back to Yahweh.

**“my people are fools, they do not know me.”** There is a clear path to knowing God, which is to know the Word of God, which is the Bible. Although God can be known in many different ways, the Word of God is the words of God from His mouth. The Word of God is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). If people listen to you over time, they get to know you. If people listen to and obey the words of God over time, they get to know God. The words of God lead to life, while advice from humans often leads to death. Hosea 4:6 says that God’s people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. That is a shame and a waste. Why be destroyed when it is so easy to learn and obey the Word of God and prosper on earth and be given everlasting life?

When God says, “my people are fools, they do not know me,” we must not make the mistake of thinking that the people were not religious. Generally in the ancient world people were very religious. They had many different gods and many religious practices and superstitions that made them look extremely religious. Sadly, that is still true today. Many “very religious” people do not actually know God or Jesus. They are like the people of Christ’s time who acted religious but did not know Christ (Matt. 7:22-23).

Jer 4:23

**“I saw.”** Yahweh is giving Jeremiah revelation visions of the near future and the devastation caused by the Babylonians.

**“formless and empty.”** This is the same phrase as Genesis 1:2. Jeremiah is using hyperbolic language to express how total the Babylonian destruction of Judah was. It was like Genesis, the earth was formless and empty and even the light of the heavens was gone.

Jer 4:25

**“the birds of the air.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the birds of the heavens,” but the Hebrew word “heavens” is always plural, there is no singular word “heaven” in Hebrew.

Jer 4:30

**“though you deck yourself with ornaments of gold.”** There were a number of different ways that biblical women decorated themselves. Wrist and ankle bracelets were common, as were nose rings, and to a lesser extent, earrings, because often the head was covered. Also common were necklaces and weaving or pinning jewelry in one’s hair. Also, gold, silver, and jewels could be sown onto one’s clothing.

**“though you enlarge your eyes with makeup.”** The use of makeup by women dates back to earliest times, and appears several times in the Bible. The Hebrew word translated as “makeup” is *pnkh* (#06320 פּוּךְ). *Pnkh* is a noun that refers to a type of antimony-based eye makeup (see commentary on 2 Kings 9:30).

Jer 4:31

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**Jeremiah Chapter 5**

Jer 5:1

**“her.”** That is, Jerusalem.

Jer 5:4

**“Surely these are the poor; they are foolish because.”** Jeremiah looks at the ungodly state of Jerusalem and the people ignoring and defying the law of God and thinks it must be because the people he is seeing are the poor people who are uneducated and underprivileged, people who do not know God’s laws. But when he goes to the rich and powerful (Jer. 5:5) he finds the same thing. So in Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s time the people, from the least to the greatest, were ignoring the law of God.

It is extremely difficult to live a godly and thankful life when all around you people defy and reject God, and Jeremiah was one of the people who lived in that situation.

Jer 5:5

**“broken the yoke and burst the bonds.”** The yoke and bonds refer to the Law of God and the way it restrains people from evil and guides them in what is right. The people in Jeremiah’s time rejected the restrictions of morality that God places on people and defied God and followed their animal instincts, engaging in all kinds of immoral and ungodly behavior. Ignoring and disobeying God is not new, nor did it end after Jeremiah’s time. Today, more than 2,500 years after Jeremiah, ungodly behavior still goes on. But Jesus taught that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled (Matt. 5:6), and there will be a day of Judgment and a day of vengeance, and the wicked will be no more and the righteous will live forever in peace and joy. Other verses speak of people casting off the bonds God would place on them for them to follow (cf. Jer. 2:20).

Jer 5:6

**“and their apostasies are numerous.”** The people had committed sin after sin. Although many versions translate the Hebrew using the word “backslidings,” that does not give a true picture. The Hebrew word refers to “turning away” or “apostasy,” and is making the point that the number of times and ways that the people were turning away from the Law, not obeying it, were many. The word “backslidings” implies that the people once followed the Law but now had gone backward and no longer did, but that does not seem to be the case; it is more accurate that Jeremiah’s generation had never followed the Law, and had disobeyed it in many ways.

Jer 5:7

**“and sworn by those that are not gods.”** The Hebrew is punchy and pointed; “sworn by no-gods.” The people abandoned the true God to follow no-gods, those who are not gods.

**“they committed adultery.”** This is both literal and figurative. Having thrown off the bonds of morality, adultery and prostitution were rampant, but the words also refer to the spiritual adultery and prostitution the people engaged in. They were in a covenant marriage to Yahweh, but they abandoned him to worship and serve pagan gods. The “prostitutes’ houses” were both literal and referred to the temples (“houses”) of idols.

Jer 5:9

**“punish.”** The word is also translated “visit,” but here “punish” is the clearer translation.

[For more on “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Jer 5:10

**“Go up on her vineyard terraces and destroy.”** In this verse, Yahweh describes His people as his vineyard, which has grown wild vines that are not Yahweh’s. The wild vine branches are to be pruned off and taken away.

Jer 5:11

**“the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”** Since the house of Israel had been carried away captive by the Assyrians well over 100 years before Jeremiah prophesied this (2 Kings 17:6), the house of Judah should have been more aware of the danger they were in of being destroyed for their disobedience, just as the house of Israel was. But the house of Judah did not repent or change their ways, and thus Judah was carried away captive to Babylon.

Jer 5:12

**“He is nothing.”** The Hebrew is simply, “Not he” (or “Not it”). This could mean a number of things, including “He does not exist,” or “He is nothing” (i.e., He will not do anything; that is, He will not do what the prophets are saying He will do), or “It is nothing” (i.e., “it,” the vengeance of God, will not happen). Actually, it is likely that the Hebrew text is worded in an ambiguous way because all of those different and erroneous things were being said by the people in Jerusalem.

Jer 5:13

**“The prophets.”** That is, the false prophets who were saying that nothing bad would happen to Judah and Jerusalem. Although some versions translate the verse as if the prophets are the true prophets and it is the godless people who are speaking, that does not seem to be what the text is saying.

**“the word is not in them.”** The false prophets were not speaking the words of God.

**“Thus will it be done to them.”** The prophets do not have the Word of God in them and they and their prophecies will prove to be empty, only wind, gone. Just as their prophecies will be shown to be false and will be gone, so the prophets themselves will be shown to be false and will be gone; destroyed.

Jer 5:15

**“O house of Israel.”** God calls Judah “the house of Israel” as antonomasia (name change), thus implying that the destruction of Israel will happen to Judah.

[See figure of speech “antonomasia.”]

Jer 5:19

**“your people.”** The Hebrew is simply the plural “you,” in this case referring to the people. It is important to identify the plural from the singular in this verse: “It will happen when you (plural) say, ‘Why has Yahweh our God done all these things to us?’ Then you (singular: Jeremiah) will say to them, ‘Just like you (plural) have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you (plural) will serve strangers in a land that is not yours.’” The REV translation has been nuanced to reflect the differences in the Hebrew text.

**“so you will serve strangers in a land that is not yours.”** This prophecy came to pass, and the people of Judah were taken captive to Babylon. ​

Jer 5:22

**“Do you not fear me.”** Although there are some versions that translated the Hebrew word “fear” as “respect” (cf. NIrV), that is not its meaning here. When it comes to willfully disobeying God, a wise person is afraid to do that, knowing that God expects certain things from people, who are, after all, His creation. Jesus taught us not to fear people but to fear God who can destroy us in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 10:28). Here in Jeremiah 5 the people were willfully disobeying and/or ignoring God, and should have been afraid of the consequences they would receive for doing that.

Jer 5:24

**“rain, both the former and the latter.”** The latter rain is mentioned in Jeremiah 3:3.

[For information on the former and latter rain see commentary on James 5:7.]

**“who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”** God ensures that the seasons are regular and productive, so the time of harvest is predictable.

Jer 5:26

**“fowlers.”** “Fowlers” are people who hunt birds. Birds are the fowl.

Jer 5:28

**“They have grown fat, they are sleek.”** The Hebrew verb occurs only here, so the meaning is debated. It seems to be related to “smooth,” as if they are so fat their skin is stretched and therefore smooth. In any case, the word is not a compliment.

**“so that they may prosper.”** It is debated if this refers to the rich men who will not plead the cause of the orphan so that they themselves get richer, or if it refers to not pleading the cause of the orphan so that the orphans do not have a chance to prosper. The latter seems to be the correct meaning. The rich will not plead the cause of the orphan because they just do not care about them, and for the same reason they will not defend the rights of the needy.

Jer 5:29

**“punish.”** The word is also translated “visit,” but here “punish” is the clearer translation.

[For more on “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

Jer 5:31

**“But what will you do at the end of it all?”** Indeed, people who have lived like they wanted and did whatever they wanted, what will they do when the end comes? They cannot give themselves life, and they will suffer the consequences of their actions. As Jesus taught, at that time there will be sobbing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 25:30).

**Jeremiah Chapter 6**

Jer 6:1

**“O children of Benjamin.”** Literally, “sons of Benjamin,” referring to the people of Benjamin. Jerusalem was in the tribal territory of Benjamin, so many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were Benjamites. But it is likely that because people of other tribes of Israel had lived in Jerusalem for generations, even from the time of David hundreds of years earlier, that they were being considered as Benjamites also.

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**“raise a signal on Beth-haccherem.”** The location of Beth-haccherem (“house of the vineyard”) is not known, but it would have been on a hilltop. The signals were fires that were lit and could be seen for miles.

Jer 6:2

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Jer 6:3

**“Shepherds with their flocks.”** This refers to leaders with their armies. The NET reads, “Kings will come against it with their armies.” Kings and leaders were referred to as “shepherds” (see commentary on Jer. 2:8).

Jer 6:4

**“let’s attack at noon.”** In the ancient world, almost all wars were fought during the daytime, and the armies did not like it as the darkness came, as this verse says. Jeremiah 6:5 then expresses the urgency felt by Judah’s enemies, as they decide to attack at night.

Jer 6:5

**“let’s go up by night.”** See commentary on Jeremiah 6:4.

Jer 6:6

**“punished.”** The Hebrew is literally, “visited,” but people and places were “visited” to be blessed or to be punished, and in this context, it means to be punished.

**“she has nothing but oppression within her.”** When ungodly people rule, they, and the systems of government they set up, are ungodly and oppressive. Ungodly people want control over others and make laws and regulations that oppress people and unnecessarily restrict their freedom.

Jer 6:8

**“Be warned.”** Here in Jeremiah 6:8 the speaker suddenly changes to Yahweh.

Jer 6:10

**“they cannot pay attention.”** The people of Judah had become so ungodly in their thoughts that they lacked the knowledge and background to even understand the word of Yahweh. It is similar to when someone today has such a darkened conscience that the laws and justice of God seem harsh and unreasonable.

Jer 6:11

**“the aged and the one who is full of days.”** That is, the older people and also those who are very old. The point of the verse is that when God’s judgment comes on Judah, it would come on everyone, both the young and old, both on the men and the women.

Jer 6:12

**“and their wives.”** The wives would be part of the booty of Judah that would be given to the victorious Babylonian army (cf. Jer. 8:10; 2 Sam. 12:8). As we would expect in these circumstances, many women were raped (Lam. 5:11).

Jer 6:14

**“‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace.”** If we understand the Hebrew *shalom* to mean “wholeness” or “wellness,” which it does in most contexts and seems to here in Jeremiah as well, we should understand the Hebrew text to be saying, “‘All is well, all is well!’ When nothing is well.” It is very common for evil people to either be deceived about the truth of a situation or else deliberately lie about a situation and say that things are well when they are not. In this case, we see that things were not “well” in Judah during Jeremiah’s time, but that was not keeping the evil leaders from saying all was well. This is stated again in Jeremiah 8:11.

Jer 6:16

**“Stand at the crossroads and look.”** What the people would look at was what they were doing and how that would turn out, and what they could be doing if they followed God’s way, and how that would turn out. The people of Judah were at a crossroads. They could listen to Jeremiah and repent and change their ways, or they could continue to live like they were living (which they did) and be destroyed as a result (which they were).

**“the old paths.”** This is most likely idiomatic for the ancient wisdom, “ask about the ancient wisdom.” Thus, “the good way” was the proper and godly way to live. The “ancient paths” were laid out in the Law of Moses. When people lived in accordance with the laws of God they found rest for their souls. There was no apparent value in simply walking on an old dirt pathway.

**“But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”** The Judean people continued to disobey and defy God in the way they lived. This resulted in the destruction of them and their country at the hands of Babylon. Whether in this life or the next, willful disobedience to God results in disaster.

Jer 6:17

**“I set watchmen over you.”** These “watchmen” were the prophets who warned them of the coming disaster if they would not repent and change (cf. Ezek. 3:16-21).

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet. The shofar warned of danger and battle and people did well to pay attention to it and prepare for potential disaster, but the people of Judah refused to pay attention, and as a result, were conquered and deported by Babylon.

Jer 6:18

**“hear, you nations, and know, O assembly.”** The Hebrew text is short and unclear. The “assembly” seems to be the assembly of nations that Yahweh was speaking to, and He had called them as witnesses to know “what is going to happen to them,” that is, to Judah for defying their God. The last phrase in the Hebrew text is quite unclear, and simply reads, “what is among them,” but it seems to mean, “what is going to happen to them.” God would be visiting their sin among them and they would be suffering the consequences of their sin.

Jer 6:20

**“your sacrifices are not pleasing.”** Sacrifices and offerings made to God by wicked people are detestable to God; He has no respect for them and will not accept them. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. Proverbs 21:27 and 28:9 say that the sacrifices of a wicked person are an abomination to God.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Jer 6:23

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Jer 6:27

**“I have made you.”** Here in Jeremiah 6:27, Yahweh speaks directly to Jeremiah about his role as believer and prophet.

**“an assayer.”** The Hebrew text of this verse is difficult because it does not use complete thoughts and because it apparently uses meanings of words that are not common meanings, and that explains the big difference among the English translations. Nevertheless, the meaning of the verse seems clear, especially given the context, so most of the modern translations have a basic agreement on what the verse means even if their translations differ somewhat (cf. CJB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV).

The people of Judah were like impure metal, mixing mostly bad with some good. God appointed Jeremiah as an assayer and tester of that metal to show the impurities in the metal (i.e., the people) and also to see if there were any “pure” people in Judah. But how was Jeremiah supposed to test the people to see if any were pure? He was to speak the words of God to them. How each person responded to the words of God revealed what kind of metal they were. The “pure people” would listen and obey, while the “dross people” would ignore or defy Jeremiah and the God he spoke for. This verse is important because it shows one way that men and women of God are fellow workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9). Believers who walk in obedience to God and speak the word of God to others help reveal which people are godly and which people are ungodly. This is important here and now, but it will also be important on Judgment Day when the thoughts and deeds of each person will be revealed and it will be obvious to everyone who heard the word and obeyed it and who heard the word and rejected it.

The smelting of metals to remove impurities was an apt metaphor for God trying to remove impurities from His people and it is used several times in the Bible (cf. Jer. 6:27-30; 9:7; Isa. 48:10).

Jer 6:28

**“rebels of rebels.”** That is, the worst rebels, or hardened rebels. In the Hebrew text, the words translated “rebel” and “rebels” are verbs, and thus inherently have the idea of actively rebelling.

**“going around spreading slander.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “going around with slanders,” and the word “slanders” is plural because they are speaking much slander wherever they go. In English we would not say the people go around “with slanders,” we would say “spreading slander” or something similar. We use the singular “slander” as a collective noun instead of pluralizing it and saying “slanders.”

**“bronze and iron.”** The meaning is that the people of Judah are hard and unyielding; they will not listen to the words of God.

Jer 6:29

**“the lead is consumed by the fire.”** The mention of lead points to how the ancients smelted metal. The NET text note says, “In the ancient refining process lead was added as a flux to remove impurities from silver ore in the process of oxidizing the lead. Jeremiah says that the lead has been used up and the impurities have not been removed.” The people of Judah have not been purified even though the Word of God has been spoken to them and they have had a chance to repent and believe.

Jer 6:30

**“because Yahweh has rejected them.”** Yahweh God will try and try to win over the people, as He did by sending Jeremiah and other prophets, but eventually, God will reject those who reject him. Jesus Christ told parables about this, such as the parable of the greedy farmers (Matt. 21:33-42; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19).

**Jeremiah Chapter 7**

Jer 7:2

**“Yahweh’s house.”** That is, the Temple in Jerusalem. By standing in the gate of the Temple, Jeremiah was in a very good place to speak to both the honest and humble people who loved God and were going to the Temple to worship, and the coldhearted hypocritical people who were religious but not godly.

**“worship.”** Or “bow down to.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jer 7:3

**“and I will let you live in this place.”** We know from the Bible and history that the Judeans did not listen to God and amend their ways and obey God, and they were carried away from Judah and Jerusalem in the Babylonian Captivity (cf. 2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chron. 36:6-20.)

Jer 7:4

**“lying words.”** The fact that the Temple of Yahweh was in Jerusalem was not a lie, but what the false prophets meant by those words was a lie. The false prophets were promoting that since the Temple of Yahweh was in Jerusalem, He would never let Jerusalem be conquered (cf. Mic. 3:11). This idea was no doubt supported by the fact that God had miraculously protected Jerusalem during the time of Hezekiah when 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were killed by an angel of Yahweh and Jerusalem was saved (2 Kings 19:32-35).

But God said that because of the sins of Judah the idea He would protect Jerusalem because of His Temple was “worthless” (Jer. 7:8). God told the people to reflect on Shiloh where God had earlier had the Tent of Meeting (“Tabernacle”), because Shiloh had been destroyed (Jer. 7:12-15), and Jerusalem would be conquered also (Jer. 7:15).

Jer 7:9

**“steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely.”** Jeremiah’s accusation should have caught the attention of the people since he used the very words in the Ten Commandments: “steal” (Exod. 20:15), “murder” (Exod. 20:13), “commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14), and “swear falsely” (Exod. 20:16). Furthermore, Jeremiah’s reference to following other gods was in direct disobedience to the opening of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3-5). But in spite of their flagrant sin and the clarity of their disobedience to God, the people did not repent.

Jer 7:10

**“We are delivered!”** The hard-hearted and self-deceived sinners of Judah would sin and then go into the Temple of Yahweh and proclaim they were delivered from danger, that they were “safe” from harm. “We are delivered” is translated as “We are safe” in some versions (NAB, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV), and that is certainly what the people thought. The people did not believe that Yahweh would ever let His Temple be destroyed; how wrong they were!

Jer 7:11

**“den of robbers.”** The Hebrew word translated “den” is *me`arah* (#04631 מְעָרָה), which means “cave.” A robber’s den, or a “robbers cave” was generally a cave in a deserted area away from authorities where robbers could band together, live, and use as a hideout, and from which they could go forth and raid. Robber’s dens were very effective in the ancient world because there was no police force and thus for any wronged person or camp to get justice they would have to round up a large number of people and attack the robbers. Many people were reticent to do that since it almost always meant men would lose their lives in the fight, so often injustice would go on for years.

Here in Jeremiah 7:11, God compares the pious sinners’ use of the Temple as a robber’s cave. The context here in Jeremiah makes it clear that people, including the political and religious leaders, would sin and break God’s commands, and then retreat to the Temple where they thought they would be “safe.” Sadly, today this behavior still often continues, and some people use religion and pious behavior as a cover for their sin.

Jer 7:12

“**But go now to my place that was in Shiloh.”** Jeremiah was a descendant of Eli, and it was at Shiloh that Eli so disobeyed God that Eli’s line was somewhat set aside, and eventually the High Priest’s line was switched from Eleazar to Ithamar. Solomon sent Abiathar home to Anathoth, where Jeremiah was from (1 Kings 2:26).

Jer 7:13

**“rising up early and speaking.”** This is an idiom meaning to send again and again, and to be eager to do it. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets, and sent them over and over as the day progressed. We have kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics. The people rose up early to sin, and God rose up early to correct them (see Zeph. 3:7).

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

Jer 7:14

**“the house that is called by my name.”** The Temple.

**“in which you trust.”** The false prophets and people “trusted” a lie: that the very presence of the Temple would protect them no matter how they behaved. This is a good example of false religion, and there are many false beliefs that involve “things” protecting or bringing God’s blessing. God protects us, and if we are evil we walk away from His protection no matter how many “religious things” we have or do.

Jer 7:15

**“Ephraim.”** The most influential tribe in the nation of Israel, and here put by metonymy for the ten tribes of Israel, which were carried into captivity by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:5-6, 18-20).

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

Jer 7:16

**“As for you, do not pray for this people.”** God spoke personally to Jeremiah here in Jeremiah 7:16 and told him not to pray for Judah. It would only allow their evil to continue. This was not the only time God told Jeremiah not to pray for Judah, He said it two other times (Jer. 11:14, 14:11). God also told Ezekiel, who was alive at the same time as Jeremiah, that He would not hear the prayers of the people of Judah (Ezek. 8:18). There are a number of verses that say God does not answer the prayers of the wicked (cf. Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; and James 4:3). Nevertheless, it seems that Jeremiah did pray for the people but complained to God that He did not hear his prayers (see Lam. 3:8, 44).

[For information on God not hearing the prayers of the wicked or honoring their sacrifices, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Jer 7:18

**“to make cakes.”** Providing ritual food to the gods, which would usually be burned up or eaten by the priests, was part of what God meant when He said that His people were not to “serve” other gods. The pagan gods demanded things that required service.

**“the Queen of Heaven.”** The Queen of Heaven was the Assyro-Babylonian goddess Astarte (also known as “Ishtar,” although at different times and places there is a difference between the two goddesses, and she was worshiped in Canaan as Astoreth. She was widely worshiped in the Middle East, including in the west from Phoenicia on the Mediterranean coast and on into the Mediterranean world, to the east throughout Babylon, and south through Canaan, and she even had worshipers in Egypt. She was connected with fertility, sex, and war, and lust, although exactly which attributes were emphasized differed from place to place and at different times. Statues of her often show her naked. No doubt the ritual sex associated with her worship increased her popularity.

**“making me angry.”** The NET First Edition text note says, “There is debate among grammarians and lexicographers about the nuance of the Hebrew particle…Some say it always denotes purpose, while others say it may denote either purpose or result, depending on the context.” The people of Israel, the fathers, mothers, and children, did not worship other gods with the purpose of making God angry, so in this context translating the phrase as a result clause is likely more accurate than translating it as a purpose clause. However, it is possible the text is saying that God is venting His frustration and anger by making an ironic, hyperbolic statement, something such as “They do this just to make me angry.” God is an emotional God (and we emotional humans are created in His image), and He could be expressing His frustration with humans by saying they worship other gods to insult Him. The fact is that even if the humans did not worship other gods to spite Yahweh, the demons that were behind the pagan worship did have the purpose of insulting God in mind, and they led the humans astray.

Jer 7:19

**“Are they not *doing it* to themselves.”** The wrath of God is expressed in many ways on earth, including famine, plague, war, etc. Here God is saying that the godless actions of Judah are only really hurting themselves. Also, although the verb translated “making me angry” is not repeated in the second sentence, in a sense it is being brought forward by the missing verb (“doing it” is supplied in italics but is not in the Hebrew text). So the people were hurting themselves, and the evil consequences that they were experiencing because of their ungodly actions were making them angry, as well as likely frustrated and confused.

Jer 7:20

**“on man and on animal, and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground.”** The anger and wrath of God did not come directly from God, but rather the words are an expression that summarized what things would be like on earth when people abandoned God. God’s wrath would come, but in contexts such as this one in Jeremiah, the wrath of God was the wrath the people and land would experience when they abandoned God and He could no longer protect them. When people disobey God, He cannot righteously protect them from His archenemy the Devil, and so the Devil and his demons attack in any way they can, affecting people, animals, and the land itself. It is why Leviticus 18:28, in the context of various kinds of sexual sin, says the land will vomit out its inhabitants. Demons afflict people and animals, and they affect the weather patterns so there are droughts and floods, they shake the land so there are earthquakes, they influence insects so there are locust plagues, and they do many other harmful things. One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10; see commentary on Lev. 18:25).

Jer 7:21

**“Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices.”** The regulations for many of the sacrifices were that the people who offered them got to eat some of the meat, and the priests got some too. Here in Jeremiah 7:21, God is using sarcasm to point out that the people do not offer sacrifices to Him from love and devotion, but so they could feast on the meat. The people acted religious by making lots of sacrifices, but it was only to look good and so they could have meat to eat.

Jer 7:22

**“out of concern for.”** Jeremiah 7:22 has caused much controversy in the theological world, including the thought that the Torah might have been written much later than the Exodus. However, there is a very important and quite simple explanation for Jeremiah 7:22. The Hebrew phrase usually translated “concerning,” (“I did not speak to your fathers…concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices,” ESV, NASB) is the Hebrew *al dibri* (עַל־דִּבְרֵ֥י). The text note in the Holman Christian Study Bible reads that *al dibri* “is best rendered ‘for the sake of,’ ‘in the interest of,’ or ‘out of concern for’ (Deut. 4:21; 2 Sam. 18:5; 2 Kings 22:13).”

A study of the Hebrew vocabulary in Jeremiah 7:22-23 as well as the scope of Scripture shows that when God refers to “the day I brought your fathers out of Egypt,” He is referring to the time when Israel entered the “Old Covenant” with God, and had the “scroll of the covenant” read to them (Exod. 24:3-8). The scroll of the covenant contained the Ten Commandments and God’s commands that are recorded in Exodus 21-23. Although it has a few basic statements about the Feasts and sacrifices, it certainly has nothing as elaborate as the descriptions of the sacrifices in Leviticus. What God was clearly concerned about when He made the Old Covenant with Israel was that the people obey Him. The idea of obeying God is woven throughout the whole record of the making of the Old Covenant (Exod. 19:5, 8; 20:6; 23:21, 22; 24:3, 7).

C. F. Keil sums up the meaning of Jeremiah 7:22 very well in his commentary: “When the Lord entered into covenant with Israel at Sinai, He insisted on their hearkening to His voice and walking in all His commandments, as conditions necessary for bringing about the covenant relationship, in which He was to be God to Israel, and Israel a people to Him; but He did not at that time give all the various commandments as to the presenting of sacrifices. Such an intimation neither denies the divine origin of the Torah of sacrifice in Leviticus, nor discredits its character as part of the Sinaitic legislation. All it implies is, that the giving of sacrifices is not the thing of primary importance in the law, is not the central point of covenant laws, and that so long as the cardinal precepts of the Decalogue are freely transgressed, sacrifices neither are desired by God, nor secure covenant blessings for those who present them.”[[7]](#footnote-20782)

There are a number of verses in the Bible that show that God is much more interested in obedience and a humble heart than in a person’s making sacrifices. The sacrifices were designed to be an outward show of an obedient and humble heart, not to acquire God’s favor if one’s heart was not right with God, as if God would overlook evil as long as one offered sacrifices (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Hos. 6:6 [quoted in Matt. 9:13 and 12:7]; Mic. 6:6-8; Matt. 5:23-24).

[For more on the scroll of the covenant, see commentary on Exod. 24:7. For more on God not being as concerned with sacrifices and offerings as He is in the posture of a person’s heart, see commentary on Matt. 5:24.]

Jer 7:25

**“rising up early and sending them.”** This is an idiom meaning to send again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets, and sent them over and over as the day progressed. The REV has kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics.

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

Jer 7:27

**“but they will not listen to you.”** There are times when God asks believers to do something that does not seem to work out. Although the reason for that may not be apparent to us, God always has His reasons for doing that. When it comes to testifying for God and Jesus, there are times when God knows that people will not listen, such as here with Jeremiah, but the witness was important for God’s purposes. Judgment Day will come, and at that time scrolls that contain a record of what people have done will be opened and read (cf. Rev. 20:12). This is a serious matter, because people who are judged as being unrighteous will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up (Rev. 20:14-15). In order for the judgment to be fair and just, it is important that people have had a chance to say “yes” or “no” to following God and His ways. It is quite possible that Judah was so evil in the days of Jeremiah that some people had not heard God’s law in a way that made it attractive and believable, or that they had not been warned about the seriousness of rejecting it. Jeremiah was to speak God’s word to the people and give them the chance to believe, even though God knew the hearts of the people and that they would not believe.

Jesus taught this same basic thing to his disciples. In Luke 21:12-15, when he told them they would be arrested and put on trial. He told them that their being brought before judges “will turn out *as an opportunity* for you to *provide* a testimony” (Luke 21:13; see commentary on Luke 21:13).

[For more on people burning up in the Lake of Fire and not “burning forever in hell,” see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Jer 7:29

**“Cut off your hair.”** A sign of mourning and sorrow.

**“the generation.”** The Hebrew text leaves the door open for this statement to be a general principle and not just a singular statement for that one generation. When a generation abandons God, then He cannot be with them, so in effect, He rejects and forsakes them. The Hebrew text just leaves “generation” as the object of the verb and does not say “this generation.”

**“that has aroused his wrath.”** The Hebrew text reads, “of his wrath,” but this a genitive of production, i.e., the generation that has produced his wrath (cf. NET, NJB, NLT, NRSV). Some versions use the word “provoke” here, but that does not carry the correct implication. The people did not set out to make God angry, but what they did made God angry (cf. Deut. 4:25).

Jer 7:30

**“they have set up their abominations.”** This is restated in Jeremiah 32:34. The “abominations” were various idols and altars to idol gods (cf. Ezek. 8:10).

**“the house that is called by my name.”** That is, the Temple.

**“to defile it.”** This is the reading of the Hebrew text of Jeremiah 7:30, and it cannot be ignored. While some modern versions change the wording to “and defiled it” (cf. HCSB), and that certainly was a result of the abominations set up in the Temple, we cannot set aside the meaning of the Hebrew text that there were certainly at least some of the ungodly priests, prophets, and leaders who were in league with the Devil and put abominations in Yahweh’s Temple with the evil intent of defiling it.

The world is in a war between Good and Evil, and while many people who do evil things do them in ignorance of the spiritual realities, there are many evil people who know full well the evil that they do and do them intentionally to defy God, and to hurt God’s people. For example, the Jewish leaders at the time of Christ knew they were setting aside the commandments of God to keep their traditions (Mark 7:9).

[For more about the war between Good and Evil, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Jer 7:31

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. The context indicates these shrines were pagan in nature (cf. NLT, “pagan shrines”). Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

**“Topheth.”** A place where children were burned as human sacrifices (see commentary on 2 Kings 23:10). The sacrifice of children is mentioned here in Jeremiah 7:31 and also in Jeremiah 19:5.

Jer 7:32

**“because there is no place *left* to bury.”** This is a horrifying prophecy. No Jew would want their body buried in Topheth because of all the dead bones scattered there. Yet we know that in the future, at the Battle of Armageddon, there will be so many dead bodies that the blood from the slain will flow for 180 miles (Rev. 14:20). Isaiah 34:3 hyperbolically expresses the huge volume of blood by saying that there is so much blood rushing down the mountains that it “melts” them; it carries them away. Here in Jeremiah 7:32 it is foretold that Judah will be so full of graves that people will be forced to bury the dead in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom,” (in Greek, *Gehenna*) because there is no room anywhere else to bury them.

However, as unclean as the Valley of Hinnom will become at the time of Armageddon, it will be cleaned up in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth (Jer. 31:40; cf. Ezek. 39:14-15).

**“Topheth.”** A place where children were burned as human sacrifices (see commentary on 2 Kings 23:10). Over time the area where that was done must have been referred to as Topheth, as we see in Jeremiah 7:32, 19:6, 11.

Jer 7:33

**“The dead bodies of this people will be food.”** It was considered a horrible tragedy for a person not to be buried, which showed honor and respect for the dead. It was even believed by many people that if a person was not buried their soul wandered the earth (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

**“the birds of the air.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the birds of the heavens,” but the Hebrew word “heavens” is always plural, there is no singular word “heaven” in Hebrew.

Jer 7:34

**“the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride.”** What God is saying here is that the normal sounds associated with happy and peaceful city life would cease. The Babylonian army would attack and conquer Judah and deport the people, and those happy sounds would come to an end.

**Jeremiah Chapter 8**

Jer 8:1

**“and the bones…and the bones.”** This is the figure of speech polysyndeton, “many ‘ands’” the repetition of “and” before each phrase to emphasize each phrase. Each group has been evil in its own way, and each will be humiliated.

[See figure of speech “syndeton.”]

Jer 8:2

**“and that they have worshiped.”** The people worshiped and loved the sun, moon, and stars, and looked to them for guidance and protection. Now their bones will degrade into dust without being buried, unprotected by those same astronomical wonders. Thus, in the context of the spiritual battle between Yahweh and celestial deities, the deities are seen to be powerless against the vengeance of God, the Most High God and creator of the heavens and the earth. It was a terrible cultural disgrace to be exposed and decompose like this and to not be properly buried. John A. Thompson correctly notes, “Even in modern times, the opening up of graves and the throwing about of the bones of the departed is practiced as a mark of extreme contempt. In recent wars in the Middle East, such desecration and insult were perpetrated.”[[8]](#footnote-25326)

The text could also read, “and that they have bowed down to.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jer 8:3

**“that remains...that remains.”** The doubling of “that remains” is in the Masoretic Hebrew text but is omitted in the Septuagint and Syriac, so many modern versions leave it out, but it could well be original and doubled for emphasis. The “evil family” is Judah, whose people were of the family of Jacob. The doubling of “that remains” may be to emphasize how difficult it would be for the people who survived the Babylonian attacks and deportations. They would choose death over life because life would be so hard.

Jer 8:4

**“If one turns away, does he not return?”** This is a rhetorical question. Normally, people who turn away repent at some later time and come back, but as we will see in the context, Judah does not repent, they are in perpetual backsliding (Jer. 8:5).

Jer 8:7

**“crane.”** The bird that the Hebrew word refers to is uncertain.

Jer 8:9

**“will be.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “have been” (cf. YLT), but this is the idiom of the prophetic perfect. They will be put to shame in the future. The REV has translated the Hebrew as a future to clarify the English meaning because the idiom is not well-recognized in English (cf. HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV).

Jer 8:10

**“So I will give their wives to others.”** Jeremiah has said this before (cf. Jer. 6:12).

Jer 8:11

**“superficially.”** The Hebrew word means “lightly, of little account, insignificantly, swiftly.” When applied to healing a wound it would indicate that it was not dealt with seriously, but just superficially treated.

**“‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.”** This is stated earlier in Jeremiah 6:14 (see commentary on Jer. 6:14).

Jer 8:12

**“abominations.”** The Hebrew is singular, abomination, but it is a collective noun.

Jer 8:14

**“let’s perish there...doomed us to perish.”** The Hebrew word translated “perish” is silence, so the phrases are more literally, “let us be silent there...put us to silence.” “Silence” in this context refers to the silence of death (cf. Ps. 94:17). Many versions translate “silence” as “perish” because it is not clear in English that “be silent” means “be dead.” That the men would yell, “let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us perish there,” is a cry of desperation, a cry of men who know they are about to die and want to make a desperate move to possibly save themselves from the “poisonous water” from Yahweh that is coming to them because of their sin.

**“given us poisonous water to drink.”** Poisonous water is also mentioned in Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15.

Jer 8:19

**“from a far away land.”** The meaning of the Hebrew text is not certain. It is possible that the text means a far away land, which in this case would refer to Babylon. However, the text may also refer to the furthest parts of the land of Israel (cf. ESV, NAB, NJB, NLT). However, the cry and question about why the Judeans would have idols is universal.

**“idols.”** The Hebrew is hard to bring into English, because the Hebrew word is the same as is translated “pointless” in Ecclesiastes 1:2 (“vanity” in the KJV). A very literal translation of the Hebrew might be “pointlessnesses,” but that would not mean much in English. One could say “vapors,” or “vanities,” but again, that would not communicate well. One could also say “worthless things,” but that would not necessarily mean “idols” to the average reader. The best solution seems to be to just say “idols,” as many modern versions do, and then explain the meaning in the commentary. Idols cannot save. They are worthless, pointless, futile, a temporary vapor, and God calls them just that.

Jer 8:20

**“The harvest is past, the summer is ended.”** This does not likely refer to specific times of that particular year, but rather was likely a well-known saying about a seemingly hopeless situation. If the grain harvest was over and summer, the time of fruits and vegetables was over too, and there had been no harvest, then starvation loomed ahead. It seems that Jeremiah was saying that the time for repentance had come and gone and now God’s vengeance was in sight.

Jer 8:21

**“the daughter of my people.”** An idiom of endearment. The NET translates it, “my dear people.” Somewhat more literal to the Hebrew text but still idiomatic is the translation, “my daughter, my people.”

**“I go about in black.”** This is roughly equivalent to going about in sackcloth, which was made of goathair, which was generally black. It means Jeremiah was in mourning.

**“dismay has seized me.”** Jeremiah understood the situation in Judah perfectly, that his people sinned and were sinning and were unrepentant about it, and God’s vengeance was coming as a result. Nevertheless, Jeremiah loved the people, and his country, and the Temple, and was overcome with dismay. We may understand why evil comes, but that does not mean that we will not have intense grief and sadness about it.

**Jeremiah Chapter 9**

Jer 9:1

**“fountain of tears that I might weep.”** Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet” because of verses such as this (cf. Jer. 9:10; 14:17) and because of his writing the book of Lamentations. The Hebrew translated “fountain” means “spring,” a place where water bubbles up out of the ground, an apt description for crying, where tears well up from the eyes. Of all the prophets and men and women of God in the Bible, Jeremiah most openly shows his love for the people in the fact that in spite of their egregious sin and what they do to Jeremiah, he weeps and cries over them. In many verses, Jeremiah openly reveals the deep emotional hurt he has because of the sin of his people and the consequences of that sin (cf. Jer. 8:21, 9:1; 10:19-20; 13:17; 14:17).

**“the daughter of my people.”** An idiom of endearment meaning my dear people (see commentary on Jer. 8:21).

Jer 9:3

**“They bend their tongue like their bow.”** Other verses in the Bible compare the tongue to a bow that shoots words like arrows that then hurt and wound people (cf. Ps. 64:3-4; Jer. 9:8). Although the verse has been translated different ways depending on how the words in the text are arranged and punctuated, the meaning is basically that people speak hurtful words.

Jer 9:4

**“deceive, yes, deceive.”** Scripture emphasizes deceive by the figure of speech polyptoton, in which the verb is repeated twice, but in different verbal aspects. There is also a wordplay because the word used for “deceive” here is related to the name “Jacob.” Thus the idea in the text is something like every brother will be a “Jacob” and deceive and supplant his brother like Jacob deceived and supplanted Esau. In fact, it has been suggested that the verse could be translated that every brother is a “deceiving Jacob.”

[See figure of speech “polyptoton.”]

Jer 9:5

**“they weary themselves committing iniquity.”** Many of the sinful things of life are tiring and wear people out.

Jer 9:6

**“Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit.”** The Hebrew text of Jeremiah 9:6 is difficult, and that plus the difference between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint and other ancient versions has led scholars to suggest a number of different changes to the text. This has resulted in the large number of different translations in the English versions. However, the message is basically the same: the people are mired in sin and refuse to acknowledge God.

Jer 9:7

**“Behold, I will smelt them and test them.”** Here in Jeremiah 9:7, God returns to the metaphor that compares Israel to impure metal (cf. Jer. 6:27-30).

**“because of the daughter of my people?”** Verses such as Jeremiah 9:7 highlight the interaction that occurs between God and people, and highlight the free will that people have.

Jer 9:9

**“punish.”** The word is also translated “visit,” but here “punish” is the clearer translation.

[For more on “visit,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5.]

**“my soul.”** Here the phrase “my soul” is used according to common idiom to mean “I,” thus, “should I not be avenged.”

[For more on the uses of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Jer 9:10

**“and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are burned up.”** God is God over the heavens and the earth, and when people sin, the weather patterns change and the land becomes harder to live on or even uninhabitable.

[For more on sin affecting the land, see commentary on Lev. 18:25.]

Jer 9:12

**“that can understand this.”** This may also be translated, “that can explain this,” because the Hebrew word translated “understand” is in the hiphil, “to cause to understand.”[[9]](#footnote-27691)

Jer 9:15

**“give them poisonous water to drink.”** God speaks again about giving the people poisoned water in Jeremiah 23:15. The people spoke about it in Jeremiah 8:14.

Jer 9:17

**“the mourning women...the skillful women.”** In the ancient world, death often came quickly and unexpectedly, and often there was no time to gather the family because dead bodies were buried the same day the person died. Also, it was important and customary to make a loud weeping and wailing when someone died to demonstrate one’s feeling of loss and as more or less of a tribute to the dead person. Also, when other people at the funeral cried, it was easier to feel the emotion and cry too. All this contributed to there being professional mourners, women, who would loudly cry and lament the death of the person. Jeremiah is saying that because of the impending invasion of Judah by the Babylonian army, there will be much death and destruction and a need for the professional wailing women.

Jer 9:19

**“For we have abandoned the land.”** This is the prophetic perfect; the prophet is seeing the future, not what was real at the time.

**“homes.”** The Hebrew is more literally “tents,” but here it refers to the people’s homes because many of them lived in houses in cities.

Jer 9:20

**“teach your daughters wailing.”** The fact that mothers would teach their daughters to wail would refer to very young girls, because the daughters seem to be still at home, but they were usually married and gone by age 14. The idea of the verse is that there is so much death that even young girls would have to do the job of professional mourners.

Jer 9:21

**“for death has come up through our windows.”** This is a bold and chilling metaphor of death as a robber who climbs into the house through the window, who even enters the “strongholds,” the supposedly secure places in the house or town where people normally feel safe and protected, and kills the young men, who are the strength and future of society. The word “stronghold” can also be translated as “palace,” but the word “palace” usually causes the modern reader to think of opulence, wealth, and power, not the strength of its fortifications, but it is the strength of fortifications that is in view here, fortifications that cannot prevent death from coming in.

Jer 9:22

**“Say *this*.”** Yahweh now directs Jeremiah in exactly what to say. The image is not pretty, but it is designed to grab our attention. God created people to serve and obey Him and be blessed and be a blessing to others. When people defy and rebel against God they are like worthless garbage and will die and be burned up in the Lake of Fire. This is a consistent message in Scripture. By the time of Jesus, the garbage dump of Jerusalem was the Valley of Hinnom (“Ge Hinnom” in Hebrew). Jesus taught that the unsaved would be thrown into Ge Hinnom and thus burned up like the garbage (see commentary on Matt. 5:22).

**“and no one will gather them.”** To not be buried was a huge disgrace. In a culture when family tombs and burial plots were common and it was a great curse to not be buried, most people believed (falsely, but it was a very widely held belief) that a proper burial was important for a comfortable existence in the afterlife. Thus, this verse was a horrifying threat of unspeakable loneliness and rejection (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

Jer 9:24

**“let the one who boasts boast about this, that he has understanding and knows me.”** This verse is quoted in 1 Corinthians 1:31.

Jer 9:25

**“those who are circumcised *only* in the foreskin.”** The Jews were circumcised in the foreskin, but that physical act was a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-14), and was worthless to God if the people were not also circumcised in their hearts and thus were intent on keeping their covenants with God.

**Jeremiah Chapter 10**

Jer 10:2

**“do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven.”** That is, do not be dismayed at what you think the heavens are predicting,” do not be dismayed at omens in the heavens. The ancients generally held that the stars influenced and sometimes even controlled what happened on earth. Furthermore, many of the deities of the nations were the sun, moon, and certain planets or stars. Jeremiah 10 is in large part a polemic against idols, and so Jeremiah 10:2 is a fitting way to start. The Judean king Manasseh was a worshiper of the celestial objects, referred to as “the army of heaven” (2 Kings 21:5).

Jer 10:3

**“customs.”** It is possible that the Hebrew word is used to refer to “idols” in this context.

**“the work of the hands of a craftsman.”** The point is that humans make idols to worship, while they ignore worshiping the One who created them: Yahweh.

**“ax.”** The “ax” may not be the exact tool the Hebrew word means in this context because the Hebrew word can refer to different cutting tools. So the tool could also be something like an adze.

Jer 10:5

**“cucumber patch.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “a field of cucumbers,” but we would commonly say “cucumber patch.” For the translation “plot of cucumbers,” see *HALOT*.[[10]](#footnote-15708)

Jer 10:6

**“There is none like you.”** The speaker suddenly shifts to Jeremiah, it had been Yahweh speaking.

Jer 10:8

**“the instruction of Delusions...is wood!”** This last phrase in the text is difficult. The Hebrew text literally reads, “the instructions of Delusions is wood.” Many scholars have suggested emendations to the text to make it make more sense, but there is no consensus among them. The idea may be that the instruction that comes from the idols is just useless wood, like the idols themselves, or it may be a rebuke that should be framed more like, “the instruction of Delusions...*they* are just wood! In any case, the idols are wood and the instruction they give is like them, useless or even harmful.

Jer 10:14

**“Everyone is stupid.”** This is “everyone” in the context of idolaters, i.e., all the idolaters, although at that time that included all the people. It is likely that “everyone” here is a hyperbole for the vast majority.

**“no breath in them.”** The Hebrew word translated “breath” is *ruach* (#07307 רוּחַ), and in this context, it primarily means “breath,” but it can also mean “spirit,” so the idols have no breath, no spirit, no life. They are just dead things, and the people who worship them are fools.

Jer 10:15

**“a work of error.”** This could also be translated “a work to be mocked” (cf. CSB, NASB).

**“in the time of their punishment they will perish.”** The word “punishment” is also translated “visitation,” that is, when God “visits” them, the idols and the demons who inspired their being made and worshiped, will perish. People may believe that idols have power, but there is a day coming when the true powerlessness of the idols will be revealed.

Jer 10:16

**“the Portion of Jacob.”** One of the many names of Yahweh (Jer. 10:16; 51:19; cf. Ps. 73:26). Yahweh is the God of Israel; He is all they need, He is their portion.

**“tribe.”** The Hebrew word also means “rod” (or “staff”) because the head of a tribe would have a recognizable staff that would in a way symbolize his leadership. Although some versions read “rod” here, the meaning here is “tribe.”

Jer 10:17

**“belongings.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “bundle” or “bag,” but it refers to the belongings of the people. The statement is an ominous one, because it means the defenders will lose the battle and be carried off to another land.

Jer 10:19

**“an affliction.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text simply reads “an affliction,” but other Hebrew texts read “my affliction,” which appears in some English versions.

**“and I must bear it.”** The nation of Judah was suffering, and Jeremiah personally shares the pain, and expresses it.

Jer 10:20

**“My tent is destroyed and all my *tent* cords are broken; my children have gone from me.”** Jeremiah is lamenting what is happening to Judah, his homeland, and to Jerusalem, his capital city, the city of the Temple of Yahweh. He is comparing it to “his tent,” as if Israel was still a tenting nation. Thus he says, “My tent [Jerusalem] is destroyed and all my *tent* cords are broken; my children [the citizens of Judah] have gone from me.” The “shepherds” in the next verse, Jeremiah 10:21, are the leaders, and their flock, the people, have been scattered. All this had not happened fully yet, but Jeremiah foretold it would, and it did.

Jer 10:21

**“the shepherds.”** The word “shepherds” here is being used for kings and leaders. When the leaders do not ask of God or follow His way, the people suffer, as is pictured here.

[For more on leaders being called “shepherds,” see commentary on Jer. 2:8.]

**“and all their flocks are scattered.”** When the leaders, the shepherds, are ungodly and unwise, the people are “scattered,” they are unorganized, uninformed, and fall victim to many evils.

Jer 10:22

**“A great commotion.”** The sound of armies and the sound of war; a great commotion. Town after town in Judah was sacked, and many towns were totally destroyed and never rebuilt. The Babylonian destruction, which came in stages, was horrific. Judah, God’s gem, had turned against Him, and was destroyed as a consequence. People think that God is so invested in His holy things on earth that He will protect them at all costs (cf. Jer. 7:4), but that is not the case. God made the earth beautiful for His people, not for Himself, and He gave Israel to His people, He Himself owns the whole earth, not just Israel. If God’s people turn against Him, He will not protect what He gave them, in fact, He cannot righteously protect it from the ravages of the Devil, His arch-enemy.

**“to make the cities of Judah a desolation.”** The Babylonians were coming, and would destroy Judah and Jerusalem, and carry the people away to Babylon.

Jer 10:23

**“that the way of man is not in himself.”** It is likely that Jeremiah 10:23 has a range of meanings that include that humans cannot control their destiny, and also that humans are so morally weak that they continually take the wrong path in life and sin against God. It seems here that Jeremiah is trying to intercede for the people and get God to have mercy on them for their foolish behavior. What Jeremiah said is very true, which is why to live a godly life people need the Word of God and other godly people to help them. Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 say that there is a way that seems right to a person but it ends in death (see commentary on Prov. 14:12). As Jeremiah says, the way a person should live is not inside them, we humans need outside guidance from God to really please God in the best way possible.

Jer 10:24

**“Yahweh, correct me.”** Jeremiah speaks for himself and his people, using himself as the representative of Israel. The Septuagint reads “us” instead of me both times in this verse, and many English versions follow that reading. But it makes sense that Jeremiah would speak as the representative of the people.

Jer 10:25

**“for they have devoured Jacob.”** When Jeremiah pleaded with God to pour out His wrath on the nations that did not know God and were not in a covenant relationship with Him, of course he meant Babylon, the current enemy of Judah, but he likely had in mind all the nations that down through the years had attacked Israel and killed or captured people. Jeremiah longed for the promised time of peace and prosperity for Israel under the rule of the Messiah.

**Jeremiah Chapter 11**

Jer 11:7

**“warned, yes, warned.”** The Hebrew text repeats the verb warned, but in different verbal aspects (a hiphil infinitive and hiphil perfect). The meaning of that polyptoton is that Jeremiah strongly warned the people, he warned, yes, warned them. A quite literal translation of the phrase might be, “in warning I have warned you,” which does not translate well into English. This is the figure of speech polyptoton, and it is used for emphasis

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“rising up early and warning them.”** This is an idiom meaning to warn again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and warned His people, and warned them over and over as the day progressed. The REV has kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics.

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

Jer 11:8

**“his evil heart.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads the singular “his,” but some English versions use the plural “their.”

**“Therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant.”** Many of the curses of the covenant that Judah had already experienced and would experience even more in the future are in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 (see esp. Deut. 28:36, 63-64).

Jer 11:13

**“Shameful Thing.”** It is clear from the text that this wording is being used as a euphemism for the name of an idol god. Due to the fact that the god in mind was a god of human sacrifice, and because Jeremiah 11:13 refers to Baal as “that shameful god … Baal,” we know this is a reference to Baal. The same name is used in Jeremiah 3:24.

Jer 11:14

**“do not pray for this people.”** God had said this to Jeremiah earlier (Jer. 7:16), He says it here in Jeremiah 11:14, and He will say it again (Jer. 14:11).

[For more on Jeremiah not praying for the people, see commentary on Jer. 7:16. For information on God not answering the prayer of the wicked, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

**“I will not listen to them.”** God tries and tries to get people to listen to Him and obey him. But those who consistently ignore and defy God will suffer for it, and when their suffering comes, very often they will call out to God and He will not hear them (cf. Prov. 1:22-28, esp. v. 28).

**“trouble.”** The Hebrew is more literally “evil,” that is, when evil times come; when trouble and disaster come.

Jer 11:15

**“What right has my beloved….”** The vocabulary and syntax of Jeremiah 11:15 is broken and impossible to reconstruct with certainty, which explains the huge variation in the English versions. J. A. Thompson writes that the verse has “suffered severely in its textual transmission; any reconstruction is conjectural.”[[11]](#footnote-12966)

**“my beloved.”** A reference to God’s people, perhaps even a sarcastic reference, given the circumstances.

**“my house.”** That is, the Temple in Jerusalem.

**“Can holy meat take away your disaster?”** That is, can your many sacrifices take away your disaster? No, they will not.

Jer 11:16

**“worthless.”** The NET text note explains the translation: “The verb here has most commonly been derived from a root meaning ‘to be broken’ ...which fits poorly with the metaphor of setting the plant on fire. Another common option is to emend it to a verb meaning ‘to be burned up’…However, it is better to follow the lead of the Greek version which translates ‘be good for nothing’...and derive the verb from (ra'a') meaning ‘be bad/evil.’”

Jeremiah 11:16 is a sobering prophecy showing that God will not continue to support and bless those who turn against Him, even if they were once beautiful in His eyes.

Jer 11:18

**“Yahweh made it known to me, and I knew *it*.”** A new subject is suddenly introduced at this point, and we are surprised to learn that men in Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown, and even people in Jeremiah’s own family, were planning to kill him. (Jer. 11:21; 12:6). No doubt Jeremiah himself was very surprised and shocked to find that out. The Bible does not say exactly how Yahweh made the plot known to Jeremiah; it could have been by direct revelation, or it could have been that a person from Anathoth was moved to let him know about it. This plot is the subject of Jeremiah 11:18-12:6. The whole plot would be easier to see and understand if a chapter break had not been put into the text, that is, if Jeremiah 12:1-6 had been Jeremiah 11:24-29.

Jer 11:20

**“kidneys...heart.”** The “kidneys” refers to a person’s emotional life. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. In contrast, in the biblical world, the “heart” refers to the thoughts, not the emotions. When the Bible mentions “heart” and “kidneys” together, it refers to the thought life (“heart”) and emotional life (“kidneys”).

[For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21. For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

**“cause.”** The Hebrew word is *riyb* (#07378 רִיב), and it means to quarrel or contend, to lodge a complaint, to make a lawsuit against. Here Jeremiah commits his cause (his legal case) to God.

Jer 11:21

**“the men of Anathoth who seek your life.”** Anathoth was Jeremiah’s hometown (Jer. 1:1; 32:7). The reason the men of Anathoth were seeking to kill Jeremiah is not stated, but it is most probably something Jeremiah did that some men and elders in the city thought brought shame to the village. Killing someone who brought shame upon the village was known to happen in olden times, and still goes on today, although sometimes the killing is localized to a family. It is known as “honor killing,” i.e., killing to preserve the honor of the family or village. It is likely that Jeremiah’s speaking out against the sins of Judah and Jerusalem embarrassed people in Anathoth, and it is also possible that Jeremiah supported king Josiah’s religious reforms which might have closed or destroyed local shrines and idols. In any case, the threat was serious enough that God told Jeremiah about it and promised vengeance on those who plotted against Jeremiah.

Jer 11:23

**“and there will be no remnant of them.”** This is a dire prophecy; Anathoth would be completely empty of people. This almost certainly happened when Babylon conquered Judah. But Anathoth was eventually repopulated and rebuilt, at least to some degree. Ezra 2:23 says 128 men returned from the Captivity, and they likely moved back to Anathoth.

**Jeremiah Chapter 12**

Jer 12:1

**“bring a case against.”** The Hebrew word is *riyb* (#07378 רִיב pronounced reeb), and it means to quarrel or contend, to lodge a complaint, to make a lawsuit against. In this context, the best meaning seems to be “bring a case, or lawsuit, against” (cf. HCSB, NASB, NIV, NRSV). On the basis of the Torah and the covenant God made with Israel, for example, the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy, it would seem that righteous people would do well and wicked people would suffer. However, in Jeremiah’s lifetime, the opposite seemed to be the situation, so Jeremiah was “bringing his case” before Yahweh. Of course, like Job the righteous sufferer, God was always able to vindicate Himself. However, Jeremiah, like Job, complained to God about the situation.

We now see things much more clearly than Job or Jeremiah ever could. Jesus Christ made known God in a way that He had never been known before (John 1:18; Luke 10:24). Today we see the great war between Good and Evil, between God and the Devil. Also, the New Testament makes it clear that the Devil is the ruler of the world, which is why the world has the nature of the Devil and not the nature of God. It is because the Devil is the ruler of the world that “the world” hates followers of Christ, and neither Christ himself nor his followers are “of the world” (John 15:18-19; John 17:14, 16). “The world” and the Father are opposed to one another (1 John 2:16), and the world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

[For more on the Devil being in control of the world, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“Why does the road of the wicked prosper.”** Godly people have noticed that wicked people often prosper, and have asked this same question for millennia (cf. Job 21:7-15; Ps. 10:3-11), but it has a good answer. Ungodly people are ruthless and often get ahead by evil and treachery. Also, being “of this world” they tend to pay closer attention to how to get ahead in life than godly people do, who are more interested in pleasing God and helping others than in building any kind of personal kingdom on earth. Furthermore, Satan, the god of this age, wants the wicked to be in charge and helps them in all kinds of ways. Job complained about the prosperity of the wicked some 1500 years before Jeremiah did (see commentary on Job 21:7).

Jer 12:2

**“near in their mouth but far from their heart.”** Religious hypocrisy and dishonesty are often hidden by smooth words, and sadly, too many people believe what people say and do not pay attention to what they do. Jesus taught us to watch what people do very carefully if we are going to know them (Matt. 7:16, 20).

Jer 12:3

**“test my heart, *that it is* toward you​.”** God tests the attitude and posture of our heart toward Him.

**“Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter.”** Jeremiah is praying to God, “Pull them out of the flock of mankind and get rid of them, the way sheep are pulled out of the flock and slaughtered.” This is what Theologians refer to as an imprecatory prayer, a prayer for judgment against an enemy. We are not to curse people, but that does not mean we cannot pray that evil people will be dealt with so their evil comes to an end. We can and should pray for them to change, but we can also pray their evil comes to an end.

Jer 12:4

**“Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it​​​.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10). (See commentary on Lev. 18:25).

Jer 12:5

**“If you have run with the footmen.”** In Jeremiah 12:1-4, Jeremiah has been speaking. The speaker now changes to God, but without any introduction such as “Then Yahweh said.” The reader has to pick up the change from the content of what is said.

**“horses.”** Jeremiah has been dealing with some very difficult situations, but they are “men” compared to the situations in store in his future, which God sees coming, and those future difficult people and situations are the “horses” (horses were the fast and powerful animals of the time). If we have trouble maintaining our trust in God and positive attitude when things are somewhat bad, how will we do if things get really difficult? We cannot be so connected to the things we enjoy in this life, including our hopes and dreams for here on earth, that we become discouraged and dejected if we lose them or never see them realized. God makes no promises for our prosperity here on earth, but He promises to be with us always and reward us for our faithfulness to Him.

Jer 12:6

**“For even your brothers and the house of your father.”** Even people from Jeremiah’s own family joined the plot to kill him (see commentary on Jer. 11:18).

Jer 12:7

**“I have forsaken my house.”** This is God speaking. The Kingdom of Judah had so forsaken God that He in turn has forsaken Judah. In this context, God’s “house” is “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 11:17). He had left “his house,” and cast off his heritage, the people of Judah, and given what His soul dearly loved, i.e., His people, into the hand of her enemies. The enemies are called “her enemies” because God is using the figure of speech personification and portraying Judah as the woman He has loved.

[For more on the figure of speech personification, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

Jer 12:8

**“like a lion in the forest.”** God’s people have rejected Him and raised their voice against Him; they roared against Him. Like a lion in the forest, Judah has even become dangerous to God, she rejects Him, twists His words, and hurts and even kills the individuals He loves, such as the prophets, the poor, and the widows.

**“raised her voice against me.”** The Hebrew is more literally like Young’s Literal Translation: “She gave forth against Me with her voice,” but that is not very clear in English, and the meaning is that Judah raised her voice against God.

Jer 12:9

**“Is my heritage to me like a speckled bird of prey.”** The reading in the REV follows the Masoretic text and the majority of English translations. However, there are scholars who support a different reading based on understanding the Hebrew differently and more closely following the Septuagint, for example, the NAB, which has: “My heritage is a prey for hyenas, is surrounded by vultures” (cf. NRSV). In any case, the meaning of the verse is that Judah is under attack from enemies, who are like wild animals ready to attack and devour her.

Jer 12:10

**“many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard.”** The “shepherds” are the rulers and leaders. This was a powerful word picture in biblical times because the animosity between shepherds, especially people shepherding goats, and farmers is age-old. The sheep and goats wandered the hillsides and often got into the crops and vineyards of the farmers. In this verse, God’s people are the vineyard, and the “shepherds” are the rulers, here especially foreign rulers, that trample God’s people.

The word “shepherd” was a common idiom for a ruler. That fact is in part obscured by the Christian tradition to translate the Greek word “shepherd” as “pastor” in the New Testament Epistles. If the Greek word “shepherd” were translated as “shepherd” in the New Testament, we would see much more clearly that God set “shepherds” over His people to care for them.

[For more on leaders being called “shepherds,” see commentary on Jer. 2:8.]

Jer 12:12

**“the sword of Yahweh devours.”** Here Yahweh speaks of Himself in the third person instead of saying, “my sword.” The use of “sword” is a beautiful and powerful personification. God’s sword is described as if it were a person with a great appetite, eating the people of the land.

Jer 12:15

**“I will bring them again, each to his heritage and each to his land.”** The promise of God is that the exiles will eventually be brought back to their countries. Although this prophecy was fulfilled in small part when the Judeans returned to Israel after the Babylonian Captivity, the ultimate fulfillment will be in the Millennial Kingdom, when Christ rules the earth (see commentary on Jer. 32:37).

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 12:16

**“learn, yes, learn.”** The verb “learn” is repeated twice in different aspects for emphasis, which is the figure polyptoton (see commentary on Gen. 2:16). The meaning is that if the people will really learn and do.

**“then they will be built up in the midst of my people.”** This remarkable prophecy shows God’s great compassion for all humanity. Here he tells Judah’s enemies that if they will learn the ways of God’s people, the Judeans, and learn to swear by the name of Yahweh instead of the name of Baal, God will build them up, even in the midst of His people. God speaks of nations repenting in Jeremiah 18:8.

Jer 12:17

**“But if they will not listen.”** In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the “pregnant sense” of the word. In this verse it has the meaning “listen to and obey.” Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42). A number of versions translate the Hebrew word as “obey” here (CSB, KJV, NAB, NKJV, NLT).

**Jeremiah Chapter 13**

Jer 13:1

**“linen loincloth.”** The Hebrew word translated “loincloth” in the REV (cf. NAB, NRSV) has been translated many different ways in the English versions, including “belt” (NIV, NLT); “girdle” )KJV, ASV); “sash” (NKJV); “shorts” (TEV; GNB); “waistband” (NASB); and “waistcloth” (RSV). Scholars have determined that the article of clothing was less like a belt and likely more like a short skirt that was worn next to the body, perhaps even reaching the knees.

The reason God chose that particular piece of clothing is explained in Jeremiah 13:9-11. The loincloth represented God’s people, and just as a loincloth clings to a person, God said that He “made to cling to me [God] the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah.” It is also likely implied that just as a loincloth provided for modesty (holiness) so God wanted Israel to be holy and magnify His holiness. It is also important that God specified that the loincloth be made of linen, because the priest’s clothing was to be made of linen (Exod. 28:5-8, 15, 39, 42; cf. Ezek. 44:17-18). Although the reason for that is not specifically stated, it was likely to show God’s intent for Israel, that it was to be a kingdom of priests and magnify God’s glory to the world (Exod. 19:5-6). Sadly, just as the loincloth Jeremiah bought was ruined, so Israel failed miserably in their God-given role as priests or even as obedient worshipers.

Jer 13:4

**“go to the *Wadi* Parath.”** The Hebrew text reads *parath*, and the Parath is a well-known wadi just east of Anathoth, where Jeremiah lived, and some versions read Parath (NET, CJB).

Although many versions read the “Euphrates,” that is unlikely given the distance and the fact that Jeremiah would be traveling alone in a very dangerous time. Also, it was common that the Euphrates was referred to as the *nahar parath*, the “river Euphrates.” The Euphrates was some 350 miles (565 km) from Anathoth, making a round trip of 700 miles. For comparison, people traveling from Persia to Jerusalem, a journey of some 800 miles, took 100 days (Ezra 7:9). This would mean that Jeremiah would have had to have left Israel for three months two different times to carry out God’s command, which seems highly unlikely. Many places in the Bible have the same name, and given the seemingly unlikely journey that Jeremiah would have had to have made to the Euphrates River, scholars have suggested other places for *parath*. A likely one is the area of the spring whose water runs down the Wadi Parath, which would only be about four miles from Anathoth. The lesson of the loincloth does not depend on where it was hidden by Jeremiah. Just as Jeremiah ignored the loincloth, God would now seem to ignore Judah and let it be destroyed.

It seems likely that what God is doing here is using a play on words to make a point. Since the word *parath* is used of the Euphrates River (Jer. 51:63) as well as the Wadi Parath, taking a loincloth to the “parath” would be symbolic of Judah being taken beyond the Euphrates by the Babylonians and there be seemingly forgotten.

Jer 13:9

**“In this way I will ruin the pride of Judah.”** This could simply refer to the fact that just as the loincloth was totally ruined, so the pride of Judah would be totally destroyed. However, there may also be the lesson that as the loincloth was ignored and eventually ruined, Judah had been so sinful and willfully disobedient that God would ignore them until they were destroyed.

Jer 13:10

**“good for nothing.”** Or “not profitable for anything,” thus “worthless.” People who consistently disobey and defy God are worthless to him—worse than worthless if they harm His people—and their end will be the same as worthless cloth; thrown out with the garbage and burned in the fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

**“to worship them.”** Or “to bow down to them.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jer 13:12

**“skin-bottle.”** A “bottle” or container made from animal skin.

[For more on skin-bottles, which were usually made from the skins of goats, see commentary on 1 Sam. 10:3.]

**“every skin-bottle will be filled with wine.”** Jeremiah was giving a prophecy about the coming wrath upon Judah and Jerusalem, but the people did not understand him. But the Bible speaks of the wine of God’s wrath in a number of places (cf. Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). In Jeremiah 25:15, God speaks of the wine of His wrath that will be given to all the nations. The wine of God’s wrath was poured out on Judah, and it will be poured out again in the future on the AntiChrist and his kingdom.

Jer 13:16

**“Give glory to Yahweh your God, before he causes darkness.”** This is metaphorical language for the coming disaster. The “darkness” is the darkness of death and destruction, for example, Amos speaks of the coming Day of the Lord as being a day of darkness (Amos 5:18-20; 8:9). To give glory to Yahweh before he brings the darkness is to repent and confess your sins before disaster comes.

Jer 13:17

**“my soul will weep in secret.”** Jeremiah was deeply hurt by the godlessness of his people, Israel. He wept over them both for their coming destruction by Babylon but also because they would not have everlasting life.

**“will be taken captive.”** The Hebrew text is literally, “has been taken captive,” but this is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, where a future event is written about as if it had already happened, it was so certain it was “as good as done.” English readers do not usually understand the prophetic perfect and it confuses them.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Jer 13:18

**“queen mother.”** The Hebrew word translated “queen mother” is *gebereth* (#01404 גְּבֶרֶת), and in this context, the “queen mother” is the mother of the king.[[12]](#footnote-16606) The Queen mother was the most powerful woman in the kingdom, much more powerful than any of the wives of the king, who often did not have much real power at all.

Jer 13:19

**“The cities of the Negev are closed up.”** Although that kept the enemy out, it also kept relief from coming in and people from leaving to try to escape the coming destruction.

**“it is wholly carried away captive.”** This is the figure hyperbole, exaggeration. Although the majority of the people were carried away captive to Babylon, not all of them were (cf. 2 Kings 24-25, esp. 2 Kings 25:12).

Jer 13:20

**“Lift up your eyes and see those who are coming from the north.”** The Babylonian army was coming from the north. Jeremiah had said the enemy was coming from the north many times before (Jer. 1:14-15; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 25:9; 47:2; 50:3; ). The leaders of Judah were evil and blinded by their arrogance, and some of them wrongly thought that because God’s Temple was in Jerusalem they would be protected (cf. Jer. 7:1-15, esp. v. 4).

**“Where is the flock that was given to you.”** The “flock,” the people of Judah and Jerusalem, are exposed and helpless against the Babylonian army.

Jer 13:21

**“those whom you yourself have taught to be friends to you?”** Judah had cultivated a friendship with Babylon that extended back to Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:12-19), but now the Babylonians would attack and conquer Judah.

Jer 13:22

**“and your heels are violated.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “your heels have suffered violence.” This verse uses the idiom of “heels” representing the pubic area and genitalia, which are often spoken of idiomatically as “feet” (see commentary on Judg. 5:27). God is portraying Judah as a woman and saying her skirt has been stripped off and she has been raped.

Jer 13:23

**“*If they can,* then you also can do good; *you* who are accustomed to doing evil.”** The answer to the question, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin,[hp]or the leopard his spots” is obviously “No.” That leads to the second stanza in the verse, “*If they can,* then you also can do good; *you* who are accustomed to doing evil.” This is irony (sarcasm), and actually a veiled challenge to the ungodly Jews, who have likely been disobedient their entire lives. Jeremiah is taunting them into changing by telling them they cannot change. Sadly, the taunt did not work and the Jews did not change, which resulted in Judah being conquered by Babylon, which involved a huge amount of hurt, loss, and death.

Jer 13:24

**“by the wind from the desert.”** The wind from the desert was the “east wind,” a term for a wind that usually came off the desert and was hot, dry, unrelenting, and very uncomfortable (cf. Jer. 4:11; 18:17; Hos. 13:15; Jon. 4:8). Jeremiah had prophesied about a desert wind earlier (cf. Jer. 4:11-12). The people of Judah abandoned Yahweh, and so they would get the consequences of their disobedience.

Jer 13:25

**“your lot.”** The word “lot” is the regular word for a “lot” that is cast. It is as if the people played dice with God and lost. Their fate is how their “lot” came up when it was cast.

**“and trusted in falsehood.”** The Hebrew can also be translated, “trusted in the Lie,” that is, trusted in Baal, and that might be the most proper translation.

Jer 13:26

**“Therefore I will also pull up your skirts over your face.”** This is a reference to Jerusalem (Jer. 13:27). Jerusalem is being compared to a woman who is about to meet with disaster and shame. The comparison to a woman is clearly implied, which is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (see commentary on Rev. 20:2). It was common in the biblical culture to refer to cities and nations as women (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**“your shame will be seen.”** The word “shame” is used idiomatically for the genital area when it had been exposed in shameful situations. A lot of pagan worship involved il­licit sex, and the people of Judah had become caught up in it. Therefore, Jeremiah prophesied of the time when the Babylonians would conquer Judah because they had forgotten God and trusted in false gods, and so God said, “Therefore I will also pull up your skirts over your face[hp]and your shame will be seen.” (Jer. 13:26). Nahum 3:5 has a similar use. A New Testament reference is Revelation 16:15. “Shame” is used for the genital area; for other sexual idioms see commentary on Leviticus 18:6.

Also, “shame will be seen” means more than just “seen.” While it is true that what will happen to Judah will reveal the shame of her practices in defying God and worshiping other gods and oppressing the people, the phrase “will be seen” idiomatically can refer to the woman having sexual intercourse, in this context, being raped (cf. Lev. 20:17; Ezek. 16:37), and the Babylonian army would rape the land and also, literally, many of the women.

Jer 13:27

**“*lustful* neighing.”** As mentioned in Jeremiah 5:8, men neighing after their neighbor’s wife.

**“On the hills and in the fields.”** The idolatry and idolatrous practices were everywhere, not just localized to certain temples.

**“I have seen your abominations.”** The abominations were both the idols and the ungodly practices and worship that supported the idols.

**Jeremiah Chapter 14**

Jer 14:1

**“The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought.”** A drought had struck Judah, but we are not told how long it lasted. We do know from Scripture that when a nation continually sins and defies God, the Devil and demons can affect the land and change the weather patterns. It is one of the great lessons of the Bible that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson about people’s behavior affecting the land is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 9:10-14; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10).

[For more on sin affecting the weather see commentary on Lev. 18:25.]

Jer 14:2

**“her gates languish.”** The drought affects people coming and going out of the cities—there is not as much traffic—so the gates languish. The servants do not go to the wells and cisterns for water, and the farmers do not go out to farm (Jer. 14:3-4).

Jer 14:3

**“their servants.”** The Hebrew text literally reads “little ones,” but in this context, where it is “nobles” (Lit. “great ones,” “majestic ones”) who do the sending, their “little ones” are their servants.

Jer 14:4

**“the ground is cracked.”** Israel had a dry season and a wet season. The Fall rain (the “former rain”) usually started in October and softened the ground and began the wet season which lasts usually until April. Usually by the end of April, the dry season starts and it does not rain again until October. The hot sun bakes the ground from April to October and it becomes dry, hard, and cracked. The farmers have to wait for the Fall rains to soften the ground so they are able to plow the ground and plant the seed. God promised that if Israel obeyed God the rain would come in its proper season (Lev. 26:3-4; Deut. 11:13-14; 28:12). If the rains do not come, the farmers know something is wrong and they are ashamed and cover their heads.

Jer 14:6

**“their eyes fail.”** When a person or animal lacks food and water, and they have no energy, their eyes glaze over and they do not look around. That is the picture that is being painted here; even the wild donkeys are close to death.

Jer 14:7

**“Though our iniquities testify against us.”** The subject suddenly shifts from the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah speaking. In the Israelite court of law there needed to be two or three witnesses, but there are many iniquities that testify against Judah and Jerusalem. In fact, Jeremiah lists three different “sin witnesses” in this verse: iniquity, apostasy (lit. “turning away”), and sin. Jeremiah openly admits and confesses the sin of the people to God and has no excuse or defense to offer for them because, indeed, there is none. The people have openly and willfully defied and disobeyed God. All Jeremiah can do is plead mercy and ask God to “act for your name’s sake,” that is, to ask God to act because, to some extent, His honor and reputation are at stake.

The drought should show those who have eyes to see that Baal and the other gods do not protect and bless the land. The land is ravaged in spite of the Baal worship going on. Sin always puts people, and God, into a difficult situation. If God helps the people then they just go on sinning, which will hurt them in the long run and especially on the Day of Judgment. But if He does not help them He hurts because He loves the people, and also it then looks like the national God of Judah, Yahweh, is not able to save His people. God’s people often face the same dilemma when people they love sin. Is it the right thing to help, or let the sinner suffer the consequences of their sin? Each situation is different and the decisions are difficult.

Jer 14:9

**“a helpless man.”** The Hebrew word translated “helpless” is *daham* (#01724 דּהם), and this is the only time it appears in the Old Testament. The lexicons generally have “astounded, surprised, confused” (cf. BDB, Holladay), but the NET text note says, “the word has been found in a letter from the seventh century [the time Jeremiah lived] in a passage where it must mean something like “be helpless”; see W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* (Hermeneia), 1:433, for discussion and bibliography of an article where this letter is dealt with.” The word “helpless” fits the context, and appears in some modern versions (cf. CSB, NET).

Jeremiah makes his plea to God more forceful, asking God why He stands aloof from the problems of Judah and Jerusalem. He asks God why He seems like a foreigner, someone disinterested who is just traveling through, someone who is helpless and cannot save (Jer. 14:8-9). Of course he has the answer; Judah has turned their back on Him and turned to other gods (see commentary on Jer. 14:7).

**“we are called by your name.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “your name is called over us” (cf. YLT). The phrase refers to ownership, and it might well be translated “we belong to you” (cf. NET, J. A. Thompson).[[13]](#footnote-22436)

Jer 14:10

**“Now he will.”** Yahweh speaks about Himself in the third person, “he,” distancing himself from the people.

**“remember.”** This is the idiomatic sense of “remember” which means “remember and do something about” (see commentary on Luke 23:42). In the phrase, “remember their iniquity and punish their sins,” “remember” and “punish” are synonymous. “Iniquity” and “sins” are mentioned in Jeremiah 14:7.

Jer 14:11

**“Do not pray for the welfare of this people.”** God had told Jeremiah not to pray for the people before this time (Jer. 7:16, 11:14), and now He tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people a third time here in Jeremiah 14:11.

[For more on Jeremiah not praying for the people, see commentary on Jer. 7:16. For information on God not answering the prayer of the wicked, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Jer 14:12

**“When they fast, I will not hear their cry.”** In this context, the people’s fasting was to appeal to God for help, and their fasting would be accompanied by prayers and cries for help, but the sin is entrenched and their fast is insincere, and God will not listen to their cries.

**“I will not accept them.”** Sacrifices and offerings made to God by wicked people are detestable to God; He has no respect for them and will not accept them. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. Proverbs 21:27 and 28:9 say that the sacrifices of a wicked person are an abomination to God. Similarly, God will not listen to the prayers of wicked and unrepentant people; they are an abomination to Him (Prov. 28:9).

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Jer 14:13

**“the prophets.”** The context tells us these are the false prophets. We can see why Jeremiah felt so alone and wept for the people. He heard from God and was not confused, but the people would have been confused by all the false voices. Furthermore, as we see in the fact that Jeremiah was beaten, put in stocks, etc., these false prophets came against Jeremiah personally.

**“lasting.”** The Hebrew word has many meanings, including “firm, faithful, sure, reliable, stable, continuing, true, etc.” The versions differ as to which meaning to choose for the best fit here. To the people listening to the false prophets, the word would indicate all of those things, and thus the false prophets were saying there would be a true, firm, reliable, lasting, stable state of well-being in Judah. They were very wrong.

**“peace and prosperity.”** The Hebrew word “*shalom*” means more than “peace,” it means well-being, wholeness. In this context of conflict and war with the Babylonians, “peace” is too narrow a meaning, The prophets were foretelling “*shalom*,” peace and prosperity.

Jer 14:14

**“The prophets prophesy lies in my name.”** It was a very serious sin to say that Yahweh said something that He did not say. Being a false prophet at all is a serious sin, but people who say that Yahweh, the God of Israel, told them to say something that He did not tell them to say are sinning very grievously. If a person says he is a prophet of Baal, God’s people can make a choice as to whether they want to listen or not, but if a person pretends to be a prophet of Yahweh, or says he represents Yahweh when he doesn’t, that requires a whole different level of diligence on the part of God’s people. People who say they represent God when they don’t are in danger of serious consequences, as Jeremiah 14:14-16 shows. Other verses that show false prophets prophesying in God’s name are Jeremiah 23:1-40, Jeremiah 28, Ezekiel 13:1-9 and 13:17-22.

**“worthless divination.”** The Hebrew text reads “divination and worthlessness,” which in this context is the figure of speech hendiadys, in which two nouns are joined by “and” with the second noun acting as an adjective of the first. “Divination and worthlessness” become “worthless divination” by hendiadys. This gives us some insight as to the source of the information of the false prophets; at least some of it was coming from divination. Divination was an abomination to God (Deut. 18:9-14), and it gave the Devil plenty of ways to feed false information to the false prophets.

Jer 14:16

**“they will have no one to bury them.”** The dead bodies of animals and unwanted or uncared-for humans were not buried in the biblical culture, but were left unburied and were usually eventually eaten by animals, birds, and vermin such as rats. For a person to have a proper burial showed that the person was honored and respected. In contrast, people were sometimes left unburied as a sign of disrespect and contempt. It still happens in some of the Middle East today that animals are sometimes left unburied. In 1935, Ida Bebbington made a pilgrimage to Israel and wrote in her diary, “At one part in the road lay a dead camel’s carcass, they never bother about removing the dead bodies (so you will gather what a lot of places are like).”[[14]](#footnote-16831)

In a culture where family tombs and burial plots were common and family and community ties were strong, to not have family or friends bury one’s dead body was considered a terrible curse. In fact, many people believed (falsely, but it was a very widely held belief) that a proper burial was important for a comfortable existence in the afterlife. Thus the threat of not being buried but having one’s dead body eaten by animals, birds, and vermin was a horrifying threat of unspeakable loneliness and rejection, both on this earth and in the afterlife. In this case, God’s threat is that not only will the men be not buried, but their wives and children will not be buried either. A lot of verses in the Bible speak of people not being buried (cf. 1 Sam. 17:44, 46; Prov. 30:17; Eccl. 6:3; Isa. 5:25; Jer. 7:33; 9:22; 15:3; 16:4; Rev. 19:21).

A major part of the threat of not getting a proper burial is that one’s dead body would be eaten by dogs. Dogs were considered unclean in the biblical world and were not generally kept as pets, but roamed the city streets and ate garbage and whatever else they could find, including dead bodies. In fact, the dogs that roamed the cities and countryside of the ancient world were a major reason that dead bodies usually disappeared fairly quickly. The Law of Moses prescribed that if there was a dead animal body found in the field it was not to be cooked and eaten but was to be thrown to the dogs (Exod. 22:31). The presence of feral dogs in the cities was so common that a standard curse was that the dogs would eat dead bodies in the city while carrion birds would eat the bodies that were in the field (cf. 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:24). The Bible has a number of verses about dogs eating dead bodies (cf. Exod. 22:31; 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:19, 23, 24; 22:38; 2 Kings 9:10, 36). For example, dogs ate the body of Queen Jezebel after Jehu had her thrown down from an upper window (2 Kings 9:10, 36-37).

There are a number of people in the Bible who were held in such contempt that they were not buried or were threatened with not being buried. For example, Goliath told David that he would leave David’s dead body to the birds of the air and animals of the field (1 Sam. 17:44). David gave the same threat to Goliath, and it was David’s threat that came to pass (1 Sam. 17:46). The first king of Israel, King Jeroboam, was told by the prophet Ahijah that because of his sins none of his family would be buried but instead the dead bodies would be eaten by dogs and birds (1 Kings 14:11). King Jehoiakim of Judah was an ungodly king who cut up part of a scroll containing the Word of God and threw it in the fire (Jer. 36:21-23). For that and other sins, God’s pronouncement upon Jehoiakim was that he would be “buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged off and cast outside; beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:19). The phrase “buried with the burial of a donkey” is irony because donkeys were not buried, they were just left where they died or they were dragged away to where they could be eaten by vultures and vermin.

The case here in Jeremiah 14:16 was that so many people would be killed or carried away captive by the Babylonians that there would be no one left to bury the bodies of the men, women, and children who died in the Babylonian attack.

Jer 14:17

**“the virgin daughter—my people.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the virgin daughter of my people, but the genitive “of” is appositional, “the virgin daughter, that is to say, my people.”

[For more on God’s people being His “Virgin Daughter,” see commentary on Isa. 1:8.]

Jer 14:19

**“utterly rejected.”** The Hebrew uses the figure of speech polyptoton, repeating the word “rejected” (“have you rejected, yes rejected Judah;” see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“your soul.”** That is, “you” (see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul’”).

Jer 14:20

**“We acknowledge our wickedness.”** Jeremiah intercedes for his sin and the sin of his people.

Jer 14:21

**“your glorious throne.”** That is, the ark of the covenant in the Temple.

**“do not break your covenant.”** Judah had broken their covenant with Yahweh, but Jeremiah pleads with God not to completely break away from the covenant.

Jer 14:22

**“Is it not you.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic, “Are you not he.”

**Jeremiah Chapter 15**

Jer 15:1

**“my mind.”** The Hebrew translated “mind” is the word *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), which has a wide range of meanings, a few of which apply here, making the translator’s choice difficult. Here in Jeremiah 15:1, *nephesh* seems to best refer to God’s thoughts and desires, which is why many English translations say “mind,” although some read “heart,” which also catches some of the meaning.

[For more on *nephesh* and soul see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Jer 15:3

**“four kinds *of punishment*.”** The Hebrew word generally means “clans” in the sense of ethnic or national groups, or “kinds” in the sense of species, thus the sense is four different types of punishments. The idea of punishments is taken from the word “appoint” which is also translated as “visit” or “punish” in many places.

**“the dogs...the birds...the animals.”** The people who were killed by the sword would face the horrible fate of not being buried, but their dead bodies being eaten by the animals and birds. Not having a proper burial was considered a terrible curse (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

Jer 15:4

**“because of Manasseh...because of what he did in Jerusalem.”** Manasseh sinned greatly against God (2 Kings 21:1-9, 16; 2 Chron. 33:1-10), and because he reigned for 55 years, that sin deeply planted itself in the culture of the people of Judah. The result of that was that even though Manasseh himself repented toward the end of his life, the sin that he sinned had taken root and grown and spread through Judah and affected what happened there generations later.

Jer 15:6

**“You have rejected me.”** The pronoun is emphatic and thus accusatory; “YOU have rejected ME.”

**“I am tired of relenting.”** God is compassionate and merciful, but His mercy and grace have limits. He will not continue to give grace after grace to people who are stubbornly defiant and continually stand against Him. Indeed, when people constantly and defiantly sin, He cannot hold back the forces of evil over and over and still be a righteous God.

[For more about God “relenting,” “regretting,” and “changing His mind,” see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Jer 15:7

**“a winnowing fork at the gates.”** Threshing floors for winnowing grain were often near the gates of the city. The grain was brought to the threshing floor, threshed to separate the grain from the stalk, and then the grain was gathered for use, the stalk gathered for fires and other uses, and the chaff was blown away, scattered to the wind. So too, different things would happen to the captives at the gates of the cities at the hands of the enemy, and Judah would end up divided and scattered.

Jer 15:8

**“at noonday.”** Ancient armies typically fought during the day, and so noonday was a good time to attack.

Jer 15:9

**“her sun went down while it was still day.”** The woman’s sons, the light of her life, were killed by the enemy so “her sun went down.”

Jer 15:10

**“Woe is me, my mother.”** The speaker now shifts to Jeremiah. It had been God. The reader is expected to notice the shift from the content itself, the Bible does not point out the shift. Jeremiah is under such pressure that here he laments his birth, similar to Job (cf. Job 3:1-16). Jeremiah was called by God from the womb, now things are so difficult in his life that he says he regrets being born. It is doubtful that he actually did, but his grief was deep and he expressed it by saying he wishes he had not been born.

**“a man of accusation and a man of contention.”** The two Hebrew words, *rib* (#07379 רִב), here translated “accusation,” and *madon* (#04066 מָדוֹן), here translated “contention,” were used in the legal system, and used of accusations and legal cases and also of the contention that occurs in courts. The genitive construction, “a man of accusation” can have either a subjective or objective meaning; so it can mean that Jeremiah instigated the court cases and contention, i.e., he accused others, or he was accused and contended with by others. Also, however, the genitive case leaves open both possibilities; sometimes Jeremiah accused others and sometimes they accused him, and that is likely what happened. Here in Jeremiah 15:10, Jeremiah expressed that he felt like he was always in battles with people and it was difficult for him. Frankly, he likely was in almost daily battles over the Law and doing what was godly, and that would have been difficult, but that was the ministry that God called him to (Jer. 1:10): that was what God wanted and needed him to do to try to call godless Judah back to God.

God called Jeremiah to an extremely difficult ministry, and although Jeremiah was up to the task, it did not mean that he did not often personally suffer for it. The fact is that the world is very ungodly, and people who stand up for God and take a stand against ungodliness regularly suffer for it. That is why we must know that great rewards will be given to those who stand for God and we must draw strength from that hope (Matt. 5:10-12). Even Jesus drew strength to endure the cross from the joy he saw coming in the future (Heb. 12:2), and we must also draw strength from the hope that is promised to us (Rom. 8:18).

**“I have not lent.”** In the context of breaking (or “stretching”) the law, “lending” was lending with interest (cf. Deut. 23:19).

Jer 15:11

**“I will send you away.”** The meaning of this verse is not well understood, and translations vary greatly. In this translation, the “you” refers to Jerusalem, not Jeremiah, which fits with the context and next verses (cf. NET First Edition text note).

Jer 15:13

**“all your sins throughout all your territory.”** The sin and idolatry of Judah was not just in Jerusalem or only localized in certain places. The sin of Judah was throughout Judah.

Jer 15:14

**“It will burn against you.”** That is, it will burn you up. There are some Hebrew manuscripts that read “burn forever,” but the Masoretic Hebrew reads “burn against you.”

Jer 15:15

**“Yahweh, you know.”** The brevity of this statement combined with the context gives us its meaning. Jeremiah was saying, “Yahweh, you know my situation.” Yahweh knew Jeremiah’s situation, his needs, and his enemies.

**“Do not take me away *from life* because of your patience *toward sinners***.” This phrase in Jeremiah 15:15 is hard to understand without a scope of what Jeremiah knew about God. He knew God was patient and slow—sometimes very slow—to punish evil (cf. Exod. 36:6; Ps. 86:15). But Jeremiah felt that if God did not move quickly in avenging him from persecutors, they would kill him and thus take him from life. The NET Bible more freely translates Jeremiah’s request so it is easier to understand: “[God], do not be so patient with them [the persecutors] that you allow them to kill me.”

One lesson we can learn from Jeremiah is the love of life. To say that Jeremiah’s life was difficult is to understate the fact. Jeremiah’s life was so difficult, and things were going so badly for the country of Judah, that God told him not to marry and have children (Jer. 16:2). In that context, we might think that Jeremiah would have been happy to have his life end because not only was his life very difficult, he had confidence that he would be resurrected to a wonderful life in Paradise. In fact, it looked at one point he would be executed because of the prophecies he was giving (Jer. 26:14-15). But here we see the great love of life that Jeremiah had, and as tough as his life was, he prayed to God not to let people take his life from him.

Life can be difficult, but if we focus on God and His love for us, and focus on others and what we can do for them even if our own life is painful, we can love our life and the opportunities that we have each day.

Jer 15:16

**“Your words were found, and I ate them.”** This statement in Jeremiah 15:16 is generally taken by scholars to be a general statement, meaning that as Jeremiah got the Word of God from various sources, including revelation, he digested them and got great joy from them. Although that is certainly true, the word “found” is *matsa* (#04672 מָצָא) in the niphal aspect, and it literally means “to be found; to be discovered.” Only a few years before Jeremiah started prophesying, Manasseh had reigned over Judah for 55 years, and the vast majority of that time he had been extremely evil. He repented, but the evil he had done was not reversed and set in motion disaster for Judah many years after his death in the reign of King Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:3). After Manasseh, his son Amon ruled Judah, and he was very evil also.

During that long time of evil, the scrolls of the Old Testament were apparently lost. Jeremiah started his ministry in the thirteenth year of the godly King Josiah (Jer. 1:1-2). In the eighteenth year of Josiah, when the Temple was being refurbished after years of neglect, the scrolls of the Law were found in the Temple (2 Kings 22:8-10). It was the first time Josiah the king had seen the scrolls of the Law, as is apparent from his reaction and the reform that he then started (2 Kings 22:11-13). Since Jeremiah lived in Anathoth in Benjamin, only 5 miles or so from Jerusalem, it is almost certain that he had never seen the scrolls of the Law either. When Josiah read the scrolls, he started a kingdom-wide reform. When Jeremiah read the scrolls of the Lord, he “ate” them, and they were to him the joy and rejoicing of his heart.

**“for I am called by your name.”** The Hebrew is literally, “for your name was called over me,” and the phrase seems to denote ownership, e.g., “I belong to you.”

Jer 15:17

**“of those who make merry.”** Although some versions read “mock” instead of “make merry,” the meaning of the Hebrew word here means more to laugh and make merry than to mock, and most modern versions have some version of making merry and having a good time. Jeremiah understood the consequences of the sin of the people and could not join them in their merrymaking as if nothing evil was going to happen in the future.

**“I sat alone because of your hand.”** Jeremiah sat alone because of the “hand” of God upon him. “Hand” in this context is multifaceted and refers to the many ways God was working with him, including the revelation he received, his calling and ministry, and his responsibility to try to turn the people from their ignorant and evil ways. Often true men and women of God are compelled to stand apart from people who ignorantly sin and party to their doom, and thus Jeremiah’s statement is similar to Psalm 26:4-7.

Jer 15:18

**“like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?”** This is a reference to a physical attribute of Israel that was well-known, and thus it is similar to a custom or idiom because you have to know the land of Israel to understand it.

The majority of the streams in Israel only flow during the rainy season, so they stop flowing at some point during the dry season. The exact time that happens depends on the amount of rain that fell that year, how long the rainy season lasted, etc. That meant that if a person needed water during the dry season, they could never really be sure if the stream would still be flowing or if it had already dried up. The ironic thing about those streams was that often during the rainy season, there was water in lots of places, so the streams were not quite as necessary. However, later in the dry season when they were really needed, the streams did not have any water.

Jeremiah is asking God if He is like that; like a stream that only provides water during the “good” times and then stops providing when conditions get tough. It can seem like in the good times when we do not need God’s comfort, it is there in abundance, but then in the tough times, God’s comfort is not there. Jeremiah’s statement, expressing some doubt in God, brings a quick and stern rebuke from God (Jer. 15:19).

We can rely on God all the time, although sometimes it may not seem that way. Sometimes our pain and grief are so great that it makes God seem abnormally distant, and we expect more from God than we should. God is God, and life is difficult, and we need to have the strength and confidence to bear up in difficult times and not expect to be somehow coddled by God. In Jeremiah 15:21, God assures Jeremiah that He will deliver him, and we can rely on God’s deliverance too. But, as we learn from Proverbs, that does not mean that He will support our wrong expectations. We have to walk righteously and with wisdom.

Jer 15:19

**“If you return back *to me*, then I will take you back.”** God addresses Jeremiah directly and rebukes him. The Hebrew is hard to express in English. In this first sentence, the verb *shub* (#07725 שׁוּב) is repeated twice in a row but in different conjugations making the statement very punchy and powerful, literally “*shub shub*” but it is *shub* (qal), *shub* (hiphil). “If you return back (*shub* in the qal aspect: “return, turn back, repent”) *to me*, then I take you back (*shub* in the hiphil aspect: “make you return, cause you to return, take back, restore). To continue the emphasis on *shub*, God uses it twice in the last sentence of the verse. The people must turn back to Jeremiah and what he is saying, but Jeremiah is not to turn to them.

**“you will stand before me.”** This was a powerful promise and hope for Jeremiah. God uses the language of trusted leaders and ministers: they stand before the king, in his presence, to carry out his will. Thus, “you will stand before me” is a way of saying, “You will be my trusted minister/official.”

**“utter the precious and not the worthless.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “if you bring out (i.e., utter, speak) the precious from (away from) the worthless.” God challenges Jeremiah to only utter “precious” words, His words or words of truth, and not “worthless” words, words that are not true, and if Jeremiah does that, he will continue to be God’s mouth, His prophet.

**Jeremiah Chapter 16**

Jer 16:4

**“their dead bodies will be food.”** The dead bodies of animals and unwanted humans were left unburied and were usually eventually eaten by animals and birds. In this particular case, the Babylonians were about to kill many Judeans in their attack on Judah and Jerusalem, and those people would not be buried because their families would have been killed or captured. In a culture when family tombs and burial plots were common and it was a great curse to not be buried, most people believed (falsely, but it was a very widely held belief) that a proper burial was important for a comfortable existence in the afterlife. Thus, this verse was a horrifying threat of unspeakable loneliness and rejection (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

**“the birds of heaven.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the birds of the heavens,” but the Hebrew word “heavens” is always plural, there is no singular word “heaven” in Hebrew.

Jer 16:5

**“the house of mourning.”** That is, a house where there is mourning, which would also have food for the family and guests to eat as often happens today.

Jer 16:6

**“They will not be buried.”** During the lifetime of Jeremiah, so many people were killed or carried away from Judah by the Babylonians that there were not enough family left to bury the dead. It was a terrible curse to not be buried (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

**“nor cut themselves.”** It was a pagan custom practiced by some people to cut yourself when you were in mourning for the dead. This is mentioned in a number of verses (see commentaries on Jer. 41:5 and 1 Kings 18:28).

**“shave their heads.”** Some people shaved their heads as a sign of mourning (see commentary on Jer. 47:5, “baldness”).

Jer 16:7

**“break bread for those in mourning to comfort them.”** There was often food and drink associated with a funeral. The customs varied but were similar, which is understandable. Occasionally the house, and/or the family members in it, would be unclean from the dead body and so food had to be brought into the house by neighbors (cf. Ezek. 24:17).

Jer 16:8

**“You must not go into the house of feasting.”** God changes the subject from mourning to feasting for happy times. Although no specific reason for the feast was given here in Jeremiah 16:8, the next verse mentions marriage, and that would certainly be a reason for a feast.

The Hebrew word translated as “feasting” can mean “drinking bout,” and it generally refers to a meal with wine. It is almost always translated as “banquet” in the REV.

Jer 16:11

**“worshiped them.”** Or “bowed down to them.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jer 16:15

**“I will bring them again into their land that I gave to their fathers.”** There are many prophecies in the Bible that the people of Israel will be reunited as one country (see commentary on Jer. 32:37), and this will happen when Jesus Christ conquers the earth and rules over it. That Israel would be gathered back together and given their ancestral land was a major part of the wonderful hope for the future that Israel had, and having a bright hope for the future is important for having the mental energy to live a godly life, especially in challenging times.

[For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 16:16

**“I will send for many fishermen.”** Hunting and fishing were common practices and were well-known and thus a good metaphor to use for the enemy coming and “catching” the people. Fishing for people is is a common biblical metaphor (cf. Ezek. 12:13; 29:4; Amos 4:2; Hab. 1:14-17).

**“hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill.”** God pictures the coming judgment as a thorough one; the Judeans will be searched for and hunted out from wherever they are.

Jer 16:17

**“they are not hidden from my face, nor is their iniquity concealed**.” The ways of the Judeans, i.e. what they were doing and their sin, were not hidden from God, who sees everything.

Jer 16:18

**“I will repay their iniquity and their sin double.”** The Hebrew word translated “double” is *mishneh* (#04932 מִשְׁנֶה), and its normal meaning in a context like this is double. It is worth noting, however, there has been found at Alalakh in Syria a similar word (but not identical) that means “equivalent,” and some scholars have suggested that *mishneh* has that meaning here, that God will fully pay back the sin of Judah without showing mercy and lessening His judgment. Although that might be possible, at this time there is no way to know. “Double” makes sense because, as God says in the verse, the Judeans had defiled both themselves and God’s land.

**“the corpses of their detestable idols.”** The Hebrew reads more literally “detestable things,” but the “things” are idols. From God’s perspective, the idols are lifeless—dead—and they lay as dead bodies on the ground, defiling God’s land; dead bodies defile the land (Num. 35:33; Deut. 21:23). God uses humor and irony here in calling the idols “corpses” as if they were once living, but in the eyes of the idolatrous people they were alive in some way, so the word “corpses” would have hit them very deeply.

Jer 16:21

**“my hand.”** Idiomatic for “my power,” all that I will do.

**Jeremiah Chapter 17**

Jer 17:1

**“with an iron stylus and with a flint point.”** The sin of Judah was so grievous that it was written in such a way that it left a permanent mark and could not be erased. By this time the consequences of Judah’s sin could not be avoided. The Babylonians were coming to devastate the land (cf. Jer. 17:3).

**“It is engraved on the tablet of their heart.”** The implication is that the people had very hard hearts, because you could not “engrave” the sin of Judah on a person’s flesh heart, it would just get cut up.

Jer 17:2

**“while their children remember their altars.”** This is not clear, and as a result the English versions vary quite a bit, struggling with the translation.

Jer 17:3

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. The context indicates these shrines were pagan in nature (cf. NLT, “pagan shrines”). Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

Jer 17:4

**“for ages.”** The Hebrew word is *olam* (#05769 עוֹלָם), and it is often translated “forever,” but that is quite often misleading in English because *olam* generally refers to only a long period of time or an indefinite period of time. God’s anger against Judah will subside and He will eventually restore Judah completely, so here *olam* means “for a long time,” for ages. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible reads that God’s anger will last, “unto times age-abiding.”

[For more on *olam*, see commentary on Josh. 4:7.]

Jer 17:5

**“who trusts in humans.”** This is not a blanket statement that we cannot trust anyone at any time. There are obviously times when it is important to trust people, but this is certainly a warning about trusting people. In the context of Jeremiah, the people had turned from God to idols and were exceedingly sinful (Jer. 17:1-2). Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry was to confront all Israel: the kings, officials, priests, and people (Jer. 1:8-19). There were not many people he could trust. In the same way, people today need to be diligent about who to trust. Many leaders and even many clergy, are wrong either out of ignorance or for their own gain.

Occasionally a Trinitarian will argue from Jeremiah 17:5 that Jesus cannot be a man because we are expected to trust Jesus, but not to trust men, and therefore Jesus must be a God-man (there are not many Trinitarians who make that argument, but some do). That analysis misses the point of this verse. The verse and its context must be read to get its proper meaning. The immediate context reveals that a person is cursed if he trusts man *and also* turns his heart away from the Lord. But we are not turning our hearts away from God by trusting in His Son Jesus. On the contrary, “he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father” (John 5:23). God is the one who made Jesus our Lord and Head of the Church. Indeed, our hearts would be turning from the Lord if we did *not* trust Jesus. This same logic applies to other servants of God. The people were not cursed when they followed Moses, or Joshua, or David, and trusted in what they said, because these men were acting for God. Exodus 14:31 says the people trusted God and Moses. The husband of the virtuous woman is blessed when he trusts in his wife, as Proverbs 31:11 (KJV) says, “The heart of her husband safely trusts in her.” It is clear that there are times when trusting another person is completely appropriate.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“and makes flesh his arm.”** The word “arm” is a literal translation of the Hebrew, and was idiomatic for “strength” but the Hebrew idiom is clear enough to be left in the text. The “arm” of Yahweh is often used for the strength or might of Yahweh (cf. Exod. 6:6; 15:16; Ps. 79:11; 89:10; Isa. 33:2; 51:9; 53:1). Here in Jeremiah 17:5, the ungodly person makes “flesh,” i.e., people and what they say, his “arm,” his strength. But such a person will end up cursed and thus disadvantaged both in this life and the next.

Jer 17:6

**“a juniper bush.”** The Hebrew word only occurs twice in the Bible and is most likely a kind of desert juniper. Here it grows in the Arabah, the area in the Jordan River Valley, mostly just west of the Dead Sea. It is mostly desert with an occasional oasis such as En-gedi. The juniper “will not see when good comes” because generally there is no rain in the area, it falls before it reaches the Arabah. The juniper lives in “parched places,” away from the water, and water meant life. In contrast, the person who trusts God will be planted by the water.

The Hebrew has a beautiful poetic wordplay in the poetry of Jeremiah and it likely is the reason the word “juniper” was chosen as the plant in this verse. The word for “juniper” is *arar* (#06199 עַרעָר), whereas the Arabah is *arabah* (#06160 עֲרָבָה), so the bush is an “arar in the arabah,” and that wordplay would catch the attention of the reader.

**“in the Arabah.”** The “Arabah” is the hot and dry desert area around the Dead Sea. The Arabah extends from south of the Dead Sea to miles beyond its northern end, and is basically a desert.

**“but will inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited.”** The Hebrew word “wilderness” could also be translated “desert.” The point Jeremiah is making is that the person who trusts in people and not God, and whose heart is not inclined toward Yahweh, will live a barren and unproductive life.

In 1855 Horatio Hackett wrote about the uninhabited salt lands he went through when he traveled from Egypt to Gaza. He traveled “through a succession of basins or valleys, where the surface of the ground was moist, and covered with a thin incrustation of salt. It was so slippery here that camels could with difficulty keep erect; one of them actually fell at full length, with a groan which was piteous to hear. We were not far at this time from the Mediterranean [Sea], of which we had glimpses now and then. It is quite possible that a strong wind from the west causes the sea occasionally to overflow the entire tract, and on its receding, the water left in the low places evaporates and encrusts the earth with salt. There are other deserts, or parts of deserts, in the east, as travelers inform us, which have a similar peculiarity, though the salt may be formed in those cases in a different manner. Perhaps the most remarkable among these is the region south of the Dead Sea. A soil of this nature must, of course, be unproductive; nothing grows there, and the means of supporting life are wanting. It may be to this feature of an eastern desert, aggravating so much its other evils, and rendering it unfit to be the abode of men, that the prophet Jeremiah refers when he says of the ungodly man, “he shall inhabit the parched places of the wilderness, in the salt land, and not inhabited.”[[15]](#footnote-31077)

Jer 17:8

**“a tree planted by the waters.”** This tree is “planted” (also “transplanted”) by the waters. The clear implication in the verse is that someone “planted” the tree close to the waters, it did not grow there naturally. People who trust in God plant themselves by waters and are continually fed, versus the people who put their trust in what other people say and eventually end up without sustenance or support, like a juniper in the desert.

Jer 17:9

**“The heart.”** This is the only time in the Hebrew text where “heart” is combined with the definite article, and “the heart” is the heart of anyone, that is to say, people in general. The human heart is deceitful.

**“deceitful above all things, and is incurable.”** The human heart is deceitful, and is incurable. The Hebrew word translated as “incurable” generally refers to being sick, and especially sick beyond being able to be healed (cf. ESV: “desperately sick”). Here that meaning applies, but also by extension it refers to being sick in the sense that it is “corrupt,” “depraved,” “wicked,” etc., and thus “incurably bad” or “desperately corrupt” (cf. ASV, GNV, KJV, NET, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV). Because humans have a sin nature that will never go away in this life, there is a very real sense in which the natural human heart is indeed “incurably bad” (NET). Proverbs 28:26 says, “The person who trusts in his own heart—he is a fool.” The wise person trusts God and gets godly advisors to help him or her make the right decision.

That people are born with a deceitful, corrupt heart shows up in many areas of life. It explains why children have to be taught civilized characteristics such as sharing with others, not biting or hitting, not interrupting the conversation of others, etc. Those things do not come “naturally.” It also explains why even godly people fight with being selfish and self-centered throughout their life, and why the majority of the people of earth refuse to humble themselves to God and obey Him and His Son.

Thankfully, the human heart is constantly changing, and the wise person is in a constant dialogue with their heart so that it conforms to God’s ways of thinking and acting. The more we obey God despite our natural inclinations, the more our heart conforms to God’s ways, and the more “natural” it becomes to think and act like God (a heart changed to God’s ways is also sometimes referred to as “an educated conscience,” that is, a conscience educated to think like God).

The Devil knows that the human heart is deceitful and sick (corrupt), so he keeps up a constant societal pressure for people to “follow the heart,” because he knows it often leads them astray. “Follow your heart” is not the message of Scripture. The message of Scripture is “obey God.” As Moses wrote long ago, “It will be our righteousness if we are careful to do every one of these commandments before Yahweh our God, as he has commanded us” (Deut. 6:25).

**“who can know it.”** The Hebrew word is the common word *yada*, “to know,” (#03045 ידע), and it has a wide range of meaning including to know and to understand, and both meanings are applicable here. Who can really “know” their heart and fathom how deceitful and corrupt it really is and who can “understand” their heart and why it causes a person to think and act the way that they do? The human heart is corrupt, which is why we cannot “trust our heart,” we have to trust what God says.

Jer 17:10

**“heart...kidneys.”** In the biblical world, the “heart” refers to the thoughts, not the emotions. The Hebrew placed thinking and planning in the heart, and emotions in the organs of the abdomen, the bowels, and kidneys. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. When the Bible mentions “heart” and “kidneys” it refers to the thought life (“heart”) and emotional life (“kidneys”).

[For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21. For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

**“to give to each one according to his ways.”** The teaching that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, good or bad, based on what they have done in their life is taught many times in Scripture (e.g., Job. 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; see commentary on Ps. 62:12).

[For more on rewards in the future and people getting what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Jer 17:11

**“fool.”** The Hebrew word translated “fool” is *nabal* (#05036 נָבָל), and it generally refers to a godless person, or a person who acts ungodly, who is a fool. When the riches “leave” the person who got wealthy through injustice, then everyone will know that that person was a fool.

[For more on “fools” and the Hebrew word *nabal*, see commentary on Prov. 16:22.]

Jer 17:12

**“from the beginning.”** From the time that the Temple was first built by Solomon. God is not a latecomer or an imposter, His throne has been there since the Temple was built.

Jer 17:13

**“written in the dirt.”** Anything written in the dirt or dust of the earth in Israel soon disappears. The righteous are written in the Book of Life and will live forever (cf. Exod. 32:32; Dan. 12:1; Ps. 69:28; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). Those people who are not saved will die a second death in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). The unsaved do not burn forever, as is taught by some Christian denominations, but are burned up and die a second death. Jeremiah 17:13 is just one more piece of evidence revealing that fact. The saved are written in the Book of Life, but the unsaved are written in the dust, and like their names in the dust, which are written down but soon disappear, the wicked die in the Lake of Fire and are gone forever; annihilated.

The Hebrew can be translated such that “dirt” refers to the land, making the sense become “all in the land who depart from you.” The NASB goes that way: “Those who turn away on earth will be written down, because they have forsaken the fountain of living water.” However, the Bible says that people’s deeds are written down anyway, so that translation, while grammatically justifiable, does not seem to fit with the rest of Scripture (Exod. 32:32-33; Mal. 3:16-17; Rev. 20:12). On the other hand, that the wicked will disappear from history and memory is written many places in Scripture.

[For more on the annihilation of the wicked, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“living water.”** “Living water” was water that was used for ritual cleansing from sin and impurity. Living water came from God, and thus included rainwater, well water, and water from a flowing river or stream. Water that sat in a cistern was not living water. In this case, the “living water” is partly true, because God is the true source of water on earth, and partly metaphorical, because in this case the “living water” also represents the spirit that God gives that brings blessings and spiritual life.

[For more on living water, see commentary on Num. 19:17.]

Jer 17:14

**“save me, and I will be saved.”** The primary focus of Jeremiah’s plea is for healing and deliverance here and now and on earth; being healed and saved from his Judean enemies.

Jer 17:15

**“Where is the word of Yahweh?”** The unbelieving Jews mocked Jeremiah and questioned what he said. Jeremiah had been saying for years that Judah and Jerusalem would be stricken by God, but God’s judgment was delayed, causing people to doubt and mock. This was very hard on Jeremiah, and it happens to all prophets and believers (cf. 2 Pet. 3:4). God is merciful and wants to give room for people to be saved, but there will come a day, as there always has, when God’s pronounced judgment will come (2 Pet. 3:9).

Jer 17:16

**“nor have I desired the woeful day.”** Although Jeremiah was terribly persecuted by his own people, he took no pleasure in knowing that a day of disaster was soon coming upon them. He wanted God’s justice to come (Jer. 17:18), but it would still be a sad day for him.

Jer 17:17

**“terror...refuge.”** The words rhyme in Hebrew (“mechittah...machaceh”) and thus make a punchy point as Jeremiah expresses his confidence in God.

Jer 17:19

**“the gate of the children of the people.”** Which gate this refers to is not known, although many scholars feel it must be a gate on the north side of the city leading out into the tribal area of Benjamin. But in any case, God told Jeremiah to go and warn the people in every gate of the city. To best deliver God’s messages, Jeremiah had to go to where the people were, and the gates were gathering places and places where people would walk. Jeremiah would not have to do this for very long before basically everyone in the city had either heard him or heard of him.

Jer 17:21

**“Be careful if you value your lives.”** The Hebrew is perhaps translated more literally, “Be careful at the risk of your souls,” where “souls” refers to the lives of the people. If the people disobeyed God, they would be killed or captured by the Babylonians here on earth, and would forfeit everlasting life as well.

**“Do not carry a burden on the Sabbath day.”** Judah has many sins, but here the Sabbath day is used because breaking the Sabbath is a sin that clearly breaks one of the Ten Commandments and thus clearly shows that the people of Judah are not the least bit interested in obeying God.

Jer 17:23

**“incline their ear.”** To “incline the ear” is to bend the head in such a way that the ear is better positioned to hear. Thus the people did not listen or even incline their ear so that they could hear. Some English versions try to clarify the meaning of the verse by translating the idiom: “they did not listen or pay attention.” That is what Jeremiah 17:23 is saying.

Jer 17:24

**“listen, yes, listen.”** The Hebrew text has the figure of speech polyptoton, using “listen” twice in the sentence but inflected in different ways; an infinitive followed by an imperfect tense. In this context, listen has the meaning of “listen and obey,” which is why some versions have “obey” instead of “listen.”

[For more on polyptoton and the emphasis it brings, as well as the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Jer 17:25

**“sitting on the throne of David.”** This is an idiom meaning that they are a descendant of David and are reigning as king. It does not mean that they are carried through the gate while sitting on a throne. This is an example of how one must understand the culture and idioms to understand the Bible.

**“for ages *to come*.”** The Hebrew word that many English versions translate “forever” is *olam* (#05769 עוֹלָם), and it is often translated “forever,” but that is quite often misleading in English because *olam* generally refers to only a long period of time or an indefinite period of time.

[For more on *olam*, see commentary on Josh. 4:7.]

Jer 17:26

**“from the land of Benjamin, and from the Shephelah and from the hill country and from the Negev.”** This is an accurate geographical description of the area around Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem is in the tribal area of Benjamin, it is on the extreme southern border, so Benjamin is to the north, the shephelah is the lowlands to the west toward the Mediterranean Sea, the hill country is generally to the northeast and southeast, and the Negev is to the south. So Jeremiah’s geographical description is accurate and describes territory in all four directions from Jerusalem.

**“the Shephelah.”** The Shephelah is the area of rolling hills east of Israel’s coastal plain and between the coastal plain and the hill country (see commentary on Josh. 9:1).

**“thank offerings.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “sacrifices of thanksgiving,” but that wording can be confusing. What is being offered is a “thank offering,” a sacrifice being offered in thanks to God for something He has done. The wording “sacrifices of thanksgiving” makes it sound like what is being offered is thanks.

Jer 17:27

**“then I will kindle a fire in its gates.”** An enemy would generally first breach the gates, often by burning them down, and then enter the city and burn it down. Jerusalem was burned down (2 Kings 25:8-9; 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 52:13).

**“it will not be quenched.”** The fires in the palaces of Jerusalem “will not be quenched,” meaning the fires will burn until the palaces are burned down.

[For how “quenched” is used in the Bible, see commentary on Mark 9:48.]

**Jeremiah Chapter 18**

Jer 18:2

**“Get up.”** The verb is imperative, so we might well understand the verse as “Get up! And go down to the potter’s house.” God had something he wanted to show Jeremiah and the potter was currently working, which was important for God’s lesson to Jeremiah, so He commanded Jeremiah to get up and go right then.

**“go down to the potter’s house.”** This is very likely geographically correct. Potters needed a lot of water, and water was generally found lower down than the rest of the surrounding geography, so “go down” is almost certainly literal.

**“I will tell you my message.”** The literal Hebrew is “I will cause you to hear my words,” but it means I will tell you my words.

Jer 18:3

**“wheels.”** This verse highlights one of the biblical customs involving pottery. The literal Hebrew text is “at the two stones.” The reason that there were “two stones,” actually, two stone wheels, is that in biblical times the potter worked at a wooden table with a hole in it. Thus, the table looked much like many of the small tables many people have on a deck or patio that has a hole in it that an umbrella goes through so the table will have shade.

Up through the hole in the table came a shaft, like the shaft that connects two wheels of a cart or wagon except thinner, and there was a stone wheel under the table and a stone wheel on top of the table that were both connected to the shaft. The potter put the clay on the wheel that was on top of the table and began to work it as he turned the wheel under the table with his feet. Although a number of English versions try to make the English easier to understand by saying “wheel” instead of “wheels,” it is helpful in building the scene in our mind if we understand what Jeremiah saw and the actual biblical custom of the two stone wheels.

Jer 18:4

**“Whenever.”** The Hebrew verbs indicate repeated action (cf. [NET text note](https://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Jer&chapter=18&verse=4&tab=commentaries)). As Jeremiah watched, there must have been a number of times the clay could not be made to form the pot the potter wanted, so he simply made that piece of clay into another kind of vessel. This is not unusual; every potter experiences this.

**“came out ruined.”** The Hebrew verb translated “ruined” is *shachath* (#07843 שָׁחַת), and here it is in the Niphal aspect and its meanings include, to be ruined, spoiled, corrupted, injured, marred, rotted. As the potter worked the piece, the clay would not form the shape the potter wanted and the pot became ruined, so the potter had to start over and make something else.

Jer 18:6

**“can I not do with you as this potter.”** The record of the potter and the clay here in Jeremiah 18 has been terribly misunderstood in traditional Christianity. It is generally taught that God is the potter and we humans are the clay and God can do anything He wants to with us. But that is not true, as a careful reading of Jeremiah shows, and especially if reading Jeremiah is coupled with knowledge of clay and pottery. For example, in Jeremiah 18:4, the clay vessel became “ruined” in the potter’s hand. The potter did not want to ruin the pot, he wanted to make the pot, so what went wrong?

Every potter knows that certain types and consistencies of clay are good for making some vessels but not others. Successfully making a clay vessel involves a kind of teamwork between the potter and the clay. A potter cannot just take “generic clay” (of course there is no “generic clay”—every clay is different) and make anything they want to. And sometimes what the clay will or will not do surprises the potter. Sometimes clay that should have worked for making a certain vessel simply doesn’t work, and sometimes clay that should not have worked to make a certain vessel works wonderfully. Ultimately, however, the fate of the clay is in the hands of the potter. The clay may not cooperate and let the potter make the vessel that he or she wanted to make, but the potter will then make another vessel from the clay, and that vessel may be a “vessel of dishonor” (Rom. 9:21), a vessel that the clay is not happy being made into.

It is the teamwork between the potter (God) and the clay (humans) that God wanted Jeremiah to see. God, like a master potter, was trying to make Judah into a glorious vessel, a great nation. But Judah did not cooperate and obey God, instead, they defied God, so He had to do something else with Judah, and they became a vessel of dishonor. This was the lesson that God gave Jeremiah in Jeremiah 18:6-10: God has plans for people and nations, but what He can do is often limited to what the person or nation is willing to do.

There are dozens of verses in the Bible that show that things do not always turn out the way God wanted them to. God did not create a spiritual and physical world full of mindless robots who simply always do what God wanted. God created spirit beings and humans with free will, which is the freedom to love and obey Him, or the freedom to disobey and defy Him. Sadly, lots of people make the free will choice to disobey God, which is why there are so many verses in the Bible telling people to obey God and confronting people over their disobedience. It is also why there are verses that show that God has to change and adjust His plans when people ignore or defy them, which is the subject of Jeremiah 18:6-10. There are dozens of verses that show that God does not always get what He wants (cf. Gen. 6:6; 1 Chron. 21:15; 2 Chron. 36:15-17; Jer. 15:6; 26:13; 35:15). A major lesson we are to learn from Jeremiah 18:1-10 is that if we want God to make us into a glorious vessel, we need to obey Him and follow His guidance. If we do not, we will still be made into some kind of vessel, but it may be a vessel of dishonor.

[For more about free will and how it affects the war between Good and Evil, God and the Devil, see commentary on Luke 4:6].

Jer 18:7

**“At one moment.”** In this context, the Hebrew can be understood as “at the moment,” or “suddenly.” Some versions use “moment,” as does the REV (CSB, DBY, NAB, NASB, NRSV, YLT); some use “instant” (ASV, JPS, KJV); some use “suddenly” (Douay-Rheims, Geneva Bible). William Holladay, who translates the word “suddenly,” writes, “The point of the passage is clearly not that Yahweh makes a judgment for some nations and against others, almost as if it were a matter of whim; the point is that whatever decision Yahweh has made about a nation, he is able ‘quickly’ or ‘suddenly’ to reverse the decision if the conduct of that nation merits it.”[[16]](#footnote-26713) Holladay goes on to explain, “indeed the ‘suddenly’ may refer to the nation’s change of heart as much as to Yahweh’s change of plan, but the main emphasis is on Yahweh’s sudden change.”

Holladay points out, and rightly so, that God will suddenly change when people change. We also see in Scripture that God will be patient with people, but His patience does come to an end if people continually defy Him. We see this with King Saul, who defied God for years until there came a day when God took the kingdom from Saul (1 Sam. 15:28).

Jer 18:8

**“change my mind.”** The Hebrew word translated “changed his mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and the range of meanings of *nacham* include to be sorry, repent, regret, change one’s mind, have compassion, be comforted, console oneself.[[17]](#footnote-12595)

When speaking of humans, *nacham* can have a number of meanings, including “comfort” and other meanings, and also *nacham* can mean to change one’s mind (Exod. 13:17) or “repent” (to be sorry, regret, and have a change of heart; Jer. 8:6). When speaking of God it does not mean “repent” as if God had done evil, but depending on the context means “change His mind” (Exod. 32:14; Ps. 110:4; Jer. 18:8; 26:3, 13; Amos 7:3, 6; Jon. 3:10); “relent” (2 Sam. 24:16; Ps. 106:45); “to be moved to pity or to compassion (Judg. 2:18; Ps. 135:14; Hos. 13:14); and to “regret” (1 Sam. 15:11).

Historically, theologians have thought that God never changes, and so they assert that God does not actually change his mind. For example, in the text note on Exodus 32:12, the NET says, “The verb ‘repent, relent’ when used of God is certainly an anthropomorphism. It expresses the deep pain that one would have over a situation. Earlier God repented that he had made humans (Gen. 6:6). Here Moses is asking God to repent/relent over the judgment he was about to bring, meaning that he should be moved by such compassion that there would be no judgment like that. J. P. Hyatt observes that the Bible uses so many anthropomorphisms because the Israelites conceived of God as a dynamic and living person in a vital relationship with people, responding to their needs and attitudes and actions.”[[18]](#footnote-14501)

It must be pointed out that there is no solid evidence that the emotions God has in the Bible are not real but are anthropomorphism. The Bible says many times that God changes His mind and has emotions such as anger, joy, and disappointment. Saying those emotions are anthropomorphisms, is saying that God says He feels or thinks like a human but actually does not. But God created humans in His image, and we change our minds and have emotions, so it makes sense that God does too, and we have to acknowledge that the Bible certainly says that He does. Although J. P. Hyatt speaks condescendingly of the Jews when he says they “conceived of God as a dynamic and living person in a vital relationship with people, responding to their needs and attitudes and actions,” there is no actual evidence that Hyatt and other theologians are correct and the ancient Israelites are wrong.

A large number of the ancient people in the Bible had very personal and intimate interactions with God, interactions on a personal level that are only a thing of legends today. Given that, it seems to be hubris and arrogance to say those ancients, and the Bible itself, are wrong in the way they portray God but we know better today. Besides, there are plenty of verses that say God changed His mind. If those statements are not true, what are we to make of them?

In Jeremiah 26:13, Jeremiah told the people that God could change His mind about His prophecies of Jerusalem being destroyed if they would repent and change their evil ways. So even though prophets such as Micah had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem (Mic. 3:12), that prophecy was not set in stone and God would change if the people did. What we must notice, however, in the context of those verses in which God says He changes His mind, is that it is never God’s overall intention or purpose that is changed. God’s purpose in creating the human race was to have people who loved Him and worshiped Him. But sadly we humans have not always followed our Creator, but instead have often ignored or even disobeyed and defied Him. In those situations, God often had to change His mind about things in order to work out the best solution for humankind and His purposes. So, in effect, although God did change His mind about some specific circumstances, we can also see that God never changed His purposes.

Theologians say that the anthropomorphisms in the Bible help us relate to God. But is that really true? If I am led to believe things about God that are not true, how does that help me relate to Him as He really is? In fact, then, the anthropomorphisms mislead us when it comes to thinking about God. If the truth is that God is not upset when I sin and not glad when I obey Him, that is the truth that I must deal with. Pretending that God has emotions that are similar to human emotions is misleading if in fact He does not have those emotions. Believers should think and believe the truth about God. If God is emotionless, then we really don’t please him if we obey him. God would be more like a computer program that just gave out certain consequences for certain behaviors. The Bible speaks of us having fellowship with God. But there is no fellowship with a computer, it’s simply action and reaction. No emotion and no true fellowship. The Bible reveals God is an emotional being with whom believers will live in fellowship forever. There is no solid reason to believe the statements in the Bible about God are not true. When God says He loves you, He really does.

[For more on the conditional nature of prophecy, see commentary on Deut. 18:20.]

Jer 18:10

**“change my mind.”** The Hebrew word translated “change my mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), see commentary on Jeremiah 18:8. That God could and would change His mind and thus change the predicted outcome of the situation is vital to understand about prophecy. Just because a prophecy does not come to pass does not mean the prophet is a false prophet (see commentary on Deut. 18:20).

Jer 18:11

**“Turn back.”** The idea in the text is, “I am planning a plan against you, so turn back from your evil ways.” It is always implied or stated in Scripture that if a person repents of their sin, God will “change his mind” and work to change the outcome of any prophecy of pain or disaster (see commentary on Deut. 18:20 and Jer. 18:8).

Jer 18:13

**“Virgin Israel.”** This is short for Virgin Daughter Israel (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). The Hebrew text reads, “the virgin of Israel,” but the text is idiomatic, and refers to Israel as a Virgin. The genitive is appositional.

Jer 18:16

**“everyone who passes by it will be astonished, and shake his head.”** This was exactly what happened (see Lam. 2:16).

Jer 18:17

**“east wind.”** The “east wind” was the term for a wind that usually came off the desert and was hot, dry, unrelenting, and very uncomfortable (cf. Jer. 4:11; 13:24; Hos. 13:15; Jon. 4:8).

Jer 18:18

**“Come and let’s strike him with our tongue, and let’s not pay attention to any of his words.”** Jeremiah’s enemies planned and plotted against him, something that is also mentioned in Lamentations 3:60-63.

Jer 18:23

**“Deal with them in the time of your anger.”** Jeremiah is asking Yahweh to not put off dealing with the evildoers, but deal with them now, while He is still angry about it. Although some people think Jeremiah should not have prayed this way, they miss the point. God had already told Jeremiah the people would be killed for their sin, so Jeremiah is only praying that God would fulfill His word before they had time to kill Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 18:15-17).

**Jeremiah Chapter 19**

Jer 19:4

**“and have filled this place with the blood of the innocent.”** This is a reference to human sacrifice, but specifically in this context the sacrifice of children.

Jer 19:5

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. The context indicates these shrines were pagan in nature (cf. NLT, “pagan shrines”). Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

**“to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal.”** This verse, along with historical evidence, shows that human sacrifice was made to Baal. The sacrifice of children is mentioned in Jeremiah 7:31 and Jeremiah 19:5.

Jer 19:6

**“Topheth.”** A place where children were burned as human sacrifices (see commentary on 2 Kings 23:10). Over time the area where that was done must have been referred to as Topheth, as we see in Jeremiah 7:32, 19:6, 11.

Jer 19:9

**“I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters.”** Cannibalism was not common in the ancient Near East, but was sometimes practiced in times of siege or intense famine. God says that because of the sin of Judah times will become so difficult that people will be reduced to cannibalism.

Jer 19:11

**“Topheth.”** A place where children were burned as human sacrifices (see commentary on 2 Kings 23:10). Over time the area where that was done must have been referred to as Topheth, as we see in Jeremiah 7:32, 19:6, 11.

Jer 19:12

**“Topheth.”** A place where children were burned as human sacrifices (see commentary on 2 Kings 23:10). Over time the area where that was done must have been referred to as Topheth, as we see in Jeremiah 7:32, 19:6, 11.

Jer 19:13

**“will be like the place of Topheth.”** “Topheth” was the name of the place where children were burned as human sacrifices (see commentary on 2 Kings 23:10). This prophecy was that the houses of Jerualem would be destroyed like Topheth was eventually destroyed.

Jer 19:14

**“Topheth.”** A place where children were burned as human sacrifices (see commentary on 2 Kings 23:10). Over time the area where that was done must have been referred to as Topheth, as we see in Jeremiah 7:32, 19:6, 11, so in this context “Topheth” is used in a broad sense referring to a place in the Valley of Hinnom (NT “Gehenna”).

**Jeremiah Chapter 20**

Jer 20:2

**“put him in the stocks.”** Being put in stocks was a horribly painful experience, especially as time passed, and Jeremiah was left in them overnight. Walter Kaiser, Jr., writes: “The prophet is put into stocks that hold his hands, feet, and neck in a contorted position, causing him pain.”[[19]](#footnote-21714)

**“the Upper Gate of Benjamin.”** This is the gate in the northern wall of the Temple, not the northern gate in the city wall. It was built by King Jotham, son of Uzziah (2 Kings 15:35).

Jer 20:3

**“Pashhur.”** There clearly seems to be a play on words here in Jeremiah 20:3. There is evidence that “Pashhur” meant “Joy All Around,” but God changed it to “Terror All Around” because spiritually and physically he brought terror to the people of Judah. This was most clear when the Babylonians sieged and finally captured Jerusalem, as is expressed over and over in Lamentations. Walter Kaiser, Jr. writes: “The name Pashhur, according to Philip King, is probably of Egyptian origin, meaning “son of Horus,” an Egyptian god, but the name was fairly common, as attested by its use elsewhere in Scripture. ...Pashhur’s contemporaries may have taken the meaning of his name from Aramaic sources to mean ‘joy all around,’ but this may reflect popular ways of regarding the name rather than strict etymology (popularization often carried the greater weight anyhow). ...The literal Aramaic meaning of Pashhur’s name is “fruitful all around”; thus Jeremiah successfully distorts his name from “Fruitful All around’ to ‘Terror All Around,’ from something delightful to something terrible. ...Pashhur likely comes from the Aramaic ‘fruitful’ (*pash*) and ‘surrounding’ (*sehor*).”[[20]](#footnote-10701)

Kaiser is almost certainly right that “Pashhur” was taken to mean “Joy All Around,” as influenced by the Aramaic. At this time in history, the Judeans had already surrendered to Babylon and there had been a lot of contact between them (2 Kings 24:1). The Babylonians spoke Aramaic (this explains why so many Judeans spoke Aramaic at the time of Christ, they had been in captivity in Babylon for 70 years; two or three generations), so it makes sense that some of the leaders of Judah would have had names that reflected Aramaic influence.

Jer 20:5

**“I will give all the riches of this city, and all its gains, and all its precious things.”** This was fulfilled and is mentioned in Lamentations 1:7, 10.

Jer 20:6

**“you will go to Babylon, and there you will die.”** Pashhur was a false prophet. Worse than that, however, he did his best to stop Jeremiah from proclaiming the Word of Yahweh, including having him tortured, discrediting what he said, and being complicit with those who tried to kill him. No one can treat God’s workers that way and do well. Walter Kaiser, Jr., writes: “It does not matter that Pashtun held a position of influence; the point is that he has taken Jeremiah as being in his own sphere of authority and beat him for proclaiming the word of the Lord. We should not look lightly on those who belittle or try to disgrace God’s servants as they reject his word. Those who deny the inscripturated word of God in our day and mock those who try to faithfully teach are in for a rough time from the Lord of the word.”[[21]](#footnote-29118)

Jer 20:7

**“Yahweh, you have deceived me, and I was deceived.”** Jeremiah was speaking out of his emotion and pain. It is quite likely at this moment of pain that he was remembering what God told him when God called him as a prophet. God had said, “I am with you to deliver you” both in Jeremiah 1:8 and 1:19. It is very likely that what God meant by “I will deliver you,” was different from what Jeremiah thought the words meant. God often speaks in ideals and concerning the long haul, including everlasting life. In contrast, Jeremiah likely thought that God was telling him that God would deliver him from problems and evil. When Jeremiah was mocked, beaten, and in pain, he felt God had deceived him. The feeling, though misplaced, is natural. God promises to save His faithful people, but not save them from trouble or even physical death, He will save them from everlasting death.

Jer 20:12

**“kidneys...heart.”** The “kidneys” refers to a person’s emotional life. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. In contrast, in the biblical world, the “heart” refers to the thoughts, not the emotions. When the Bible mentions “heart” and “kidneys” together, it refers to the thought life (“heart”) and emotional life (“kidneys”).

[For more on the heart referring to the thought life, see commentary on Prov. 15:21. For more on kidneys referring to the emotional life, see commentary on Rev. 2:23, “kidneys.”]

**“let me see your vengeance on them.”** Jeremiah expressed the same thing in Lamentations (Lam. 3:64-66).

Jer 20:14

**“Cursed is the day in which I was born.”** Jeremiah was in a very low spot emotionally. He had been prophesying for years and taking all kinds of abuse. It is likely that he was just released from the stocks when he said this (Jer. 20:2-3) and was in horrific pain and discomfort. The book of Jeremiah is well-known to be the “most human” of all the prophetic books because it reveals so much about Jeremiah’s personal life and feelings, and we see that here. Everyone has a “breaking point” when they have endured so much physical and emotional pain that they want to die or wish they had never been born. Job certainly did, and spoke much like Jeremiah did (Job 3:1-8). God understands human emotions and that humans have “weak moments,” and there is no evidence He holds that against us. Quite the opposite, often He shows up in powerful and supportive ways in those times. Jeremiah recovered from his feelings at this time and continued to prophesy—and put up with the abuse that went along with it.

Jer 20:16

**“and did not relent.”** God overthrew the cities without relenting, that is, God did not back off of the destruction until it was done. However, the word *nacham* can also be translated as God overthrew the cities without pity, or without compassion (CSB; ESV). The Hebrew word *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם) has both meanings, and it is likely that both meanings apply in this verse. This is an example of when the receptor language, English, just cannot express the richness of the Hebrew without an expanded translation: God overthrew the cities without pity or relenting.

[For more on *nacham*, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

**Jeremiah Chapter 21**

Jer 21:2

**“Perhaps Yahweh will deal with us according to all his wondrous works so that he will go away from us.”** Zedekiah was wondering if Yahweh would deliver Judah by a miracle and somehow defeat Babylon as He had defeated Egypt, the Canaanites, and Assyria. The answer, as we know from the Bible and history, was “No.”

Jer 21:7

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jer 21:9

**“his life will be his spoils of war.”** For more on this idiom, see commentary on Jeremiah 39:18.

**Jeremiah Chapter 22**

Jer 22:1

**“the house of the king of Judah.”** The “house” of the king is the palace, just as the “house” of God is the Temple. God told Jeremiah to go to the palace.

Jer 22:2

**“your servants.”** In this context, the “servants” of the king are his officers and high officials, both civil and military.

[For more on the word “servants” being used for people of high position in the kingdom, see commentary on 2 Sam. 11:1.]

Jer 22:3

**“right.”** The Hebrew word is literally “righteousness,” but in this context, it refers to doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6). This verse lists some ways we can be just and righteous toward others. There are several times in the Bible when God lists things He wants people to do, as He does here in Jeremiah 22:3-4, and they are sometimes quite similar, but the heart is the same (see commentary on Mic. 6:8).

Jer 22:5

**“this house.”** The king’s palace. As we know from history, the kings of Judah failed to obey the word of Yahweh and the Babylonians came and conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem, even burning the Temple of Yahweh.

Jer 22:7

**“they will cut down your choice cedars.”** Judah did not have “choice cedars,” so since the context of Jeremiah 22:7 is the “house” (or “palace”) of the king of Judah, it is quite likely that the choice cedars that will be cut down are the cedar pillars in the House of the Forest of Lebanon that Solomon built as a wing of his palace (1 Kings 7:2).

**“against you.”** Against the king’s palace. God started speaking about the palace in Jeremiah 22:6, and continues here in Jeremiah 22:7. The “choice cedars” are the choice cedar panels and boards of which the palace was constructed; Judah did not have cedar trees. The king’s palace ended up being burned down, even as Jeremiah had foretold (2 Kings 25:9).

Jer 22:9

**“worshiped other gods.”** Or “bowed down to other gods.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bowed down” and “worshiped;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jer 22:11

**“Shallum.”** This is apparently the given name of the king of Judah also known as Jehoahaz. He was captured by Pharaoh Neco and died in Egypt. Pharaoh Neco then installed Jehoiakim as the new king of Judah (2 Kings 23:30-34).

Jer 22:13

**“builds his house through unrighteousness.”** In Judah, the rich and powerful were oppressing the people. Only the rich and powerful could build houses with upper rooms and then find ways not to pay the workers.

**“wages.”** The Hebrew word is literally “work,” but in this case “work” is put by metonymy for that which is gained by work, which is “pay” or “wages.”

Jer 22:14

**“vermilion.”** A bright red color.

Jer 22:18

**“‘Ah my brother!’ or ‘Ah sister!’.”** These are the words of the mourners as they spoke to one another. The death of a king was always a traumatic time for the people in the kingdom. What would happen now? Who would reign over them and what would it be like? This was especially the case when a king was killed or deposed by a foreign power, as was the case in Judah at that time with Jehoiakim.

Jer 22:19

**“the burial of a donkey**.**”** The phrase is irony because donkeys were not buried, they were just dragged away to where they could be eaten by vultures and vermin. Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, and was bound by him to be carried off to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6), but died before he could be exiled. He was not honored as a king, but instead, his dead body was simply thrown outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem as if he were a dead donkey or camel (Jer. 36:30; for more on the death of Jehoiakim, see commentary on 2 Kings 24:6).

In biblical culture, animals and sometimes unwanted or despised humans were not buried. In fact, that has been the case for centuries in the Middle East, and still happens today with animals—their dead bodies are left on the ground where they are eaten by the birds and animals. Goliath taunted David by saying he would give David’s body “to the birds of the air and to the animals of the field” and David answered back and said that he would give the dead bodies of the Philistines to the birds and animals (1 Sam. 17:44, 46). The Bible has several references to the unwanted dead bodies of people being left on the ground to be eaten by animals and birds (Jer. 7:33; 16:4; 34:20; Rev. 19:21).

In 1935, Ida Bebbington made a pilgrimage to Israel and wrote in her diary, “At one part in the road lay a dead camel’s carcass, they never bother about removing the dead bodies (so you will gather what a lot of places are like).”[[22]](#footnote-27699)

Jer 22:20

**“Abarim.”** A mountain range in Moab. Lebanon, Bashan (Syria), and Moab were places where Jehoiakim apparently expected to get help from his “lovers,” i.e., those people who he courted and who apparently indicated they would help him fight Babylon, but who turned against him (2 Kings 24:2).

Jer 22:22

**“shepherd away all your shepherds.”** A play on words to emphasize that the kings and leaders of Judah, the “shepherds,” would be “shepherded away,” that is, taken away by God’s “wind.” The word “wind” is *ruach*, (“wind, breath, spirit”), and is sometimes used of God’s judgment. This idiomatic verse could be understood as, “The judgment of God will remove your king and your leaders.”

Jer 22:24

**“Coniah.”** Coniah is a shortened version of Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah (1 Chron. 3:16-17). He is also known as Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6, 8). He is listed in Matthew 1:11 in the genealogy of Mary. Jeconiah is known as Coniah only in Jeremiah.

**“signet rings.”** A signet ring was a ring that was engraved with special letters and/or characters that identified the owner of the ring. The signet ring was very powerful because it gave the wearer the authority to sign documents in the name of the owner, often a king or high official. Yahweh states that even if Coniah was one with His royal authority, He would get rid of him.

[For more on signet rings and cylinder seals, see commentary on Gen. 41:42.]

Jer 22:28

**“are he and his seed to be hurled out.”** The Hebrew texts put the verbs in the past tense (the perfect tense) and they are prophetic perfects, expressing something that will be a future reality.[[23]](#footnote-30276)

[For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Jer 22:29

**“Land, land, land.”** This is the figure of speech epizeuxis, the repetition of the same word with the same meaning for emphasis. The triple repetition of “land” adds a lot of emphasis and emotion; most examples of epizeuxis only repeat a word two times. This phrase is also the figure of speech personification, with God addressing the land as if it could hear.

In this context, the translation “land” is better than “earth” (cf. CJB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NIV, Rotherham). That is because God is lamenting the great loss of the kingdom and the Promised “Land” because there will be no more king from the line of David to rule over it. To God (and to His people) this is an unbelievable tragedy. God had done so much for His people through the centuries, and yet they abandoned Him and defied Him time and again. God had divorced Israel, the ten northern tribes, years earlier and sent her away for her sin (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8), and Israel was gone; scattered along the borders of the Assyrian Empire. Now the land area that once belonged to Israel was given over to strangers (2 Kings 17:21-25). But Judah had managed to stay intact as a nation and remain on the land God gave her. But that was soon to come to an end.

God had given the kingdom to David’s line and thus to Judah by a covenant, but the covenant promises were conditional upon the kings and people keeping the covenant (Ps. 132:11-12; Jer. 22:4). But the Judean people were as bad as Israel (perhaps worse; 2 Kings 17:19; Jer. 3:8-10; Ezek. 23:1-49). They broke the covenant they had with God, and now there would be no king from the line of David to rule over the land of Judah. The land of Judah would soon be like the land of Israel, controlled by foreigners, although some of the people of Judah would come back to the land (see commentary on Jer. 22:30). Historically, however, the last time there were more Judeans in Judah than scattered in foreign lands was before the Babylonian Captivity. That was one reason that some of the New Testament books were written to the Diaspora Jews, the Jews scattered outside of Israel (cf. James 1:1).

[For more on the conditional nature of prophecy, see commentary on Deut. 18:20.]

Jer 22:30

**“childless.”** The Hebrew word is actually “stripped.” In this context, it means stripped of children, but it also means stripped of other things as well. There are many clear ways God could have said Jehoiachin did not have children besides using the word, “stripped.” “Stripped” has many potential meanings, so no doubt its use here also includes many other things that Jehoiachin was stripped of besides children, such as power and prestige. Jehoiachin was also stripped of his kingdom. Jehoiachin was dishonored and disgraced; and worse, none of his seven sons ascended to the throne.

The prophecy to record this man “childless” is not to be taken in an absolute and strictly literal sense, because Jehoiachin was not childless. He had seven sons who are in fact recorded in the Bible (1 Chron. 3:17; Jer. 22:28, 30). He was to be written “stripped” of children, power, and prestige in the kingdom in the sense meant in this particular context: he was “a strong man who will not succeed in his days.” Thus Jehoiachin was stripped of children in the sense that none of them got to rule after Jehoiachin.

**“a strong man who will not succeed.”** This is an irony, as we can see from the Hebrew word translated “man,” which is not the usual word for “man,” but is *geber* (#01397 גֶּבֶר), meaning a strong man or warrior, emphasizing a man who is strong and has the ability to fight, for example, a warrior. Thus, the Hebrew text reads, “Write down this man [Heb. *ish*, ‘man’] ‘stripped,’ a man [Heb. *geber*, ‘strong man’] who will not succeed….” The irony portrays Jehoiachin as a strong and capable man in one sense, but we know from the Scripture that he did not use his abilities to serve God, but did evil in the eyes of Yahweh (2 Kings 24:9). So he did not “succeed” in life including the fact that none of his seven sons got to reign as king when he was deposed.

**“none of his seed will succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling any more in Judah.”** This prophecy literally came to pass, and also came to pass in a larger sense as well. To understand this prophecy of Jeremiah, it is helpful to know some information: for one thing, following King “Coniah” (Jer. 22:24, 28) through the Scripture can be confusing because he is also called “Jehoiachin” and “Jeconiah,” but he is most often referred to as “Jehoiachin.” Also, the word “seed,” like many biblical words, has more than one meaning, and it can refer to someone’s descendants far into the future or it can refer to someone’s direct descendants. Also, we must keep in mind that the original text of the Bible had no chapters and no verses, so a new chapter may not be a break in the subject matter, and that is the case here in Jeremiah 22-23.

In this context, Jeremiah 22:30, Jehoiachin’s “seed” refers to his direct descendants, his birth children. Given that, this prophecy about Jehoiachin and his children was literally fulfilled at the time Jehoiachin and his children lived. None of Jehoiachin’s “seed” ever sat on David’s throne or ruled Judah. We know that in this context Jehoiachin’s “seed” refers to his direct descendants, his sons, because two verses earlier, Jeremiah’s prophecy was about Jehoiachin and his “seed” being cast out into a land that they did not know: “Why are he [Jehoiachin] and his seed to be hurled out, and cast into a land [Babylon] that they do not know” (Jer. 22:28). That prophecy of Jeremiah 22:28 was very accurate, because Jehoiachin and his direct descendants—his birth children—were cast out of Judah and taken captive to Babylon. However, Jeremiah’s prophecy in Jeremiah 22:28-30 did not apply to Jehoiachin’s later descendants. They were never cast out of Judah. In fact, even Jehoiachin’s grandson Zerubbabel was not cast out of Judah; he was born in captivity in Babylon and later traveled back to Judah and became the governor of Judah during the reign of the Persians.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, deported Jehoiachin, and his wives and children, and even his mother, to Babylon (2 Kings 24:15). The text does not specifically say that Jehoiachin’s sons were taken to Babylon, but we would not expect it to. Jehoiachin was only 18 when he started his reign, so he would not have been sexually active for very many years before his captivity, and he only reigned three months (2 Kings 24:8; 2 Chron. 36:9). Thus, any sons that his wives bore to him before he was taken captive were only babies or small children, and they would have been taken to Babylon along with their mothers.

Before he died, Jehoiachin was restored to favor by the king of Babylon who ruled after Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-merodach (2 Kings 25:27-30; he is also referred to as “Amel-Marduk”), but he never got to return to Judah. The line of David continued from Jehoiachin to his son Shealtiel (1 Chron. 3:17; Matt. 1:12), who died in Babylon, but Shealtiel’s son, Jehoiachin’s grandson, was Zerubbabel, who, because he was the lineal descendant of King Jehoiachin, was appointed governor of Judah by the Persians (Hag. 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21). So it is absolutely true that none of Jehoiachin’s “seed” (his direct descendants) sat on the throne of David, but instead, they were cast into a land they did not know: Babylon.

As well as the above sense in which Jeremiah’s prophecy was literally fulfilled, it seems to have been fulfilled in another, larger sense as well. Although the phrase “his seed” refers in this immediate context to Jehoiachin’s direct children, there is also a sense in which none of Jehoiachin’s descendants ever reigned on the throne of David over Judah until in the future when his descendant through Mary, Jesus Christ, will rule. Jehoiachin was the last surviving king to have ever reigned on David’s throne over the Kingdom of Judah until Jesus Christ will reign. After Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah on the throne in Judah. Zedekiah was a descendant of David, but through Josiah; Zedekiah was not a son of Jehoiachin, so he was not “Jehoiachin’s seed.” Besides, Jehoiachin outlived Zedekiah. Zedekiah died during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 52:11) whereas Jehoiachin lived longer than Nebuchadnezzar and was brought out of prison by Evil-Merodach. Furthermore, Zedekiah’s children did not survive and outlive Jehoiachin, they were executed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:6-7; Jer. 52:10).

After King Zedekiah, the Old Testament Kingdom of Judah ceased to exist. While Zedekiah was on the throne, Judah was conquered by Babylon, which was conquered by Persia, which was conquered by Greece. Then the area was ruled by the Hasmoneans, but they never put a descendant of David on the throne. The Hasmoneans were conquered by Rome, who controlled it during the time of Christ. After the Romans, the history of Judah becomes very complex, but at no time did a king from the line of David ever rule in Judah after Jehoiachin then Zedekiah, right up to today.

However, did the prophecy that none of Jehoiachin’s seed would reign on the throne of David mean that Jesus Christ was not a descendant of Jehoiachin or that somehow he was an illegitimate ruler? Not at all. As we have seen, the specific meaning of Jeremiah’s prophecy was that none of Jehoiachin’s direct descendants would reign on the throne of David, and that came to pass. But we must also read Jeremiah 22:30 in its larger context, which includes Jeremiah 23 (Jer. 22:30 is the last verse in chapter 22, and the context continues into Jeremiah 23). As we read Jeremiah 23, we see that in Jeremiah 23:5 Yahweh says He will raise up a Righteous Branch “of David” (from David), who will reign as a wise king. God cannot say in Jeremiah 22:30 that no descendent of Jehoiachin would reign on David’s throne but then say five verses later that a Righteous Branch from David would reign as a wise king. That would be a huge contradiction. But there is no contradiction in the text. The prophecy of Jeremiah as recorded in Jeremiah 22 and 23 was that no direct descendent of Jehoiachin would reign on David’s throne (Jer. 22:30), but that God would later raise up a Righteous Branch from the line of David who would reign as a wise king (Jer. 23:5). Both of those prophecies are true. No direct descendant of Jehoiachin reigned on David’s throne, and a Righteous Branch and wise king from David will reign on the earth one day, and that wise king from the line of David is Jesus Christ.

The people of Judah had repeatedly broken the covenant they had made with Yahweh, and the promises associated with that covenant, such as the land, were conditional (Ps. 132:11-12; Jer. 22:4. Also, see commentary on Jer. 22:29, “land, land, land”). After the very evil reign of Manasseh, God said he would remove Judah from His sight (2 Kings 23:26-27; 24:3; Jer. 15:1-4), which He did. The Kingdom of Judah was reduced to a “stump” a cut-off tree (Isa. 11:1). It was no longer the “house” of David, but rather God called it a “fallen booth,” using the term “booth,” which referred to a small shelter that was usually set up for a temporary use and then allowed to collapse in disuse. Today, the “booth” of David is still fallen, but one day it will be restored to a kingdom that will rule over the earth. The Messiah will rule the world from Jerusalem, but not because he accepts rulership handed down from a previous king, but because he comes from heaven and conquers the world (Rev. 19:11-21). The Messiah will come as a “shoot” that springs from the stump of David; a branch that comes from his root (Isa. 11:1; cf. Jer. 23:5; 33:15).

**Jeremiah Chapter 23**

Jer 23:1

**“the shepherds.”** Here in Jeremiah 23:1-4, as in other places in the Bible, the word “shepherds” is used for the rulers and leaders (see commentary on Jer. 2:8).

Jer 23:2

**“visit...visit.”** When God “visits,” He does so either for good or for evil (see commentary on Exod. 20:5). Jeremiah 23:2 is an example of the figure of speech antanaclasis, called “word clashing” by E. W. Bullinger.[[24]](#footnote-20134) Antanaclasis occurs when the same word is used in a sentence with two different meanings. In this case, the leaders would not “visit” the people to help them, so God will “visit” the leaders to repay them for their evil doings.

[See Word Study: “Antanaclasis.”]

Jer 23:3

**“I will gather.”** Many verses prophesy Israel’s return to the land of Israel, most of which will happen at the first resurrection, referred to as the Resurrection of the Righteous (cf. Ezek. 37:12-28). Although Israel did return from Babylon, these prophecies will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom, as is clear from the context (Jer. 23:3-8).

[For more information on Israel’s return to the Promised Land, see commentary on Jer. 32:37.]

Jer 23:4

**“I will set up shepherds over them.”** When Jesus Christ reigns as king on earth, he will be assisted in his reign by people who were faithful to God in their first life. These “shepherds” will genuinely care for God’s people and will keep law and order over the earth. Among those who will be judges in the Millennial Kingdom will be the twelve apostles (Matt. 19:28). Isaiah and Micah prophesy of the law going forth from Mount Zion (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2), and that is in part because the Lord and some of his appointed judges will be there. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament indicate that people who have been faithful in their first life on earth will help rule the future earth (Isa. 1:26; 32:1; Jer. 3:15; 23:4; Ezek. 44:24; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26). God will reward each person for what they have done in this life, and part of that reward for godly people is helping Christ rule the future earth (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”).

Jer 23:5

**“for David.”** The Messiah will be raised up “for David,” that is in fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would come from the seed of David (2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Chron. 17:11-12), and as a blessing to David and “his house.” “David” is put by metonymy for “the house of David,” and then by extension includes all the people of God, who will be blessed by the Messiah.

**“a righteous Branch.”** This is one of the titles of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (see commentary on Zech. 3:8).

**“justice and righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God, and in effect is “justice.” In Jeremiah 23:5, “justice” means more like “judgment,” that is fair and equitable judgment, thus justice. The emphasis is the effect: justice. In contrast, “righteousness” has more emphasis on the action; doing what is right toward God and to fellow humans. There is no justice on earth now, but there will be in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 23:6

**“this is its name by which he will call it.”** Here in Jeremiah 23:6, the verb “called” is in the active voice. That would usually mean that the one doing the calling is the Branch of David, the king (Jer. 23:5), and he will call “it,” i.e., Israel, by the name “Yahweh is our righteousness.”

It is worth noting that the Hebrew word translated in many versions and the REV as “righteousness,” is not the normal way of writing “righteousness.” As it is written, the Hebrew word can mean more like “justice” (see NAB, NET, NJB), or the meaning in this context could even extend to “vindication” (“the LORD is our Vindicator” JPS). However, “righteousness” seems to be the best fit for the context, even if it is not a perfect match with the Hebrew.

The NET translation of the phrase is, “The LORD has provided us with justice,” and the NET text note says, “The Hebrew word translated ‘justice’ here is very broad in its usage, and it is hard to catch all the relevant nuances for this word in this context. It is used for “vindication” in legal contexts (see, e.g., Job 6:29); for “deliverance” or “salvation” in exilic contexts (see, e.g., Isa. 58:8); and in the sense of ruling, judging, with “justice” (see, e.g., Lev. 19:15; Isa. 32:1). Here it probably sums up the justice that the LORD provides through raising up this ruler, as well as the safety, security, and well-being that result (see vv. 5-6a).”

A second possible interpretation is that although the verb “called” is technically active voice, it is grammatically possible to take the active verb “called” in a passive sense so that it would read “it will be called” instead of “he will call it,” and most English versions do that. In that case, the verse would be saying that the Messiah would be called “Yahweh is our righteousness.” Trinitarians take Jeremiah 23:6 as evidence that Jesus is God. But that cannot be what the verse is saying, because the Messiah is not Yahweh; Yahweh is the personal name of the Father. Beyond that, however, when someone is “called” a certain name it does not mean the person is what the name means (see commentary on Matthew 1:23, “Immanuel”). In this Messianic prophecy, it would be possible, though unlikely, that the Messiah is prophetically being referred to as “Yahweh our Righteousness.” This would not mean that Jesus is being literally identified as Yahweh (“LORD”) simply because Jesus is being called that name. For example, about ten chapters later in Jeremiah, Jerusalem is also called, “Yahweh our Righteousness,” and Jerusalem is obviously not Yahweh (Jer. 33:16). So, calling something a certain name does not mean it is what the name says it is, or even that two things that have the same name have identical attributes in all respects.

Being “called” a certain name is often done as an honor to the one with the name (cf. Judg. 13:17). For example, when Abraham called the mountain on which he was about to sacrifice Isaac “Yahweh will provide,” he was not literally calling the mountain Yahweh. Similarly, calling an altar “Yahweh my banner” does not mean that the altar is Yahweh either, even if Moses called it that: “Moses built an altar and called it ‘Yahweh is my Banner’” (Exod. 17:15). Furthermore, Gideon also built an altar, but gave it a different Yahweh name. He called it “Yahweh is Peace.” Judges 6:24 says, “Then Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh and called it ‘Yahweh is Peace.’” These verses show that just because something is called Yahweh (“LORD”), that does not make it literally Yahweh, the name may just honor Yahweh. In conclusion, since Jerusalem is being called “Yahweh is our righteousness” in Jeremiah 33:16, it makes sense that Israel is being called “Yahweh is our righteousness” here in Jeremiah 23:6.

**“Yahweh is our righteousness.”** Here, Israel is called “Yahweh is our righteousness” or “Yahweh our righteousness.” In Jeremiah 33:16, Jerusalem is called “Yahweh is our righteousness.” It cannot mean that Jerusalem (or Israel) is literally Yahweh, that is simply the name of the city, a name that magnifies Yahweh.

[For more on the subject of “names” and being “called,” see commentary on Matt. 1:23. For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Jer 23:9

**“the prophets.”** In this context, “the prophets” are the false prophets. Sadly, there were so many false prophets that Jeremiah could just call them “the prophets.” In those days of trouble when Judah had been under threat and assault by Babylon, and would end up being destroyed by her, the number of false prophets grew like weeds. For example, the word “prophet” occurs over 90 times in Jeremiah, whereas in Isaiah, which is a longer book, it occurs less than ten times.

In times of danger. it is natural for people to want to know what is going to happen and so arrogant people step forward and claim to speak for God, even though God has not spoken to them. The Devil assists in that deception because many of those “prophets” acquire a demon that feeds them information, some of which is false and misleading, although some of it is true, which is how they get credibility in the first place (cf. the slave girl who had a “python spirit” and prophesied about the future (Acts 16:16-18). According to Jeremiah 23, the false prophets were not sent by God and were ungodly, wicked, liars, and adulterers. They prophesied by Baal and led Judah astray, and they filled people with false hope as they spoke from their own minds, not from Yahweh. Zephaniah 3:4 adds that these false prophets were arrogant and treacherous. They were deceivers, and a person who believed their words and followed their advice eventually was ruined.

It is sad that so many times in history the sound of the large number of ungodly and misleading voices is a huge roar while the godly voices seem to be a quiet whisper in comparison, but that is the nature of our fallen world, which is mostly controlled by the Devil and his people (1 John 5:19). Truth is available, and although it can sometimes seem hard to find it can be found. But that is why the Bible has kept repeating the message that godly people must seek and keep seeking God and truth, and that if they do seek Him from the heart, they will find Him (Deut. 4:29; Prov. 2:3-6; 8:17; Jer. 29:13; Matt. 7:7). God-seekers and truth-seekers must be courageous, however, because once you find truth you will find that living it openly in the world can be very challenging (2 Tim. 3:12).

Jer 23:10

**“land mourns”** This is the figure of speech personification, speaking of the land as if it were a person. The figure magnifies the emotion of the situation.

**“the curse.”** This refers to the curse of Deuteronomy 27-28, which stated that if Israel obeyed God the people would be blessed, and if the people disobeyed God they and the land would be cursed.

**“the pastures of the wilderness are dried up.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10). (See commentary on Lev. 18:25).

Jer 23:11

**“in my house.”** The house of God is the Temple in Jerusalem. The false prophets and evil priests were so brazen and hard-hearted that they were not concerned about doing evil even in the Temple of God.

Jer 23:14

**“Strengthen the hands.”** This is an idiom for strengthen the power and authority.

Jer 23:15

**“Poisonous water.”** This is not literal water, but water often refers to, or is related to, the spirit, and that is the case here. The spiritual information the false prophets were getting from demons, that they thought was truth, was “poisonous water.” It led to death; both their death and the death of those who listened to them.

[For more on “water” being related to spirit, see commentary on Jer. 2:13.]

Jer 23:18

**“for who has stood in the council of Yahweh.”** This council of Yahweh is His inner divine council of spirit beings who help Him administer His creation. The word “council” is translated from the Hebrew word *sōd* (#05475 סוֹד), and it refers to a “council, secret council, intimate council, circle of familiar friends, assembly.” In this context, it refers to God’s intimate inner divine council in contrast to large general assemblies of spirit beings such as we see in Job 1:6 and 1 Kings 22:19.

In Jeremiah 23:16-22, the false prophets spoke from their own minds and had not “stood in the council [*sōd*] of Yahweh” (Jer. 23:18). If they had stood in the divine council of Yahweh, Jer. 23:22 says that they would have heard the truth and been able to tell it to the people of Israel. These verses show that Yahweh has a divine council with whom He confers, and those who stand in that council hear the truth. God’s prophets sometimes are given access to the information in those council meetings, which is why they can speak the truth. In Job 15:8, Eliphaz, who thought Job was hiding some secret sin and whose wisdom was false, asked Job if he had gotten to sit in on the divine council [*sōd*] of the Lord.

[For more on God’s divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26. For more on God’s holding general assemblies for all His spirit beings, see commentary on Job 1:6.]

Jer 23:19

**“the storm of Yahweh!”** The wrath of God is often portrayed metaphorically in Scripture as a powerful and destructive storm (e.g., Ps. 18:12-14; 77:17-18; 83:15; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 13:11; see commentary on Ezek. 13:11).

Jer 23:22

**“council.”** This is a reference to God’s divine council. See commentary on Jeremiah 23:18.

Jer 23:28

**“What is straw to the wheat.”** The process of threshing and winnowing left the grain divided into the straw (the broken pieces of shaft that were straw and chaff) and the wheat, the edible part that sustained life. God is making the point that just as there is a huge difference between the straw, which cannot be eaten, and the wheat, which is the very “staff of life,” so too there is a huge difference between His Word, which are the words of life, and the lies of the false prophets, which lead to death.

Jer 23:30

**“who all steal my words from one another.”** The false prophets were apparently speaking things that they had heard from other false prophets. It seems to happen a lot that when one person says something that others like or find personally advantageous, they repeat it, and “get on the bandwagon” so to speak.

Jer 23:33

**“burdensome message.”** The word of the Lord can be a burden to the prophet, and then, when it is spoken, can be a burden to the people. The Hebrew word means “burden,” but some scholars say it refers to a message, an oracle. In this context, as in many others in the Old Testament, it was the word of Yahweh that was the burden because of its weight and severity. The NET translation, “burdensome message,” seems to catch the sense well.

[For more information on “burden,” see commentary on Mal. 1:1.]

**“You are the burden.”** This translation follows the Septuagint and Latin (cf. ESV, NAB, NET, NLT, NRSV, RSV). The Hebrew reads “What burden” and is much less clear in this context and does not connect the two final sentences in the verse. The ungodly priests and false prophets were being a burden to God, so He decided to cast them away and not carry them anymore.

**Jeremiah Chapter 24**

Jer 24:1

**“After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the officials of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem.”** This captivity is recorded in 2 Kings 24:8-17 and 2 Chronicles 36:9-10.

Jer 24:2

**“first-ripe.”** A first-ripe fig was a fig that ripened earlier than the rest of the figs and was usually large and sweet. See commentary on Isaiah 28:4.

**Jeremiah Chapter 25**

Jer 25:3

**“rising up early and speaking.”** An idiom meaning, “persistently,” or “over and over.” The point was that the prophet got up early and started speaking, and kept on speaking.

Jer 25:4

**“rising up early and sending them.”** This is an idiom meaning to send again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets, and sent them over and over as the day progressed. The REV has kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics.

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

**“inclined your ear to hear.”** This is literal. When someone is speaking and we want to hear, we often turn our heads so we can hear better. God is reproving the Judeans because when His prophets spoke no one turned their head to hear better, instead they ignored the prophet.

Jer 25:6

**“worship them.”** Or “bow down to them.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**“with the work of your hands.”** That is, with idols made by hand.

Jer 25:9

**“everlasting.”** The Hebrew word sometimes means “everlasting,” but sometimes is used of a limited time.

**“devote them to destruction.”** That is, destroy them.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

Jer 25:10

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

Jer 25:20

**“Ashkelon.”** A chief Philistine city. The Philistine city of Gath is not mentioned (see commentary on Zeph. 2:4).

Jer 25:33

**“On that day.”** Although this verse occurs in the general context of the destruction of Judah by Babylon, the phrase “On that day,” which is often used of the Day of the Lord, especially together with the phrase, “from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth,” makes this verse a distinct prophecy of the future Tribulation spoken of in the book of Revelation.

[For more on the Great Tribulation spoken of by the prophets and Jesus Christ, see commentary on Isa. 13:9.]

Jer 25:34

**“you shepherds.”** In this context, the “shepherds” are the “leaders” of the people, the people being the “sheep.” So here in Jeremiah, God is announcing that there will be a day of retribution against the evil leaders.

**“and wallow in dust.”** When leaders and rulers wallow in the dust it is a picture of humiliation and degradation (cf. Isa. 52:2).

**“fall *and be broken* like a precious vessel.”** The Hebrew text simply reads “fall like a precious vessel,” but in the biblical culture, the meaning of that would be very clear. “Precious vessels” were thin and delicate, unlike the common cookware that was thick and made to stand up to much use. “Precious vessels” were not put on the floor, and so if a “precious vessel” fell from where it was placed it would shatter into many pieces and be hopelessly destroyed. That is the picture in this verse: the evil leaders will be destroyed.

**Jeremiah Chapter 26**

Jer 26:2

**“cities.”** This is the figure of speech metonymy for the people who live in the cities. The metonymy emphasizes that Jeremiah will speak to people from many different parts of the country.

**“to worship.”** Or “to bow down to.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jer 26:3

**“I will change my mind about the evil.”** The Hebrew word translated “change my mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and in this context, it means to change one’s mind and the subsequent course of action (cf. NLT, NRSV). God sometimes changes His mind in response to what people do, as we see here.

[For more information on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Jer 26:5

**“even rising up early and sending them.”** This is an idiom meaning to send again and again and to generally be eager to do it. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets, and sent them over and over as the day progressed. The same idiom occurs in Jeremiah 7:13, 25; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:15. We have kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics. But the people rose up early to do evil (Zeph. 3:7. Zephaniah and Jeremiah both prophesied during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah).

We can hear the frustration in God’s voice. He does not want anyone to be hurt or lose out on everlasting life, but people have to make their own choice. Meanwhile, our loving God gives people chance after chance, sending prophet after prophet to bring them back to Him. He wants people to turn from their evil ways so He can repent and disaster can be averted (Jer. 26:3). But we know the end of the story. Judah did not listen, and so the Temple was burned down and the people were carried away captive to Babylon.

Jer 26:6

**“Shiloh.”** When Joshua crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the Tabernacle with the ark of the covenant was set up at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1, 8, 10; 19:51; Judg. 18:31; 21:19; 1 Sam. 1:3, 24; 3:21; 4:4; Jer. 7:12). The Tabernacle stayed at Shiloh for so long that it seems to have been modified somewhat into a more permanent structure and is actually called a “Temple” (1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3). Hophni and Phinehas, the evil sons of the High Priest Eli, helped the army of Israel take the ark from the Tabernacle to the battlefield, where it was captured by the Philistines, and that was the last time the Tabernacle and ark were together (1 Sam. 4:3-11).

The ark was returned by the Philistines but was taken to Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam. 7:1-2). Then it was taken by David to Jerusalem, who pitched a tent for it, but that tent was not “the Tabernacle” (2 Sam. 6:17). The ark stayed in David’s tent until the Temple was finished, at which time Solomon moved it into the Holy of Holies in the Temple (1 Kings 8:4).

As for the Tabernacle itself, the Israelites apparently felt that the Tabernacle was in danger at Shiloh, so it was taken without the ark to Nob (1 Sam. 21:1-9). Then, when Saul killed the priests at Nob (1 Sam. 22:11-19), the Tabernacle was taken to Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39). It was there at Gibeon until Solomon finished the Temple in Jerusalem, at which time it was placed in storage in the Temple.

God saying He would make His Temple (His “house”) “like Shiloh” should have been a very powerful warning to the people of Judah about their behavior. Both Shiloh and the Temple had been the center of worship for Israel, and God had made His very name to dwell at Shiloh (Jer. 7:12). But God’s name and His presence are a blessing to be enjoyed and to be honored by loving obedience. God will leave if He is misused. God abandoned Shiloh (Ps. 78:60), and centuries later the city of Shiloh was abandoned by the people. We know from history that despite the warning of the prophets, Judah continued to disobey Yahweh, and eventually He abandoned the Temple, which was burned down, and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the people carried away captive to Babylon.

Jer 26:8

**“die, yes, die.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16, “eat, yes, eat.” The figure is the same as occurs in Genesis 2:17.]

Jer 26:12

**“this house.”** That is, the Temple (cf. Jer. 26:2).

Jer 26:13

**“and Yahweh will change his mind.”** The Hebrew word translated “change his mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and in this context, it means to change one’s mind and the subsequent course of action (cf. NASB, NLT, NRSV). God sometimes changes His mind in response to what people do, as we see here.

[For more information on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Jer 26:15

**“know, yes, know.”** The Hebrew verb translated as “know” occurs twice for emphasis, which is the figure of speech polyptoton (see commentary on Gen. 2:16). The idea is “absolutely know” or “know for sure.”

Jer 26:18

**“Micah the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah.”** This prophecy of Micah is Micah 3:12.

**“and the Temple Mount like a forested hill.”** The Hebrew is more poetic: “the mountain of the house (i.e., the Temple) like the hill (“high place”) of a forest.” In other words, the Temple will be destroyed and trees will once again grow on Mount Zion. This no doubt happened in the time between when the Temple was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC, and when it was rebuilt during the Persian empire (cf. Ezra 1:1-4).

Jer 26:19

**“Yahweh changed his mind.”** The Hebrew word translated “changed his mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and in this context, it means to change one’s mind and the subsequent course of action (cf. NASB, NLT, NRSV). God sometimes changes His mind in response to what people do, as we see here.

[For more information on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

**“upon ourselves.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “upon our souls,” where “soul” stands for the person themself.

[For more on the uses of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Jer 26:20

**“But there was also a man.”** Jeremiah 26:20-23 is the opposite example of Jeremiah 26:16-19, and there are two different possibilities as to what is happening here. One is that there is a back-and-forth dialogue between Jeremiah’s supporters and those who wanted him dead. The supporters spoke in Jeremiah 26:16-19, but the people who were against Jeremiah responded in Jeremiah 26:20-23 with a contrasting example. The other is that the whole section, Jeremiah 26:16-23 was spoken by Jeremiah’s supporters, who first used the example of good King Hezekiah, during whose reign Yahweh saved Jerusalem by a miracle, and then used the example of evil King Jehoiakim, during whose reign Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians.

**Jeremiah Chapter 27**

Jer 27:1

**“In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim.”** This revelation came to Jeremiah in the “beginning” of Jehoiakim’s reign, but perhaps not the very beginning. But it was before Jehoiakim was conquered by Babylon, which was in 604 BC. So this prophecy could have been as early as 608 BC. Then, it was after the reign of Jehoiakim—and Jehoiachin and Jehoahaz—during the fourth year of the reign of King Zedekiah (Jer. 28:1), that Jeremiah spoke this same message to King Zedekiah (Jer. 27:12), likely at least ten years after getting the revelation in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim.

Jer 27:7

**“great kings will make him their servant.”** Babylon became a servant to other kings when it was conquered by Persia in 539 BC (Dan. 5).

Jer 27:8

**“I will punish that nation.”** The actual punishment would be done by Babylon, as Judah found out. It resisted the Babylonian advance and was destroyed by Babylon.

Jer 27:12

**“I spoke words like all these to Zedekiah.”** This was likely at least 10 years after Jeremiah got the revelation to give to King Jehoiakim (Jer. 27:1), (see commentary on Jer. 27:1).

Jer 27:15

**“with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish.”** This is a great example of how the Devil and demons work behind the scenes to destroy God’s plans and His people. We can tell from the context and scope of Scripture that the false prophets were getting their information from demons (Jer. 2:8; 23:13), although no doubt most of them did not know it. This is the same way that most psychics, fortune tellers, and mediums get their information today, which is why those practices are an abomination to God (Deut. 18:9-15). Not all false prophets and teachers are ignorant of the true source of their information, however. Some people actively work for the Devil (in person or in one of his many forms) and know the true source of the wickedness they are promoting, but it fits with their agenda.

Also, however, there are times when a prophet feels so strongly about something that he thinks it comes from God even though it is just his imagination (Jer. 23:16; Ezek. 13:2, 17). But in those cases, the reason the prophet would feel so strongly that false information was actually the truth would be due to the fact that his mind had been influenced to think that way because of the culture around him and his own ungodly thoughts and behaviors (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-2; Eph. 4:17-19). That is a major reason that the Bible has so many verses about guarding your heart and thoughts and living a righteous life (cf. Prov. 2:20; 3:21-23; 4:23; 16:17; Phil. 4:8-9). Anyone’s heart can be darkened if he follows his own fleshly desires—our sin nature will lead us to evil and death (Prov. 14:12).

The Devil and demons want God’s plan and His people to be destroyed, so they promote information that will result in that end. This happens in every field of endeavor, especially fields of great influence, such as government, religion, education, and healthcare, and it is one reason that we must be godly and promote godly leaders. Ungodly leaders do not have to be “prophets” to promote evil plans, they just have to have an ungodly or anti-God understanding of life, and/or be getting information from demons. Godly leaders do not “just hope” ungodly people will go away—they won’t—so they watch for, and then scatter or destroy, evil within their field of influence (Prov. 20:8; 21:12).

Jer 27:18

**“that the articles that are left in the house of Yahweh.”** The articles in the Temple that were left included the huge pillars that Solomon made, and the bronze sea, which was also too heavy to be easily moved. However, as Jeremiah foretold (Jer. 27:22), they were broken up and carried to Babylon (2 Kings 25:13; Jer. 52:17).

Jer 27:22

**“then I will bring them up and restore them.”** The bronze sea and huge pillars were not restored, but the other articles were brought back to Jerusalem.

**Jeremiah Chapter 28**

Jer 28:1

**“in the house of Yahweh.”** So Hananiah, Jeremiah, and the people listening, were in the Temple.

Jer 28:2

**“This is what Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, says.”** The prophecy, spoken by Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet from Gibeon, was a false prophecy, and Hananiah was one of the false prophets, as we see from this record in Jeremiah 28.

Jer 28:4

**“Jeconiah.”** He is also called “Jehoiachin,” and he had been carried captive to Babylon. He outlived Zedekiah, and was therefore the last living king of Judah. After that, every ruler was an appointee of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, or Romans.

Jer 28:6

**“Amen. May Yahweh do so!”** Jeremiah used sarcasm here. He had heard from Yahweh the captivity would be 70 years.

Jer 28:17

**“died that same year in the seventh month.”** Since Jeremiah was prophesying in the fifth month (Jer. 28:1) and Hananiah died in the seventh month (Jer. 28:170, Hananiah died two months after he confronted Jeremiah. Hananiah prophesied that the Babylonian Captivity would end within two years (Jer. 28:3), but instead he died within two months.

**Jeremiah Chapter 29**

Jer 29:2

**“this was after Jeconiah the king...had departed from Jerusalem.”** “Jeconiah” is also called “Jehoiachin” (2 Kings 24:8-9). The Babylonian deportation of Jeconiah along with the large numbers of people was in 597 BC. Jeremiah wrote this prophecy during the reign of Zedekiah, after the vast majority of the Judeans had been carried to Babylon, and much of the wealth of Jerusalem had been carried there too. The conquest of Judah began during the reign of Jehoiakim and lasted through the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. So Jeremiah’s letter came after most of the carrying away to Babylon had occurred but Jerusalem had not been destroyed yet, which happened in the eleventh year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:2).

**“queen mother.”** The Hebrew word translated “queen mother” is *gebereth* (#01404 גְּבֶרֶת), and in this context, the “queen mother” is the mother of the king (BDB Hebrew-English lexicon). The queen mother was the most powerful woman in the kingdom, much more powerful than any of the wives of the king, who often did not have much real power at all. The mother of Jehoiachin was Nehushta, wife of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:8).

Jer 29:8

**“the dreams that you are encouraging them to dream.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “your dreams that you cause to be dreamed.” Since there is no indication that the common people were dreaming dreams but the false prophets were (Jer. 29:9), it seems clear that “your dreams” are not the ones that the common people themselves dreamed, but dreams that were dreamed due to the encouragement of the common people. In other words, the false prophets were being encouraged by the people to dream the dreams that they did. For his part, Jeremiah continues telling the people not to listen to the false prophets, something he had been saying all along.

The verse makes perfect sense. The people did not want Babylon to capture Jerusalem and destroy their families and lifestyles as Jeremiah had been saying (Jer. 6:12; 8:10), so any time a false prophet dreamed a dream indicating that would not happen, the people would encourage the prophet for more similar dreams that might have more details. This kind of thing happens in prophetic churches today. If a person in the church is known to have dreams that are supposedly from the Lord and come true, it often occurs that people in the congregation encourage that dreamer to “seek the Lord” and get more dreams with more details.

Jer 29:10

**“After 70 years are accomplished for Babylon.”** The Babylonian Captivity was 70 years (2 Chron. 36:21; Jer. 25:11-12). After that some of the Jews returned to Judah, however, we learn from history that there were more Jews that stayed in the area of Babylon/Persia than returned to Judah.

Jer 29:11

**“I know the plans that I have in mind for you.”** This verse has been used as a “proof text” and taken out of context by many well-wishing teachers who use it to try to show that God always has good plans for us. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although God loves us and would love to always have plans that seem good to us, when we do evil, God sometimes plans for disasters in our lives that He hopes will “wake us up” so that we turn from our evil. For example, seven chapters later in Jeremiah, but earlier in time, before the Babylonian Captivity, God has “plans” to bring disaster upon the people of Judah unless they repent (Jeremiah is not in chronological order, some later chapters are earlier in time than some earlier chapters): “It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I am planning to do to them, so that each one turns back from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin” (Jer. 36:3; cf. Amos 4:6-10).

Jeremiah 29:1 makes it clear that Jeremiah 29:11 is part of a letter that Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem to the Jews who had been captured by the Babylonians and deported from Israel to Babylonia. The Judeans had repeatedly defied God, so He took His blessing off Judea and allowed them to be conquered. God said, “I will send and take all the families of the north, says Yahweh, and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations around, and I will devote them to destruction and make them a horror, and a hissing, and everlasting desolations” (Jer. 25:9). The Babylonians destroyed the cities of Judah, including Jerusalem, killed the men, raped the women, burned the Temple, and carried a huge part of the population away from their homes into captivity in Babylon. The devastation and sorrow are portrayed in the book of Lamentations.

Now in captivity, the people prayed that somehow they would be allowed to go back to their homes, but Yahweh had told Jeremiah that the captivity would last 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12), too long for most of the people to ever see their Judean homes again. Nevertheless, God had plans to prosper the people in their captivity, not to deliver them from it, but for many people who longed for their homeland, that was a difficult message to hear. In spite of the Israelites’ desire to go back to Judah, God’s word to the captives was to build houses, plant gardens, get wives or husbands for their children, and pray for the city they had been deported to. God planned to prosper them there (Jer. 29:5-7). God had stated earlier that he would bless the captives that had been deported from Judah, and had given Jeremiah a vision and a message about them (Jer. 24:1-10).

The 70 years of captivity (Jer. 29:10) were long enough for three or four generations of Judeans to be born in Babylon (girls usually married by age 15), and we know from historical records that when the Persians conquered Babylon and let the Judeans go back to Judah, that more Judeans stayed in Babylon, which they now considered home, than returned to Judah.

[For more on God allowing disaster so people will turn back to Him, see commentary on 1 Kings 17:1.]

Jer 29:14

**“the place from which I caused you to be carried away.”** The Judeans in Babylon would be allowed to return to Judah (cf. Ezra 1).

Jer 29:16

**“concerning the king who sits on the throne of David and concerning all the people who live in this city.”** This prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 29:16-19) would have been very alarming to the captives in Babylon. The “king who sits on the throne of David” was Zedekiah, who was the reigning king in Jerusalem. Jeremiah 29 tells us that this prophecy was given by Jeremiah, who was in Jerusalem (Jer. 29:1) and the prophecy was in a letter to the Judeans who had been taken captive to Babylon (Jer. 29:1, 4). The letter said that the Judeans who had been taken to Babylon should settle in there, have families, and do their best to make the cities where they had been taken prosper, for then they would prosper too, because the captivity would last 70 years, which was longer than most of that first generation would live (Jer. 29:5-7, 10). God had plans for those captives, plans for a good and hopeful future (Jer. 29:11).

In contrast, King Zedekiah of Judah decided to fight the Babylonians, and Jeremiah’s prophecy was that they would suffer the sword, famine, and pestilence, and that is exactly what happened. The disaster was horrific, and Jerusalem was burned and destroyed.

Jer 29:19

**“rising up early and sending them.”** This is an idiom meaning to send again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets, and sent them over and over as the day progressed. The REV has kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics.

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

Jer 29:24

**“Shemaiah the Nehelamite.”** Shemaiah is otherwise unknown in history and in the Bible, as is the town he apparently comes from, Nehelam. What we know of him comes from Jeremiah 29:24-32. He was a false prophet who wrote about the situation in Babylon and Jerusalem and spoke against Jeremiah. Yahweh said that He would deal with Shemaiah.

Jer 29:26

**“overseers.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text is plural, which is why some English versions have “officers” or some other plural term (the REV has “overseers”) but the Septuagint and Targums are singular, “overseer, ruler” which is why some versions use the singular. However, because Shemaiah wrote to the priests, the plural word “overseers” seems to make good sense.

**“*responsible* for every man who is mad.”** The priest and ruler of the Temple (ordinarily the High Priest) was responsible for discipline, including execution, anyone who led people away from Yahweh and the Law (Deut. 13:5). Although Shemaiah does not mention Jeremiah by name here, it is clear from the context that he had Jeremiah in mind. But Yahweh protects Jeremiah and says He will deal with Shemaiah. If evil people do not meet disaster in this life, they will on Judgment Day.

Jer 29:32

**“I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed.”** God normally does not punish children for the sins of their parents (Deut. 24:16), but He does when the children are involved with the sins of the parents, like happened with Achan in Jericho (Josh. 7:20-25). The fact that this prophecy was to Shemaiah and his “seed” indicates that his children were complicit in his sin. The fact that Shemaiah, who was in Babylon, would not live to see the good that God would do for His people, which good started in Babylon, meant Shemaiah would not live very long.

**Jeremiah Chapter 30**

Jer 30:3

**“I will cause them to return to the land.”** Jeremiah 30:3 shows us that this section of Jeremiah is speaking of the time after Armageddon when both Israel and Judah are returned to the land of Israel, as is foretold in many Scriptures. Judah returned from the Babylonian Captivity, but Israel has not returned from the Assyrian Captivity even to this day. Also, even after Judah returned to the land of Israel, they never possessed it as promised in the Scriptures, and it was always under the control of others: the Persians, Greeks, Romans, etc. So this verse in Jeremiah is about the restoration of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, and the verses associated with it, such as Jeremiah 30:4-7 are about the Great Tribulation that precedes the Millennial Kingdom.

[For more information on Israel’s return to the Promised Land, see commentary on Jer. 32:37. For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 30:7

**“Jacob’s trouble.”** “Jacob’s trouble” in this context is the period of the Day of the LORD, also known as the Great Tribulation, that will come upon Israel and the earth for all the sin they have committed. That Israel will suffer greatly is why Jeremiah refers to the time as “Jacob’s trouble.” Although Israel and the earth will suffer great tribulation, some of the people both of Israel and the nations will survive and be allowed into the future Kingdom of Christ on earth at the “Sheep and Goat Judgment” (Matt. 25:31-46).

The context of Jeremiah 30 seems to be about the Babylonian Captivity and the return from captivity, but actually, the prophecy is looking beyond that to the reestablishment of Israel during the Millennial Kingdom. At that time all the scattered believers of Israel will be regathered to the land of Israel and the Messiah will rule over them. Both Israel and Judah will be regathered (Jer. 30:3), strangers will no longer enslave Israel (Jer. 30:8), and “David,” here referring to the Messiah, will rule over the people (Jer. 30:9).

[For more on the prophecies of the Great Tribulation, see commentaries on Isa. 13:9 and Dan. 12:1. For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 30:9

**“David their king.”** Here in Jeremiah 30:9, the Messiah is called “David.” This is the figure of speech antonomasia, “name change,” where a person is called by a name other than his or her own name in order to import characteristics from the other person. David was a well-known type of Christ, and the Bible calls the Messiah, Jesus Christ, by the name of “David” in Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25, and Hosea 3:5 (see commentary on Ezek. 34:23).

[For a more complete explanation of the Messiah being called “David,” see commentary on Ezek. 34:23.]

Jer 30:10

**“I will save you from *that* distant place, and your seed from the land of their captivity.”** Although there were times in history when Israelites returned to the land of Israel, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will be in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth. At that time the resurrected Israelites will return to their land (Ezek. 37:12-14) and righteous Jews who survived the Tribulation will be let into Christ’s kingdom at the Sheep and Goat Judgment and will go to the land of Israel (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

[For more on Israel and Judah being gathered in the future, see commentary on Jer. 32:37. For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Reign on Earth.”]

Jer 30:11

**“For I am with you.”** Jeremiah 30:11 is almost identical to the second part of Jeremiah 46:28.

Jer 30:14

**“All your lovers have forgotten you.”** This is a reference to the countries that used to be glad that Judah resisted Babylon because they themselves did not want to be conquered, for example, Egypt (Jer. 27:5-7). Egypt had tried to help Judah in the past, when Hezekiah was king (2 Kings 18:19-21), and they may have tried to support Judah early on, but now that the Babylonian army had conquered Judah, all the “lovers” abandoned Judah.

Jer 30:18

**“mound of ruins.”** The Hebrew is “tel,” a mound of ruins. See Deuteronomy 13:16 and Joshua 8:28.

Jer 30:21

**“leader will be one of them...their ruler will proceed from their midst.”** The “leader” and the “ruler” are the same person as we can see from the singular pronouns later in the sentence. This leader is never stated to be the Messiah. However, this section of Jeremiah is about the reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel, which other sections of Scripture make clear ultimately occurs under the reign of the Messiah. C. F. Keil writes, “The meaning is, that the people will no longer be ruled or subdued by foreign masters, but be ruled by glorious princes, i.e., leaders endowed with princely glory, and these out of the midst of themselves. Herein is contained the truth, that the sovereignty of Israel, as restored, culminates in the kingdom of the Messiah.”[[25]](#footnote-17067) Barnes’ commentary on the Bible correctly states that the “Messiah shall be revealed to them out of their own midst.”[[26]](#footnote-31164) Ancient Jews applied Jeremiah 30:21 to the Messiah. Alfred Edersheim wrote, “Jeremiah 30:21 is applied to the Messiah in the Targum, and also in the Midrash on Psalm 21:7.”[[27]](#footnote-13894)

That this verse points to the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom becomes clear from a study of the history of Israel. During Jeremiah’s time, Israel was conquered by the Babylonians. Then they were conquered by the Persians. Then Israel was conquered by the Greeks. Then there was a short time of rule by Israelites themselves, when the Hasmoneans defeated the Greeks, but that was very short-lived and was not the glorious time that the prophecies called for. Then Israel was conquered by the Romans, and so on down through history. The glorious kingdom of Israel portrayed in Old Testament prophecy has never been since Jeremiah’s time, but will be restored by the Messiah, who will conquer the earth, reestablish Israel, build the Temple, rule from Jerusalem, and make the earth into a “paradise.”

[For more about the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“for who is he who would dare to risk his life to approach me.”** The Hebrew is difficult and idiomatic, but the REV catches the sense of it (cf. NASB). The rulers were not normally priests, so they could not approach God without risking their life. But this ruler, the Messiah, will be a king and priest.

Jer 30:23

**“Behold, the storm of Yahweh! His wrath has gone forth.”** The wrath of God is often portrayed metaphorically in Scripture as a powerful and destructive storm (e.g., Ps. 18:12-14; 77:17-18; 83:15; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; Jer. 23:19; 30:23; Ezek. 13:11; see commentary on Ezek. 13:11).

**Jeremiah Chapter 31**

Jer 31:4

**“I will build you again.”** The primary fulfillment of Jeremiah 31 will be in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth (see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” There have been times in history, especially after 1948, when people of Israel came back to the land of Israel, but those times did not fulfill this prophecy in Jeremiah 31. But when Jesus rules the earth from Jerusalem and all Israel is regathered to the land of Israel, then Jeremiah will be fully and literally fulfilled.

**“O virgin Israel.”** It was common in the biblical culture to refer to cities and nations as women (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Jer 31:6

**“let’s go up to Zion to Yahweh our God.”** Mount Zion is where the Temple is and thus where God said He dwelled (Ps. 132:13).

Jer 31:8

**“gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth.”** Many verses prophesy Israel’s return to the land of Israel. Although many Judeans returned from Babylon, these prophecies will be fully fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom, as is clear from the context (Jer. 31:8-17, esp. v. 17). It should also be remembered that there were Israelites—people from the Northern Kingdom of Israel—in Judah (cf. 2 Chron. 11:3).

[For more information on Israel’s return to the Promised Land, see commentary on Jer. 32:37.]

Jer 31:9

**“and Ephraim is my firstborn.”** This is not meant to be literal, but is a poetic expression of the love God had for Israel, here called “Ephraim,” in parallel with “Israel” in the previous phrase. Israel is called “Ephraim” many times in the Old Testament because Ephraim was the most powerful tribe of the ten tribes that made up the nation of Israel. Also, that “Ephraim” (Israel) is called God’s firstborn is a poetic way of expressing that God had special love and concern for His people Israel, and was not meant to express in any way that Israel, who had been so unfaithful to God that they were scattered by the Assyrians, were somehow more loved than the Southern Kingdom of Judah. All the tribes of Israel are metaphorically referred to as God’s son (cf. Hos. 11:1).

Jer 31:10

**“the islands afar off.”** In this context, the word “islands” refers to the Gentile lands in contrast to Israel, the homeland of the Jews. Thus, the word “nations” and the word “islands” are parallel phrases, a duplication for emphasis. From Israel looking west, the Gentile lands were out in the ocean (the Mediterranean Sea) so the word “islands” is applied to them, even though we do not think of the countries west of Israel as being islands (although some of them were). The whole earth needs to hear the Word of Yahweh.

Jer 31:11

**“will ransom.”** The Hebrew uses the prophetic idiom, and puts this phrase in the past tense (“has ransomed”) for emphasis.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6].

**“Jacob.”** Jeremiah 31 has a mixture of references to God’s people returning to the land of Israel, and to Samaria and Zion. Thus Jeremiah 31 is not just about Israel returning from the Assyrian Captivity or about Judah returning from the Babylonian Captivity, but about all of God’s people returning from their captivity.

Jer 31:13

**“rejoice with dancing.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “rejoice in the dance,” but that phrase is not clear in English. It is the young women who rejoice by dancing (cf. Exod. 15:20; Judg. 21:19-23).

Jer 31:14

**“I will fill the soul of the priests with fatness.”** The ESV reads that the priests would have “abundance,” which is the right idea, but the Hebrew word is more literally “fatness.” In the biblical culture in which many people were hungry, to have enough food to be somewhat fat was considered a blessing from God. The fact that the priests would be “fat” indicated that everyone else was also well-fed and prosperous, because the priests lived off the tithe of the people. If the people had plenty, the tithe was plenty, but if the people were famished, then there was not much of a tithe given to the priests, and they would not be filled with fatness.

Jer 31:15

**“A voice is heard in Ramah.”** Jeremiah 31:15 is quoted in Matthew 2:18. “Rachel” is the perfect choice to weep for the captivity of both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Rachel was one of the wives of Jacob and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin (Gen. 30:22-24; 35:16-18), and thus the grandmother of Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph fathered Ephraim and Manasseh while he was in Egypt (Gen. 41:50-52), and Ephraim became the chief tribe of the ten-tribe nation of Israel, which at the time Jeremiah wrote had been carried away over a century earlier by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:5-24). Thus, at the time of Jeremiah, the nation of Israel was “no more,” so “Rachel,” who had been dead for many centuries, is poetically portrayed as weeping bitterly for her children. But God promises that he will bring Israel back from captivity to the land of Israel, a promise that has still not been fulfilled but will be when Christ rules on earth in his Millennial Kingdom.

Rachel was also the mother of Benjamin, and the tribe of Benjamin had joined with the tribe of Judah to form the nation of Judah. But the nation of Judah sinned against Yahweh too, just as Israel had, and so during Jeremiah’s ministry Judah had been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (cf. Jer. 1:1; 2 Kings 24:1). Nebuchadnezzar carried away huge numbers of Judeans to Babylon, so “Rachel” is portrayed as weeping for her captive children of Benjamin as well as for her captive children from Joseph.

Rachel’s connection with the tribe of Benjamin and the nation of Judah also connected her to the territory of Judea under King Herod the Great, so when Herod murdered the babies in the area of Bethlehem, Rachel was said to be weeping (Matt. 2:18).

[For more on Israel being brought back to the land of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Jer. 32:37. For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 31:18

**“You have disciplined me.”** Ephraim (Israel) begins speaking here and Jeremiah 31:18-19 are Ephraim speaking.

Jer 31:19

**“Surely after I turned away, I repented.”** Ephraim started speaking in Jeremiah 31:18 and is still speaking.

Jer 31:20

**“remember, yes, remember.”** The Hebrew verb translated as “remember” is repeated twice in the Hebrew text for emphasis, which is the figure of speech polyptoton (see commentary on Gen. 2:16). The idea of the text is, “I absolutely remember.”

**“my bowels.”** In the biblical culture, the bowels and abdominal organs were the seat of emotion. Yahweh has deep feelings for his people even though they have sinned greatly.

Jer 31:23

**“righteousness.”** The emphasis of “righteousness” here is the relation of people to each other, which is why some versions translate it as “justice” (cf. CJB, DRA, RV, GNV, KJV, NAB, NJB, NKJV).

[For more on why “righteousness” would be translated “justice” in some versions, see commentary on Matt. 5:6 and Rom. 3:22.]

Jer 31:31

**“new covenant.”** The New Covenant is spoken of here, and in a number of other places in the Old Testament, often using different names. For example, in Jeremiah 32:40 it is called an “everlasting covenant.” In Isaiah 54:10 and Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26, it is called a “covenant of peace.”

The New Covenant, which was future to Jeremiah, has now been ratified with Christ’s blood and death on the cross. However, covenant promises, such as the one in Jeremiah 32:39 (cf. Ezek. 11:19) about the people having one heart and one way of life, will not be fully realized until the Millennial Kingdom and First Resurrection, when Christ rules as king over the earth and the righteous believers are raised from the dead in their new everlasting bodies.

It is common with covenants that there is a period of time—sometimes a long time—between when a covenant is ratified and when the covenant promises are fulfilled. For example, God made a blood covenant with Abraham and promised that Abraham and his offspring would get the Promised Land. It has now been 4,000 years and that covenant promise has not been fulfilled, but it will be. Part of the reason that believers of all time have a secure hope for the future is that God is a God who keeps promises.

[For more on the New Covenant, see commentary on Jer. 32:39. For more on Christ’s reigning as king on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the Rapture and resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

Jer 31:32

**“not like the covenant that I cut with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.”** The covenant God cut with Israel when He brought them out of Egypt is what is commonly known as the “Old Covenant” (often miscalled the “Old Testament”), and it was a blood covenant (Exod. 24:3-8).

Jer 31:33

**“covenant.”** This refers to the New Covenant, whereas the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was the “Old Covenant” (usually but mistakenly called the “Old Testament”). The Old Covenant was made with animal blood, while the New Covenant was made with Christ’s blood. There are many aspects to the New Covenant, one of them being that we will live on a restored earth.

[For more on the restored earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 31:34

**“from the least of them to the greatest.”** Under the New Covenant in Christ’s future kingdom, there will still be a hierarchy among the people. Although it is unclear how this hierarchy will be established in the New Jerusalem and Everlasting Kingdom of Revelation 21 and 22, in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ it will certainly be based in large part upon what a person did for the Lord in their life on earth, and reigning with Christ in his earthly kingdom will be part of the reward that people receive for being faithful to God and Christ now.

Jesus’ apostles knew there would be different positions of authority in Christ’s kingdom, which is why Zebedee’s wife, the mother of James and John, came to Jesus and asked that her two sons sit next to Christ—one on the right and one on the left—when he reigns as king, and why the other apostles were angry at the request (Matt. 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-41).

Getting to reign with Christ in the future is just one reason that believers should be very serious about their walk with the Lord and serving him. The person who serves well will reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12), while if we ignore Christ or turn from him we may forfeit all our rewards in the Millennial Kingdom (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:12).

[For more information on the future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth,” and also see commentary on Matt. 5:12; 6:1; 1 Cor. 9:26, 27. For more about rewards in the future Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.” For a much more complete explanation of the Millennial Kingdom and rewards in the future, see John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*.]

Jer 31:38

**“are coming”** The words “are coming” are lacking in the Masoretic Hebrew text but are in the Septuagint and Vulgate, and from other places in Scripture they seem to be properly supplied.

**“Yahweh’s city.”** This refers to the city of Jerusalem. Yahweh’s Temple will be just north of the city on Mount Zion (Ezek. 1:1-2), and it will be ruled by Yahweh’s designated ruler, His Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The places mentioned that can be located were in Jerusalem.

**“the Tower of Hananel.”** The Tower of Hananel was at the northeast corner of Jerusalem (Neh. 3:1; 12:39; Zech. 14:10).

**“the Corner Gate.”** The Corner Gate seems to have been on the northwest side of Jerusalem (2 Kings 14:13; 2 Chron. 26:9; Zech. 14:10). 2 Chronicles 26:9 mentions King Uzziah building a tower at the Corner Gate, and considering the topography of the city, the northwest corner seems to be the most likely candidate for that gate. The northwest corner would also make sense because as Jeremiah 31:38-40 describes the city, the description moves in a counter-clockwise direction starting with the northeast corner then moving west, then south, then back to the east.

Jer 31:39

**“the hill Gareb, and will turn to Goah.”** These locations are not known to us, but are likely on the west side of Jerusalem because as Jeremiah 31:38-40 describes the city, the description moves in a counter-clockwise direction starting with the northeast corner then moving west, then south, then back to the east. So this would be the description of the west side of Jerusalem. J. A. Thompson writes: “The two places mentioned here...are not known; but since v. 38 is concerned with the northern limits of the city, and v. 40 with the south and east, it is a fair assumption that Gareb and Goath [sp] were on the west side.”[[28]](#footnote-16079)

Jer 31:40

**“The whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes.”** The translation and meaning of Jeremiah 31:40 are somewhat debated by scholars, but there is general agreement that the description involves the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem, and that the Horse Gate (Neh. 3:28) is on the east side, although where on the east side is debated. So the description of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38-40 began at the northeast corner and then moved counterclockwise around the city.

**Jeremiah Chapter 32**

Jer 32:1

**“in the tenth year of Zedekiah.”** Jerusalem was captured and destroyed by the Babylonians in Zedekiah’s eleventh year (2 Kings 25:2; 2 Chron. 36:11; Jer. 52:1), so here in Zedekiah’s tenth year time was running out for him. Sadly, he ignored Jeremiah’s warnings and disaster overtook him, his family, and his city.

By this time, Zedekiah’s tenth year, Jeremiah had been prophesying for some 40 years (about 18 during the reign of King Josiah, 3 months during the reign of King Jehoahaz, 11 years during the reign of King Jehoiakim, 3 months during the reign of King Jehoiachin, and currently ten years during the reign of King Zedekiah). Jeremiah started prophesying when he was a youth, likely in his mid to late teens (Jer. 1:6). So by this time Jeremiah was in his mid to late 50s.

Jer 32:5

**“he will bring Zedekiah to Babylon.”** Ezekiel said that Zedekiah would not see Babylon, although he would die there (Ezek. 12:13), and that riddle is solved by knowing that Nebuchadnezzar had King Zedekiah blinded before he was taken to Babylon (see commentary on Ezek. 12:13). It is quite possible that Nebuchadnezzar was furious at Zedekiah for rebelling against him and then fighting his army, and did not think that Zedekiah was worthy enough to even see Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar’s greatest city, so he had him blinded before being taken there in chains.

Jer 32:7

**“Buy my field.”** See commentary on Jeremiah 32:8.

Jer 32:8

**“Then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh.”** God told Jeremiah to buy the field as an object lesson to show that there would be a time in the future when the Judeans would return from captivity and again buy and sell land. Jeremiah’s obedience is noteworthy because there is no evidence he ever got to take advantage of that land. The Babylonians were soon attacking Judah, and Jeremiah ended up being taken to Egypt, where presumably he died.

Jer 32:9

**“17 shekels.”** 17 shekels is roughly 6.8 ounces (193 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

Jer 32:10

**“in the balances.”** It is not that there was more than one balance, but the noun “balance” is a dual noun because there were two pans or pouches, one on each end of the balance beam.

[For more on the biblical balance, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

Jer 32:19

**“to give to every one according to his ways and according to the fruit of what he does.”** The teaching that on Judgment Day people will get what they deserve, good or bad, based on what they have done in their life is taught many times in Scripture (e.g., Job. 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; see commentary on Ps. 62:12).

[For more on rewards in the future and people getting what they deserve, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil.”]

Jer 32:23

**“your Law.”** The Hebrew word “Law” is Torah, and it refers more to “instruction” than law (see commentary on Exod. 24:7).

Jer 32:24

**“famine.”** The Babylonian attack produced a severe famine in Jerusalem (see commentary on Lam. 1:11).

Jer 32:33

**“rising up early and teaching them.”** The phrase “rising up early” is an idiom meaning to do something again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and taught Judah over and over as the day progressed. The REV has kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “over and over” in italics.

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

Jer 32:34

**“they set their abominations.”** This is essentially a restatement of Jeremiah 7:30.

**“in the house that is called by my name.”** That is, the Temple.

Jer 32:35

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

Jer 32:37

**“and I will bring them again.”** There are many verses like Jeremiah 32:37 that prophesy Israel’s return to the land of Israel (cf. Isa. 11:11-12; 27:13; 56:8; 66:20; Jer. 12:15; 16:15-17; 23:3-8; 29:14; 30:3-10; 31:8; 32:37-38, 42-44; 33:10-13; 46:27; Ezek. 11:17, 28:25; 34:11-13; 36:24; 37:21; 39:28; Hos. 1:11; Amos 9:14-15; Mic. 2:12; Zeph. 3:18-20; Zech. 8:7-8; 10:6; John 11:52). God uses a number of different words and phrases to make his point; for example, some verses used both the word “gather” and the word “assemble” to emphasize and reinforce that this return to the land of Israel will be a great move of God, not something people do (cf. Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 11:17; Mic. 2:12; 4:6).

Jeremiah 32:37 is one of many verses that foretells Israel and Judah returning to the Promised Land, which was part of the promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:8-33). The return to the land of Israel will be in large part due to the first resurrection, the Resurrection of the Righteous (cf. Ezek. 37:12-28). It is likely that there will be many thousands of righteous Israelites, perhaps even millions of righteous Israelites, who will get up from the dead and return to Israel. And also there will be righteous Israelites who will survive the Great Tribulation and battle of Armageddon and will be allowed to enter the Millennial Kingdom at the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46).

Although most of the prophecies about Israel being gathered from the nations and returning to the land of Israel occur after the captivities, especially the Babylonian Captivity, the prophecies of the return to the land are not fully fulfilled by the return from Babylon. For one thing, from the time of the Babylonian Captivity even until today, there have always been more Jews in the diaspora, the Jews who live outside of Israel, than in the land of Israel. The prophecy of Israel’s return to the land of Israel in Ezekiel 39:28 specifically says no one will be left behind in the nations.

Furthermore, there are a few verses that acknowledge that Israel was scattered among the nations long before the Babylonian Captivity. God had said if Israel sinned they would be scattered among the nations (Lev. 26:33; Deut. 4:27), and Israel started sinning very early and people left Israel or were taken captive and deported. The Psalmist (likely David) prays that God will bring Israel back from the nations to which they had been scattered (Ps. 106:47). Isaiah 11:11-12, which was written more than 100 years before the deportations of the Babylonian Captivity started, says that the Israelites had already been scattered to Assyria, Egypt, Ethiopia (Cush), Elam, Shinar, Hamath (in northern Syria), and the coasts (or islands) of the Mediterranean Sea.

Jesus will come from heaven and fight the Battle of Armageddon and conquer the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). After that, God will reunite the countries of Judah and Israel, and the land of Israel will again be given to the twelve tribes of Israel and divided up among them (Ezek. 47, 48), and Jesus will reign over the earth as king for 1,000 years, and people will be safe and joyful. That 1,000-year reign is known as Jesus’ Millennial Kingdom.

[For more on Jesus’ Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the two future resurrections, the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the “big picture” chronology of the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Jer 32:39

**“way.”** The Hebrew word is literally “road,” and “road” was used idiomatically for a way of life, and the verse could be amplified somewhat to read, “And I will give them one heart and one way of life.” We see “road” used of a way of life in dozens of verses (cf. Ps. 1:1, 6; 18:30; 25:9; 37:5; 101:2; Prov. 2:20; 4:14, 19; 8:13; 11:20; 12:15; 13:6; 15:9, 19; 16:7; etc.).

Under the New Covenant, when people get a new heart and God puts His Word in people’s minds, people will live a godly life. They will all have one heart, and one godly way of life. The New Covenant, which was future to Jeremiah, has now been ratified with Christ’s blood and death on the cross. However, the covenant promises, such as these in Jeremiah 32:39, will not be fully realized until the Millennial Kingdom and First Resurrection, when Christ rules as king over the earth and the righteous believers are raised from the dead in their new everlasting bodies. It is common with covenants that there is a period of time—sometimes a long time—between when a covenant is ratified and when the covenant promises are fulfilled. For example, God made a blood covenant with Abraham and promised that Abraham and his offspring would get the Promised Land. It has now been 4,000 years and that covenant promise has not been fulfilled, but it will be. Part of the reason that believers of all time have a secure hope for the future is that God is a God who keeps promises.

[For more on the New Covenant, see commentary on Jer. 31:31. For more on Christ’s reigning as king on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the Rapture and resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

**“forever.”** This is expressed in the Hebrew text by the idiom, more literally translated as “all the days,” In this context, this idiom means “forever” or “always.” This is a wonderful promise because it is saying that when God gathers Israel again, which will happen in the time of the New Covenant that people will get a new heart (they will all have “one heart”) and “a new spirit” (cf. parallel verse; Ezek. 11:19), and they will always fear God for their own good and for the good of their children. This promise is similar to the promise to the Christian Church that the New Birth is permanent (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3).

Jer 32:41

**“in faithfulness.”** Here in Jeremiah 32:41, God reminds us that He is a faithful God. The reason we can trust His promises is that He is faithful and He does not lie, and He made promises to Israel that they would have the Promised Land. Here in Jeremiah, He promises to plant Israel in the land, thus being faithful to what He had said.

**“whole soul.”** Here in Jeremiah 32:41, the word “soul” means “self” in the sense of God’s thoughts, emotions, and attitudes. God does not have a “soul” that gives him life, like humans do.

[For more on “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Jer 32:44

**“and…and…and…and…and.”** Here in Jeremiah 32:44, God uses the figure of speech polysyndeton (many “ands”) to emphasize each individual point. From a human viewpoint, it seemed like Judah was so devastated that it would never thrive again, but God makes it clear it will flourish everywhere—the hill country, the lowlands, and even in the more arid Negev. When Christ rules in the Millennial Kingdom, the earth will be a paradise, which is why Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with the Lord in “paradise” (see commentary on Luke 23:43).

**Jeremiah Chapter 33**

Jer 33:4

**“this city.”** Jerusalem. Jeremiah was imprisoned in Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah.

Jer 33:5

**“fill those houses.”** The Hebrew text reads, “fill them,” but it is referring to the houses.

Jer 33:11

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

Jer 33:13

**“and...and...and...and.”** This is the figure of speech polysyndeton, or “many ands,” in which the connective “and” is repeated before each item in a list to give emphasis to each individual item.

**“pass under the hands of him who counts them.”** This was referring to the custom of how a tithe was taken from a flock or herd. The herdsman drove the flock or herd through a gate, and someone counted the animals as they went through, marking every tenth one. Each tenth animal was given to God as His tithe. If a person was starting out with a small herd or flock, and ten animals were not born to him that year, then the man did not have to tithe that year, which was a way God provided for His people and helped them build their wealth (Lev. 27:30-33). In the Millennial Kingdom, the tithe will once again be established so the priests and Levites can live well.

Jer 33:15

**“a righteous Branch.”** This is one of the titles of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

**“for David.”** See commentary on Jeremiah 23:5.

**“justice and righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God, and in effect is “justice.” In Jeremiah 33:15, “justice” means more like “judgment,” fair and equitable judgment, thus justice. The emphasis is the effect: justice. In contrast, “righteousness” has more emphasis on the action; doing what is right toward God and to fellow humans. There is no justice on earth now, but when Christ reigns on earth as king there will be justice and righteousness.

[For more on “righteousness” having the meaning of doing what is right or just (“justice”), see commentary on Matt. 5:6. For more on Christ’s future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 33:16

**“and this is what he will call her”** The “her” in this verse is Jerusalem and it is a feminine singular. However, the verb “called” is masculine and active voice, and so would be ordinarily translated as “he will call her [i.e., Jerusalem].” From the context, the one who is doing the calling is the Branch from David, the Messiah, who says, “Yahweh is our righteousness” (Jer. 33:15). Most English versions translate the active verb “called” as if it were a passive (“she will be called”), but there does not seem to be much justification for that here, even though in Hebrew an active verb is sometimes used in a passive sense. Note that the grammar here in Jeremiah 33:16 is very similar to the grammar in Jeremiah 23:6, but the object of the verb is feminine here (i.e., Jerusalem), but it is masculine in Jeremiah 23:6 (i.e., Israel).

**“Yahweh is our righteousness.”** Here, Jerusalem is called “Yahweh is our righteousness” or “Yahweh our righteousness.” It cannot mean that Jerusalem (or Israel) is literally Yahweh, that is simply the name of the city, a name that magnifies Yahweh (see NAB, NET, NJB; cf. JPS. See commentary on Jer. 23:6).

Jer 33:18

**“the Levitical priests.”** The Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “the priests the Levites.” Every priest was also a Levite.

[For more on the Levitical priests, see commentary on 2 Chron. 30:27.]

**Jeremiah Chapter 34**

Jer 34:1

**“against Jerusalem and against all its cities.”** In this case, Jerusalem and “its cities” referred to Jerusalem and all the cities that were in touch with it and supported by it. We see from Jeremiah 34:7 that these cities included Lachish and Azekah.

Jer 34:3

**“and you will go to Babylon.”** Zedekiah did see Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and Zedekiah did go to Babylon, but as Ezekiel 12:13 says, he never “saw” Babylon. The answer to that apparent riddle is that Nebuchadnezzar had King Zedekiah taken to Riblah in Syria and blinded him, and then took him to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7; Jer. 52:10-11).

Jer 34:5

**“you will die in peace. And just as with the burnings made for your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they will burn *a fire* for you.”** This prophecy, like most prophecies, was conditional (see commentary on Deut. 18:20), and this one was conditional upon Zedekiah surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, because it was not fulfilled. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and was captured. Zedekiah was taken to Riblah in Syria and his sons were executed while he watched and then he was blinded and carried to Babylon and died there in chains (2 Kings 24:20; 25:6-7). So Zedekiah did not die in peace and neither did the people make a memorial burning for him because of the total devastation of the cities and population of Judah and the removal of its leadership.

**“the burnings made for your fathers.”** The use of “fathers” shows that these memorial fires were regularly made for the kings of Judah. (See commentary on 2 Chron. 16:14).

Jer 34:9

**“his brother.”** That is, his fellow Israelite. Every Israelite was a descendant of Jacob, so in a sense they were all distant “brothers.”

Jer 34:13

**“when I brought them.”** The Hebrew text is more literally, “in the day that I brought them,” but that can be confusing because the Exodus took much more than a day. In this case, the word “day” is used idiomatically. The covenant was made in Exodus 24:3-8, and we refer to it as the “Old Covenant” (often incorrectly as the “Old Testament”). Part of the Old Covenant, the Law, was that a Hebrew slave was to go free after serving six years (Exod. 21:2-3).

Jer 34:14

**“At the end of seven years.”** The expression is strange to us in English, but it seems to be in the seventh year, when six years are fully finished (cf. Exod. 21:2).

Jer 34:17

**“to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine, and I will make you to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth.”** What Jeremiah’s prophecy stated is exactly what happened to Judah and Jerusalem. The Babylonian attack brought death by sword and famine (cf. Lam. 1:11 and commentary on Lam. 1:11), and although the Babylonians were the major attacker, other nations participated in the captivity of Judah (Jer. 34:1).

Jer 34:18

**“when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts.”** A common way of making a blood covenant in the ancient world was to cut an animal in half and then for both parties to walk between the pieces. In the case of the Abrahamic covenant, God had Abraham cut animals in half, but then He put Abraham to sleep and went between the pieces Himself (Gen. 15:9-21).

The killing of the animals and cutting the large ones in half was a form of self-maledictory oath, and was the equivalent of saying, “If I do not keep this covenant, may what happened to these animals happen to me.” Then, if one party did break the covenant, the other party often did seek the death of the covenant breaker. Here in Jeremiah, the leaders who made the covenant and then broke it were the subject of divine retribution. God said, “I will even give them into the hand of their enemies…and their dead bodies will be for food to the birds of the heavens and to the animals of the earth.” Those leaders made a blood covenant and then broke it, and God sought their lives. It was acceptable in the culture to have someone else carry out the retribution, as we see here. It was the Babylonians who destroyed Judah.

Jer 34:20

**“the birds of the air.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the birds of the heavens,” but the Hebrew word “heavens” is always plural, there is no singular word “heaven” in Hebrew.

Jer 34:21

**“who have withdrawn from you.”** During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the Pharaoh of Egypt came out to attack the Babylonians, apparently thinking that they may have spread their army too thin and thus were vulnerable to attack. The Babylonian army withdrew from Jerusalem to deal with them (Jer. 37:5). Apparently the Jews in Jerusalem thought the Babylonians were going to be defeated and took that opportunity to return to some of their sinful ways, including reenslaving some of the slaves they had made a covenant to release. But Jeremiah prophesied to them that the Babylonians would return and Jerusalem would be conquered.

Jer 34:22

**“and burn it with fire.”** Jerusalem was burned (2 Kings 25:9; Jer. 52:13) and many years later when the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem there was still major damage from the fire (Neh. 1:3). There is still evidence of this great fire in Jerusalem, and tourists today can go see “The burnt house,” remnants of the fire that consumed much of Jerusalem in 586 BC when the Babylonians burned the city.

**“I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.”** This prophecy was fulfilled. Many of the cities of Judah were depopulated in the Babylonian Captivity, and many, like the great city of Lachish, are only abandoned tels (mounds) even today, or, like happened to Beersheba, the ancient city was abandoned and a new city was built close by.

**Jeremiah Chapter 35**

Jer 35:14

**“rising up early and speaking.”** This is an idiom meaning to speak again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets who spoke to the people again and again as the day progressed. The REV has kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics.

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

Jer 35:15

**“rising up early and sending them.”** This is an idiom meaning to send again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets, and sent them over and over as the day progressed. We have kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics.

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

**Jeremiah Chapter 36**

Jer 36:3

**“hear.”** This is the full or “pregnant” sense of the word “hear.” It means more than just hear audibly, it means hear, pay attention to, and act upon.

**“disaster.”** The Hebrew is *ra* (#07451 רַע), which is the standard Hebrew word for “evil,” here put by metonymy for disaster and all that accompanies it.

**“that I am planning to do to them.”** This is a good example of the idiom of permission, in which God is said to do something that is actually a consequence of a person’s own actions.

[For a more complete explanation of the “idiom of permission,” see commentary on Exod. 4:21.]

Jer 36:5

**“I am restricted.”** Jeremiah could not go into the Temple, but no reason is given as to why. Scholars have suggested various reasons, the most likely of which seems to be that Jeremiah’s earlier prophecies made him unwelcome at the Temple. However, it may have been that he had some kind of sickness that made him unclean at the time. We do not know the reason Jeremiah could not go into the Temple.

Jer 36:6

**“on a fast day.”** The Jewish leaders would proclaim a fast day when there was some concern about a coming calamity and there was a need for prayer. By choosing a fast day to read the scroll, the people in the Temple would be concerned about a problem and in a mind to repent and confess sins, and he also knew there would be a large crowd in the Temple on a fast day, so lots of people would hear the Word of God being read. Thus a fast day would be a good chance for people to hear, believe, and repent.

Jeremiah dictated the scroll in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:1), and an appropriate fast day came up the next year, the fifth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:9). We do not know when in the fourth year Jeremiah wrote the scroll, but we do know that Baruch read it in the ninth month of the fifth year, which is our November/December (Jer. 36:22). This means there was at least a nine-month wait between when the scroll was written and when it was read. This is a great lesson in patience. Even though Jeremiah and Baruch wanted to read the Word of God to the people, they waited for the time that God told them to wait for. Spiritual maturity involves learning to wait for the right time to do God’s work. Although some commentators believe this fast day to be the Day of Atonement, that cannot be correct because this fast occurred in the ninth month (Jer. 36:9), while the Day of Atonement was the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 16:29).

**“in the house of Yahweh.”** The house of Yahweh is the Temple. Baruch was to read Jeremiah’s prophecy in the Temple to the people there.

Jer 36:10

**“the upper court.”** Very likely the court of the priests (cf. 2 Chron. 4:9).

Jer 36:21

**“the scroll.”** The scroll of the Word of God, which Jeremiah had dictated to Baruch the scribe.

Jer 36:22

**“the ninth month.”** The month Kislev, basically equivalent to our December, but the Hebrew months could shift back and forth somewhat due to the lunar calendar they were based on. It is cold in Israel in December, and can even occasionally snow.

Jer 36:30

**“he will have no one to sit on the throne of David.”** Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin did sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem for three months, but since his reign was so short we can see that Jeremiah’s prophecy did come to pass in effect. A three-month reign when the king was really set on the throne and controlled by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is hardly a reign.

**“his dead body will be cast out in the day to the heat and in the night to the frost.”** This is a more literal rendition of what happened to Jehoiakim, who was “buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged off and cast outside; beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:19; for more on the death of Jehoiakim, see commentary on 2 Kings 24:6).

**Jeremiah Chapter 37**

Jer 37:1

**“Coniah.”** Coniah is a shortened version of Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah (1 Chron. 3:16-17). He is also known as Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6, 8). He is listed in Matthew 1:11 in the genealogy of Mary. Jeconiah is known as Coniah only in Jeremiah 22:24, 28; and 37:1.

Jer 37:2

**“nor his servants.”** In this context, the word “servants” refers to the high civil and military officials serving the king.

[For more on “servants” being high officials, see commentary on 2 Sam. 11:1.]

Jer 37:3

**”Zedekiah...sent...to the prophet Jeremiah.”** King Zedekiah was a weak and hypocritical king. He stood by and allowed the false prophets, priests, and officials to torture and imprison Jeremiah—and they would have killed him—but then when he needs information he sends to Jeremiah to hear from Yahweh or to pray to Him. It is a lesson worth learning that there are people like Zedekiah in leadership positions in the world today, and their works often reveal who they are.

Jer 37:9

**“depart, yes, depart.”** The Hebrew text uses the verb “depart” twice for emphasis, using the figure of speech polyptoton.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Jer 37:12

**“to receive his portion *of property* there.”** Jeremiah was from Anathoth in Benjamin and had property there (Jer. 1:1).

Jer 37:16

**“the dungeon house.”** The Hebrew is literally, “the house of the cistern” or “the house of the pit.” The Hebrew word translated as “dungeon” in the REV is *bor* (#0953 בּוֹר), and it means “pit, cistern, well” but it then gets used as a “dungeon,” generally a below-ground prison cell. This “cistern” (or dungeon; *bor* (#0953 בּוֹר) where Jeremiah spent “many days” was different from the cistern (*bor*) that Jeremiah’s enemies put him in that is mentioned in Jeremiah 38:6-13. Jeremiah was only in the cistern mentioned in Jeremiah 38:6-13 for a short time and would have died there if he had not been rescued from it. He had no food or water in the cistern, and had sunk into the mud that was in it.

Jer 37:17

**“the king asked him secretly.”** Zedekiah was a weak and cowardly king. He knew Jeremiah was a prophet, but he would not protect him from the evil men in his kingdom (see commentary on Jer. 38:5).

**“in his house.”** This could be translated “in his palace,” because the king’s “house” was his palace, but the Hebrew word is literally “house.”

Jer 37:18

**“against your servants.”** In this context, the king’s “servants” are his officials and military officers.

[For more on the word “servants” being used for people of high position in the kingdom, see commentary on 2 Sam. 11:1.]

Jer 37:19

**“And where are your prophets who prophesied to you.”** This is very honest communication and very valuable to God. It is important that people have a clear choice between doing good and doing evil, if for no other reason than that they will have no excuse for their behavior on the Day of Judgment. By speaking boldly and plainly, Jeremiah gives Zedekiah a chance to make a godly decision and do the right thing. Alas, like so many other people, Zedekiah is too wishy-washy and fearful to make a godly decision.

Jer 37:21

**“until all the bread in the city was gone.”** The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem produced a horrific famine in the city that is described in more detail in Lamentations (see commentary on Lam. 1:11).

**Jeremiah Chapter 38**

Jer 38:2

**“his life will be his spoils of war.”** For more on this idiom, see commentary on Jeremiah 39:18.

Jer 38:4

**“let this man be put to death.”** Killing Jeremiah was the desire and intention of the top officials, priests, and false prophets. Although the word “Pharisee” had not been invented yet, these leaders embodied the spirit of the Pharisees of the time of Christ who wanted to kill Jesus (in fact, they may have had some of the same demons). They wanted to kill Jeremiah but they did not want blood on their hands, so they put him in a cistern where they knew he would certainly die, but they could say, “We didn’t kill him.” The Pharisees let the Romans kill Christ; these “Pharisees” would have let the cistern kill Jeremiah.

Jer 38:5

**“for the king cannot do anything against you.”** Here Zedekiah speaks about himself as “the king,” rather than using the more personal “I,” saying “I cannot do anything against you.” But that was not true. Zedekiah was a weakling and coward. He knew Jeremiah was a prophet and had even sought his advice (Jer. 37:3-10, 17-20). Yet as we see here in Jeremiah 38:5, he was afraid of the powerful (and evil!) men in his kingdom so he gave in to their will and subjected Jeremiah to prison and suffering (Jer. 32:2; 33:1; 38:6). When leaders are weak and unrighteous, God’s people suffer. That is a reason that God’s people should do whatever they can to make sure that godly people are put into leadership positions.

Jer 38:6

**“cistern.”** The Hebrew word translated as “cistern” is *bor* (#0953 בּוֹר), and it means “cistern, pit, well” but its meaning expands to also mean “dungeon,” generally a below-ground prison cell. This “cistern” (or dungeon; *bor*) in Jeremiah 38:6-13 was different from the cistern (*bor*) that Jeremiah’s enemies put him in that is mentioned in Jeremiah 37:16, where he spent “many days.” Jeremiah was only in the cistern mentioned here in Jeremiah 38:6-13 for a short time and would have died there if he had not been rescued from it.

Jer 38:7

**“Ebed-melech the Ethiopian.”** For the kindness that Ebed-melech showed to Jeremiah, God made sure his life was spared when Babylon conquered Jerusalem (Jer. 39:16-18).

**“was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin.”** It was customary for kings and officials to sit in the gate and judge the people of the city and conduct business (e.g., 2 Sam. 19:8; 1 Kings 22:10; 2 Chron. 18:9; Esther 2:21; Jer. 38:7; Dan. 2:49). The fact that King Zedekiah was sitting in the gate was a gesture that he was king and was in control, which was not quite the truth given the situation.

Jer 38:16

**“has given us this life.”** Here Zedekiah uses the Hebrew word often translated as “soul” to refer to the life and breath of a living “person.” And so, the idiom can be understood that Zedekiah is claiming it was Yahweh “who made me.”

[For more on “soul” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Jer 38:19

**“The Chaldeans may deliver me.”** The Hebrew text is “They may deliver me,” but the word “Chaldeans” has replaced the pronoun for clarity of meaning.

Jer 38:22

**“All the women who are left in the king of Judah’s house.”** The “house” of the king of Judah was the palace, and the women of his “house” are his harem, his daughters, and his servant girls. All the ones “who are left” are the ones who did not die from the famine or were killed in other ways. When a kingdom was conquered, the women of that kingdom became the property of the conquering nation (Jer. 38:23). The reason Absalom had sex with David’s wives was to show that he was the conquering king (2 Sam. 16:21-22).

When a kingdom was conquered and the women were taken from one house to another or one harem to another, what their new life would be like was uncertain. Although it seems most of them would have been treated worse than they had been treated, some would likely have been treated better.

**“Your trusted friends have misled and overpowered you.”** In this context, the “trusted friends” of the king were the false prophets and evil advisors that the king had trusted, who told him that Jerusalem would not be conquered by the enemy. King Zedekiah trusted them, but how wrong they were! Zedekiah, blinded and with no family, died in chains (2 Kings 25:5-7).

Jer 38:26

**“Jonathan’s house.”** The leaders in Jerusalem had made that the prison (Jer. 37:15).

**Jeremiah Chapter 39**

Jer 39:1

**“And in the ninth year of his reign.”** This event and chronology are in 2 Kings 25:1-4 and in Jeremiah 39:1-2 and 52:4-5. The siege of Jerusalem took from the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:1; Jer. 39:1; 52:4) to the ninth day of the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:2-3; Jer. 39:2; 52:6-7). So the siege of Jerusalem took about 18 months.

Jer 39:3

**“came in and sat in the Middle Gate.”** It was customary for kings and officials to sit in the gate and judge the people of the city and conduct business (e.g., 2 Sam. 19:8; 1 Kings 22:10; 2 Chron. 18:9; Esther 2:21; Jer. 38:7; Dan. 2:49). So that fact that these Babylonian officials went and sat in the gate was a purposeful gesture to show everyone that Jerusalem was now under Babylonian control.

**“Nergal-sharezer of Samgar, Sarsechim the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer *the* Rabmag.”** These are Babylonian names and titles, and exactly what they mean and how they should be translated is debated, so different English versions handle them differently. No doubt that when the book of Jeremiah was written these names were well-known and understood, but they are lost to us now. A man named “Nergal-sharezer” became king of Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar, and it is quite possible that one of these two men with that name was the man who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar.

Jer 39:4

**“toward the Arabah.”** So they fled east and headed toward the Jordan Valley. The archaeological and geographical evidence supports the “king’s garden” being on the southeast side of the old city of Jerusalem. The king was heading east towards Moab and Arabia in hopes of escaping the Babylonians.

The Arabah is mentioned a number of times in the Bible, and it is the geographical designation of the part of the Great Rift Valley that is around the Dead Sea and north of it for 15 miles or so. It is mostly desert and scrub wilderness.

Jer 39:5

**“Riblah.”** A strategic town on the Orontes River in Syria. Riblah was about 200 miles north of where the Babylonians captured Zedekiah, so Zedekiah would have been in chains awaiting judgment for at least the better part of a month, and maybe considerably more. That would surely have been a fearful time for him, awaiting Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment.

Jer 39:6

**“slaughtered.”** The Hebrew text uses a word that means “slaughtered” instead of the normal word for “killed.” So although the way Nebuchadnezzar had the men executed is not described, it may have been quite gruesome. The punishment that King Zedekiah received was very harsh, but Zedekiah’s rebellion had cost Nebuchadnezzar time, money, and the lives of many soldiers, and it was exactly that kind of harsh punishment that kept other kings from rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar.

Jer 39:8

**“the king’s house.”** That is, the palace.

**“and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.”** This was not a small feat, as the walls of Jerusalem were thick and high. In many places, they had been there since the Jebusites some 500 years earlier.

Jer 39:9

**“and the rest of the people who remained.”** There would have been some people in places in Judah who had not fought against Babylon, who did not live in Jerusalem, and who were taken to Babylon. Only the poorest people in Judah were allowed to remain (Jer. 39:10).

Jer 39:10

**“gave them vineyards and fields.”** Nebuzaradan did not give land to the poor people just because he was a nice guy, although he may have had genuine pity for the poor people of Judah who had been so taken advantage of by the rich people. Having people in the land who would be thankful to Babylon and occupy and farm the land was good for taxes and also good as a small buffer from Egypt to the south. It ensured that the land was not just free for the taking by anyone who happened by.

Jer 39:11

**“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon commanded...concerning Jeremiah.”** Neither the Bible nor history tells us how King Nebuchadnezzar knew about Jeremiah, but he did know, and he respected Jeremiah and had him treated well. The most likely way that Nebuchadnezzar knew about Jeremiah was from the Judeans who defected to the Babylonians. No doubt they were questioned and gave the Babylonians intelligence about what was happening in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a large city for those days, but actually a small city compared to our modern cities; it was only about a square mile, so it is very likely that everyone knew about Jeremiah. Both in the city and in the Temple where many people gathered, Jeremiah had been very active in publicly declaring that Jerusalem should surrender to the Babylonians and that they would stay alive if they did (e.g., Jer. 27:8-12).

Jer 39:13

**“Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushazban.”** This list of officials who got involved in making sure Jeremiah was well taken care of shows us that Nebuchadnezzar clearly communicated his concern for the welfare of Jeremiah to his officials. It is a sad testimony of the Judeans, “God’s people,” that they treated Jeremiah so badly but the “pagan Babylonians” cared so well for him. Sadly, it still happens today that sometimes Christians treat other Christians worse than some unbelievers treat the Christians.

Jer 39:14

**“they sent and took Jeremiah out of the court of the guard.”** Here in Jeremiah 39:11-14, Jeremiah was released from prison and went to be with Gedaliah the man Nebuchadnezzar had appointed to be the new governor of the land. But somehow in the confusion of war, Jeremiah was taken prisoner again and chained and taken north. But Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, found Jeremiah at Ramah and let him go again (Jer. 40:1).

Jer 39:18

**“your life will be your spoils of war.”** An idiom meaning that the booty that Ebed-melech would get from the war would be his life; the spoils of war for Ebed-melech would be staying alive. Ebed-melech had helped the prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 38:7-13), and so God promised that Ebed-melech would not die in the Babylonian attack. Given the ruthless attack of the Babylonian army on the city of Jerusalem once the army had broken through the gate and poured into the city, the promise that God would protect Ebed-melech in the midst of all that mayhem and carnage was no small promise. This idiom of a person’s life being the spoils of war occurs in Jeremiah 21:9; 38:2; 39:18; and 45:5.

**Jeremiah Chapter 40**

Jer 40:1

**“from Ramah.”** Ramah was the apparent assembly point of the captives from Judah and Jerusalem. It is a little over five miles north of Jerusalem. Ramah was the home of Samuel the prophet (1 Sam. 7:17).

**“among all the captives of Jerusalem.”** Jeremiah had been mistakenly rounded up with the people of Jerusalem and began the journey to Babylon, but was recognized and released again (cf. Jer. 39:11-14).

Jer 40:3

**“you all.”** The Hebrew text uses the second-person plural, thus “you all” or “all of you.” This is important to recognize here because the “you” in verse 4 is singular and refers to Jeremiah only.

Jer 40:10

**“to represent you before.”** The Hebrew is literally, “to stand before,” but it means to represent you.

**“your cities that you have taken over.”** When the Babylonians deported most of the people of Judah, the remaining people took over the empty cities.

**Jeremiah Chapter 41**

Jer 41:1

**”royal seed.”** The royal family.

Jer 41:3

**“all the Jews who were with him.”** That is, all the Jews at that meal, not all the Jews remaining in Jerusalem, as we learn by reading further.

**“who happened to be there.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “who were found there,” but in this case, the meaning is “who happened to be there.” The text is not saying that Ishmael and his people went looking for Babylonians to kill.

Jer 41:4

**“the second day.”** The day after the murders.

Jer 41:5

**“from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria.”** In the same way that there had been Jews who fled Judah and went east to Moab, Ammon, etc., (cf. Jer. 40:11), there were Judeans (and Israelites) who lived in the cities of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that had been conquered by Assyria. Men from these cities were apparently going south to Jerusalem with offerings for the Feast of Tabernacles, which was in the seventh month. It is unclear how much they knew about the destruction of Jerusalem, although they came mourning.

**“having their beards shaved.”** Easterners were very proud and protective of their beards, and shaving them off was a demonstration of great commitment, in this case showing the great sorrow they had. In 2 Samuel 10:4-5, the king of Ammon took the emissaries that had come from David and shaved off half their beards, and the men were so embarrassed that David advised them to stay away from Jerusalem until their beards had grown back.

A similar sign of mourning to shaving the beard was shaving the head. Verses that mention shaving the head in mourning for the dead include Isaiah 15:2; 22:12; Jeremiah 16:6; 48:37; Ezekiel 7:18; and Micah 1:16. Other signs of mourning include putting on sackcloth (cf. Jer. 48:37), having a time of silence (Jer. 47:5), and cutting oneself. It was also customary for people to bring food and have a mourning feast (Jer. 16:5-8).

**“having cut themselves.”** God made humans in His own image, and we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (or “remarkably and wonderfully made,” Ps. 139:14 HCSB). Nevertheless, the Devil has been successful in getting people to cut and burn themselves for a number of different reasons. Here in Jeremiah, Israelites have slashed themselves as part of their mourning for the dead. Cutting oneself was a pagan custom that was done as part of mourning for the dead. It became a practice of some Israelites as they began to follow some of the pagan customs from the culture around them, particularly as they were influenced by demons (Jer. 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; 48:37), but God never wanted people to mourn that way and forbade it in the Law of Moses: “do not cut yourselves…for the dead” (Deut. 14:1). In that culture, cutting oneself not only needlessly harmed the person, and from the Devil’s point of view defaced God’s wonderful creation, but it was a genuine danger because the people had no effective way to fight infection if the wound should become infected. Thus every cut was a very real danger to the person. Of course, the pain and suffering of the cut was supposed to show how deeply the person cared for the one who had died, but that is a false and demonic display of sincerity. God never wants or requires it of people.

The fact that the Jews would cut themselves for the dead in spite of it being prohibited by the Law shows how deeply the pagan religions had penetrated the culture in Judah at this time. Jeremiah 2:8 gives a pretty graphic picture of the state of things in Judah: the priests had stopped asking about Yahweh’s involvement, the rulers broke the Law, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and followed idols.

[For more on cutting and self-mutilation, see commentary on 1 Kings 18:28. For the custom of shaving the head for the dead and some other customs associated with death, see commentary on Jer. 47:5.]

**“the house of Yahweh.”** Normally “the house of Yahweh” would be the Temple, but the Temple had been burned to the ground. It may be they wanted to offer an offering where the Temple had stood, but the text does not say. The fact that the text says that they had “their beards shaved and their clothes torn and having cut themselves,” indicates they knew Jerusalem had been destroyed.

Jer 41:6

**“weeping all along as he went.”** Ishmael was a good liar, and his deceit fooled these men and led to their death. It is a valuable lesson that evil people are often excellent liars, which is why Jesus told people to look at their fruit instead of listening to their words (Matt. 7:15-20).

Jer 41:8

**“brothers.”** Here the word is used of companions, not blood relatives.

Jer 41:9

**“was the one that Asa the king had made.”** Asa king of Judah was concerned about Baasha king of Israel and so he fortified Mizpeh (2 Chron. 16:6; 1 Kings 15:22). Although it does not specifically say in Kings and Chronicles that Asa had cisterns dug as part of his fortification efforts, this verse in Jeremiah makes it plain that Asa did that.

Jer 41:10

**“the king’s daughters.”** It is highly unlikely that this refers to the daughters of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, because Nebuchadnezzar would have taken those very important women captive to Babylon. Note that the actual sons of Zedekiah were killed while he watched (2 Kings 25:7). The “king’s daughters” is almost certainly a reference to other women who, although they were in some way related to the royal family and may have even been part of the royal court, were actually the daughters of less prominent men in the kingdom.

**“departed to go over to the children of Ammon.”** The phrase “departed to go over to” refers to going over the Jordan River.

Jer 41:12

**“the great pool.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “the great water” (or “the great waters;” the word “water” in Hebrew is always plural). There was a huge pool of water in Gibeon (cf. 2 Sam. 2:13).

**“and they found him by the great pool that is in Gibeon.”** It is unclear why Ishmael would have gone to Gibeon. It is southwest of Mizpah, and Ishmael wanted to go to Ammon, which is east. It is possible that he went west to get the foods that the ten men he spared said were hidden in the field. Or it is possible but less likely that a scribe miscopied and wrote Gibeon when he meant to write “Gibeah,” which would have been generally in the direction Ishmael wanted to go.

Jer 41:16

**“*Johanan took* the men of war, and.”** Johanan rescued the people that Ishmael had taken captive and they returned to Mizpeh. Then Johanan took all those people and traveled south, intending to go to Egypt (Jer. 41:17).

**Jeremiah Chapter 42**

Jer 42:1

**“Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah.”** “Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah” is very likely the same man as “Ahaziah the son of Hoshaiah” in Jeremiah 43:2. The two men, Jezaniah and Johanan, would then be together in both Jeremiah 42:1 and 43:2. The Septuagint reads “Ahaziah” here, and also King Uzziah of Judah was also referred to as Ahaziah. “Ahaziah” means something like “Yahweh grasps” [the hand], and the name may have been given to someone who supposedly received divine help, in this case, Jezaniah. So we have to carefully read to see when Jezeniah is called Ahaziah, just like we have to carefully read when other people in the Bible are called by two different names.

Jer 42:5

**“sends us through you.”** The Hebrew is more idiomatic and harder to understand in English: “will send you to us.” That could be expanded to “will send you *to give* to us.”

Jer 42:6

**“or whether it is evil.”** They are not saying that Yahweh will give them something “evil” to do, they are saying that if Yahweh gives them a command that they do not want to follow (and thus it is “evil” to them), they will obey it anyway. The CSB gets the sense: “whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, we will obey.”

Jer 42:10

**“for I am grieved about the evil.”** The Hebrew word translated “grieved” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and it has a wide range of meanings. It is difficult to be precise about the exact sense of *nacham* that God means in this context, which is why the English versions differ so greatly. The English translations read differently, and include “repent,” “relent,” “regret,” “grieve,” “sorrow,” “sad,” “appeased,” and “compassion.” It is likely that these all partly express what God was feeling, and together we get a much fuller sense of what God was trying to express about what had happened to Judah.

[For more on *nacham*, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

**“that I have done to you.”** This is the idiom of permission. God did not do the evil to the Judeans. They brought the evil upon themselves, as is clear in the biblical records in Kings and Chronicles as well as the prophets. But God put the laws in place that the Judeans broke, and so by the idiom, God is said to have done the evil.

[For a more complete explanation of the idiom of permission, see commentary on Exod. 4:21.]

Jer 42:13

**“obey.”** The Hebrew text is “listen to,” which in this context means “obey.”

Jer 42:14

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet. It was blown during war.

Jer 42:18

**“and you will see this place no more.”** Or, “you will never see this place again.”

Jer 42:20

**“For you have deceived yourselves at the cost of your own lives.”** The Hebrew of this phrase is idiomatic and can be brought into English in different ways, as the great variety in the English versions shows. The essence of the verse is that the Judeans were deceiving themselves, or going astray, at the cost of their lives (their “souls”), e.g., “you have been behaving deceitfully, against your own interests” (CJB); “You have led your own selves astray” (HCSB); “you have gone astray at the cost of your lives” (ESV); “ye have dealt deceitfully against your own souls” (JPS); “You are making a fatal mistake” (NET); “you were hypocrites in your hearts” (NKJV); “ye have shewed yourselves perverse in your souls” (YLT).

Jer 42:22

**“know, yes, know.”** The Hebrew text repeats the verb “know” in different inflections (an infinitive and an imperfect), thus using the figure of speech polyptoton to emphasize the fact that Jeremiah was giving the people of Judah a dire warning and they better know it.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**Jeremiah Chapter 43**

Jer 43:2

**“Azariah the son of Hoshaiah.”** This is very likely the same man as Jezaniah (see commentary on Jer. 42:1).

Jer 43:6

**“the king’s daughters.”** This almost certainly did not refer to actual daughters of King Zedekiah, who would have been carried to Babylon along with the rest of Zedekiah’s immediate family, but rather it was a title for the women of the royal court (see commentary on Jer. 41:10).

Jer 43:7

**“and they went into the land of Egypt.”** They had always intended to go to Egypt (Jer. 41:17). Because of that, even though they had agreed to obey the voice of Yahweh whether His direction was something they wanted or did not want (Jer. 42:6), when Jeremiah opposed their plan they called him a liar (Jer. 43:2) and went to Egypt anyway.

**“the voice of Yahweh.”** It was the prophet who did the speaking, but the “voice” was Yahweh’s voice.

**“as far as Tahpanhes.”** The Judeans did not go very far into Egypt. Tahpanhes was on the northern border of Egypt in the northeastern Nile delta. It was a fortress city that protected the northeastern border of Egypt. It is generally thought to be the same as the Greek city of Daphne.

Jer 43:9

**“Pharaoh’s house in Tahpanhes.”** That is, Pharaoh’s “palace” in Tahpanhes. In Hebrew, the word “house” had many meanings. The “house” of a king was a palace, and the “house” of a god was a temple. It is not unusual that Pharaoh would have a palace in the fortress city that guarded his northeast border. Of course that would not be his main palace, which would have been in his capital city. Pharaoh likely had several palaces, as did most kings.

**“while the men of Judah watch.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “in the sight of the men of Judah,” but that could be confused to mean that the men of Judah could see the place where the stones were. But God said to hide the stones while the Judeans watched.

Jer 43:10

**“will set his throne on these stones.”** It makes sense that King Nebuchadnezzar would set his throne right at the entrance to the palace. It would establish his royal presence and authority where everyone could see it, but also not allow everyone into his royal palace.

**“he will spread his royal pavilion over them.”** So the Judeans’ plan to go to Egypt to escape Nebuchadnezzar would not work after all, whereas if they had obeyed the voice of Yahweh that Jeremiah spoke they would have lived and prospered.

Jer 43:11

**“the one who is *destined* for death to death.”** The noun “death” is masculine singular, and so while in this context it refers to either man or woman, the singular indicates that each person will get what they deserve; there is no collective judgment here. Some scholars think that “death” refers to death by plague or disease, but the Hebrew is simply “death,” and it could come by many different means.

Jer 43:12

**“He.”** Nebuchadnezzar. The “he” is preserved in the Septuagint, Syriac, and Latin texts, the change from “he” to “I” was apparently a copyist’s error that now shows up in the accepted Hebrew text. The “he” continues in the rest of the verse in the Hebrew text.

**“the houses of the gods.”** That is, the temples. A victor would burn the temples and carry the gods away captive to show that their own gods were superior to the gods of the conquered nation.

**“and he will burn them or carry them away captive.”** This is referring to the gods of Egypt. Some were wood and would be burned, while valuable gods made of gold, silver, etc., would be carried away captive. The burning of the temples is stated in Jeremiah 43:12. The belief in the gods, even the gods of other nations, was strong, and so the idols were not considered booty, but captives.

**“he will clean the land of Egypt as a shepherd cleans his garment of vermin.”** This translation follows definitions preferred in the *HALOT*[[29]](#footnote-12866) (cf. HCSB, ESV, NAB, NET, NLT, NRSV, RSV). Sheep and goats commonly got vermin like fleas and lice, and they would get on the shepherd’s body and clothing (which was often wool) when he handled them, and the shepherd would have to clean his clothing of them.

Jer 43:13

**“standing-stones.”** In the context of Egypt, the “standing-stones” were the obelisks, of which there were many in Heliopolis. In the rest of the Middle East, most standing-stones were natural stones, or slightly worked stones, that were set up as part of the worship of pagan gods. God commanded that they be destroyed. What is noteworthy here in Jeremiah 43:13 is that it is Nebuchadnezzar, not the forces of Yahweh, that destroy the obelisks in Egypt and burn the pagan temples. Rulers knew that people drew strength from relying on their gods, and if a foreign king could destroy a country’s gods then the people were more easily defeated and controlled. Nebuchadnezzar burned the Temple in Jerusalem for the same reason.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on idols being harmful, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

**“House of the Sun.”** The Hebrew is Beth-shemesh, but that means “the House of the Sun,” or, since “house” in this context can mean “temple,” it means “the Temple of the Sun.” There was also a Beth-shemesh in Judah (2 Kings 14:11), but that was a city. This “Beth-shemesh,” Temple of the Sun, was almost certainly in the city that is better known by its Greek name, Heliopolis, though it was called “On” (Gen. 41:45). Heliopolis was well-known for all the obelisks there, and of the many that were there, only one remains intact today.

**“the houses of the gods.”** That is, the temples of the gods.

**Jeremiah Chapter 44**

Jer 44:1

**“Egypt.”** This refers to what we today know as “Upper Egypt,” the northern Egypt that touched the Mediterranean Sea, and we can tell that by the towns associated with the name such as Tahpanhes, which is near the northeast border of Egypt. Also, the name “Pathros” refers to southern Egypt, the “Lower Egypt” that was deeper into the African continent.

Jer 44:4

**“rising up early and sending them.”** This is an idiom meaning to send again and again. The idea is that God rose up early and sent His prophets, and sent them over and over as the day progressed. The REV has kept the idiom but inserted the meaning of the idiom by adding “again and again” in italics. Thus the CSB has, “So I sent you all My servants the prophets time and time again.”

[For more on this idiom and where it occurs, see commentary on Jer. 26:5.]

**“hate.”** When God uses the word “hate” in this context, He does not mean that He has a “deep, enduring, intense emotion expressing animosity, anger, and hostility towards” what the people were doing.[[30]](#footnote-30377) He means He is disgusted and repulsed by what the people were doing.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate.”]

Jer 44:7

**“your own souls.”** Here equivalent to “yourselves” (see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul’”).

Jer 44:8

**“*Why do* you.”** The “Why do” is picked up from Jeremiah 44:7, because the force of the question is continued, but the run-on sentence is confusing in English.

Jer 44:15

**“Then all the men.”** The men speak to Jeremiah first, then the women speak up in Jeremiah 44:19 (see commentary on Jer. 44:19).

Jer 44:17

**“do, yes, do”** The Hebrew uses the word “do” two times for emphasis, using the verb in different cases, which is the figure of speech polyptoton. Thus the people demonstrate their commitment to serve other gods by the emphatic way that they spoke. This phrase is repeated twice in Jeremiah 44:25, where it is translated “perform, yes, perform.” The English translation is different because we “do” what we say we will, but we “perform” a vow.

**“the Queen of Heaven.”** Although there is some disagreement among scholars, it seems that the Queen of Heaven is the pagan goddess of love and fertility that is known by different names, such as Ashtoreth in Israel, Anat in the land of Canaan, and Ishtar in Mesopotamia. Although she had somewhat different characteristics and worship practices from place to place, she was basically the same goddess.

**“For then had we plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no evil.”** The people miss the point and are spiritually blind. They do not see that any good times in Judah were due to God’s continued blessing on Judah because of His covenant faithfulness, and that the evil that came upon them was due to their breaking the covenant they made with God. Also, they thought that the evil that came upon Judah was due to the weakness of Yahweh, and that He could not protect them from evil. They ignored the prophets who said over and over that their evil activities would bring disaster upon them, and that there would be horrific consequences for breaking their covenant with Yahweh.

Interestingly, the spiritual blindness of the people shows up in that they seem to think that if they had been more dedicated to the Queen of Heaven she could have protected them, which is why they say they want to continue worshiping her now. But there are problems with their logic. For one thing, that “Queen” did not protect them in Judah, which is obvious from the fact that Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians (who included Ishtar in their pantheon). Also, why would the people believe that not serving the Queen of Heaven fervently enough would have consequences but ignoring their covenant with Yahweh would not have consequences? That does not even make sense.

There is a powerful lesson here: stubborn, prideful people, and people who are possessed by demons or led by demons, do not think clearly and avoid obeying God. By their evil thoughts and actions they can, if they gain enough influence, even destroy a country. Israel and Judah were both destroyed for that very reason. Godly people must know God and the Bible well enough to recognize when they are being led astray from the One True God of Scripture and must take a stand against evil. As we can see from culture after culture that has been destroyed by demons, if godly people do not stop the downward trajectory of culture, it will go into ruin, which is a chief aim of the Devil and his people (cf. John 10:10).

Sadly, the way these idolatrous people will discover that the pagan goddess that they call the Queen of Heaven cannot help them is when they die by famine, sword, or plague. Similarly, the unbelieving and godless people on earth may scoff at Christianity now, but when they stand on the brink of the Lake of Fire they will sob and gnash their teeth, but it will be too late (cf. Matt. 13:49-50; Rev. 20:11-15). As the prophet Jonah pointedly said, “Those who pay regard to worthless idols forsake their own mercy” (Jon. 2:8). The everlasting death of unbelievers is one reason that Christians should try to convince the world about Jesus Christ, salvation, and everlasting life.

[For more on the annihilation of the unsaved, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Jer 44:19

**“*the women added*.”** The words “the women added” are demanded by the context because the women are obviously speaking here. The words are not in the Hebrew text, but they are in the Syriac version and a Septuagint text. Some scholars defend those texts and say the Hebrew text omits the words because of a scribal error, while other scholars believe the words were added to the other texts for clarification; it is not completely unusual for the Hebrew text to switch speakers without announcing that fact.

That the women spoke up in the confrontation with Jeremiah shows how adamant the people were about going to Egypt and resuming their sacrifices to the Queen of Heaven. The “Queen of Heaven” is also known as Ishtar, a Babylonian fertility goddess, and women had a major role in worshiping her. Fertility and having lots of children was very important to ancient society because of the mortality of babies and children who never reached adulthood, so we can see why Ishtar was popular with women. Ordinarily, the women stood silently watching while the men engaged in such confrontations. This shows that although women were usually quiet bystanders, they participated in certain rites and the worship of certain gods and goddesses.

Jer 44:21

**“that Yahweh remembered and that came up into his heart.”** This is a very idiomatic phrase. For Yahweh to “remember” what the Judeans did means He paid attention to them; they caught His attention (see commentary on Luke 23:42). That those things “came up into his heart” means they affected Him, they made an impact upon Him, as well they would have. Yahweh was the God who had delivered Israel for centuries by this time, yet the people were ignoring Him and giving credit for what He had done to an enemy goddess. Also, the word “heart” can mean “mind” in Hebrew, but although many English versions go that way, saying that the sins the people were committing came into the “mind” of God does not seem to have the strong emphasis that “heart” does in this context.

Jer 44:22

**“and a curse.”** This is not saying that Judah was cursed. It is saying that what happened in Judah was so well-known and proverbial that it was used in curses. For example, a person might curse someone else by saying, “May you become like Judah!”

Jer 44:24

**“including to all the women.”** The fact that the text adds “including to all the women” at this point shows that Jeremiah was especially addressing the women. The NET version picks up the sense well: “Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people, particularly to all the women.”

Jer 44:25

**“fulfill, yes, fulfill.”** Jeremiah repeats what the Judeans had said, using the same emphatic speech that they had used, employing the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Jer. 44:17).

**“Then confirm, yes, confirm your vows! And fulfill, yes, fulfill your vows!”** Here Jeremiah (and God!) sarcastically yields to the free will of the people. Neither Jeremiah nor God can keep the people from sinning if they want to sin. They will get the consequences that Jeremiah foretold would come upon them, but they did not believe Jeremiah had heard from God, and they obviously felt that the Queen of Heaven had more power to support and protect them than Yahweh did. They were wrong, of course, but they found that out just before they died, and by then it was too late to change the situation. That is similar to what will happen on Judgment Day. The people who rejected salvation all their lives and defied God will find out they were wrong, but it will be too late to prevent the consequences.

Jer 44:26

**“my name will no more be named.”** That is, no man of Judah in Egypt will any longer invoke the name of God in a promise or curse using “As the Lord Yahweh lives” as the anchor phrase to solemnify the promise or curse.

Jer 44:30

**“I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies.”** Pharaoh Hophra died in 570 BC (this date is disputed) while trying to retake his throne and quell a rebellion in Egypt. He was actually being supported by Babylon at the time, but the Egyptian rebels were strongly against him. So the death of Hophra would have been more than 15 years after this prophecy by Jeremiah, so the Judeans did not die in Egypt immediately, but they did over a period of years. The point is that they had wanted to move to Egypt temporarily and then return to Judah, but they never returned, they died in Egypt as the prophet had said.

**“This is what Yahweh says: Behold.”** Jeremiah 44:30 ends the events after the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah chapter 45 occurred some 20 years before Jeremiah 44.

**Jeremiah Chapter 45**

Jer 45:1

**“he wrote these words spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah.”** This shows how the book of Jeremiah was written: Jeremiah dictated to Baruch the scribe.

**“in the fourth year of Jehoiakim.”** That is likely 605 BC, but due to the fact that the Judean calendar that Jeremiah was using was based on the New Year beginning on Nisan 1, and the Judean year was different from our years, it could also have been 604 BC. So this event occurred somewhere between April 605 BC and April 604 BC. That means that Jeremiah 45 predates Jeremiah 44 by about 20 years (most likely 19 years).

Jer 45:5

**“Are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them!”** Baruch was a professional scribe and thus made a good living for himself. He wanted to better his life, but God told him not to get invested in material things. God foresaw the coming of the Babylonians and their destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, and that in that destruction Baruch would lose all he had built for himself. However, unlike the thousands who would die, God’s promise to Baruch was that he would stay alive.

There are many uncertainties in life, and wealth and possessions can disappear in an instant. In this life, God’s promise of everlasting life is the important thing that people should hold onto for their security.

**“your life I will give to you as the spoils of war.”** For more on this idiom, see commentary on Jeremiah 39:18.

**Jeremiah Chapter 46**

Jer 46:1

**“The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations.”** God called Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5). Although the great majority of Jeremiah’s prophecies were to the people of the Kingdom of Judah (the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been carried away before his lifetime), Jeremiah did prophesy to the nations, especially in Jeremiah 46-51.

Jeremiah’s prophecies to the nations show us that although Israel and Judah were of special interest to God, God is the One God, and is concerned about every person and every nation.

Although Jeremiah 46:2 was written after the Babylonian defeat at Carchemish, the prophecy in the rest of the chapter was not.

Jer 46:2

**“which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim.”** The Egyptians had controlled Palestine until their defeat at Carchemish (605 BC). After defeating the Egyptians, Nebuchadnezzar came to Judah and Jerusalem, which surrendered to him, and carried captives back to Babylon. Daniel was one of those first captives taken to Babylon in what is commonly called the “Babylonian Captivity.” The Babylonian Captivity was actually a series of captivities in which people were taken captive to Babylon. Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon in the second major wave of the Babylonian Captivity (see commentary on Ezek. 1:2).

This prophecy of Jeremiah points to how God can work in historical events and why we know that God is the Almighty God and can influence and reveal the future. The prophecy of Jeremiah from verse 3 onward was not given “after the fact,” after the Babylonians had defeated Egypt. There would have been no point to that, nor to the information in the chapter. Jeremiah 46:1-2 are an introduction so readers know what is coming in the chapter, but the prophecy starting in Jeremiah 46:3 is Jeremiah revealing a future event by revelation from God. Furthermore, this prophecy was not just “good guesswork” on the part of Jeremiah. People who wagered would have predicted Egypt to win the battle at Carchemish. Egypt was the larger nation and had what was apparently the more powerful army. They had come from Egypt all the way north to Carchemish because they were confident of victory. But they lost, and were soundly defeated, just as Jeremiah describes in the chapter.

**“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”** Jeremiah 46:2 is part of Jeremiah’s introduction to the prophecy that follows. When Jeremiah gave the body of the prophecy, before the battle between Egypt and Babylon at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar was not yet king, but was the crown prince. As it happened, the king, Nabopollassar, died that year and Nebuchadnezzar was the king when King Jehoiakim of Judah surrendered to him.

Jer 46:5

**“They are terrified.”** The Egyptian soldiers were terrified. They were soundly defeated by the Babylonians. However, that is not at first clear. From Jeremiah 46:3-10 it is not clear who the “they” is who are terrified and defeated. No doubt there were Judeans who would have been rooting for both sides. Pharaoh Neco had killed the godly king Josiah (2 Kings 23:29), so it seems many people would be hoping that Neco would be killed in battle. On the other hand, Pharaoh Neco had put the current king, King Jehoiakim on the throne (2 Kings 23:34), so it is likely that there would have been support for Neco in the royal court of Judah.

Beyond that, it is quite possible that there was some historical memory among the people that about 100 years earlier the prophet Isaiah had told King Hezekiah that the Babylonians would carry away both material things and human captives to Babylon (2 Kings 20:17-18), and that would only seem possible if Babylon won the battle. So for that reason, some people in Judah would have wanted Babylon to be defeated so they could not take captives back to Babylon.

Jer 46:6

**“by the Euphrates River.”** The Euphrates River is hundreds of miles north of Israel and runs through the country of Babylon.

Jer 46:7

**“the rivers whose waters toss.”** The “rivers” here are the rivers of the Nile, the various rivers and streams that feed the Nile (cf. Exod. 7:19). Thus, this is still a reference to Egypt.

Jer 46:8

**“I will rise up, I will cover the earth.”** As perhaps the most powerful nation in the Middle East at that time, Egypt was overconfident in its ability to conquer nations and territory. It boasted that it would be like the Nile at flood time, and rise up and cover the earth. This kind of megalomania is inspired by demons. Both Egypt and Babylon had plenty of land and resources to have a prosperous nation with cared-for people. Unnecessary wars like the one fought at Carchemish in 605 BC just end up killing and hurting a lot of innocent people. Truly, the Devil and his people only come to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).

Jer 46:9

**“Cush and Put...and the Ludim.”** “Cush” refers to Ethiopia. Also, although there is some debate, “Put” likely refers to Lybia in Africa and “Lud” to Lydia in Asia Minor. These nations were known to send mercenaries to help Egypt in war (cf. Ezek. 30:5; Nah. 3:9).

Jer 46:10

**“that day belongs to Yahweh.”** Yahweh did not inspire this war that killed so many, but once demons and people put it in action, He worked behind the scenes to bring His plan to pass and His prophecies to fulfillment.

**“that he may avenge himself on his adversaries.”** Many scholars believe that Yahweh considered Pharaoh Neco His adversary and worthy of vengeance due to Neco’s killing of the godly King Josiah, although he did warn Josiah (2 Chron. 35:20-24; 2 Kings 23:28-30) and then afflicting Judah by replacing King Jehoahaz and carrying him off into captivity and placing a heavy fine on Judah (2 Kings 23:30-35; 2 Chron. 36:1-4).

Jer 46:11

**“virgin daughter Egypt.”** The literal Hebrew is “virgin daughter of Egypt,” but the phrase is idiomatic. It refers to Egypt as a virgin daughter, which here refers to her inexperience and vulnerability (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Jer 46:14

**“Migdol...Tahpanhes.”** These are border cities in northeast Egypt that would be quickly affected and conquered by a Babylonian army coming from the northeast heading southwest into Egypt.

**“Memphis.”** Memphis was the key city in lower Egypt (northern Egypt). The three cities of Memphis, Migdol, and Tahpanhes would certainly be affected and likely conquered in a Babylonian attack.

Jer 46:15

**“bull.”** The Hebrew word can mean “bull” or “strong one.” The noun is plural, but this is most likely because it is a plural of majesty. The Septuagint reads “Apis,” which was the bull god of Egypt. It is quite possible that the Egyptians took a statue of Apis or a live bull representing Apis into the battle with them, just as Israel carried the ark of God into battle with them (cf. 1 Sam. 4:3-5).

**“It did not stand…pushed it”** The words “stand” and “it” are singular in the Hebrew text.

Jer 46:20

**“destruction out of the north.”** The Babylonians have come from the north.

Jer 46:21

**“will be like.”** The Hebrew text is written as if the events are currently going on, but it is a vision of the future, so the REV and many English versions use the future tense for clarity.

**“calves of the stall.”** The reference to calves of the stall means the hired men, the mercenaries hired by Egypt, were like fattened calves, unprepared to fight but ready for the slaughter. Fattened calves were often used as sacrifices on the altar because, in some of the offerings, only some parts of the animal were burned into smoke on the altar while other parts were eaten by the priests and the people.

Jer 46:22

**”Egypt.”** The Hebrew text is “she,” but it is referring to Egypt. The “sound” (the Hebrew word can also mean “voice”) that the snake makes while getting away is unclear. Some English versions read “hissing,” and that may be the meaning of the text, but snakes don’t usually hiss when they are escaping, they hiss when they are ready to strike. A snake moving quickly through dry grass makes a noise too.

**“they will march with an army.”** This refers to the Babylonians, who defeated Egypt in battle. Axes are good for killing snakes.

Jer 46:23

**“They will cut down her forest.”** Egypt’s army will be so numerous it will appear like a forest of people. It is also possible that the image of a forest is being used because of the spears and bows the army will carry, which will be so numerous that they will look like a forest. The use of the word “forest” in this context is an example of the figure of speech hypocatastasis, comparison by implication (for more on figures of comparison, see REV commentary on Rev. 20:2).

Jer 46:24

**“Daughter Egypt.”** The Hebrew is more literally “the daughter of Egypt,” but this is an idiom for “daughter Egypt” (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**“she will be given into the hand of the people of the north.”** The people of the north in this context are the Babylonians. The word-picture painted by this sentence is of the female victims of a conquering army, helpless in the situation, many of them sexually abused, separated from their families, and carried off into slavery. Actually, Nebuchadnezzar never conquered the country of Egypt, but he did “conquer” it as far as putting an end to its dominant influence and control in the Middle East, i.e., Sinai, Israel, Syria, etc. The conquest of Egypt proper was accomplished by the Persians.

Jer 46:25

**”Amon.”** The god Amon was the chief god of the city of Thebes, the capital city of Upper Egypt.

**“Pharaoh and those who trust in him.”** The Judeans had trusted in Egypt to help them against Babylon, but it only resulted in failure and destruction.

Jer 46:26

**“But afterward it will be inhabited, as in the days of old.”** The Bible foretells that Egypt will be restored in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules the earth (cf. Isa. 19:23-25).

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 46:27

**“and Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease, and no one will make him afraid.”** This prophecy will be fully fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom, when all the believers from Israel will be regathered to the Promised Land. There are many verses like Jeremiah 46:27 (see commentary Jer. 32:37). This future gathering of God’s people to the land of Israel (and it is still future!) will occur after the First Resurrection, the resurrection at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. That resurrection is spoken of in verses such as Ezekiel 37:11-13 and Revelation 20:4-6. Knowing that this return to Israel spoken about here in Jeremiah 46:27 is a return after believers have been raised from the dead solves the tension between promises such as this one and statements like are in Jeremiah 44:7-14, 27, which say that the people will not return to Israel. Jeremiah 44:7-14 and statements like them apply to Israelites who will not return to Israel in their mortal lifetime because they will die in exile, but if they are believers they will return to Israel after they are raised from the dead.

[For more information on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Jer 46:28

**“For I am with you.”** Jeremiah 46:28 is almost identical to Jeremiah 30:11.

**Jeremiah Chapter 47**

Jer 47:5

**“Baldness.”** The people in the East had many customs when it came to mourning the dead, and Jeremiah 47:5 mentions three of them: shaving the head (thus the “baldness”); having a time of silence; and cutting oneself. When it comes to baldness, for the sake of clarity the NIV translates it, “Gaza will shave their head in mourning.” Other verses that mention shaving the head in mourning for the dead include Isaiah 15:2; 22:12; Jeremiah 16:6, 48:37; Ezekiel 7:18, and Micah 1:16. Other signs of mourning include cutting off the beard (cf. Jer. 41:5), putting on sackcloth (cf. Jer. 48:37), having a time of silence (Jer. 47:5), and cutting oneself (see commentaries on Jer. 41:5 and 1 Kings 18:28). It was also customary for people to bring food and have a mourning feast (Jer. 16:5).

**“cut yourself.”** It was a pagan custom practiced by some people to cut yourself when you were in mourning for the dead. This custom was adopted by some Israelites even though it was forbidden by the Law (Deut. 14:1). This is mentioned in a number of verses.

[For more on cutting and self-mutilation, see commentary on 1 Kings 18:28. For the custom of shaving the head for the dead and some other customs associated with death, see commentary on Jer. 41:5.]

**Jeremiah Chapter 48**

Jer 48:1

**“Of Moab.”** Although Jeremiah was primarily a prophet to Judah, he was also a prophet “over the nations and over the kingdoms” (Jer. 1:10). So for that reason, and also because what happened in and to the other nations in the Middle East directly affected Judah, it is very appropriate that Jeremiah gave words of prophecy to other nations besides Judah. Jeremiah prophesied to Moab (Jer. 48); to Ammon (Jer. 49:1-6); to Edom (Jer. 49:7-22); to Damascus (Jer. 49:23-27); to Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor (Jer. 49:28-33); to Elam (Jer. 49:34-39); and to Babylon (Jer. 50:1-46; 51:1-58).

**“Nebo...Kiriathaim.”** These are towns that were originally built by the people of the tribe of Reuben (Num. 32:37-38), and Kiriathaim was specifically assigned to the tribe of Reuben (Josh. 13:19), but as Moab gained power in the Transjordan, those towns were taken from Reuben and were part of Moab, as we see here in Jeremiah 48:1 and in Isa. 15:2).

**“will be.”** This prophecy about Moab, like many of the prophecies in Jeremiah, is written in the Hebrew text from the perspective of the prophet Jeremiah, who is seeing the vision as happening or as what has already happened. God has taken Jeremiah in a vision into the future to see these things, and so he writes as if they were being done or were already done. Writing about the future as if it were the past is known as the “prophetic perfect.” Some versions of the Bible translate the Hebrew very literally and it seems like these events are past (cf. ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB), but that can confuse the modern reader, whereas the ancient Hebrew reader would not be confused. Many modern versions are like the REV and use the future tense because the events are actually future (cf. CSB, CEV, NCV, NET, NIV).

Jer 48:2

**“Heshbon.”** Heshbon is a town in the Transjordan (east of the Jordan River) near the border of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, so it is north of the area originally south of Israel but was conquered by Moab, and it was apparently a good place for an invading army to stop and plan for a move south.

**“O Madmen.”** The location of the town of Madmen is unknown. Jeremiah foretold it would be conquered by the sword.

Jer 48:3

**“Horonaim.”** Horonaim is a town in Moab that is further south than Nebo or Kiriathaim, so Jeremiah’s prophecy depicts an army moving from north to south through Moab, conquering and destroying. Moab was cut from east to west by deep gorges that went from the upper highlands of the Transjordan down to the Arabah and the Dead Sea. From Jeremiah 48:5 we get the idea that Horonaim was on down towards or in the Arabah while a sister city, Luhith, was on or near the top of the highlands to the east.

Jer 48:4

**“her little ones will cause a cry *of distress* to be heard.”** This is a heart-wrenching phrase, and we can picture the cry of little children as fathers and brothers are killed in war, the women are captured and raped, and the children are sometimes killed and sometimes carried off into servitude.

Jer 48:5

**“For by the ascent of Luhith....”** Jeremiah 48:5 is quite similar to Isaiah 15:5, written over 100 years earlier. Actually, there is a lot in Jeremiah about Moab that is similar to what is written by Isaiah (e.g., Jer. 48:5 is similar to Isa. 15:5; Jer. 48:29-30 is similar to Isa. 16:6; Jer. 48:31 is similar to Isa. 16:7; Jer. 48:32 is similar to Isa. 16:9; Jer. 48:33 is similar to Isa. 16:10; Jer. 48:34 is similar to Isa. 15:4; Jer. 48:37-38 is similar to Isa. 15:2-3; Jer. 48:43-44 is similar to Isa. 24:17-18. Also, Jeremiah 48:45-46 is very similar to Numbers 21:28-29, which had been written many hundreds of years earlier.[[31]](#footnote-17111)

Jer 48:6

**”Juniper bush in the desert.”** The juniper bush is mentioned in Jeremiah 17:6. The juniper bush is a hardy bush that can survive lots of heat and low rainfall, but it would not be considered a “prosperous,” leafy bush, nor does it produce nice fruit like the fig, date palm, or pomegranate tree. The prophecy is more or less saying, “Flee, save your lives! You can survive, but life will be difficult and you will not prosper” (also, for more on the juniper bush see commentary on Jer. 17:6).

Jer 48:7

**“and Chemosh will go out into captivity.”** It was a common custom for a conquering nation to take back home with them the gods of the defeated nation (cf. Isa. 46:1-2; Jer. 48:7; 49:3; Hos. 10:5; Dan. 11:8; see commentary on Hos. 10:5).

Jer 48:11

**“he has settled on his lees and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel.”** Here in Jeremiah 48:11, Moab is compared by the figure of speech hypocatastasis to old wine that has been ignored by the vintner, who did not complete what should be done in order to make the wine good. As the wine ferments, “lees” (the waste product of the yeast as it makes alcohol) sink to the bottom of the vessel. The lees smell and taste bad. The way to separate the wine from the lees is to carefully pour the wine from the fermentation vessel into another vessel, being careful not to stir up the lees. The implication of the figure is that Moab has not taken the time or effort to do what it takes to become “good wine,” a good and godly people. They are bad wine, and they stink. Like bad wine, they need to be thrown out, destroyed.

[For more on the figure hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

Jer 48:13

**“Chemosh.”** This was the chief god of Moab. Sadly, Solomon built a shrine to Chemosh on the Mount of Olives east of Mount Zion and the Temple of Yahweh (1 Kings 11:7). It was part of the reason the Bible says that Solomon did evil in God’s eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

**“ashamed of Bethel.”** Bethel was a main religious site in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the place of one of the golden calves that the Israelites worshiped (1 Kings 12:28-29). That “god” did not help them, and the Northern Kingdom, Israel, was destroyed by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:6). Because their gods could not help them, Bethel was ashamed, and Moab will be ashamed for the same reason.

Jer 48:15

**“will be laid waste.”** Jeremiah 48:15 uses the prophetic perfect—the Hebrew text is literally written in the past tense, but it idiomatically portrays a future event.

Jer 48:29

**“We have heard of the pride of Moab.”** This is very similar to Isaiah 16:6 (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:31

**“So I will wail for Moab.”** This is similar to Isaiah 16:7, written over 100 years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:32

**“With more than the weeping of Jazer.”** This is similar to Isaiah 16:9, written over 100 years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:33

**“Gladness and joy is taken away.”** Jeremiah 48:33 is similar to Isaiah 16:10, which was written over 100 years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:34

**“From the cry of Heshbon even to Elealeh, even to Jahaz.”** Jeremiah 48:34 is similar to Isaiah 15:4, which was written over 100 years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:35

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

Jer 48:36

**“Therefore my heart sounds for Moab like pipes.”** Jeremiah 48:36 is similar to Isaiah 16:11, which was written over 100 years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:37

**“every head is shaved bald.”** Jeremiah 48:37 portrays tremendous mourning in Moab, a nation just east of the Dead Sea, and has four ways of mourning for the dead; Isaiah 15:2 is also about Moab mourning, and has two of these four. One is shaving the head (see commentary on Jer. 47:5). Another is for a man to cut off his beard (cf. Jer. 41:5). Another is to cut oneself—self-mutilation (see commentaries on Jer. 41:5 and 1 Kings 18:28). The last is to put on sackcloth, a very coarse and uncomfortable cloth that was put on as a sign of grief or mourning (cf. Ezek. 7:18, which also mentions shaving the head). Jeremiah 48:37-38 has a lot in common with Isaiah 15:2-3, which was written over 100 years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:43

**“Fear and the pit and the snare are upon you.”** Jeremiah 48:43-44 is very similar to Isaiah 24:17-18, which was written over 100 years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

Jer 48:45

**“for a fire has gone out of Heshbon.”** Jeremiah 48:45-46 is very similar to Numbers 21:28-29, which had been written many hundreds of years earlier (see commentary on Jer. 48:5).

**Jeremiah Chapter 49**

Jer 49:1

**“Milcom.”** Milcom was the chief god of the Ammonites. The Israelite tribe of Gad settled in the Transjordan, the area east of the Jordan River (Josh. 13:8, 24-28). Thus, the eastern border of Gad was the western border of Ammon. By the time of Jeremiah, the Northern Kingdom of the Ten Tribes of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians and deported (2 Kings 17:5-6, 18-20, 24), and so the Ammonites and their gods moved into the area that Gad had occupied.

Jer 49:2

**“her daughters.”** The phrase “her daughters” is an idiomatic use of language referring to the daughter cities of Rabbah, the capital of Ammon. The daughter cities are the cities supported by the capital city. This verse is not speaking about burning the women of Ammon, but cities in it.

Jer 49:3

**“Milcom will go into captivity.”** It was a common custom for a conquering nation to take back home with them the gods of the defeated nation (cf. Isa. 46:1-2; Jer. 48:7; Hos. 10:5; Dan. 11:8; see commentary on Hos. 10:5).

Jer 49:19

**“who is the shepherd.”** The word “shepherd” here is being used for kings and leaders. What king or leader can stand against God?

[For more on leaders being called “shepherds,” see commentary on Jer. 2:8.]

Jer 49:28

**“Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor.”** Not much is known about Kedar and the “kingdoms” of Hazor. They were likely tribal groups in Arabia. Since “Hazor” is related to the Hebrew word for “enclosed space,”[[32]](#footnote-28924) it is not unusual that there are a number of cities that are named Hazor in the Middle East, but this Hazor seems to be some kind of confederation of tribes or cities. “The Babylonian Chronicle records Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on Arab tribes and his taking plunder during the year before his invasion of Judah in 597 [BC].”[[33]](#footnote-23025)

Jer 49:31

**“bars.”** The “bars” were strong wooden beams that were placed behind the doors of the gate so they could not be opened and could withstand pounding from the outside without giving way. Those bars were the origin of the shout “Bar the doors!” when an enemy would approach.

Jer 49:33

**“Hazor.”** This refers to a Hazor in Arabia, not the commonly known Hazor that is in the territory of the tribe of Naphtali.

**Jeremiah Chapter 50**

Jer 50:2

**“Bel...Merodach.”** “Bel” is another name for Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, and Merodach is another spelling of Marduk. So this is a repetition for emphasis. The top god of Babylon will fail to protect the Babylonians when their destruction comes at the hands of the Persians (Dan. 5), which at the time Jeremiah was writing was decades away (70 years after Babylon destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem).

**“Her images.”** That is, Babylon’s images. Marduk was male, so “her images” refers to the images and idols in Babylon.

Jer 50:3

**“both man and animal.”** This is a hyperbolic statement, but it makes the point that Babylon will be completely conquered.

Jer 50:4

**“the children of Israel will come, they and the children of Judah together.”** This is a very important verse for understanding the actual history of “Israel” (meaning the united kingdom composed of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah). Although national Judah returned from the Babylonian Captivity, there were Israelites in the mix. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria, and scattered around its kingdom and borders (2 Kings 17:6; 1 Chron. 5:26). So when the Babylonians (in league with the Medes) finally fought the last battle with Assyria and thus conquered it in 609 BC (there had been a series of battles that lasted more than ten years), what had been Assyria was now Babylonia. So when “Judah” returned from Babylon to rebuild the Temple, there were some true Israelites among them (see also Jer. 51:5).

Jer 50:6

**“their shepherds have caused them to go astray.”** “Their shepherds” were the leaders; religious leaders, political leaders, and popular leaders, that led them in the worship of idols and in many other things that were in disobedience to the laws of Yahweh.

[For more on “shepherds” being leaders, see commentary on Jer. 2:8.]

Jer 50:7

**“We are not guilty, because they have sinned against Yahweh.”** Even the enemies of Judah knew that the Judeans had sinned against their God, Yahweh, and because of that the enemies thought that they were not guilty of the crimes they had committed. That is false and harmful logic. Just because one group sins does not give another group (or nation) the right to attack them, as there are numerous sins and atrocities associated with war and conquest (see Jer. 50:14). We know that Judah sinned against Yahweh and we know that they were conquered by Babylon because of it, but then later Babylon was conquered also; by the Persians.

Jer 50:15

**“will fall...will be thrown down.”** Although the Hebrew text is written in the past tense, Jeremiah is seeing this as a vision of the future. This is a grammatical form known as the prophetic perfect. The REV and some other versions put this in the future tense so it does not confuse the reader.

Jer 50:16

**“Cut off the sower from Babylon.”** The idea is, “Do not let anyone sow or reap in Babylon.” Babylon will be attacked and conquered by the Persians, and so there will not be anyone to plant or reap. Some versions replace “cut off” with “kill,” and read, “Kill the sower,” but although the phrase “cut off” can mean “kill” it likely does not mean that here or else the people would not be alive to flee and go back to their homeland. “Cut off” can mean “stop” or “put an end to” and that is most likely its meaning here.

**“everyone will return to his people.”** Babylon had conquered many nations including Judah, and those people were now sowing and reaping in Babylon. But when Babylon is being attacked and conquered, those conquered people will flee and return to their homeland.

Jer 50:18

**“as I have punished the king of Assyria.”** Assyria was punished by being conquered by Babylon, now Babylon will be punished by being conquered by Persia.

Jer 50:19

**“I will bring Israel again to his pasture...and his soul will be satisfied.** Although many people of Judah did return from the Babylonian Captivity, the majority of the people did not return, and “Israel” did not return from their captivity by the Assyrians although some Israelites had moved to Judah and were carried away to Babylon. So the return from Babylon did not fulfill this prophecy. Many verses of Scripture testify that when Jesus Christ conquers the earth, Israel will be restored and the people of “Israel” (including Israel and Judah) will be regathered (see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth,” and commentary on Jer. 32:37).

**“Carmel...Bashan.”** These are two areas that were known to be lush or good for pasture; Carmel in central Israel and Bashan in Transjordan (east of the Jordan River).

**“Ephraim...Gilead.”** “Ephraim” is central in the Promised Land, and Gilead was good grazing and quite central in the Transljordan.

Jer 50:21

**“Merathaim...Pekod.”** These are towns in Babylon, picked because of their names and used in reference to the whole of the country of Babylon. “Merathaim” means “Double Rebellion” and “Pekod” means “Punishment.”

**“devote them to destruction.”** That is, devote them as an offering to Yahweh and destroy them.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

Jer 50:26

**“devote her to destruction.”** That is, devote her as an offering to Yahweh and destroy her.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

Jer 50:27

**“bulls.”** In this context, the “bulls” of Babylon are the strong male leaders, similar to the way “cows” were women in Amos 4:1.

**“the time of their visitation.”** When God “visits” someone it can be for good or bad, for reward or punishment. Here it is punishment (for more on “visits,” see commentary on Exod. 20:5).

Jer 50:30

**“brought to silence.”** A euphemistic way of saying the men will be killed.

Jer 50:34

**“rest to the land.”** That is, rest to the land of Israel, which is sometimes referred to as “the land.” The context lets us know that “the land” is Israel because when Babylon is destroyed then the land of Israel will have rest.

Jer 50:37

**“become as women.”** That is, they will be basically defenseless against the powerful male aggressors who come against them.

Jer 50:38

**“and they go mad because of.”** When we take an honest look at what people did because of their idols, hard service, unreasonable demands (like killing your children), and the very fact that they are “obeying” an object of wood or stone that they themselves have made, it is madness; insanity. It is religion directed and empowered by demons.

**“idols that cause terror.”** A more literal reading is “because of their Terrors,” but “terrors” is a metonymy for the idols that cause terror (by the atrocities they demand, the evil predictions they make, and the fact that they lead to everlasting death). In this case, the clearer English reading, “idols that cause terror,” is helpful, although “the idols that are terrors” would be good also.

Jer 50:39

**“it will not be lived in from generation to generation.”** The prophet Isaiah had said the same basic thing about Babylon some 200 years earlier (Isa. 13:20). In fact, there is much in Isaiah 13 about Babylon that is the same basic message as here in Jeremiah 50.

Jer 50:41

**“a people comes from the north.”** The Persians will come from the north and conquer Babylon. But the “Persians” had conquered nations before they conquered Babylon, so the army that came against Babylon was a mixed group with people from many kingdoms, especially Media.

Jer 50:42

**“daughter Babylon.”** For the translation and meaning of “daughter Babylon,” see the REV commentary on Isaiah 1:8.

Jer 50:44

**“like a lion from the pride of the Jordan.”** Until modern times, the banks of the Jordan River were heavily forested and many wild animals lived in the Jordan River forest, including lions. The lions became extinct in Israel during the Roman times because so many of them were captured and used in gladiator games, and the Jordan forest was cut down and killed off in modern times to keep enemy soldiers from the nations of Syria and Jordan from coming into Israel.

**“who is the shepherd.”** The word “shepherd” here is being used for kings and leaders. What king or leader can stand against God?

[For more on leaders being called “shepherds,” see commentary on Jer. 2:8.]

Jer 50:46

**“her cry.”** Babylon’s cry of distress and anguish when she is captured will be heard among the nations. Babylon had ruled over many nations, and when she is conquered those nations will hear her cry of anguish.

**Jeremiah Chapter 51**

Jer 51:1

**“against those who lift up their heart against me.”** The Hebrew text has the word “Lebkamai,” (spelled differently in various English versions; e.g., ASV: “Leb-Kamai” or CSB: Leb-qamai”). In this case, the Hebrew text is using a code word for the Babylonians. John Goldingay explains: “MT’s [the Masoretic Hebrew text] expression comes from substituting the Hebrew equivalent of ABC by ZYX; thus *ksdym* (Chaldeans) becomes *lbqmy*…. Jeremiah then provides these consonants with some vowels, generating a phrase that makes a point about Babylon. ...The letters of that phrase (*lbqmy*) are a reverse paronomasia on the name Chaldeans…. But in addition...the letters can be vocalized so that *those who rise against me* makes another comment on Babylon’s offensiveness and on the reason for bringing catastrophe upon it.”[[34]](#footnote-15525)

Jer 51:2

**“who will winnow her, and they will empty her land.”** In a usual cultural context, this statement does not make sense. Normally, winnowing was the process that separated the grain from the chaff by throwing the threshed grain into the air. Then the wind would carry the light chaff away and the heavier round grain would fall to the ground in piles and be gathered up to be sieved and then ground into flour. But in this case, the winnowing leaves nothing behind and the land is “empty.” Both the chaff and the grain are gone. The apparent problem is cleared up by reading the context, specifically Jeremiah 51:1, in which Yahweh says, “Behold, I will raise up a destroying wind against Babylon.” So in this context, the reason that the winnowing empties the land is that the wind is a “destroying wind,” a gale, that blows both the grain and the chaff away.

Jer 51:3

**“Do not let the archer bend his bow.”** The enemies of Babylon—primarily the Persians—were to attack Babylon so hard and fast that the Babylonians had no time to even prepare to defend themselves. The archers were not to have time to string their bows, nor soldiers have time to put on their armor.

**“devote to destruction.”** That is, devote them to Yahweh as an offering and destroy them.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

Jer 51:5

**“For Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah.”** When the Persians allowed Judah to return from the Babylonian Captivity, some true Israelites returned with them (see commentary on Jer. 50:4).

Jer 51:7

**“a gold cup.”** A gold cup would be beautiful and apparently valuable, but was actually deceptive and resulted in ruin. Although the text does not indicate why “Babylon” was a gold cup that made people drunk, there is a good possibility that it had something to do with idolatry, sexual practices, and the killing of innocent people that was practiced, promoted, and promulgated during the Babylonian empire. That would fit with why in Revelation 17:4-6 Babylon is called “the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth” (Rev. 17:5).

Jer 51:8

**“perhaps she may be healed.”** This suggestion goes against the other prophecies in Jeremiah that Babylon’s destruction is certain. It also goes against the context (see Jer. 51:9). It is therefore almost certainly sarcasm.[[35]](#footnote-15653)

Jer 51:9

**“We would have healed Babylon.”** This would have been spoken by the foreign captives who were in Babylon, who, when Babylon could not be healed, made the choice to return to their homelands.

**“for her judgment reaches to heaven.”** The extent of God’s judgment on Babylon and the punishment she receives is extensive, hyperbolically even reaching into the sky.

Jer 51:10

**“Yahweh has brought forth our vindication.”** The speaker has now shifted, and this is now the Judean exiles in Babylon who are speaking and saying Yahweh has vindicated them by the destruction of Babylon. The word “vindicated” is more literally “righteousness,” with the idea that Judah’s righteousness was revealed by what happened to Babylon, but that does not bring forth the meaning of the text as clearly as “vindication.” Some versions read that Yahweh has “shown forth our righteousness” (cf. DBY, GNV), or “brought our righteousness to light” (Jubilee Bible 2000).

Jer 51:11

**“the kings of the Medes.”** Media was one of the powerful countries in the Middle East during the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires, and it occupied territory north of those kingdoms. The extent and growth of the Median Empire is debated and hard to determine—in fact, much about the Median Empire is hard to determine—because unlike the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and many other ancient kingdoms, the Medes left no official records. What we know about them primarily comes from what was written about them by the countries they had contact with, especially the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Greeks. Nevertheless, they were a powerful empire and were closely related to the Persians. Persia had been a subjugated province of Media for years, but the Persians conquered Media around 550 BC. The website Wikipedia notes: “In 550 BC, Cyrus [the Persian] finally won a decisive victory [against Media] resulting in [the Median King] Astyages’ capture by his own dissatisfied nobles, who promptly turned him over to the triumphant Cyrus. After Cyrus’ victory against Astyages, the Medes were subjected to their close kin, the Persians. In the new empire they retained a prominent position; in honour and war, they stood next to the Persians; [and] their court ceremony was adopted by the new sovereigns, who in the summer months resided in Ecbatans: and many noble Medes were employed as officials, satraps, and generals.”[[36]](#footnote-23264)

About 200 years before the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon, during the time that the Assyrians were the major power in the Middle East, Isaiah the prophet foretold that the Medes would have a part in the destruction of Babylon (Isaiah 13:17-19; see commentary on Isa. 13:17).

Media is mentioned a number of times in Scripture. In 2 Kings 17:6 and 18:11, the Assyrians are said to have deported the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the cities of the Medes. Ezra 6:2 mentions “Achmetha...the palace that is in the [Persian] province of Media.” Esther 1:19 and Daniel 6:8, 12, and 6:15 mention the laws of the Medes and the Persians. Jeremiah 25:25 says the wrath of God will fall on many nations, including the Medes. In Daniel 5:28, that the kingdom of Babylon would be given to the Medes and Persians was part of the message that God wrote on the wall of Belshazzar’s banquet hall. There were Jews from Media who came to the Day of Pentecost and heard the apostles speak in tongues in the language of the Medes (Acts 2:9).

Jer 51:12

**“Yahweh has both purposed and done what he spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon.”** God had given many prophecies that Babylon would be destroyed, and had even said it would happen after Judea had been captive 70 years (Jer. 25:11-14).

Jer 51:13

**“You who dwell on many waters.”** The primary meaning of “many waters” here in Jeremiah seems to be literal, because Babylon did have many rivers and canals. The mighty Euphrates River went right through the city of Babylon, and Babylon also had a very extensive canal system to take water around the city and surrounding area (cf. Ps. 137:1).

However, there is almost certainly another meaning as well, and that is that the “many waters” are people and nations. This meaning shows up to a certain degree in the Old Testament, but is explicitly stated in the Book of Revelation. The angel said to the Apostle John: “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute that sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality, and those who live on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality” (Rev. 17:1-2). This “prostitute” is further identified as “BABYLON THE GREAT. THE MOTHER OF THE PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Rev. 17:5). Then in Revelation 17:15 the angel speaking with John identifies the “many waters and says, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and languages.” This identification of the “many waters,” or the “sea,” being masses of people can be confirmed from the Old Testament (Dan. 7:2-3, cf. Isa. 17:12-13. Also see Rev. 13:1).

Jer 51:19

**“Jacob’s Portion.”** God uses this title of Himself. Yahweh is the God of Israel; He is all they need, He is their portion. This name for God is also used in Jeremiah 10:16 (cf. Ps. 73:26).

Jer 51:24

**“Before your *very* eyes.”** That is, before the eyes of Israel. The subject has changed from Jeremiah 51:23, and the subject is plural and refers to Israel.

Jer 51:30

**“her bars are broken.”** The “bars” were strong wooden beams that were placed behind the doors of the gate so they could not be opened and could withstand pounding from the outside without giving way. Those bars were the origin of the shout “Bar the doors!” when an enemy would approach. “Her bars are broken” means that her gates can be easily opened, the city cannot withstand an attack.

Jer 51:37

**“hissing.”** Hissing in derision or disgust is common among humans, and it was a custom in the Old Testament world, which is why Babylon, a center of evil, would be hissed at when it was destroyed. Today we hiss at the villain in a movie or play.

Jer 51:39

**“drinking-banquet.”** The Hebrew word can mean “drinking bout,” and it generally refers to a meal with wine. This would have been a huge meal with lots of wine and likely beer as well. The Hebrew word is generally translated as “banquet” in the REV.

Jer 51:51

**“the sanctuaries of Yahweh’s house.”** The Hebrew word translated as “sanctuaries” in the phrase, “the sanctuaries of Yahweh’s house” clearly seem to refer to the Temple courts that surround the Temple. The Hebrew word is *miqdash*, sometimes spelled *miqqedash* (#04720 מִקְדָּשׁ ,מִקְּדָשׁ). and it means “holy place, sanctuary.” Of course, a number of different places can be referred to as holy places, so the culture and context is the best way to determine the meaning in any given verse. The word clearly seems to refer to the Temple courts in Psalm 68:35; 73:17; and here in Jeremiah 51:51).

Jer 51:58

**“So the peoples will labor for nothing.”** The last sentence in Jeremiah 51:58 is very similar to Habakkuk 2:13, but the context in Habakkuk is much less clear and it is not stated who the people and nations are who will work to no effect. Here in Jeremiah it is clear that it is Babylon and the nations allied with her that labor for nothing and will be fuel for the fire. Although some scholars argue over whether Habbakuk copied from Jeremiah or Jeremiah copied from Habakkuk (who is believed by conservative scholars to be earlier than Jeremiah), or whether they both copied from an earlier source, there is no reason to believe that either prophet copied from another source. God spoke to both prophets, so there is no reason to doubt that is what happened here. It is known and believed by godly men and women that ungodly people labor and toil on earth to no effect. Ungodly people and the works of ungodly people will be destroyed, and this is stated in many places in the Bible and stated in many different ways. That Jeremiah and Habakkuk state it in very similar ways just emphasizes that truth.

Jer 51:59

**“when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign.”** There is no record of this trip in 2 Kings, in 2 Chronicles, or in Jeremiah—this is the only place in Scripture where it is mentioned. Because of that, there are scholars who say the record is made up. But there is no reason to believe that, and actually it makes perfect sense that Nebuchadnezzar would want Zedekiah to visit Babylon. The previous two kings of Judah, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, had both rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:1-11) and so it makes sense that after Zedekiah reigned for four years that Nebuchadnezzar would want to see Zedekiah face to face in order to personally evaluate their relationship. Nebuchadnezzar had set Zedekiah on the throne (2 Kings 24:17) and changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah, which indicated that there was some kind of covenant between them. So it would have been in those early peaceful years of Zedekiah’s reign that he was summoned to Babylon, and one of the top men to go with Zedekiah was Seraiah, the chief quartermaster.

**“chief quartermaster.”** The Hebrew is more literally, the “official of rest,” and scholars are not sure what that refers to, hence the large number of translations in the English versions. Whatever the official duties of Seraiah were, he was important enough to travel with the king to Babylon, and he was a faithful believer, which is why Jeremiah charged him with throwing the prophecy about Babylon’s destruction into the Euphrates River at Babylon (Jer. 51:61-64).

**Jeremiah Chapter 52**

Jer 52:1

**“Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.”** This is not Jeremiah the prophet, who was from Anathoth.

Jer 52:4

**“And in the ninth year of his reign.”** This event and chronology are in 2 Kings 25:1-4 and in Jeremiah 39:1-2 and 52:4-5. The siege of Jerusalem took from the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:1; Jer. 39:1; 52:4) to the ninth day of the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:2-3; Jer. 39:2; 52:6-7). So the siege of Jerusalem took about 18 months.

**“They built a siege wall around it.”** The siege wall the Babylonians built around Jerusalem is mentioned in 2 Kings 25:1, Jeremiah 52:4, and Ezekiel 17:17. It was a common practice for an army to build a wall that surrounded the city that they were attacking to keep the enemy from escaping and to keep weapons and supplies from being smuggled into the city (see commentary on 1 Kings 25:1).The famine in Jerusalem was in part caused by this siege wall (Jer. 52:6).

Jer 52:6

**“In the fourth month.”** Cf. 2 Kings 25:3.

Jer 52:7

**“Then a breach was made in the city.”** This verse is very similar to 2 Kings 25:4 (see commentary on 2 Kings 25:4).

Jer 52:8

**“But the army of the Chaldeans.”** See 2 Kings 25:5.

**“Zedekiah.”** The record in 2 Kings 25:5 has “him,” not “Zedekiah.”

Jer 52:9

**“Then they took the king.”** Cf. 2 Kings 25:6.

**“and he pronounced judgment.”** The “he” would be Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon.

Jer 52:10

**“The king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah.”** Cf. 2 Kings 25:7.

Jer 52:12

**“in the tenth day of the month.”** 2 Kings 25:8 says the seventh day of the month. One of the two dates is a copyist’s error, but it is unclear which date is wrong.

Jer 52:13

**“the house of Yahweh.”** Cf. 2 Kings 25:9. The house of Yahweh is the Temple. The burning of the Temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar’s army is mentioned in 2 Kings 25:9; 2 Chron. 36:19, and Jeremiah 52:13.

**“every great house.”** The “great houses,” the large and magnificent houses, are mentioned separately because they might normally be spared, especially if Nebuchadnezzar planned to have an administrative center in Jerusalem.

Jer 52:14

**“All the army of the Chaldeans.”** Cf. 2 Kings 25:10.

Jer 52:17

**“the pillars of bronze that were in the house of Yahweh.”** Cf. 1 Kings 7:15-22.

**“the bronze sea.”** Cf. 1 Kings 7:23-26.

**“the stands.”** The stands were the stands that all the washing basins were set in (1 Kings 7:27; cf. 2 Kings 25:13).

Jer 52:18

**“the pots”** Cf. 1 Kings 7:45.

**“the sprinkling bowls.”** Cf. 1 Kings 7:40.

Jer 52:19

**“the sprinkling bowls.”** Cf. 1 Kings 7:40.

**“whatever was of gold, as gold, and whatever was of silver, as silver.”** The idea was that whatever was of gold was taken away as gold, and the same with silver. So the Babylonians took away all the gold and silver before they burned Jerusalem to the ground. If they hadn’t, the gold and silver would have just melted into the ground. Compare the shorter list in 2 Kings 25:15.

Jer 52:20

**“the 12 bronze bulls.”** This is an addition to the list in 2 Kings 25:16. King Ahaz had taken the Sea off of the bulls (2 Kings 16:17), but what he did with the bulls we are not told. He must not have destroyed them because they are listed here.

Jer 52:24

**“Chief Priest.”** This is the same position as the High Priest (cf. 2 Kings 25:18).

Jer 52:25

**“and seven men.”** 2 Kings 25:19 says “five men,” and there is no known reason for the difference.

**“Who See The King’s Face.”** This is a title for the close advisors to the king (see commentary on 2 Kings 25:19).

**“present in the city.”** The Hebrew text reads “found in the city,” but the use of “found” is idiomatic. The people were not necessarily hiding, they were still present in the city when the Babylonian officials came into the city.

1. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-21957)
2. Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-12314)
3. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 8:42. [↑](#footnote-ref-16918)
4. Cf. *HALOT* and Holladay. [↑](#footnote-ref-31252)
5. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17605)
6. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-28407)
7. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 8:103. [↑](#footnote-ref-20782)
8. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-25326)
9. Cf. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-27691)
10. Koehler and Baumgartner,  *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15708)
11. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-12966)
12. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16606)
13. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-22436)
14. *The Jerusalem Report* 30, no. 13 (Tamuz 5, 5779/July 8, 2019): 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-16831)
15. Horatio B. Hackett, *Illustrations of Scripture*, chap. 1, para. “Salt Deserts,” Kindle. [↑](#footnote-ref-31077)
16. William Hollady, *Jeremiah*, Hermeneia. [↑](#footnote-ref-26713)
17. *Strong’s Lexicon*; BDB. [↑](#footnote-ref-12595)
18. NET First Edition text note on J. P. Hyatt, *Exodus*, New Century Bible Commentary, 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-14501)
19. Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-21714)
20. Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 247-248 and footnote 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-10701)
21. Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-29118)
22. *The Jerusalem Report* 30, no. 13 (Tamuz 5, 5779/July 8, 2019): 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-27699)
23. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 8:206-207. [↑](#footnote-ref-30276)
24. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 286-293, “antanaclasis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20134)
25. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Jeremiah*, 8:266. [↑](#footnote-ref-17067)
26. Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, s.v. Jer. 30:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-31164)
27. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 731, app. XVI, “List of Old Testament Passages Messianically Applied in Ancient Rabbinic Writings.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13894)
28. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 538. [↑](#footnote-ref-16079)
29. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12866)
30. *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, s.v. “hatred.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30377)
31. Also see John Goldingay, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 850-852. [↑](#footnote-ref-17111)
32. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28924)
33. John Goldingay, The Book of Jeremiah, NICOT, p. 892. [↑](#footnote-ref-23025)
34. John Goldingay, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 930-932. [↑](#footnote-ref-15525)
35. John Goldingay, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT], 933. [↑](#footnote-ref-15653)
36. Wikipedia, “Medes,” accessed June 6, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medes. [↑](#footnote-ref-23264)