



The Life Setting of Jeremiah

The book of Isaiah ends in Isaiah chapter 66 with these words: *“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word”* (Isaiah 66:2).

God is on the lookout for a man who will be quiet enough to get a message from Him, brave enough to preach it and honest enough to live it. Jeremiah is such the man. His prophesy picks up some 50 years after that of Isaiah. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah’s ministry is focused on Israel’s southern kingdom of Judah, particularly in Jerusalem. Specifically, Jeremiah began his ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah’s reign in Judah (1:2) and it continues “until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month” (1:3). Jeremiah will experience everything Isaiah predicated about the exile of Judah. No other prophet in the Old Testament will suffer persecution for his message to the extent of Jeremiah. Or, at least no other prophet will have his suffering so graphically depicted in the Scriptures.

The historical background for the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry is found in 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34 and 35. In these chapters we learn that King Josiah was eight years old when he became king so if we do the math, he was 21 years old when Jeremiah began his prophecies, *“in the thirteenth year of his reign”* (Jeremiah 1:2). Josiah in the eighteenth year of his reign initiated a building renovation program for the temple in Jerusalem that was in disrepair. As the renovations began on the temple, the high priest Hilkiah, finds the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord. A man named Shaphan reads it to Josiah for the first time. When Josiah heard the

words of the book of the law he tore his clothes, a symbol of mourning and repentance of Jews in the Old Testament. Josiah was humble, contrite and trembled at the word of God.

The sad reality of the 2 Kings 22 account is this appears to be the first time King Josiah ever heard the word of God. The ramifications of this are critical to our understanding of Jeremiah's prophesy and the message he is to deliver to the house of Judah. Their spiritual condition is a direct result of not knowing or hearing, not even having the word of God in their lives.

Josiah's building reform program becomes a revival of the word of God. Second Kings 23, tells us that after Josiah heard the word of God, he called everyone in Jerusalem to gather together and he made a covenant before the Lord, *"to walk after the Lord and keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book"* (2 Kings 23:3). Tragically, Josiah is killed shortly after in battle. His reforms while necessary and good, were ultimately too little, too late to stop Judah's downward progression of sin and God's judgment for it.

This is the life setting Jeremiah is called to speak into. For Jeremiah this calling was placed upon him by God, before he was even born (Jeremiah 1:5). God has called Jeremiah to be *"a prophet to the nations"* (1:5). While God has predestined Jeremiah for this purpose Jeremiah has his fears and doubts that he expresses in Jeremiah 1. It mostly centers around his youthfulness. His initial reluctance to God's calling is not uncommon among the prophets. Such a calling as Jeremiah's will involve an encounter with the holiness of God which will always require an acknowledgment of our inadequacies in being God's messenger.

God's prophets do not speak in a vacuum. Their message is situational and grounded in historical reality. God uses unique life circumstances to issue the calling. For Jeremiah, it comes before he is even in his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). In reality this verse is a statement of not only God's foreknowledge of human history, but his sovereign grace that predestines us to a holy calling. God's prophets are not just reacting to the events of their day. Their message reflects a God who is purposeful in his eternal plan of redemption. God uses various situations and circumstances to frame his message. Nothing is by accident.

God's prophets are an evidence of his grace to the nations to which that prophecy is directed. When the prophets aren't speaking, the nations are in big trouble. Just as we're in big trouble apart from God's word. We know from 1 Peter 1:10-12 that God's prophets were not just seeing into the future, they were pointing us to Christ. Their spoken words were more than an accurate time warp into the future. More importantly, they were a message of grace that included judgment, punishment, and even exile for the heavy burdens of sin.

Finally, there's a reluctance or sense of inadequacy from some of the prophets themselves. Isaiah said, *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips"* (Isaiah 6:5). Jeremiah did not know how to speak because of his youth (Jeremiah 1:6). Whatever the inadequacy or limitation, the prophets' resolve to obey the call is best described by Amos, *"The Lord has spoken; who can but prophesy"* (Amos 3:8).

What can we learn from all this? While spokesmen of God's word, the prophets like everyone else have their share of sin issues that can or cannot be limitations in our service to God. They must walk by faith, repent and believe the God who called them to deliver his message. Like us, they live in unique moments of history that demand a response and their voice is the mouthpiece of God.

Jeremiah 1

The historical background and specific life setting of Jeremiah's prophecy is brought to life in the opening verses of Jeremiah chapter 1. Jeremiah is the son of Hilkiah, a priest of Anathoth, a Levitical city, a few miles northeast of Jerusalem, given to the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 6:54-60). It is doubtful that Jeremiah's father is the same Hilkiah as the priest who discovered the book of the Law in the temple at Jerusalem in 2 Kings 22:8. Nonetheless, Jeremiah comes from a priestly family, but that does not guarantee Anathoth representing a godly remnant of God's people. In Jeremiah 11:21, Jeremiah is a prophet who is not welcome in his hometown as the men of Anathoth seek his life.

Jeremiah's prophesy is clearly dated during the reign of King Josiah of Judah. Josiah's reforms are due to the discovery of the book of the Law during temple renovations and are centered around the reading of God's word. There are no doubt political motivations behind Josiah's reform measures, but the word of God also played a key role due to the discovery of the book of the Law in the temple during temple renovations.

Jeremiah's initial reluctance to God's calling upon his life centers around insecurity to his youthfulness (1:6). Yet, God equips those He calls, and beginning in verse 9 of Jeremiah 1, the Lord consecrates Jeremiah for the task ahead.

To listen to Jeremiah is to hear the very words of God because God has put the words in his mouth. Jeremiah's mission is given to him in verse 10, *"See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."* This mission is best understood in terms of death and resurrection. The ungodliness of Judah will need to be plucked up, broken down, destroyed and overthrown. It will require death. But, it will be replaced by renewal of a godly remnant of repentant people who will build and plant.

God puts the words into Jeremiah's mouth at the beginning of his ministry by giving him two signs, an almond branch, and a boiling pot. The sign of a boiling pot is obvious. Judah's sin is in opposition to the holiness of God. The boiling pot is the cauldron of judgment. The almond branch seems to represent Jeremiah's role as a watchman over the house of Judah. As Almond trees are the first to blossom in the spring, Jeremiah's ministry is a sign of things to come. Jeremiah will watch, wait and warn Judah of the things that are to come.

Jeremiah is specifically commissioned to address the sin of his people. He is to dress himself for work (1:17) and guard against discouragement. God is making Jeremiah *"a fortified city, an iron*

pillar, and bronze walls,” (1:18, 19) against Judah from the top down, from “*its officials, it’s priests,*” right down to “*the people of the land*” (1:18). This will be a difficult, even intense spiritual battle in which the people of Judah will fight against Jeremiah and his message. The Lord promises Jeremiah that they will not prevail against him for the Lord is with Jeremiah to deliver him.

Jeremiah 2

Beginning in **Jeremiah 2** and continuing through **Jeremiah 6:30**, Jeremiah issues a litany of one example after another of how God has richly blessed his people and how they have in turn desecrated it. All told, these five chapters of the Bible provide one of the most detailed accounts of the universal depravity of mankind in all of Scripture. It’s a comprehensive indictment revealing the totality of the fall. The phrase “*declares the Lord*” is used repeatedly throughout this section emphasizing that this is not just Jeremiah’s opinion, but proof that this indictment of Judah’s sin is directly from the Lord himself. Jeremiah proclaimed this in a public hearing in Jerusalem (2:1). It is preserved for us in written prose as the word of the Lord, directed not only to Judah, but to us as well.

The first indictment in Jeremiah 2:1-3 takes the audience to the very beginning in the days of Israel’s youth or the creation of Israel as a nation. It recalls the days of the wilderness wanderings after the Exodus. Israel at this time had been freed from the bondage of sin through the Passover and exodus. Israel is pictured in the opening verses of Jeremiah 2 as God’s bride who was holy, “*the firstfruits of the harvest.*” But, as they partook of God’s blessing they incurred guilt upon themselves and returned back to the bondage of sin in which they had been freed. The imagery is similar to the Genesis account before Adam’s sin. Once people decide to forsake the Lord, the only question left is what do you replace him with. Jeremiah will continue this indictment all the way through the next 5 chapters of how God’s covenant people have replaced God with sinful alternatives.

Beginning in 2:4, the audience of Jeremiah’s message is clearly established. It is to the house of Jacob, the clans of Israel. The problem is not with God, that he’s unjust or burdensome. Verse 5 asks a rhetorical question, “*What wrong did your fathers find in me?*” One bad choice for Israel has led to another and then another in the downward progression of forsaking the Lord. This started with the fathers and it’s been inherited by their children, even their children’s children, and so on. They’ve gone after “*worthlessness, and became worthless*” (2:5). All this to spite the fact that God had led them into a plentiful land that they defiled. No one escapes this indictment including priests, shepherds and prophets, indeed all of creation (2: 8).

God’s response to the sin of his people is that he will “contend” with them (2:9). God is bringing the charges against Judah through Jeremiah as his spokesman. While this is a message of condemnation, no doubt, it is also a message of grace that reveals the character and heart of God. God is holy and as such has no choice but to act against sin. But, his contending is proof of God’s relentless pursuit of his people in love that is not just for the people of Judah, but “*with*

your children's children" (vs. 9), proof of an everlasting covenant. Sin leads to death, but with God, the death caused by sin leads to a resurrection.

Jeremiah 2:13 is a summary statement of God's indictment that Jeremiah is delivering. The problem is twofold. First, God's people have forsaken him and secondly, in forsaking the Lord, they have replaced God with things that cannot and will not redeem. This is the very definition of idolatry. God is described as *"the fountain of living water"* (2:13). He alone is complete, and all his people will ever need or want. Just as the Word of God is essential for spiritual life, water is essential for physical life. The people to whom Jeremiah is speaking have physical food, but without spiritual food, they are in effect starving themselves of any resources from God. Worse, what they've replaced their diet with, or more specifically, what they're using to cover up their sin does not remove the problem. It only worsens it. Or, as Jeremiah puts it, *"They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water"* (2:13). These "broken cisterns" that God's people have placed their hope are the subject of Jeremiah's rebuke upon them.

The remainder of Jeremiah 2 is a litany of what God has supplied and how his people have desecrated it:

- God had led them to *"a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things."* But, the people *"defiled the land and made my heritage an abomination"* (2:7).
- Israel had been freed from slavery only to enslave themselves to their own passions (2:14).
- Judah wrongly sought security from political alliances with Egypt (Memphis and Tahpanhes), even Assyria only to experience the evil and bitterness of forsaking God (2:19). They feared other nations more than they feared God.
- God had planted them as *"a choice vine, wholly of pure seed"*, only for them to *"degenerate and become a wild vine"* (2:21). No amount of soap could cleanse them of their guilt. (vs. 22).
- Judah went after the Baals and declared herself clean. She pursued them with unrestrained lust (2:23 – 25).
- Judah assigned deity to idols made of wood and stone, yet in her time of trouble they were powerless to save her (2:26 – 29).
- Judah completely forgot they were God's bride. They resisted the discipline of the Lord, spurned their prophets, and rejected God's word. Seeking their own freedom, they found themselves enslaved by the bondage of their sin. Instead of confession and repentance, they claimed not to have sinned (2:30 – 37).

Jeremiah 3

Jeremiah equates Israel's unfaithfulness to a divorce in the opening verses of Jeremiah 3. Israel is the unfaithful spouse. By turning to other gods, Israel is no longer God's bride, described in Jeremiah 2: 1. The lingering question is will God take Israel back after her unfaithfulness to him?

He will indeed, but the way of restoration is through repentance and faith of God's bride, Israel. Jeremiah delivers a call to Israel to repent. His message comes *"in the days of King Josiah"* (3: 6) and is no doubt a response to King Josiah's reforms mentioned in 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 24. We know from 2 Chronicles 24: 19 that God *"sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention."*

Jeremiah turns to the northern kingdom of Israel who *"played the whore"* (vs.7). As a result of her sin, the northern kingdom was taken captive by Assyrian occupation. This was God's *"decree of divorce"* (vs. 8), yet it was also an example or warning to her sister Judah to the south in an attempt to bring them to repentance. *"Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense"* (vs 10).

Jeremiah 3 is not only the proof of Israel's hardened heart, but a reminder that *reform measures of man seldom produce lasting results if they are not accompanied by true repentance*. While Jeremiah approved of King Josiah's reforms, he acknowledges that ultimately, it's a matter of the heart, a movement toward God in faith. It is heeding the discipline of God which the people of Judah have not done. As a result, *"Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah"* (vs. 11) because she has undergone the discipling hand of the Lord through exile.

The focus now is on faithless Israel to return to the Lord. God *"will not be angry forever"* (vs. 12). This will require Israel to *"acknowledge their guilt, that you have rebelled against God"* (vs. 13). This is more than the pretense of fake repentance Judah has followed. Israel has had to face the discipline of the Lord in exile in order to experience true and lasting repentance by faith in the living God. Jeremiah looks beyond reform measure that have only given temporary relief to the intervention of God himself to deliver the necessary changes.

The first order of business is that God will provide his people with *"shepherds after my own heart."* These shepherds will feed the people on *"knowledge and understanding."* As a prophet, Jeremiah is prototype of this promise.

The second thing God will do is a dismantling of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. It's in the temple in Jerusalem and it's up to this point the center of worship. It contains the presence of the Lord. Jeremiah is looking forward to the day when *"it shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again"* (3:16). Jeremiah is leading Israel to a day where it will no longer be needed.

Finally, God promises a restored Israel, *“the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel”* (3: 18). This promise looks beyond geographical boundaries of divided kingdoms to a time when the Son of God will rule in the presence of his people and once and for all we will *“no more stubbornly follow our own evil hearts”* (3:17).

“Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel” (3: 23).

Jeremiah 4

Jeremiah describes what true repentance looks like in the opening verses of Jeremiah 4. The problem with Judah is if there’s been any repentance at all, it’s been in pretense (3:10). God is calling through Jeremiah upon a reunified Israel to repent. *“If”* there is any repentance from them at all, it must involve a returning to the Lord by removing detestable things and practices.

This will involve a *“breaking up of their fallow ground,”* a common metaphor in Old Testament prophecy denoting a sowing of seed in a more fertile soil, with the promise of new things or a new crop to harvest in Judah. This involves issues of the heart verses the outward signs of religion. It is their heart that needs circumcision (4:4). It is their heart that is hardened just like the fallow ground of Israel.

Jeremiah now turns his attention on the disciplining hand of the Lord that will be executed against Judah *“from the north.”* This is a common reference throughout the book of Jeremiah to Babylon, a powerful nation to the north of Judah. They are coming for Judah and it will be a terrible day for them. As Jeremiah watches and waits for this terrible day, he cannot help but warn his people through cries of desperation that reveal the seriousness of what is to come. Jeremiah pulls out all the stops. His cries of warning include blowing a trumpet, assembling his people to fortified cities, raising a standard in Zion to flee for safety. Babylon is described as a *“lion”* and a *“destroyer of nations”* who when finished with this path of destruction will leave the land of Judah in utter ruins.

The end result of God’s judgment from Babylon is that the king will lack courage, and the priests and prophets will be appalled at how they missed the Lord’s message and in so doing deceived their people. This is Jeremiah’s indictment upon the false prophets of Israel. Judgment has come upon the people of Judah (4:9-18).

As Jeremiah sees into the future of what lies ahead for his people, he is in deep anguish. What is so clear for Jeremiah is hidden from the people from Judah. They are blind and deaf to any message from God. They appear wise in their own eyes or in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of the Lord they’re not. In fact, God calls them *“stupid children”* (4:22).

The temptation the people of God constantly face is to view evil in terms of enlightenment or some sort of sophisticated wisdom. This is the clearest demarcation of the *“wisdom”* of this world and the wisdom that comes from God. The former should be avoided at all possible

costs. It is the very definition of stupidity. The mind of Christ, on the other hand, will reflect the Word of God and it will instruct the one who knows God, the Living Word.

Jeremiah 5

Jeremiah 5 begins with Jeremiah's quest to find one righteous person in Jerusalem who does justice and seeks truth. He cannot and Jeremiah 5 is a stunning litany of the sins his people are guilty of:

"For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly treacherous to me, declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 5:11).

"But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone astray" (Jeremiah 5: 23).

"Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you" (Jeremiah 5: 25).

Beginning in verse 14, Jeremiah pronounces the inevitable judgment. God is *"bringing against them a nation from afar"* (vs. 15). We know this nation as Babylon and Jeremiah is warning them of this impending judgment if they don't repent. For Jeremiah's people, the inevitable judgment from Babylon will lead them to say, *"An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land"* (vs. 30). Prophets other than Jeremiah are speaking lies to the people and the people like what they're hearing. But, it will not appease their guilt or cure their sin problem.

The chapter ends with a question we'd do well to consider: *"but what will you do when the end comes"* (5: 31).

Jeremiah 6

Since Jeremiah's people don't even see their need to repent, Jeremiah 6 describes the impending judgment they will face. Whereas Isaiah, spoke further into the future, Jeremiah now deals with the present situation at hand. The time Isaiah spoke of is at hand. *"Disaster looms out of the north"* (6:1), which is a common reference to Babylon in Jeremiah's writing. The result will be *"great destruction"* as the remainder of the chapter details.

If in fact, *"God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance"* (Romans 2:4), then these chapters in Jeremiah should be viewed as an outpouring of God's grace and not the resulting outpouring of wrath that comes from judgment of our sin. The latter is the result of those in Romans 2 *"who presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience."*

The problem is the people of Judah will not listen to Jeremiah. This is not a personal attack on Jeremiah, rather it is a rejection of the very word of God which for Judah is *"an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it"* (6:10).

Everyone in Judah is dealing falsely including priests and prophets who are *“greedy for unjust gain”* (vs. 13). Those who should shepherd Judah and warn them of the wrath to come have instead *“healed the wound of my people lightly, saying ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is not peace”* (6:14). God had provided a good path for his people through his word, a path in which they would *“find rest for your souls”* (6:16). However, *“because they have not paid attention to my word; and as for my law, they have rejected it”* (6:19). God will respond in turn by placing a stumbling block before them in which together they will perish. (6:21)

God puts such stumbling blocks in our lives in an attempt to bring us to repentance. Throughout Scripture, the Word of God is either a stumbling block *“an object of scorn”* or it is a place of refuge where the righteous run to and are saved.

“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11,12).

Jeremiah 7

Jeremiah takes up the issue of nationalism in Jerusalem that centers primarily around the temple.

The temple in Jerusalem was built by Solomon. The planning, building and furnishing of it is recorded in 1 Kings chapters 5 through 8. Solomon’s temple plans had many goals, but one was to consolidate worship in Israel to one central location in Jerusalem. This problem Solomon sought to correct is best described in 1 Kings 3:2, *“The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord.”* Even after the temple was constructed Solomon did not discontinue worship at the high places of Israel.

The temple, however, was the pinnacle of Solomon’s kingdom bringing recognition from foreign dignitaries, the Queen of Sheba being the most notable (1 Kings 10). Even with the split of the kingdom, Jeroboam recognized the tremendous threat the temple and its apparatus would have in bringing his people of the newly established northern kingdom back to the south in Jerusalem. As a result Jeroboam constructed golden calves in an effort to unite his new kingdom in worship and draw his people away from the temple in Jerusalem.

In the southern kingdom of Judah, the temple had managed to withstand the threats and political instability of its times. It became a cultural iconic symbol of Jerusalem and surrounding Judah. Yet that did not guarantee spiritual stability. King Ahaz copied an altar from Damascus and erected it in the temple, one of the grossest instances of idolatry in the Old Testament (2 Kings 16). Ahaz even went as far as to remove the gold from the temple to pay tribute to Assyria. Nonetheless the temple remained and became a nationalistic emblem of a nation that held to a certain form of “godliness” while denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5).

As Jeremiah has directed his message in a public hearing (2:1), beginning in chapter 7 he moves even closer to the problem by taking his message directly to the temple gates in Jerusalem (7:1). His focus is on the temple and how the people of Judah have come to worship its structure in place of the God who inhabits it. Jeremiah uses a literary technique known as incremental repetition to emphasize the seriousness of the situation. The phrase "*the temple of the Lord*" is repeated three times (7:4) to illustrate how the temple structure in Jerusalem had become a symbol of idolatry or superstition among the people. Jeremiah is in effect mimicking and mocking the mantra of his people, "*the temple of the Lord.*" Instead of the temple being a place of worship for his people, it had at best been reduced to a false sense of security. The people rallied around the temple thinking that God would not render judgment upon them because of the temple structure and the security it brought to them. It is a mantra Jeremiah is tired of hearing and so is God.

Jeremiah further addresses the seriousness of what the temple has become in Jeremiah 7:14 by pointing his people northward to Shiloh as a graphic illustration from their history. Shiloh is a significant geographical location in the Bible. After the conquest of Canaan in Joshua 18, the Mosaic tabernacle was set up in Shiloh. It became one of the main centers of Israelite worship before the period of the kings and was a precursor to what Jeremiah's people know as the temple in Jerusalem.

In 1 Samuel 4, Israel suffers a terrible defeat by the Philistines and they fear the Lord has forsaken them. They demand the ark of the Lord that is back in Shiloh accompany them in battle. This plan backfires on them as the Philistines capture the ark from them. In other words, Israel is worshiping their structures of worship instead of the God who inhabits them. Those who learn nothing from their past are bound to repeat it in the future. The people of Judah are repeating the sins of Shiloh with the temple in Jerusalem in Jeremiah 7.

Jeremiah's people are treating the temple of the Lord similar to how robbers treat their dens in the limestone caves surrounding Jerusalem. It's a temporary refuge of safety before moving on to the next round of sin. God is not pleased and is pointing them back to the events of his worship structure at Shiloh and the end result of it in the early chapters of 1 Samuel. Jeremiah uses this as a warning to his people. Even with a new temple structure in Jerusalem after Jeremiah's prophesy and after the exile, Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:11 in Matthew 21:13 with regard to the temple in Jerusalem. The problem persisted long after Jeremiah.

Jeremiah leaves the temple gates in 7:30 and directs his attention to Tophet, also known as the valley of slaughter. This is a place outside Jerusalem in which the people of Judah are sacrificing their children in the fire. They are offering them to the god Molech. The very thought of such a practice in Judah is foreign to God. He never commanded it, nor did such a thought ever enter God's mind (7:31). In God's economy, sacrifice was commanded for the forgiveness of sin, but it has always been a substitutionary atonement. Instead of accepting the required sacrifices of God in which a substitute is offered in the form of an animal, the people of Judah are now paying the ultimate price for their sin by sacrificing their own children to a foreign god. It is the ultimate expression of their apostasy, making worship in the temple in Jerusalem null and void.

Jeremiah 8

In response to the sin of child sacrifice in Jeremiah 7, Jeremiah now turns his attention to the kings, priests, prophets and inhabitants of Jerusalem who encourage and permit this sin. In Jeremiah's vision these people have died and their bones are brought out of their tombs and "*spread before the sun and moon and all the host of heaven*" (vs. 2). This is the ultimate torment in death for their sin. As bad as this sounds, whatever remnant is left will prefer death to life (vs 3).

Jeremiah's vision is in stark contrast to Ezekiel being taken to the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37. What Jeremiah sees is God's confrontation of what the people of Judah are worshipping. This is a picture of death. As they have worshipped the sun and the moon, their bones are brought from their tombs to confront their idols that are powerless to resurrect them. Ezekiel, however is not only shown a vision of death, but one of resurrection or more importantly the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. "*And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land*" (Ezekiel 37:14). Ezekiel see a vision of the new covenant. Jeremiah sees a broken covenant and must confront his people of their sin.

Beginning in 8:4 and continuing through 9:11, Jeremiah details their sin and its tragic effects and then mourns for his people, not only for what they have done, but the judgment they will face because of it. The sin of Jeremiah's people is perpetual (vs. 5). Reform measures have resulted in constant backsliding. It is the cumulative effect of rejecting the word of the Lord (8:9). Jeremiah 8:11 is an exact repeat of 6:14, "*They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying Peace, peace, when there is no peace.*" It is a total dereliction of duty among the spiritual leaders of Judah to whom Jeremiah is now bringing under fire for their sin. Jeremiah addresses the hardness of heart in his people by using the figure of harvest. "*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*" (8:20). Season after season, Jeremiah's people had rejected every available opportunity to repent and now they are without hope. They are not saved. This is what Jeremiah is lamenting and it's the saddest tragedy of human existence.

Jeremiah 9

Jeremiah sees the lostness of his people in the opening verses of **Jeremiah 9** and he weeps. Their void of God is so serious Jeremiah does not know how to stop weeping. If only his "*head were waters and his eyes were a fountain of tears,*" Jeremiah would "*weep day and night for his people*" (vs. 1).

Their condition is so bad, Jeremiah actually wishes he could leave the scene by escaping to the desert, "*Oh that I had in the desert a travelers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them!*" But, he can't. There is no retreat from his mission, no *travelers lodging place* for him to have a vacation from what the Lord has called him to do. The condition of Jeremiah's people is best summarized in verse 3, "*they do not know me, declares the Lord.*" As a result, "*they weary themselves committing iniquity*" (vs. 5).

Beginning in verse 7, the Lord speaks to Jeremiah's lament. God promises to *refine* and *test* Jeremiah's people, for what else can he do? *"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives"* (Hebrews 12: 6). God is not a vengeful God, but one who loves his children dearly, too much to allow them to continue in their sin.

Jeremiah 9:23 – 24 is some of the most beloved words of Jeremiah's prophecy. It reveals what is vital to our life in Christ, that we understand and know God. The two go hand in hand and it's the problem with the people of Judah. They do not understand or know God's word and therefore they do not understand or know God. To know God is the highest treasure for anyone; to be valued more than wisdom, might or wealth.

Jeremiah points to a coming day when God will punish sin. The message is directed to *"all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh"* (9:25). This includes surrounding nations in verse 26, but it also includes Judah who has failed to see the spiritual implications of their circumcision, a people who are merely *"uncircumcised in heart"* (9:26).

Jeremiah 10

Jeremiah now turns his attention to a comparison contrast between Judah's idols and the God of Israel. The problem he confronts is the people of Judah are better informed of the ways of surrounding nations than they are the way of God. They are following those *"who are circumcised merely in the flesh"* (9:25). Jeremiah 10 closely parallels Isaiah's treatment of this subject in Isaiah 46 as very similar comparisons are made. Jeremiah compares the stupidity of idolatry to *"scarecrows in a cucumber field"* (10:5). The two major problems with a scarecrow-like figure of worship are *"they cannot speak"* and *"they have to be carried"* (10: 5). Contrast this to God where he carries us and daily bears our burdens (Psalm 68:19).

Herein lies the problem with the people of Judah. They are seeking independence from God by replacing him with a god they can manage. They worship self-sufficiency and pride themselves in being their own determiners of right and wrong. This is not only sinful, but as Jeremiah will emphasize in this chapter, it defies all forms of human logic and reasoning. How can something that has been fashioned by man, *"the hands of a craftsman"* (vs. 3), have any power to save or lead a people? They *"cannot speak; they have to be carried and they cannot walk."* Jeremiah has confronted the sin of idolatry and the atrocities of it in previous chapters. Now he confronts the stupidity of it. Whereas Judah thought they were wise in the *"wisdom"* of this world, their idolatry ultimately reveals their stupidity. *"They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction of idols is but wood"* (vs. 8).

The stupidity of Jeremiah's people is ultimately a reflection on their leaders, *"For the shepherds are stupid and do not inquire of the Lord; therefore they have not prospered and all their flock is scattered"* (10: 21). The *"scattered flock"* is a reference to the waywardness of Judah.

Jeremiah warns that the rumors and threats of Babylon to the north are true. The idolatry of Judah will be judged by Babylon as they *"make the cities of Judah a desolation, a lair of jackals"*

(vs. 22). In verses 23 – 25, Jeremiah personally wrestles with this reality. As he does, he appeals to Scripture for better understanding of the prophecy he's been given. Jeremiah first alludes to Proverbs 16:9 in verse 23. Jeremiah understands that man, left to his own wayward inclinations is totally incapable of reforming himself. It is the Lord who directs his steps and God will use Babylon to redirect the steps of Judah. In verse 24, Jeremiah pleads with the Lord to bring about correction, not only for Judah, but for Jeremiah personally. His prayer is common throughout the Old Testament; that God would do this in justice and not in anger. Verse 25 is from Psalm 79:6, 7. Those who have "devoured Jacob" are the idols Jeremiah previously addressed in this chapter.

Jeremiah 11

God reveals to Jeremiah in chapter 11, that the covenant that He made with Israel has been broken by his people and now Jeremiah must deliver this message to Judah. Jeremiah's answer to his mission is in verse 5, "*So be it, Lord.*"

Jeremiah is to take this message into all the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem (vs. 6). God declares Israel's and Judah's unfaithfulness to the covenant to be a "conspiracy" against him (vs. 9). Throughout Israel's history they have "*not obeyed or inclined their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart*" (vs. 8). Since Israel has broken the covenant with God, what God is about to do is in accordance to the stipulations of the covenant outlined in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The time is up for Judah. Since they have refused to repent by turning to other gods, God in turn will respond in like manner as their gods would. Since idols of wood and stone are incapable of answering, so God will be to Israel.

Likewise, Jeremiah is instructed not to pray on their behalf. Even the sacrificial system will be incapable of averting their doom. The people of Judah have done this to themselves. They cannot blame God for it. They should, blame their own worship of Baal who is powerless to save them. So God will be to them.

Beginning in verse 18, Jeremiah reveals the personal nature of the vision that he has been given. The Lord has made this known specifically to Jeremiah to reveal to the people of Judah. What Jeremiah did not understand until now was that his people will respond with a personal attack on him. Jeremiah is like a "*gentle lamb to the slaughter*" (vs. 19). As such Jeremiah serves as a prototype of Christ. Jeremiah asks of the Lord to "*see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause*" (vs. 20).

Beginning in Jeremiah 11: 21 to the end of the chapter, the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, are seeking his life. Truly Jeremiah is a prophet not welcomed in his hometown. God in turn promises disaster upon them as punishment of their sin.

Jeremiah 12

Jeremiah 12 is divided into two parts. The first is Jeremiah's very personal complaint before the Lord in verses 1 – 4. The second part beginning in verse 5 through the end of the chapter is the Lord's answer to Jeremiah's complaint.

Jeremiah's complaint is typical of other prophets. It is the perplexing question of why do the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer. Jeremiah puts himself in the latter category of the righteous. Jeremiah's complaint ends in verse 4 with a plea of "how long, oh Lord." The anguish of his own people hunting down his own life, is more than Jeremiah can personally bear.

Beginning in verse 5, the Lord answers Jeremiah's complaint with tough love. *"If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?"*

Not only do the people in Jeremiah's hometown of Anathoth oppose him, Jeremiah's own household is against him, even *"though they speak friendly words to you"* (vs. 6). Jeremiah is being instructed by God to toughen up for what lies ahead. Things are about to get worse before they get better. What Jeremiah will face in opposition, however, is nothing compared to what God has faced with the forsaking of his people. God compares this to lions, hyenas, birds of prey and other wild beasts who have turned against him. The shepherds of Israel have made God's vineyard a desolation and it mourns God (vs. 11). What Jeremiah will face in persecution is akin to what God has experienced and Jeremiah will get to experience it for himself.

Throughout this chapter God describes Israel as his "heritage." In verse 10 the heritage of God is compared to a choice vineyard that has been destroyed not only by surrounding nations, but the wickedness of God's own people.

Beginning in verse 14 to the end of the chapter, God informs Jeremiah that his judgment is not limited to Judah, but will be extended to the surrounding nations that have violated God's sacred heritage.

Jeremiah 13

God asks Jeremiah to take a loincloth and put it around his waist. For Jeremiah, the loincloth starts out as a fashionable garment. It symbolizes the closeness God desires with his people. Jeremiah is then asked to take this loincloth and hide it in a cleft by the Euphrates River. The location is significant because it is in Babylon. Sometime later Jeremiah is asked to return to the place where he hid the loincloth only to find the garment *"spoiled; it was good for nothing."*

The illustration is explained in Jeremiah 13:11, *"For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen."*

God's prophets are often asked to do some strange things and this is Jeremiah's turn. God communicates with us not only in spoken words but graphic pictures that contain powerful messages. There's no end to what God will do to try to get our attention. This should be viewed as a display of God's grace to us. Focusing on the bizarre behavior of the messenger misses the point. The real issue is: do we appreciate the lengths God will go to get our attention? Are we listening? Moreover, are we willing to do the things God asks us to do that may seem even stranger in our world than what God asked of Jeremiah?

Another image is given to Jeremiah to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness to him beginning in Jeremiah 13:12. It is jars filled with wine. Normally, this is a symbol of God's blessing. Indeed, it's an image Jeremiah's people can identify with, "*Do we not indeed know that every jar will be filled with wine?*" (vs. 12). But, instead of treating the covenant promises and blessings of God responsibly, the people of Judah have violated them. They have literally become drunk on God's blessing. The end result will be judgment upon kings, priests, prophets and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Beginning in verse 15 to the end of the chapter, the Lord gives Jeremiah a message of threatening exile. The king and queen mother mentioned in verse 18 are probably a reference to Jehoiachin and his mother from 2 Kings 24. If this is the case, Jeremiah has moved beyond the period of Josiah's reforms and Judah is inching ever more closely to Babylonian exile.

Jeremiah 14

The people of Judah are experiencing a drought in **Jeremiah 14**. Verses 1 through 10 is Jeremiah's plea to the Lord concerning the drought and all the effects it has had upon his people. In verses 11 and 12, the Lord answers Jeremiah:

"Do not pray for the welfare of this people. ¹² Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence."

This is not the first time the Lord has told Jeremiah not to pray for his people (see Jeremiah 7: 16 and 11: 14). This may seem a bit odd to us, but if it does, it says more to Jeremiah's role as an intercessor for the people of Judah than it does to God's willingness to forgive. God stands ready to forgive, but his people refuse to repent. Jeremiah's prayers are not enough. In verse 12, God responds with a common triad of punishment in the Old Testament that he promises to bring upon Judah in response to their sin: sword, famine, and pestilence.

The second half of chapter 14, beginning in verse 13, is focused on the lying prophets. These are people who are opposed to Jeremiah's message and are telling the people what they want to hear instead of what God wants them to hear. It's hard to hear God's voice when you've already decided what you want him to say.

Jeremiah 15

Jeremiah 15 describes Jeremiah's role as an intercessor on behalf of his people. The Lord speaks to Jeremiah in the opening verses by comparing his role to that of Moses and Samuel. Even though Moses and Samuel, along with Jeremiah, intercede for their people, the Lord rejects their plea. God will send pestilence, sword, and famine upon the people. This is in response to what wicked King Manasseh has done (vs. 4). Of all the kings of Judea, he is considered one of the worst. His reign as king of Judah precedes Jeremiah's ministry, but in Jeremiah 15 the Lord is bringing to justice the sin that Manasseh inflicted upon his people.

Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah and his reign as king of Judah is described in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33. All the good that Hezekiah did in Judah was undone by Manasseh. His worst violations are described in 2 Kings 21:6, *"And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger."* A parallel account is also given in 2 Chronicles 33: 6. What Jeremiah is delivering is God's promise in 2 Kings 21:13, 14, that God *"will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish."* God will *"forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and spoil to all their enemies."*

There is evidence of Manasseh repenting of his sin in 2 Chronicles 33:10 – 20. Yet, the fallout of his sin had lasting consequences in Judah that cannot be overlooked. God is *"weary of relenting"* (15: 6) while his people continue in their sin.

Beginning in verse 10, Jeremiah issues another complaint to the Lord. This is one of Jeremiah's most hard felt confessions in the entire book. He recalls that throughout his ministry, he's been faithful to do what the Lord has called him to do, but it's been a difficult mission as everyone curses him. Jeremiah declares, *"Your words were found and I ate them, and your words became to me the joy and the delight of my heart"* (vs. 16). Jeremiah is simply recalling that throughout his prophecy as he's received God's message, he's internalized it, or made it his own. This has been and continues to be a lonely mission for Jeremiah and he's about to give up. His pain is unceasing, his wound incurable (vs. 18).

The Lord answers beginning in verse 19 and promises Jeremiah that if he returns to his mission, the Lord will restore him. God promises that Jeremiah will be God's mouth to the people of Judah and that he will be *"a fortified wall of bronze."* The sin of his people will not prevail over Jeremiah. This is a reiteration of Jeremiah's initial vision when he was called as a prophet in Jeremiah 1:18, 19.

Jeremiah 16

The Lord continues his response to Jeremiah's complaint in Jeremiah 16. Jeremiah is instructed by God not to marry or have children. Children born in this environment have a horrible future in store for them, and God is sparing Jeremiah that anguish.

Chapter 16 concludes with a promise of future restoration. God compares this to the days of the Exodus, only this time God will bring the people of Israel “out of the north country and out of all the countries he has driven them” (vs. 15). The “north” or “north country” is a common reference to Babylon in the book of Jeremiah and is one of the first references in Jeremiah to God releasing his exiled people from Babylon. This is issued before they even go. The eventual return to the land of Judah after exile will be a second Exodus for Jeremiah’s people, but first they must suffer the consequences of their sin.

Jeremiah 17

The beginning of Jeremiah 17 shows the irrevocable curse of our sin. It *“is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond, it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars”* (Jeremiah 17:1). Verses 7 and 8 of Jeremiah 17 closely echo Psalm 1. Both use the comparison of a tree planted by streams of water to illustrate a person who is flourishing in the Lord even in spite of difficult circumstances.

For Jeremiah, the image of a tree planted by the water is very real. In Jeremiah 14 he’s actually addressing the drought his people are in the midst of. The issue for Jeremiah is: how does one prosper in the Lord when everything around you seems to be falling apart? For Jeremiah, his life is a picture of the man in Psalm 1 whose *“delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”*

Such devotion to the Lord is the product of testing. Difficult circumstances define what we’re really made of. Jeremiah has witnessed firsthand the rebellion of his people against the Lord and the Lord’s unrelenting response to it. He patiently waits for the judgment of God upon his people. Things are going to get worse, much worse, and Jeremiah’s been given special insight into just how bad things are going to get.

These kinds of circumstances will either lead us closer to the Lord or further away from him. To better understand this, we need to read the two verses prior to Jeremiah 17:7, 8. Verse 5 warns of those who turn away from the Lord and follow the so-called “wisdom” of our culture, *“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. Instead of being like a tree planted by the water,”* Jeremiah 17: 6 describes this person as *“a shrub in the desert who shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”*

The problem is our sin runs so deep that Jeremiah rhetorically asks, *“who can understand it?”* (vs. 9). Our hearts have deceived us into thinking we’re not really as bad as we are. But, in truth, we’re *“desperately sick.”* Jeremiah repeats the indictment he used at the beginning of his prophecy (Jeremiah 2:13) in verse 13. His people *“have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water.”* What Jeremiah now addresses is the helplessness of reform measures to soften the hardened hearts of his people. Jeremiah has faithfully delivered God’s message, but it’s consistently fallen upon hardened hearts. This is no minor problem. It requires a searching of

the heart and a testing of the mind (17:10) which will reveal what we really worship. For the people of Judah it is anything but God.

Beginning in verse 19, Jeremiah once again issues his message from the “*gates of Jerusalem*” in hopes that all who enter will “*hear the word of the Lord*” (vs. 20). The specific problem Jeremiah is addressing at the end of chapter 17 is his people’s failure to keep the Sabbath day holy. This is a testing of the heart and mind of Jeremiah’s people. The Sabbath is not holy to them because their hearts and minds are far removed from God. They have instead turned the Sabbath into another day of further accumulating wealth by placing heavy burdens on others.

Verses 19 – 27 of Jeremiah 17 are more than an indictment against Judah for failure to keep the sabbath holy. They are more importantly God’s vision for how he intended his people to live and the intensions regarding the sabbath. It was supposed to be an integral part of Israel’s worship; a time when they ceased from their labors and enjoyed the blessings of God. These blessings were to flow to Israel and Israel in turn was to be a blessing upon the other nations of the earth.

Jeremiah 18

In Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah is asked to go to a potter’s house where he is to observe a potter working at a potter’s wheel. The vessel the potter was making got “spoiled” in the potter’s hands and he had to rework it into a new vessel. The message the Lord is conveying to Jeremiah through this experience is in verse 6, “*O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.*”

What the Lord is about to do with the people of Judah is further explained in verses 7 through 11. It is God who plucks up and breaks down kingdoms and nations. What God is about to do with the people of Judah is compared to clay in a potter’s hands.

God takes sinful people who are described in the previous chapter of Jeremiah and he recreates them into something beautiful, fashioned for his glory and honor. It’s a beautiful illustration of redemption. No reform measure of man can accomplish this great work. It must come about through the hand of God and a people who are willing to receive it. In verse 12, the people of Judah see this whole process as one of vanity. Instead of experiencing the blessings of God, they wish to follow their own plans and act according to the stubbornness of their hearts.

The process of refashioning the clay is never pleasant. For the people of Judah, it will be the experience of the sword, famine, pestilence, and captivity. Yet it is through these fires that the people of Judah are clay in the Lord’s hands. He’s recreating something beautiful.

For Jeremiah, it’s an intense, highly emotional spiritual battle of watching his people rebel and waiting on God to act. In verse 18, Jeremiah’s people are plotting for Jeremiah’s life. Their plot will involve slandering him, digging a pit for his soul, setting snares for his feet and eventually

slaying him. Verses 19 through the end of the chapter detail Judah's false accusation of treason against Jeremiah and Jeremiah's cry for justice.

Jeremiah 19

Jeremiah 19 must be understood against the backdrop of Judah's sin. They have stiffened their necks and refuse to hear God's word. As a warning of what God is about to do, Jeremiah is commanded to go to a potter's house and buy an earthenware flask. He is to take some of the elders of the people with him and then he is to break the flask at an entry point to Jerusalem called the Potsherd Gate as an illustration that God's judgment is irreversible. The broken vessel cannot be repaired and neither can the sin of Jeremiah's people.

The Potsherd Gate is in an area known as Topheth. This is not the first time Jeremiah has taken the people of Judah to Topheth. The account of chapter 19, is strikingly similar to chapter 7. It's an area in which Jeremiah's people have worshiped Canaanite deities which ultimately led to child sacrifice. Jeremiah 19:5 describes the gravity of this sin: They *"have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind."*

Child sacrifice represents the last straw for the people of Judah and the inescapable judgment that will follow. If this sin was not introduced to Judah through Manasseh, it certainly accelerated through his practice of it. Whereas Judah will be held guilty for the sins of Manasseh (15:4), Jeremiah, once again, now takes his people to the exact location of their sin: Topheth. Jeremiah's people have filled Topheth *"with the blood of innocents,"* which is how God describes the sin of child sacrifice. God will utterly destroy Topheth for the sin that occurred there.

Before the people of Judah can experience the blessings of being a vessel in the potter's hands, their old vessel must be destroyed. This is the very thing Jeremiah does in this chapter with the broken flask, *"behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words"* (vs.15).

Jeremiah 20

Being a prophet is anything but a glamorous job as Jeremiah 20 will clearly illustrate. Jeremiah is persecuted by Pashhur for speaking the prophecy he spoke in Jeremiah 19. Pushhur beats Jeremiah and puts him in stocks. He is released the next day. While Pushhur's persecution was aimed at silencing Jeremiah, it ultimately had the opposite result. Jeremiah pronounces the judgment of God on Pushhur beginning at the end of verse 3 of Jeremiah 20:

"The Lord does not call your name Pushhur, but Terror On Every Side. For thus says the Lord: Behold I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of

their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon. He shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall strike them down with the sword."

Hebrew scholars have a lot of fun with this verse and the derivatives of Pushhur's name because there is a play on words going on in this passage. The point of it all is the frightening message Jeremiah is communicating to Pushhur.

The implications of being *"a terror to yourself and to all your friends"* are indeed terrifying to ourselves and to others. This verse provides valuable perspective on God's judgment and Jeremiah's warnings, but more importantly, it reveals the depths of our sin and its tragic and terrifying effects. Our life should not be limited to escaping the fires of hell, but understanding that we've brought hell upon ourselves and others through our own sin. Jeremiah's people have done this to themselves. This chapter reveals the terrifying consequences that awaits those who refuse to heed Jeremiah's message of repentance and faith.

The task of being God's spokesmen is taking its toll on Jeremiah and he lays his soul bare before the Lord. Jeremiah has become *a "laughingstock"* (vs. 7). The word of God has become to Jeremiah a *"reproach and derision"* (vs. 8). He even goes as far as to curse the day he was born (vs. 14). Yet, in spite of these hardships on the prophet, Jeremiah cannot help but speak the truth: *"there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot"* (vs. 9). For Jeremiah, the burden of failing to warn his people is greater than the burden of persecution from his own people.

Jeremiah wrestles with the fact that his message is anything but good news. While there are certainly gospel implications to everything Jeremiah has spoken, his message represents the "bad news" of the gospel. There is no simple, easy way to escape the terrifying reality of our sin. This word for Jeremiah is *"a reproach, and derision all day long"* (20:8). However, Jeremiah is comforted in knowing that the Lord is with him (vs. 11) and as such he does not face this battle alone. This reality causes Jeremiah to break out in song (vs. 13).

Even still it's a difficult, emotional journey. Understanding the effects of this on Jeremiah personally is pertinent to an accurate understanding of the book of Jeremiah in general and its emphasis on the sinfulness of humanity in particular.

Jeremiah's call is from the Lord and him alone. Jeremiah would never have chosen this path for himself. Understanding Jeremiah's original calling given to him in the opening chapter, before God formed him in his mother's womb, becomes all the more critical for the prophet at a time like this. *"Why did I come out of the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?"* (20:18). The answer can only be explained in light of Jeremiah 1:5. God is the potter and Jeremiah is the clay.

Jeremiah 21

Jeremiah delivers the harsh reality in Jeremiah 21 that Jerusalem will fall into the hands of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Their discipline is at hand and there's no escaping. Jeremiah is asked by Pushhar and Zephaniah the priest as to how to face this judgment from God. It is doubtful this is the same Pushhar Jeremiah dealt with in the previous chapter. The hope is God will relent.

Beginning in verse 3, Jeremiah answers by directing his message to king Zedekiah. This marks a significant movement in the chronology of the book of Jeremiah. Zedekiah is the last of the kings of Judah from the Davidic dynasty. Zedekiah has been placed in power over Judah by the Babylonians. Jeremiah's message is that Jerusalem will not stand and those who stay and fight to defend Jerusalem against the Babylonians will in effect be fighting against God (vs. 5).

God is setting before his people the way of life and the way of death (vs. 8). For the people of Jerusalem and surrounding Judah, this will result in two options. The first is the way of death: to stay and defend Jerusalem. God has made clear that this is a losing battle. Jerusalem will fall by the hands of the Babylonians. The second option is to accept the disciplining hand of the Lord and surrender to the Babylonians.

Jeremiah's message runs counter to everything his people have placed their trust in. The very idea of not standing and defending Jerusalem while the Babylonians destroy the temple was no doubt a harsh reality for the religious establishment in Jerusalem. So much so that a lot of Jeremiah's prophesy was discredited by them. But, the people of Judah are about to be surprised by God's grace. God will accomplish his purposes for his people while they are in exile in Babylon. Those who resist will suffer the worst for it.

Jeremiah concludes this chapter in verse 11 with a message specifically directed to the king of Judah. It is an indictment against the oppression of the poor in which the king has been the oppressor. God is against the king (vs. 13) and anyone who does not believe Jeremiah's prophesy.

Jeremiah 22

Jeremiah 22 is a series of prophecies that can be confusing to the study of the book of Jeremiah due to problems with the chronology. They are instead thematic and they highlight the problems of temporal leaders and false leaders of the people of God.

The first prophecy is directed to the king of Judah in verse 1. It is a reiteration of the ending of the previous chapter. While the beginning of chapter 21 was directed to King Zedekiah, it is hard to establish the specific king Jeremiah is addressing in both of these passages. Rather than tying them to a specific king, they are best understood as a general warning to whoever happens to be reigning. The message pertains to Judah's failure to execute justice and righteousness that the king is responsible and now culpable for his failures. Much of this

centered around temple worship that gave the people of Judah a false sense of security. Threats from the north (Babylon) are a clear and present danger to the people of Judah. However, the reality of the temple being destroyed by the Babylonians has not yet sunk in. For many, it is their last hope and Jeremiah has consistently stripped it away from them.

Yet, Jeremiah has not withheld this troubling message. His vision is clear; many nations will pass by the city of Jerusalem and wonder what happened. Jeremiah himself will record these exact scenes in the book of Lamentations where he himself does exactly that. The reason is the people of Judah *“have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God and worshipped other gods and served them”* (22: 9). The people of Judah should not weep for those who are dead, but for those who have left the land of Judah never to return again to their native land. This is a reference to those who will flee to Egypt and find security there. It is in contrast to those who accept the Lord’s discipline and go to Babylon. Those people will have the hope of returning to the land of Judah. Those who flee to Egypt do not.

This truth is further expounded beginning in verse 11, where Jeremiah directs his message to King Josiah’s son Shallum. Josiah was killed in battle by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (2 Kings 23: 28 – 30). The people of Judah buried him in Jerusalem and his son Jehoahaz became king of Judah. Jehoahaz is also referred to as Shallum. His reign only lasted three months (2 Kings 23: 31) before Pharaoh Neco forced tribute on the land of Judah and deported Jehoahaz to Egypt. Jeremiah states in Jeremiah 22: 12 that he will never return to the land of Judah, but will die in Egypt (vs. 12). This is a stern warning to the people of Judah not to go to Egypt.

Beginning in verse 18, Jeremiah turns to another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim, who became king after his brother Jehoahaz was deported to Egypt. As Shallum was renamed, so too Jehoiakim as his original name was Eliakim. Jeremiah states that Judah will not mourn for him when he dies, but he will instead experience a disgraceful burial, not fitting for a king of Judah, but of that of a donkey (vs. 19). The instability of Jehoiakim’s reign and death will cause Judah to cry out to neighboring nations for help (vs. 20), but instead of gaining any help from them, their shepherd will be the wind (vs. 22).

This is a hopeless scene in the final days of Judah that grows even more hopeless with Jehoiakim’s son Coniah whose throne name is Jehoiachin. His reign will also be very short, only three months after which time he is exiled to Babylon. Even though Jehoiachin (Coniah) had children, as far as ascendancy to the throne of Judah was concerned, the Lord declared him childless (22: 30). This represents the end of the Davidic dynasty in Judah. All this sets the stage for the coming of the new shepherd, the righteous branch that Jeremiah will introduce in chapter 23.

Jeremiah 23

Jeremiah 23 begins with a “Woe” to the shepherds who are over the people of Judah for scattering the sheep of God’s pasture. The shepherds Jeremiah is speaking of are the kings, the false prophets and priests, anyone in a position of authority over the people of Judah. Their sin

is clearly spelled out in verse 2: *"You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them."* Verse 4 addresses three specific aspects of failed leadership for God's people that have resulted in fear, discouragement, and missing sheep.

God promises the false shepherds that he will attend to them for their evil deeds, but he also promises a restoration of a godly remnant that God will reunite under the leadership of new shepherds who will properly care for God's people.

This paves the way for God's intervention in rising up a better shepherd to lead God's people. This person is referred to in Jeremiah 23:5 as the *righteous branch*. It is a work of God's intervening grace, not of dynastic succession. God will do this according to his timeline. This person will *"reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."* When this happens, Judah *"will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely."* The end of verse 6 even gives us the name in the title, *"The Lord is our righteousness"*. This righteous branch, this leader and Savior of God's people is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ while other leaders who precede his coming will serve as prototypes. The Hebrew name Zedekiah (the last king of Judah) means "the Lord is righteous."

Any promise of this happening during Zedekiah's reign was a false hope. At best he represents a future hope for Judah that will come after exile to Babylon. Jeremiah compares this to the days when Israel was freed from Egypt (vs. 7) and thus when his people are freed from Babylon it will be a second exodus for them.

Beginning in verse 9, Jeremiah once again addressed the lying or false prophets of his day. In God's eyes they are much worse than the false prophets of Samaria who prophesied according to Baal (vs. 13). The false prophets of Judah have committed adultery and are like Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 13, 14). Contrast this with the true prophets of the Lord who stand in the council of the Lord and pay attention to God's word and actually listen (vs. 18). What is about to happen in God's anger is confusing to them now, but in latter days will be understood clearly (vs. 20).

Among the many problems with the message of the false prophets is that they portray God as one who is far off rather than the God that he is, one who is at hand (vs. 23). It is the God of Israel who *"fills heaven and earth"* (vs. 24).

With such stark contrasts between true and false prophets, serious questions emerge as to what exactly is the burden of the Lord. Prophetic utterances in the Old Testament are often described as "oracles" or "burdens." It represents the deeply personal effect the message has upon the prophet himself and the burning need to share it with others. Beginning in verse 33, the Lord somewhat turns the tables on Jeremiah by the rhetorical question of *"What is the burden of the Lord?"* The burden is so great it is not limited to Jeremiah and the deep spiritual and emotional toll it's taken on him. The false prophets and the people of Judah who they are deceiving the people have now become a burden to the Lord.

Jeremiah 24

It is evident from Jeremiah 24, that deportation to Babylon occurred in multiple stages . Jeremiah 24 records one of the first major deportations of the people of Judah to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Those who submitted early to exile, experienced a relatively peaceful transition to a new land, as later chapters will attest.

What is ironic about exile is that this is the preferred option for God's remnant. Jeremiah has already warned against staying in Jerusalem or going to Egypt. Yet, surrendering to Babylon and accepting exile is a hard reality to accept for the people of Judah.

As a result, the Lord gives Jeremiah a vision in chapter 24 in order to interpret what's going on. This vision is of two baskets of figs, one good and one bad. The good basket represents those who accept the Lord's discipline and go to Babylon. The bad basket represents those who resist.

The figs are placed "*before the temple of the Lord*" (vs. 1). The good basket is a further expounding on the remnant that was introduced in chapter 23. Thus, the only viable choice for the people of Judah is to accept the discipling hand of the Lord and be exiled to Judah. This is very confusing for the people of Judah to sort out and that confusion will be a large part of Jeremiah's remaining prophesy. It would seem they should fight against exile at all costs. But, that is not the case. The exiles are the good basket of figs, representing the godly remnant that will have the hope of returning to the land under the leadership of new shepherds Jeremiah 23: 1-4).

The best interpretation of Jeremiah 24 is Hebrews 12: 5 -6: "*And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*"

Jeremiah 25

Jeremiah 25 warns God's people of the impending judgment that will come to them from exile as they begin the process of being deported to Babylon. It's consistent with the message Jeremiah has been preaching in Judah for twenty-three years (vs. 3). Once they get there, the duration will be 70 years, yet the effects will forever define the people of God.

Beginning in verse 15, Jeremiah is given a vision of judgment poured out, not just on Judah, but surrounding nations. It's quite similar to what Isaiah says in chapters 13 through 24 of the book of Isaiah. Jeremiah makes clear, the day that Isaiah foretold is now at hand. There is an urgency to Jeremiah's prophecy with an immediate fulfillment.

Jeremiah 26

Jeremiah is issued a death sentence in Jeremiah 26 for speaking the truth in the temple courts and “to all the cities of Judah” who worship in this central location. Jeremiah is commanded by God not to “hold back a word” and he doesn’t (vs. 2). This is not the first time Jeremiah has issued his words in the temple gates. He also did it in chapter 7. We also see from chapter 26 that this particular prophecy comes at the beginning of Jehoiakim’s reign so these chapters are not necessarily given to us chronologically.

Jeremiah proclaims that the Lord will “*make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.*” This prophecy is quite similar to what Jeremiah said in chapter 7 where his message is also delivered in the temple gates. In both chapters, God promises that he will do to his house what he did at Shiloh. (See chapter 7 for the significance of Shiloh).

For the people of Judah, especially the people of Jerusalem, the thought of the destruction of the temple is unthinkable. As Jeremiah’s prophesy progresses in the chapters ahead, saving the temple will become a major issue with the people who refuse the Lord’s discipline of exile. All of this will lead to worsening conditions for those who stay behind in Jerusalem to defend the temple. It will be destroyed by the Babylonians along with the rest of the city.

Jeremiah is accused of treason for delivering this message (vs. 10) and the priests and prophets deliver a death sentence against him. This does not detour Jeremiah from speaking. His message is that the people of Judah should repent or face the consequences of their sin. Even so, Jeremiah is secure in the Lord’s hands. By stating to the officials in Jerusalem “*I am in your hands. Do with me what seems good and right to you*” (vs. 14) he is ultimately placing his fate in God’s hands.

As the officials consult with each other concerning the death sentence they’ve placed on Jeremiah, they have a change of heart and conclude that Jeremiah should not be put to death. Their reasoning is that the prophet Micah of Moresheth prophesied the same thing in the days of King Hezekiah and he was not put to death (see Micah 3:12). Therefore, Jeremiah should be spared as well.

Not only is Jeremiah not the first prophet to preach this news to the officials in Jerusalem, he’s also not alone. In verses 20 through the end of the chapter, another prophet named Uriah is speaking the same thing. He too is in fear of his life and he escapes to Egypt. Uriah is not as fortunate as Jeremiah, though. King Jehoiakim sends men to Egypt to hunt Uriah down and “*dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people*” (vs. 23).

“*But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death*” (vs. 24). Ahikam is one of the key figures involved in Josiah’s reforms who is mentioned in 2 Kings 22:8 – 20 and is still around even in the reign of Jehoiakim.

Jeremiah 27

Jeremiah 27 addresses the power and authority of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Jeremiah is to make for himself straps and yoke-bars around his neck to symbolize the bondage Judah will face under the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. That God would use the Babylonians in such a way is perhaps one of the greatest ironies in all of Scripture. The prophet Habakkuk wrestled to understand this complicated movement of history. In fact, it was the impetus of the prophetic book that bears his name. Jeremiah's exposition of it provides clarity to what God is doing through Nebuchadnezzar, and his explanation only adds to the mystery and incomprehensibility of our God.

A casual reading of the Old Testament might lead one to believe that Nebuchadnezzar is a nice guy. In fact, there are Old Testament passages that one could even imply that Nebuchadnezzar is a believer. Jeremiah 27 presents a different side.

At the time of Jeremiah's writing, Babylon is becoming the dominant world power. Years prior, the people of Judah had escaped the strong hand of the Assyrian army through divine intervention (see Isaiah 37). Babylon has now swallowed up Assyria as a world power and Judah will not be as fortunate in the hands of Babylon. God makes clear through the word of Jeremiah that the people of Judah, the land, their worship in Jerusalem is about to be placed in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and as later chapters of Jeremiah will reveal, he showed no mercy. Their temple, their homes, and livelihoods were destroyed and the people were exiled to Babylon.

Jeremiah 27 makes clear this was "*by the great power and outstretched arm of God.*" The word of God even goes as far in verse 6 of Jeremiah 27 to call Nebuchadnezzar God's *servant* and that God had even given him "*the beasts of the field to serve him.*"

Once again, this is a hard message for the people of Judah to accept, particularly the officials. Jeremiah directs this message to King Zedekiah in verse 12. These chapters in Jeremiah cannot be viewed chronologically, but must be viewed thematically. The problem Jeremiah is addressing beginning in verse 16 through the end of the chapter is the false prophecy and the problem with people hearing what they want to hear versus what they need to hear. Human beings, even prophets like Jeremiah are in no position to tell God what to do. It is God's sovereign prerogative to be God. Moreover, God does not act at random. He's a God of order and purpose. His plans will be accomplished and cannot be thwarted by the powers that be. Even by false prophets who speak differently.

Jeremiah 28

Jeremiah 28 introduces Hananiah as the false prophet. This presents a reader with an interesting dilemma. What makes Hananiah's prophesy false prophesy? Hananiah has a hopeful message. Even Jeremiah offers a hearty "Amen" to it by hoping it's true (28:6). Hananiah has spoken that those who have been taken away to Babylon will be returned back to Judah "within two years" (28: 3). This contradicts Jeremiah's earlier prophesy that it will be 70 years from

Jeremiah 25. Naturally, the people would rather believe Hananiah than Jeremiah. But, time will tell and Jeremiah is content to apply the true/false prophet test to Hananiah of Deuteronomy 18:21, 22.

What is ironic of this chapter is that it is Hananiah who breaks the yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah with his false prophesy. As he sets Jeremiah free of his yoke, he symbolically believes he will be able to do the same for his people against Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. While Hananiah freed Jeremiah of his persecution, he did not detour Jeremiah from speaking the word of the Lord. Jeremiah proclaims, *“Go, tell Hananiah, ‘Thus says the Lord: You have broken wooden bars, but you have made in their place bars of iron’”* (vs. 13). The bars of iron are those of Nebuchadnezzar in which the people of Judah will not be able to escape. This yoke is not for Jeremiah, but for the people of Judah and it will be far worse than anything Jeremiah has experienced so far.

In the end, Hananiah is a false prophet who is telling people what they want to hear as opposed to what they need to hear. The Lord intervenes and Hananiah dies.

Jeremiah 29

All of Jeremiah 29 is a letter written by Jeremiah to the exiles of Judah who have been transported to Babylon. What a difficult and excruciatingly painful journey this must have been for God’s people. In fact, the book of Jeremiah doesn’t really tell us the full extent of it. That doesn’t come until the next book of Lamentations and it is indeed painful, especially for those who stayed behind in Jerusalem or fled to Egypt who suffered the most. God’s blessings flowed first and foremost to those who submitted to the Lord’s plan for them and went to Babylon, however painful that was. We know from Jeremiah that this process came in stages. The exiles in Jeremiah 29 represent the first of those who submitted and went to Babylon.

Even at the disciplining hand of God, the exiles in Babylon are the recipients of God’s blessing. In Jeremiah 29, God’s people are encouraged to experience the evidences of God’s grace. They are to build homes, plant gardens, enjoy the produce of the land. They are to marry and experience the blessings of family in pursuit of seeking the welfare of the city to which God has sent them in exile, *“for in its welfare they will find their welfare”* (29: 7). What a beautiful picture of restoration and outpouring of God’s grace contained in Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles. Yet, it comes to them in midst of great and painful loss. They are, after all, in exile. Yet, this is the context for one of the most beloved verses in the book of Jeremiah, 29: 11, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”* That’s good news, but understanding the context of Jeremiah’s letter makes it even better news.

Jeremiah’s mission was given to him in Jeremiah 1:10 over nations and kingdoms. It involved plucking up, breaking down, destroying and overthrowing and up until this point that is mostly what Jeremiah’s ministry has focused on. However, in chapter 29, there is a breakthrough in God’s promise to Jeremiah in 1:10, *“to build and to plant.”* Exile to God’s people represents the

wages of sin, death. Yet even in the most hopeless of circumstances, we see the triumphs of God's grace in the building and planting that are part of God's vision of restoration. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, however is in direct contradiction to the false prophets who have followed the exiles to Babylon. Beginning in verse 15, God promises to pursue the false prophets and their followers with sword, famine and pestilence (vs. 18). Three specific false prophets are mentioned by name in chapter 29: Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemaiah. All three are among the exiles in Babylon.

Apparently, Ahab and Zedekiah (not to be confused with kings of the same name) view exile as temporary. Their intention is that the exiles will be able to return to the land of Judah much earlier than the 70 year time frame that Jeremiah spoke of. They do not see settling in the land of Babylon and prospering to be a viable option for themselves or for the exiles. In their eyes Jeremiah's message will severely affect morale among the exiles in Babylon and will hamper their quest to gain power for themselves. However, God has other plans. He will use Nebuchadnezzar to strike down Ahab and Zedekiah in judgment for their sin of adultery and for their false prophesy.

Beginning in verse 24 to the end of the chapter, the false prophet Shemaiah is introduced. In response to Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, Shemaiah sent a letter to Jerusalem to Zephaniah the priest. He accuses Jeremiah of being a madman for speaking of an extended stay in Babylon (70 years) and telling the exiles to settle down and build and plant. His aim is to silence Jeremiah. Zephaniah reads the letter in Jeremiah's presence which elicits a response from Jeremiah in verse 31. The Lord will punish Shemaiah and his descendants for the false words of his letter. *"He shall not have anyone living among this people, and he shall not see the good that I will do to my people, declares the LORD, for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD."* (29:32)

Those who speak contrary to God's word miss the blessings God has for his people.

Jeremiah 30

Beginning in Jeremiah 30 and continuing through chapter 33, the Lord gives Jeremiah a vision of the future restoration of Judah and Israel. Jeremiah is instructed to write this vision so that it will be preserved for future generations. The vision is for a reunited Israel that includes repossession of their land. First, however, Israel will experience a time of great distress, *"Yet he shall be saved out of it"* (30:7). Whatever yoke of burden the Lord has placed on his people through the punishment of other nations will be broken.

Like many prophecies in the Bible there is a partial fulfillment pointing to an ultimate fulfillment, the now and the not yet. This prophesy speaks to a great day, similar to the Day of the Lord in the book of Amos. While this finds immediate context with Babylonian exile, there is also a future end time connotation. Babylonian captivity will be a time of great distress, but there is also the promise of a return to the land and a restoration of the fortunes of Israel, a second exodus after exile.

God's promise is to make a full end of nations that persecuted Israel while preserving Israel for eternity (vs. 11). God will use Babylon to discipline the people of Judah, but eventually Babylon

will face their own form of discipline by God making a full end of them. This, however, will not happen until God disciplines his own people in just measure (30:11).

A future restoration is God's doing and his alone. There is salvation in no one else. Israel's hurt and pain is incurable (30: 12, 15). Whatever attempts of reform Israel has sought have failed. While the Babylonians will inflict Israel with great harm, it is ultimately from the disciplining hand of God. *"Because your sins are flagrant, I have done these things to you"* (vs. 15).

Just as this is from the hand of God so too any hope of future restoration will also come from God. Who would dare approach God on his own initiative? This too must come from the hand of God. His judgment is because Israel is his people and thus he disciplines them in order that he shall be their God (vs. 22). As confusing as that is to Israel at the time of Jeremiah's writing, *"In the latter days you will understand this"* (vs. 24).

Jeremiah 31

Jeremiah 31 is a promise from the Lord that he will turn mourning into joy. As painful as the judgment of exile is for Israel, those who survive it will find the grace of God on full display (31: 2). God has loved his people with an everlasting love and his faithfulness to Israel has been unceasing (vs. 3). What Israel once experienced in the past, shall happen again. Proper shepherds (watchmen) will lead the people in truth to Zion. God will save his people, *"the remnant of Israel"* (vs. 7). The Lord will pay their ransom and bring about their redemption (31: 11), something Israel is totally incapable of doing on their own.

Before this can happen, though, Israel will have to grieve their loss and in verse 15, their grief, at least for now, is inconsolable. *"Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children: she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more"* (vs. 15).

As Jacob's wife, Rachel is the mother of Israel. Specifically, she's the mother of Joseph whose sons, Ephraim and Manasseh comprised the northern tribes of Israel. She was also the mother of Benjamin who along with the tribe of Judah comprised the southern kingdom we refer to as Judah that's being taken to exile in Babylon. While this passage is specifically directed to Judah, it includes a reunited Israel.

The place of Rachel's weeping is Ramah, a town located five miles north of Jerusalem that served as a gathering place for the exiles before being deported to Babylon. This location also helps us understand what their grief was about. Ramah is the last stop in the promised land before the exile. It's the moment reality sets in. What Jeremiah and other prophets warned about really is going to happen. It's the beginning of Judah coming to terms with its sin and that is never a joyous occasion, but it is also the beginning of restoration. Israel will not be able to experience resurrection without first experiencing death.

Grief and death are not the final words for God's people and that's the beautiful part of Jeremiah 31: 15. Readers of the New Testament are familiar with this verse. Matthew quotes it

in his gospel in Matthew 2:18 to describe the horror of Herod's genocide of baby boys in the region of Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph avoid this fate by escaping to Egypt but other parents are not as fortunate. Their grief is likened to Jeremiah 31:15. It's inconsolable. This is the place where many from Judah find themselves in Ramah, as they await their deportation.

Grief has a way of revealing what's really on our hearts and how we accept the discipline of God. At this point, the people of Judah are unable to see exile as being for their good. The promise from Jeremiah, however is that *"there is hope for your future"* (vs. 17). God has heard their grief as he's disciplined them. They are instructed to reflect upon their waywardness by marking road markers or guideposts of where and how they went astray (vs. 21). As they consider their ways, they shall return to the Lord.

Verse 28 is a reiteration of the mission God gave Jeremiah in 1:10. God, through Jeremiah did exactly what he commissioned Jeremiah to do, *"to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy and bring harm"* (vs. 28). But, the day is coming when God will build and plant. Right now, however the people do not see this promise. Instead they are stuck reciting the proverb that has replaced the word of God in people's lives, *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are on edge"* (vs.29). Ezekiel also dealt with people saying the same thing in Ezekiel 18:2 in Babylon, so this has become a popular expression among the exiles. Void of the Word of the God in their lives, this is the mantra that has replaced it. The people in effect blame their current sin and punishment as being the fault of their fathers. They don't see their need to repent. Jeremiah makes clear, the people of Judah must take responsibility for their sin. They cannot blame it on their fathers. *"But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge"* (vs. 30).

The days are coming when God will make a new covenant with a reunited and disciplined Israel. Beginning in verse 31, Jeremiah describes what this new covenant will look like and it is perhaps one of the most important portions in the book of Jeremiah. Whereas the Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone handed to Moses on Mount Sinai, the new covenant will be written on the hearts of the people who believe. People under the new covenant will know the Lord and will not depart from him. God *"will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more"* (vs. 34).

Jeremiah 32

Jeremiah 32 finds Jeremiah imprisoned in the king's court by Zedekiah King of Judah for prophesying against the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Zedekiah views Jeremiah's words as an act of treason. All this happens while the city of Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonians. While Jeremiah is imprisoned, the word of the Lord is that Zedekiah will suffer much worse than the suffering he's inflicted upon Jeremiah. Zedekiah will be deported to Babylon never to return to the land of Judah. At this point his fate is in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Those who stay behind and fight against the Babylonians for control of Jerusalem will not succeed.

The Lord asks Jeremiah to purchase a field in his hometown of Anathoth from his cousin. Jeremiah obeys but struggles to understand why God would ask him to do such a thing during the siege of Jerusalem. At the time of purchase, land in this area was more or less worthless as people were being taken away in exile and everything left behind would be destroyed by the Babylonians. Any hope of this being a wise investment seemed impossible in light of the hopelessness of the situation.

Beginning in verse 16, Jeremiah prays to the Lord for understanding about the land transaction he just made in the previous verses. The beautiful confession of verse 17 is the opening of Jeremiah's prayer: *"Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you."* What Jeremiah lacks in understanding is more than compensated by his faith in a God in which nothing is too hard. In verses 18 through 25, Jeremiah recounts the steadfast hand of God upon his people and specifically to Jeremiah himself.

Then in verse 26, the Lord answers Jeremiah's prayer: *"Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?"* The Lord then reveals to Jeremiah what he is going to do through the exile of his people and the eventual returning of his people to the land Jeremiah had previously purchased. Jeremiah is to rest in the peace and security that comes with knowing a God who can do all things, *Nothing is too hard*. Even redeeming the worthless piece of land Jeremiah just purchased.

Jeremiah's purchase is a picture of redemption. Jeremiah is buying something that is worthless at the time of purchase, but eventually after exile it will be a valuable piece of property. But, first God must deal with the sin of the children of Israel which is all-inclusive including kings, priests, prophets and inhabitants of Jerusalem. *"They have turned to me their back and not their face"* (vs. 33). Though God had persistently taught them in truth, they would not listen or receive instruction. In verse 35, God addresses the sin of child sacrifice which represents the last straw for Judah.

Verses 36 to the end of the chapter are a restating of the New Covenant God promised in Jeremiah 31:31 – 40. It is given once more in chapter 32 for purposes of clarification of God's faithfulness. It also helps to explain Jeremiah's land purchase that makes no sense without the promise of future restoration. God has not given up on the land of Israel. Just as he will redeem Jeremiah's purchase of worthless property, so too will he redeem Israel.

"For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them" (32:42).

Jeremiah 33

In Jeremiah 33, Jeremiah is still imprisoned *"in the court of the guard"* where he receives a second message from the Lord. This message concerns the fate of the homes in Jerusalem that were destroyed to form a defense against the invading Babylonians. God informs Jeremiah that

these homes are going to be filled with dead bodies of those who have come to fight against the Babylonians.

This is exactly what Jeremiah has been trying to get across to his people and now God confirms it again. They should not fight against the Babylonians. They should accept their fate as the discipline of God and submit and go to Babylon. This is what repentance looks like for the people of Judah. This is the best-case scenario and as such it's a message of grace to God's people. Yet, it's a message that is very unpopular among the people and their leaders. Jeremiah's even been imprisoned for delivering it. If this is hard for Jeremiah's people to understand, it's because they have not consulted the Lord in these matters. Jeremiah is given a beautiful promise in 33:3, *"Call to me and I will answer you and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."*

Throughout his prophetic ministry, Jeremiah has struggled to understand what God is doing. Jeremiah knows so much about God and yet there's so much he doesn't know or understand. Like all of us he doesn't know what he doesn't know. And he's God's prophet! That's why the promise in Jeremiah 33:3 is so important. God will reveal to Jeremiah "great and hidden things" that he does not know.

The reassurance Jeremiah received in this chapter is concluded with another reiteration of the promised new covenant beginning in verse 14 that God will use to restore the fortunes of Israel. God is raising up faithful shepherds to restore Israel that will lead them to the one true Shepherd, *"the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" (33:16)*. This promise is a reiteration of the righteous branch from Jeremiah 23:5, 6. It points to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who is our righteousness.

God's covenant with Israel is as certain as the rising of the sun and the sunset which God describes as his covenant with the day and with the night. This is God's general revelation to mankind of his common grace and faithfulness.

Jeremiah 34

The siege of Jerusalem is at hand in Jeremiah 34. Everything Jeremiah warned about with the Babylonians overtaking Jerusalem is now happening. In this midst of this assault, Jeremiah receives a word from the Lord to deliver to King Zedekiah. The promise is that Zedekiah will suffer a lesser fate if he will but listen to Jeremiah. He will die in peace (34:5), but it will be in the land of Babylon, not Judah.

King Zedekiah, in turn, makes a covenant with the Lord, under the terms that everyone in the land of Judah should set free his male and female slaves. According to Levitical Law, Jews could sell themselves into slavery as payment of a debt they could not pay. They were to be released by their master in the year of Jubilee, which occurred every seven years (Leviticus 25: 40). Israel had not observed the year of Jubilee in freeing their slaves. Jeremiah and other prophets before him often addressed this problem in their message.

With his back against the wall with the invading forces of Babylon knocking on his doors, Zedekiah attempts to make a new covenant with God and enforce the year of Jubilee. What he is in effect doing is not making a new covenant, but enforcing the old. The problem with Zedekiah's actions is that it was only temporary. The people obeyed, *"But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them into subjection as slaves"* (34:11).

Zedekiah and his people in effect violated the covenant they made with God. It was a continuation of Israel's problem of repenting in pretense that Jeremiah has addressed throughout the duration of his prophesy (See Jeremiah 3: 10). God is now going to do to the men who made this covenant in pretense what they did with the calves used in their ceremony.

The ratification of a covenant involved a cutting ritual, established as early as Abraham's covenant with God in Genesis 15:18. The cutting usually involved an animal, in this case a calf. God will now act in like manner to the people of Judah who turned around and enslaved their former slaves they had set free in pretense in this phony covenant: *"And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts"* (34:18).

God will make the land of Judah *"a desolation without inhabitant"* (34:22).

Jeremiah 35

In Jeremiah 35, we are introduced to a small clan of people known as the Rechabites. The only other reference to this people group is in Nehemiah 3: 14 where they helped rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. It is believed they originate from the Kenites who accompanied the Israelites when Joshua took possession of the promised land. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro was a Kenite (Judges 1:16). They were not opposed to Israel, but neither were they a part of the covenant community. It appears they lived on friendly terms with the Israelites. They are mostly a nomadic community whose distinguishing characteristic is their abstention from wine and they lived in tents. This is part of a vow they made to their forefathers that they faithfully clung to.

In Jeremiah 35, they've sought asylum from Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah goes to the Rechabites to test their vow to abstain from wine. He sets before them "pitchers full of wine, and cups" and tells them to drink (vs. 5). Notice Jeremiah is not tempting them, he's testing them, specifically their faithfulness to the vow they made to their father Jonadab. The Rechabites pass the test. They refuse the wine Jeremiah sets before them. As a result, Jeremiah contrasts their faithfulness to their forefathers with the unfaithfulness of Judah to their forefathers. *"The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the command that their father gave them, but this people has not obeyed me"* (vs. 16). As a result, Jeremiah promises them that because they have obeyed their father they *"shall never lack a man to stand before me"* (vs. 19). This is in stark contrast to King Jehoiakim who in Jeremiah 36:30 will have *"none to sit on the throne of David."*

Jeremiah 36

More problems emerge with the chronology of the book of Jeremiah in chapter 36. In chapter 34, Jeremiah addressed his message to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. In chapter 36, Jeremiah is addressing his message to Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah who reigned before Zedekiah. This is just one of many examples of where the book of Jeremiah weaves in and out between kings of Judah in no particular chronological order. The events of chapter 34 occurred after chapter 36 so the account is not in proper chronological order. The timeline of Jeremiah 36 is best understood to fall in line with the events of Jeremiah 25 where Nebuchadnezzar first made his moves on Judah and Jeremiah prophesied a 70 year captivity for Judah in the land of Babylon.

Jeremiah 36 offers several plausible explanations for these chronological problems in the book. The first possibility is what Jeremiah is asked to do from the Lord in the opening verses of this chapter. He is to write on a scroll all the words that the Lord has told Jeremiah to speak. Jeremiah delivered his prophesy both orally and in writing. It appears what is happening in chapter 36, is Jeremiah is asked of God to write down what he has spoken. In other words, the spoken word is also going to become the written word. The hope is that since the written word has a wider audience than the spoken word, all of the house of Judah will get the message. This appears to correspond with God's instruction to write in 30: 1 and if so, is helpful in sorting out the chronological problems in the book of Jeremiah. Beginning in chapter 30 and continuing through to chapter 39, Jeremiah is putting forth God's sentence upon Judah in written form. He is citing present and past violations. His purpose is to address Judah's sin, not necessarily following proper chronology.

Jeremiah's prophesy can best be described as a collection of anthologies that occurred throughout the duration of his prophetic life that all told was approximately 40 years. Whoever compiled the book of Jeremiah had other intentions than providing a chronological account. What is recorded is perhaps a recounting of prior content or at the very least it speaks of a different time period. Jeremiah 36 is helpful as it shows some of the process involved to preserve in written form what Jeremiah spoke orally. These processes make the various anthologies of Jeremiah difficult to compile in a chronological order.

Regardless, Jeremiah employs the services of his scribe Baruch in chapter 36 to write what Jeremiah dictates to him. This is the process of dictation and it should not be confused with the process of authority and inspiration that the first three verses of chapter 36 address. Jeremiah is simply speaking to Baruch what the Lord has given him to speak and Baruch is Jeremiah's recording secretary. Not only does Baruch write the words of Jeremiah, he also follows the Lord's command to read Jeremiah's words in the Lord's house. This is after all, the reason why Baruch is doing what he's doing. The Lord is using him to preserve the Word of God for present and future generations.

In Jeremiah 36:9, a fast is initiated throughout Judah during which time Baruch reads the words of Jeremiah in their assembly. When the officials hear what Baruch has read they are fearful of what Jeremiah has to say. They ask for Baruch's scroll to take to the king so that he too can hear Jeremiah's words. They also ask Baruch and Jeremiah to hide themselves for safety (36:19).

As Jeremiah's words are read before the king, he cuts the scroll in pieces and burns it in the fire. *"Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments"* (Jeremiah 36:24). Jehoiakim then orders his servants to seize Baruch and Jeremiah, *"but the Lord hid them"* (36:26).

Because Jehoiakim viewed the word of God as an object of scorn (Jeremiah 6: 10), God's message to Jehoiakim is that *"He shall have none to sit on the throne of David and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night"* (Jeremiah 36:30). This is not just an individual matter, but one that affects his offspring, his servants, the inhabitants and all the people of Judah.

What Jeremiah spoke and what Baruch recorded and read is more than Jeremiah's words, opinions of ideas. It is the very word of God which the king and his servants have not only ignored they've sought to destroy it forever by burning it in the fire. But, God's word is far greater and more powerful than these schemes of hell that Jehoiakim and his servants sought to employ.

"Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them" (Jeremiah 36:32).

Jeremiah 37

The chronology in the book of Jeremiah is fast forwarded in chapter 37. Whereas Jeremiah 36 dealt with King Jehoiakim, chapter 37 deals with his successor, Zedekiah. While the chronology fits, serious questions remain regarding the time gap between the two chapters and what other events occurred in the book of Jeremiah in between.

Since Jehoiakim was cursed with no sons to succeed him to the throne of Judah (36: 30), Zedekiah is king of Judah not by dynastic succession, but appointment of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In 2 Kings 24:10 – 17, the city of Jerusalem is captured by the Babylonians. At the time Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin is king. He is also known as Coniah (Jeremiah 37: 1). There are only two short verses of Scripture regarding his reign in 2 Kings 24, verses 8 and 9. His reign only lasted three months before surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:12). This led Nebuchadnezzar to appoint Zedekiah as vassal king of Judah. He also took all the remaining gold from the temple in Jerusalem and took 10,000 captives to Babylon. Only the poorest of the land remained in Judah (2 Kings 24:14).

Zedekiah is concerned about his future under such dire circumstances. Beginning in verse 3, he sends messengers to Jeremiah asking him to pray for the situation at hand. The Egyptians have come up to the region to face the Babylonians in order to gain control of the region. Many in Judah have placed false hope in Egypt delivering them from the hand of the Babylon. Jeremiah's message to King Zedekiah is given to the messengers to deliver back to Zedekiah, beginning in verse 6. Jeremiah's word is that Pharaoh is about to return to Egypt and when he

does the Babylonians will come back and take control of Judah. The Babylonians will burn the city with fire.

Beginning in verse 11, the Babylonian army has withdrawn from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army being there. Jeremiah is headed to Benjamin to claim his portion. Perhaps he is going to claim his land purchase that he made in Jeremiah 32. Yet, Zedekiah's servants believe he is headed to Babylon and they seize him. Jeremiah states this is a lie, but Zedekiah's servants don't believe him. They beat him and imprison him in the *"the house of Jonathan the secretary, for it had been made a prison"* (37:15).

After many days in this dungeon cell, Zedekiah calls for Jeremiah secretly seeking a word from the Lord. Jeremiah informs Zedekiah that he will be handed over to the King of Babylon (37:17). Jeremiah then pleads his case before Zedekiah asking what wrong he has done in speaking the truth. Moreover, why haven't the false prophets been punished in like manner to Jeremiah? Jeremiah pleads with Zedekiah to not be returned to the dungeon in the house of Jonathan. Zedekiah relents and allows Jeremiah to be imprisoned in the court of the guard and given a daily ration of bread.

Jeremiah 38

It is hard to discern if Jeremiah 38 records a separate incident in the life of Jeremiah other than the imprisonment recorded in chapter 37 or if it is another account of the same event. Either way, Jeremiah 38 is one of the saddest chapters in the book of Jeremiah. After spending many days imprisoned, Jeremiah is rescued only to be imprisoned again, only under far worse conditions than before. All this for saying to the people, *"Thus says the Lord: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live"* (vs. 2). Jeremiah's message has not changed throughout his prophetic ministry, even under the threat of persecution. Jerusalem and surrounding Judah will be taken captive by Babylon. The only viable option for the people of Judah is to submit to the Lord's discipline and be exiled to Judah. This is not only the truth from the Lord, it is also the Lord's extension of grace to Judah.

Jeremiah suffers greatly for speaking the truth. In Jeremiah 38, he's cast in the cistern of Malhaiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard. It's unclear if this is further persecution from the events recorded in chapter 37, or if this is an entirely new round of persecution. Jeremiah is let down by ropes. There is no water in the cistern, only mud in which Jeremiah is stuck (38:5, 6). Of all the prophets in the Old Testament who have a book named after them, Jeremiah is the prophet whose suffering is most vividly recorded in written form.

An Ethiopian named Ebed-melech, a eunuch serving King Zedekiah appeals to Zedekiah to release Jeremiah from the cistern for fear of him dying of starvation. Zedekiah agrees and Ebed-melech and thirty men release Jeremiah from the cistern. Jeremiah remains in the court of the guard.

After being released, at Zedekiah's urging, Jeremiah continues to warn Zedekiah. Jeremiah warns Zedekiah that if he surrenders to Babylon his life will be spared and Jerusalem will be spared. However, if Zedekiah does not surrender the city will be burned by the Babylonians and Zedekiah will not escape their hands. Zedekiah is fearful of his fellow countrymen who have already gone to Babylon, fearing they will turn against him and deal cruelly with him. Jeremiah promises that if he obeys the voice of the Lord that will not happen.

"And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken" (38:28).

Jeremiah 39

Jeremiah 39 records the fall of Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. It's not a pretty picture. Nebuchadnezzar's forces showed no mercy in their destruction, even the extinction of human life. Everything Jeremiah spoke has now come true. The first thing to happen in the siege of Jerusalem is Nebuchadnezzar's forces taking Zedekiah captive. Zedekiah tries to flee, but the Babylonian army overtook him (39:4, 5). True to Jeremiah's prior word (34:2 – 5) Zedekiah is taken to Babylon where he will survive. Yet, what he sees would cause one to question if this was an act of mercy to Zedekiah. He sees his own sons slaughtered before him. He also has both of his eyes put out.

This chapter serves as the authentication of Jeremiah's prophesy. *"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold I will fulfill my words against this city for harm and not for good, and they shall be accomplished before you on that day" (vs. 16).*

Even though Nebuchadnezzar showed no mercy to Jerusalem and surrounding Judah, he does show far more mercy to Jeremiah than the leaders of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar's captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan commands his men to take Jeremiah, *"look after him well, and do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you" (vs. 12).* This is in accord with God's promise to Jeremiah, *"But I will deliver you on that day, declares the Lord, and you shall not be given into the hand of men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have put your trust in me, declares the Lord" (vs. 17, 18).*

Already some had obeyed the Lord's command to go into exile to Babylon. Those who stayed behind either fled to Egypt or were given vineyards and fields in the land of Judah. On the surface, this might seem like an act of mercy or the best of options for the people of Judah. It was not. The people who were given the vineyards and fields in Judah had no resources to cultivate a harvest and their efforts of even trying were at best in vain. They were destined to a life of starvation and poverty and suffered the worst for it.

The Lord delivers Jeremiah from the Babylonians and allows him to stay in the land of Judah. At first, this is a positive arrangement for Jeremiah, but it will soon go bad when a power struggle

erupts in Jeremiah 40 with the captain of the guard. This will cause some in the land of Judah to want to flee to Egypt, but Jeremiah warns in chapter 42 that they should not do this.

At the end of chapter 39, the Word of the Lord once again comes to Jeremiah. The Lord will indeed fulfill Jeremiah's prior words regarding the fall of Jerusalem. He also issues a message of hope to his friend Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian who rescued Jeremiah in Jeremiah 38. Because he was loyal and faithful to Jeremiah, the Lord will spare his life (39:15 – 18).

Jeremiah 40

Jeremiah 40 addresses what exile will mean for Jeremiah personally. All along, Jeremiah has told his people that they should submit to the discipline of the Lord and go to Babylon. In the opening verses of chapter 40, Jeremiah is in Ramah, the last stop before the exile, bound in chains with the rest of his fellow captives, but it's not certain if he himself will be going to Babylon.

The captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, Nebuzaradan, confirms what Jeremiah has said all along in verses 2: *"The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place. The Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you"* (vs. 2). Nebuzaradan releases Jeremiah from his chains and gives Jeremiah the option of going to Babylon or staying behind in Jerusalem., *"See the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it is good and right to go"* (vs. 4).

Jeremiah decides to stay behind in Jerusalem which means he will be under the authority of Gedaliah whom Nebuchadnezzar has appointed governor over Judah. Faithful to Nebuchadnezzar's promise to Jeremiah, Gedaliah promises to treat Jeremiah well. He's given *"an allowance of food and a present"* (vs. 5). Even so, this is far from ideal living conditions. Those who stay behind are the *"poorest of the land"* and the political turmoil they experienced in Judah prior to exile is far from over. While it appears Gedaliah will treat people well who stay behind in Judah, his life is in danger. Baalis the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take Gedaliah's life. Gedaliah is warned but doesn't take the threat seriously.

Jeremiah 41

Gedaliah is murdered by Ismael in **Jeremiah 41**. It is the beginning of tremendous unrest for those who stay behind in the land of Judah, including Jeremiah. Eighty men disguised as refugees come *"from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria, with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, bringing grain offerings and incense to present at the temple of the Lord"* (vs. 5). Ishmael tricks them into coming to meet Gedaliah. He ends up slaughtering them and casting them in a cistern.

Ishmael is an evil man and Johanan the son of Kareah tries to stop Ishmael by attempting to turn those whom Ishmael has persecuted against Ishmael. Johanan is unsuccessful. As a result, many in Judah flee to Egypt for safety.

Jeremiah 42

Johanan pleads his case to Jeremiah in the beginning verses of Jeremiah 42. He asks Jeremiah to *“let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the Lord your God for us, for all this remnant – because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us – that the Lord your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do”* (vs. 3). Johanan and his men promise to do whatever the Lord tells them to do through the word of Jeremiah.

After ten days, Jeremiah has an answer from the Lord. It is to stay in the land of Judah regardless of how unstable it is. Under no circumstances should they go to Egypt. *“If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow close after you to Egypt, and there you shall die”* (vs. 15, 16).

Jeremiah 43

In spite of all of Jeremiah’s warnings to his people not to flee to Egypt, Jeremiah is taken there in Jeremiah 43 by Johanan and the commanders of his forces. Even though they had previously promised to do whatever the Lord commanded them to do through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 42: 5), they turn on Jeremiah’s word when they don’t like Jeremiah’s answer to stay in Judah. They end up taking Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch and the surviving remnant of Judah to Egypt.

As the remnant heads to Egypt with Johanan and his guard, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah beginning in verse 8. Jeremiah asks people to take stones and *“hide them in the mortar in the pavement that is at the entrance of Pharaoh’s palace in Tahpanhes.”* These stones are a sign that Nebuchadnezzar will destroy Egypt and set his throne in the very location where they have placed their stones.

Throughout his prophecy, Jeremiah has referred to Nebuchadnezzar as God’s servant. This designation was a difficult conundrum for Jeremiah and his people to understand. How or why would God call a wicked king of another nation his servant? But, in Jeremiah 43 that message becomes more clear. Nebuchadnezzar is God’s servant of judgment upon Jeremiah’s people for their sins. No matter how hard they try to escape it, even by escaping to Egypt, the ultimate victor is God. He will have his way with his people regardless of where they are.

Jeremiah 44

Jeremiah 44 is Jeremiah’s word those in Judah who escaped the Babylonian exile by fleeing to Egypt. It is somewhat ironic that Jeremiah now finds himself among them in Egypt when he so persistently warned his people not to flee there for safety. In Jeremiah 44, Jeremiah is in Egypt against his will.

Nonetheless, it is another occasion to try to make his people understand what God has been warning them about all along. The judgment, exile, murder, and destruction of their land should

not surprise anyone who has been listening to Jeremiah. This is an act of profound grace from God that Jeremiah's people have consistently resisted.

God has not acted in judgment indiscreetly. He's sent his prophet Jeremiah to warn the people and try to encourage repentance. *"But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their evil and make no offering to other gods"* (vs. 5) It is not that God has not spoken; it's that God's people have not listened.

Jeremiah 45

Jeremiah 45 is one of the shortest chapters in the book of Jeremiah. It contains Jeremiah's message to his scribe, Baruch. This chapter is a follow up to the events of Jeremiah 36 when Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's scroll that Jeremiah dictated to Baruch. Verse 1 seems to imply that the events of this chapter happened *"when he [Baruch] wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah."*

On the other hand, it could be that this chapter records a conversation Jeremiah and Baruch had on the way to Egypt and if that's the case the chronology fits. We know from Jeremiah 43: 6 that Baruch accompanied Jeremiah to Egypt.

Baruch seems to have taken personal offense at what Jehoiakim did in burning his scroll. Baruch is quoted by Jeremiah in verse 3 of saying *"Woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain. I am wary with my groaning, and I find no rest."*

This is a hard thing for Jeremiah to hear from his own scribe. Whatever suffering Baruch experienced from Jehoiakim is minor compared to what Jeremiah has experienced throughout his prophetic ministry. In verse 4, Jeremiah repeats the mission the Lord gave to him at the very beginning of his prophetic calling in 1: 10. This applies not only to Jeremiah, but to Baruch as well, *"Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up – that is the whole land"* (45:4).

Jeremiah is personally offended that in the midst of everything Jeremiah has personally experienced with suffering, that Baruch would seek greatness for himself (45: 5). Even though God is bringing disaster upon Judah, Jeremiah promises Baruch that *"I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go"* (45:5)

Jeremiah 46

Beginning in Jeremiah 46 and continuing through chapter 51, Jeremiah issues a series of judgments against surrounding nations beginning with Egypt. Jeremiah 46 records the battle of Carchemish in which Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt.

Any hope Judah had in finding asylum in Egypt is removed in this chapter. Even in Egypt, the people of Judah cannot escape God's judgment for their sin, through Nebuchadnezzar. God's

use of Babylon to judge sin is not limited to Judah. Surrounding nations, including Egypt will suffer the same fate. *“The daughter of Egypt shall be put to shame; she shall be delivered into the hand of a people from the north”* (46:24). But, just as future blessing is promised to the people of Judah following judgment and exile, the same grace will also be extended to Egypt. *“Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, declares the Lord”* (46:26).

Throughout Scripture, Israel has been sternly warned never to return to Egypt (Numbers 14:4, Deuteronomy 17:16, 28: 68). Symbolically, a return to Egypt represents a return to the slavery the Lord had graciously freed Israel from. To desire to return is the ultimate in Israel’s apostasy.

Even so, Jeremiah delivers a concluding promise to the people of Judah who went to Egypt in verse 28: *“Fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the Lord., for I am with you. I will make a full end of all the nations to which I have driven you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.”*

Jeremiah 47

Jeremiah 47 contains God’s judgment upon the long time enemy of Israel, the Philistines. The Egyptians through Pharaoh attacked the Philistines at various times in the Old Testament. Their attack at Gaza is mentioned in verse 1. Egypt and Israel had a common enemy in the Philistines and Israel often looked to Egypt of hoping in defeating the Philistines. However, the defeat of the Philistines will not come from the Egyptians, or even Israel. The ultimate judgment of the Philistines will come from Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar’s army.

Babylon is described in verse 2 as *“waters that are rising out of the north”* that will affect every inhabitant of Egypt. The destruction will destroy all of the Philistines, even though they will seek refuge in Tyre and Sidon. It will not be enough to stop the Lord’s judgment against them being executed by Babylon.

Those who are spared will follow the mourning practices of their gods by shaving their heads and gashing themselves, (47:5) but it won’t be enough to stop it. What Jeremiah foretells is so bad that he rhetorically asks, *“Ah, sword of the Lord! How long till you are quiet? Put yourself into your scabbard; rest and be still! (47:6).*

Jeremiah 48

Jeremiah now turns to Moab in his series of judgments against other nations in Jeremiah 48. This is the longest passage against other nations. Moab had a history of friendly / unfriendly relations with Israel over the years. Mostly it was on unfriendly terms as it is at the end of Jeremiah’s prophecy.

As Babylon makes its way to Judah and its destruction against Jerusalem, it must first go through Moab. Jeremiah makes clear Moab won’t escape Babylon’s destruction either as a long list of their cities are mentioned in this chapter who will also be destroyed. The reason for this

judgment against Moab is in verse 7, *“because you trusted in your works and your treasures.”* In verse 10, Babylon is considered cursed if they are slack in withholding the wrath against Moab.

Their judgment also includes *“Chemosh,”* the chief Moabite deity who will also face defeat. This is a long chapter and most of it is centered around the worship of this deity. The chapter ends with a promise from God, *“Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, declares the Lord. Thus far is the judgment of Moab”* (48:47).

Jeremiah 49

Jeremiah 49 continues the series of judgments against specific nations by pronouncing judgment upon Ammon in verses 1 – 6, Edom in verses 7 through 22, Damascus in verses 23 – 27, Kedar and Hazor in verses 28 – 33, and finally Elam in verses 34 – 39.

So much of Jeremiah’s prophecy has been focused on Judah and the sins of God’s people. As important as that is, Jeremiah’s series of judgments of other nations is proof that God will not let sin go unabated. Surrounding nations are just as guilty as Judah and they too will have their day of reckoning with God.

In verses 1 through 6 of Jeremiah 49 the focus is on Ammon and their god Milcom. The specific sin that is being addressed is how the worship of Milcom and the influence of the Ammonites displaced the worship of the God of Israel among the tribe of Gad.

In Numbers 32, the tribe of Gad along with the tribe of Reuben ask Moses to allow them to settle in the Transjordan area rather than crossing the Jordan with the rest of Israel to take possession of the promised land. The reason for this request is that these tribes possess a great number of livestock and the Transjordan area offers them better pasture land. At first Moses does not think this is a good idea, but eventually he agrees to their request as long as they accompany the rest of Israel in taking possession of the land. Their settlement of this territory was brought into suspicion in Joshua 22, when they erected a tower of witness that was misinterpreted as a false god by the other tribes of Israel. Here in Jeremiah 49, they are in fact worshipping a false God that is the god of the Ammonites, Milcom.

The focus is shifted to Edom, beginning in verse 7, The Edomites are descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau and they have a long standing history of enmity with Israel. Jeremiah is not the first prophet to address Israel’s problems with Edom.

Jeremiah begins his judgment upon Edom by addressing their wisdom that in verse 7 has vanished. God’s judgment upon Edom will be worse than the remnants of grape gatherers and thieves who have destroyed *“only enough for themselves* (49:9). God’s destruction of them by the Babylonians will strip Edom bare. The sound of their fall will be heard by the whole earth (49:21).

A shorter oracle of judgment is reserved for Damascus in verses 23 through 27. Their cities of Hamath and Arpad being further north will be some of the first to be affected by Babylon’s

invasion of Judah. Once a stronghold of power, Damascus will be forsaken and God will devour the stronghold of their ruler whose title is Ben-hadad.

Beginning in verse 28, Jeremiah focuses on *“the people of the east.”* Specifically, this is directed toward a tribal people located in the Arabian desert of Kedar. The focus is also on neighboring Hazor. Nebuchadnezzar *“has made a plan against them”* (49:30). Being a nomadic people, they have *“no gates or bars”* but dwell alone (49:31). They will be no match for Nebuchadnezzar’s army. *“No man shall dwell there; no man shall sojourn in her.”* The message is clear that surrounding nations will not be able to seek asylum in what normally would be a place of isolation and security.

The final judgement in Jeremiah 49 is reserved for Elam. This particular prophesy is dated to the reign of Zedekiah. There is a possibility that the people of Judah were hoping for Elam to step up and counter the attack from Babylon. However, Jeremiah makes clear that is not even a possibility. God is unleashing upon Elam *“the four winds from the four quarters of heaven”* (49:36), after which time they too will be scattered like the wind.

The main point of Jeremiah 49 is that Babylon will be God’s instrument of judgment against Judah and there is nothing Judah can do to stop it. No alliance with any other nation will be sufficient enough to curtail what is about to happen.

Jeremiah 50

Beginning in Jeremiah 50 and continuing through chapter 51, the last of Jeremiah’s judgment of other nations is reserved for Babylon. Up until this point God has used Babylon to discipline his own people, Judah. This reality confounded prophets, including Jeremiah, even before it happened. How or why would God use a world power more evil and ruthless to judge and discipline the sin of his own people? Jeremiah will come to terms with the answer in the next two chapters.

While God’s use of Babylon as his servant is confounding, Jeremiah chapter 50 is helpful. The judgment of God is now upon them for their sin. God does use other nations to judge his people, but even their sin will have a day of reckoning and this chapter recounts what Babylon’s will be.

Jeremiah has followed the same pattern as Isaiah. Beginning in Isaiah chapter 13, Isaiah issues a series of oracles against other nations that concludes in Isaiah 24 with Isaiah’s apocalypse. The whole world is guilty before God. Isaiah began and ended his oracles against the nations with Babylon and his words no doubt brought comfort and direction for Jeremiah as he watched Isaiah’s scenarios unfold. At the time of Isaiah, Babylon was an emerging world power. What Isaiah warned about is what Jeremiah lived. Jeremiah followed a similar pattern to Isaiah by issuing his prophecy as Israel is being exiled to Babylon. It is hope for the future. As Jeremiah and other godly men question why the wicked prosper, the words of the prophets provide assurance that no man escapes God’s righteous sentence.

In Jeremiah 50:2, *“Babylon is taken.”* Their gods, Bell and Merodach are humiliated. These are forms of Baal worship and they are powerless to save Babylon from the fate that awaits them.

Throughout Jeremiah's prophesy, he has spoken of Babylon as a power from the north that will invade Judah and carry her to exile. That northern power, of course, is a reference to Babylon. In Jeremiah 50:3, Jeremiah uses a play on words with this phrase. *"Out of the north a nation has come up against"* Babylon. This is an example of God judging in like measure. The picture in this verse and throughout chapter 50 is one of total desolation.

The destruction of Babylon will cause a united Israel to come together and seek the Lord *"in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten"* (50:5). This is no doubt a reference to what Jeremiah previously spoke about in Jeremiah 31:31 – 34 and 32: 38 – 41. There will be a partial fulfillment of this promise with the return of the exiles to Jerusalem in the second Exodus in which the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. As Ezra will record this historic occasion that Jeremiah foretells here in Jeremiah 50, it is in Ezra's words, *"that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled"* (Ezra 1:1). Yet the new covenant promises of Jeremiah 31 and 32 are ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

God is *"stirring up and bringing against Babylon a gathering of great nations, from the north country"* (Jeremiah 50:9). These prophecies are so specific that Isaiah actually named the leader of this military alliance as Cyrus the Mede (45:1). Even before Babylon exiled Judah, Isaiah names the one who will defeat them. While Jeremiah does not specifically mention Cyrus by name he does include the military alliance he leads in Jeremiah 51:27, 28. *"For this is the vengeance of the Lord: take vengeance on her; do to her as she has done"* (Jeremiah 50:15).

Jeremiah describes Babylon's fall as *"the hammer of the whole earth being cut down and broken."* The Lord's fury of judgment upon Babylon is described as the Lord opening his armory. Perhaps this is a play on words as this is the very thing King Hezekiah did in Isaiah 39. As envoys came to visit Hezekiah, he showed them everything he owned including his armory. Isaiah rebukes Hezekiah for this mishap by stating *"Behold the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your father have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon"* (Isaiah 39:6). Now the tables have turned and it is the Lord who has opened his armory against Babylon (Jeremiah 50:25).

The future for Babylon is that *"She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations"* (Jeremiah 50:39). Again, an ironic turn of events is implied with the people of the north. While this has been used to describe Babylon throughout the book of Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 50: 41, the tables have turned and now it refers to others from the north (Medes and Persians) who will destroy Babylon.

"At the sound of the capture of Babylon the earth shall tremble, and her cry shall be heard among the nations" (Jeremiah 50:46).

Jeremiah 51

Jeremiah 51 continues the theme of judgment against Babylon that was started in chapter 50. These two chapters form a one, two punch to Babylon. If chapter 50 is the verdict against

Babylon then chapter 51 is their sentence. This is a long chapter and for good reason. The Lord has a lot to address with them and Jeremiah doesn't spare any details.

While God's use of Babylon as his servant is confounding, Jeremiah chapter 51 is helpful. The judgment of God is now upon them for their sin. This is always the focus of God's judgment and it's an important factor. God used Babylon to judge his people Israel, but that does not mean God approves of Babylon's sin that was used against Judah. Lest Israel and Judah feel that God has issued a personal assault on them, they must understand it was against their sin and not them personally. God establishes that fact early in Jeremiah 51, *"For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the Lord of hosts"* (Jeremiah 51:5). What will eventually happen to Babylon is a vindication for Israel and Israel should boldly proclaim it in Zion (Jeremiah 51:10), for ultimately, it will lead Israel back to Zion. What must be understood through passages like Jeremiah 51 is that God's pattern of restoration, involves destruction. It's necessary because of our sin. It is in fact a confirmation of Jeremiah's initial mission over nations and kingdoms given in Jeremiah 1: 10, *"to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

Throughout the Old Testament, Babylon, or the Chaldeans, have been described as God's hammer. Jeremiah continues that theme in verses 20 – 23. Babylon was a hammer used by God to pluck up, break down, destroy and overthrow kingdoms as judgment against their sin. However, beginning in verse 24 of Jeremiah 51, God will repay Babylon for what they have done to Zion, even though they were God's servant in executing judgment against Judah.

The process God will use against Babylon includes an alliance from Ararat Minni, and Ashkenaz, along with the kings of the Medes (Jeremiah 51:27 – 28). Babylon will tremble, their strength will fail. God is responding in like measure. *"The violence done to me and to my kinsmen be upon Babylon, let the inhabitant of Zion say"* (51:35). The picture from this chapter is one of complete desolation and destruction of Babylon; a confirmation of the mission in the beginning of Jeremiah's prophesy in 1: 10. *"Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel, just as for Babylon have fallen the slain of all the earth"* (Jeremiah 51:49). *"For the Lord is a God of recompense; he will surely repay"* (51:56).

Beginning in verse 59, Jeremiah directs his prophesy to Seraiah who is a quartermaster in Zedekiah's administration. Jeremiah is giving the words of his prophesy to Seraiah to take with him to Babylon. It's unclear if Seraiah or Zedekiah actually made a visit to Babylon during the time of Jeremiah's writing. But, Jeremiah is writing of a future fulfillment not a present reality. His words are the words of the Lord and he wants the king and his administration to be aware. This is given to Seraiah as a future hope of what awaits the people of Zion. *"Thus far are the words of Jeremiah"* (59:64).

Jeremiah 52

Jeremiah 52 is the last chapter of Jeremiah but it is the beginning of what Jeremiah will continue to experience in the book of Lamentations that follows. Chronologically, it comes years

before the events mentioned in Jeremiah 50 and 51. Chapter 51 is a vision of the future for Babylon; chapter 52 addresses the present situation at hand for Jeremiah. In large part, it is a reiteration of what has already happened in Jerusalem and surrounding Judah by the Babylonians. It is the long, difficult process of tracing the path that has brought Jeremiah to Egypt.

Zedekiah did not follow the words of Jeremiah to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. Instead verse three tells us that he rebelled and as a result Nebuchadnezzar's forces laid siege to Jerusalem. Those who stayed behind in Jerusalem suffered the worst, including Zedekiah. As his troops attempted to escape the siege, Zedekiah tried to flee, but Nebuchadnezzar's army captured him in the plains of the Jerico and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah. There, Nebuchadnezzar's slaughtered Zedekiah's sons and all the officials of Judah before Zedekiah's eyes. He then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and put him in prison.

The next focus of Nebuchadnezzar's army is the temple in Jerusalem beginning in verse 12. Before destroying the temple, Nebuchadnezzar's forces removed whatever precious metals were left in the temple and carried them to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar then burned not only the temple, but just about everything else in Jerusalem. The poorest of the land are left to be vinedressers and plowmen, but conditions are so bad in Jerusalem after Babylon's destruction this is hardly prime opportunity for anyone in the land of Judah. They lack the necessary resources to plant or maintain a crop, let alone reap a harvest.

While exile occurred in stages, Jeremiah 52:24 – 30 records the last of it. These remaining holdouts experienced the worst of it. Whereas, Jeremiah's letter in Jeremiah 29 encouraged the early exiles to make the most of their existence in Babylon and even prosper, the exiles in Jeremiah 52 are not as fortunate. They are stuck down and put to death in Riblah (Jeremiah 52: 27). Beginning in verse 28, Jeremiah provides a detailed accounting of the stages of exile.

Jeremiah's prophesy concludes with the final days of King Jehoiachin who had been put in prison. This section is much later than the earlier events recorded in chapter 52 and a new ruler is on the throne in Babylon, Evil-merodach. Jehoiachin is freed from prison and treated kindly until his death, providing a small glimmer of hope for the exiles of Judah that Jeremiah spoke of in earlier chapters.

The people are living in exile, the monarchy is broken and God's people now await an uncertain future. Jeremiah saw all this coming and he was faithful in his mission as a watchman. Now everyone waits in exile not for Jeremiah's warnings, but for God to deliver on his promises.