

A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah

By

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INTRODUCTION:

This commentary is based upon my personal devotional notes and reflections on the *Book of Jeremiah*. It is intended to help you better understand some of the background and issues in Jeremiah's prophecy. It is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church, especially our Life Group leaders to help you lead your group in a verse by verse study of *Jeremiah*. However, I do not include discussion questions in the commentary. That I leave up to you as a group leader.

In the commentary there are occasional references to the original Hebrew words Jeremiah used in a particular passage. Those Hebrew words are always quoted in italics and are transliterated into English from the Hebrew. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the New International Version and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. Books of the Bible, Scripture references and quotes are also italicized.

KEY HISTORICAL DATES IN THE TIMELINE OF JEREMIAH:

- *Assyria is weakened. Amon son of Manasseh, King of Judah is assassinated, 640.*
- *Eight year old Josiah son of Amon becomes King of Judah, 640.*
- *Jeremiah called to be a prophet, 627 (the 13th year of Josiah).*
- *Josiah begins his reforms, 622.*
- *The Book of the Law is found in the temple, 621; 2 Kings 23:1-25.*
- *Nineveh capital of Assyria is destroyed under Nabopolassar of Babylon, 612 B.C.; Nahum 3:18-19.*
- *Pharaoh Neco moves to reinforce the remnants of Assyria against Babylon; Josiah moves to intercept him at Megiddo and is killed in battle, 609.*
- *Jehoahaz son of Josiah made king; he reigns three months, 609.*
- *Neco captures Jehoahaz and takes him to Egypt where he dies in captivity; he makes Eliakim son of Josiah king and changes his name to Jehoiachim (Jehoiakim) and exacts heavy tribute from Judah, 609.*
- *Neco once again tries to support the remnants of Assyria against Babylon but is defeated by the new Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish in Syria, 605.*
- *Jehoiachim becomes a Babylonian vassal, 605.*
- *Jehoiachim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar; he sends troops to raid and punish Jehoiachim, 602.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar deports some Jews to Babylon from Jerusalem including a young man named Daniel, 602.*
- *Jehoiachim dies and is replaced by his son Jehoiachin; he reigns three months, 598.*

- *Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem after a siege and deports Jehoiachin, his mother, and many of the leading citizens of Jerusalem, including a young priest named Ezekiel; he puts Jehoiachin in prison upon arrival in Babylon, 597.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar installs King Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah, son of Josiah as King of Judah and changes his name to Zedekiah, 597.*
- *Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invade Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem, January 588.*
- *The Babylonians breach the walls of Jerusalem, July 18, 586; Zedekiah flees the city in the night and heads toward Jericho where he is captured and taken to Riblah in Syria, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters. There his sons are killed before him, his eyes put out and he is taken to Babylon in chains where he dies, July 586.*
- *Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard comes to Jerusalem with orders to burn the city to the ground. This he does, taking all the sacred objects of the temple to Babylon as booty. He burns the temple and tears down Jerusalem's walls. He also deports much of the elders and leading officials of the city who are left alive, executing some at Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters, August 586.*
- *Gedaliah is made governor of the Babylonian Province of Judea and left to oversee the survivors of the land. Jeremiah is among them. Gedaliah gathers the survivors together at Mizpah, 586.*
- *Gedaliah is assassinated by an officer in Zedekiah's guard named Ishmael, October 586.*
- *Johanan, another of King Zedekiah's officers pursues Ishmael and those he has taken captive. He drives off Ishmael and frees the captives including Jeremiah. Johanan flees with his band to Egypt fearing a Babylonian reprisal. Jeremiah is with them. He dies in Egypt some time later, October 586.*
- *Nebuzaradan returns to Jerusalem and takes another small group of Jews captive to Babylon, 582.*
- *Evil-Merodach, King of Babylon, frees Jehoiachin from prison and gives him a place at the king's table, 561.*
- *Babylon falls to Cyrus the Great of Persia, October 539.*
- *Cyrus decrees that the Jews of Babylon are free to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord, 538.*
- *The second temple is completed and dedicated, March 12, 516, 70 years after it was destroyed.*

KINGS OF JUDAH & THEIR REIGNS DURING JEREMIAH'S LIFETIME:

Amon (642-640)

Josiah (640-609)

Jehoahaz (609 – 3 months)

Jehoiachim (609-598)

Jehoiachin (598-597 – 3 months)

Zedekiah (597-586)

Fall of Jerusalem and Judah – July –August 586

OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH:

Jeremiah as a book is not in chronological order. Some have said that Jeremiah as it stands today is more like a collection of books than one single book. Most of them have been

authored by Jeremiah, though some were probably written by his friend and scribe Baruch and a few appear to be quotes from other Old Testament sources like *II Kings*. The internal evidence of the book suggests that Baruch was the major editor of Jeremiah's prophecies and was probably the one who put the book into the form we know today as the *Book of Jeremiah*. The outline below is based on Andrew Blackwood's *Commentary on Jeremiah*.

Part I: The Word of the Lord to Jeremiah – 1:1-25:38

Superscription – 1:1-3

Jeremiah's call to be a Prophet – 1:4-19

Oracles, chiefly from his early ministry – 2:1-6:30

The Temple Sermon and related discourses – 7:1-10:25

God in history – 11:1-25:38

Note: Within this section are Jeremiah's *Confessions*, prayers to God expressing his heart over the difficulties and suffering he had to endure as God's prophet. They are honest and direct prayers that at times even accuse God of tricking Jeremiah. In style they are similar to the songs of lament in the *Psalms*. They provide personal insight into Jeremiah's thinking and his struggles as a prophet and are unique to his writing. They are invaluable in helping us understand the burden that God's prophet carried and give insight into all prophets and their unique ministries. There are five: *11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12, 14-18.*

Part II: The Words of Jeremiah the Prophet – 26:1-45:5

Jeremiah, a pillar of iron – 26:1-29:32

The Book of Consolation – 30:1-31:40

Note: Within this section is the New Covenant in *31:31-33*, one of the most important prophecies in the Old Testament. Jesus uses this passage at the Last Supper.

God is Lord of the future – 32:1-33:26

The question of obedience – 34:1-35:19

A book is born – 36:1-32

Jeremiah's life while Jerusalem was dying – 37:1-40:6

The remnant of Judah – 40:7-44:30

The Lord's promise to Baruch – 45:1-5

Part III: The World – Concerning the Nations – 46:1-52:34

Superscription – 46:1

Concerning Egypt – 46:2-28

Concerning the Philistines – 47:1-7

Concerning Moab – 48:1-47

Concerning Various Nations – 49:1-39

Concerning Babylon – 50:1-51:64

Historical Postscript – 52:1-34

A NOTE ABOUT CHRONOLOGY:

You may note that some Bibles have a slightly different chronology for the reigns of the last kings of Judah and the date of the fall of Jerusalem. I follow many scholars who date the fall of Jerusalem as 586BC. Other scholars date the city's fall as 587. The discrepancy comes in the

dates for the reigns of the kings plus trying to synchronize those dates with extra-Biblical sources like the court records of the Babylonian kings. There is also some debate about the differences between a king's reign as defined by the years of his life and a king's reign as the actual time he ruled from the throne of David, including time as the regent of his father who was still living. The discrepancies are small and are of no major theological significance, however, your Bible may be slightly different than the chronology used in this commentary and I wanted to clarify the differences.

A WORD ABOUT HEBREW POETRY:

Most of the *Book of Jeremiah* is written in Hebrew poetic style. In fact *Jeremiah* has some of the greatest Hebrew poetry in the entire Bible. What is Hebrew poetry and how does it work? The following helps explain it.

The nature of Hebrew Poetry is paralleling ideas rather than rhyming sounds. Think of "*Mary Had a Little Lamb.*" Try reciting it in English. Now try it in German or Spanish! It only works in English because the poem depends on the sounds of the words. Hebrew poetry doesn't depend upon rhyming words and sounds, but on putting ideas together in patterns called *parallelism*. There are three basic types of Hebrew Poetry.

1. *Repeating* – You simply repeat the thought. The technical term is *synonymous*.
Examples: *Isaiah 1:3, 40:1, 53:4-5, Psalm 1, Amos 5:21-24.*

2. *Opposite* – You say the opposite. The technical term is *antithetic*. Examples: *Proverbs 10:9, 12:25.*

3. *Completing* – You complete or add to the thought in a slightly different way. The technical term is *synthetic*. Examples: *Genesis 1:27, Isaiah 53:6.*

Jeremiah will use all three types. It will help you understand his writing better if you can learn to spot the type of poetry he is using so you can better interpret and apply it.

A FINAL PERSONAL NOTE:

Jeremiah is my favorite prophet in the Old Testament and probably my favorite Old Testament book. His example of faithfulness and perseverance in the midst of tremendous opposition and great tragedy is inspiring to me. Plus, his honesty with God is a model for us all in terms of a real and living relationship with our Heavenly Father. Professor John Bright summed it up best in his book, *The Kingdom of God* when he said of Jeremiah: "*We must now leap forward...another century, to the days of the final collapse of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem. On our way we shall encounter other prophets, among whom one – for violence of passion and tenderness of feeling, for agony of spirit and plain raw moral courage – stands out as a man of mark; the prophet Jeremiah. For many reasons, but especially for his comprehension of the inner and spiritual nature of man's relation to God, he has few peers in the history of religion.*"

I hope you enjoy studying this extraordinary book as much as I have!

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THE COMMENTARY:

Chapter 1:

1:1-3 - Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah the priest from the town of Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Anathoth was one of the towns in Benjamin allotted to the Kohathite clan of the descendants of Aaron the Levite, the high priest. Jeremiah was a young man when he started his ministry. The Levites did not begin serving in the temple and taking up their duties to assist the priests until age 25. I am assuming the same is true for priests. If that is the case then Jeremiah had not yet begun his ministry as a priest when he began to prophesy for the Lord. He says he is a child, or teenager in *1:6*.

God called Jeremiah in the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah in 626 B.C. He prophesied through the destruction of Jerusalem in July of 586 B.C., the 11th year of the reign of Zedekiah, last king of Judah. The final chapters in *Jeremiah* show him being taken by a group of exiles to Egypt where he dies, probably around 585 or 584. Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry five years before Josiah's reforms, when the king had ordered the cleaning up of the temple. The discovery of the book of the Law and the reforms the king instituted happened in his 18th year or 621 B.C. Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet of the Lord spanned forty-six years from his teenage years to being an old man. He saw the highpoint in Josiah's reforms and the revival of the faith of Israel and Judah's fortunes under Josiah and he saw the low point, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. From the beginning Jeremiah had prophesied that ultimate fate for Judah, even despite the revival under Josiah. In large measure it is Jeremiah's ministry to the people of Judah and Ezekiel's ministry to the exiles in Babylon that allows the Jews to survive the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and their nation and interpret the disaster in light of God's judgment for their sin. Without them, and especially Jeremiah it is doubtful the Jews would have emerged from the exile with their faith and identity as God's people intact. For that reason alone Jeremiah is one of the greatest if not the greatest of God's prophets.

1:4-8 - "*The word of the Lord came to me*" is a common saying among Israel and Judah's prophets. In fact the phrase occurs 225 times in the Old Testament, almost always expressing a prophetic revelation. The Word of the Lord is seen in *Genesis 1* in the poem of creation; *and God said... and it was so*. God speaks and the universe comes into being. In the same way God speaks and his revelation is given, his character revealed, his plans outlined and his judgments pronounced. The Word of the Lord carries with it the power of God to accomplish that which it declares.

Jeremiah says the Word of the Lord came to me; it came to him as an individual. It did not come to his fellow priests, or his family, or the nation it came to him alone. It was a joy and a wonder and it was a terrible burden for one lone man to bear, especially considering the content of that Word to Judah and the nations to whom Jeremiah would speak. In many ways it is arrogant to assume that you, a mere human being, could somehow be privy to the very Word of God, yet that is exactly what God tells Jeremiah at the beginning of his prophetic career.

His call as a prophet was long in the making. God tells Jeremiah that he knew him before God formed him in his mother's womb and before he was born he set him apart and appointed him a prophet to the nations. God appoints Jeremiah a prophet to the nations not just to Judah. How does one even resist such a call? Jeremiah could not even though he objected that he was only a youth, he was too young and did not know how to speak. God's call on Jeremiah's life

suggests that God has a calling for all of us, even though our calling may not be as visible or difficult as being a prophet to the nations. Before God knew Jeremiah he had set him aside as a prophet and chosen him for this destiny. Has God done the same for all of us? The implications of God's Word to Jeremiah are incredible. God formed him in his mother's womb. God created Jeremiah using the natural process of human birth but clearly God is the author of his life. God gave him a purpose even as he was being formed and before he was conceived. That means God knows us, chooses us, creates us and gives us a destiny before we are even conceived. God knows us outside of time and space and knows us before any of the days of our lives. Therefore all human life is precious because God created it and forms it. All persons are immensely valuable because God creates them and has a purpose for them. Abortion therefore becomes not only a crime against the baby in the womb it is a crime against God because it thwarts God's plan for that individual and substitutes a mere human being's values and plans for God's. A human life is of immense worth because God created it. In abortion I substitute my own value judgment upon that life over God's. I declare what that life is worth and treat it according to my needs, desires, wants, and fears. It is a violation against the Creator! All of this we can infer from Jeremiah's call!

Jeremiah objects as Moses had objected that he can't speak. His excuse is not slowness of speech but that he is a youth. He is too young and does not know how to speak to adults! God says you must not say that. You are to go to everyone to whom I send you and say everything I command you to say. Don't be afraid I am with you and I will rescue you! God will repeat this promise in *1:19* as he describes the difficulties of the message Jeremiah must proclaim and the opposition he will face because of that message. God's prophetic call to Jeremiah would not lead to a comfortable life. As John Bright observes in *The Kingdom of God* it is doubtful whether Jeremiah was ever a person with an integrated personality and at peace with himself. Preaching God's Word would be a burden to him all his life because the Word he was given to preach was most often a Word of judgment against Judah and the nations. Sometimes God's call to us is not to a happy, integrated life but to bear a burden that no one else is given to bear and to bear it with faithfulness all one's life. That is exactly what Jeremiah was given to do and it is precisely what he did.

1:9-10 - Jeremiah sees God's hand reach out and touch his mouth and he is given the Word of God. This is similar to Isaiah's call in *Isaiah 6* but here rather than a seraphim God touches his mouth directly. He then describes in more detail his commission as a prophet. God appoints Jeremiah over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow and to build and to plant. His will be a ministry of judgment and punishment but not exclusively. Most of Jeremiah's ministry was to Judah, her people and her kings and his duty was to pronounce God's unrelenting judgment upon them and to prepare them for Jerusalem's destruction. But Jeremiah is also the prophet of the New Covenant and God gave him the grace to be able to declare a new future for his people as well as their judgment. It was that dual purpose that allowed the Jews to interpret the events of 586 and to see them from God's perspective so that eventually they would repent and God could bring them back to the land and they could begin anew. It was Jeremiah's ministry that framed the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in order to allow the Jews to survive it with their faith in God intact. God put his creative powerful Word in Jeremiah's mouth to accomplish what he declared! Because Jeremiah was faithful to God's calling on his life judgment came but a remnant survived and as Jeremiah had prophesied, one day they returned and started over. The plan of God begun with Abraham to save God's world

from sin through the descendants of Abraham was still alive in the world. The seed still lived and 500 years later would sprout and come to fruition. Jeremiah, one man with God's message at the right place and the right time, would guide and shape that destiny. If he had not been faithful to God's calling in his life, would Jesus have come and would we have ever been able to hear the gospel and believe and so be saved? As C.S. Lewis would say, we are never told what might have been.

1:11-12 - Jeremiah uses many different ways to communicate God's Word. Sometimes as here, he uses visual images that are symbolic or a play on words. The word for almond tree and the word for watch sound similar in Hebrew. Most often Jeremiah uses Hebrew poetry and its parallelism to communicate God's message. Jeremiah was a master at this and his poetry is some of the best and most profound in the Old Testament. He is an artist with language. Did this come from his upbringing in a priestly family or was it simply a talent the young Jeremiah had? We do not know. Perhaps it is a result of both.

God asks Jeremiah what he sees and he tells him the branch of an almond tree. The Lord replies you are correct for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled. The words for almond tree and watch sound alike in Hebrew. God will fulfill his Word through Jeremiah because he is God's prophet. During his whole career Jeremiah will be at odds with the court prophets of the kings of Judah. They will be telling the king what he wants to hear and Jeremiah will be proclaiming God's Word. At times he will be accused of treason because he will advocate surrender to the Babylonians. Yet that is exactly what God told him to say and for the people to do! God will fulfill his Word through Jeremiah, he can count on it.

1:13-16 - A second time God asks Jeremiah what he sees. This time it is a boiling pot tilting away from the north. The Hebrew words are difficult but it means the pot is tilting towards Judah and Jerusalem. God tells Jeremiah he is going to bring disaster on all who live in the land. He is about to summon the peoples of the northern kingdoms, meaning the Babylonians. Their kings will set up their thrones at the gates of Jerusalem. They will surround its walls and come against all the towns of Judah. God will pronounce judgment on his people because they have forsaken him. They are wicked at heart and have turned to other gods away from Yahweh. They worship and burn incense to things their hands have made.

This is a core prophecy in Jeremiah and outlines God's plan and judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. His people have rebelled against him with their idolatry. They have violated the first and most important command of God; they have put other gods before God. They have followed that disobedience with another; they have made idols for themselves and worshipped them, which was God's second command to them. They have forsaken God and violated his covenant. As we will see their idolatry has led to violence, injustice and debauchery. Their hearts are wicked as a result of turning away from God. Though Jeremiah will preach repentance in hopes that the people will turn back to God yet God knows in the end he will send the kings of the north, the Babylonians, to destroy the towns of Judah and Jerusalem where his name dwells. Judgment is coming and the people cannot stop it because God has decreed it!

At times the *Book of Jeremiah* leaps back and forth in terms of time; now early in Jeremiah's career now in the middle and now late. It is not written in chronological order. However, the context here clearly indicates this is at the beginning, at Jeremiah's call. Jeremiah's essential message to Judah would be one of judgment. Time had run out. God would no longer tolerate their idolatry, especially since they had seen what he had done to their northern brothers

and sisters in Israel. Judah's time was coming as well because they had failed to learn and their hearts were stubborn. God held them doubly accountable because they had the temple while their northern relatives did not. They had the priests from the line of Aaron who were to teach them God's Law. They had the king from David's line. Judah had all the advantages in order to stay faithful but they turned away from God anyway. Therefore God was turning away from them.

1:17-19 - God tells Jeremiah get yourself ready. Stand up and say what I tell you to say. Do not be afraid of them, meaning the king and the court officials and the people of Judah. It is they who will be afraid of Jeremiah for God will make them afraid. There comes a moment in answering God's call when the time is right to begin the ministry to which God has called us. That time for Jeremiah was now.

God gives Jeremiah an image of who he is as his prophet. God has made him a fortified city and iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land. A city's gate may be made of bronze but not a whole wall; that would be unheard of. A pillar may be made of bronze, there were several in the temple, but not iron. No one did that. God has fortified Jeremiah to stand against the opposition of the whole land; the kings of Judah, its officials and priests and all the people. They will fight against Jeremiah and attack him but will not overcome him. They will not be able to silence him or conquer him or refute him because the Lord is with Jeremiah and he will rescue him. God has declared it and what God declares he brings about!

God repeats here in *1:19* a promise he makes to Jeremiah in *1:8*. He will be with him and rescue him no matter what. The repetition shows that the whole section from *1:4-1:19* belongs together and is all part of Jeremiah's call.

This assurance to Jeremiah is prophetic. The rest of the book describes the almost constant opposition Jeremiah had to face. It was not just for a little time, but his whole 40 plus years of being a prophet! Yet despite all the suffering Jeremiah faced and all the ridicule and persecution he did not waver. In the end his enemies and the ones who opposed him were silenced and shown to be wrong and everything Jeremiah said would happen did happen. Judgment did come and Jeremiah lived to see God's Word through him vindicated. But it gave him no comfort. In fact it broke his heart. God called Jeremiah to unquestioning obedience and faithfulness to him. Jeremiah would prove faithful to his task. For those reasons his prophecy is the most tragic and human of all God's prophets.

Chapter 2:

2:1-3 - This first major prophetic address in *Jeremiah* deals with Israel's relationship with God and her abandonment of God for idols. Jeremiah is told to go and proclaim this in the hearing of Jerusalem, in other words publicly. How he did this we do not know. But this was not an anonymous scroll sent to the king that he then threw away. This pronouncement was probably proclaimed in the streets or more likely at the temple or city gates.

Baruch was Jeremiah's secretary and he is the one who probably wrote down Jeremiah's words either at the time or later. We do not know when he joined Jeremiah and helped him in his ministry. It is unlikely that he was with him at the very beginning since Jeremiah was only a teenager when he started. However, as his power and influence grew it was probably not long before Baruch was attracted to the young prophet and decided to help him.

Jeremiah begins by reminding Israel of her devotion to God in the desert after God rescued her from slavery. God led them in the wilderness to the Promiseland. All who attacked her he defeated. God is reminding Israel that he was faithful to his covenant promises, even as

Israel was faithful to God those forty years in the wilderness. Jeremiah does not bring up the golden calf incident here or the necessity of the forty years because of their disobedience. This is an idealized picture of Israel as God's bride and he as her husband. That is a theme Jeremiah will return to again, especially in the New Covenant in *chapter 31*. He also calls Israel God's firstfruits. She is holy to the Lord and set apart for him alone. From the beginning Israel would consistently violate that relationship.

2:4-8 - God through Jeremiah declares his Word to the house of Jacob and all the clans of Israel. This message is not just to Judah even though the north kingdom of Israel had been destroyed over 95 years before. However, Israelites from the northern tribes swelled Judah's population fleeing south after the Assyrians laid siege to Samaria and destroyed the north kingdom. Some of their tribal identities survived as evidenced by the prophetess Anna in *Luke 2*. Luke says she was from the tribe of Asher. It is difficult to know the exact timing of this message but it is probably early in Jeremiah's ministry.

God asks what fault their fathers found in God. They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. This is an important insight. When one abandons their relationship with God for seemingly something better, namely an idol, one does not become better one becomes worse. The people did not ask where is the Lord who led us out of Egypt through the wilderness into the Promiseland. Instead when they arrived in the land God was giving to them they defiled it and made God's inheritance detestable to him. They abandon God and worshipped idols. The priests did the same thing as did the prophets. Those who deal with the Law did not know God. Those who prophesied in the Lord's name did so no longer but instead prophesied by Baal and followed worthless idols. The basic indictment of Israel by God is their rejection of God and their worship of pagan idols.

2:9-19 - God brings charges again against Israel and against their grandchildren. This indictment will continue for two generations into the future. Jeremiah would prophesy that Judah would go into exile and captivity for 70 years. He hints at that consequence here in God's indictment against Israel.

Jeremiah asks if you go to Kittim, Cyprus or the western coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea, or into the deserts of Syria-Arabia, Kedar, will you see anything like this? In other words go as far as you can think of going. Has any nation changed its gods, which are no gods at all? Even pagan nations who worship worthless idols stay faithful to their false gods. But Israel has rejected their Glory for worthless idols! They have exchanged the worship of the living God the Creator, for images of beasts and man and reptiles. This is Paul's indictment against a sinful pagan human race in *Romans 1*. The difference here is that Jeremiah is indicting God's own people!

He calls the heavens to be appalled and shudder at such a thing. God's people have committed two sins. First they have abandoned him, the spring of living water. Second they have dug cisterns for themselves which cannot hold water. They have turned to worship idols that are dead and that cannot help them. Only God gives life. Idols can only give death because they are powerless, yet Israel had exchanged the worship of God for the worship of Baal and the other pagan deities of their day.

Jeremiah asks, is it then no wonder that lions have roared against them and laid waste their land? The lion is probably a reference to Assyria which had destroyed Israel and invaded Judah or a future reference to Babylon who would supplant Assyria as the next great Middle

Eastern power. Jeremiah even refers to the Egyptians, Memphis and Tahpanhes, (or Heliopolis or On, two of the chief Egyptian cities), and their attacks on Israel and Judah. The Israelites have brought all this upon their own heads by forsaking God.

What will happen to America as we forsake God? We are not God's covenant people but we were founded on Biblical principles and a common shared Christian faith and morality.

God asks them why go to drink from the Nile in Egypt or drink from the River, the Euphrates, in Assyria? Israel's own wickedness will punish them and their backsliding will rebuke them. The evidence is clear. They have forsaken the Lord and no longer hold him in awe. The verdict is in and sentence is going to be pronounced. When it is it will be an evil and bitter day for Israel. Jeremiah knew it and lived to see it. Their land would be taken. Their temple and capital city would be destroyed. Their king would be taken into exile and his successor killed. The throne of David would be eliminated. In forty short years everything they knew as a nation would be gone. It broke Jeremiah's heart to see it.

2:20-22 - Israel long ago broke off their yoke and tore their bonds away from God. They declared, *"I will not serve you!"* God pictures Israel as a donkey or ox, yoked in servitude to God. Jeremiah is being ironic here because a few short verses before he has called Israel God's bride whom he cared for in the desert. This is Israel's view of herself and her relationship with God! She is not God's bride for whom he cares; she is God's ox that he keeps in slavery to him! She has gained her freedom and thrown off her yoke. How courageous, how wonderful she is and how mean and oppressive God is!

Yet her "freedom" is simply slavery to pagan idols. At every high place and every sacred tree she bows down to worship. She prostitutes herself to the Baals. God had planted her as a choice vine of sound stock and she has now been corrupted, turning against God. Her sin is apparent and cannot be washed away. There is no soap that can make her clean before God. She is guilty and shamed before him. Israel's sin has separated her from her Savior. Jeremiah's lesson is relevant for us today. Our sin cannot be washed away by anything we do. Once we sin only God can make us clean again.

2:23-25 - Israel's sin has caused her to deny her guilt before God. She is in deep denial that anything is wrong! She claims she is not defiled and has not run after the Baals when she has done it in plain sight! Jeremiah with great sarcasm describes her as a she-camel or a wild donkey in heat sniffing for males to come and mate with her. Idols that seek her don't need to pursue her because they will find her; she is ready for them. Israel is so far gone in her pagan ways God warns her don't run until your feet are bare and your throat dry. He sees what she is doing and how trapped she is in her idolatry. She is like an addict who can't stop. On the one hand she denies she has a problem and on the other in a moment of honesty she declares, *"It's no use; I love foreign gods and I must go after them!"* What has Israel's "freedom" gained her except slavery and bondage?

Jeremiah gives us insight into what happens to us when we abandon God for other gods and idols. We are not free; we become slaves. Idolatry becomes like a drug to which we become addicted and we can't stop. It makes us crave it more and more. And the more we crave the false gods the worse it gets because we are seeking something only God can give us, but instead of repenting and turning back to the true God who made us we become insane. We keep doing the same thing over and over, worshipping more pagan idols, expecting a different result each time. Modern people understand the dynamics of addiction to drugs, alcohol and sex but we are blind

to the addiction of other gods. We smirk at Israel's idolatry and think it quaint and ignorant, then turn around and exchange our own worship of God for things that we have made. They may not be golden statues but they are idols just as surely. Jeremiah shows us that our modern idolatry is just as addictive to us as the idolatry of ancient Israel was to them.

2:26-28 - God has caught Israel red-handed in idolatry like a thief is caught stealing. She is shamed before him and disgraced. Remember, Hebrew culture is a shame-honor based culture so one does whatever one can to avoid shame. Israel's denial and shame is plain for all to see. Yet she continues to bow down to idols. Jeremiah in his best sarcasm says, "*They say to wood, 'you are my father' and to stone, 'You gave me birth'*". They have not bowed down to God they have turned their back on the one who chose them, saved them, preserved them and gave them the Promiseland!

When trouble comes they run to God and cry out to him to save them as if nothing was wrong! God is not listening. He tells them let your new gods save you if they can: "*For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah!*" When we stop worshipping the living God we don't go and worship one other god we worship many gods and we keep adding more. We become like the Hindus with hundreds of gods all of which are powerless to do anything to help us!

America today is starting to become like ancient Israel. We have abandon God and have begun to worship anything in his place. Instead of settling on one new god we run after many trying to find peace and security but unable to satisfy our longings that only our Creator can fulfill. Jeremiah shows us that we will not stop. We will continue to add gods and yet cry out to the true God when we are in trouble. We are deep in our idolatry and deep in our denial that there is anything wrong. God help us!

2:29-30 - God asks Israel why they bring charges against him! It is *THEY* who have rebelled! They are like spoiled children who blame their parents for their problems and proclaim, "It's not my fault!" God has tried to correct them with his discipline but to no avail. They will not change. In fact they have killed the very prophets he sent to correct them.

Jeremiah is building a case for God's judgment of his people. They have been unfaithful to him going after foreign gods. God has tried to correct them and bring them back to him. He destroyed the north kingdom and allowed Assyria to invade and oppress the people of Judah, yet they did not repent. Hezekiah tried to be faithful but his son Manasseh was so bad God finally said enough. If this message is given in the early days of Josiah before his reforms then there has as yet been no great repentance and no delay in God's wrath over Judah's sin. God has been pushed as far as his patience will take him. Judah was doomed and in her pride and ignorance kept denying there was any problem.

Biblical historian John Bright describes the official theology of the king's court and the priests who oversaw the temple. We have a king from David's line that sits on David's throne and God's covenant with David protects him even if he sins. We have the temple of God where God's name dwells and he is jealous for his name's sake. God protected us when Sennacharib, king of Assyria, invaded us and almost destroyed us. Therefore we have nothing to fear as long as the king lives and the temple stands. They had made the mistake of divorcing the grace of God from obedience to God. They had forgotten the tension between the covenants of grace like David's and Abraham's and the conditional covenant of Sinai which was tied to their obedience to the Lord. God sent the prophets to them to remind them of that tension and what his covenant demanded from them. Jeremiah was no exception to that mission. In many ways he and *Isaiah*

were the greatest and the most insistent that Judah return to God and obey him or else God would judge them. The problem was the official theology was supported by the court prophets who were in the employ of the kings and by the priests who were tasked by God to teach the people God's Law and his covenant demands. The heresy of the official theology was upheld by the very people who were supposed to guard the people from heresy. That is why God had to send his true prophets like *Amos*, *Hosea*, *Isaiah*, *Micah* and *Jeremiah* to the people. Except for a handful the majority of the people rejected the prophets' message and continued to live in denial of the truth and the false security of the official theology. *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* helped the people come to terms with their sin and the collapse not only of their country but the official theology as well. They were the reasons Israel's faith survived at all.

2:31-37 - God addresses the people. He asks them if he has been so bad to them. Is he a desert or a land of darkness that they think they must be free from him and reject him? God compares them to a maiden or a bride on her wedding day, forgetting her jewelry and ornaments for the wedding. That jewelry is the most important thing a bride has; it represents her dowry and the wealth she brings to the marriage. She would never forget them! Yet Israel has forgotten God. They have been gone from him for a long time. *Amos* and *Hosea* began in the mid-700's. *Jeremiah* writes in the late 600's. For over a century and even long before, Israel and Judah have been unfaithful to God. One could argue that from Solomon's apostasy onward Israel had been unfaithful. This was not just something that began in Jeremiah's day. This apostasy and rejection of God had been going on for centuries. God had been patient with them but no more!

Once again Jeremiah uses his scathing wit to expose Judah's sin. The people are so skilled at going after foreign gods they could teach prostitutes a thing or two about adultery. Their clothes are stained with the blood of the innocent. *2 Kings* describes King Manasseh sacrificing his own infant son in a fiery idol. God had warned his people through his prophets especially *Amos*, *Hosea*, *Micah* and *Isaiah* that he would not tolerate their mistreatment of the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger. *Jeremiah* here accuses the people of mistreating the poor and killing them without cause. They aren't caught stealing from you yet you mistreat them. The image of the poor's lifeblood on their clothes suggests murder; something which God says defiles the land. *2 Kings* says Manasseh's child sacrifices defiled the land. In our day the holocaust of abortion defiles our land and stains it with innocent blood. (*Note: Since Roe vs. Wade in 1973, 55,000,000 babies have been aborted in the United States.*) Is there any turning back and repentance left for us?

Israel was deep in denial of their sin. Despite all the evidence to the contrary the people persist in denying anything is wrong. They are innocent. God will not judge us. He is not angry with us. We have a king from David's line on the throne. God's temple where his name dwells is in our midst. Jerusalem is secure. *Jeremiah* exposes their denial and arrogance towards God. He tells them God in fact will pass judgment upon them because they deny their sin and will not repent.

Jeremiah warns the people not to go after Egypt and think they will be any help to them against the rising power of Babylon. Egypt will prove as inept at helping you as was Assyria. You will be as disappointed with Egypt as you were with Nineveh. God has rejected them both and they will not be able to help you. *Jeremiah* is both judging and pleading with his people to turn back to God and seek him rather than Egypt and a political solution. At the root their problem is spiritual not political, but in their denial and pride the people do not see it. How frustrating it must have been for *Jeremiah* to speak the truth and see it so clearly and then have

the people reject that message and continue in their denial and foolishness. Jeremiah shows us a prideful, unrepentant heart is ultimately stupid and foolish.

Chapter 3:

3:1-5 - The Law of divorce in *Deuteronomy 24:1-4* forbid a man to remarry his wife after he had divorced her and she had married another man. If her second husband divorced her or died her first husband could not remarry her because the Law said she had become defiled. That is the situation that Jeremiah raises here with Israel. She has divorced God and run off to play the prostitute with many gods and now she wants to return to the Lord? Would not the land be defiled?

Jeremiah describes Israel's behavior. On every high place she has been ravished, meaning Israel has habitually worshipped pagan gods at the pagan high places. Along the road she sits like a nomad or Arab in the desert waiting for a new lover, like Tamar waited for Judah in *Genesis 38*. Israel is acting like a shrine prostitute of Asherah or Astarte. It has defiled God's land that he gave them.

Because of Israel's idolatry and the wickedness that resulted from it God has disciplined them, withholding the spring rains that water their crops. This is what God had said he would do in *Leviticus 26* and *Deuteronomy 28* as part of the covenant curses for disobedience. It is what happened in the north kingdom of Israel in Elijah's day in *1 Kings 17*, two hundred years before Jeremiah. What changed in Israel's behavior as a result? Nothing, they have not changed at all. They even refuse to blush with shame!

Israel under the folly of the official theology still comes to God and calls him my Father and friend. They pray to God and ask if he will always be angry with them but they do not repent. They do not acknowledge their sin because they are blinded to it and are in denial about it. They have divorced obedience to God's covenant from their relationship with God within that covenant. They go out and do all the evil they can and think they are still right with God because they have the king and the temple. They have done what Paul in *Romans 6* said believers cannot do; use God's grace as a license to sin! The people of Jeremiah's day had completely paganized their religion. As long as they did the sacrifices and the rituals, as long as the temple stood and they worshipped there, God was appeased and they could live as they pleased! Jeremiah was the last in a long line of writing prophets going back a century or more that God sent to them to show them his covenant did not work that way and if they did not change God would do more than stop the rain. He would call down the full weight of the covenant curses upon them. That is exactly what he did and Jeremiah would live to see it.

This section of *chapter 3* is the last part of the initial message of *Jeremiah*. It sets out the essential elements of God's case against the people of Israel and the nation of Judah. Jeremiah tells them time has run out. They have refused to repent so God will judge them. That judgment will come soon and is already on their doorstep. Josiah's reform would delay it for a generation but it would not stop it. God was going to destroy Jerusalem and send his people into exile. It was Jeremiah's task to tell them and to watch it happen and explain why to an unrepentant and disobedient people.

3:6-10 - Jeremiah receives a message from the Lord during the reign of King Josiah. This is almost certainly before Josiah's reforms and the revival of the worship of Yahweh he brought about because the Lord only talks about Judah's unfaithfulness and their lack of repentance.

God compares faithless Israel, the north kingdom, to her unfaithful sister Judah. Israel went after idols at every high place and participated in idolatry and wickedness. God sent her prophets to call her back to him but they ignored him. Therefore God sent her a certificate of divorce and sent Israel away from him because of the adultery of her idolatry. God says something very chilling in *verse 9*. Israel's immorality mattered so little to her that she defiled the Promiseland and committed adultery with stone and wood. When people turn away from God and start worshipping idols of their own making, they reach a point where they no longer care what happens or how they treat people. All they care about is their idols. When that happens their idolatry corrupts their morals so much they no longer know how to repent. That is what happened to Israel and therefore God sent them away. Judah saw all of this and yet did not repent either. What's even worse, she repented in name only. She pretended to repent but her heart was still far from God. The implication is God is ready to send Judah away just as he sent Israel away.

If this was before Josiah's reforms then it is incredibly prophetic and chilling because on the surface when the king led the people in repentance it seemed genuine. Yet after Josiah was killed it was not long before the people returned to their idolatry and wickedness just like before the reforms. The repentance proved to be only on the surface and not genuine. God already knows their repentance will be only skin deep and not heart deep. Jeremiah fears that is the case as well. Unfortunately he was proven right and God's Word was fulfilled.

3:11-13 - God's conclusion is that faithless Israel is *MORE* righteous than unfaithful Judah! Judah should know better. She has the example of what happened to her sister but she continues in her idolatry and immorality!

God calls out to Israel to repent. Is this the north kingdom that he has sent away or is this all of Israel, both Israel and Judah together as the one people of God? I think in context Jeremiah is talking about the north kingdom Israel. He is calling them to repent even now after they have been destroyed and sent into exile. There was a remnant of the northern tribes who had fled south to Judah at the destruction of Samaria and Israel by the Assyrians. Is God speaking to them specifically or to all of Israel symbolically? It is difficult to tell. God says he will forgive Israel and not be angry with them forever because he is merciful. He calls them to acknowledge their guilt before him. True repentance includes acknowledging our guilt before God and being sorry for our sins. God calls Israel to confess her idolatry and her lack of obedience before God. She has broken her covenant with the Lord. If she will truly repent God is ready to forgive her. This is a remarkable passage because the north kingdom had been completely wiped out at least 35 years before and probably longer by the time Jeremiah receives this specific prophecy. God is still calling the remnant of the destroyed northern kingdom and scattered northern tribes to repent. He will do the same thing with the southern kingdom of Judah and the southern tribes after Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed in 586. God calls a remnant of the northern tribes to repent, for even if they are no longer are a nation, Israel, they are still his people, the descendants of Jacob and Abraham!

3:14-18 - God commands his faithless people to return to him because he is their husband and they are to obey him and love him. God then says he will choose one from a town and two from a clan and bring them to Zion. This is describing gathering the remnant. In *verse 11* Jeremiah uses the imperative form for the return of faithless Israel. Here in *verse 14* he uses the same word and imperative form for faithless people. Is this the north kingdom or the whole people of God,

Israel? I think he is talking about the whole people because what follows is an eschatological passage that describes the gathering of the remnant and the Kingdom of God.

When God gathers the remnant of his people he will give them shepherds after his own heart. That may be a veiled reference to David who was a man after God's own heart. However, this isn't really a Messianic prophecy since *Jeremiah* uses the plural shepherds and not Shepherd. The shepherds of those days will lead the people with knowledge and understanding, meaning understanding of the Lord and his ways. They will not lead them astray with idols as Manasseh had done. Their numbers will increase greatly in the land and Israel will be restored.

This passage sounds as if it is written in a time when the ark of the covenant was destroyed along with the temple. Is Jeremiah reflecting back as he looks forward here? Or did Baruch put this prophecy here at a later date in his editing of Jeremiah's work because it fit the theme of the faithless people returning to God? It is difficult to tell. It does not seem as if it was written at a later time and inserted here. If that is the case then that means Jeremiah was prophesying not only a time of restoration of God's people but also the destruction of the temple and the ark!

Jeremiah says people will no longer say, the ark of the covenant of the Lord. They will not remember it nor will it be missed, nor will another be made! At that time Jerusalem will be called the Throne of the Lord and the nations will come to Jerusalem and honor the name of the Lord. Jeremiah does not say they will worship in the temple but that they will honor the Lord by turning from their evil hearts and ways. God will unite Judah and Israel again together in one people and he will bring them from a northern land back to the Promiseland he swore on oath to give their fathers. This passage is *NEVER* quoted by those who advocate for a third temple in the end times because it is in conflict with *Ezekiel 40-48* and their interpretation of *Revelation 11* and the measuring of the temple. Jeremiah is clearly speaking about the end times and the times of the New Covenant. He makes it plain that there is no ark. Can one conclude that there is no temple as well or will the third temple have no ark? The problem is all these eschatological passages are difficult to reconcile with one another and are not consistent, especially when one gets into the apocalyptic sections of *Ezekiel*, *Daniel* and *Revelation*. This passage could also be interpreted in an already-not yet way, that it has a partial fulfillment in the New Testament when the New Covenant is established through Jesus. The remnant was gathered at Pentecost and the Gentiles did come to the Lord. However, Jerusalem was not declared the Throne of the Lord and at the time of Pentecost the temple still existed. Was there an ark? If there was it was not the original. Jewish tradition and legend says Josiah hid it under the temple mount to protect it from the invasion he knew was coming and it will be discovered in the last days. That is what the Temple Institute people maintain. It would be interesting to hear how they interpret *Jeremiah 3:14-18*!

3:19-20 - Jeremiah shifts back to his day. The Lord would gladly treat Israel like sons and give them his land, a desirable and beautiful land. The Lord thought they would call him Father and not turn from following him. But Israel has treated the Lord like an unfaithful wife. She has committed adultery with other gods, pagan gods. The Hebrew word for “*unfaithful*” includes the idea of betrayal. Jeremiah uses two metaphors to describe the Lord's relationship with his people. The first is sons to their father. The second is a wife to her husband. In each case the relationship is one of love and in each case one party is subordinate to the other, the son to the father and the wife to the husband. Those are not accidental. We, as God's people are not equal to God yet he wants a relationship of love with us and wants to be our Father and like a husband to us, his

bride. Jesus uses the Father relationship with God to describe who God is and how he relates to us. Paul uses the bride-husband metaphor to describe Jesus' relationship with us his church. *Jeremiah* uses both here! The point is God was ready to treat his people like a father and a husband but they would not allow him because they became unfaithful and disobedient to him.

3:21-22a - Israel cries out to God in her desperation. She has perverted her ways and betrayed God but now cries out to him because she is in trouble. She has forgotten God but now needs him. God for his part calls them to return to him. *Jeremiah* uses the same Hebrew word in the imperative again, return, as in *verse 11* and *verse 14*. God says if they return he will cure them of their backsliding. The root of the Hebrew word for backsliding can also mean repentance and means to turn one's back. The word used as backsliding means one turns one's back to God. The word used as repentance means one turns one's back on sin and turns back to God.

3:22b-25 - Israel responds with a confession of their sin towards the Lord. Does this language reflect some of what was being said in Josiah's reforms and the repentance of the king? Or is this *Jeremiah* prophetically hoping this is what a repentant people would say? Both may be true. Repentant Israel declares that the Lord is their God. All the worship of their idols will not save them, only in the Lord is there salvation. They have been deceived!

From their youth shameful gods have consumed the fruit of the father's labor, their flocks and herds and children. They mean that they have sacrificed to the pagan gods and it is they who have consumed what they have grown and labored over as well as their sons and daughters. Some of them they have even sacrificed and some have become temple prostitutes. They have been shamed and disgraced by their behavior! Israel admits their idolatry has been going on a long time. The fruit of God's land that he gave them has gone to other gods that Israel *CHOSE* to worship as they abandoned God and his covenant. The evidence of the historical books is that Israel was faithful to God for only a minority of their history. Most of their time in the Promiseland they were worshipping God while at the same time worshipping the pagan idols of the nations around them. Some of the time they had abandon the worship of God all together or had completely paganized their worship of Yahweh, performing the rituals but not obeying his commands. They admit because of this they are covered in disgrace and shame! From their youth to Jeremiah's day they have not obeyed the Lord their God. They have sinned against the Lord.

This public and community confession would not happen in Jeremiah's day, except briefly during Josiah's reforms. However, those were only temporary and not heartfelt. The national confession would happen after the exile in the days of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. *Daniel* perceived the need and confessed to the Lord but his was vicarious on behalf of his people. It would take the experience of the exile and the leadership of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* almost two centuries later to bring Israel to their knees in full confession before the Lord of their guilt.

Chapter 4:

4:1-2 - Jeremiah continues the theme of return, using again the same word he has used in *3:12*, *3:14*, & *3:22*. God asks Israel to return to him. One way to translate the sentence is: If you will return Oh Israel then return to me. If you will return then do it, stop worshipping your idols now! Put them out of God's sight and come back to him. Do not go astray any longer. Swear again by the Lord in a truthful way not a religious way. If you do then the nations around you will be blessed and in him they will glory. *Jeremiah* says the reason Israel needs to return to God is not only for their own sake but for the sake of the nations around them. He is speaking about Israel's

role as priests to the world. When they stray from God and worship the nations' gods then the nations have no chance to see who the Lord really is and turn to him away from their lifeless idols. Israel has an evangelistic mission, to proclaim and demonstrate the Lord's goodness to the world. When they turn away from him the nations are lost. God needs a faithful people to carry out his mission of salvation for the nations.

4:3-4 - The Lord issues a call to repentance through Jeremiah. Circumcise your hearts to the Lord; break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among the thorns. In other words, soften your hearts towards God and stop turning to idols. If they do not God's wrath will break out like a fire and consume them. In fact, if it comes no one will be able to put it out. His wrath is ready to burn over them because of the evil they have done.

Jeremiah refers to circumcision here not as the physical act but as an act of faith and love towards God. The term is used the same way in both *Deuteronomy 10:16* and *30:6*. In both cases it refers to the heart of the person so that they will turn from their stubbornness and turn to God in love and obedience. Paul argues in *Romans 2:28-29* that true circumcision is of the heart and not of the flesh. *Jeremiah* relates circumcision to covenant faithfulness and love to God and not a physical religious act. He pre-figures the understanding of the sacraments in the New Testament; an outward act that symbolize an inward reality.

Jeremiah is calling Israel to a profound relational and covenantal faith in God. This is so far removed from their paganized religion of Yahweh, thinking they could appease God and divorce their worship of Yahweh from love and obedience to him. One wonders whether many of the people even understood what Jeremiah was talking about. Like the prophets before him, Jeremiah has a high view of Israel's covenant with Yahweh. Part of what he is doing is calling each individual Israelite to a personal faith in Yahweh, not just a community faith. It is a counter against the official theology that said if you were a citizen of Judah and worshipped Yahweh at his temple then you were part of God's covenant. Jeremiah argues that one needs a personal faith in Yahweh to be part of his covenant and only then will one obey him and love him with all their hearts. It is Jeremiah's answer to the question; who is a true Israelite? The New Covenant he will speak of in *31:31* will emphasize the same thing; know the Lord! It was this fundamental shift in the understanding of what it meant to follow Yahweh and be a part of his covenant that enabled the Jews to survive the exile with their faith intact. It also laid the groundwork for individual faith in Jesus as Messiah in the New Testament, the New Covenant of God!

4:5-8 - Jeremiah is told to announce in Jerusalem and Judah that disaster from the Lord is coming upon them. A destroyer of nations is coming and nothing they do can stop it. It is difficult to tell the timing of this message. Is this early in the reign of Josiah when there was still the chance to delay God's judgment through repentance or is this later after Josiah has been killed? Josiah was killed in 609 by Neco of Egypt, who was moving north to assist the last Assyrian king against the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Neco is defeated at Carchemish in northern Syria and on his way home from that defeat takes Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, home to Egypt as captive and installs Jehoiachin as vassal king of Egypt. That was in 605. The lion from the north and destroyer of nations Jeremiah speaks of here is not Neco and Egypt, but clearly Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Jeremiah says the destroyer will lay waste the towns of Judah and the land will lay in ruins. That is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did when he invaded Judah in 597. The question remains when did Jeremiah prophesy this message? It appears that this still belongs to the early part of Jeremiah's career and he is warning Judah that a new power is

coming. Assyria is weak which led to Josiah throwing off the Assyrian yoke and his revival of the worship of Yahweh. Jeremiah is telling the king and the people of Judah their sins have brought judgment. In *verse 14* he still holds out the hope that repentance will stop the coming judgment but history tells us it was only delayed not stopped.

4:9-12 - When the Babylonians come the king and his officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified and the court prophets will be appalled. All those who lead Judah who should have led the people to repentance will not know what to do because they have been deceived by their own false official theology. Their belief in the temple and the king from David's line did not allow any room for God to judge them for their sins. They had substituted a false belief for the true covenant of God. They had taken part of Scripture and God's promises and shaped them and used them for their own ends. Even Josiah's discovery of the *Book of the Law* did not help in the long run. They knew what was right; it was clear in God's Law, but they ignored it and returned to their false belief that God would not allow Jerusalem to be destroyed because the temple was there and David's son was on his throne. It is possible that this message was given before Josiah found the *Book of the Law*. If it was it would have given the young king good reason to begin his reforms.

Their deception led to their destruction. Jeremiah hints that God caused the deception or at least allowed it to persist. He also points out that God's leaders bear ultimate responsibility for God's people. The people all sinned, but the leaders are held most responsible because they were the ones that preached and taught the official theology and ignored the prophets' warnings. The judgment coming would not be to discipline Judah but to punish her for her sins just like God had punished the north kingdom of Israel.

The scorching wind Jeremiah speaks of is the desert wind, the sirocco, which blows down from the Golan Heights or Mountains of Moab into the Jordan Valley and on to Jerusalem from the east. It is a dry, hot wind like the Santa Annas in California, which often brings destruction and fire because it has no rain. That is Jeremiah's description of the Babylonian army.

4:13-15 - The "*He*" Jeremiah speaks of in *verse 13* is the lion and destroyer of nations he describes in *verse 7*. This is almost certainly Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon the next great imperial power in the Middle East following Assyria's collapse. Over Jeremiah's lifetime he would crush Assyria and Egypt and create a new empire out of the old Assyrian empire, ruled from his capital Babylon.

He will advance like the clouds, meaning there is nothing anyone can do to stop him. His war chariots come like a desert whirlwind and the only thing to do is get out of the way. Jeremiah realizes if Nebuchadnezzar comes Judah is finished. She cannot resist him or stop him. The only thing the Jews can do is repent of their evil and be saved. *Jeremiah* and *2 Kings* show they did not.

A voice from Dan announces Nebuchadnezzar's coming. For most of Israel and Judah's history the greatest threats to the two kingdoms came from the north. Dan is at the far reaches of the Promiseland, at the foot of Mt. Hermon. The road from Damascus and Syria passes nearby. That would have been one of the main invasion routes for the Babylonian army. Dan is announcing to Jerusalem they are coming. The hill country of Ephraim proclaims the same message. Ephraim's territory was centered in Bethel, just north of the territory of Benjamin which was the northern part of Judah. Jerusalem was on the southern boundary of Benjamin. In other words they are coming. They have moved from Dan to Ephraim; Jerusalem is next!

4:16-18 - Jeremiah explains to the peoples around Judah why the Babylonians will invade Judah and besiege Jerusalem. The people of Judah and Israel, God's people, have brought this upon themselves. It is their fault because they rebelled against Yahweh their Lord and God. Their own conduct and actions have brought this. It is bitter to swallow and horrible to bear. This is a core message in *Jeremiah* and was one of the things that helped the people survive the crisis of the exile. The Babylonians destroyed the temple and Jerusalem not because Yahweh was weak and could not stand against Marduk and the Babylonian gods. Judah was destroyed and went into exile because they rebelled against the Lord! They were unfaithful to God's covenant with them and despite all the warnings of the prophets they continued to rebel until God had had enough and used Nebuchadnezzar to punish them and stop their wickedness. In the end it was because the Lord loved them and was keeping his covenant he made with their ancestors that he sent them into exile just as he had said he would in the Law of Moses. God disciplined them into order to save a righteous remnant so he could start over. He had not forgotten them or abandoned them. They had forgotten and abandon him!

4:19-21 - Jeremiah speaks in *verses 19-21* and expresses his anguish and sorrow over the judgment that is coming upon Judah. God speaks in *verse 22* giving the reasons for his judgment against them. Jeremiah replies in *verses 23-26* and observes the destruction of the land as a result of God's judgment.

These verses are not considered one of Jeremiah's confessions. However they do express his grief over the judgment that he sees coming upon his people. This is the first time he has expressed his feelings over his message so directly. He says he is in anguish and pain and his heart pounds within him. His reaction sounds like someone coming upon the scene of a horrific accident or disaster. In his visions Jeremiah has heard the battle trumpets of the Babylonians. He has seen the land ruined. His own shelter has been destroyed and he wonders how long he must see the battle standards in his country and hear the trumpets of the enemy. From his perspective the coming invasion and judgment is horrible. It breaks his heart to see it. God gives his perspective in *verse 22*.

Can you imagine bearing up under this burden? You see what is going to happen. God has told you clearly. Your job is to warn the people and call them to repentance. The young king responds but you know it will not last. Hope starts to rise but you know it will cheat you. God has shown you what his people will do. You have seen in the visions God has shown you what will happen. Your people will not repent. The Babylonians will invade and take the people into exile. Your country and your home will be laid waste. No wonder it almost tore Jeremiah apart. Yet he remained faithful to preach God's Word to his unrepentant people. I don't know if I could have done it. The cost of obedience and faithfulness to God is sometimes more than one soul can bear. God help me be faithful like your prophet!

4:22 - Jeremiah looked at God's judgment upon Judah and it grieved him. God looks at his people's response to him and it grieves him too. They are fools who no longer know me, he says. They are senseless children who have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil and do not know how to do good. Judah's idolatry has had its inevitable effect. It has not only turned God's people away from him it has led them to wickedness of the worst kind. They have lost the ability to do good. Their lives have become a corruption. They are his people in name only. How then can God allow them to go on giving him lip service in the temple when they violate everything his covenant with them stands for? How can God not punish them for doing the very things he

warned them centuries ago not to do? How can God dishonor the Word of his prophets who kept telling the people to repent or else God would judge them? When will God's patience run out?

Jeremiah's words give us an insight into God's character and love for us. His first inclination is not to judge and punish as so many think. God's first inclination is to forgive and have mercy. He wants to be patient and give us a chance to repent, confess and come back to him. Our sin grieves him and breaks his heart. He longs for fellowship with us. But his holiness at some point must be acknowledged. We often think God responds in anger as we do. Someone hurts us and we lash out in retaliation. That is not God. His people had grieved him almost from the moment he led them out of Egypt. The books of *Joshua*, *Judges*, *Samuel* and *Kings* attest to the consistent idolatry and disobedience of his people. There were so many times God could have lashed out and destroyed them just as we lash out at those who hurt us, yet he did not. He disciplined them in hopes of their repentance. He continued to bless them and send them leaders who could lead them in the right way and prophets who could encourage them to repent. It was almost two centuries from *Amos* and *Hosea* to *Jeremiah*, and still Judah survived. More than anything else what we see of God in the time of the *Kings* is not his anger and judgment but his patience and love. He is a husband who deeply loves his cheating wife. He is a father who grieves over his rebellious children. But there is even a limit to the patience of God and Jeremiah's job was to proclaim the limit had been reached and observe God's judgment being carried out on the people they both loved. It broke Jeremiah's heart and maybe the greatest insight he gives us is it broke God's heart as well. Judah's rebellion in the end leads to the New Covenant where God would take all the rebellion, punishment and grief over human sin upon himself, upon Jesus on the cross.

4:23-26 - Jeremiah describes what he sees when God's wrath over Judah's sin is finally unleashed. It is like the earth at creation; it is formless and void. There are no lights in the heavens. God will go back to the beginning. The mountains quaked and the hills shook. There were no people, no birds, nothing fruitful in the land. It was like a desert and every town lay in ruins. This is what Judah's sin has unleashed upon herself. This is God's wrath over sin. He will destroy Judah using the Babylonians to do it.

4:27-31 - Yet even in the midst of God's terrible anger over Judah's sin there is grace. God says he will not utterly destroy the land. It might have looked like it to Jeremiah when he saw it in his vision in *verses 23-25*. Some small sliver of hope will remain. God will cleanse the land with his anger over Judah's sin. He will purge it of its evil and defilement. But he will not totally destroy it.

But the earth will mourn and the heavens grow dark. Perhaps to the people going through his wrath it will seem like total destruction. God has spoken and he will not change his mind. He delayed his wrath during Josiah's time because he was faithful. But it only delayed the inevitable. The Babylonians are coming and people will flee to the hills but it will do them no good. Judah dresses herself up as if to sway her attackers or appeal to Egypt or someone else to help her. No help will come. All will turn away from her. She will be left to herself to defend herself. God has cut her off. When she finally sees it she will be in pain like a woman in labor. There will come a moment when she will know that God has handed her over to those who would destroy her. It will feel as if God has totally abandoned her. God's judgment will finally break Judah and humble her. It will shatter the official theology. Her king, her priests, her court prophets and wise men will have no answers for what has happened. The only ones who will be able to make sense

out of all the tragedy will be God's prophets, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Habakkuk*, who had been telling them all along that judgment was coming. The very ones they had despised and persecuted will be the ones that will save their faith and allow a repentant remnant to return to the land that God had promised he would not totally destroy.

Chapter 5:

5:1-2 - God commands Jeremiah to go through the streets of Jerusalem to see whether he can find one person who seeks the truth and lives honestly. If he can, then God will forgive the city. This is the reverse of Abraham's dialogue with God in *Genesis 18*. Abraham haggled with God and got him down to five righteous people. Here the Lord asks Jeremiah to find just one! This is obviously for dramatic effect because if this was in Josiah's time the king would have counted. However, the point is made. The people keep swearing by the Lord's name and worshipping at the temple, going through the right rituals, but their hearts are far from God.

5:3-6 - Jeremiah replies to the Lord's request. He says God looks for people who value the truth. The reality is God has disciplined his people but they have not responded. They have not repented. One would think that the destruction of Israel and Samaria and the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib would have brought the people to their knees but instead they have responded irrationally by forming the official theology. They built a theology from pieces of God's covenant promises and events of history into something that justified their continued paganizing of the worship of Yahweh, their continued idolatry and their disobedience to God's Law!

Jeremiah said he thought that the disobedient people were just the poor who didn't know any better because they never had the training in knowing the Lord. Surely their leaders knew God's ways. Yet Judah's leaders as well had broken God's covenant and "*broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds.*" They believed and taught the people that God's covenant was like slavery and they needed to be free of it. So they substituted the real slavery of idolatry and wickedness for the blessing and freedom of God's commandments.

God will judge them for their idolatry. Jeremiah piles up image upon image of violent animal attacks to describe what will happen. A lion from the forest will attack them followed by a wolf from the desert and a leopard near their towns. Anyone who goes out will be torn to pieces. Why? Their rebellion is great and their backslidings many. The word for backsliding means to turn the back. In other contexts the Hebrew word can be used for repentance. Here it is negative. Judah, God's people, has turned their backs on God. Now he is about to turn his back away from them and allow them to be punished.

The straightforward teaching of *Jeremiah* is there are consequences for disobeying God. Judah thought that paying God lip service by continuing to worship in his temple would appease God so that they could then live however they wanted to live. That was paganizing the worship of Yahweh. It led to rampant immorality and injustice in the country. God would not tolerate it. God wanted the people to worship him but not to divorce their worship from their behavior. Yahweh was holy and intensely moral. That was one of the greatest differences between the pagan gods Judah was worshipping and Yahweh. One cannot love God and not love people at the same time. Love for God must be accompanied by holiness of conduct; otherwise one does not love God. The same applies to Christian believers today. We cannot paganize our worship of God and think God is pleased with us any more than he was pleased with Israel.

5:7-9 - God's evidence is irrefutable. Why should God forgive Judah? Neither the leaders of the people nor Jeremiah can give one good reason. Their children have forsaken God and have worshipped idols, gods that are nothing but stone and wood. God has supplied their needs and cared for them yet they commit adultery with other gods like men who go to prostitutes. They are like lusty stallions looking for a mare in heat. They go after other men's wives and think they have done nothing wrong! They have hurt, betrayed, disobeyed and insulted God. Does he not have a right to defend his honor? Does he not have a right to hold his own people whom he chose and saved accountable for their rebellion and betrayal? Should God not avenge himself on such a people as this?

Jeremiah knows there is no one in Judah who can justify the people's behavior or defend their actions. God is completely justified in destroying Jerusalem and sending Judah into exile. It was this verdict and conclusion that helped the faithful remnant make sense out of the events of 597-586. It was their fault because they had betrayed God and he was just and right in taking out his wrath upon them. They got exactly what they deserved! They were going to reap what they had sown.

5:10-11 - God invites his destroyer, namely the Babylonian armies, to go through Judah and ravage her vineyards and strip off the branches. This could be literally destroy her vineyards or it could also be figurative meaning destroy this people. The prophets often used the metaphor of God's vineyard to describe Israel. See *Isaiah 5* and *Jeremiah 12:10*. God says these people do not belong to me and the houses of Israel and Judah have been utterly unfaithful to me. The word means dealt treacherously but utterly unfaithful is a good translation and captures the meaning of the word in context. Israel and Judah from the beginning were unfaithful to the Lord. They have always struggled to worship God alone and have always been tempted to stray and worship idols. God had finally had enough. He sent unfaithful Israel into exile and destruction and now he will do the same with her southern sister, unfaithful Judah. Yet, God will not destroy them completely. A remnant will survive. Though their country, king and temple will be no more yet a group of the exiles, humbled and purged of their idolatry will survive. God is faithful to his covenant with Israel even if she is not. As Paul says in *2 Timothy 2:11-13*: *If we died with him we will also live with him; if we endure we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*

5:12-13 - They have lied about the Lord, saying he will do nothing. They have ignored the prophets' warnings and claimed that he was not speaking through them. No harm will come to us they say. This is the conclusion of the official theology, the twisted belief that because they have the temple and a king from David's line nothing bad will happen. Their pride and denial lead them to not only ignore God's prophets but to ridicule and oppose them. God's Word is not in them so let what they say about judgment and destruction be done to them! They are arrogant in their denial and sin. *Jeremiah* shows us that when we do not pay attention to God's Word or only read and understand part of it, we will construct a theology that justifies our own sinfulness and behavior. We will oppose God's true Word and say he isn't speaking. People do this today, picking and choosing this part of Scripture and that part to justify what they want to believe and do. They ignore or twist parts of Scripture that plainly refute their beliefs and say it really doesn't plainly speak against what I want to do. It doesn't mean what it says. It actually says something quite different. We set our own desires and sin over God's Word to justify our actions. Like Judah we do not want to submit to God!

5:14-17 - God answers them and defends his prophet. He will make Jeremiah's words a fire and his people like wood. God's Word will consume them! He warns them again he is bringing a people from the north against them. *Jeremiah* describes the Babylonians. They are an ancient, enduring people speaking a language Judah does not understand. They are mighty warriors and will devour your harvests and food, your sons and daughters, your flocks and herds, vines and fig trees. They will strip the land bare and destroy your fortified cities. Nothing will be left.

This is exactly what happened. When Nebuchadnezzar moved against Judah in 597 he laid waste to Judah's fortified cities before he captured Jerusalem and carried Jehoiachin and many others into exile. A huge invading army in those days lived off the land they were conquering. They had no supply chain, but ate and consumed what they could find in the land. They were like Sherman's march to the sea through Georgia in the Civil War. Judah was left devastated and never really recovered from the first invasion. When Zedekiah foolishly rebelled in 587, Nebuchadnezzar invaded again and finished the job. He destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and it would be generations until the land could again support any kind of population. God vindicated his prophet and proved Jeremiah's words true.

5:18-19 - Here is the crux of the matter and the conclusion that *Jeremiah* kept coming back to as well as *Ezekiel*, enabling the people to make sense out of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple and Judah. When the people asked *WHY* has the Lord done all of this to us, the answer *Jeremiah* gave was, "*as you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your own.*" God was not going to destroy them utterly; he would preserve a remnant. That remnant would have to go through his discipline and come to terms with the people's sin. The reason God allowed the Babylonians to destroy Judah, Jerusalem and even God's temple was their sin. They had forsaken God. It was their fault!

5:20-25 - Jeremiah is told to announce a message to the people, a foolish and senseless people, a people who have eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear. They are capable of understanding what God wants them to do; they simply do not want to do it. God asks them if they should not fear him. He set the boundaries for the sea. The waves may roll and the sea roar but it can go no further because God has established its boundaries. Why do God's people think that the God who is in charge of his creation and forces way beyond man's ability to control is not in charge of his people? Why do they not honor and fear him? We would say today, "Are they just dumb or what?" Jeremiah's answer is *YES!* His insight is that idolatry and the wickedness that flows from it lead to foolishness and stupidity. We forget who God is even though we see evidence all around us of his power and care. Our rebellious and stubborn hearts lead us to turn away from God refusing to honor him. The Jews should have been saying we fear the Lord our God because he causes the rains to come at the right time so our harvests are good. Instead they have turned away from God and he has withheld the rains. Their sins have deprived them of the good God wants to do for them. They miss out on God's blessings because they rebel against him. The same is true for us today. When we sin and rebel against God we miss out on the good he wants to give us, because we turn away from him. What blessings from God would we have received if we had not been living in sin?

5:26-29 - Jeremiah describes wicked men among God's people who are so rebellious and sinful that their evil deeds have no limits. They live to do evil. They are so far gone in their sin they seek to trap others like one would trap a bird in a snare. Their houses are full of deceit, full of

lies and treachery. Jesus said Satan was the father of lies; it is his nature. God is a God of truth and these people are so far from God they have taken on the character of the enemy, of Satan. They have grown fat and rich off of others and they no longer seek justice or care for the poor, the widow and the orphan.

Verse 29 is a repeat of 5:9: "*Should I not punish them for this?*" declares the Lord. "*Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?*" The repeat of this refrain shows that Jeremiah is building God's case against Judah. This is God's indictment and the outline of the charges God is bringing against his people.

5:30-31 - Jeremiah observes that there is something horrible and shocking in the land. The words mean horrible and appalling. It is so terrible as not to be believed. The court prophets, those who are supposed to speak God's Word to the king and his officials, speak lies instead. The very ones who are charged with advising the king with God's truth speak instead what he wants to hear; they speak lies and utter what God has not said and then say, "Thus says the Lord!" The priests, those set aside by God to lead the people in the worship of God and to teach the people God's Law, they are ruling by their own authority! The priests are ruling over the people on their own. They were never given that task. God made them servants of the people to guide them and keep them faithful to the Lord. They have usurped God's role and are leading the people astray. Together the court prophets and the priests were feeding the lie of the official theology to the people.

Jeremiah is shocked by the prophets and priests but just as shocking is the people's response. They love it that way. The word for love here can mean desire and to satisfy one's desire besides human love for one's spouse or family. *Jeremiah* is using love as desire here. God's spiritual leaders are feeding the people's rebellion and not trying to correct them or lead them back to God. That is one of the reasons God had to raise up his own prophets from among his people. His leaders who had been called and tasked with the responsibility to guide the people in God's covenant and his ways had abandoned their calling and led the people astray. It fed their sin and rebellion and the people liked it. They did not want to hear correction. *Jeremiah* along with God's other prophets were tasked with speaking God's truth. It convicted the leaders and the people and they tried to silence them. No wonder most of God's prophets were constantly opposed by the people and the religious leaders of Israel and Judah.

Jeremiah asks the question: "*But what will you do in the end?*" When God's judgment falls who will you turn to, the leaders who led you into sin and have no answers? What will God's people do when his judgment comes? History tells us a remnant stayed faithful to the Word of God through his prophets like *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*. God preserved a remnant but the vast majority of the people of Israel were killed or went into exile and abandon their faith all together, being absorbed into the pagan cultures of Assyria and Babylon. Following lies leads to destruction unless there is repentance because the lies cannot deal with the truth, nor can they explain why the tragedy comes. Apart from God there are no answers!

Chapter 6:

6:1-5 - Jeremiah calls to his own tribespeople to flee from Jerusalem. The city was right at the border of the tribal territory of Benjamin. Tekoa was about 15 miles south of Jerusalem in the hill country of Judah. Beth Hakkerem is unknown. Jeremiah is telling his people to flee south from Jerusalem because the invader is coming from the north.

God is going to destroy Jerusalem, this beautiful and delicate city. Shepherds will come against her, pitching their tents around her, each tending their own portion, meaning each trying to tear down a section of her walls. The image of shepherds with their flocks is a gentle, pastoral image. Here *Jeremiah* uses it to describe the invading Babylonian army. It is a curious image to use for an army that will destroy the city. Shepherds in other places in *Jeremiah* and the prophets are used to describe the people's leaders and kings. These "*shepherds*" from Babylon will destroy the city. They will be the people's new leaders and carry them into exile.

The shepherds cry out to prepare for battle. They plan to attack at noon. Yet the battle rages throughout the day and the light is fading. So they decide to attack at night and destroy the city completely! The Babylonian invaders will attack day and night until they take the city. They will not stop until they succeed. They laid siege to it for a whole year until they finally breached its walls in July 586.

6:6-8 - God speaks to the Babylonians. Cut down the trees and build siege ramps against Jerusalem. The city must be punished because it is filled with oppression and wickedness. Violence and destruction resound in her. All God sees is her moral sickness and her festering wounds of corruption. God warns Jerusalem to heed his warning. God is turning away from the city where he said he would put his Name because they have become unfaithful to him. He will use the foreign invader to destroy her and make her desolate, so desolate no one can live in her. That is exactly what happened.

All that Jeremiah prophesied would happen to Jerusalem did happen. The Lord fulfilled his Word that he gave to the city and to Judah through his prophet. Even up to the very end the people still did not believe him. Jeremiah was vindicated but it gave him no joy. He had to watch his people suffer for their sins, their city be destroyed and God's temple, where he would have trained as a priest in which to serve, be burned to the ground with nothing left but rubble and ashes. If Jeremiah wrote *Lamentations*, it expresses his grief over Jerusalem and the tragedy of the summer of 586.

6:9-11a - God had said if Judah will turn away from their idols and sin, God will turn away from his judgment against them. Now in *verse 9* he says to the invading Babylonians, the army from the north; go through the country and glean the remnant of Israel. Pass your hand over the branches again, meaning let none be unaffected by the invasion; no one will escape judgment. God had sent the northern tribes into exile, now he will send the southern tribes as well.

Even though God will judge Judah, yet he will preserve his plan. Judah is the tribe through which the Messiah will come. They will experience judgment, yet God will preserve a remnant and even preserve David's bloodline so that Jesus might be born. When judgment falls on the people we must not conclude that God has abandon his covenant or forgotten his promises. God works out his purposes in history despite human sin. He will use even the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews to prepare his people for Messiah's coming!

Jeremiah then asks to whom can he speak that will listen? The people's ears are closed and they can no longer hear. They don't want to hear because the Word of the Lord is offensive to them! They find no pleasure in it! But Jeremiah is full of the wrath of God over his people's sin and he cannot hold it in. Part of the burden of being a prophet is one feels what God feels. God is filled with wrath over his people's sin and their betrayal of him and his covenant. He is also frustrated that no one will listen to his Word because it is in his Word they will find

repentance and will turn back to him so that he does not have to judge them. That is what he wants, but no one will listen to him or pay attention to him! Jeremiah felt this too.

There is a chilling lesson here for us today of what happens when a people no longer listen to the Word of God because it is offensive to them. Our Founding Fathers held the Bible in high esteem and desired to live by its tenants. Today people find it offensive because the Bible calls sin what people now want to call acceptable. Therefore they shut it out of their lives and ignore it or worse ridicule it as outdated and bigoted. When we stop taking pleasure in reading and studying God's Word in order to listen to it and do what it says we are in danger of judgment as a nation and as a church. Where do we stand at Southside? We want to be a church founded on the Bible, yet do our people love it and do they take pleasure in reading and obeying it? Or is it a chore they must do to be a "*good Christian*"?

6:11b-15 - Jeremiah says he is full of the wrath of God and can no longer hold it in. God then tells him in the second half of *verse 11* to pour it out on everyone in Judah; from the children in the street to the young men, to husbands and wives together and to the old. God's wrath is coming. Their houses will be turned over to others along with their fields and wives when God stretches out his hand against all those who live in the land. No one will escape his judgment and wrath, including the few who are still faithful because the people have turned away from God. God will preserve a righteous remnant through the disaster that is coming but they will not escape the consequences of what God is going to bring upon Judah. Even Jeremiah did not escape the consequences and eventually died in Egypt, an exile from the Babylonians taken captive by rebels among his own people in disobedience to God's instructions to them. See *Jeremiah 43*.

In *verses 13-15* God then describes the people of Judah. From the least to the greatest they are all greedy for gain. Money and greed now dominate their lives. They are liars! Prophets and priests alike, those who were tasked by God to lead the people in the way of the Lord, practice deceit. They all deal falsely. The word means to do, to make and is translated in the LXX as *poieo*, to do. Jeremiah is saying their lies are not like common lies, an occasional lie and sin to justify ourselves or cover for ourselves which is sinful but unfortunately normal for humans to do. No, they *PRACTICE* deceit. They continually make lying their way of life. They have denied the God of truth and their character has become like the father of lies. These are the priests and the prophets! If the people's spiritual leaders have done this what hope have the people for being truthful?

They put a Band-Aid on the people's sin and declare "*peace, peace*", when there is no peace. They lie to them and pretend their sin is not that big of a problem when it is going to lead to their destruction! They cry peace and everything will be fine when it is not fine! In other words their answer to the growing corruption and wickedness of Judah is the official theology. We have a king from David's line on David's throne and we worship at the temple of the Lord. Therefore Jerusalem is secure!

They can no longer see their "*loathsome conduct*." In fact they are so far gone in sin they have forgotten how to blush. They no longer have any shame at all. In a shame-honor based culture this is almost unbelievable! Today our culture in America is fast moving in this direction. Things that God calls an abomination we call normal and good. Things that grieve God we label necessary and a "choice" that people must have the right to make and any limits on that "choice" are viewed as bad.

What will happen to this people? They will fall. God will punish them and there is nothing they can do to stop it. Judah has passed the point of no return! Has America? I do not know. I hope not!

6:16-20 - The Lord calls Judah to stand at the crossroads and look. Judah is at a crossroads in her history and her covenant with God. The Lord tells her to ask for the ancient paths and where the good way is. If they walk in it they will find rest for their souls. The ancient paths are God's Law and his covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. The good way they are to walk in is the *Book of the Law* that Josiah's servants found hidden in the temple. The reality is they have known all along what they needed to do. The prophets consistently called all of Israel back to God's covenant with them at Sinai. In that sense they were conservatives, calling the people to return to their roots and the time tested relationship they had with Yahweh. *Jeremiah* says if they do this they will find rest for their souls. He knows the deepest need they have is spiritual not political or military. If their relationship with God is healthy and good everything else will fall into place. Jesus emphasized this as well telling people in *Matthew 11* to come to him, take his yoke upon them and learn from him and they would find rest for their souls. The people of Judah were not fulfilled because they had sought fulfillment in idols, politics, alliances and greed. They now stand at a crossroads. Which way will they choose?

Jeremiah answers his own question. God begs them to listen to his voice and return to the ancient paths, the good way and walk in them, but they say, "*We will not walk in it.*" God appointed watchmen, probably a reference to his prophets, to sound a warning trumpet but they would not listen. God's people have turned their backs on him. Instead they have paganized their religion of Yahweh, continuing to worship at the temple with the best of rituals yet ignoring what God has told them about how to live and love.

In *verse 18* God calls the nations to observe and bear witness of what he is about to do to his people. He calls the earth to listen, because he is bringing disaster on this people, which will be the fruit of all their schemes and alliances. Their kings have abandon God for Egypt, Assyria and others to play politics and try and maintain their power through worldly means. They have forgotten from whom they were given rule and authority in the first place, from Yahweh! They have rejected God's Law so God will reject them. In their arrogance and pride they continue to bring the finest of incense to the temple to worship God, as if that would appease him and then they could continue to do as they please. They have made the fatal mistake of believing the Lord is like all the pagan gods of the nations around them. As long as they appease him with elaborate worship in his temple they can do as they please. Give Yahweh some fancy incense and he'll stay out of the way. We can then do what we want. They treat Yahweh as if he were dumb or dense and doesn't know what is happening or what they are doing. Their vision of Yahweh is small and limited. They have forgotten he is the very Creator of the universe and has chosen them for a special mission out of all the peoples in the world. They think their worship appeases this small god. The reality is their worship sickens the Lord and he is not pleased with their sacrifices. They have followed all the rituals but their hearts are far from God and that's what he wants more than anything else!

6:21 - God is about to put obstacles in the way of this people that all will stumble over to their destruction. The Hebrew word literally means stumbling block or object of offense. This would later be applied to Jesus as the rock of offense and the stumbling block that makes people fall. Isaiah in *Isaiah 8:13-15*, written a century before Jeremiah said: *The Lord Almighty is the one*

you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured. It is quite possible Jeremiah had access to Isaiah's prophecy and writing and deliberately uses this image here in his own prophecy. It certainly fits with Isaiah's.

6:22-23 - God describes the obstacle and stumbling block he is going to bring against his people Judah: the Babylonians. They are a great army from the north, a great nation. They will come with bow and spear and show no mercy for they are cruel. Their horses sound like the roar of the sea as they come in battle formation. They are coming to attack Judah, the daughter of Zion, and there will be no way they can resist them.

6:24-26 - Jeremiah now comments about what the Lord has declared. He and his people have heard reports about the Babylonians. Fear now grips them like a woman in labor. Jeremiah warns his people, don't go out into the fields or walk on the roads. The enemy is coming with swords and is a terror on every side. He calls for his people to put on sackcloth and mourn with bitter wailing as one mourns for an only son, because the destroyer will come suddenly upon them.

It is interesting to speculate on precisely when *Jeremiah* wrote these words. If they are during the time of Josiah after the fall of Assyria and before the king was killed by Neco at Megiddo, then many people would not have listened to Jeremiah's words and would have easily discounted them. After all, the land was now faithful to Yahweh with a young able king! But if these words were penned after Josiah was killed when Neco had deported Jehoahaz and installed Jehoiachim as king then these words would have had a completely different effect. Or, if he wrote them after Carchemish when Nebuchadnezzar had defeated Neco and what was left of the Assyrian forces and the way was open for the Babylonians to come against Judah, Jeremiah's words would have caused a panic because the people would have seen them being fulfilled. Perhaps all are true in that even if he had written them early during Josiah's days at each point people would have recalled what he had written or perhaps Jeremiah himself would have stated them again. His warning would have been impossible to ignore.

6:27-30 - In *verses 22-23* the Lord describes the army from the north that is coming against Judah, namely Babylon. In *verses 24-26*, Jeremiah replies for his people and warns them to not go out but mourn for what is coming. Now in *verses 27-29* the Lord speaks again about Jeremiah and his people.

God says Jeremiah's role is to test his people like someone would test metal ore. He is to observe them under stress and confirm that they are rebels against God and ready to slander the Lord. They are like bronze and iron, meaning their hearts are hard towards God and they all act corruptly. *Jeremiah's* word, God's Word, to the people will be like the fire in the bellows, it glows hotter and hotter until it burns away the lead, yet the refining is in vain. God's people will not listen to *Jeremiah's* message. They are rejected silver because the Lord has rejected them. Judgment is coming and there is nothing they can do to stop it.

In context this message is given right before Jeremiah gives the famous temple sermon and indicts the official theology publicly before the gates of the Lord's temple.

Chapter 7:

7:1-8 - The Lord tells Jeremiah to go and stand at the gate of the temple and there proclaim a message to Judah. Baruch his secretary must have written this message down to be preserved but Jeremiah gives this message publicly to a crowd at the temple. This is not a private audience with the king. When did Jeremiah give this temple sermon? The context seems to indicate this was still early in his ministry, perhaps before Josiah's reforms. If so then the temple is filled with idols, Asherah poles, and pagan altars to many gods. See *2 Kings 23* for all the reforms Josiah carried out. Was this before or after Josiah had found the *Book of the Law*? It is difficult to tell. However, if the two incidents were close together in time, Jeremiah's sermon at the temple could have spurred the young king to action. The sermon itself is an indictment of the official theology of the court prophets and the priests. The Lord will protect Jerusalem because we have the temple of the Lord. Nothing will harm us because Yahweh's name dwells here at his temple. They could not see how repulsed the Lord was by all their idols within God's temple itself and their behavior as well. Jeremiah's sermon is a great summary of much of the prophets' messages to Israel and Judah. It is a call to return to the "*ancient paths*" of the Lord's covenant at Sinai and an indictment of their paganizing of the religion of Yahweh.

Jeremiah begins with a call to reform their ways and actions. If they do God will let them continue to live in Jerusalem and the land. He tells them do not trust in deceptive words, meaning false prophecies, and say, "*This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.*" In other words don't trust in the false official theology. It will not protect you! Instead reform your ways! Change your actions. God expects obedience to his commands not lip service in worship at a polluted temple, even if it is his temple. Deal with others justly; don't oppress the alien, the orphan or the widow. Don't shed innocent blood in this place. That is probably a reference to the child sacrifice that Manasseh and the people did during his reign. Children were offered to Molech and other idols as worship. God never demanded child sacrifice but graciously had provided a way to redeem the firstborn of his people. That was to show them how different he was compared to the other pagan gods around them. *Jeremiah* says do not follow other gods and the Lord will let you continue to live in this city, in the land he swore to their forefathers forever. Then he says, "*But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.*" *Jeremiah* is trying to get them to see that the official theology is nonsense. It only deceives them into a false security and the people are using it to justify their immoral and pagan ways. God sees through it!

7:9-15 - In some respects Jeremiah's indictment of their sinful behavior and worship sounds a lot like Jesus' indictment of the Sadducees' system at Herod's temple. In fact Jesus quotes *Jeremiah* about the people making the temple a den of robbers.

Jeremiah demonstrates their hypocrisy. He asks, will they steal, murder, commit adultery and bear false witness, all violations of God's Ten Commandments, then offer incense to Baal and follow a host of pagan gods they have not known and then come before God in his temple and act as if everything is fine? Will they come before God and say we are safe, and yet still do all these detestable things? Do they think the worship of Yahweh can be divorced from the covenant of Yahweh? Plus the Ten Commandments, the summary of how God called them to live, expressly forbids the worship of other gods and the making of idols. They have violated all of God's express commands yet still come to the temple to worship God and think everything is fine between them and Yahweh! Has this house become a den of robbers to you *Jeremiah* asks. They had compartmentalized the worship of God and divorced it from their behavior toward others. They had paganized their worship of God, something God warned them not to do and had

given them his commands to keep them from doing. The people have not listened and have done it anyway and the priests and court prophets have led them into this folly and evil!

God is not mocked! He says, "*I have been watching!*" Yahweh knows. He tells them to go to Shiloh, where the tabernacle stood and the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the days of Samuel. If you think you are safe simply because you have the temple and the ark, think again. Remember what God did to the ark and his tabernacle because of the wickedness of the people. See *1 Samuel 4* and the story of how the ark was captured by the Philistines. After the ark's capture the tabernacle was never set up again in Shiloh. It was abandon as a holy site. God is telling the people he will do the same thing with Jerusalem if they do not repent! The Lord has spoken to the people again and again through his prophets but they have not listened. They have kept sinning. Therefore what he did to Shiloh he will now do to the temple in Jerusalem that bears his Name, the temple in which the people trust, the one he gave to their ancestors for them to worship Yahweh. God will thrust Judah from his presence just as he did to their brothers, the people of Ephraim, Israel the north kingdom.

7:16-20 – These verses sound as if God is speaking to Jeremiah here, yet in context this is still part of the temple sermon. God tells Jeremiah something very chilling. Don't even pray for this people any more. Don't ask me anything for them because I am not listening and I will not listen to you on their behalf anymore! Judah has passed the point of no return and even last minute repentance will not halt God's decision to judge them. God is always ready to forgive and ready to receive repentant sinners, even at the last minute. But corporately, as a people God had reached a verdict and the sentence was going to be carried out. God preserved a remnant through the exile that would be faithful to him. Perhaps they were preserved precisely because they had repented even as the Babylonians were breaching the city walls. They knew their people deserved God's wrath and submitted themselves to it. In light of the gospel we know God is always ready to forgive a repentant sinner but God does reach a point when he turns away forever from a sinner who will not repent and confirms for eternity their choice to live without him. That "*life*" is hell with all of its consequences but God will not force anyone to spend eternity in heaven with him. Why anyone would not is still the greatest mystery of the human heart and human sin.

God asks Jeremiah if he sees what the people are doing, from the children all the way up to the parents. They make cakes for the "*Queen of Heaven*." The Queen of Heaven is mentioned again in *Jeremiah 44:17-19* in a conversation with the rebel exiles who had fled to Egypt and taken Jeremiah with them. It is probably a reference to the Phoenician goddess Astarte or more likely the Assyrian goddess Ishtar. She was a Mesopotamian goddess of love, war and sex and was represented in the night sky by the planet Venus. Ishtar would make sense as the identity of the Queen of Heaven because of Manasseh's rampant idolatry while he was an Assyrian vassal. It should be noted that many near eastern peoples had a goddess of fertility that was the consort of the king of the gods, including the Egyptians and Canaanites. The Canaanite goddess was Astarte, the Egyptian goddess was Isis. The Greeks later incorporated these ideas into Artemis or Diana whose temple was in Ephesus. She was the mother goddess or earth mother because she was the goddess of fertility. The center of her worship was cult prostitution. The point is God's people had taken up worship of the Canaanite pagan earth mother or Queen of Heaven, something God had warned them not to do and which was detestable to him. By Jeremiah's day it was a common practice. Even after the destruction of Jerusalem when refugees had fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them, they still persisted in worshipping the goddess claiming that

when they stopped burning incense to her all their troubles started. That is the exchange *Jeremiah* records in *chapter 44*. Their idolatry and sin was so imbedded in them that after Yahweh had fulfilled everything he had said he would do against this people they still persisted in their worship of the Queen of Heaven thinking that their troubles were caused by not burning incense to her! The denial of their sin and idolatry were so great they could not see it at all. It must have frustrated Jeremiah beyond understanding.

God tells Jeremiah he is provoked to anger by their actions but ultimately they are only harming themselves to their destruction. God has pronounced sentence and his wrath will be poured out on this people and on the land he gave them that they have now defiled by their idolatry. It will burn and not be quenched on people and animals, and even on the trees and plants of the field. God will destroy it all!

7:21-26 - God summarizes for Jeremiah his history with this stubborn rebellious people. From the beginning till Jeremiah's day this people has rebelled against God. They have persisted in following their rituals concerning the worship of Yahweh but divorcing their worship from their behavior. God had told them that if they would obey him he would be their God and they would be his people and it would go well with them. They refused and did not pay attention. From the time of Moses onward God sent prophets to them to call them back to faithfulness to him. But they went backward and not forward. They had their temple and put on elaborate worship of the Lord but their corruption and sin grew and grew until now they are worse than anything their forefathers ever did. Their hearts are evil and stubborn. They have not listened to God's warnings and so judgment is coming.

This is the conclusion of the prophetic-history books of the Old Testament. The testimony of history is that Israel and Judah were never faithful to God. There were a handful of times when a good king or judge would lead the people in repentance but it never lasted. As a whole Israel was a stubborn people who turned very early to idols and never kept the Lord's covenant he made with them at Mt. Sinai. *Jeremiah's* summary here is simply stating what the evidence shows. These are the kinds of statements that helped the exiles in Babylon make sense out of what had happened when Jerusalem was destroyed. God had not abandoned them. Long ago they had abandoned God and he was therefore justified in punishing them and sending them into exile.

7:27-29 - God tells Jeremiah that the people will not listen to his warnings or the pronouncement of sentence for their idolatry. They will not repent. In fact their sin is so great that truth has vanished from their lips. *Jeremiah* gives us a great insight here. Sin ultimately results in the abandonment of truth. We can no longer see what we do as evil. All we believe are the lies of Satan who is the great liar. We take darkness for light and light for darkness, even when it is irrational. We are incapable of seeing the truth anymore. John says Jesus came full of grace and truth. Both are needed if we are to repent and be saved. We need to see and own the truth about ourselves and our own sinfulness before we can embrace the grace of God and his forgiveness. Judah was so far gone she was no longer capable of seeing the truth.

God tells *Jeremiah* it is over between him and this people. He tells him cut off your hair and take up a lament upon the heights for the Lord has rejected and abandoned this people. This generation, Jeremiah's generation, is under God's wrath and no longer under his grace. The *Book of Lamentations* is perhaps Jeremiah's lament over the wound of his people.

7:30-34 - God's people Judah have done evil in the eyes of the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the very temple of God, the temple that bears his Name and by doing so have defiled it! It would be as if one came to church to worship God and found an altar to the Hindu gods and a statue of Buddha and the preaching was all from the Qu'ran and the words of Mohammed. They had denied their Lord, the one who saved them and made them his people. They built the high altar of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, to the south of the City of David, which runs east to west along the southern edge of Jerusalem. The altar and high place is mentioned in *Isaiah 33:30* that was written at the time of Hezekiah in reference to the destruction of the Assyrian army under Sennacherib. However, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, sacrificed his infant boy in the fiery altar of Topheth which is what Jeremiah is referring to here. He says the people of Judah have sacrificed their sons and daughters, their children in Topheth, something the Lord never commanded not did it enter his mind! God would never even think of such a thing! It goes against his character yet the Israelites sacrificed their children on it worshipping pagan gods and thinking Yahweh was still happy with them. *2 Kings 23* says Josiah destroyed Topheth and desecrated it with human bones so that it would no longer be used for pagan worship. This prophecy of *Jeremiah* is therefore almost certainly given before Josiah's reforms. That puts it early in Jeremiah's ministry.

The Lord says the days are coming when the people will rename the Valley of Ben Hinnom the Valley of Slaughter because of the dead that will be buried there. In fact there will be so many that there will be no more room because God is going to bring disaster on Judah and Jerusalem. The dead will be left to rot in the open air and be food for the carrion birds and beasts with no one to chase them away. God will bring an end to celebration and normal life in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. The land will become desolate. This prophecy was given before Josiah's reforms that began in 622. Jeremiah began his ministry in the 13th year of Josiah in 626. Thirty seven years later everything *Jeremiah* said would happen happened. Judah and Jerusalem were destroyed and the land was left desolate by the Babylonians. The temple and the king were no more. God had judged his people.

Chapter 8:

8:1-3 - When God judges Judah and the Babylonians invade the land the bones of all the religious leaders who should have led Judah to worship the Lord, but instead led the people astray, they will all be dug up and exposed to the air. They will be exposed to the sun, moon and stars that they worshipped and called upon to save them. But they will not be saved. They have loved astrology and sun and moon worship but all of it will be shown to be powerless to stop the Lord's judgment. God will reject his priests and prophets, and all the officials of Jerusalem, including the king. Some of them will be carted off to exile in Babylon, but the survivors will not consider themselves lucky because they will prefer death to the life they have in exile. They mocked God and rejected him. They led the people to worship idols and abandon God's covenant with them. Therefore God will abandon them. Judah will cease to exist as a nation.

It is difficult to tell if these verses are a continuation of the Temple Sermon or if it ended at 7:29. It appears that Jeremiah returns to a more poetic style in 8:4, which may indicate that his remarks at the temple were concluded and a different message was beginning.

8:4-7 - God is perplexed by his people. When someone falls down they get up, when they turn away or go the wrong way, they turn around. God asks, why has Judah persisted in going the wrong way? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They continue to cling to deceit, to lies and

refuse to repent and return to God. The Lord has listened to them. He knows what they are saying and thinking. No one repents of their wickedness and says, "*What have I done?*" They do not see how evil their lives have become. They are lying to God, to one another and to themselves about their behavior. They are each going their own way, charging ahead into evil like a war horse charging into battle. God says even the birds like the stork, the dove, the swift and the thrush know when it is time to migrate. God has built that instinct into them and they follow it. But God's people do not know his covenant and do not know his commands. They have forgotten the very foundation of their nation! *Jeremiah* says the problem with Judah is not that they have stopped worshipping Yahweh; they have stopped obeying him. Plus their disobedience included worshipping other gods and idols besides the Lord.

8:8-12 - How can God's people even say they are wise because they have the Law of the Lord? They have misused it and mistaught it and then disobeyed it! God says their wise scribes and teachers will be put to shame. They will be trapped and dismayed because they have rejected the word of the Lord. God will hand over their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. In other words someone else will come and take their property and their families. Then *Jeremiah* repeats the saying he gave in *6:13-15* about Judah being greedy for gain. Their court prophets and priests alike practice lies. They preach peace when there is no peace. They are no longer ashamed of their sin and have even forgotten how to blush. Their consciences are so seared they can no longer feel shame or guilt over their wrongdoing. God says they will fall and be brought down.

This prophecy is a repeat of an earlier one and *Jeremiah* includes it here again as he is speaking about Judah's leaders, their wise teachers and scribes. *Jeremiah* restates the principle that God holds leaders to a higher standard of accountability for the people's actions and attitudes. Judgment falls on the leaders first before it falls on the people. It is similar to what James said in *James 3:1*, not many of you should be teachers for they shall be judged more strictly than all the rest. Everyone will be held accountable before God for their sinful behavior but the leaders and shepherds of the people are more accountable than all the rest.

8:13 - God had promised blessing in his land to his people if they obeyed him. Now he will withdraw that blessing. Their harvest of grapes and figs will fail. The leaves will wither and what he has given them will be taken from them. God's judgment will come upon them not just with the invading Babylonian army. It will come upon nature within the land itself. The people forget that it is God who is the Creator, who sends the rains in the right seasons so their crops will grow and the land flourish. He also can withhold his hand of blessing on the land. That is exactly what God says he will do here. Judah will experience God's wrath not only on a political-military level; they will experience it on an agricultural-natural level as well.

God's judgment can come on many levels. When I think of the USA and our slide into idolatry and abandonment of God we need to be prepared for not just political disasters but natural ones as well. All can be modes of God's judgment on this nation. He is still our Creator and Lord of History!

8:14-17 - *Jeremiah* expresses the people's feelings as they see God's judgment coming. They call to one another to flee to the fortified cities and survive a little longer because God has doomed them to perish. God has given them poisoned water to drink because they have sinned against him. Is this figurative or literal? The poisoned water to drink could be a symbol for the invading

Babylonians or it could be literal or a combination of both since invading armies would often try to poison the water supply of a besieged city in order to force its surrender faster.

Judah has hoped for peace but only war has come; they hoped for healing but received only terror. These are the reactions of the people when the Babylonians finally begin to take the land. This is what they will say when they realize the court prophets knew nothing and were lying to them. When their false faith and official theology crumbles the people will be in terror. Notice they don't cry out to God and repent; they call to one another to flee to the fortified cities so they can die there rather than out in the open. Despair will capture their hearts and not hope.

From Dan in the north near the slopes of Mt. Hermon they hear the snorting of the enemy's war horses. They are coming. The people know their days are numbered and they are living in terror and despair. When it became plain that the official theology was false and that God was not going to save them as he had in the days of Hezekiah because of their wickedness and idolatry they gave up. That was the most dangerous moment from a faith perspective because it was too easy to simply abandon their faith in Yahweh all together rather than seek his forgiveness and repent. *Jeremiah's* prophecy helped the remnant keep their faith.

God says he is sending snakes among them to bite them. These are snakes that cannot be charmed. This is a picture of the Babylonians and Judah's helplessness before them. They will not be able by political maneuvering or alliance to get out of this crisis. Judgment has been pronounced and they are going to die because these are poisonous snakes, probably cobras that will kill them. God had sent poisonous snakes among the Israelites in the wilderness when they complained against God for having to go around Edom on the way to the Promiseland. See *Numbers 21*. This is probably not a literal picture here in *Jeremiah* but a figurative one of Nebuchadnezzar and his armies.

8:18-20 - Jeremiah now cries out in grief and sorrow over his people and their refusal to repent. *Verse 18* is difficult because of the uncertainty of the Hebrew text. NIV translates it: *O my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me*. The NLT translates: *My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken*. The NASB translates: *My sorrow is beyond healing, my heart is faint within me*. Both the NLT & NASB follow the LXX and other versions in translating the phrase the way they do. The Hebrew word translated *Comforter* in the NIV comes from the root for gleam or smile. No matter how one translates it Jeremiah is expressing his grief over Judah.

He is grieving because his people have rejected God so God has rejected them and they do not understand it. From a faraway land they ask if the Lord is no more, *"Is the Lord not in Zion, is her King no longer there?"* They question whether the Lord is even alive and powerful enough to do anything about their exile. They are confused! The court prophets kept telling them the exile would only be for a short time and then they would come home. But, it keeps going on and there is no sign of deliverance. Now they question whether Yahweh is stronger than the gods of Babylon! This section appears to be written during the time after 597 when the first wave of exiles was taken to Babylon with Jehoiachin the young king. Jerusalem was still standing and Zedekiah had been installed as king by the Babylonians.

God answers their question with one of his own. Why have they provoked him with their worthless idols? Why has this people continued to worship idols even when they have begun to experience the Lord's discipline over their disobedience? If the people are perplexed so is the Lord!

The people speak again saying, the harvest is over and the summer is ended and still we are not saved! *2 Chronicles 36:10* says that Nebuchadnezzar sent them into exile in the spring of

597. The people in exile or in Jerusalem are saying it is now fall and the harvest is passed and still nothing has happened, the exile is not over and we are not saved! What's going on? Where is the Lord? Why doesn't he do something? Where is the king? We have the temple why isn't Jehoiachin restored? Their false theology left them totally unprepared to deal with the disaster of 597. It was even worse 11 years later in 586 when Jerusalem and the temple are burned to the ground. Their sin had blinded them. What false theology lives in the church today that will leave believers totally unprepared to face adversity or God's judgment over the USA when it finally comes if we do not repent? I think of the health and wealth gospel or prosperity gospel. That false teaching could not cope with adversity. To a lesser extent the distorted teaching of the Healing Rooms leaves people ill-equipped to deal with a devastating illness or a terminal one. What about liberal theology? It emphasizes justice but can it deal with personal sin and salvation? Most importantly are their holes in our theology at Southside that leave us vulnerable to facing tough times or persecution? I pray there are not and we stay faithful to God's Word and the whole counsel of God!

8:21-22 - This passage is one of *Jeremiah's* most beautiful and poignant. His poetry reaches incredible depths of feeling and pathos. He has been given the task of pronouncing God's judgment against a sinful and rebellious people and frequently one can read the anger in his words. But his message gave him no comfort. It broke his heart. Part of the burden of a prophet is to feel what God feels; is to love one's people even when you can see their sin and be angered and frustrated by it. You know they are getting exactly what they deserve yet it gives you no satisfaction. That was Jeremiah's heart as well. His people are crushed so he is crushed. He mourns for them and is horrified over what has happened to them and what is coming.

Then in *verse 22* he cries out with words that are both beautiful and sad. *"Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?"* There is an old spiritual based on these words, *"There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole. There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul."*

Gilead was the region in the Jordanian highlands above the east bank of the Jordan Valley. It was given to the tribes of Manasseh, Gad and Reuben as their territory and as part of the Promiseland. It stretched from the wadi of the Yarmuk River south to Mt. Nebo and the mountains of Moab. The northern part of Gilead was also referred to as Bashan or at least southern Bashan which also extended into the Golan Heights. It is a fertile area because it catches the rains coming from the sea after it passes over the Rift Valley of the Jordan. Gilead was famous for its balm which was a resin taken from trees that grew on the heights and was used as medicine by ancient healers. The Midianite traders to whom Joseph's brothers sold him were on their way to Egypt with balm from Gilead.

Jeremiah cries out to the Lord to see if there is any medicine, any balm that will heal the wound of his people. He grieves over their sin just as God grieves over ours. There is no healing to come short of repentance and that the people will not do. Ultimately the only healing for the wound and disease of sin is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 9:

9:1-2 - *Jeremiah* continues the back and forth dialogue with the Lord about the people of Judah. **8:18-19a** is Jeremiah and *verse 18b* is the Lord speaking. Jeremiah replies for the people or the people speak in **8:20** and then Jeremiah replies in **8:21-22**. **9:1-2** is a continuation of Jeremiah's words of mourning over Judah. The Lord finishes the dialogue in **9:3-6**.

In *9:1* Jeremiah mourns for those of his people who have been killed. His heart is broken and he cries out wishing he were a fountain or spring that he might weep day and night for those of his people who have been slain. This section of his prophecy must have been written either post 597 or 586, because of the mention of the numbers of dead. This makes no sense in Josiah's day early in his ministry.

He expresses a totally different attitude in *verse 2*. In *verse 1* he is weeping over those who have been killed by the Babylonians or disease in the siege. Now in *verse 2* he expresses his disdain for his people. He wishes he could get completely away from them because of their sin and unfaithfulness. He wishes he could go out to some desert retreat where he wouldn't have to be with all their idolatry. This is what the Essenes in Jesus' day did at Qumran; got away from the temple and its corruption. The attitude shift expresses Jeremiah's love the sinner hate the sin heart for his people. We can genuinely love the people around us while abhorring what they do and what they have become. Jeremiah was repulsed by the people's attitude towards God and his covenant and did not hesitate to pronounce God's judgment upon them for their sin. Yet he was grieved when they paid the ultimate price for their disobedience. God may be angry with us but as *Ezekiel* said he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God's holiness demands justice and punishment for sin but God's first desire is mercy and forgiveness. It is his nature. *Jeremiah* expresses that in a very human way here in these verses. I grieve over them yet at the same time I can't stand them!

9:3-6 - Now the Lord speaks again to his prophet and to his people. The people the Lord saved and called his own are dominated by lies and not truth. They go from one sin to another and do not acknowledge the Lord. From a New Testament perspective they show they belong to Satan, the father of lies and not to the Lord God who *IS* truth. *Jeremiah* shows us again in this section that one of the evidences that a people have fallen away from God and no longer know him is whether they speak truth or lies. If you know God and have a relationship with him you value truth. If you do not you will lie and the lies will grow; it will become your nature. Once you have walked away from God into lies sin will grow worse and worse because there will no longer be the truth of God's Word by which to measure one's behavior. Things will go from bad to worse with nothing to stop them. That is what was happening to Jeremiah's people and God is warning him.

The Lord tells Jeremiah not to trust his friends or even his family anymore. Every one of his people has become a deceiver. In Hebrew there is a play on words here with Jacob's name which means deceiver. They have all become Jacobs! God tells Jeremiah you can no longer trust what they say to you. How isolated and alone he must have felt! God describes what has happened to his people. Friend deceives friend; relationships have broken down. No one speaks the truth to one another any longer. They lie constantly and grow tired in their sin. God tells Jeremiah you live in the midst of deception so great that they have grown to believe it. They stopped worshipping me long ago and turned to idols. Now they will not even acknowledge my existence! They only believe the lie. Paul in *Romans 1* says people exchange the worship of the immortal God for images and idols and end up believing a lie, worshipping and serving created things rather than their Creator! That is what has happened to Judah.

In America today one can see the same symptoms God outlines for Jeremiah in these verses. People are so far into their sin, selfishness and idolatry that they can no longer even see the truth. They live in their denial. The culture of the government is to lie and cover up any

wrongdoing. People have lost trust because they can no longer believe what they hear and are told. We are in mortal danger as a nation!

9:7-9 - God tells Jeremiah what he is going to do. The time frame here is confusing because in *9:1-2* Jeremiah implies there are already many dead from the judgment of the Lord. Here God says he will judge them. Was Jeremiah grieving prophetically in *9:1-2*? Or is this section separate from the earlier parts of *chapter 9* even though the themes are the same? It is difficult to tell. It is possible that different messages have been grouped together thematically by Baruch when he edited Jeremiah's prophecy. But it is also possible that his grieving over the dead in the early part of *chapter 9* is prophetic because he knows what is coming and from God's perspective it has already occurred.

God tells Jeremiah that the people's sin and their lies have led him to test and refine them. In fact what else can he do with this people because of their lies? They say one thing to each other but their hearts are bent on evil. They talk cordially but inside they plot to trap their neighbor. Like *9:4-6* God tells Jeremiah that this people are full of deceit and lies. God's holiness demands some sort of punishment and justice against his people for their behavior.

9:10-11 - God now says he will weep for the land, the mountains and the desert plains. The animals have gone from his land and it lies desolate because of the people's sin. Jerusalem is in ruins, a haunt of jackals and the towns of Judah have been laid waste such that no one can live there. This is similar to what Jeremiah says in *9:1-2* only he wept for the people and here the Lord weeps for his land. Like *9:1-2* this statement reflects a time after the judgment of 586. But it comes at the end of a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and God over the people's sin and God's judgment. I don't think it is coincidental that this final part of the dialogue is analogous to the first part in *9:1-2* that Jeremiah spoke. There the time frame appears to be after the destruction of Jerusalem and lamenting what has happened. This also appears to be the same time frame. The rest of the dialogue fits best before God's judgment has finally come. Looking at the whole section it appears Jeremiah is doing what prophets often do, telescoping events and shifting from one time frame to another, now before judgment and now after. Logic says he wrote this section after 586, but that is too simplistic. It is quite possible that Jeremiah saw the prophetic consequences of God's judgment early on in his ministry and his writing here reflects that before and after picture of events, some of which at the time of his writing had not yet occurred. But, from God's perspective were already accomplished.

God cares for his creation and his land. For whatever reason God loves the Promiseland! From a human point of view there are more spectacular and beautiful mountains and more desolate and beautiful deserts. Yet to God this land above all others is special because he chose this land to give his people. God grieves over what has happened to his special land and even its animals because of his people's sin. It was not how he had planned it even though he knew beforehand what would happen.

9:12-16 - It is no surprise that *Jeremiah* speaks of how mysterious and wise God is. What man is wise enough to understand all of God's purposes and plans? Who has instructed God and given him counsel? These are words Paul will later use at the end of *Romans 11* after he has tried to explain the mystery of why the Jews have rejected their Messiah which has opened the door for the Gentiles to believe in Jesus and receive salvation. In many ways Paul was dealing with the same mystery as *Jeremiah*! How can God's promises be fulfilled when God must judge his

people for their sins and destroy their land? Why is the land laid waste? Who can explain how God works out his purposes and fulfills his promises even through human sin and faithlessness? I don't think *verse 12* is coincidental either in light of the preceding verses in *chapter 9* concerning the prophetic timing of events that God and Jeremiah speak about. Now they talk about what has happened as Jerusalem has been destroyed and now they talk about what will happen when God will punish Jerusalem for the people's sins. Who can understand how this can be? Only the Lord, who is the Creator of time itself, can see something as already accomplished when from a human point of view it has not yet happened!

The Lord tells Jeremiah why Jerusalem has been (or will be) destroyed. The people have forsaken God's Law. They have not obeyed the Lord but instead have followed and worshipped the Baals as their forefathers had done. They are stubborn in their hearts towards God and will not repent. Therefore God will punish them as he warned them he would for their disobedience. He will make them eat the bitter food and drink the poisoned water of exile. He will scatter them among the nations, ones that neither they nor their fathers have known. The Lord will pursue them with the sword until he has destroyed them as a nation. He will not send them to Egypt; he will send them to Babylon!

This concluding paragraph that relates to the dialogue between Jeremiah and the Lord is God's explanation for what has happened or will happen. It is this explanation that enabled the exiles to make sense out of the calamity of 586 and helped them survive with their faith intact. Even though God says he will destroy the whole nation yet in other places in the prophets and in *Jeremiah* he says he will preserve at least a remnant through which he will carry on his covenant. *Jeremiah* will even look forward to the time when God will make a new covenant with this people which they will not break, unlike the covenant they broke and for which God is now punishing them. God's desire is for a people he can call his own who will obey him out of love. Israel failed in that task. God will one day build a new Israel who will not fail to love and obey him because he will put his will in our hearts and change us from the inside out.

9:17-19 - God speaks, yet this section sounds like the women of Jerusalem are speaking. The Lord calls the professional mourners to come and wail over the people. In *Jeremiah's* day there would have been women who would come and weep, mourn and wail at a person's funeral. That is who God is talking about here. He counsels them to come and weep over Jerusalem because of their shame. They must leave their land because their houses are in ruins. The Lord has brought calamity upon them. The mourners would have shouted out their grief and made a show over someone. God says do that over Jerusalem because they will have cause. *Jeremiah* has said the people are so far gone in sin they have lost the ability to blush. When God's judgment falls they will know and experience their great shame over their sin. It will be too late then.

9:20-21 - God calls the women to hear his Word. Teach your daughters to weep and wail. Death has come into the city. It has broken down the walls of your fortress. What is worse it has cut down the children and young people in your city. Grief comes to all when someone dies but usually there is a sense of acceptance when someone who has lived a long and productive life dies. The grief is tempered by the knowledge of what that person accomplished and the kind of person they were. We were glad to have known them. But when a child or young person dies, the grief is all the greater because they are so young. There is the sense that they were cheated out of life. It is not fair. They never got to experience all the things a long life gives to a person and to their families. They were robbed of it. That escalates the tragedy and increases the grief. God

says that is what is going to happen to the people in Jerusalem. Their grief will be great because their children and young people will die. This is a chilling prophecy of the calamity that is coming and gives a glimpse into the severity of the grief the Jews would experience.

It also speaks to the consequences of our sin towards innocent people. Sin has relational consequences and not just spiritual and personal ones. The children suffer the consequences of the sins of the parents. They are collateral damage. Yet *Jeremiah* shows the adults of his generation had learned their idolatry and wickedness from their parents and were so immersed in their sin they could no longer see its evil. As each generation of Jews distanced themselves from God they passed on that spiritual poverty to their children until the situation was so grave God had to act in judgment.

9:22 - How bad will the calamity be? What will their grief be over? In Judea the burial customs called for the people to be buried the same day if possible. Even if the body was prepared with spices like Jesus' body there was no modern embalming. The Egyptians would mummify the remains of the pharaohs but that was a very expensive and time consuming process. Normal people simply buried their dead quickly to avoid the stench and decay that came with a dead body in that hot Mediterranean climate. It was a great shame for a person and their family if one could not bury the dead. Thus when Saul's and Jonathan's bodies were left exposed on the walls of Beth Shan it was a grave insult. By Jesus' day the Jews had convinced the Romans to allow them to remove bodies on the cross so as not to desecrate the Sabbath. *Jeremiah* says the death will be so great that the bodies will be like grain in the fields behind the reaper. Bodies will lie in the open like garbage with no one to bury them. Death, stench, decay and shame are coming with which the people will not be able to deal, so great will the tragedy be.

9:23-24 - At first read this passage seems out of place. Yet it fits here because of the attitude of Jeremiah's people. They were boasting in their temple and the strong walls of Jerusalem. They were boasting in their king from David's line and the promise given to the kings. Their conventional wisdom said, make an alliance with Egypt and the other countries around them in order to stand against Babylon and we will be safe. King Jehoiachin and King Zedekiah even thought they could rebel against Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar would be too far away to do anything about it and Judah would be free. The leaders of the people, the kings and his advisors were all thinking these things, all the while worshipping idols and committing injustice, murder and adultery. They had abandon God and his ways for their own wisdom and then believed token worship of Yahweh would bring them his help and protection when they needed it.

God calls his people to boast about him. Boast that they know the Lord and have a true relationship with him. Boast that they understand and know Yahweh. Boast that he is a God who loves kindness, justice and righteousness. In other words prove you know the Lord by being like him, treating people with his character. Judah was completely the opposite. Jesus and the apostles say the same things in the New Testament. Jesus said if we know him we will love him and obey his commands. Paul said if we know the Lord we will walk in his Spirit and his character will grow in us. The proof that Judah had abandoned their relationship with God was in their behavior and character. Token worship is not a relationship with the living God. The same holds true for us today. Judah would pay the price for their denial of God.

9:25-26 - God declares that even circumcision is not protection against judgment. Someone can be circumcised in their flesh but be far from God in their heart. The Lord will punish Judah and

the nations around Judah who practice circumcision: Egypt, Edom, Moab and Ammon. The Jews had lived among all these nations and were related to most of them through Abraham, all except Egypt. God will punish all who live in the desert in distant places too, probably referring to the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael. An alternative reading says, "*those who clip the hair by their foreheads*", meaning those who clip their sideburns. The Jews were told to let them grow out in the Law of Moses. The Arabs clipped theirs.

God says all of these nations circumcise their males yet none of them are close to him. Therefore they will be judged just as Judah will be judged. God holds all nations accountable to him for their actions not just his covenant people. His standard of conduct is the same for all; he expects justice, righteousness and kindness. All are under his watchful gaze and none escape his notice. The USA would do well to remember the Lord's warning!

Chapter 10:

10:1-5 - *Jeremiah* compares the idols of the nations that Judah is worshipping to the living God who is their God and who made a covenant with his people which they have broken.

The Lord told Israel not to learn the ways of the nations around them. Do not be terrified by signs in the sky, astrological signs. The nations are afraid of the stars and think they govern their affairs. The stars are created things just like the earth! They have no power over human kind. The pagan nations' customs are worthless; these nations Israel has tried to emulate. They make idols out of a tree in the forest. A craftsman shapes it and another adorns it with gold or silver and then it must be fastened to a base so it will not tip over. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch they cannot speak. NASB and NLT read cucumber field in *verse 5*. The Hebrew word means field of cucumbers. Why NIV translated the word melons I do not know. Whatever the word the image *Jeremiah* is painting does not change. A scarecrow is a lifeless thing meant to scare birds away from the field. It does nothing to frighten people because they know it is not real.

Taken together the picture *Jeremiah* describes of an idol here is very similar to *Isaiah's* great sarcastic portrait of idols in *Isaiah 44:9-20*. *Isaiah* ends his passage with the words: "*Shall I bow down to a block of wood? He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say 'Is this not this thing that I hold in my right hand a lie?'*" *Jeremiah* follows *Isaiah's* thinking here in *chapter 10*. Idols are man-made things. They are not gods. They have no power. They cannot speak nor can they do *ANYTHING!* The nations are afraid of scarecrows and lights in the sky! In the next verses *Jeremiah* will compare the stars and idols to the Lord God Almighty!

10:6-10 - No one is like the Lord who is mighty in power. Yahweh is king of the nations and even if they do not worship him he rules history and determines their fate. No wise man or sage in all the nations is like the Lord. He is above all the wisdom of the nations. All their wise men are foolish because they are taught by worthless idols, mere blocks of wood. Their gold and silver is brought from far away; Tarshish and Uphaz. Tarshish was either Carthage or further west, perhaps in Spain or on the Atlantic coast of Spain. It is used in the prophets to denote a great trading-sailing city in the far west of the Mediterranean Sea. Uphaz is otherwise unknown. One possibility is that it is a corruption of Ophir which supplied much of Solomon's gold via trading ships. It was probably located on the Arabian coast or in northeast Africa. What *Jeremiah* is saying here is that the idols become valuable to the nations who worship them only because they are overlaid with fine silver and gold from distant shores. They have no value in and of

themselves. They are dressed up with blue and purple cloth that craftsmen make. The Lord however is the one true God, the living God, the eternal king. When he is angry the whole earth trembles and the nations themselves cannot endure his wrath.

Jeremiah, like *Isaiah* before him, takes Israel's faith out to its logical conclusion. The great prophets help us understand the implications of what God has revealed to his people. The Lord alone is God and there is no other. All the gods of the nations are simply man-made idols with no power and no existence except that given to them by false and deluded faith. God alone is maker of the heavens and the earth. Israel has nothing to fear from the gods of the nations. It is in fact the other way around. The nations need to fear the Lord who made all things. *ALL* the astrology and paganism of the nations of the world are just superstition. The New Testament will add the insight that it is all a strong delusion of demonic powers in order to steal the worship of God from people. *Jeremiah* in his outlining who God is also shows Israel what their mission to the nations was to be. They were to live in such a way before the nations of the world that they would see the truth and be drawn to Yahweh away from their false idols. Instead Israel has been drawn away from the one true God to the false gods of the nations!

In our day people are tempted away from the worship of God to idols of our own making. We substitute money, sex, power, drugs, excitement and adrenalin or something else for the one true God. Many people are still drawn into worshipping the stars and the superstition of astrology, thinking that balls of flaming gas somehow determine their fate! There is even a revival of paganism among some today! The more sophisticated we become technologically the more deluded we become in our spirituality! There is truly nothing new under the sun!

10:11-13 – Verse 11 is written in Aramaic not Hebrew like the rest of *Jeremiah's* prophecy. Why Aramaic? *Jeremiah* does not tell us. God says tell the nations this: the gods who did not make heaven and earth will perish from under the heavens. Aramaic was the language of the Persians and not Babylon. Yet by quoting God's words in Aramaic *Jeremiah* demonstrates that his mission is not just to his people Judah but God truly did appoint him as a prophet to the nations. His message is for everyone and that includes us today in America!

In 10:6-10 *Jeremiah* showed how God is different from the gods of the nations. He continues on that theme here in verses 11-13. God is the one who made the earth by his power and wisdom. He stretched out the heavens by his understanding. He makes the clouds and the thunderstorms with the lightning and the rain. God is Creator not the man-made dumb idols of the nations! He is the living God not a dead block of wood overlaid with gold and silver!

10:14-16 - All the idols of the great nations all around Israel are frauds. They have no breath in them. The Hebrew word here is *ruach*, meaning wind, breath or spirit. One could translate this they have no spirit or Spirit in them! God's Holy Spirit is not in any idol made by the hand of man. They are all deceptions. The NIV translates the word fraud. Anyone who makes them like the goldsmith is senseless and stupid.

The idols of the nations that Israel is tempted to worship and that they have been worshipping are objects of mockery and scorn. They are worth nothing! When their judgment comes they will perish. From a New Testament perspective this is a prophecy of the fall of the demonic. Paul in *1 Corinthians 10* said behind all idols are demons trying to deceive people into worshipping them instead of God. When their time of judgment comes they will perish in hell which was created for Satan and the demons.

Yahweh, the Portion or inheritance of Jacob is not like the idols. He is the maker of all things, the Creator. He made the heavens and the earth and he also made Israel his people. *Jeremiah* states one of the greatest insights from Israel's faith. They were a little nation and never very powerful but God who made everything had chosen them for his own and gave them a mission to live before the nations in such a way that their lives would show who the Creator was. From the pagan world's view this insight made no sense. The gods were all about power and territory; Israel had neither. But Jeremiah knew God had chosen his people to work out his purposes in the world and God had chosen him as his prophet to speak his Word. Yahweh Almighty is his Name, the Lord of heaven and earth. Who he chooses is up to him and how he chooses to work *HIS* purposes out in *HIS* world is also totally up to him. God is sovereign and in control, not the nations and certainly not the false gods of Babylon. To those who had forgotten God it seemed things were out of control. But to those with eyes of faith to see like Jeremiah, God was in charge and was working his purpose out through his people, even if it meant their judgment and exile. The Lord is almighty. He is not weak and impotent. Nothing that is happening to Judah or will happen to her is out of his control or purview. Despite the difficult days ahead Judah can trust in the Lord who made her and chose her.

10:17-18 - God warns the people that very soon they will be thrust out of the land and go into exile. He tells them to pack their bags because they are leaving. God is going to bring distress on those who live in the land and they will be captured.

The timing and content of this section appears to be right before or during the siege of Jerusalem. There were two times the Babylonians came against Jerusalem with a siege; the first in 597 and the second and final time in 586. Either of these could be the setting for this part of *chapter 10*.

10:19-22 - It is confusing as to who is speaking here. It appears to be Jeremiah speaking in the first person but because of the content it could also be an individual who is representative of the people of Judah. Perhaps it is Jeremiah representing his people. That makes the most sense. It also points out how on the one hand the prophet speaks for God to his people and on the other hand he speaks on behalf of his people to God. He is the go-between and the mediator, the spokesman for both.

Jeremiah expresses pain at his wound; he says it is incurable. This is his suffering and he must endure it. He expresses the reality of Judah's sin and God's judgment upon them. They cannot escape it and there is no cure for it any longer. Punishment and discipline are the Lord's prescription for their sickness and they must all go through the treatment, even the innocent like Jeremiah. He is part of his people and not separate from them. This is the principle of the community being responsible together for the people's sins. Even the innocent among them, those who have remained faithful to God, share in the people's guilt before God.

He speaks of his tent being destroyed. This is a metaphor for Judah, his people. It harkens back to the desert when they lived in tents in the wilderness (including God!) and the Lord took care of them. *Jeremiah* like all the prophets looks back with fondness to those days in the wilderness when the people were dependent upon the Lord and he provided for them every day. Even though there was great sin and difficulties in the wilderness the prophets see those times as the golden days of the covenant between God and his people. Now the tents are destroyed; his sons are dead and no one is left to set up the tents. The house of Judah has fallen; the line of even David has failed.

He speaks of the shepherds of his people; they are stupid and senseless. These could be the kings and their court. However, *Ezekiel*, prophesying to the exiles in Babylon, also speaks of the shepherds of the people and he speaks about the priests of God who were to teach and care for the people. They have failed. *Jeremiah* says the shepherds have not inquired of the Lord, which the priests were to do by the sacred lots, the *urim* and *thummin*. The flock, the people, are scattered because the priests have lost their way. Remember also that Jeremiah is from a priestly family so the shepherds being priests in this context makes sense.

Verse 22 is a final warning. Listen to the report coming from the north. The army of the Babylonians is coming. The final doom of Judah approaches. It will be destroyed and all her towns ruined. God's nation living in his land will be no more. It will become a haunt for jackals, a desolate land.

10:23-25 - Jeremiah prays. This is one of the first of his personal prayers we have in his prophecy. This prayer is not included in Jeremiah's Confessions. The first of those comes in *11:18-12:6*. However, here Jeremiah wrestles with all that has happened. It appears as well that this prayer was written after the calamity of 586. It makes the most sense in that setting. This is further evidence that Baruch, who was Jeremiah's secretary and wrote down and collected *Jeremiah's* prophecies and who also edited the final form of *Jeremiah's* words, did not put *Jeremiah's* prophecies in chronological order but ordered them according to his own purposes.

Jeremiah begins his prayer with a recognition of God's absolute sovereignty over our human lives. A person's life is not his own, but God directs our steps. This reflects language of *Proverbs 3* and Paul in *Romans 14:8* who said whether we live or die we belong to the Lord. *Jeremiah* does not deny human freedom here he simply recognizes our total dependence upon God for life and our inability to control the circumstances of our lives. Our lives are in God's hands.

He asks God to correct his ways with justice but not with his wrath. It is interesting that *Jeremiah* makes a distinction between God's wrath over sin and his justice that corrects. Perhaps *Jeremiah* is showing us that when God's wrath comes against a nation for its sin, even the innocent who have tried to follow God are caught up in that wrath and in that sense it is unjust. Whereas when God disciplines us to correct us as individuals it is always just and right because his discipline is for us alone. However, God's wrath is never unrighteous, yet the innocent are caught up in it with the guilty. This reflects the principle of the righteous remnant.

He calls upon God to judge the nations who do not call upon the Name of the Lord, meaning all of them, for they have devoured Israel and destroyed their homeland. God made Jeremiah a prophet to the nations and not just to Judah. He has the right as God's prophet to call down God's judgment upon them. History shows God did punish Babylon, Edom, Egypt and others for their role in the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. No nation is exempt from God's justice nor are they free from God's standards for conduct. God's Law applies to all, especially his moral law that is good for all times and all peoples. The ceremonial law was given only to Israel and applies only to Israel. But all nations are held accountable to the moral law of God and his justice. Here in his prayer *Jeremiah* calls upon God to execute justice to the nations. Today we in America need to heed *Jeremiah's* warning. We too are accountable to God's moral law and we too if we disobey it will be subject to his justice because as individuals and also as a nation it is the Lord who guides our steps. Our lives are not our own!

Chapter 11:

11:1-5 - God tells Jeremiah to review the covenant he made with the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He quotes part of *Deuteronomy 11:26-28*, where the Lord outlines the covenant blessings for obedience and the covenant curses for disobedience. God reminds Judah that this was the covenant he made with their ancestors when the Lord brought them out of Egypt. He brought them out of the "iron-smelting furnace." Solomon referred to Egypt like that in his prayer of dedication of the temple in *1 Kings 8:51*. The command to obey reflects the language of Moses during the covenant ratifying ceremony on the slopes of Mt. Sinai in *Exodus 24* when he sprinkled the people with the blood of the covenant. The ultimate promise of God was he would be their God and they would be his people if they obeyed him. The promise of the land flowing with milk and honey recalls the language God used when he called Moses on Mt. Sinai at the burning bush in *Exodus 3* and recalls his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jeremiah answers with an Amen.

As God rehearses his covenant with Israel he uses phrases from: the renewal of the covenant by Moses on the plains of Moab before they crossed the Jordan into the Promiseland; Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem; the words Moses used during the blood of the covenant ceremony after God brought the people out of Egypt; the words God used at the burning bush when he called Moses to go and deliver the people from Egypt; the promise to the patriarchs of the Promiseland. In other words God uses words from some of the central events of the covenant history of Israel in his reviewing of the covenant he made with his people. *Jeremiah* as his prophet gives his Amen to God's review. This is the covenant he has been trying to get Judah to remember!

Jeremiah's quoting of Scripture in this passage shows that the words of the Pentateuch and also the events of *1 Kings* and the dedication of the temple had already been written down. Whether they were in their final form is impossible to know, but Israel's early tradition existed and *Jeremiah* quotes from it.

11:6-8 - God tells Jeremiah to proclaim the terms of God's covenant to all the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. Tell them the covenant and call them to follow and honor it. The Lord says from the time he brought their ancestors out of Egypt up to the present day he kept warning them to obey him but they would not listen or pay attention to him. Their hearts are stubborn and evil. God even brought upon them the covenant curses he swore he would bring if they disobeyed him but still they did not listen. Those curses he clearly outlined to them in *Leviticus 26* and *Deuteronomy 28*. God had even destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel for their disobedience but Judah still does not listen.

11:9-14 - God tells Jeremiah the awful consequences of his people's disobedience. The people would not listen to God's repeated attempts to get them to obey his covenant. He has sent the covenant curses upon them for their disobedience to bring them back to him. But they have returned to the sins of the ancestors and worshipped and followed other gods. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken God's covenant commands to have no other gods before him. They have broken his covenant. The heart of the covenant conditions he had given them in *Deuteronomy 11* was that idolatry was the *FIRST* disobedience and led to *ALL* other sins. How bad had Judah's idolatry gotten in Jeremiah's day? The people have as many gods as they have towns! When crisis comes they go out to the high places and cry out to their gods to whom they burn incense but who will not and cannot help them. They do not cry out to the Lord!

They burn incense to that shameful god Baal on altars that number as many as the streets of Jerusalem. They have stopped listening to God. So God tells Jeremiah do not pray for this people or intercede for them because I will not listen to them when they call on me. God has stopped listening to the prayers of his people! That is how great their idolatry, disobedience and betrayal has gotten.

Jeremiah shows us that there comes a time when our rebellion and sin against God is so great that even though we are his people and we pray to him he will no longer answer or listen to our prayers. He shuts up his ears and no longer listens. When our sin and failure to repent gets that bad the only recourse left is to submit ourselves to his justice and discipline, knowing that it may cost us dearly. In this passage God shows Jeremiah the condition of his people's hearts and shows him why there is no longer hope for them to turn back to him and repent. All that is left is the fearful prospect of God's wrath against his people's sin and adultery with other gods.

11:15-17 - The Lord asks what the people of Judah are doing in his temple. They come to the temple to worship, keeping all the rituals scrupulously, but at the same time plotting evil and sin against others. The Lord once again gives evidence that they have divorced their worship of God from their moral behavior, something God's covenant never did. They have paganized their worship of Yahweh. So God asks them, do they really think that their consecrated meat will save them from judgment for their wickedness? Do they really think God is that blind and uncaring that he does not see what they are doing? Do they think that they can be so morally bankrupt then come to the temple and go through some sacrificial rituals and God will be pleased and ignore their wickedness?

This is one of the key reasons God warned Israel not to practice idolatry. Pagan idols didn't care how people lived as long as they received their due. Not only was God jealous of Israel's affections and devotion so he warned them not to worship idols; the Lord knew that if they began to practice idolatry like the Canaanites around them that they would begin to separate their religious worship from their behavior. That is where idolatry inevitably leads. The basis of Israel's morality was the Lord's commandments and their relationship with him. Once they broke that relationship they began to treat people in an increasingly immoral way. Their native selfishness and sin were allowed free reign. That is exactly what is happening in America today. As people have increasingly abandoned God we have abandoned moral and even civil behavior to one another. People's moral behavior is governed by their own desires and selfishness. When that happens there are no more barriers to complete moral and social breakdown except popular opinion which is now governed by that same selfishness and sin!

Jeremiah says the Lord called Judah a thriving olive tree with beautiful fruit but now he will set it on fire and judge it. Its branches will be broken. The Lord planted Judah but destruction has been decreed for the nation because the house of Judah has followed the pattern of the house of Israel that the Lord destroyed. They abandoned the worship of God and turned to Baal. Now God will abandon them.

11:18-20 - This is the first of Jeremiah's confessions, prayers to God expressing his heart over the difficulties and suffering he had to endure as God's prophet. They are honest and direct prayers that at times even accuse God of tricking Jeremiah. In style they are similar to the songs of lament in the *Psalms*. They provide personal insight into Jeremiah's thinking and his struggles as a prophet and are unique to his writing. They are invaluable in helping us understand the

burden that God's prophet carried and give insight into all prophets and their unique ministries. There are five: *11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12, 14-18.*

In his first confession Jeremiah says the Lord revealed to him a plot by men of his own hometown, Anathoth. They have plotted to kill him. Jeremiah had not been aware of their plot. The men had desired to kill Jeremiah and Jeremiah, once God revealed to him what was happening, asks that the Lord take vengeance upon them. He tells the Lord he has committed his cause to God and asks that God would now defend him. Jeremiah appeals to God's promise to him when he called him to be the Lord's prophet. God said he would protect Jeremiah. These men have plotted Jeremiah's death so he asks God to take vengeance upon them.

Jeremiah's attitude is not one of forgiveness but retribution. Part of the reason for Jeremiah's anger is undoubtedly because these are men of his own village! At other times in his prophecy Jeremiah will express the Lord's love and compassion for his people despite their sin. That is not in Jeremiah's mind here! At times he is a Christ-like figure in his suffering; not here. His cry for vengeance from God towards his enemies is one of the reasons Jeremiah's confessions are so powerful. They express the complexity of the man, his emotions, beliefs and relationship with the Lord. They show a real human being struggling to stay faithful to God in trying circumstances.

11:21-23 - The Lord answers Jeremiah and tells him he will execute justice towards the men of Anathoth who have plotted his death. They have told Jeremiah to shut up and not prophesy in the Lord's name or they will kill him. They didn't like what Jeremiah had to say! They wanted to kill Jeremiah and wipe out his name. God says he will wipe them out. All their young men will die by the sword and their sons and daughters will die by famine. Not even a remnant will be left when God brings disaster upon Anathoth through the Babylonian invasion. He will punish them and directly answer Jeremiah's prayer for vengeance. This is one of the few times God answers Jeremiah's prayers and requests in the affirmative.

Why does God say yes to Jeremiah's demand for vengeance against the men of Anathoth? Part of the reason may be because this was a Levite town in the territory of Benjamin. These men would have been of priestly or Levite heritage not members of the tribe of Benjamin. They had told Jeremiah to stop prophesying or they would kill him. They were priests and Levites who should have known better because they knew the Law of God and were to teach God's Law to the people! They should have been encouraging Jeremiah in his ministry as best they could but instead want to stop it and plot to kill him! God agrees with his prophet and declares he will wipe them out in the year of their punishment because his priests and Levites have not stood up to the people's sin but have led them astray. They are part of the problem and have resisted the Lord's prophet who was seeking to call the people to repentance.

Chapter 12:

12:1-4 - Jeremiah continues his prayer moving to the larger question the plot of the men of Anathoth illustrates. Why do the wicked prosper? Jeremiah does not understand God's justice or the timing of it. How can God even tolerate those who are faithless to him? The wicked prosper and the faithless live at ease. How is that even possible if God is righteous and just? God has planted them and they grow and bear fruit. These are people who worship Yahweh but their hearts are far from him. These are the hypocrites like the priests of Anathoth and the king's officials and court prophets. They worship the Baals and the pagan gods alongside Yahweh.

Jeremiah in a private moment expresses his confusion over God's justice and patience with the wicked in Judah who reject the Lord's covenant. He tells the Lord to test his heart. He knows how Jeremiah feels about God. He calls on the Lord to slaughter those who rebel against Yahweh! Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Jeremiah asks how long must God's land suffer before God judges the wicked who live in it? The grass in the fields suffers as do the very animals and birds. Why is God waiting? How can he put up with them? Plus, the people who are rebelling against Yahweh don't even believe he will do anything! They say he will not see what happens to us, meaning God will do nothing.

When did Jeremiah write this? We do not know. However, he had a long prophetic career and the longer he preached that the judgment of God was coming against a wicked Judah and the longer that judgment was delayed the more this question must have risen in his mind. When the justice of God is in tension with the patience and love of God for the sinner we are often in conflict at the delay of God's justice. When we know what people deserve and yet it appears God does nothing we wonder whether God still cares. That is the issue with which Jeremiah is struggling and he gives us insight into his heart and questions in this first of his confessions.

12:5-6 - God answers Jeremiah's complaint but it is not the answer Jeremiah wanted to hear. If you have had trouble racing men on foot what will you do when you have to race horses? If you stumble in safe country how will you manage to keep your feet in the thickets or flooding of the Jordan? In other words, you think this is bad, you haven't seen anything yet! Quit complaining because things are going to get worse!

God acknowledges that Jeremiah's own family has betrayed him and spoken out against him. He tells him do not trust them even if they speak well of you. They are lying. God's answer is difficult yet it is the truth. He tells Jeremiah that things will get worse for the prophet and he will become increasingly isolated even from his own family because very, very few of his own people will believe his message and respond to it. God is preparing Jeremiah for the darkest days ahead when he will practically be the only voice in Judah who will be faithful to the Lord and speak the truth. God will always tell us the truth even when we don't want to hear it because often times the truth is difficult. Jeremiah's destiny was to be God's prophet in the darkest days of his nation. His calling in life was to speak God's truth no matter what it cost him and it would cost him dearly. He would be called to sacrifice family and friends and every person's dream for home and family. That would not be Jeremiah's lot in life and God is preparing him here for those difficult times ahead. God's answer to Jeremiah is a reminder to us that God's will is not about our earthly happiness but about his Kingdom purposes and some of us are called to sacrifice all hope of earthly happiness in the service of God. We are called to live in faith and to look forward in hope to the *"city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10)."* But the cost in this life is hard, as it was for Jeremiah. God called Jeremiah to suffer for his name's sake. Jeremiah was faithful to that call. His confessions reflect his struggles to stay faithful and give us a window into an honest soul's struggle to follow our Lord. For that alone, we owe Jeremiah much.

12:7-9 - God now speaks about his people, his inheritance. He has decided to forsake it and give the one he loves into the hands of their enemies. God's people have turned away from him and opposed him. Judah is like a lion in the forest that roars at God therefore God now hates her. She is loathsome to him. God calls the wild beasts to come and gather to devour her. There is no hope left for Judah because God has turned against her.

12:10-13 - God says many shepherds will ruin his vineyard and trample down his field. They will turn God's pleasant field and land into a desolate wasteland. Think of the beautiful country in Galilee or north in Dan or even the coastlands near Joppa then contrast that with the Judean wilderness on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. The land truly is a wasteland around En Gedi, Qumran or Masada. God will allow invaders to make the whole land like those places. It will be parched and desolate before the Lord. The whole land will be laid waste.

God will allow his fertile, beautiful land to become a desolate wasteland because no one cares about the Lord anymore. His people have turned their backs on him so he will destroy them. The images *Jeremiah* uses here are literal in terms of the land but they could also be taken as symbolic of the spiritual devastation that will come upon Judah as well. The temple will be destroyed. No one cares for the land but no one cares for God either. All the idols that the people now care about will be devoured and laid waste. Spiritually they will be devastated. It will be as if they live in a parched wasteland with no water because God will turn his back on them and walk away. He will not deliver them this time. He will allow them to be destroyed.

Destroyers will swarm over the land because the sword of the Lord will come against Judah. The people will cry out to God for deliverance but they will not understand that God sent the Babylonians. It is his sword of judgment that they carry in their hands. They will be God's instrument of judgment against Judah and all their cries for help will go unheard. No one will be safe, from one end of the land to the other. They must bear the shame of the harvest they have planted because of their sin. They will sow wheat but reap thorns. In other words the people will come and worship Yahweh and perform all their rituals in God's temple but they will accomplish nothing. God will withhold his blessing and instead give them a curse. In fact all their empty worship of God will only serve to confirm the Lord's verdict against them. All they will reap is the Lord's fierce anger against their sin.

12:14-17 - *Jeremiah* now addresses the nations around Judah, their neighbors. He identifies them as wicked neighbors of his people who seize the inheritance of Israel. It appears *Jeremiah* is speaking to Syria, Ammon, Moab and Edom. It is possible Egypt could be included in this list as well although they were not immediate neighbors of Israel. Ammon, Moab and Edom at times were under the rule of Israel and learned to call on the name of the Lord. God says because they are wicked and want to take God's inheritance from his people he will uproot them from their own lands even as he will uproot Judah from theirs. But after he has uprooted them he will have compassion on Israel's neighbors. He will bring them back to his own country and his inheritance. If they learn the ways of God's people, meaning worship Yahweh and obey his commands then God will restore them and they will have a share among the Lord's people. If they will swear by the name of the Lord he will save them. But if they do not listen then he will completely uproot and destroy that nation.

This is a remarkable promise to Israel's neighbors. It is an invitation to salvation and blessing by God. God basically says to the nations around Israel come worship and follow me and I will save you and restore you. But if you reject me, my people and my ways I will utterly destroy you. Where are Moab, Edom, Ammon and even Syria today? Syria exists as a nation but its people are Arabs not Arameans. Moab, Edom and Ammon have disappeared from history. They did not listen to the Lord's invitation. God's Word through *Jeremiah* is not just to the Jews. It is to all the nations. The Word of God is for all.

Chapter 13:

13:1-5 - Jeremiah is told to go and buy a linen belt and put it around his waist, in other words wear it but don't let it touch water. Prophets were often told to take prophetic actions besides give verbal or written oracles. This is one such action. Flax for linen cloth was grown in Israel but not extensively. Most of the linen the Israelites used was imported from Egypt where it was a major cash export crop. Two kinds of linen are noted in the Old Testament, linen and fine linen. It appears that Jeremiah's belt is of simple linen. It is unknown why God tells him don't let it touch water, unless as linen becomes wet or is washed too many times it begins to break down or loses its virgin feel. Jeremiah does as God commands, buys the belt and puts it around his waist, which would mean he put it as a wrap around his robes.

The Lord speaks to Jeremiah a second time and tells him to take the belt he bought and is wearing around his waist and go to Perath and hide it there in a crevice in the rocks. He again does what the Lord commands. Perath is the key. One commentary thinks it must have been near Anathoth but the word also refers to the Euphrates River. The NASB and NLT translate it that way. If that is the case then God sends Jeremiah on a considerable journey. The Euphrates was approximately 400 miles or more from Jerusalem. Even traveling 20 miles in a day it would have been a journey of almost three weeks! Why Perath on the Euphrates? Two reasons are possible. First, the river could symbolize the empires of Mesopotamia, especially Babylon. But if that is the case why didn't God send Jeremiah to Babylon? He is to hide the belt in some rocks. Is Judah hiding itself in the empire of Babylon? I don't think so. A more likely meaning is that the Euphrates River is the northern boundary of the Promiseland. God promised Israel all the land from the Wadi of Egypt to the "*Great River*", the Euphrates. Israel never conquered all that territory and only once during the height of Solomon's reign did she have either direct rule or tributary to the entire Promiseland. I think that is the meaning here. Israel was given the land all the way to the Euphrates. The promise was there for the taking if they had simply obeyed but they did not. They did not trust the Lord to help them take the land and gave up, settling for only Canaan instead of the entire middle portion of the Fertile Crescent.

Jeremiah spends at least three weeks and journeys to the Euphrates to hide the linen belt in a crevice in the rocks by the river. Counting the return journey back to Jerusalem he would have been gone almost two months!

13:6-7 - Many days later God says go back to Perath, the Euphrates River, and retrieve the belt I told you to hide. So Jeremiah goes back to the river and finds the belt where he had hidden it only now it is ruined and completely useless. The linen cloth has spoiled. Why did God wait many days later? The simplest answer is that the Euphrates River was at least a three week journey from Jerusalem and God needed to give Jeremiah both the opportunity to return from northern Syria where the river was located to Jerusalem and then prepare for the return journey to retrieve the belt. This was not an easy journey from Jerusalem and took some planning and money to finance it. It is also very difficult to pinpoint when during Jeremiah's career he told him to undertake the journey. However, this is probably not during the first siege of Jerusalem in 597 or the second and final one in 586. Jeremiah would not have been allowed to leave the city under those circumstances. This is probably either under the reign of Josiah or Jehoiachin. But it could also have taken place during the reign of Zedekiah as he was a Babylonian vassal for 11 years.

The prophetic meaning of the ruined belt is explained in the message God gives Jeremiah in *13:8-11*. The symbol is graphic however because the belt must now have been soiled and

ruined after so much time hidden in the rocks by the river. It was no longer useful to serve as a belt.

13:8-11 - God tells Jeremiah that in the same way the linen belt is now ruined God will ruin the pride of Judah and Jerusalem. The pride of Judah could mean the king from David's line. The pride of Jerusalem could mean the temple. This may be a reference to the official theology of the court prophets and the priests. God calls them wicked people who have refused to listen to his words. In the stubbornness of their hearts they have followed other gods and served and worshipped them rather than the Lord. Therefore they will be like this linen belt, completely useless. As a people Judah has stopped being useful for God. He had bound them to himself as his people like a man puts a belt around his waist. The Lord had bound all of Israel to himself to be his people for his renown, praise and honor but they have not listened. They are soiled by their idolatry and ruined for God's purpose. God will cast them off just as Jeremiah had to throw away the ruined linen belt.

13:12-14 - *Jeremiah* gives a second prophetic metaphor to Judah, this time using the example of a wineskin. *Jeremiah* quotes a popular saying or proverb here: "Every wineskin should be filled with wine." The statement sounds obvious and the Lord tells Jeremiah if the people reply that they know that then he is to tell them the Lord is going to fill them with drunkenness like wine in wineskins. The NIV translation does not bring out the play on words in Hebrew in this passage. The word translated wineskins can also mean jug or clay jar which fits the context far better because it links the wine in the jug with God smashing the people. One does not smash a wineskin.

The prophetic action of the buried linen waste belt was to communicate God's judgment upon Judah who had become useless to him. Now in the example of the wineskins he gives another message of judgment. God will fill all who live in the land, beginning with the king himself, the priests, the court prophets and all who live in Jerusalem with drunkenness. He will smash them one against another like someone smashes a wine-jug to destroy it. God will have no pity or compassion on them which will keep him from destroying them.

The question that I have is whether the drunkenness God speaks of is literal or symbolic. Perhaps it is both. Is this something the Lord will do to them or is this something they are doing and the Lord will encourage it to the point of their judgment? I think it is the latter. If this is literal and drunkenness was one of the symptoms of Judah's moral decay then this is very chilling for us in the USA. Alcohol, partying, binge drinking and drug use are all rampant in America today. Now in Washington we have passed a law to legalize marijuana use giving another option for people to get high and escape reality.

God never forbid Israel from drinking wine, in fact wine was used in the temple rituals as a drink offering to the Lord. The *Psalms* speak of the joy that comes from drinking wine as a gift from the Lord. The Messianic Feast will include the finest of wines. However, the Law of Moses was very clear about drunkenness and forbid it. Here *Jeremiah* implies that from the king on down drunkenness is rampant in the country. The people drink to party and escape, which is exactly what we do in America today. Their drunkenness leads to all sorts of different forms of debauchery. It is also possible that many pagan rituals involved getting drunk. Paul counsels the Ephesians not to get drunk with wine for that is debauchery but be filled with the Spirit (*Ephesians 5:18*).

The most chilling part of this passage however is God's statement that Judah's sin is at a point of no return. God will have no compassion on them and show them no mercy. He will not even allow any repentance on their part to change his mind. Judgment has been decreed for God's people the Jews!

13:15-17 - *Jeremiah* addresses Judah and tells them to listen to his words and pay attention. They need to listen to the Lord because he has spoken! In the example of the wineskins there was no possibility of repentance or stopping God's judgment. It was coming and there was nothing Judah could do about it. Here Jeremiah pleads with his people to repent because there is still a small possibility that God's judgment can be turned aside.

Give God glory before he brings the darkness. Get rid of your arrogance before your feet stumble because the darkness is coming. You hope for light but it will turn into thick darkness. This might be a reference to Judah's hope for an alliance with Egypt against Babylon, as if Egypt through a military alliance could stop Nebuchadnezzar. The leaders of Judah are thinking their situation is a political, military predicament that can be solved by human means. *Jeremiah* keeps warning them that their problem is a spiritual one that can only be solved by repenting and turning to God with a whole heart. He tells them if they do not listen to his words and turn back to God he will weep for them because they will be taken captive. Jeremiah will weep for his people in secret because their pride kept them from listening to the Word of the Lord and repenting.

13:18-19 - *Jeremiah* speaks directly to the king and his mother. Since he is speaking here of Judah going into captivity the most likely king here is Jehoiachim, Jehoiachin or Zedekiah. If it is Zedekiah, then his mother would have been one of the wives of Josiah. The same is true for Jehoiachim. They would have been part of Josiah's revival but neither woman was able to get her son to follow the Lord, perhaps because she herself was unfaithful to God. The king and his mother in their pride have turned away from God. Their crowns will fall from their heads and they will be humbled. That is exactly what happened.

Jeremiah says all the towns of Judah even into the Negev will be taken. Beersheba which was on the northern edge of the Negev will be destroyed and the entire country will be taken into exile. The Babylonians took the cream of the country's leadership into exile and left only the poorest people to work the land and keep it settled. Unlike the Assyrians who killed half the population, exiled the rest and re-settled other conquered peoples in the newly conquered land, the Babylonians only took the political, religious, economic and artistic leadership of the country captive. The results were the same however. The conquered people were in no shape to rebel against Babylon because their country's leadership was decimated. This is what *Jeremiah* says will happen to Judah. It did in 597 and 586.

13:20-21 - *Jeremiah* is still speaking to the king and his court. He tells them to look north and see that the Babylonians are coming. He asks them, where is the flock entrusted to you? You are their shepherd; where are the sheep? You have destroyed your people by your wickedness. You cultivated Babylon as an ally. What will you do when the Lord sets them over you? You will be in pain like a woman in labor!

The timing of this message is uncertain. Josiah had tried to stop Neco from aiding Assyria against Babylon in 609 but that is hardly being an ally. It is more likely that Jeremiah is speaking of Jehoiachim who was a vassal of Babylon for three years. He had been installed as

king by Neco after the defeat of Josiah and the deportation of Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, to Egypt by Neco. After the defeat of Neco at Carchemish in 605 by Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiachim went before Nebuchadnezzar and pledged his loyalty as his vassal which he remained for three years before he rebelled. Jehoiachim thought that Egypt would help him against Babylon but help never came. He was arrested by the Babylonians and on the way to Babylon as a captive he died and Jehoiachin his son replaced him as king. This is probably the setting for *Jeremiah's* prophecy in these verses.

Jeremiah speaks to our plans and the Lord's plans. We think we are in control and have everything figured out. We maneuver and believe we can be successful but we leave God out of the picture. That is what the kings of Judah did after Josiah. Yet they continued to worship Yahweh, at least giving him token worship, thinking that would enhance their security. Their false official theology blinded them to the reality of their sin and the Lord's coming judgment. False doctrine and teaching can be extremely dangerous if we are blinded by it and base our actions upon it! It can lead to our destruction! It blinded the kings of Judah to their sin and gave them a false sense of security.

13:22-23 - The kings of Judah were mystified as to why God was judging them because their false official theology had divorced God's election of them from their behavior. They thought they could appease God with their worship and sin as they pleased and God would be fine with them. *Jeremiah* tells them the Babylonians are invading the land because of Judah's sin! They have been ravaged like a young woman attacked in the fields or the streets because of their sin. If I am right about the context of this prophecy then Babylonian, Syrian and Moabite raiders were already harassing Jerusalem and it is possible that Nebuchadnezzar was invading the land and laying siege to Jerusalem. See *2 Kings 24:1-3*.

Jeremiah asks them if an Ethiopian can change his dark skin or if a leopard get rid of his spots? The obvious answer is no, it is their nature. Judah's nature, the king's nature, is sin! They cannot do good who are accustomed to doing evil. The implications are clear. Idolatry inevitably leads to immoral behavior to the point of no return. Rampant idolatry leads to a heart that can no longer repent because sin is its natural condition. A note in my study Bible says: "*Sin is an addiction which so changes our spiritual chemistry we lose the ability to do good. Sin masters us so we can no longer refuse to sin. Putting something in God's place is the first step to depravity. Such depravity leads to destruction.*"

13:24-27 - Therefore God will scatter Judah like chaff before the desert wind. The Lord has decreed it and this is their lot, their portion. The image is from the custom of casting lots to make decisions or divide up property. The Lord has cast Judah's lot to see what she will receive and it has come up captivity and destruction. They have forgotten the Lord and trusted in false gods. They still worship at the temple but it is hollow and hypocritical worship.

They have committed adultery with pagan gods so God will expose them like a prostitute caught in the act. He will lift up her skirts and expose her nakedness for all the nations round about Judah to see. They will be shamed and devastated by their punishment. God has seen everything they have done on every high place and even out in the fields. They are unclean before God and he has had enough! When you think of their hypocrisy you can see why the Lord was so angry with them. They would worship the pagan gods, even in God's temple, sin as they pleased and completely ignore God's Law, and then on the Sabbath and the high feast days come into the temple and go through the rituals of worship to Yahweh and somehow think he was

pleased with them. They treated him like any other pagan god as if he were stupid and could not see what they were doing or didn't care. In their pride they thought they were in charge of their lives and had appeased God and when they needed him he would come to their rescue and they could command him to do what they wanted and in the meantime live like they pleased. God had sent *Jeremiah* to tell them he knew everything they were doing and God had reached the end of his patience with them. They did not listen and self-destructed. The result was the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and their country.

Chapter 14:

14:1-6 - *Jeremiah* gives Judah the Lord's message concerning the drought. It is unclear when this drought occurred because *Jeremiah's* career as a prophet spanned 40 years, so it could have been during any of the reigns of the kings he knew, including Josiah. It is most likely however to be during Jehoiachim or Zedekiah's reign because of their unfaithfulness and the people's idolatry.

Deuteronomy 28:22 specifically lists drought as one of the covenant curses God would send to Israel if they broke his covenant and worshipped idols. They did so God did. During Elijah's time 200 years earlier Israel experienced a drought that lasted three years.

Jeremiah describes a time when there is no water. The cisterns are empty. Many places in Israel, especially near the desert relied on cisterns for their water supply because they were not near a spring. Qumran near the Dead Sea in Jesus' day used this system, collecting rainwater during the rainy season and storing it up for the dry season. If the rains did not fall then the cisterns were empty and the people would die of thirst. Israel was not a people that irrigated their crops like the Egyptians and Mesopotamians. They did not have a huge river to use for irrigation like the Nile or Tigris-Euphrates system. They relied on the early and late rains to water their crops. The Jordan flowed year round but was a smaller river and was also not near the population centers of Israel. When the rains did not come the ground was parched and the crops died just as *Jeremiah* describes here. Even the wild animals are suffering because of the drought. The grass in the fields has dried up and there is no forage for the animals.

14:7-9 - *Jeremiah* confesses the sins of his people for their sake. He acknowledges their "backsliding" is great. The NASB translates the word apostasies. The root word in *Jeremiah* means to return and is related to repentance. It is one of *Jeremiah's* favorite words and he uses it more than any other prophet. The noun used here in *verse 7* means to turn away from God, or to backslide, meaning go back to sin rather than follow God. The word implies that once Judah was faithful to God but now she has turned her back on him and gone back to idols. She has sinned.

Jeremiah appeals to God, calling him the hope of Israel and her savior. He asks God why he is a stranger in the land like a traveler who only stays a night. God is not present with them as he used to be. *Jeremiah* affirms that God is among them and he begs him not to forsake his people. *Jeremiah* has already recalled a covenant curse from *Deuteronomy 28* in describing the drought. He often likes to harken back to the days in the wilderness when God dwelt with his people in the desert and he fed and cared for them daily. He was among them. Even as they conquered the land and began to live in it he was among them and with them. The temple with the ark was his sign that he was with them. Now however as Judah has strayed farther and farther away from the Lord and turned to other gods God has distanced himself from his people. They are beginning to experience not his caring presence but his righteous discipline. *Jeremiah* begs for God to save them.

14:10 - The Lord replies to Jeremiah's prayer with his own assessment of the people and their sins. They love to wander and they have no more restraints on where they go, meaning to other gods. The Lord does not accept them anymore. Their sacrifices and worship mean nothing to him any longer. He will now remember their sins and punish them for it. *Jeremiah* has pleaded with God to save Judah in their sinfulness. The Lord replies that the time for repentance is past. It is too late!

14:11-12 - God then commands Jeremiah not to pray or intercede for the people any longer. Those are chilling words! God says though they fast I will not listen. Though they offer sacrifices and burnt offerings I will not accept them. Instead I will destroy them with sword, famine and plague! These are three of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in *Revelation 6*; war, famine and plague. More importantly they are part of the covenant curses in *Leviticus 26* and *Deuteronomy 28*. Judah has reached the point of no return. Her sins have earned not grace and covenant faithfulness from the Lord but his covenant curses. God will discipline his people for their disobedience! Jeremiah, don't pray for their salvation and deliverance anymore because I am going to destroy them!

14:13-16 - *Jeremiah* raises the objection with God that the court prophets are all saying Judah will have lasting peace and Jerusalem will be secure. The people will never see war or suffer famine. The court prophets were part of the king's court and had powerful positions as advisors to the kings. They could trace their origins to the movement of the prophets founded by *Samuel* and stood in that tradition. They were a counterpoint to the power of the priests but by Jeremiah's day had been coopted by the kings and their power. They basically told the kings what they wanted to hear and said this was the Word of the Lord. It is unknown how many of them there were but they had the ear of the kings. Jeremiah is a lone voice prophesying destruction and judgment. The court prophets are many and are directly telling the king everything will be all right. Jeremiah is expressing his unease at having to keep giving God's Word when he is in direct conflict with the court prophets. Who will the people believe is speaking for the Lord?

Yahweh answers his prophet directly. The court prophets are false prophets! They are speaking lies in God's name. He has not sent them or appointed them. Their visions are false. God calls their prophecies divinations and worthless divinations or visions. This could be symbolic or sarcastic, calling their prophecies divinations, or it could be literal. They might have been practicing divination which many pagan religions practiced and then calling whatever their pagan omens said a word from the Lord. If that is the case they were doing what God's Law expressly forbid Israel to do. Further the Law in *Deuteronomy* was clear. If a prophet was claiming to be from God and was found to be a false prophet the punishment was death. In the end whatever messages they claim to receive from the Lord are only delusions of their own minds.

God tells Jeremiah the destiny of the court prophets will be exactly what they are telling the kings and the people will not happen. They will fall by the sword and by famine. God's judgment upon them will prove he did not send them nor do they speak for him. The people who are listening to their false prophecies and are not testing their words against God's Law will be thrown out into the streets and slaughtered. There will be no one to bury them because they will all perish by famine and sword. God will send on them the calamity they deserve. When the final siege of Jerusalem came in 587-586, the food supply was so low people reverted to cannibalism, eating their dead, in order to have enough food. When the Babylonians finally breached the walls

in July 586 they slaughtered many in the city. They pursued Zedekiah to the Jordan Valley, captured him, and took him to Riblah in Syria. There before Nebuchadnezzar his sons were slain before him and his eyes were put out. He was taken to Babylon in chains where he died. All that the Lord told *Jeremiah* would happen did happen. He confirmed his Word through his prophet and judged the false prophets and those who were listening to them, especially the king!

14:17-18 - Jeremiah is told to speak a word to the people of Judah. Is this Jeremiah talking here of weeping over the people or is it the Lord through Jeremiah? Perhaps it is both. God tells him to weep day and night for the wound of his people, his virgin daughter. They have suffered a crushing blow. If he goes into the country he finds people slain with the sword. If he goes into the city he finds those who are ravaged by famine. Yet prophet and priest have gone to a land they know not. Was this given before or after 586? The siege of Jerusalem in 586 was the time of the worst famine. This is perhaps prophetically telling the people what will happen rather than reporting on what Jeremiah sees.

The point is when Jeremiah goes out into the countryside and goes into Jerusalem he sees exactly what God said would happen; the people have been destroyed by sword and famine. God's judgment has come. Yet it gives God no satisfaction or pleasure to have to judge his people. He weeps over them, just like Jesus wept over Jerusalem on Palm Sunday knowing they would reject him and the judgment that was coming through the Romans in 70.

14:19-22 - Jeremiah cries out to God, asking him if he has rejected Judah completely. The Lord has afflicted them. They hoped for peace but nothing good came; they prayed for a time of healing but they experienced only terror. He confesses his people's sin and wickedness. Jeremiah acknowledges their guilt before God and the fact that they have sinned against the Lord. He calls upon the Lord to stop his judgments, appealing to the honor of the Lord's name and the covenant he made with Israel. Jeremiah appeals to God, telling him that none of the worthless idols of the nations bring the rains. It is God who is the Creator and therefore Judah puts their hope in him. He is the one who has made the covenant and has brought judgment. And he is the one who can turn that judgment away as well.

Jeremiah as God's prophet takes up the role of intercessor for his people. But even the faithful prophet's prayers God will not answer this time. The Lord has decided to judge his people for their idolatry and wickedness and no prayers, even righteous ones from Jeremiah will cause God to change his mind. God had already told Jeremiah not to intercede for the people anymore. He would not listen to any prayers on their behalf. Jeremiah tries one more time, but the Lord holds to his word. He is not listening. It is too late.

Chapter 15:

15:1-2 - The Lord expands on his answer to Jeremiah's prayer of confession and repentance on behalf of his people. Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before the Lord and call on the Lord to change his mind about judging Judah, God would not relent. Moses pleaded for the people after the golden calf in *Exodus 32* and God did not destroy them. Samuel pleaded for the people in *1 Samuel 7* and led their turning back to the Lord after the ark was captured by the Philistines. Both of the great prophets pleaded for mercy from God on behalf of their people and the Lord answered their prayers. Here God says even if both Moses and Samuel begged the Lord for mercy on behalf of Judah the Lord would not answer their prayers. It is too late.

God tells Jeremiah send this people away from his presence. If they ask him, where shall we go, tell them those destined for death to death, for the sword to the sword, for starvation to starvation and for captivity to captivity. In other words many will die from sword and starvation and many who survive will go into captivity. There is no hope for this people that God will change his mind. The only glimmer of hope here is that God does not say he will utterly destroy Judah and wipe them all off the face of the earth. Later as *Isaiah* did, *Jeremiah* will tell the people that God will preserve a remnant. That remnant however will go through the tragedy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and most will face exile. Even the righteous among Judah, the few that exist, will face the Lord's discipline and will not escape the punishment their whole nation deserves for abandoning God.

John in *Revelation 13:10* modifies *Jeremiah's* statement but definitely alludes to it in his description of the time of the beast and his control of the world and war against God's people. If I am correct in my assessment of *Jeremiah's* message that the nation of Judah is being judged but God will maintain a faithful remnant even though they will experience the Lord's discipline along with their fellow countrymen, then this lends credibility to the interpretation that Christians will be preserved through the Great Tribulation but will not be taken out of it or be spared from the persecution that occurs during it. God will preserve a remnant but we will not be immune from the devastating effects of the Tribulation even as the righteous remnant of the Jews were not immune from the Babylonian's destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of the Jews.

15:3-4 - God will send four destroyers against the people: the sword, dogs, birds and wild beasts. People will be killed with the sword and the dogs, birds and beasts will scavenge on their dead flesh. *Jeremiah* uses pictures of judgment from both *Leviticus 26* and *Deuteronomy 28*, the two occurrences of covenant curses that the Lord gave Israel, detailing what he would do if they violated his covenant and did not repent.

On a side note, because *Jeremiah* uses images from the two passages from the Pentateuch and quotes from them in other places in his prophecy it is logical to assume that the first five books of Moses were close to their final form and were being used as Scripture by Jeremiah's day. This would put the final completion of the Pentateuch some time before 600 BC.

God states in *verse 4* that he will make Judah abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah did in Judah and Jerusalem. Manasseh led the people to the worst kind of idolatry, including child sacrifice, wickedness and violence so much so that God said he would destroy Judah for the sins Manasseh led the people to commit. That judgment was delayed because of the reforms and revival under Josiah. The Lord promised Josiah he would not live to see all the punishment the Lord would bring upon Judah and Jerusalem because of the sins of Manasseh but the Lord did not forget. *Jeremiah* states the principle here that a leader can so damage a country that God decides to judge the whole nation because a leader has led them astray. The leader leads the people into such great sin there is no chance for change and repentance left. That was the case with Judah. Josiah's reforms were greater than any other king and it looked as if the people were returning to the Lord. But as soon as he died his sons reverted back to Manasseh's ways and the people easily followed. Josiah's reforms proved to be only on the surface. Manasseh had so corrupted the people's hearts that they never opposed a return to idolatry.

Even a so-called Christian nation will not last because of the evil of the human heart. Only the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ can finally and fully defeat evil and bring resurrection and righteousness. It is a hard historical fact that all revivals eventually fade. The

amillennialists who say the gospel and the church will ultimately triumph and establish the Kingdom of God on earth fail to take human sin into account. Human beings will always turn from God until we are totally remade and resurrected so that we are beyond sin. Ultimately only the return of the Lord Jesus will save us. In the meantime we preach the gospel and call people to repentance. We work for revival but no revival will ever change that which is inevitable, and that which the Scriptures say must happen. What happened in Judah will happen to the whole world. The world will turn away to God and worship Satan. God will send his judgments upon it and even faithful followers of Jesus will be caught up in those judgments. But God will preserve his elect in the midst of those judgments and finally come to usher in the Kingdom of God. In that sense the destruction of Judah and the exile is a type of the events of the end times.

15:5-9 - *Jeremiah* laments over what will happen to Jerusalem once God's judgment falls. Who will have pity on her? Who will mourn her? Judah has rejected the Lord. They continue to backslide, turn away from God, the opposite of repentance. God has determined he will destroy Judah. He will no longer show compassion to her but will punish her for violating his covenant. God will bring destruction upon his people because they have not changed their ways.

He had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that their descendants would be as the sand of the seashore. Now he declares that Judah's widows will be like the sand of the sea. God will bring the destroyer to Judah. Anguish and terror will come to the people. Mothers will grieve their children and they will become disgraced widows, filled with shame over what has happened. Those who survive will be slaughtered and not escape. God has determined to destroy Judah and *Jeremiah* paints a stark picture of what that will look like.

The difficulty we have with this passage is it seems so out of character for God who is love. How could he do this to the people that he loves? *Jeremiah* helps us balance the picture of the God of love with the God who is holy and righteous. God cannot ignore sin, or overlook it as if it never happened. God cannot ignore Judah's blatant disobedience as if there was nothing wrong. How is it loving to the innocent victims of the violence of Manasseh and those who followed him? Plus, how does God have any honor if his people continually violate his covenant and expect no consequences and the continuation of God's promises and blessings? Love is righteous and holy as well as merciful and forgiving. We must have a complete understanding of God's character as we read the prophets like *Jeremiah* and interpret the history of God's people in the Old Testament. We also tend to forget the cost the Jews bore for rejecting Jesus as Messiah as we read the New Testament. Though it does not focus on the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 yet it is in the background of the books of the New Testament and is a reality with which we must deal. God will not be mocked. What we sow we also reap because God is just.

15:10-11 - This is the beginning of Jeremiah's second confession, which continues to *15:21*. It takes the form of a lament and a dialogue with the Lord.

Jeremiah begins by lamenting that he was ever born because the whole land strives and contends with him. Everyone curses him yet he has never borrowed or lent to anyone that they should be angry with him. He expresses the extraordinary loneliness he must have felt as God's prophet. So often Jeremiah was the lone voice of impending judgment calling the people to repentance, especially after Josiah's death it must have seemed as if no one in the entire country believed him or supported what he said. Jeremiah was continually at odds with the court prophets, the priests and the king and his officials. We know from the context of *Habakkuk's* writing that he wrote late in the process of the Babylonian invasion right before the exile. *Ezekiel*

did not become a prophet until after 597 and his call was in Babylon and his ministry was to the exiles there not to the people back in Jerusalem. That means for at least twenty years Jeremiah had no colleague in Jerusalem, no other prophet of God who shared his understanding of what was happening in his nation. That is why he laments that he was ever born.

The Lord replies that he will deliver Jeremiah for a good purpose. He will make his enemies plead with him in times of disaster and distress. God will preserve Jeremiah for the crucial role he has for him to do. He will spare his life because *Jeremiah* and his insight will be critical in helping the Jews keep their faith and understand why the events of 586 happened to them. God tells Jeremiah that he has to keep God's purpose in mind in order to survive the difficulties ahead. He reassures him that the Lord will protect him and in the end his enemies will turn to him. King Zedekiah did turn to Jeremiah in the end but unfortunately it was way too late.

15:12-14 - This section is an interlude within the dialogue between Jeremiah and the Lord. It summarizes God's judgment and sets the context for Jeremiah's lament.

Who can break the power from the north, namely Babylon, which is like iron? It is too strong for Judah to resist. God declares he will give all Judah's wealth and treasures as plunder to the Babylonians. He is doing this because of the sins that not only their leaders have committed but the whole people as well. God says he will enslave his people to their enemies who will take them to a land they do not know because his anger burns against them like a fire. God's anger that burns like a fire is a picture of the final judgment against human sin in the lake of fire and brimstone in *Revelation 20* that burns forever. The language here reflects both the covenant curses in *Deuteronomy 28* and the reason for the fall of Jerusalem in *2 Kings 25*.

15:15-18 - *Jeremiah* continues his dialogue with God. He pleads his case before God. God understands him and knows his situation. He begs the Lord to vindicate him before his enemies. He asks God to take vengeance on those who persecute him because he has been the Lord's faithful prophet. Jeremiah tells God he has suffered much for the Lord's sake and taken the reproach of his people.

Jeremiah tells God when his Word came to him he took it in. He uses the picture of eating God's Word and says his Word was a joy and delight to him. That same picture Ezekiel uses in *Ezekiel 2:8* and John uses in *Revelation 10:10*. Both Ezekiel and John are given a scroll to eat which is God's Word and it was sweet like honey to taste but bitter when they swallowed it. It is a great joy and privilege to be God's prophet and to have him speak to you, but the message one is given to deliver is often very painful and bitter to speak. That is the reality Ezekiel and John speak of and it is the reality *Jeremiah* alludes to as well. Jeremiah knew he was called by the Lord to be his prophet and he was under the authority and protection of God's name.

He reminds God that he never took part in the revelries and merrymaking of his people. It is possible that Jeremiah is speaking about Judah's pagan feasts and festivals here and not the feast days the Lord had given his people. Even if he is only speaking of the Lord's feasts he states that he sat alone and did not partake of their hypocrisy because they would feast to the Lord but disobey him completely in their conduct. Jeremiah sat alone because the Lord's hand was on him and he had filled his prophet with indignation at the people's sin. Part of the burden of being God's prophet is one perceives things as God sees them. One feels what God feels. You are in touch with God's heart and to look upon the people's sin and idolatry and their hypocrisy in feasting to the Lord would make you incensed at their sin. Jeremiah has experienced this.

However, even knowing God's heart towards the people's sin has not filled Jeremiah with joy. Instead it has caused him grief and pain. That pain shows no signs of abating. Think about it. Jeremiah was a prophet for over 40 years. For almost that entire time his heart was filled with pain. As John Bright observes in *The Kingdom of God*, it is a wonder that Jeremiah even kept his sanity! Part of the reason Jeremiah was able to hold on to his sanity was his ability to take his pain and despair to the Lord as he does in his confessions. He was brutally honest with God and the Lord heard him and answered him. He did not always answer Jeremiah as he wanted but he did answer him and showed his prophet that he was with him. Jeremiah in his pain asks God if he is still there. Is he like a spring that fails or a deceptive brook that looks as if it has water but when one comes to drink it is not enough? He begs God for an answer because the pain he is feeling when he writes these words is more than he can bear. God when will this end? Lord I can't take this anymore! Help me! We have all been there. What is God's answer?

15:19-21 - The Lord responds to Jeremiah's lament. If he repents the Lord will restore him. Had Jeremiah sinned in complaining to the Lord that his role as a prophet had caused him pain? No, but the Lord reminds him that he is not wholly righteous either. Jeremiah is not without sin and like all sinners needs repentance in order to have a right relationship with God. God tells him speak worthy words and he will continue to be his spokesman. In other words, stay the course. Be faithful to me and speak what I give you to say and you will be my prophet. Do not be tempted to curry favor with your countrymen and speak words they want to hear. Speak what I give you. The Lord tells Jeremiah let the people turn to you; let them repent. Do not turn to them; do not be tempted to tell them what they want to hear in order to ease your burdens. Stay faithful!

God then reiterates what he told Jeremiah at the beginning of his prophetic career in his call in *Jeremiah 1:17-19*. The Lord will make Jeremiah a fortified wall of bronze. The king and the people will fight against him but will not overcome him because the Lord is with Jeremiah to rescue him and save him. God will save his prophet from the hands of the wicked and redeem him from the grasp of the cruel. This was literally fulfilled when Jeremiah was rescued from the cistern into which King Zedekiah had allowed Jeremiah's enemies to throw him during the siege of Jerusalem in *Jeremiah 38*. The most important thing God tells Jeremiah in his response to him is in *verse 20*, "I am with you to rescue and save you." That is God's great promise to his prophet. God's message to Jeremiah is don't give up. Stay faithful and I will be with you. How often is that exactly what God says to us during difficult times when it is hard to follow the Lord and continue to obey him?

Chapter 16:

16:1-4 - God gives *Jeremiah* a series of commands linked to what will happen to the people of Judah. The first one he gives him is, do not marry or have children in this country. The Lord is about to bring death to the sons and daughters, fathers and mothers of the people. They will die of diseases and their bodies will lie in the open in shame. They will not be buried because there will be no one to mourn them. If disease does not kill them, sword and famine will. Their bodies will become food for the birds and beasts, the scavengers.

God tells Jeremiah not to marry or have children. The times will only get worse but Jeremiah's life was to be an example and sign to his people. He would not marry because the Lord was going to hand over people's children to death. That meant Jeremiah was alone through his whole career. One can assume he was not married when the Lord called him as a teenager.

This command does not tell him to divorce his wife and put away his children but don't get married and have children. The implication was Jeremiah was single at the time God gave him this command. That means if he obeyed God, which he did, he was single for his whole life. Jeremiah shows us that when the crisis is great enough the burden of God's prophet is greater. We know *Isaiah* was married and named his children in a way that expressed God's message. *Hosea* was married as well, in fact he was told to marry Gomer the prostitute and name his children as messages from the Lord to Israel. *Ezekiel* was married but God told him not to mourn his wife's death because God was about to destroy his sanctuary the temple and the people would not mourn. *Jeremiah's* life is also a sign to the people, a message from God in action. He never married and had children as everyone around him did because his life would declare that mothers and fathers, sons and daughters would be killed. The burden of being God's prophet throughout the crisis of Judah's fall and exile must have been extraordinary. No wonder we have *Jeremiah's* confessions and he is known as the "*weeping prophet*."

16:5-7 - God's second command to *Jeremiah* is don't go to any funerals or pay your respects to the dead. Don't show any sympathy to anyone you know who is mourning because the people of Judah will die, both high born and low, and their bodies will lie in the streets and no one will mourn them. There will be no one to comfort them or console them. Jeremiah's absence from any funerals was to be a sign to the people that when God's judgment finally struck, they would die and no one would be there to mourn them.

This behavior would further isolate Jeremiah. Can you imagine a family member dying and you do not come to the funeral or console your relatives or pay your respects and the reason you tell your family is because you will all die and no one will mourn you? Sometimes obedience to the Lord as his messenger comes with a huge personal cost. It did for Jeremiah.

16:8-9 - The third command *Jeremiah* is given by God is don't go to any wedding feasts or any family feasts and times of joy. God had told Jeremiah to stay away from any times of mourning and gathering to pay respects to the dead. Now he tells him stay away from your family and friends in any occasion for joy or feasting like a wedding because God is going to bring an end to any sounds of joy and feasting in the land.

The practical outcome of God's commands to *Jeremiah* would be increasing isolation from his family and friends and the people around him. He would become more and more a recluse and be seen as strange; the odd man who was always telling people the Lord was going to judge Judah and they would all die. Who wants to be around someone like that? His behavior, which the Lord had told him to do, would cause people to turn away from him and not want to be with him at all. But this was the Lord's command and message to Jeremiah and he dutifully obeyed despite the cost.

What about us today? Are we willing to obey God and do what he asks us to do no matter the cost to ourselves? Jesus said in the Beatitudes in *Matthew 5:10-12* that we are blessed if we are persecuted for righteousness sake and for standing up for his name's sake. I think in the days and years ahead we are going to find out what his blessing means in a much deeper way and we will need the courage to obey God no matter what like God's prophets, and especially like *Jeremiah*.

16:10-13 - God told Jeremiah not to marry, mourn over his friends or family or attend any weddings or feasts of family and friends. His actions and lifestyle choices were to be a message

to the people. When they inevitably ask him why he is behaving in such a way and why has the Lord decreed death and destruction for us, God gives him what to say. He says when the people complain that they have done no wrong and have not sinned against the Lord tell them their fathers forsook the Lord and worshipped and followed other gods. They did not keep God's Law. But you have done even more wickedly than your fathers! All of you are following the stubbornness of your evil hearts instead of obeying the Lord. Therefore God will throw them out of the land he promised to their forefathers. He will cast them into a land they have not known and there they will serve foreign gods and the Lord will show them no favor at all. Death, destruction and exile are coming.

Jeremiah's answer to the people's questions over his odd anti-social behavior and his blunt message of judgment is that the people have sinned worse than their ancestors. The people of Israel sinned from the beginning, only months from being delivered from Egypt. God punished that generation and raised up a new one to conquer the Promiseland. Once they conquered the land they sinned and repented, sinned and repented again and again. This is the prophetic cycle that begins in *Judges*. Yet each successive generation did not learn from their parents' mistakes. Instead they sinned all the more and their idolatry and wickedness grew and grew until it peaked in the days of Manasseh king of Judah. The king and the people had become more wicked and more idolatrous than all their ancestors and now they have the audacity to ask when they have sinned against the Lord! Their moral bankruptcy has blinded them to their own sin. They do not repent because they can no longer see the need for repentance. Their hearts are hard towards God and filled with wickedness. God therefore will thrust them from his presence, destroy Judah and Jerusalem and send them into exile to Babylon. *Jeremiah's* life and message were to be a testimony and witness against the people and their sin.

16:14-18 - For the first time in his prophecy God gives *Jeremiah* a message of hope and restoration that will come after God's judgment of Judah. The days are coming, after a time of judgment, that God will bring the people back from exile, out of the land of the north, meaning Babylon. That is exactly what God did in 538 through the decree of Cyrus the Great of Persia. This restoration and return will be so dramatic that people will compare it with the Exodus. In fact, it will be a new exodus from exile back to the Promiseland. This theme of a new exodus *Isaiah* declares in the second half of his prophecy from *chapters 40-66*, the section spoken to the exiles. This message seems somewhat out of place for *Jeremiah* who has so unflinchingly stated God is finished with Judah and is going to destroy her and punish her for her idolatry and disobedience. However, one must remember that *Jeremiah* is also the prophet of the New Covenant in *Jeremiah 31*. He makes it very clear in the next paragraph that this time of restoration will only come after God's judgment upon Judah. There will be no last minute reprieve, no stay of execution. Yet God promises to gather his people whom he has banished and bring them back to the Promiseland that he swore to give to their forefathers. He will bring them back from Babylon and from all the nations where he had sent them. God will keep his promises to his people despite their sin and their breaking of his covenant. God will keep his Word even if we disobey it!

Jeremiah's phrase in *verse 14*, "*the days are coming*," is pushed into the future. In *verse 16* he says, "*but now*." The immediate future for Judah is judgment because of their sin. God will send fishermen to catch them like fish and hunters to hunt them down on every mountain and hill and hiding place in the rocks. In other words no one will escape God's punishment and judgment. They will all be found and punished. Even *Jeremiah* will go through the fall of Jerusalem and

though he will not be deported to Babylon and go into exile there yet he will be part of a group of survivors who flee to Egypt where he will eventually die. The sins of Judah are so bad and pervasive that the righteous are caught up in God's judgment along with the wicked. God still preserves a righteous remnant who will one day return in the days that are coming. But all will taste the bitterness and grief of God's wrath over Judah's sin. I wonder if that will not be the fate of faithful Christians in America today?

God says he sees all the ways of his people. Their sins are not hidden from God. If they think he does not know or see what they have been doing they are gravely mistaken. He knows it all. So because they have sinned against the Lord and betrayed him and the covenant he made with them the Lord will repay them double for their wickedness and sin. They have defiled his land with their idols and sin. They have passed a point of no return. There is no room for repentance left, only judgment.

16:19-20 - *Jeremiah* responds to the Lord's message with a song of praise. The Lord is his strength and fortress. God is *Jeremiah's* refuge in times of distress. Now rather than express his pain over having to be God's prophet *Jeremiah* expresses his faith. God has been his strength. He has experienced God's deliverance of him and his help. *Jeremiah's* faith reigns over his suffering. In the end the Lord is greater than all his suffering! That is true for us as well and something we need to remember.

The Lord's message of restoration and judgment leads *Jeremiah* to declare that one day even the nations will come to the Lord and say that all their gods are false gods. They are all worthless idols made by human hands. The reality is they are no gods at all! One day even the Gentiles will come to the Lord and put away their idols and worship the Lord alone! That day is fulfilled in the New Testament and the Gentile mission of Paul and the other apostles.

16:21 - The Lord adds a note to *Jeremiah's* declaration of the nations coming to the Lord. He will teach them his power and might. At that time all the nations will know that the Lord is God; that his name is Yahweh, *I AM!* The seeds of the New Covenant are here and the coming of the nations to the Lord. But this statement also looks back to God's purpose in calling Israel at Mt. Sinai. They were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to teach the nations about the Lord and call all people to worship him. One day, God would fulfill Israel's destiny and calling. One day the Lord will call the nations to himself. That day has come in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one from whom we learn about God. He is the one who calls all people into a relationship with the one true and living God!

Chapter 17:

17:1-4 - *Jeremiah* returns to describing Judah's sin. It is like an engraving with an iron tool on a stone tablet or an inscription with a flint point, a sharp point, so it is marked deep into the stone. This engraving however is not on stone but on the hearts of the people and on the horns of their altars. *Jeremiah* might be alluding to God writing the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone he gave to Moses and contrasting that with the people's sin. In *Exodus 27* God gives Moses instructions for building the altar for the tabernacle. There is nothing in those instructions that speaks of writing anything on the horns of the altar. In *2 Kings 6-7* there is also no reference to anything being written on the horns of the altar for the temple. If anything was written at all on the altar it might have been God's name, but *Jeremiah* says it is not God's name that is written on the hearts of the Jews but their sin. *Ezekiel* will describe his people as needing new hearts

because they have hearts of stone and God will give them hearts of flesh when he saves them and gives them his Spirit. *Jeremiah's* idea that the people's sin is engraved on their hearts with an iron tool suggests he saw their hearts the same way. They were hard as stone towards God. How bad is Judah's idolatry? Even the children know where the Asherah poles are on all the high hills and beside any great tree.

God says he will give away the land as plunder, all the people's wealth and treasures. The Lord will even give away his mountain, which could be Mt. Zion, which would be Jerusalem, or more likely Mt. Moriah which is a reference to the temple mount. *Jeremiah* gives an indirect prophecy of the destruction of the temple here. This would be heresy to the official theology because one of its tenants was that the Lord would always protect Jerusalem because the temple of his name was there.

All of this will happen because of their sin. When the judgment falls and the Babylonians come and enslave the Jews and take them into exile it is no fault but their own. Judah's sin has kindled God's anger that he says will burn forever! How are we to take God's statement here? In other places in the prophets God clearly says he will not be angry with Israel and Judah forever. In the New Testament we are saved from the wrath of God by Jesus' death for us on the cross and his wrath is turned away from us. Yet, in *Revelation 20* the lake of fire burns forever as a symbol of the wrath of God for sin and Jesus makes reference to God's wrath and the fires of hell that never go out. Are we to take *Jeremiah's* statement here literally or poetically? If it is poetic then he is referring to the fact that nothing Judah can do will stop God's judgment upon them for their sin. If it is literal, then it is more difficult to understand. Perhaps *Jeremiah* is showing us that the face of God in his holiness that is turned to the unrepentant sinner is his wrath, his anger over sin. But, the face of God we know as those who have turned to the Lord in repentance is his love for the sinner. Yet the Bible clearly tells us God loves the sinner whether they repent or not. He punishes sin in his holiness, but his love also leads him to punish his only Son with all the punishment our sins deserved. This is a difficult statement and raises many questions that don't have immediate answers.

17:5-8 - This is a famous passage in *Jeremiah* that reflects the language of *Psalms 1*. Did *Jeremiah* know that *Psalms* and borrow some of its images? We do not know. The notes that accompany the *Psalms* added later do not mention it as a Psalm of David. Was it based on *Jeremiah's* words here? These are all interesting questions for which we do not have answers.

At a time when Judah and her kings were depending upon political alliances, intrigue and armies to rescue them from the impending threat of Babylon and at a time when they had turned away from the Lord their God and his worship to worship the idols of the nations, *Jeremiah* contrasts the one who depends upon human wisdom and the one who depends upon the Lord.

The one who depends upon human wisdom and strength and whose heart turns away from God will be like a bush in the wastelands. Prosperity will not come to him and he will dwell in the parched places of the desert in a salt land where no one lives. One has only to think of the area around the Dead Sea near Masada. Almost nothing grows there and the land is barren and dead because of the salt from the Dead Sea and the dry air of the desert. When we trust in people and turn away from the Lord *Jeremiah* tells us we will wither and die like a bush in the desert with no water. Trusting in people for our strength is to trust in death. When we need help nothing will come just like there is no water in the desert by the Dead Sea. This is a lesson we are beginning to learn in America today. We have trusted in man and politicians and have turned

away from the Lord. People cannot understand why we cannot solve our problems and why we are so divided. *Jeremiah* tells us the answer is obvious; we are trusting in people and not God!

The one however who trust in the Lord and puts their confidence in him will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. I think of the oasis of En Gedi in that same desert by the Dead Sea. At the beginning of the wadi it is dry and barren but as one walks further up into the valley where the springs are located there are plants and trees that flourish there. Those plants are safe from any droughts that come because the springs always provide water for them. It is always cooler in the valley by the springs and so the trees do not suffer from the brutal heat of the open desert by the shores of the Dead Sea. Their leaves are green and the trees are not threatened in the times of drought. The oasis allows them to bear fruit every year. Even today the date trees and other trees planted near the oasis of En Gedi always bear fruit.

Jeremiah gives us a vivid picture of the person whose heart does not turn away from the Lord but trusts in him. The bush in the desert and the tree by the stream both go through times of drought. The bush dies, but the tree flourishes. Those who trust in God are not immune from difficult times. *Jeremiah's* whole life is testimony to that fact! Yet, they can still flourish because they draw their strength and wisdom from the Lord, a stream of living water that never runs dry! I need to continually be reminded of this lesson as do the people of Southside. America has forgotten the lesson and is beginning to suffer the consequences. We need to return to the Lord as a country before we wither and die like the bush in the desert!

17:9-10 - *Jeremiah* reflects upon the human heart in the context of contrasting the person who trusts in people vs. the one who trusts in God. It is almost like he is asking why anyone would trust in people and not God. I do not understand. That is why he asks the question; who can understand the human heart. It is deceitful above all things. Nothing else in all creation is as deceitful as the human heart. It is dishonest and misleading. In other words we lie and cannot be trusted! We say one thing and do another. We are beyond cure. Other translations read desperately wicked or desperately sick. *Jeremiah* does not as yet have a full understanding of Satan and his lies but he clearly understands the consequences of sin and a heart that has turned from God. We lie like the Father of Lies. Our condition is so bad it cannot be cured. Sin is a spiritual disease and addiction that is beyond cure. We cannot do anything to heal it, fix it or stop it in ourselves. Sin leads us to illogical and destructive behavior even when we *KNOW* that behavior is wrong and will hurt us; we do it anyway! Judah knew her sins would not go unpunished but she persisted in doing them. People with any sense could see that trusting God was the best way to live and yet they trusted in their own strength or the wisdom of the king or priests or political alliances. That is why *Jeremiah* exclaims, who can understand the human heart!

His answer comes in *verse 10*. From a human point of view our sinful behavior is a mystery that has no answer. But God understands us. He sees into our hearts to our deepest motivations and desires. He can examine our minds. The word for mind here is literally kidneys which is a metaphor for our secret motivations. Heart in Hebrew thought expressed our will, desires, inner thinking, mind, or conscience. It describes the inner person and was the center of our human thought and will. In this context heart and mind are parallels and synonymous. God sees through to our true selves and understands us even when we do not understand ourselves.

Based on the Lord's true understanding of us at our deepest levels he rewards each of us according to what our deeds deserve. The Lord bases his justice on a true assessment of our true selves. That means his judgment is totally fair and impartial. No one can say, God didn't

understand; he didn't know. God understands our thinking, feelings and conduct even when we do not fathom why we do what we do. *Jeremiah* sees the implications of God's understanding of our hearts and their wickedness. His judgment is based on who we truly are. He will reward or judge us based on that understanding. No one in Judah therefore can argue that God is not being fair when the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem and take the people into exile. Judah is getting exactly what her deeds deserve. The same is true for us. No one will be able to say when they stand before God in judgment, God did not understand me. I got a raw deal! This was unfair. His judgment will be precisely fair, and will be exactly what our deeds deserve; death. That is why his grace is not fair because we receive what we don't deserve; eternal life. Praise God!

17:11 - *Jeremiah* reflects on the person who gains their wealth by unjust or dishonest means and trusts to that wealth to save him. Even before his life is half over his riches will be stripped from him and all that he has amassed will be taken. In the end the wealth in which he trusted will be gone and he will end up a fool. Jesus said the same thing in the *Parable of the Rich Fool* in *Luke 12* who built bigger barns in which to store all his crops. When the Lord demanded his soul because he would die that very night all his wealth was given to another. He was a fool because he trusted in his wealth to save him or give him comfort and had left God out of the equation of his life. *Jeremiah* sees the rich people in Judah who are trusting in their wealth to save them in precisely the same way. They are fools! They are like birds who incubate eggs and hatch them that are not their own. The rich fail to see how God has blessed them and has been the one that helped them amass their wealth. It was not their doing but the Lord's; he is their provider. This image goes back to *Jeremiah's* contrast of the one who trusts in people and the one who trusts in the Lord.

17:12-13 - *Jeremiah* concludes this whole section that is tied together with the images of trust in *verses 5-8*, with praise to the Lord. His throne is glorious and exalted from the beginning. The place of our sanctuary probably refers to the temple and the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat, which was seen as the footstool of the Lord's throne. However, *Jeremiah* is not saying the temple is exalted but God's throne in heaven which is what the temple represented. The temple is God's building but he has already told the people do not trust in it because God will destroy it. His throne can never be destroyed because the Lord is exalted above all thrones. He is above all nations and all answer to him. His throne has existed from the beginning. Why would Judah or anyone trust in anything that human beings can build?

The Lord is the hope of Israel not alliances with Egypt, not even a king from David's line. God alone is our hope. Every person who forsakes the Lord will be put to shame. Everyone who trusts in some one or some thing other than God will be shamed for all to see. In fact they will be worse than the bush in the desert because they will have looked for water in the dust where there is none. They have forsaken the Lord who alone is the spring of living water! Jesus would use this same language when he told the woman at the well in *John 4* that he is the living water that wells up to eternal life. Jesus also publicly declares that he is the living water during the water ceremony on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in *John 7*. Jesus was being very clear. He is Yahweh, the spring of living water! He is the exalted one who is from the beginning, the hope of Israel!

17:14-18 - This is *Jeremiah's* third confession. It is a plea to the Lord for healing and salvation because of the opposition *Jeremiah* receives from his opponents. He appeals to God because the

Lord is the one he praises and worships. People keep asking him, when is the Word of the Lord you keep telling us going to be fulfilled? This criticism must have been strongest during Jehoiachim's reign and also Zedekiah's. Jehoiachim reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. Part of that time he was a vassal of Neco king of Egypt and for three years he was a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. At the end of that three year time Jehoiachim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and he sent troops to raid and harass Judah. During that invasion before the full invasion of the Babylonian army Jehoiachim died or was killed and Jehoiachin his son became king. He only lasted three months before Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and sent the young king into exile in Babylon along with many other leaders in 597. Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah as king who reigned eleven more years until he too rebelled against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar sent his troops to lay siege to Jerusalem and they finally took the city in July of 586 and the next month burned it to the ground in August 586. The most likely context for Jeremiah's lament to God in this third confession therefore is during the middle of Jehoiachim's reign. Jeremiah would prophecy disaster and it would be literally years before anything happened. During that time the people would mock him and accuse him of false prophecy, especially since the court prophets were telling the king the exact opposite of Jeremiah's message. The Lord was going to save Jerusalem as he did when the Assyrians invaded the land. Jeremiah faced severe opposition for telling the people God's Word. It would have been very discouraging and Jeremiah expresses his frustration and discouragement to the Lord.

He reminds the Lord that he has not run away from his mission and calling as God's prophet. He describes himself as a shepherd of Judah. That is an interesting description because it suggests that a prophet is also a pastor-shepherd of the people. He loves his people. Jeremiah exclaims he has not desired the day of despair. In other words he loves his people; he does not hold animosity towards them, wanting to use God's wrath as a weapon for his personal vengeance. He tells the Lord that God knows what is on his heart and the words he speaks on God's behalf. He appeals to the Lord for comfort and strength in the day of disaster. He is probably referring to the days of the Babylonian invasion that he knows are coming. Jeremiah knows the future and he is not looking forward to it. In fact it would be normal to be frightened by it and concerned about it. He asks God to protect him when God's judgment falls.

Yet Jeremiah does have enemies. The court prophets, some of the priests and even the king himself arrogantly oppose him, ridicule him and have even tried to kill him. He will be beaten, put in stocks and thrown into a cistern to die by people who want to shut him up because they do not want to hear God's Word. He asks God to put those people to shame. Let the judgments God is bringing against Judah fall on them. Let them be terrified and destroyed. When that day comes Jeremiah asks God to protect him. This is exactly what happened. His opponents, including King Zedekiah, were killed and Jeremiah was spared during the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem. Yet Jeremiah was taken by Ishmael of the king's guard along with some other rebels to Egypt where he died. The Lord protected his prophet but he was not totally spared the consequences of the disaster that befell his people for all their sins. That is the cost of being a prophet of God and a shepherd of God's people. We share their fate just as Jeremiah shared Judah's fate. Ultimately it costs something to be a faithful prophet of the Lord.

17:19-23 - *Jeremiah* highlights the Sabbath law that Judah has failed to keep. The Lord tells him to go out to the people's gate where the king goes in and out of the city and then to the other gates of Jerusalem. The Lord gives him a message to speak at each gate, warning the people to not carry a load into the city or out of their houses and out of the city on the Sabbath. He tells

them do no work on the Sabbath. Keep it holy and remember it. The people have forgotten it. When Judah began to worship idols along with the Lord they forgot the Sabbath and honoring the Lord. God gave the Sabbath command to Israel to help build a rhythm of work and rest into their lives. But more importantly he gave it to make worship and the honoring of the Lord central in their lives and the rhythm of their weeks. When the people turned to idols they abandoned keeping the Sabbath and did not pay any attention to not working or honoring the Lord. Thus they began to dishonor the Lord and the rhythm of their lives was corrupted because they never rested and money and trade became their center rather than God. Their idolatry led them to forgetting the Lord's Sabbath.

How do we keep the Sabbath command today? We are not bound by the Law yet it still expresses the will of God. Our culture has almost completely abandoned the Sabbath command. We have weekends off yet stores and businesses are almost always open on Sundays. People have time off on Saturday and Sunday but it is not to honor the Lord and rest it is to do what they want to do. God gave the command to give his people a blessing. We have ignored his command and are cursed with long work weeks and no rhythm and balance in our lives. We view the Sabbath command as outdated, quaint and useless rather than a gift from God.

17:24-27 - *Jeremiah* tells the people and the king what will happen if they obey the Lord, if they do no work on the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The king who sits on David's throne will enter the city gates with all his officials on horses and riding in chariots. The people of Judah and Jerusalem will accompany them and they will live in Jerusalem forever. It will always be inhabited. People will come from the towns of Judah and Benjamin, the western foothills and the Negev into the city. They will bring their burnt offerings, sacrifices, grain offerings and incense to the house of the Lord. The people will worship the Lord and be blessed. A son of David will sit upon his throne and Jerusalem will always be inhabited. Historically Jerusalem has often been empty and abandoned. *Jeremiah* tells us the reason is the people forgot the Lord's Sabbath. Even today only some Jews in Israel keep the Sabbath. It is a holiday and the Jewish weekend but people use it as a time to recreate and party not to worship and remember the Lord. Only the very Orthodox Jews fully celebrate and remember the Sabbath and they are a small minority!

Jeremiah closes his message about the Sabbath with a warning. If they do not obey the Lord and keep his Sabbath; if they work and carry loads into and out of the city on the Sabbath day and ignore God's command, then the Lord will kindle an unquenchable fire against the gates of Jerusalem and fire will consume her fortresses. Judah did not heed *Jeremiah's* warning because on August 10, 586 Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard put the city to the torch and burned Jerusalem to the ground. He smashed the city gates and tore down its walls. He was the instrument of the Lord's unquenchable fire and everything *Jeremiah* warned would happen, happened. The Lord fulfilled his Word against his city and *Jeremiah* tells us one of the chief reasons was because the people ignored the Lord's Sabbath.

Jeremiah's warning about the Sabbath commandment takes on deeper meaning when you consider *2 Chronicles 36:20* says the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests for 70 years while the Jews were in captivity in Babylon. That means the 70 years of captivity is related to the Sabbath and the Lord's command to Israel that even the land was to have a Sabbath year every 7 years. Israel disobeyed that command too. *Daniel* in *Daniel 9:2* while he is in Babylon prays his great prayer of confession because he understands from *Jeremiah's* words that the 70 years of captivity are almost over. Literally it was 48 years from the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 586 to Cyrus' decree that the Jews could go back to Jerusalem in 538. 70 years was a symbolic number

on an historic level, however, it is 70 years from 586 to 515 when the second temple is dedicated which I do not believe is an accident in God's economy for his people.

Chapter 18:

18:1-4 - God tells Jeremiah to go to the potter's house and there he will be given the Lord's message. When he arrives the potter is working at his wheel, shaping a pot. But the "*pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands.*" The root of the word for marred or spoiled means pit or destruction. A form of it means grave and another form came to be used for the Pit. The verbal form here means to be marred, spoiled, be corrupted, be ruined, or be rotted. The implication was the pot was marred or corrupted. The potter didn't spoil the pot, the pot was spoiled. That is important to understand for the message that follows. When the pot was spoiled the potter formed the clay into another pot. He started over and shaped it in a way that seemed best to him. God will draw important lessons from this incident for Jeremiah that apply not only to Judah but to all nations including the USA.

18:5-10 - The Lord tells Jeremiah that he is the potter and all of Israel is the clay in his hands. He has the absolute right as Creator and Lord to shape Judah and Israel as he sees fit. God is sovereign and in control. He reserves the right to respond to repentance or to a people falling away from him as he wills. If he has announced judgment against a nation and that nation repents and turns back to the Lord then God will relent and not inflict the punishment upon that nation that it deserves. The opposite is also true. If he decided to bless a nation and they turn away from him God reserves the right to withhold that blessing and instead inflict judgment upon them. God is the final arbiter of when a nation or a people is repentant in his sight or disobedient. There is no formula that forces God to act or paints him into a corner where he must do something because we met certain conditions and now God has to respond. He is free to change his mind as he deems necessary. However, he is telling Jeremiah there is still hope for Judah if they repent. It is very difficult to tell in what sequence this incident was written. Was it before or after God told Jeremiah don't pray for these people anymore because there is no hope for them? See *Jeremiah 11:9-14* where Jeremiah is told not to pray for the people anymore because God will no longer listen. They are to be judged. Is the potter's house incident after or before the message in *Jeremiah 11*? It is difficult to tell because it is clear that at least parts of *Jeremiah* are not in chronological order. Baruch, who probably edited the final copy of Jeremiah's prophecy, arranges his material with his own purpose in mind and not necessarily in the order in which the prophecies were given. At times because of this God's messages can seem inconsistent.

What we must not miss is that God's Word here to *Jeremiah* applies to all nations not just Judah. The Lord is telling Jeremiah that he is the potter of Judah but also of every nation in the world. God is Creator and judge. All peoples are responsible to him. That includes us in the USA today. We are not sovereign and in control of our own destiny. We exist by the free choice and grace of God. If God determines that we have sinned greatly and become evil in his sight he has the absolute right as Lord of history to destroy us. Old Testament history is proof of this fact. All one has to do is ask, where is Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia? Where are the Hittites and the Philistines? God judged them all. They had their times and they were destroyed because God alone is Lord of history and he works his purposes out in history. As the old *Bethel Bible Series* said, history itself is the judgment of God.

18:11-12 - God gives Jeremiah a message for Judah. Repent because God is preparing a disaster for them because of their sins. The Lord tells Judah that he is preparing a plan against you, and the “you” is plural. Then he says each one of you needs to repent. God gives insight into how national repentance works. A whole nation is responsible to God but repentance happens when the individuals of that nation turn back to God and repent. Only the Lord knows when a critical mass of repentance is reached to stop God's judgment and discipline from being carried out against a guilty nation. *Jeremiah* tells Judah it is still possible to repent and to stop God's judgment.

However, in *verse 12* God tells Jeremiah they will not change. They will continue to follow their stubborn hearts and continue to do evil. God expresses to Jeremiah the mystery of his omniscience and his eternal character and being. God truly wants Judah to repent and even now holds out the possibility for them if they change their hearts and turn to back to God. Yet God also knows the future and knows they will not repent. They will continue to sin and bring upon themselves the judgment of God through the Babylonian invasion. This may explain some of the seeming inconsistencies within Jeremiah's prophecy. At times the Lord is letting Jeremiah know what he knows. Judah will not repent. He sees the future already. At times God is showing Jeremiah his heart. He longs for his people to repent and gives them another chance to turn back to him. Even though the Lord knows the future; they will not come back to God, he gives them a chance to repent in the present. He gives Judah the free choice to reject God or turn to God. He does not base his decisions on the future but upon our free choices in the present. This expresses the mystery of the free and sovereign God who is Lord of time and creation and us, his creatures, whom he has created with free will of our own. God is able to somehow manage the paradox and carry out his purposes for his people in history because he is the potter and we are the clay.

18:13-17 - God responds to what he knows the people will say to his offer of repentance. He tries to help them see how shocking and horrible their behavior towards him really is. God asks if the snow of Lebanon ever disappears from the rocky slopes. He is speaking of Mt. Hermon, over 9000 ft. and the tallest mountain in the Middle East. He asks, do the cool waters from its springs and snows ever cease to flow? Think of the sources of the Jordan River, especially at Baniyas where the river flows out of the cave at the base of Mt. Hermon. The water from the snow melt percolates down through the limestone rock of the Mt. Hermon massif. There is always water coming out of the cave and that is one of the chief sources for the Jordan.

These things never change. Yet God's people have forgotten him. They burn incense to worthless idols that can do nothing for them. Their idolatry has led them to stumble in their behavior. They have abandon the ancient paths of God's Law and covenant and now walk on roads that are not built up, meaning roads that lead them astray, away from the Lord.

Therefore God will lay waste their land. He will make it an object of scorn and all who pass through it will shake their heads and be appalled at what has happened to Judah. He will scatter his people before their enemies like the desert wind that pours over the Golan Heights or down over the Mt. of Olives to Jerusalem. God will turn his back on Judah just as they have turned their back on him. They will not see his face but his back in the day of their judgment. Judah will not repent therefore God will not relent in his plan to punish his people for their sin and rebellion. God has given them chance after chance to repent and they would not. Now all that is left is God's wrath over their sin.

18:18-23 - This is *Jeremiah's* fourth confession. This one focuses on his asking God to punish his enemies. It is full of anger and vengeance. Jeremiah expresses his full frustration and anger towards the people who oppose him and accuse him of lying. He is honest with God and shares his deepest feelings for revenge with the Lord. But fortunately he expresses these feelings to God and not the people. He only says to the people what God gives him to say. This is a great example of what we need to do with our feelings of rage and vengeance toward those who hurt us. We want revenge and *Jeremiah* shows us that while those feelings may be ugly and selfish the thing to do with them is express them to the Lord rather than acting upon them. He already knows how we feel. Take them to him.

Jeremiah begins with what his enemies say about him. They make plans to attack him and shut him up because they believe he is lying. Jeremiah prophesies disaster upon the people. But the false prophets and court officials say the exact opposite. The teaching of the Law by the priest, the counsel of the wise and the word from the prophet will not be lost among the people. In other words everything will continue as it always has and nothing bad will happen to Judah. Jeremiah's enemies say let's attack him verbally and pay no attention to anything he says. Yet Jeremiah's words are God's true Word to his people. And if priest, wise teacher and prophet were faithfully following the Lord they would have known that and heeded his warnings. This section does point out the three major groups of advisors around the king and in his court. The priests, who were centered in the temple and who had the traditional task of teaching God's Law to the people; the wise teachers, who were advisors to the king and who carried on the Wisdom Tradition of Israel based in Solomon's teaching; the court prophets, who supposedly told the king the Word of the Lord but by Jeremiah's day told him mostly what he wanted to hear. Jeremiah says they have betrayed the Lord, their king and their country by giving the kings of Judah false counsel and advice. Their hearts are far from the Lord and they are part of the problem not the solution.

Jeremiah appeals to God for revenge against his accusers. He has pleaded with God on their behalf not to destroy them. They have repaid him with evil, opposing him and ridiculing him publicly. Jeremiah then unleashes his deepest feelings of anger and revenge against them to God. He asks God to give their children over to famine and kill them with the sword. Let their wives be widows and childless and their sons slain in battle. Let a cry of panic be heard from their homes when the Babylonians come. Jeremiah uses the image of a dug pit and hidden snares to capture him. These may be symbolic and poetic but their plots against him were real. Jeremiah reminds God of all he has had to put up with from his enemies. He calls on God not to forgive them, show them no mercy. May they stumble and fall in the day of God's wrath toward Judah.

Jeremiah's honesty is jarring, yet do we not feel similar things towards those who have hurt us? Don't we want God to punish the people who hurt us and take out his wrath upon them? Don't we feel justified in our anger and hurt; as if our desire for revenge is righteous and their hurtful actions were deserving of all the punishment God could give? When we are hurt, especially when it is unjustified or when we have been doing what God wanted us to do; we feel our desire for revenge is like God's righteous anger. Praise the Lord he does not. In some ways Jeremiah got his wish and his opponents were killed or taken into exile. But that was because of God's perfect justice not because of Jeremiah's need for payback for those who opposed him. God's wrath is just, our wrath is full of conflicting motivations, some righteous and some selfish. As difficult as this confession is to read Jeremiah did the only thing he could do. He took his feelings of revenge and anger to God in prayer. He honestly admitted them to the Lord and then left the judgment up to God. That is what Paul advises us to do in *Romans 12:19: Do not take*

revenge my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord."

Chapter 19:

19:1-6 - Sometimes God's messages to Jeremiah were acted out rather than simply spoken. Those symbolic actions added meaning and force to Jeremiah's words from the Lord. God tells him to go and buy a clay jar from the potter. The word in Hebrew is *baqbuk*, which was a flask used for fine oils or perfumes and was one of the most difficult items the potter would make because it had a very thin long neck. *Baqbuk* is an onomopoetic word, meaning the sound of the word describes the word itself. *Baqbuk* was the sound the flask made when you poured perfume out of it.

Jeremiah goes and buys a *baqbuk* from the potter. He is told to take some of the elders of Judah and some of the priests and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance to the city at the Potsherd Gate. This gate was so-named because it was where people threw their useless shards of pottery. They tossed them out of the gate and people further crushed them into the ground as they walked over them and they became part of the dirt around the city at that place. Ben Hinnom is the valley on the southwest side of Jerusalem and the City of David that runs roughly west to east. In Jesus' day it was where the garbage was thrown and burned. In Jeremiah's time, Manasseh had built a shrine and altar to Molech in the bottom of the valley and there sacrificed his infant son in the fiery idol. Josiah during his reforms had defiled the site. It is unclear if it had begun to be re-used as a pagan site during the last kings of Judah from Jehoiachin on.

Jeremiah addresses the elders and priests and tells them to tell the king and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem that the Lord is going to bring disaster upon the city because of all their idolatry and sin. They have forsaken the Lord their God and worshipped foreign gods by burning incense and offering sacrifices to gods neither they nor their fathers knew. They have filled this valley with the blood of the innocent, which is a reference to the child sacrifices at the altar of Topheth that Manasseh built. They have offered incense on the high places to Baal, and burned their sons in the fire to Baal, something God never commanded them nor did it enter his mind! The days are coming when the people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom but the Valley of Slaughter. The word for slaughter refers to the violent killing of people and not the killing of animals. It is a word associated with executions or more often war. The place the people thought was a sacred place for the pagan gods they now worshipped will be turned into a place of violence and war. It will be a place where no one wants to go! By Jesus' day Ben Hinnom had become Gehenna, the symbol of hell, where the fires burned constantly and the stench filled the air. It was the garbage heap.

19:7-9 - Jeremiah continues his message to the king, the priests, the officials and the people of Judah. God says he will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. The word for ruin in Hebrew is *baqaq* which sounds similar to the *baqbuk*, so there is a play on words here. The Lord will hand over Judah to her enemies who will kill the people by the sword and their carcasses will be food for the carrion eaters, the birds and beasts. The Lord will devastate the city and make it an object of scorn among the nations. Jeremiah has said similar things before in other messages. Then he adds a new twist. The Lord will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters and the flesh of one another during the siege that is coming. Both *Leviticus 26* and *Deuteronomy 28* mention cannibalism during an enemy's siege or attack as part of the covenant curses. It was an abhorrent

practice among the Jews as it is in most cultures. I had thought the historical books recorded cannibalism during the siege of Jerusalem. But it is only mentioned in the covenant curses and here in *Jeremiah's* prophecy. It appears that scholars have inferred the practice took place because of the severity of the siege and *Jeremiah's* prophecy of the event.

19:10-13 - God tells Jeremiah to break the *baqbuk* while all the elders and priests are watching and tell them the Lord is going to smash this city just like Jeremiah smashed the *baqbuk*. Once the *baqbuk* is smashed it cannot be repaired because it was so difficult to make and its form so delicate. That is the way Jerusalem will be as well. This symbolic action is all the more poignant because the *baqbuk* was the most precious flask the potter would make. It was a symbol of how precious and rare God's people were to him and how far their sin had angered God and led him to finally punish them.

Jeremiah tells the officials as they are standing near Topheth that the city will become like Topheth which had been defiled in Josiah's day. The dead will be so many that they will run out of room burying them near Topheth. The houses in Jerusalem and the king's palace will be defiled. All the places where people burned incense to the stars and poured out drink offerings to pagan gods will be destroyed! When Jeremiah smashed the *baqbuk* it must have been dramatic and wrenching for those watching. They knew one couldn't repair a flask like that. Yet in the end they did not listen to Jeremiah's words or repent.

19:14-15 - As Jeremiah returns from Topheth and smashing the *baqbuk* the Lord sends him to the temple courts to speak to the people gathered there. He tells them the Lord is about to bring disaster upon Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages of Judah because they are stiff-necked and will not listen to the Word of the Lord and obey it. They will not repent.

In Topheth he spoke to representatives of the elders and priests and large crowds did not see his symbolic action of smashing the flask. Here he speaks to the crowd in the temple. The text does not tell us what time of day this was but there were always people in the temple so there must have been a crowd when Jeremiah spoke. Judgment is coming because of their stubborn refusal to obey God and continue in sin. It was not a very popular thing to say.

Chapter 20:

20:1-6 - Pashhur the priest was the chief officer of the temple, which probably means he was the priest in charge of the administration of the temple. Pashhur was not the high priest, that is a man named Seraiah. Pashhur therefore is the chief officer not the high priest or chief priest. Pashhur was an administrative priest. Perhaps he was a priestly official who had charge of keeping order within the temple precincts. When he heard Jeremiah speaking to the people in the temple he had Jeremiah arrested, beaten and put in stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate of the temple. That was a gate that was probably on the north side of the temple since the territory of Benjamin was just north of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah identifies him as Pashhur son of Immer. Immer was his ancestor from Solomon's time, who was also a priest. Immer was one of the heads of a priestly family whose family was to serve at the temple. In *Jeremiah 21:1* he is listed as Pashhur son of Malkijah his father. Son of can also mean ancestor of and Jeremiah uses son of Immer here to emphasize his position as an important priestly family. *2 Kings 25:18* implies that Pashhur was taken into exile to Babylon. Seraiah the chief priest was executed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah tells Pashhur after Pashhur frees him from the stocks that the Lord will change his name to Magor-Missabib which means terror on every side. God will make Pashhur a terror to himself and all his friends and he will see them killed with his own eyes. The Lord will hand over Judah to the Babylonians and they will kill many and take many into exile. All the wealth of the city will be confiscated and taken and the treasures of the kings of Judah will be taken as plunder. Pashhur himself will go into exile. Pashhur was a temple official in Zedekiah's day so he had already experienced seeing King Jehoiachin taken into exile in 597. Now Jeremiah says he too will be taken and die away from the Promiseland, he and all his friends to whom he has prophesied lies. Jeremiah implies that Pashhur has been a false prophet as well as a priestly official in the temple. At the very least he has agreed and defended the words of the court prophets to the king that contradict what the Word of the Lord to Jeremiah was telling the people. God will have his vengeance on Pashhur and all whom he supports for oppressing his prophet. He did not understand what he was doing when he had Jeremiah put in the stocks!

20:7-10 - This is the opening part of *Jeremiah's* fifth confession. Jeremiah expresses in prayer to God his feelings of depression and anger towards God and his situation. If this passage is chronological following the incident in the temple and Pashhur's putting Jeremiah in the stocks then this may be Jeremiah's response to his public humiliation and suffering for speaking God's Word. This confession and his sixth confession in *20:14-18* are some of his most personal prayers to God. We get a window into Jeremiah's soul and his struggle with God to be his prophet and speak his Word in the difficult circumstances in which Jeremiah ministered. God's prophet says things about God here that most of us would fear to say! Yet Jeremiah is brutally honest with the Lord and it is that honesty that helped him deal with the opposition, the loneliness and the suffering that came with being a prophet of the Lord.

He starts out by saying God deceived him or persuaded him to speak his Word. The Hebrew word means to persuade someone who is gullible or weak. The word means persuade, seduce or deceive and sounds like a man trying to seduce a woman and trick her. Jeremiah says the Lord overpowered him and prevailed over him. This too sounds like a man overpowering a woman and seducing her. It is a shocking description of God and one can sense the emotion of Jeremiah and his desperation over his situation as he accuses the Lord himself of such behavior! Yet God allows it because he loves Jeremiah and he knows that he is all Jeremiah has. In this case the Lord is like a great counselor who simply listens to Jeremiah's feelings of anger and depression. The Lord is his best therapist! When Jeremiah speaks of God deceiving and overpowering him he may be thinking back to the time of his call when he was a teenager. God called him as a young man not yet fully grown and Jeremiah is reflecting on the fact that he had no defenses against God. Yet who does?

He tells the Lord that all day long people mock him. Think of his time in the stocks. He tells the Lord all he ever speaks is violence and destruction yet all the Word of the Lord has brought him are insults and reproach. He complains to the Lord that the message he has been given to say has only caused him suffering and pain!

Verse 9 gives us one of the greatest insights into the psyche of one of God's prophets. Jeremiah says he will not speak the Lord's Word anymore. He is tired of the ridicule and the pain. He is telling God I don't want to do this anymore! Yet as soon as he says I am not going to speak God's Word any longer there is a fire in his heart and it burns within him down to his very bones. This fire exerts a tremendous pressure inside of him to burst out. He grows weary of holding it in and he cannot. He is compelled to speak. If God calls you as his prophet there is an

inevitability about speaking out for him. Jeremiah tells us that the Word of God inside of him builds up so much pressure inside his heart and mind that he cannot resist it even when he doesn't want to speak it. He is still free but God is sovereign and in charge of his life. He is not his own; he is God's prophet! Jeremiah gives us a picture here into the cost of being a spokesperson for the Lord to his people.

He hears people complain against him wanting to turn him in and report him for speaking treason, which was what Pashhur accused him of doing. Even his former friends are waiting for him to slip; waiting for him to be deceived then they can overcome him and shut him up. The word for deceived here in *verse 10* is the same word Jeremiah uses in *verse 7*, accusing the Lord of deceiving him. In context here it is not referring to the Lord deceiving his prophet but of Jeremiah making a mistake in his preaching such that the people can get rid of him. They are waiting for him to overstep his authority or say something so outrageous that he will be arrested. Again think of the incident in the temple with Pashhur arresting Jeremiah, beating him and putting him in the stocks. Did the people think Jeremiah had crossed a line? Did Jeremiah fear he had crossed a line and would be killed? Is that why he "confesses" to God? It is possible.

20:11-13 - The second half of this fifth confession of *Jeremiah's* is a great statement of his faith in the Lord. *Jeremiah's* fifth confession follows the form of many of the *Psalms* of lament. They express the difficulties someone is experiencing and then afterwards express their faith in God and his ability to deliver them from their enemies and their situation. Jeremiah does that here.

He expresses the great truth of his life; the Lord is with him like a mighty warrior. He had promised to be with Jeremiah and despite his difficult life the Lord had kept his promise. In the end his persecutors and enemies will stumble and fall. Jeremiah will remain. Those who oppose him will fall into dishonor and be disgraced. Jeremiah then asks God to be able to see his vengeance upon those who oppose Jeremiah and God's Word. This is not a loving thing to say yet God answered his prayer and Jeremiah did see his greatest critics either killed or taken into exile, including Pashhur. In the end however it did not give Jeremiah satisfaction but only grief. Vengeance may feel good at first but it does not last. God's Word of judgment and vengeance may be sweet to say to your enemies but it turns sour in one's stomach and gives no satisfaction.

Jeremiah remarks that he has committed his cause to the Lord. Who else was going to help him? Jeremiah had no one else but God. Yet that is what made him so powerful and so faithful. For him it was the Lord or nothing. In that Jeremiah is a tremendous example for us of faithfulness and solitary commitment to the Lord and his work. He had no other God but the Lord his God.

He closes this confession with a song of praise to the Lord. He is the one who rescues the needy and saves them from the hand of the wicked. Even after being put in the stocks it did not last for Jeremiah was released. More persecution and suffering was to come and in fact it would be worse, yet God would spare his life. The hardest part would be Jeremiah living to see everything he had prophesied come true. God would vindicate his prophet but it would not heal him, it would break his heart over the suffering of his people and his city. In that he would reflect the heart of his God, who does not desire the death of the wicked but that they should repent and turn to God. In the end Jeremiah grieved over his fallen nation just as God grieved over his bride, just as Jesus would grieve over Jerusalem because he knew they would not turn and accept him as Messiah. In his grief over his people's sin, even when he was proved right in his words, Jeremiah is a Christ-like figure.

20:14-18 - This is Jeremiah's sixth confession and perhaps his most disturbing. He curses the day he was born and asks that his birthday not be blessed. He curses the man who brought his own father news that he has a son. His anger and depression lead him to curse that man and wish that he would be like the towns the Lord overthrew without pity. May he hear wailing in the morning and a battle cry at noon. From those desires and curses it appears that this confession is written later in Jeremiah's career, perhaps during the siege of Jerusalem. Towns in Judah have already been destroyed, that puts it at least after 597. The incident with Pashhur and the stocks in *20:1-6* was during Zedekiah's reign which puts it sometime between 597 and 586. It is possible this is the same time frame but I have a hunch it is later. It seems like this confession, expressing such despair and depression, was written as Jeremiah is seeing the Babylonians destroy his country. I think he might be writing this when he is seeing all his prophecies about the destruction of Judah come to fulfillment. If that is true then it gives Jeremiah no joy. Jeremiah wishes he had never been born because all he has seen is trouble and sorrow and the prospect of ending his days in shame. Was he already on his way to Egypt with Ishmael? It is impossible to know but clearly Jeremiah has seen the consequences of Judah's sin and God's judgment upon his people and it has driven him to a deep depression. He wishes he could have died in his mother's womb because of all the tragedy he has seen.

Jeremiah's sixth confession helps us understand the almost crushing burden God's prophet carried all his life. Jeremiah will give messages of hope, in fact one of the greatest in the New Covenant in *Jeremiah 31*. Yet for most of his career his message was one of judgment and punishment and he was persecuted and ridiculed for his preaching. When those things began to be fulfilled and his message was vindicated it led him not to celebrate but to a deep depression. The satisfaction of knowing he spoke the true Word God gave did not make up for watching the destruction of the city he loved and the death and exile of his people. It broke his heart just as it must have broken the Lord's heart.

Chapter 21:

21:1-2 - King Zedekiah sends Pashhur, here named the son of Malkijah after his father not his ancestor (see note on *20:1*), and Zephaniah the priest who was second to the high priest, Seraiah according to *2 Kings 24:18*, to speak to Jeremiah. Zedekiah had a respect for Jeremiah as God's prophet even though he often arrogantly ignored Jeremiah's word to him and often had him punished for telling the king what God said. The king's court prophets continually told the king what he wanted to hear. The setting of the king's request is the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army. That puts this sometime between December 10, 588 and July 9, 586 when the walls were breached and Jerusalem fell. See *Jeremiah 52:4-6*.

The king sends his two envoys to Jeremiah to see whether the Lord will miraculously intervene as he had in the days of Hezekiah and the Assyrian invasion. One can see the false official theology in the king's words that still ignored Jeremiah's convicting words and Judah's sin. The king thinks Yahweh will still rescue them at the last minute because he is from David's line and Jerusalem is the site of the Lord's temple. He has completely divorced his idolatrous, wicked behavior from the Lord's covenant with him and his people. Zedekiah believes he can do what he wants, live as he wants, appeal to Egypt rather than trust the Lord, and rebel against Babylon and the Lord will still save him and his city. Even during the siege of Jerusalem the king clings to the false official theology. In a wider sense his attitude illustrates the consequences of believing false doctrine and refusing to listen to the truth of God's Word.

21:3-7 - Jeremiah receives an answer for the king that he gives to Pashhur and Zephaniah. God is about to turn against the king and his army the very weapons they are using to defend the city. God is going to fight against Jerusalem. Jeremiah tells the two priests the Lord is against them and will fight them with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm. The very miraculous power that God was supposed to use to save the city once again from her enemies God will use against them and hand the city over to the Babylonians for the Lord is filled with great wrath towards Jerusalem and all in it. He will strike down the city with a terrible plague and many will die. Then the Lord will hand over Zedekiah, his officials and the people of the city who survive the plague and the sword and the famine to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar will put them to the sword and show no mercy, pity or compassion.

During the siege food became so scarce that the people resorted to cannibalizing their dead for food. Disease spread and once the walls were breached the Babylonians unleashed a slaughter as they took the city. Plague, sword and famine are three of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in *Revelation 6*. If conquest is the fourth then Nebuchadnezzar fits as the fourth horseman.

Zephaniah the priest was captured, taken to face Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah in Syria, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters, and there put to death with the sword. According to *Jeremiah 20:6* Pashhur was also captured along with his family and taken into exile in Babylon. King Zedekiah escaped into the desert the night the walls were breached, July 9, 586. The Babylonian army pursued the king and captured him in the Jordan Valley. He too was taken to Riblah to face Nebuchadnezzar. His sons were killed before him, then his eyes were put out and he was taken in chains to Babylon as prisoner. Everything Jeremiah told Pashhur and Zephaniah came true.

21:8-10 - Jeremiah does hold out some hope to Zedekiah, Pashhur, Zephaniah and the king's court. Surrender to the Babylonians and your lives will be spared. If you stay in the city you will die. If you surrender you will escape with your life. That is hardly the hope that Zedekiah and his officials had wanted the Lord to give them. *Jeremiah* ends his message to the king with a chilling warning. God has determined to do harm to Jerusalem. He will give it into Nebuchadnezzar's hands who will destroy it with fire. Jeremiah's words are literally fulfilled. On August 10, 586, one month after the city's capture, Nebuzaradan the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard under orders from Nebuchadnezzar, burned the city to the ground and broke down its walls. God's temple and Jerusalem his city were completely destroyed.

21:11-14 - The conjunction "*moreover*" at the beginning of *verse 11* ties this message to the previous one to Zedekiah and his two priests who came to Jeremiah for a word from the Lord. The content of the message relates it to what *Jeremiah* says in *chapter 22* to the king who sits on David's throne, who is probably King Jehoiachim.

Jeremiah concludes his message to Zedekiah by addressing the whole royal house of Judah, the house of David. He tells them what the Lord expects from the kings from David's line; all things Zedekiah and his brothers and nephew failed to do. They were to administer justice and rescue people from the hand of their oppressors. If they do not do this God's wrath will break out against them like fire. Most of David's descendants did evil, especially Manasseh, so God's wrath burns against David's house and nothing will quench it. God holds the kings responsible for what has happened to his people. They are the leaders and as the leaders go so goes the people. That is the principle of leadership. There were always some righteous people among the people of Judah who worshipped and followed the Lord. But the nation as a whole was led astray by their kings

and God held them accountable for the nation's behavior. It had gotten to the point where God was now against his own city and no longer for it. God is against Jerusalem on its rocky plateau that they thought was secure. God says he will punish their deeds as they deserve. He will kindle a fire in the forest around the city that will consume everything around them.

Jeremiah addresses the last part of this message to the house of David. Zedekiah was the last of David's royal line that sat upon his throne in Jerusalem and ruled the people of Israel. The line continued but because of their sin it was stripped of its royal authority and power until one should come, the Messiah, the anointed one, who was to take it up again. The Lord Jesus took up his royal authority as the rightful king of Israel at his resurrection and ascension. Now he reigns in heaven at God's right hand, the heir of David and the true and faithful king of his people.

Chapter 22:

22:1-5 - This prophecy is given at an earlier time than Jeremiah's message to Zedekiah in *chapter 21*. From the context it appears this was given to King Jehoiachim or perhaps the young Jehoiachin in the three months he reigned before his capture and exile in 597 by Nebuchadnezzar. The subject matter however is the same, as this message is spoken to the royal house of David and to the one who sits on David's throne. This message is given to the king, to his officials and all who come in and out of Jerusalem. The Lord calls the king to do what is just and right. Do no violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood. Carry out these commands and the one who sits on David's throne, the king, will come in and out of the palace riding in chariots and on horses with all his officials. In other words they will live in the palace and reign in peace. Disobey these commands and this palace will become a ruin. God will destroy the king's palace and the city.

The message presents a contrast to the king. Obey God and do right; reign justly and God will bless the king and his reign. This is what Josiah had done. Disobey the Lord and God will remove the king from his throne and destroy his palace and his city. This is one of the fundamental concepts that made Israel different from all the other nations around her, including the great empires of the prophet's time; the kings of Judah were responsible to the Lord and accountable under God's Law. They were not above the Law unlike Nebuchadnezzar who was the law in Babylon. No one could accuse him of misconduct because he was the standard of conduct. But one of God's prophets like Jeremiah could come to Jehoiachim or Zedekiah and accuse him in light of the Lord's Law given to Moses of conduct deserving judgment and punishment because the king was accountable to the Law and even more so because he was the leader of his people. God expected more from him. That principle of the king not being above the Law of God is one of the fundamental ideals of the American system of government. It originated in ancient Israel! Not only was the king accountable to God, God would punish the king in history if his sin and disobedience got out of hand. That is exactly what Jeremiah argues has happened in his prophecy to the kings and people of Judah.

22:6-9 - Jeremiah delivers a message from the Lord to the king about his palace. Jerusalem is like Gilead and Mt. Hermon to the Lord, meaning it is his favorite place in the high country where it is beautiful and green. Yet God will make it deserted and like a desert. Destroyers are coming who will cut up the fine cedar beams of the palace and burn them in the fire. People from many nations will pass by and ask why the Lord has done such a thing to this great city. The answer will be because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God and worshipped and served idols.

This is the consistent message *Jeremiah* has given over and over again. Punishment is coming because the people have broken the Lord's covenant and worshipped other gods before him. The difference here is this is pointedly given to the king and speaks of his home, his palace, being destroyed in the coming judgment upon Judah.

22:10-11 - These verses are about Shallum son of Josiah, whom *2 Kings 23* names Jehoahaz. He was taken into exile in Egypt by Pharaoh Neco after Neco had defeated Josiah and his forces at Megiddo. Jehoahaz died in Egypt in exile and Jehoiachim was made king by Neco. His original name was Eliakim but Neco changed it to Jehoiachim. He too was a son of Josiah.

Jeremiah tells the people not to grieve over the dead king, meaning Josiah. Grieve over Jehoahaz his son who will never see Judah again. He never returned but died in exile. Jeremiah's words were literally fulfilled.

22:13-17 - This is the first part of a message about Jehoiachim son of Josiah whom Neco made king after he took Jehoahaz his brother to Egypt. He forced Jehoiachim to pay an expensive tribute to Egypt. Jehoiachim paid the tribute which was an economic burden on his country and then proceeded to build himself a much more expensive palace than his father's. Jeremiah had nothing but scorn for the young king. He was 25 years old when he began to reign.

Jeremiah accuses Jehoiachim of building his palace by unrighteousness with conscript labor or slave labor, oppressing his people to build himself a house of cedar. Sarcastically Jeremiah asks if it makes you a king to have more cedar in one's palace. He asks if his father had plenty of food and drink? Josiah lived prosperously as king because he did what was right in the Lord's eyes. He defended the poor and needy and so all went well with him as the Lord had promised. But Jehoiachim does not know the Lord, and his heart is set on dishonest gain because he is greedy. He sheds innocent blood and oppresses his people and extorts them for personal gain and wealth. He takes advantage of the fact he is king to get wealthy and does not care for his people. He is following not in Josiah's footsteps but in Manasseh's. God will judge him for this!

Jeremiah longs for Jehoiachim to be like his father Josiah who was a good and righteous king; the last good king of Judah. It is one of the ironies of Judah's history that so many of the good kings of Judah were followed by a bad king. The fact is the good kings like Hezekiah and Josiah failed to disciple and teach their sons to follow in the way of the Lord and obey him. And so a good and great king was followed by an evil and horrible one. Hezekiah was followed by Manasseh, the most evil king of all and Josiah was followed by two of his sons and a grandson, all of which "*did evil in the sight of the Lord*", as *2 Kings 23-24* says. The greatest weakness of the kings, even the best ones, was a failure to disciple their children. We need to heed that lesson today as well.

22:18-19 - *Jeremiah* pronounces the Lord's judgment on Jehoiachim, son of Josiah, king of Judah. People will not mourn for him at all. He will have the burial of a donkey, meaning his body will be dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem. He will not be buried in the tombs of the kings in the city of David. In his death he will be scorned and shamed.

According to *2 Kings 24:1-6*, Jehoiachim was Nebuchadnezzar's vassal for three years but then changed his mind and rebelled. Nebuchadnezzar sent raiders against him in advance of the whole Babylonian army coming against Jerusalem. Sometime in that timeframe Jehoiachim died. *2 Kings* does not tell us whether he died of natural causes or was assassinated. However, 2

Chronicles 36:6 says Nebuchadnezzar captured Jehoiachim and bound him in bronze shackles "to take him to Babylon." The implication being Jehoiachim died before he was sent into exile. The Bible does not specifically tell us but the circumstances surrounding Jehoiachim's death certainly sound suspicious. The Babylonian army was surrounding Jerusalem at the time and his son Jehoiachin only lasted three months before he was captured and taken into exile in Babylon in 597. Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled. The people did not mourn the passing of such a weak and petty king who also was too stupid to realize rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar was not a good idea!

22:20-23 - *Jeremiah* continues to speak about the king. The curious thing about this passage however is that in Hebrew the pronouns are feminine singular. Is that a subtle insult to Jehoiachim? I do not know. Jeremiah tells the king to go all the way to the north into Lebanon or Bashan, which is the Golan Heights. Cry out in distress for all your allies are crushed. Babylon had long ago crushed Syria or any other nation that might have helped Judah. Neco in Egypt had been humiliated at Carchemish in 606 and now refused to come to the aid of Judah when Nebuchadnezzar invaded in 597.

God tells Jehoiachim that he warned him when he felt secure but the king refused to listen to the Lord. This has been his way since his youth in Josiah's house. He never was obedient to God. All his supposed allies in whom he trusted will be driven away and he will be left alone to face the might of the Babylonian army. Jehoiachim will be ashamed and disgraced because of all his wickedness which was in such stark contrast to his father Josiah. The Lord addresses those who live in "*Lebanon*" that is the *Palace of the Forest of Lebanon* that Solomon built. See *1 Kings 7*. Labor pains will come upon the king and his allies when the Lord sends his judgments. Nebuchadnezzar is coming and nothing the king can do will stop him for Jehoiachim is under the judgment of the Lord Almighty. His idolatry, apostasy and wickedness have born their fruit. He dies or is killed in 597 and Jehoiachin his son succeeds him as king but only reigns three months before he too is deposed, captured by Nebuchadnezzar and taken into exile to Babylon.

22:24-27 - *Jeremiah* now prophesies about Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiachim. Even if he were a signet ring on the Lord's right hand the Lord would pull him off. God has determined that Jehoiachin will be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. God will hand over the king of Judah who is from David's line to the enemies of his people, the Babylonians. He and his mother will be exiled and there they will die. Jehoiachin will never come back to the Promiseland.

In 597 Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and took Jehoiachin, Nehushta his mother, the king's wives and his major officials and many of the leading men of the land, about 10,000 in all, into exile to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar stripped the country of its leadership. He installed the king's uncle Mattaniah and changed his name to Zedekiah as king in Jehoiachin's place. See *2 Kings 24:8-17* for the details. Nebuchadnezzar also stripped the temple of its gold and precious articles and took it all to Babylon.

Jeremiah's words were literally fulfilled. He must have written this message close to the time of Jehoiachin's exile because he was king for only three months before Nebuchadnezzar captured the city.

22:28-30 - *Jeremiah* asks if Jehoiachin is a broken pot, something no one wants. When a pot broke people would sometimes use the shards if they were large enough for a tool or to sweep things, but most of the time the pottery was simply thrown out as useless. Jehoiachin is like a broken pot. He is useless as a king in the Lord's sight.

He will be thrown out of the land along with his children. *Jeremiah* calls the land to hear the Word of the Lord. Record the king as childless. Jehoiachin was 18 when he ascended the throne but his reign only lasted three months before he was exiled. It is possible that he did not have children at the time of his exile and his sons were born later in Babylon. It is also possible that his children were infants when he and they were exiled. However, he was not old enough to have grown sons to succeed him at the time of his capture. *Jeremiah* says record him as childless, a great shame to a king. He will be a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, he will not be blessed. None of his offspring will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah. Jehoiachin was 18 when he was captured and exiled. Nebuchadnezzar bound him in chains and took him to Babylon where he was in prison for 37 years until he was 55 years old. Evil-Merodach, the successor to Nebuchadnezzar finally released the aging king from prison, gave him an allowance and gave him a seat at the king's table until his death. See *2 Kings 24:27-30*.

Jehoiachin had a son named Shealtiel, whose son was Zerubbabel who led the exiles back to Jerusalem after Cyrus the Great's decree in 538. Zerubbabel was a prince of Judah and became a Persian official but he never reigned as king of Judah because the nation had ceased to exist. The line of the kings remained and was preserved down to the Lord Jesus but the reign of the kings was ended. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah and none of Jehoiachin's sons ever came to the throne.

These prophecies by *Jeremiah* against Zedekiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiachim and Jehoiachin indict the line of David. They show how bankrupt the official theology had become and how twisted was its thinking. The official theology had completely divorced the promise God made to David in *2 Samuel 7* from his covenant with his people in *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*. By doing so the official theology said it didn't matter how the kings lived or what they did; they were of David's line and so they were safe because of God's promise to David. They had selectively used God's Word to justify a position that guaranteed their safety no matter how wicked and idolatrous the kings or the people had become. In other words the official theology justified the people of Judah's idolatry and immorality in the name of God's promise to David. *Chapters 21-22 of Jeremiah* are his indictment upon that theology and condemnation of that thinking. The kings and the people had violated God's covenant with Israel and God was not going to stand for it any longer!

Chapter 23:

23:1-4 - *Jeremiah* speaks to the shepherds of Israel. This is a broad term that means the kings, the priests, the prophets and the wise men of the court. The context in the preceding chapter and in this chapter suggests he is focusing more on the kings. The shepherds of Israel have destroyed and scattered the Lord's sheep. God will punish them for scattering his flock and not caring for them. *Jeremiah* in *22:11-17* has accused Jehoiachim of building a new palace with slave labor and caring more for his wealth than his people, totally unlike his father Josiah. Jehoiachim fits *Jeremiah's* indictment of the uncaring shepherds of Israel.

God will punish the shepherds of his people. See *Ezekiel 34:1-31* where *Ezekiel* gives a very similar message to the shepherds of Israel. However, *Jeremiah* now adds something new to his message. For the first time he speaks of God gathering the remnant of Israel from all the

nations from which they have been driven. The Lord will bring them back to their pasture, meaning their land where they will be fruitful and increase in number. God will place shepherds over them who will care for them and they will no longer live in fear, nor will any be missing. Jesus identified himself as the good shepherd in *John 10:1-30* and says no one will be able to take his sheep from his hand. *Jeremiah* states the remnant theme that many of the major prophets of Israel speak about, especially *Isaiah*. God's punishment will fall on Judah but this is not the end of God's people. He will bring a remnant back to the land and care for them as his own flock. Judah the nation may be destroyed, but the Jews as a people have a future because of God's purposes for them.

23:5-6 - This is *Jeremiah's* first overtly Messianic passage. The days are coming; meaning sometime in the future God will raise up a king from David's line to rule over his people Israel. *Jeremiah* pushes his Messianic hope for a coming king into the future. Judah would go into exile yet even when the Jews returned to the land none of the sons of Jehoiachin would rule the people as king. Zerubbabel would be a Persian governor. *Zechariah* would even call him the "*Branch*" but he was only a type of Messiah, Zerubbabel would not be the Messiah. For *Jeremiah* the coming of the Branch would be far into the future. It would be five and a half centuries before the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem!

God will raise up a righteous Branch from David's line. The word for branch can mean bud or shoot. I think *Jeremiah* is referring to *Isaiah's* words about the shoot from the stump of Jesse in *Isaiah 11*. The Branch is the Messiah. One can infer from *Jeremiah's* statement that people knew *Isaiah's* prophecy and *Jeremiah* is referring to it here. The line of David will be reduced to a stump and out of it will come a shoot, a bud, a Branch who will be king and reign over God's people with wisdom and justice. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel live in safety. He will have a name, The Lord Our Righteousness. This is a play on the name of King Zedekiah whose name meant The Lord Is Our Righteousness. The Branch will be true to his name and fulfill it unlike the weak and ineffective last king of Judah. One can see that *Jeremiah* has nothing but contempt for Zedekiah. He proves by his actions that he is a coward and not fit to sit upon David's throne. *Jeremiah* says one day one will come again who will fulfill God's covenant with David, the Branch, the Messiah.

The Lord Our Righteousness, *Jeremiah's* title for the Branch or the Messiah, is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus and his work on the cross. His death paid for our sins and now by faith in him as Lord his righteousness is counted or reckoned to us so that we are righteous before God and justified before him. We are not righteous before God because of our own good works but solely based on his work for us appropriated through faith in him. This is Paul's argument in *Romans 3 & 5*. The Lord Jesus is the Branch of *Jeremiah*! He literally is our righteousness!

23:7-8 - *Jeremiah* continues the theme of the exiles coming home after suffering God's judgment upon them. The people used to say, the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt. The days are coming when they will say, the Lord who brought Israel out of the land of the north and all the countries where he banished them. When the Lord brings them home they will live in their own land. *Jeremiah* does what *Isaiah* does in *chapters 40-66*; he paints the return as a second exodus. In many ways the Jews interpreted the return this way. The first exiles to return were under the leadership of Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin, in 538 after the decree of Cyrus the Great, king of Persia who had conquered Babylon.

Today, since 1948, many Jews continue to return to Israel and settle there. In some manner the Lord is still fulfilling his Word to them through *Jeremiah* that he would bring them back to the land from all the lands to which they had been scattered. However, *Jeremiah*, *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* all speak of the remnant that returns as the faithful remnant of God's people. Most of the Jews who return to Israel today are secular and have a cultural identity as Jews but not a religious identity. The more strict Orthodox Jews are a small minority of those returning to Israel. Luke, in *Acts 2*, reporting on the events of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, declares that the faithful remnant of the Jews has been gathered back in the land because the Messiah has come in Jesus of Nazareth. God gathered the remnant and gave them all his Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the prophets. How that event and the modern return of the Jews to their land after so many centuries are connected I do not completely understand. Pentecost may be a type of the ultimate return and fulfillment of the prophets' visions or they may be already fulfilled. In that case like much of the New Testament and prophecy we are dealing with an already-not yet scenario.

23:9-10 - *Jeremiah* now prophesies against the prophets, meaning the court prophets, who gave the king and his officials the "*Word of the Lord.*" They are false prophets and speak lies. *Jeremiah* says his heart is broken within him and he is like a drunken man because of the Word of the Lord. His words are holy but the land is under a curse. It is full of adulterers and people who follow evil and use their power unjustly. The land mourns or suffers from drought because of their sin. *Deuteronomy 28* speaks of drought as one of the covenant curses the Lord would send upon the land and the people if they broke his covenant and were unfaithful to the Lord. That is what *Jeremiah* says is happening because the prophets are evil.

23:11-12 - *Jeremiah* says both the prophets and the priests are godless! Even in the Lord's temple he finds their wickedness. The very ones who were to speak the Word of the Lord to the people and teach them God's Law are worshipping idols and practicing evil. They have led the people astray by divorcing the worship of God alone from how they lived and treated people. They are the spiritual leaders and the people have followed their example. Therefore their path will become slippery and they will be banished to darkness. God will bring upon them disaster in the year they are punished.

From the context this was probably written either prior to 597 and the first exile or 586 and the final destruction of Jerusalem. My hunch is it was written prior to 597 and the exile of King Jehoiachin because the chief priest and many of his assistants along with many of the court prophets were either killed or sent into exile at that time. Regardless, by 586, *Jeremiah's* words had literally been fulfilled. All the priests and prophets who had led the people astray and falsely advised the kings were either dead or exiled. The official theology they continued to hold onto even though God had told them it was false was totally discredited and shown to be not from the Lord.

23:13-14 - *Jeremiah* continues his message against the prophets of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom Israel. The prophets there prophesied by Baal and led Israel astray. But the Lord has seen something horrible in Jerusalem too. The prophets in Judah commit adultery and live a lie. *Jeremiah* means the prophets are worshipping idols along with worshipping Yahweh, and then they turn around and speak in the name of Yahweh and act as if they have a Word from the Lord. All they are

really doing is strengthening those who do evil and the result is no one turns from their wickedness back to God. Their words have no effect because they are not the Word of the Lord. The Lord says the prophets are like Sodom to him and the people of Jerusalem like Gomorrah. The Lord has decided to judge Jerusalem and her false prophets just like he judged Sodom and Gomorrah, the two cities who had become so wicked the Lord destroyed them. He now says that about Jerusalem!!

23:15 - The Lord hands down his judgment against the prophets. They will eat bitter food and drink poisoned water because they have spread ungodliness throughout the land. The prophets were supposed to call people back to the Lord and hold up the covenant God made with Israel. They were to be a check on any corruption among the priesthood and the monarchy. Instead the court prophets had been coopted by those in power so that they began to tell the kings what they wanted to hear and say that it was from the Lord.

The word for bitter food is wormwood. Wormwood is a little used term from a rare root word meaning to curse. Metaphorically it means bitter or bitterness which is how the NIV translates it. In *Revelation 8:10-11* Wormwood is the name of the great star that falls from the sky and poisons a third of the rivers and springs of fresh water so they turned bitter. It is the third of the trumpet judgments in *Revelation 8-9*. The similarity between *Revelation* and this passage in *Jeremiah* is that both speak of judgment and both speak of things tasting bitter. In *Jeremiah* it is the food and in *Revelation* it is the water. In *Jeremiah* however the bitter food or wormwood is focused upon the false prophets while in *Revelation 8* it is one third of the world. John might have borrowed Jeremiah's metaphor and expanded it to describe the terrible judgments God would bring during the end times.

23:16-18 - The Lord tells his people not to listen to what the prophets are saying. They speak visions of their own making and not from God. They fill the people with false hopes. They keep telling people who despise the Lord, meaning those who disobey him and do not worship him any longer, you will have peace. They tell people who stubbornly refuse to repent that no harm will come to them. The prophets are telling the people what the official theology had come to believe. No harm will come to Jerusalem because the temple is there and the king sits on David's throne. They divorced God's promises to David about his dynasty and to Solomon about the temple from the covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai when he called them as his people. They quoted only those parts of God's Word that they wanted to believe, especially those that served their own ends and helped them maintain their power and influence. *Jeremiah* asks which of the false prophets has ever stood in the heavenly council of the Lord. Who has truly seen him or listened to his Word? Jeremiah has, but none of the king's prophets have heard the true Word of God.

23:19-22 - Because the court prophets have never heard the Lord's Word his storm of judgment will break out against them. The Lord's wrath will descend upon them like a whirlwind. The Lord's anger will not turn away from them until he accomplishes all his purposes. In days to come the people will understand clearly that God did not send these prophets. All their false prophecies will turn out to be wrong and all *Jeremiah's* preaching will turn out to be right and true. The events of history as it unfolds will show who the true prophet was in Judah. The Lord did not speak with the false prophets yet the people have believed their message and ignored the Lord's true prophets. The proof of who is the true prophet is simple. If someone truly speaks for

the Lord and has been in the presence of the Lord they would have proclaimed God's true Word to his people and called them back to him. They would have called the people to repentance and turned them from their evil ways. Any prophet that downplays obedience to the Lord and says people can worship other gods besides Yahweh and live as they please and Yahweh will take care of us and let no harm come to us does not know Yahweh! The prophets had allowed Judah to paganize their worship. No true prophet of the Lord would countenance such behavior because the Lord is incensed by it and therefore the prophet would be too. A true prophet knows the Lord's character besides knowing his Word. A true prophet knows the Lord's heart for his people and his covenant. The false prophets did not and the people had forgotten the Lord and only listened to those who were telling them what they wanted to hear. Paul tells Timothy in 2 *Timothy 4:3-4* that in the last days people will surround themselves with false teachers who will tell them what their itching ears want to hear. They will wander away from the truth and believe lies and myth. That is exactly what was happening in *Jeremiah's* day between the people and the court prophets. It is starting to happen again in America today, even in the Lord's church!

23:23-24 - The Lord speaks through Jeremiah about his own nature. This is an important statement about God's omnipresence and his omniscience. God is a God nearby; he is close to us and imminent. He is also a God who is far away; he is transcendent and above us. God is omnipresent; he is everywhere. *Jeremiah* ends this poetic description of God with a repeat of the same idea, only this time saying God fills heaven and earth. There is nowhere we can go where God is not present. *Jeremiah* shows how Israel's faith had gone way beyond the Lord as a territorial God like the pagan gods. The Lord is everywhere and if he is everywhere it doesn't matter where his people are God is with them. Plus if he is everywhere he is more than the God of Israel he is the God of all the nations, even those Israel has never known because God is in their territory too. *Jeremiah* takes this idea to its logical conclusion; God fills heaven and earth. He is in his heavenly court and somehow at the same time he is everywhere on earth as well. God is omnipresent.

The beginning of *verse 24* is the middle of this chiasmic statement about God. If God is everywhere then there is nowhere anyone can hide from him. He sees everywhere and knows everything. This is both a statement of God's omnipresence but adds the dimension of his omniscience. God knows all things.

Why is this statement included here in the middle of a message to the court prophets? *Jeremiah* points out that they may fool some of the people, claiming to speak for Yahweh but they are fools if they think they are fooling the Lord. He is not like the gods of the nations who are limited to a specific territory and who depend upon their people to expand that territory. He is not limited in his knowledge of the events of the world. The Lord knows all things. He knows their false messages and how they have led the Lord's people astray. There is no place on earth the false prophets can hide from the Lord. Fleeing to someplace like Egypt is futile because God is already there. There are no secret places in the world where the Lord cannot see them. They need to repent!

23:25-29 - What the prophets are saying is not hidden from the Lord. They claim they have had a dream, a vision from God but it is only the delusions of their own minds. There is no hint here of any kind of demonic delusion. The prophets continue to lie to the people because they are trapped in their own lies. *Jeremiah* says they are trapped in their own idolatry and think their lying prophecies will make the people forget the Lord and worship their idols.

God says, let them continue to prophesy but let Jeremiah and his fellow prophets speak the Word of the Lord faithfully. That was Jeremiah's mission. At times he struggled with it and at times it broke his heart and was almost too much for him to bear. Yet he is the model of faithfulness in the midst of the most trying circumstances. He obeyed God and did what the Lord asked him to do.

What has straw to do with grain? On the surface straw and grain may look similar but you can't eat the one and it will not feed you whereas with the other you can make bread and feed a family. The false prophecies will not feed the people and are only empty words. The true Word of the Lord spoken by his faithful prophets will feed the souls of God's people. Historically it was the words of *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, *Habakkuk* and others who enabled the people to survive the calamity of 586. If they had not faithfully spoken God's Word to his people they would have lost their faith entirely because it became only too clear that the court prophets were false prophets and their visions were empty. They had not heard from the Lord but had prophesied lies.

Jeremiah says God's Word is like fire and a hammer that breaks rock into pieces. God's Word exposes lies for what they are. God's Word is timeless and able to portray future events as well as interpret the present and give insight into the past. God's Word strips away our sin and breaks our stubborn hearts. It is the most powerful force in the world, even though at the time it does not seem like it. In the end the Lord's Word will be shown to be truth and all false prophecy will be shown for what it is, delusion and lies.

23:30-32 - God declares he is against the court prophets, the false prophets. They steal words from one another and proclaim they have heard from the Lord. They spout the official theology even when God has not said it and has promised judgment for Judah's sin rather than saving them from the Babylonians who are coming. The Lord is against the false prophets who continue to declare they are speaking for the Lord when they are not. He did not send them or appoint them. All they are doing is leading the people astray with their false dreams and reckless lies. Their "*prophecies*" are reckless because they excuse the people's idolatry and wickedness. They lead them to believe they can live however they please and God will save them from Nebuchadnezzar because they have the Lord's temple and David's son on David's throne. The Lord says they do not benefit his people in the least. They tell people what they want to hear but ignore the true Word of the Lord that will save them. They operate under a delusion.

Did the false prophets not know at some level that they were not speaking the Word of the Lord? *Jeremiah* does not speak about Satanic influence. It is doubtful that he even understood it. Yet, Paul in *1 Corinthians 10* tells us that behind every idol stands a demon. Judah's idolatry had taken her away from God. She was giving her worship to demons and yet still claiming to worship God and be God's people, believing that God would save them and not allow any great harm to come to them. For the court prophets, the combination of idolatry which had blinded their hearts from the truth of God's Word, their positions of power as the court prophets of the king, and their popularity with the people because they were telling them what they wanted to hear all combined to wall their hearts off from the truth. They believed the lies because they wanted to and were so locked into them that as they kept saying them over and over they came to believe the lies as the truth and the truth became for them lies that had to be stopped. That is why they so vehemently opposed Jeremiah. It is why today those who are trapped in false religions so vehemently oppose Christians who alone have the message of truth that can save them. Unfortunately the false prophets of Jeremiah's day are a continuing phenomenon in human history. People still do it today for many of the same reasons. Lies and

delusions of the enemy wedded to our own desires are powerful forces that keep us away from God. In the end they will destroy us. Only the true Word of God is powerful enough to break through the lies and set us free!

23:33-40 - God gives Jeremiah instructions for how to respond to the people's questions about what the Lord is saying to Jeremiah. He says if a prophet, priest or anyone from the people ask what is the Lord's message tell them the Lord will forsake them. Jeremiah uses the word oracle, which can also mean burden. There is a play on words here in Hebrew. They ask, what is the oracle of the Lord and Jeremiah is to ask what oracle. One could also translate the word; you are the burden so the Lord will forsake you. If anyone claims to have a burden or oracle from the Lord besides Jeremiah they are lying and the Lord did not speak to them. He will punish that person. People even ask each other, what did the Lord say, even though the Lord is no longer speaking to this people. They distort the Lord's Word and keep speaking in his name even though he has not spoken to them at all. God tells Jeremiah to remind them that he has told the people not to use the words any longer; this is the oracle of the Lord. Yet they keep doing it, as if they are truly concerned about what God is saying to them. They ignore him, worship idols, disobey his Word and then want to know what the Lord says. Their hypocrisy has reached new heights. God is through with them. He will forget them and cast them out of his presence. He will turn away from Jerusalem, the city he gave to their fathers, even the city where his name dwells. The Lord says he will bring upon Judah everlasting shame and disgrace that will never be forgotten.

One must be very careful when even today one says; I have a Word from the Lord. To speak as if God has spoken to you when he has not is a dangerous thing. Even in the subjective revelation of listening prayer we need to be careful. Like Judah we can baptize our own desires and needs far too easily and then call them a Word from God. The Lord takes any false prophecy very, very seriously. John in *Revelation 2-3* speaks bluntly against the false prophecy that was disturbing and leading astray some of the seven churches. He warns us in *1 John 4* to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. Paul in *1 Corinthians 14* encourages people to prophesy but we must also be vigilant to not allow false teaching and prophecy to take root in the church. The same danger as happened in Judah in Jeremiah's day can also happen in our day. God takes people falsely speaking a message to his people very seriously and will severely discipline anyone who does so in order to save his church. See *Revelation 2:18-29* and the letter to Thyatira.

Chapter 24:

24:1-7 - Jeremiah receives a vision from the Lord of two baskets of figs. This happened after 597 when Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin (literally Jeconiah or Coniah a variant of Jehoiachin) son of Jehoiachin into exile to Babylon along with the cream of the country's leadership and craftsmen. One basket of figs had very good figs, those that ripen early, and the other poor figs, so bad they couldn't be eaten. The Lord asks Jeremiah what he sees and Jeremiah describes the two baskets with the good and bad figs.

The Lord then explains the two baskets of figs to Jeremiah. The good figs are the exiles from Judah who are now in Babylon. The Lord promises to watch over them for their good and he will bring them back to the land. He will build them up and not tear them down. He will plant them and not uproot them. This is language that echoes Jeremiah's call in *Jeremiah 1*. The Lord says he will give them a heart to know him, in other words they will have a relationship with the

Lord. They will be his people and he will be their God for they will return to him with all their heart.

God promises he will bring the exiles back to the land and he further declares that they will know him and seek him from the heart. God outlines his purpose in allowing the leaders and leading people of Judah to go into exile away from the Promiseland. He is going to create a repentant, faithful people who will worship him. It is in Babylon in exile that the Jews will rediscover their faith and return to the Lord. So he will bring them back to the land and watch over them. God says the nation of Judah is nothing; the people who will love him and return to him are everything. God's desire is to have a people for himself. He will use the exile to shape and mold that people.

Perhaps this is why *Haggai*, *Zechariah* and *Malachi* so vehemently scold the people for their unfaithfulness and lagging zeal for the Lord. They had gone through the fire of exile so that God could purify them and then they begin to return to the old ways of idol worship and a lukewarm faith in Yahweh. *Jeremiah* shows us that God allows tragedy and trials into our lives to mold us and shape us so that we depend upon him, worship him and love him with all our hearts. His purpose is always lifechange, to make us like himself. Some in Judah like *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* saw this. Others went back to the ways of their ancestors before the exile and some abandon the worship of Yahweh all together. Those that fell away lost their identity as Jews and were lost.

24:8-10 - God now describes the basket of bad figs to Jeremiah, the figs that are spoiled and cannot be eaten. These are Zedekiah, his officials and the survivors in Jerusalem, whether they are in Judah or have fled to Egypt. God will make them abhorrent and an offense to all the kingdoms of the earth. They will become a reproach and an object of ridicule and cursing. God will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are destroyed from the land he gave their ancestors. Jeremiah once again describes three of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in *Revelation 6*. The word for destroyed here means to be consumed. God will see to it that the survivors of 597 will be killed or exiled permanently. They will never return to the land.

Jeremiah was taken into Egypt by a group of soldiers led by Ishmael, a captain in Zedekiah's army. This may have been one part of the people who founded the Elephantine community on an island in the Nile in southern Egypt. Modern liberal scholars make much of the Elephantine community and see it as a great source for how the Jews worshipped Yahweh around the time of the exile. The facts are however even though the Elephantine community built a temple to Yahweh on their island they also had numerous pagan altars on the island as well. They do give us a window into how the Jews who fled worshipped Yahweh; they were idolaters! They belonged to the bad basket of figs and were never faithful to God. They built a temple to God outside of Jerusalem alongside pagan altars. Their worship had all the faults of the people of Judah before the exile that Jeremiah continually prophesied against and warned to repent. It is no surprise that the Elephantine community of exiled Jews soon died out. They totally lost their distinctiveness as the people of Yahweh. Some of the exiles in Babylon gained new insight into what it meant to be part of God's people and maintained their distinctiveness. For them, God's covenant became central. They were the good figs. For those that fled Jerusalem at the city's fall, they were the bad figs and perished away from the land. Jeremiah's vision of the baskets of figs was literally fulfilled.

Chapter 25:

25:1-7 - A message from the Lord comes to Jeremiah in the fourth year of King Jehoiachim's reign. It is the first year Nebuchadnezzar is king in Babylon. The year is 605 which is the year of the battle of Carchemish when Neco of Egypt tries to help the remnants of the Assyrian Empire against the rising power of Babylon or the Neo-Chaldean Empire. The three armies meet in northern Syria at Carchemish and Nebuchadnezzar wins a decisive victory. It is one of the great battles of the ancient world and shaped events in the Middle East for decades to come.

Jeremiah says he has brought the word of the Lord to the people for twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign, which would have been 618, when Josiah was twenty-one years old, up to the present time, the fourth year of Jehoiachim's reign. He has spoken a consistent message, as have all the prophets the Lord has sent to his people. Repent, turn from your evil ways and worship and serve the Lord alone and you can stay in the land the Lord gave your ancestors. Do not provoke the Lord to anger with your idols, then the Lord will not harm Judah. But the people have not listened. Jeremiah reflects back on several centuries of God's prophets, going all the way back to *Amos* and *Hosea* before the fall of Israel and on through *Micah* and *Isaiah* during the fall of the north and now to *Jeremiah* himself in Judah. He says you have not listened to the Lord. You have done exactly what all the prophets told you not to do. You have made idols and worshipped and served them rather than the Lord your God. Now you have brought harm upon yourselves. Jeremiah is saying he is part of the long stream of prophetic revelation to Israel and is carrying on the message of the prophets from the Lord. He has added his voice to that prophetic message. It has been the same message for almost two centuries, and still the people have not listened to the Lord or repented of their sin and idolatry. The point has been reached where God will stop warning the people to repent. Now he will send his judgment upon them. The time for repentance has passed. It is too late.

25:8-11 - *Jeremiah* says God will summon the peoples of the north, meaning the Babylonians who will invade from the north, and Nebuchadnezzar the Lord's servant. He calls the pagan king Yahweh's servant! Jeremiah expresses the understanding that the Lord is in charge of history. He is the one who helps raise up new empires and causes old ones to fall. As great and powerful as Nebuchadnezzar is and thinks he is, the reason he has come to the throne of Babylon is the Lord has put him there to carry out his purposes in history. God will use Nebuchadnezzar to execute his judgment upon Judah just as *Isaiah* says he will use Cyrus of Persia to bring the people back to the land after their exile. The Lord is the Lord of history!

God will use Nebuchadnezzar and his armies to completely destroy Judah and Jerusalem. He will make Judah and the nations around her an object of scorn and ridicule among the nations. The Lord using the Babylonians as his instrument of judgment will banish the sounds of joy and singing from the land, and the activity of commerce and harvest. The whole country will become a desolate wasteland and Judah and the nations around them will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years!

Jeremiah specifically says Judah will serve Nebuchadnezzar for seventy years. This cannot literally refer to the exile because even if one counts from the first exile in 597 there are only 58 years to the decree of Cyrus in 538. From the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 there are only 49 years. The number in reference to the exile must therefore be symbolic. However, from the destruction of the temple in 586 to the dedication of the second temple in 515 is 70 years. That is one possibility. If one counts from the fourth year of Jehoiachim in 605 when Jeremiah gave this prophecy to the decree of Cyrus in 538 you still get only 67 years. No literal number

fulfills Jeremiah's seventy year prophecy. However, in Hebrew terms seventy is seven, the number of completion for God's plan, times ten, which is a round number denoting time passing. Seventy symbolically means the completion of God's plan for the judgment of Judah and Jerusalem which will take many years, more than a generation. That was literally fulfilled.

25:12-14 - In *verse 9* Jeremiah called Nebuchadnezzar the Lord's servant. Now in *verse 12* he says he will punish the king of Babylon and his nation after the seventy years are fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar was not king when Babylon fell to Cyrus of Persia. And it was several centuries before Babylon as a city was abandoned and became a ruin. However, if one visits the site today there are only ruins and it is an archeological site and nothing more. No one lives there because it is a desolate place. Jeremiah's words have been literally fulfilled. God will punish the Babylonians for their guilt in killing so many and ruthlessly conquering many nations to build their empire. God says he will bring against Babylon all the things that *Jeremiah* has prophesied against all the nations. The Lord will repay them according to their deeds for enslaving so many.

In the New Testament, especially *Revelation*, Babylon becomes a symbol for godless culture and power, specifically Rome. It is never a positive symbol but always negative. God used it to punish his people yet God then turned around and punished Babylon. He would do the same thing with Persia, Greece and Rome, using them to accomplish his purposes in history for his people then holding them accountable for their deeds. God alone is Lord of history!

25:15-16 - *Jeremiah* begins a new message about the cup of the wrath of God. God speaks to Jeremiah in a vision. The cup God gives him is probably symbolic. God says take the cup from his hand and drink it. It is filled with the wine of the wrath of God and God says make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it they will stagger and go mad because of the sword the Lord will send among them.

The cup becomes a very important symbol in the New Testament. In *Revelation 14* all those who worship the beast are made to drink from the cup of God's wrath. At the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus in *Revelation 19* John says Jesus treads the winepress of the wrath of God. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane begs the Father to take the cup from him yet not his will but God's be done. The cup is the symbol of the wrath of God over human sin which Jesus will drink on the cross. See *Mark 14:32-36*. The cup of God's wrath becomes the ultimate symbol of God's judgment over sin at the last days. The cup at the cross shows that Jesus' death prefigures the last judgment of God for human sin. It is the last judgment come into history. All who accept Jesus' sacrifice for them will be saved from that final judgment. All who do not will be forced to drink from the cup of God's wrath just as the nations against which *Jeremiah* prophesied will be forced to drink from it. God is not only Lord of history he is Lord of the human race, its Creator and Judge. He is righteous and just and has the absolute right to judge humanity for its sin because he is our Creator and we are his creatures.

25:17-26 - Jeremiah takes the cup of God's wrath from his hand and he makes all the nations to whom God sends him drink it. This is some kind of symbolic act or he sees this happening in a vision. Jeremiah did not literally travel to each of these nations and somehow compel their rulers to drink the cup of God's wrath. Nevertheless, the symbolism declared something very real. God's wrath is about to be poured out on many nations. First in the list is Judah and Jerusalem, its king and all its officials. God is going to destroy them and make them an object of scorn

among all nations. The Lord is rejecting his people and will judge them, using the nations around them to punish them with Babylon being the chief instrument of his punishment.

Jeremiah goes on to list many other nations who are also subject to God's wrath. In these verses at first God's wrath is going to come soon or is already happening. As *Jeremiah's* message continues in the rest of this chapter it becomes more and more eschatological, until in the end it becomes a prophecy of the end times.

The Pharaoh of Egypt will be judged along with his officials and people. Egypt was the one nation with whom Judah kept trying to make alliances to resist Babylon. It proved an unreliable ally. *Jeremiah* lists the kings of Uz, which are listed in *Genesis 10* and *1 Chronicles 1* as descendants of Aram in the table of nations. Uz therefore is a Semitic or Aramaic nation. Job was from Uz and there is no certainty about where it was. Someplace in Syria seems to be the most likely location. The Philistines are listed next, including all the kings of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and the people left at Ashdod. Ashdod was sacked by Sargon II of Assyria in 711 and *Jeremiah* is probably referring to that attack. The city was a ruin until the Persian era. Edom, Moab and Ammon are listed next, the three nations to the south and east of Judah in the Jordanian Highlands, mountains of Moab and south and east of the Dead Sea. They were conquered by David and Solomon, regained their independence and then were reconquered during the days of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel. Edom was an ally of the Babylonians during the siege of Jerusalem. The little prophecy of *Obadiah* concerns the Edomites and God's judgment upon them for assisting Babylon. *Jeremiah* lists the kings of Tyre and Sidon next, who were often allies of Israel from David's day. Yet it was Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre married to Ahab king of Israel, who almost succeeded in wiping out the worship of Yahweh in Israel. Only the ministry of Elijah and Elisha saved the north kingdom from complete apostasy. *Jeremiah* then lists the kings of the coastlands across the sea. This is a general term that often in the prophets means the kingdoms around the Mediterranean Sea, which could include Greece, Carthage, Rome and others. The point is even nations far away from Judah will drink the Lord's wrath. Efforts to include the USA in the coastlands are dubious at best. North America is simply unknown to *Jeremiah*. We are not unknown to God but *Jeremiah* is speaking to his people and the nations that Judah has known.

Next he lists Dedan, Tema and Buz, all of whom are in distant places. Dedan is associated with the Queen of Sheba and was a city in northwest Arabia on the spice caravan route from southern Arabia to the Mediterranean Sea. Tema was a desert oasis on the main trade route through Arabia and was settled by the sons of Ishmael. The location of Buz is unknown. Buz is listed as a nephew of Abraham in *Genesis 22:21*, the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother. Here in *Jeremiah* Buz is a land associated with Dedan and Tema, which is a long way away from Judah. Literally distant places means all who clip the hair by their foreheads, meaning they cut their bangs and do not allow the hair on their sideburns to grow out, unlike what God had told his people to do. The kings of Arabia and all the foreign people who live in the desert are listed next. This is a more general reference to the whole Arabian Peninsula and the Arab peoples. *Jeremiah* then moves north and east listing the kings of Zimri, Elam and Media. Zimri is otherwise unknown but because it is associated with Elam, which is Persia, and Media, which is northern Mesopotamia a related nation to Persia, it can be assumed that Zimri is also near Persia or part of it. These are kingdoms far to the north and east of Judah. *Jeremiah* then says all the kings of the north, near and far will drink the cup of God's wrath, even all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. God is getting ready to judge the whole world because of the sin of the nations, not just the sin of his people Judah. *Jeremiah* has moved from the specific nations around Judah to the whole

world. Last of all, after all the other nations have drunk from the cup of God's wrath the king of Sheshach will drink too. Sheshach is a cryptic name for Babylon. God will not forget Babylon for what they have done to his city Jerusalem and his people Judah. They too will be judged.

This paragraph reinforces what God told Jeremiah in his call in *Jeremiah 1*, that God appointed him a prophet to the nations, not just his people Judah. The prophets consistently spoke of God's rule over all the kingdoms of the earth besides Israel and Judah. The pagan nations expanded the territory of their gods by conquering other lands. Yahweh did not need Israel to conquer anyone to expand his territory. He was the Creator! He owned the world because he made it. The Lord God created the human race and governed its affairs. He chose Israel to be his people to demonstrate to the nations who he was and call all people everywhere to worship him. Israel failed at that task; that is why God judged them. But the fact that he wants all the nations to worship him has never changed. That is why he sent the Lord Jesus into the world and that is why we have been given the task of preaching the gospel to all nations so that the whole world may know the Lord and be reconciled to him. God is patient wanting everyone to have a chance to repent and come to him. But as *Jeremiah* shows there will come a day when his wrath over human sin will be poured out on the kings and kingdoms of the world. His wrath for sin was poured out on his Son to bring salvation. The next time it is poured out on the world will be the end of days and the final establishment of his Kingdom.

25:27-29 - God tells the nations to drink the cup of his wrath. Get so drunk on it you vomit and stagger. Fall to rise no more because God is sending the sword among them. If they refuse to drink it tell them they must! The Lord is punishing his people and his city that bears his Name; do they think somehow they will go unpunished? If God's people are not spared judgment and the sword neither will the nations of the world be spared. Judah is God's people and they are held to a high standard because of the covenant God made with them. Yet the nations of the world are also subject to God for their behavior, idolatry and wickedness. Sin is sin and God's standards do not change. They are the same for all. He holds his people to a higher standard of conduct but all peoples are responsible to obey the will of God. The USA would do well to remember this fact and heed *Jeremiah's* warning to the nations. If we do not repent the sword of God's wrath will fall upon us as well!

25:30-31 - Jeremiah is told to prophesy against the nations. This prophecy now looks ahead to the end times and takes on an increasingly eschatological tone.

The Lord will come from on high with a mighty roar like a thunderstorm. He will come against those who live upon the earth. His tumult or noise will reach the ends of the earth. The Lord will bring charges against the nations and judgment to all mankind. He will put the wicked to the sword. Sin breeds death and demands life in payment. Therefore since all mankind is sinful the Lord has a day when he will bring death to the world. This will not come with a flood as in the days of Noah. This will be with a great battle. *Jeremiah* infers that the Lord himself will come down from heaven and fight the nations and destroy them.

The cross of Jesus Christ is God's gracious answer to his righteous wrath against human sin. Rather than sending Jesus the first time at the head of heaven's armies to destroy sinful mankind, he sent his Son to die for mankind and pay for our sin. He then offers forgiveness through trusting Jesus as Lord and King of one's life to anyone who will believe and submit themselves to Christ. The alternative is the final battle and judgment of God. We can reject the cross and Jesus' offer of forgiveness and take our chances against God when he comes against

the nations. Or we can see the cross for what it is; a pre-figuring of God's just judgment against human sin, occurring in history so we can see it and giving us the opportunity for forgiveness through his free gift of grace in Jesus Christ. There are no other alternatives. *Jeremiah* has already said the human heart is desperately wicked and who can understand it. No one seeks after God. Paul will confirm those insights in *Romans 1*. In our arrogance we continue to either worship idols of our own making or create our own God in our image and likeness, saying God is this way because *WE* want him to be. We forget as *Jeremiah* has shown us we are the clay and he is potter! We are his creatures and he alone is our Creator!

25:32-33 - The Lord says through his prophet that disaster is spreading over all the earth from nation to nation. A great storm is coming, the Lord's storm that is rising from the ends of the earth. The picture here is of a great thunderstorm rising up and covering the land.

Jeremiah says when the Lord's storm breaks over the nations there will be slain from one end of the world to the other. The dead will be so many no one will mourn them or bury them but they will lie like refuse on the ground. *Jeremiah* would live to see a day like this on a smaller scale when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. There were so many dead they could not all be buried. Imagine it on a world scale. *Revelation 16 & 20* describe the gathering of the nations by demonic powers to fight against the Messiah and his armies in the final battle. *Revelation 16* says it will be at Armageddon, or Har Megiddo in Hebrew. *Jeremiah* is describing that time of judgment against all the nations of the world who oppose God. God is holy and cannot tolerate sin. He has provided a way through the cross for human beings to be forgiven. If we reject that way the only option left open to us is a terrible time of judgment against all who have turned away from God.

25:34-38 - *Jeremiah* now addresses the shepherds and leaders of the flock. In *chapter 23* he described the shepherds as the kings, priests and prophets of the people. The shepherds are their leaders. *Jeremiah* is speaking about the leaders of Judah again. Their day is coming. They will fall and be shattered like fine pottery, just like *Jeremiah* shattered the *baqbuk* in the Hinnom Valley. They will have nowhere to flee or escape. They will wail and grieve because the Lord will destroy their pasture, their land and country. The Lord will bring down upon the land, the people and the leaders his fierce anger over their sin and idolatry. What will happen to Judah is a pre-figuring of what will happen to all the nations! God will begin his judgment upon human kind with his people. The Promiseland that the Lord gave to Abraham and his descendants will lie desolate because of the sins of his people. The sword of the oppressor, the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar, will in reality be the sword of the Lord's anger. He will use the Babylonians, this pagan, evil nation, to punish his sinful, disobedient people. There will be nothing they can do to stop it.

Jeremiah started this whole message about the cup of God's wrath with Judah and then moved out to the nations. He finishes the message by returning his focus to Judah and especially its leaders.

Chapter 26:

26:1-6 - Early in the reign of Jehoiachim the Lord sent *Jeremiah* to the temple courtyard to give a message of repentance to Judah. Jehoiachim reigned from 609 to 598. This prophecy was given early in his reign, perhaps 609 or 608 but almost certainly before Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco at Carchemish in 605.

God tells Jeremiah to stand in the courtyard of the Lord and speak to all the people of Judah who come to worship there. Tell them everything and don't omit a word. God says perhaps they will listen and repent and turn from their evil ways. This prophecy is aimed at the people and not directly at the king or his officials. God tells Jeremiah to tell the people that he is going to bring disaster on Jerusalem and the people of Judah unless they repent. He calls them to listen to the Lord and follow his Law. If they do not listen to the words of his prophets that he has sent them again and again then he will make the temple like Shiloh and Jerusalem an object of cursing and scorn among the nations.

This message is similar to the famous temple sermon in *Jeremiah 7*, where he also mentions Shiloh and what happened to the Ark of the Covenant there when it was captured by the Philistines. The best guess we have is that the temple sermon was early in his career when Josiah was still king, though that is uncertain. This message is a different one yet similar in content and warning. Remember at this time the official theology dominated the king, his court and the priesthood so Jeremiah's message would have been seen as outright heresy against what they believed.

26:7-11 - When the priests, court prophets and the people hear Jeremiah's message that he dares speak in the temple itself they seize him and declare that Jeremiah must die. They demand to know why he is prophesying the temple of the Lord will become like Shiloh and Jerusalem will be destroyed and deserted. To them that was an absurdity because the temple was where the Lord's name dwelt and King Jehoiachin was of the line of David. These two things made them safe from all enemies. They would refer back to Hezekiah's day and the Lord's defeat of Sennacherib and the Assyrians as proof. He had saved them once from a mighty empire and he would save them again. Israel was destroyed because their king was not of David's line and they didn't have the temple. Judah did. From their perspective it made sense, especially because they wanted to believe it. The problem was it totally divorced their behavior, character and rampant idolatry from their relationship and worship of Yahweh. They didn't want to see it. Jeremiah tried to get them to open their eyes. Their reaction to his message shows how closed their hearts were to what God was saying.

The people want to kill Jeremiah. It sounds like a mob. The Lord was protecting his prophet but on a practical level what also helped save him was probably the fact they were in the temple courts themselves and the people were reluctant to shed blood in the temple for fear it would defile it. The priests were probably exerting some influence at this point as well. The officials of the king hear about the commotion and come to the temple courts and take their places at one of the gates of the temple itself to sit in judgment. The priests and prophets then accuse Jeremiah and call for his death because he has dared to prophesy against Jerusalem! Never mind they are the ones who are disobedient and Jeremiah has only said what the Lord gave him to say.

26:12-15 - Jeremiah speaks to the officials who are sitting in judgment over him. He replies to the charges the people, priests and prophets have brought against him. He tells them the Lord has sent him to speak against the temple and Jerusalem. He calls them to reform their ways and obey God then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against them. Jeremiah says he is in their hands and to do with him what they will. However, if they put him to death they will bring the guilt of innocent blood on themselves and the city and all who live in it, for in truth the Lord sent Jeremiah to speak all his words to the people.

This would not have been the first message Jeremiah had spoken to the people. Remember the temple sermon. Plus he began his ministry in the 13th year of Josiah in 626. This is at least in 609 or 608, some 17 or 18 years later. Jeremiah had already been ministering among them as a prophet for almost two decades. Even though the Lord's prophets declared things the people did not want to hear there was a reticence to kill them because people still feared God on some level. It was a dangerous thing to kill a prophet!

26:16-19 - The officials and all the people then declare to the prophets and the priests, the strongest defenders of the official theology, that Jeremiah should not be put to death because he has spoken to them in the name of the Lord. They recognize Jeremiah's call and authority as one of the Lord's prophets!

Some of the elders of the people then step forward to speak. They ask them to recall the prophet *Micah*, son of Moresheth who prophesied in the days of King Hezekiah. See *Micah 1:1* where *Micah* is identified as the same man. The elders tell the people that *Micah* said Jerusalem would someday be destroyed and the temple would become a heap of rubble. Yet Hezekiah and the people did not put *Micah* to death. Hezekiah feared the Lord and sought his favor. The Lord relented and saved the city from the disaster he had pronounced against them. This was the incident with the plague sent against the army of Assyria when Sennacherib invaded Judah. The elders declare that the people are about to bring disaster upon themselves if they kill Jeremiah.

The elders fail however to bring the people to their knees in repentance. What must Jeremiah have been thinking at this moment? Were his hopes rising as he heard the elders speak only to be dashed when he saw they were going to spare his life but not call the people to repentance? We do not know. However, Jeremiah is spared and freed to continue his mission as the Lord's prophet.

26:20-24 - The NIV views *verses 20-23* as a parenthesis in the narrative telling about an incident where a prophet of the Lord was killed. Perhaps Baruch included this incident in order to show how serious the situation was with Jeremiah in the temple when the priests and prophets accused him that day.

The narrative tells about another prophet, Uriah from Kiriath Jearim from the hill country of Judah. He prophesied in the name of the Lord against Jerusalem and the land of Judah as *Jeremiah* did. King Jehoiachim and his court when they heard his prophecies tried to put him to death. Uriah heard about it and fled to Egypt. Jehoiachim sent Elnathan, probably one of his palace guards, along with some other men to Egypt to bring Uriah back. They succeeded and King Jehoiachim had Uriah put to death with the sword. They threw his body into the burial place of the common people, meaning a mass grave where poor people were buried who could not afford a normal cemetery plot. The whole point of reporting the incident with Uriah the prophet is to illustrate the severity of the threat against Jeremiah. Jehoiachim had already killed one prophet for speaking against Jerusalem and the king. The mob in the temple gave him a perfect excuse to get rid of Jeremiah whom he did not like and who spoke judgment against the king. Jeremiah's life was in great jeopardy that day in the temple.

Verse 24 returns to the incident in the temple with Jeremiah. Baruch reports that Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah so he was not handed over to the mob to be put to death. Ahikam was an official in King Josiah's court. His father Shaphan was secretary to King Josiah when the book of the Law was found in the temple. See *2 Kings 22:12*. His son Gedaliah was appointed governor of the people remaining in the land after the fall of Jerusalem. See *2 Kings*

25:22. Ahikam was a faithful man and saw Jeremiah spoke the truth. His position of authority and respect in the king's court allowed him to save Jeremiah's life that day. It is unclear whether Ahikam was killed in the siege of Jerusalem or taken captive in the first or second exile. His position if he survived the siege meant he almost certainly would have been taken captive to Babylon but *2 Kings* does not tell us.

Chapter 27:

27:1-7 - Zedekiah was made king by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 after the Babylonians had captured Jerusalem and taken Jehoiachin as captive to Babylon along with the cream of the country's leadership. Early in the reign of Zedekiah would have been around 596 about ten years from the final destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah receives an incredible message from the Lord to the nations around Judah. He is instructed to make a yoke for his neck and wear it. Then he is to give a message to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through their ambassadors who have come to the court of Zedekiah. Jeremiah's message goes out to the diplomatic corps in Jerusalem!

He is told to say that Yahweh Almighty, the God of Israel says to all the kings of the nations around Judah that he is the Creator and by his will all the earth, the people on it and even the animals are given to whomever he pleases because they are his. The Lord is going to hand over all their countries to his servant, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. Even the wild animals will be subject to him. This is confirmed in Daniel's prophecy in *Daniel 4*. All the nations will serve him, and after him his son and grandson until the time for Babylon comes. Then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.

This is the second time God has called Nebuchadnezzar his servant in *Jeremiah's* prophecy. See *Jeremiah 25:9*. This prophecy also reinforces Jeremiah's mission as a prophet to the nations and not just to Judah. The Lord is the one who has established Nebuchadnezzar's empire and it will also be the Lord who takes it away. In the meantime the Babylonians will rule the Mid-East. Many nations and great kings will end its reign, which is a reference to Cyrus the Great of Persia who led the Medes and Persians against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Merodach reigned after him. He was succeeded by Nabonidus, a grandson who deposed the heir of Evil-Merodach and who left the rule of Babylon mostly to his regent and son Belshazzar, mentioned in the *Book of Daniel* as the king of Babylon. Nabonidus returned to Babylon later in his life but Cyrus the Great took the city in 539 without a great battle and was hailed as a liberator. The Neo-Chaldean or Babylonian Empire was thus ended. *Jeremiah's* prophecy is remarkable in its laying out of Babylon's power and eventual fall, telling the nations around Judah that this is all the Lord's doing. Here Jeremiah echoes what is said in the second half of Isaiah's prophecy to the exiles in *Isaiah 40-66*. Nebuchadnezzar's power is inevitable because the Lord of history has given it to him. But the fall of his empire is also fixed because Yahweh the Lord of history has decreed it. He is in charge! This entire message is given to the diplomatic corps in Jerusalem while Jeremiah is wearing his home-made yoke, symbolic of the subjugation of the nations to whom he speaks.

27:8-15 - Jeremiah continues his message this time focusing on what will happen to a nation that does not submit to Nebuchadnezzar's reign. If a nation does not bow its neck under the yoke of Babylon God will punish that nation with sword, famine and plague and destroy it by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah gives the same warning he had given Judah to the nations around Judah. These are pagan nations, some of which are related to Judah through their ancestry with

Abraham or Lot but many are not. Sword or war, famine and plague in *Revelation 6* become the last three of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. The fourth, the white horse, was the conqueror, which fits here in Jeremiah because God is handing over the nations to the conquering king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah tells the ambassadors of the nations to not believe their prophets, diviners, interpreters of dreams, mediums or sorcerers who tell them they will not serve the king of Babylon. All of these pagan and occult activities Israel was forbidden to practice but the pagan nations around Israel all used to foretell the future and advise their kings. In Babylon this whole class of advisors combined a study of the stars and astrology to become the Magi of *Matthew 2*. Daniel became one of these "*wise men*" as an advisor to the kings of Babylon. Jeremiah says if they say their nations will not serve Nebuchadnezzar they all lie! In fact if the kings believe their false prophets they will perish. If they submit to the Babylonians God will grant them to keep their land. It is interesting to note that Edom became an ally of Babylon, but because they helped the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem God said through the prophecy of *Obadiah* he would punish them rather than allow them to keep their land.

Jeremiah tells the ambassadors that he has given this same message to King Zedekiah. Serve the Babylonians and you will stay in the land and live. Rebel and God will destroy you. God has not sent any prophet who tells the king that he will not serve the king of Babylon. They are prophesying lies in the name of the Lord! If the king believes the lies God will banish him and he will perish along with the prophets who prophesied such lies. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and was taken captive in 586, blinded and sent to Babylon in chains where he died. Many of his court were taken before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah in Syria where they were put to death during the same time frame. Jeremiah's words were literally fulfilled. See *Jeremiah 52:9-11*.

27:16-22 - Jeremiah had been talking to the representatives of the nations around Judah who had come as ambassadors to Zedekiah's court. Now he speaks to the priests and all the people. He tells them not to listen to the prophets who tell them all the precious things of the Lord's house will soon be brought back from Babylon. They are lying. Do not listen to them, instead serve the king of Babylon and you will live. This must have seemed treasonous to many in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah calls on the court prophets to plead with the Lord to bring back all the furnishings of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar took with him when he took Jehoiachin into exile along with many others. He tells them plead with the Lord that the bronze sea and pillars of Solomon's temple, along with the stands and other furnishings be left in the city. Then Jeremiah declares that the Lord has said they will all be taken to Babylon and there will remain until the day the Lord comes for them. Someday, sometime in the future the Lord will restore the temple furnishings to his house, but first Nebuchadnezzar will carry them away to Babylon and all the prophecies of the court prophets will be proved false.

Nebuchadnezzar did carry away the bronze sea and the pillars and all the rest of the temple furnishings when his army destroyed the city and the temple in 586. It was not until Zerubbabel led the exiles back to Jerusalem after 538 and Cyrus' decree that the temple furnishings returned to Jerusalem. See *Ezra 1*. The bronze sea and pillars Nebuchadnezzar had broken up and melted down for their bronze. They never returned to Jerusalem, but the temple furnishings did and were used again in the second temple which was dedicated in 515. Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled. He was preparing his people for the worst that could happen, the destruction of the Lord's temple. It was the final step in the total dismantling of the official

theology and his prophecy helped the people make sense of what happened so they could return and rebuild after their exile.

Chapter 28:

28:1-4 - This section about Hananiah son of Azzur is related to *chapter 27* and the more general message about the false prophets and what they were preaching in the temple to the people. *Chapter 27* begins with “*early in the reign of Zedekiah*” and Jeremiah is told to speak to the diplomatic corps wearing a yoke. *Chapter 28* appears to be a specific incident during that time involving Hananiah who was one of the court prophets prophesying peace, the early return of the exiles and the defeat and collapse of Nebuchadnezzar. In the fifth month of that same year refers to the time frame in *27:1*. Jeremiah further clarifies that by saying the fourth year, which probably refers to the fourth year of Zedekiah's eleven year reign as king of Judah. That would put this incident around August of 593. According to *Jeremiah 51:59* Zedekiah went to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign, in 593, to reinforce his vassalage to Nebuchadnezzar after the western kingdoms began plotting revolt with Egypt during a revolt in Babylon which Nebuchadnezzar was forced to put down. This had come the year after fighting between Babylon and Elam or Persia. If all these dots connect then the setting of this incident in the temple may have been shortly before the king's return from Babylon. There may have been high hopes that Zedekiah would return with Jehoiachin, the exiled king and Zedekiah's nephew, and that Nebuchadnezzar would restore the temple articles as an act of goodwill toward his faithful vassal. If that is the case then Hananiah is expressing the hopes of the official theology and looking for signs of the Lord's intervention where there were none.

Hananiah is named the son of Azzur, who is otherwise unknown. Gibeon, his hometown, is in the territory of Benjamin at the northern border between Judah and Israel. Gibeon is also the city in *Joshua 9* that deceived the Israelites into making a treaty of peace with them by claiming to be from a far country rather than neighbors nearby. The treaty was made because Joshua and Israel did not seek the Lord as they made it and thus uncover the deception. The link between the deception of the Gibeonites and Hananiah is not accidental! Hananiah becomes not only a specific example of a false prophet but an illustration of the deception inherent in those false prophetic messages. Judah is in danger of hearing from the Lord what they want to hear through Hananiah's words rather than checking with the Lord first to see if his prophecy is valid. That is the argument that Jeremiah makes in *27:5-9*.

Hananiah prophesies in the Lord's name before Jeremiah and the priests and people in the temple courts that within two years God will break the yoke of the king of Babylon and the temple articles that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon would be returned. Jehoiachin as well will return to Judah along with the other exiles that were taken to Babylon in 597. God will break Nebuchadnezzar's yoke. Hananiah is speaking to Jeremiah while Jeremiah is wearing the homemade yoke the Lord had told him to wear and go speak in the temple about serving the king of Babylon or be destroyed.

28:5-9 - Jeremiah replies to Hananiah's false message; Amen! Would that the Lord would do so! Jeremiah would like nothing more than for the Lord to return Jehoiachin and the exiles and the articles Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Lord's temple. But he reiterates before Hananiah and all those who were listening to the two of them in the temple courts that the proof of a prophet's message and validity is only if his predictions come true. If they do not then the Lord never sent them! Jeremiah says many prophets before them have prophesied war, disaster and plague

against many nations and kingdoms, but the prophet who prophecies peace is one truly sent from the Lord only if real peace happens! Then the people will know the Lord sent that prophet. In other words Jeremiah says to Hananiah and all who are in the temple that day, let's see whose words come true; Hananiah's who prophecies peace and the early return of the exiles, or Jeremiah's who prophesies disaster and serve Nebuchadnezzar or perish because the Lord is judging Judah. It was Jeremiah who was eventually vindicated not Hananiah.

28:10-11 - Hananiah dramatically takes the homemade yoke off of Jeremiah's neck in front of all the people in the temple and breaks it. Then declares the Lord says in the same way he will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar off all the nations within two years. Jeremiah the text says went on his way. The implications being Jeremiah either did not know how to respond or was humiliated or the Lord simply prompted him to leave the temple at that point because further confrontation would go nowhere. However, *Jeremiah 28:12-17* details a message Jeremiah receives from the Lord about Hananiah and he is told to go deliver it to Hananiah personally. I think Jeremiah is shocked and humiliated in the temple courts by Hananiah. Jeremiah had made that yoke at a command from the Lord and Hananiah declaring that he speaks for the Lord publicly broke the yoke off of Jeremiah's neck. I don't think Jeremiah is cowed by Hananiah, because in other places he isn't afraid to speak to the king in a forceful way. He isn't afraid of Hananiah! I think Jeremiah was confused and at a loss for how to respond to such a brazen act by Hananiah. Rather than compound the situation he simply leaves. Not long after the Lord tells him what to say to the false and deceiving prophet from Gibeon, but he does it privately not publicly in the temple. Hananiah wanted to publicly humiliate Jeremiah and stop him from prophesying destruction and judgment. The official theology demanded Jeremiah cease and Hananiah was a spokesperson and adherent of that official theology. Jeremiah did not want to demean Hananiah but he tried to warn him and the people to test his words lest they be deceived. Jeremiah knew the cost of false prophecy and how dangerous a game Hananiah was playing.

28:12-17 - Shortly after his confrontation with Hananiah in the temple Jeremiah receives a message for Hananiah from the Lord. He is instructed to tell the false prophet that he has broken a wooden yoke off the neck of Jeremiah. God will replace it with a yoke of iron. The Lord himself will put a yoke of iron on the necks of all these nations to make them serve the king of Babylon. He will even give Nebuchadnezzar control over the wild animals, meaning the Lord will give Nebuchadnezzar absolute dominion over all his empire. All these nations probably refers to Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, the nations to whom Jeremiah delivered his message to their ambassadors in *27:1-11*. These may be the same kingdoms who were plotting with Egypt to revolt against Babylon when they learned of a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon itself. The setting of Zedekiah's trip to Babylon in 593 after the revolt was put down by Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon in 594 makes sense of the context of *chapters 27-28*. The Lord tells Jeremiah to tell Hananiah he was wrong. His prophecy of peace and return is false!

Then in *28:15-16* Jeremiah is given a personal message for Hananiah himself. God has not sent him. He has persuaded Judah to trust in lies like his hometown of Gibeon. Therefore God will remove Hananiah from the face of the earth. The Lord says this very year he will die because he has preached rebellion against the Lord! *Verse 17* adds the chilling detail that two months later in the seventh month, October of 593, the prophet Hananiah died.

What happened when the people learned of Hananiah's death? Jeremiah gave this message to him privately and there is no evidence he called him out in the temple to deliver the

Lord's death sentence. Yet surely after the incident in the temple with the breaking of the yoke, the people were watching what would happen to the two prophets. Their messages were so diametrically opposed something had to give. Hananiah's death would have been vindication for Jeremiah before many of the people and a warning to the other court prophets. Unfortunately, most of them didn't listen and they kept clinging to the official theology right up to the bitter end, rather than face their rebellion and sin. Lies are a powerful tool in the arsenal of the enemy because they keep us from hearing the truth, repenting and following the Lord. Listened to long enough the lies become our truth and we are trapped and unable to repent. That is what happened to Hananiah and it cost him his life. The only defense is a constant vigilance using the Word of God as our protection and check. As John says in *1 John 4:1*, test the prophets!

Chapter 29:

29:1-3 - This introduction to Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon was probably written by Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary and editor of his prophecy. The letter is written after 597 when Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem the first time and sent Jehoiachin, his mother, the court officials and leaders of Jerusalem and Judah, and the craftsmen and artisans into exile. It is addressed to the surviving elders, priests, prophets and others. Jeremiah gave the letter to Elasah, son of Shaphan who was King Josiah's secretary, and Gemariah, son of Hilkiyah who was high priest during Josiah's reign and the priest who found the Book of the Law in the temple. These are men Jeremiah watched grow up and are now on a mission for King Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Jeremiah had probably known Elasah and Gemariah most of their lives and knew they would not refuse to take the letter to the priests and elders in exile in Babylon.

The letter itself could have been viewed as treasonous by some in Zedekiah's court. It was in complete contradiction to the official theology. Since Zedekiah is still king this is written after 597 and before 586. If the order in Jeremiah means anything here it is probably written after Zedekiah's mission to Babylon in 593, but that is not certain. If that is the case, then Jeremiah is trying to tell the exiles not to get their hopes up because they are not coming home.

29:4-9 - The letter is God's Word to the exiles. God tells them that it is he who has carried them into exile away from Jerusalem and their homes. His counsel to them is to settle down in Babylon. Plant gardens, marry and have families, and find wives and husbands for your sons and daughters. Increase in number; grow as a community. This is a call to get on with life. From *Psalms 137* we know that the exiles were extremely depressed and unsure how they were to continue living away from Jerusalem. Since they had so paganized their religion of Yahweh, it was natural to assume the pagan idea that outside Yahweh's "territory" he had no influence and power. *Jeremiah, Ezekiel* and *Isaiah* all help the exiles understand that idea is completely false. God is the Almighty Lord of history itself and the exiles are in his hands. He sent them to Babylon and he still controls their future. They are in his hands. Jeremiah's letter becomes a comforting and encouraging one.

God tells them to seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which he carried them. Pray for it, because if it prospers they will prosper. He is talking about Babylon! The exiles are to pray for its peace and prosperity and to do everything they can to ensure it. *Daniel* becomes an example of this idea yet without giving up his faith in Yahweh. The exiles were to learn an important lesson that the Jews would have to understand from this time forth. They were to learn how to be Jews outside of Judea and Jerusalem, and what it meant to follow God in a strange

land. This is the beginnings of the Diaspora or dispersion, and from this time on there will always be more Jews who live outside Judea than inside it. There will be more Jews born outside the land than in it and raised having never been to Jerusalem. Yet they are still Jews. What does that mean? Jeremiah's letter is the start of helping them sort through those issues. It would take the missions of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, a century and a half later during the Persian period to solidify their understanding.

Jeremiah includes a further warning against believing the false prophets who are prophesying the exiles will return soon to Jerusalem. He mentions the word diviners too. Divination was forbidden to the Jews by the Law of Moses. It is possible that some among the exiles and false prophets were practicing this occult art, reading the entrails of animals for portents of the future. These would have been people who said they worshipped Yahweh but had become thoroughly paganized. God says he has not sent them and they are speaking lies. Do not listen to them. The false prophets would have still been spouting the false official theology that somehow even now God would bring the exiles back because King Jehoiachin was of David's line and the Lord's temple still stood in Jerusalem. Jeremiah's letter is trying to kill the last vestiges of that false theology among the exiles.

29:10-14 - Jeremiah tells the exiles the Lord promises to bring them back to "*this place*", meaning Jerusalem, when the 70 years are completed for Babylon. Many people assume that Jeremiah's 70 years are literal and equate them with the time of the first exile or destruction of Jerusalem to the time of Cyrus' decree in 538. The problem is the math doesn't work out. If one counts back 70 years from 538 as your starting point one gets 608, which is a year after Josiah's death in battle at Megiddo against Neco. Jehoiachim who was king at that time was an Egyptian vassal, not Babylonian. Not until after the battle of Carchemish in 605 did Judah become a Babylonian vassal state. 608 does not work. If one takes 597 as one's starting point it is only 59 years, and it is only 48 years if one uses 586 and the destruction of Jerusalem as the starting point. The only number that adds up close to 70 is from 586 to 515, the year of the second temple's dedication; that is 71 years. The number Jeremiah writes here therefore must be symbolic because it is not literal using any reasonable starting point. The destruction of the first temple and dedication and completion of the second is the closest. I do not believe that is coincidental, however, the problem is Jeremiah does not speak to the rebuilding of a destroyed temple in his letter to the exiles. He speaks about their return to the Promiseland. If the number for Babylon is 70 years, 7 x 10 is a very symbolic number in Hebrew thought and represents the completion of God's plan for Babylon and the exiles. That is the far more likely interpretation of the 70 years rather than a literal time frame.

When God's plan is complete for Babylon and her control over God's people (70 years) then God will fulfill his promise and bring the Jews back to the land. Jeremiah then says God has plans for the exiles; plans to prosper them and not to harm them. He wants to give them hope and a future. This famous verse is often taken out of context to speak to people about the Lord's plan for their lives. In context it must have been a revelation to the exiles because the best of Judah had been carried into exile in 597 and King Jehoiachin was in a Babylonian prison. They had begun to think God had abandoned them. Now Jeremiah tells them the Lord has not abandoned them because he has plans for them, a future for them. They can hope in the Lord. They are still his people!

When he brings them back to the land they will call upon the Lord and he will answer them. When they seek the Lord with all their heart they will find him. This is a reverse of what

God had told Jeremiah to say to the king, his court and the people of Judah. God had told Jeremiah in *7:16* and *11:14* not to pray for the people anymore because God would not listen. In *Jeremiah 14:12* the Lord said even if they fasted and prayed to the Lord he would not listen to their cries because he had determined to judge the people for their sins and idolatry. Now that they have been chastised God is ready to hear them again if they seek him. This is a remarkable prophecy because it says God has not totally rejected his people. As the official theology collapsed under the weight of events the natural conclusion was that God had rejected the Jews and they were no longer God's people. The covenant was finished. *Jeremiah* tells the exiles the exact opposite is true. God still has a plan for them. He has not rejected them, he has chastised them. Now they need to seek the Lord with all their hearts and pray to him. When they do he will listen and they will find him. This is a wonderful picture of God's first desire which is to forgive and not to punish. It is a reminder to us after we have suffered God's discipline to return to the Lord. He wants us to be in fellowship with him. His desire is to give us a hope and a future and for us to know him and seek him.

God says he will bring the exiles back from captivity. Notice it is not in two years, as the false prophet Hananiah had said. It will be 70, the time of the Lord's plan and its completion. There is a long time of exile ahead. Yet there is also the promise of return from the Lord. He will gather the exiles from all the nations and places he has banished them, which includes Babylon, and he will bring them back to the place from which he carried them into exile, which is Judah and Jerusalem. That promise was literally fulfilled in 538 when Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem according to the command of Cyrus the Great, king of Persia. He had conquered the Babylonian empire and was now in control of the Middle East. His policy was one of tolerance and not exile. God the Lord of history had fulfilled his promise to his people!

29:15-19 - Jeremiah continues his letter to the exiles by shifting his focus to the false prophets speaking to the exiles in Babylon. People were saying that the Lord had raised up prophets for them in Babylon who were saying that because King Zedekiah sits on David's throne Jerusalem will be spared and the exiles will shortly return home. They were telling the people what they wanted to hear rather than the truth God wanted spoken. God *HAD* raised up a prophet for the exiles, *Ezekiel*. He however spoke essentially the same message as *Jeremiah* and did not support the false prophets and the official theology. You can hear some of that official theology reflected in Jeremiah's comments here. Jeremiah writes the exiles to correct their false understanding of what is going to happen to them and to Jerusalem. God has determined he will destroy the city and will send war, famine and plague against it. The exiles are not to believe the words of the false prophets because God is going to judge King Zedekiah, Jerusalem and the Jewish nation for not listening to him. He has sent them his servants the prophets, like *Jeremiah*, to call the people back to the Lord but they have ignored his Word. Even the exiles have not listened to God. Therefore Jerusalem will not be spared. The temple and a king from David's line will not make any difference. God is judging Judah for her sins and idolatry.

This paragraph is in marked contrast to the first two paragraphs of Jeremiah's letter. In the first two paragraphs he reminds the exiles that God still loves them, has a plan for them and will bring them back to the land when the time for judgment is over. Here he clearly states that their return will not be immediate as the false prophets have said. God is not finished judging his rebellious people, including the exiles. They will watch and see Jerusalem destroyed like a basket of spoiled figs that are thrown out because they cannot be eaten.

29:20-23 - Jeremiah specifically names two "*prophets*" who are speaking lies in the name of the Lord; Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah. Nothing more about them is known outside of Jeremiah's mentioning their names in his letter. They were exiles who must have been part of the country's leadership when Nebuchadnezzar included them in the first deportation in 597. Ahab and Zedekiah were proclaiming that the exiles would soon go home and God would spare Jerusalem. God says he will hand them both over to Nebuchadnezzar who will put them to death before all the exiles. Their deaths will be so shocking and horrible that the exiles will start using a curse that says, "*The Lord treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.*" Obviously they would be killed by being burned alive. Nebuchadnezzar threw his enemies who would not worship his image into a fiery furnace in *Daniel 3*, so this is not out of the ordinary for Nebuchadnezzar to do. God will demonstrate that he has not sent Ahab and Zedekiah. The Lord says the two men have done outrageous things among the exiles. The word for *outrageous* means disgraceful and profane things. They have openly committed adultery with their neighbor's wives and have spoken lies in the Lord's Name which he did not tell them to speak. God knows it and is witness to it!

From an historical standpoint Ahab and Zedekiah are simply two exiles who were false prophets and were deceiving the people by speaking for Yahweh when he did not send them. From a spiritual standpoint it can hardly be coincidental that they are named after one of the most evil and idolatrous kings in Israel's history and the last, cowardly, immoral and idolatrous king in Judah's history. The pedigree of their names is not a good one in the Biblical account. They live up to their namesakes and Jeremiah says God will punish them. The Lord continues to expose the false prophets who speak lies to the people and give them false hopes and lift up his true prophets who expose the people's sin before the Lord and try and bring them to repentance. It was the Lord's true prophets like *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* who helped the exiles make sense out of what happened to them and turned them back to God rather than rejecting him totally. Without *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel's* missions it is doubtful the faith of the Jews would have survived the calamities of 597 and 586.

29:24-32 - Jeremiah now addresses a third false prophet among the exiles in Babylon, Shemaiah the Nehelamite. He is otherwise unknown except for the reference here in *Jeremiah*. His town or village of Nehelam is also unknown, though it must have been in Judah. This message comes to Jeremiah after he sent the letter to the exiles but it does concern that letter.

God says Shemaiah sent letters in his own name claiming to speak for the Lord to Zephaniah the priest and all the priests in Jerusalem. Zephaniah was the chief priest during this time and according to *2 Kings 25* was captured when Jerusalem fell, taken before Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah and executed in 586. Shemaiah told Zephaniah that he was appointed priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the Lord, the temple. Jehoiada was the priest who hid King Jehoash when he was an infant and raised him in secret until he could take back the throne from the evil queen Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The Jehoiada mentioned here in *Jeremiah* must have been a namesake. Shemaiah tells Zephaniah that he has authority and should put any madman who acts like a prophet in chains. He asks why he has not reprimanded Jeremiah "*who poses as a prophet*" among you. He tells Zephaniah about the letter Jeremiah sent to the exiles telling them to settle down in Babylon because it is going to be a long time before they finally get to return home. Shemaiah is perhaps another of the court prophets of King Jehoiachin who was taken into exile in Babylon in 597. As such he adheres to the official theology about the temple and the king from David's line just like Ahab and Zedekiah in 29:20-

23. Shemaiah however is not only speaking false prophecy to the exiles he is still trying to influence events in Jerusalem and silence God's true prophet Jeremiah.

Shemaiah's plan backfires however when Zephaniah reads his letter to Jeremiah. The text implies that right away the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah about Shemaiah. God tells Jeremiah to send this message to the exiles about Shemaiah. Because Shemaiah has prophesied in the Lord's name even though the Lord did not send him and has led you to believe a lie, namely that Jeremiah is a false prophet and the exiles will soon come home, God will punish him. He will have no one left as descendants among the people. His family will be wiped out. He will not see the good thing God will do for the people, meaning he will never come home in the return but will die in Babylon. God will do this because he has preached rebellion against the Lord.

The cost of false prophecy was death because it led the people to continue in disobedience and rebellion. The exile was designed to bring the Jews to repentance not raise false hopes of an early restoration and return. God needed to completely obliterate the false official theology. Unfortunately the false prophets tried to keep it alive and it was hindering God's true work with his people. Shemaiah is one example of what a false prophet did.

One can see how confused people would be over who was really speaking for the Lord. It is quite possible that the reason we have the *Book of Jeremiah*, besides Baruch's work to preserve it, is because everything Jeremiah prophesied came true and he survived the calamity of 586. Events themselves proved Jeremiah was a true prophet of the Lord and all the other prophets who were prophesying according to the official theology were proved false. God's Spirit worked in the people to preserve *Jeremiah's* words because he spoke the truth of the Lord. We still have the same problem today, trying to figure out who is a true prophet of the Lord. However, we have some things the people in Jeremiah's day did not have. We have the Holy Spirit in us who gives us discernment and we have the complete Bible, God's Word, to help us test the prophets. The dilemma still remains however, who truly speaks for the Lord and who is speaking the lies of the enemy.

Chapter 30:

30:1-3 - God tells Jeremiah to write in a book all the words he has spoken to him. There are some passages in *Jeremiah* that repeat themselves, like 6:12-15 & 8:10-12 or 23:19-10 & 30:23-24. The process of transferring Jeremiah's sermons and oracles to a written text included such repetition. It is also possible that like Jesus, Jeremiah repeated himself on purpose in various settings because the message he was giving needed to be repeated. We know from other parts of the book that Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary was instrumental in gathering Jeremiah's prophecies, setting them down in writing and arranging the material. See 36:32.

God tells Jeremiah the days are coming when he will bring his whole people, Israel and Judah, back from exile and restore them to the land. Israel had gone into exile in 721 and had been scattered and absorbed into the Assyrian Empire. There were a few from the northern tribes who had fled south to Judah at that time and swelled Judah's population. Jeremiah's words tell us that God has preserved a remnant of those ten northern tribes that were part of the north kingdom and will along with Judah bring them back to the land.

30:4-7 - God gives Jeremiah a message for Israel *AND* Judah. This is curious because Israel as a nation, the north kingdom, had ceased to exist as of 721, at least 120 years prior to Jeremiah's prophecy. But God still has a plan for Israel and the implication of Jeremiah's words is that the

Lord has preserved a remnant of the ten northern tribes, otherwise they could never return to the land the Lord gave them. Therefore the ten northern tribes are not completely lost in God's sight, even though historically they disappeared. This may explain the prophetess Anna in *Luke 2:36* and how she could be from the tribe of Asher, a northern tribe which was supposed to have become extinct.

God says his people hear cries of terror and not peace. They are attacked. Strong men are bent over in pain as if they are women in labor. Their faces are pail. A day of trouble is coming to Jacob. There has never been a day like it in Israel's history. It will be a time of trouble and affliction but Israel will be saved out of it. In the context of Jeremiah's prophecy he is speaking of 586 and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians. When Jeremiah wrote this it had not yet happened. If the order of the prophecy is any guide in this part of *Jeremiah* this is probably near the time he writes the letter to the exiles which would put it sometime between 597 and 586. That however is not certain.

Dispensational prophecy scholars say this is a reference to the Great Tribulation in the end times before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. That is possible and the ultimate fulfillment of Jeremiah's words may come during that time. However, in context I don't think Jeremiah is looking beyond the destruction of Jerusalem. There is only one other time in Israel's history that can compare to 586 and the Babylonian's burning of the temple and Jerusalem. That is 70 AD and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. That time in the New Testament is also linked by Jesus to the end times. Both may be types of the final "*time of trouble*" for God's people before the Messiah returns and completes his kingdom. The bottom line is the promise at the end of *verse 7*; God will save Jacob out of this time of trouble, even though it is unprecedented in their history.

30:8-9 - Jeremiah continues his message about God bringing Israel back to the land after "*a time of trouble for Jacob*." In his message *Jeremiah* echoes many of the other prophets. Liberal scholars want to see these messages as not written by Jeremiah and added later because they are so different from his unrelenting criticism of the last kings of Judah. Jeremiah is not a prophet of hope therefore he could not have written these messages. That of course is nonsense. It artificially imposes what Jeremiah could and could not have written according to a handful of scholars' opinions. It is not based on the text as we have it but on a perception of Jeremiah's prophecy and what it should say. It fails to take the text at face value and refuses to admit that Jeremiah stands in the long line of God's prophets who spoke both judgment and hope to God's people!

"*In that day*", meaning the time of trouble, God will break the yoke off his people's necks. He will tear off their bonds and foreigners will no longer enslave them. When God frees them from their oppressors they will serve the Lord and David their king. In fact the Lord will raise up David for them. Jeremiah lived at a time when the line of David failed, and he saw the last ruling king of David's line, Zedekiah. He looks forward to a time when God will raise up David as king over his people again. The basic meaning of the word raise up is to rise up from a prostrate position. Here in context this becomes a prophecy of the Messiah. Someday, in a future time, a time of trouble for Jacob, God will raise up David, Israel's king and will deliver his people from their bondage. This is a veiled prophecy of Jesus' resurrection. God will do this for his people. *Romans 1:4* says that Jesus was shown to be the Messiah through the Holy Spirit by his resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the true king from David's line whom God will raise up in the last days. This prophecy also repeats themes in *2 Samuel 7* and God's covenant with David

that Israel would have peace in the land and freedom from oppression from her enemies. Jeremiah adds his voice to the other prophets who proclaim that in the last days God will bring his people back to the land and raise up David their king who will rule over them. He will not be like Jehoiachim or Zedekiah. He will follow the Lord and rule his people with justice and righteousness!

30:10-11 - God tells the exiles do not fear. He will save them out of the far country to which he sent them. They will once again have peace and security in the land and no one will make them afraid. In fact, though the exiles question whether God still loves them he is with them and will save them. Jeremiah's words here are similar to Isaiah's words to the exiles in *Isaiah 40-66*. He is reassuring the exiles that God has not forgotten them even though they have endured his judgment and discipline.

God says even if he completely destroys the nations to whom he has sent the Jews he will not completely destroy them. He will discipline them but only with justice, only with what they deserve. He will not let them go entirely unpunished. They must bear the consequences of their rebellion and idolatry against the Lord. Yet God's ultimate plan is not to destroy the Jews but to save the Jews. That implies he still has a purpose for them.

30:12-17 - Jeremiah returns to the theme of judgment and God's punishment for their sin. Judah's wound is incurable and beyond healing. No one is left who will plead their cause before the Lord. There remains no healing for their situation. No allies will come to their aid. Here Jeremiah is probably referring to Egypt. The Egyptians did not lift a finger to help when Nebuchadnezzar finally invaded Judah a second time in 587 and laid siege to Jerusalem. They stayed beyond the Nile. Jeremiah says they care nothing for you, which was true. Egypt only helped Judah when it was in her interests to do so. God has struck at Judah as an enemy would attack. Her king and most of her officials, priests and leading citizens are in exile in Babylon. A puppet king is ruling over them. Even if Zedekiah is a son of Josiah, yet he is beholden to Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 15 expresses the core message of Jeremiah's prophecy. Their wound is so great because of their guilt before God and their many sins. It is because of them that God has brought this punishment upon them. This idea was *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel's* gift to the Jews because it enabled them to make sense of the disasters of 597 and 586 and allowed their faith in Yahweh to remain intact. He had punished them for their sins which they deserved but he had not forgotten them or abandoned them. They were still the Lord's people.

God says all who have devoured you, including Egypt and Babylon, will be devoured themselves. Their days are numbered too. Those who have plundered Judah and Jerusalem God will plunder because he is Lord of history. No nation, even the most powerful, is immune from the Lord's justice and judgment. God may use the Babylonians to exact his justice on Judah but he will also hold them accountable for their atrocities. *Habakkuk* shared that same insight and theme in his prophecy, written around the same time as *Jeremiah's*. Unlike Babylon God will restore Judah to health and heal her wounds. They are called outcast and Zion is a city no one cares about among the nations, but the Lord cares. He will bring them back after their time of punishment. God's judgment will only be for a time. It is not permanent. We need to remember that today when we undergo God's discipline to bring us to repent for our sins. It is not permanent. He will restore us and heal us again.

30:18-22 - Jeremiah continues his message about the return of Judah and the exiles to the Promiseland. God will have compassion on Jacob and his ruined houses. The city, meaning Jerusalem, will be rebuilt on her ruins. This was literally fulfilled in *Nehemiah's* day in 445 about 150 later when the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. God promises the palace of the king will stand again. From the houses in the city songs of thanksgiving and rejoicing will come once again. God will add to the population of Jerusalem and its numbers will increase. The people of the city will be honored and not disdained. By Jesus' day this was certainly the case as Jerusalem was considered a temple city with special rights and privileges under Roman law. After the Maccabean revolt it once again gained status as the capital of Israel. Herod the Great built many expensive projects in and around Jerusalem to beautify it besides the remodeling of the temple. God fulfilled his promises to his people. This prophecy can be seen as fulfilled in Jewish history and does not need to be an eschatological promise reserved for the end times though it could speak to the New Jerusalem of *Revelation 21 & 22*.

God says the city's population including her children will grow and flourish. God will punish all who oppress Jerusalem and Judah. Then in *verse 21* Jeremiah says their leader will be one of their own and their ruler will arise from among them. Ruler literally means one who has dominion and reign. The word refers to a king. This is a Messianic verse and speaks of God raising up a ruler one day who will emerge from among the people, meaning he will not be a foreign king but a Jew. Jesus grew up among the people and was "*one of their own*." He was not half-Jewish like the Herods, but a full descendant of Abraham and David. The Lord says he will bring this leader close to him because who would dare come close to the Lord unless the Lord invited him. If this is a Messianic passage, which I believe it is, then God says he will have a close personal relationship with the Messiah. The Lord Jesus was not only God's Son but he was intimately close to the Father and had a unique and special relationship with God that marked his life. This passage is fulfilled only in Jesus as Messiah.

When God restores Jerusalem and brings his ruler close to him then his desire that he expresses many, many times in the Old Testament will be fulfilled. The Jews will be his people and God will be their God. That saying summarizes God's covenant purpose from Abraham all the way through Jesus to the church. He wants a people for himself with whom he has a deep and lasting personal relationship and who will obey him and follow him. Through that people God intends to work out his plan of salvation for the world. *Jeremiah* will repeat this line in his prophecy of the New Covenant. It is the purpose of God in history!

30:23-24 - Like the previous prophecies in this section after Jeremiah speaks of God's ultimate restoration of Judah, he returns to the theme of judgment and the current situation. The storm of the Lord is about to burst forth in wrath. God is going to take out his vengeance upon the wicked. His anger will not turn back until it has accomplished his purpose of judgment and discipline upon Judah. This very definitely speaks to the current situation in Jeremiah's day with the Babylonians looming over Jerusalem like a shadow. God is not going to relent in his judgment upon Jerusalem. It is possible that Jeremiah repeats the theme of judgment here just in case any of the exiles or people of Judah thought he was embracing the official theology. Restoration and deliverance in Jeremiah only happens after God's judgment and punishment for their idolatry and sin. There is no escaping God's discipline towards them.

One could also take this passage eschatologically, and see this as a statement of the ultimate judgment of God upon evil in the whole world and not just in Judah. The wicked here are not just the Jewish wicked but the entire world's wicked. God has a day when he will execute

justice upon those throughout the human race who have rejected him and his ways. I think the immediate interpretation of this passage is to Judah in Jeremiah's day, but this is one of those telescoping passages in the prophets where both a near application and a far application are warranted. Jesus does this frequently in his Olivet Discourse on the end times in the gospels. See *Matthew 24* and *Mark 13*.

Jeremiah says in days to come the Jews will understand God's judgment and what is about to come. They will all have first-hand experience of the storm of the wrath of God breaking over them. They will also come to understand God's ultimate plan to judge sin in the human race. God has a day set aside to judge the wicked. In other prophets it is frequently referred to as the Day of the Lord.

Chapter 31:

31:1-6 – “*At that time*” refers to the end times or to the time after God's punishment when he gathers Israel back to the land and raises up David to be their king. At that time God will be God of all the tribes and clans of Israel and they will be his people. This is a rephrasing of *30:22*. Jeremiah emphasizes that all of Israel will be with the Lord. Scholars talk about the ten lost tribes of Israel. They may be lost to history but they are not lost to God! A remnant of each tribe must have somehow been preserved within Judah when the north kingdom fell.

The Lord says those who have survived the sword, meaning God's judgment, will find favor in the desert, in the wilderness. God will come to his people to give them rest. The word translated desert in the NIV most often means the wilderness or uninhabited land. This is language reminiscent of the Exodus from Egypt when God took care of Israel in the wilderness. He will do so again when he restores his people “*at that time.*” The Lord came to Israel once before in the wilderness and proclaimed his love for his people. Loving-kindness in *verse 3* is *hesed* in Hebrew, God's covenant love. God will renew that love for his people and build them up again. Their numbers will swell and rejoicing and singing will return to them after such a time of punishment. They will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria and enjoy the harvest it brings. God is speaking here of the whole land not just Judah.

There will come a day when the watchmen will cry out let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God. From 930 on, after Solomon's death, people of the north would journey to Jerusalem to worship at the temple and celebrate the feasts of Israel, yet once Jeroboam I built the two calf idol shrines those pilgrimages became fewer and fewer. Israel was drawn away from the worship of Yahweh at his temple in Jerusalem. Jeremiah tells us that a day will come in the future when the whole people of Israel, all twelve tribes, will see Zion, Jerusalem as the center of their worship of God. They will all worship the Lord from Dan to Beersheba. The Lord will be the God of all of Israel in the end times when he sends the Messiah.

31:7-9 - God invites his people and maybe all peoples to shout for joy. He calls Israel the foremost of nations, which is ludicrous from an historical, political or military standpoint. Yet from God's point of view they are the most important nation on earth! God invites all people to pray that he would save the remnant of Israel his people.

He says he will bring them from the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Babylon is frequently seen as being from the north, as are all the major Mesopotamian powers. Babylon is geographically literally east yet their armies always came from the north down the Fertile Crescent and not east across the Syrian Desert. God will gather his remnant and they will not all be strong and battle ready. Many will be blind and lame, with pregnant women and others

in labor. Yet a great throng will return. God is describing a people who are not the foremost of nations from any human point of view. He is describing a weak and hurting people who have survived but not without suffering. Yet, a new generation is on its way. The people will survive. The population of the Jews will be renewed in another generation. It is about to be born, a generation born in exile or born during the return. Historically this was true. The population of Judea and Jerusalem swelled due to the return of the exiles not from the poor who were left in the land.

Those who return will come home with weeping and they will pray as God brings them back. The Lord will lead them beside streams of water and on a level path. Ezra describes his return to Jerusalem in *Ezra 7-8* as being bathed in prayer and that the Lord provided for them all the way home. God will bring them back and care for them on the way because he is Israel's father and Ephraim is his firstborn son. Ephraim is most often in the prophets a name used to describe the northern tribes of Israel that made up the north kingdom of Israel. Jeremiah says God will bring them back to the land because he cares for them like a father cares for his firstborn son. Here *Jeremiah* uses a metaphor that describes the relationship God has with the northern tribes rather than a historically accurate description. Ephraim was a son of Joseph who was the eleventh of the twelve sons of Jacob. The point is God still has a plan for the "lost tribes" of Israel. Somehow he has preserved them and will bring them back to the land along with Judah. *Ezekiel* expresses a similar idea in his vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones in *Ezekiel 37*. As *Jeremiah* has said in *30:9* he will bring all of Israel back, all twelve tribes to the land and give them David their king to reign over them. The return *Jeremiah* describes here therefore is probably eschatological in nature, though it was partially fulfilled when the exiles of Judah returned to the land. Some of the northern tribes were preserved in Judah after the fall of Samaria and some of them must have returned as well with the Jews. The point is God will save his people, all of his people!

31:10-14 - God speaks to the nations of the earth, even to the distant coastlands. He will gather scattered Israel and watch over them like a shepherd. The Lord will bring them back to the land he gave them. He will redeem them from nations stronger than they are. Historically this has proven true. God has watched over the Jews to preserve them when so many times in history they were threatened with extinction. Now today many are returning to the land of Israel.

His people will come to Zion with shouts of joy and celebration. They will rejoice over the bounty of the Lord in the land. Their grain, new wine and olives will flourish as will their flocks and herds. I think of what Ze'ev our Israeli guide said when the radio message went out in 1967 that the Temple Mount was secure in Israeli hands. The whole Israeli army rejoiced. Today in Israel one sees a bountiful land that produces many crops and is wonderfully fertile and productive. Israel even grows fruits and vegetables to export to other countries; it is so fertile. As Ze'ev also said, "the land responds to the Jews." God has already started to fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy.

God will turn their mourning into dancing and their sorrow into joy. His people he will fill with bounty and abundance. He will comfort them and not punish them. Today many in Israel experience this blessing from God. He has begun to bring them back to the land. Even though there are still threats all around from their neighbors and even internally from the Palestinians yet the Jews continue to return to Israel and swell its population. Now the number of Jews who live in Israel is approaching the number killed in the Holocaust by the Nazis in Europe. Is what is happening in modern day Israel a direct fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy? At least some of it

is, but this prophecy is also eschatological and it is clear that much remains to unfold of God's plan for his ancient people. They have still not recognized their Messiah and until they do God's promises to them will remain only partially fulfilled.

31:15 - This verse is used by *Matthew* as fulfilled prophecy after the slaughter of all male children under two years of age in Bethlehem by Herod the Great in response to the Magi's visit seeking the king of the Jews. *Matthew* says that incident was prophesied by *Jeremiah*.

Ramah is in the territory of Benjamin just north of Jerusalem. Rachel was Benjamin's mother. Jeremiah says there will be great weeping and mourning over the children lost in slaughter. Their grief will be so great they will refuse to be comforted because their children have been killed. In the context of *Jeremiah* he is referring to the slaughter of people, including children, by the Babylonian armies as they came to attack Jerusalem. They would have had to cross through Benjamin's territory to get to the city from the north which was the normal route for invaders who were seeking to lay siege to Jerusalem. Jeremiah has been contrasting the time of God's judgment against Judah and the Lord's gracious promise to bring them back to the land after that time of punishment. This verse about Rachel weeping for her children is a passage of judgment and grief. Jeremiah will follow it with a message about stopping their weeping because there is hope for their future.

How is this passage fulfilled in *Matthew's* gospel? From a strict historical viewpoint this does not apply because Ramah is in Benjamin's territory and Bethlehem is in Judah's. It is not the historical details to which *Matthew* calls our attention but the spiritual. The mothers were weeping for their murdered children and would not be consoled. That is why *Matthew* picks this verse to use as fulfilled prophecy. The mothers of Bethlehem weep over the atrocity committed by Herod's troops who are seeking to kill the new king. The terrible thing about that incident is that every baby killed that day by Herod's troops was innocent. Jesus had already been taken away by Joseph and Mary. They were already on their way to Egypt when Herod's soldiers struck the village. It was a brutal, senseless slaughter. It is the mothers' grief in Bethlehem that echoes the mothers' grief in Ramah in the days of *Jeremiah* that fulfills Jeremiah's saying. *Matthew* sees it as pointing to the life of the Messiah, Jesus.

31:16-17 - *Jeremiah* contrasts this message of hope with the message of despair and mourning in *verse 15*. The Lord tells the mothers stop your weeping, calm down. Your work will be rewarded. I think Jeremiah is referring here to faithful mothers who have tried to raise their children to honor the Lord. He is not speaking to the rich and powerful women of Jerusalem who have been corrupted with the city's growing paganism. He is speaking to the village women who live in the towns of the Judean countryside. Those who have tried to teach their children to revere the Lord he has seen and known. Their efforts the Lord will honor. Jeremiah implies that though the nation as a whole deserved punishment yet there were faithful people that still remained within it. It is difficult to understand why when a nation is judged by God faithful people will be caught up in that judgment along with the wicked. However, the Lord will watch out for his people and those who worship and honor him, even in the midst of calamity and judgment.

God tells the mothers of Ramah and of Judah their children will return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for their children because they will see the land again. God will bring them back. In *verse 15* it sounds as if the children are dead and have been killed in the invasion and that is why the mothers weep. In *verse 17* it sounds as if *Jeremiah* is saying the children have

been torn away from their mothers and taken into exile but God will bring them back some day so they do not need to weep and grieve any more. One needs to take the prophecy that way otherwise the contrast between *verse 15* and *verses 16-17* makes no sense. God is telling the faithful mothers of Judah that he will intervene and save their children! There is still hope despite the circumstances they face.

31:18-20 - Jeremiah speaks on behalf of Ephraim, the northern tribes of Israel. God has heard their moaning. He has disciplined Ephraim but he has returned to the Lord. He repented and came back to God. The Lord disgraced Israel and he was ashamed and humiliated. He bore that disgrace but he desires to return to the Lord because the Lord is Ephraim's God. This is a remarkable prophecy because Israel was almost completely given over to paganism. They never had a king who was completely faithful to Yahweh. Once Jeroboam I built the calf shrines at Bethel and Dan, no king tore them down, even Jehu, who was zealous for Yahweh in the beginning. He destroyed Baal worship but not the golden calf idols. For Jeremiah to say someday Ephraim will say, "*the Lord my God*", is a gigantic turn around in Israel's attitude. It points to the fact that Israel has learned its lesson and has understood and accepted God's discipline of them.

Yet how and when will Israel, the northern tribes return to the Lord? Most of them were destroyed by the Assyrian invasion and destruction of Samaria in 721. *Jeremiah* writes this around 590. Somehow God has kept track of the northern tribes. They are not lost to him. He says Ephraim is his dear son in whom the Lord delights. Even though God has spoken against Israel and destroyed their kingdom yet he remembers them and his heart yearns for them in compassion. God will somehow save a remnant of the northern tribes. From an historical point of view the only logical explanation is that a remnant of the northern tribes was preserved in Judah after the destruction of Samaria. Some of the people of Israel must have fled south during the Assyrian invasion and been absorbed into Judah. At least some of that remnant kept their tribal identity. There is also an eschatological explanation. God knows who are his. He knows who among the Jews are descended from the northern tribes represented by Ephraim. He has marked them out to save even though they may have totally lost their tribal identity and consider themselves Jews. Once again *Jeremiah* tells us that the "*lost tribes of Israel*" are not lost to the Lord their God. He will save them in the end.

31:21-22 - God says set up road signs so Israel will know the way back home. He calls Virgin Israel to return to him, to come home to the Lord. God asks how long his unfaithful daughter will wander. Here he calls Israel his daughter. In *verse 20* Ephraim was his dear son. Either way describes Israel as God's children.

The Lord will create a new thing on the earth. A woman will seek a man. The NIV says surround a man. The NLT says Israel will embrace her God. The NASB says a woman will encompass a man. The Hebrew word means surround or encircle, like someone dancing around someone or circling them. It is a curious word and is difficult to translate in this context. That is apparent from the various translations and interpretations of the text. The basic meaning here seems to be Israel will come around Yahweh or circle him like a woman courting a man. That is the upside down image *Jeremiah* is trying to convey. In his time and culture, women did not seek out men, they did not court them. It was the other way around; a man would court a woman. But when God brings Israel back to him they will seek him out and it will be so unexpected and surprising it will be like a woman seeking a man. Israel will seek God just as God sought Israel

and found her. Israel's return to Yahweh will be a complete surprise to the nations and to themselves but not to God. He has planned it and through *Jeremiah* has prophesied it.

This time of return is seen in an already, not yet way in the New Testament as Jews from all over the world came to Jesus as the Messiah from Pentecost onward. Some of those people based on this prophecy in *Jeremiah* must have been from the northern tribes of Israel. The full return of all of God's people in his remnant that he will preserve and save has not yet happened. History awaits that return. Other prophets like *Zechariah* speak to that time. He says in *Zechariah 12* at the last days the Jews will look on him whom they have pierced and weep because of what they had done. Many Jews are today returning to the land of Israel and there is great evangelistic activity as well among the Messianic Jewish community in reaching the Jews both inside and outside Israel. But this prophecy in *Jeremiah* is yet to be fulfilled. Someday all Israel will return to the Lord and seek him, just as Paul says in *Romans 11*. It will occur either right before or right at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus.

31:23-26 - God will bring the Jews back to the land. When he does the Jews will once again use words of blessing about the righteous dwelling, the sacred mountain, meaning the temple on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. In 586 it was destroyed but in 516 the second temple was dedicated. Jeremiah prophesies that even though the temple will be destroyed by the Babylonians it will be rebuilt. God will bring his people back to the land and they will live in Judah and its towns. Farmers and shepherds will once again work the land and tend their flocks. God himself will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.

In *verse 26* Jeremiah comments that he awoke from a pleasant sleep after this vision from the Lord. In the previous chapter he does not say he fell asleep and the Lord spoke to him in a dream. Yet here that is exactly what it appears happened. Jeremiah had a pleasant dream of God restoring the people to the land. God used dreams to speak to his prophet and give him the Word of the Lord concerning his people. Jeremiah promptly wrote down the message in the dream. Peter in *Acts 2*, quoting *Joel 2*, says in the last days when God pours out his Holy Spirit the old men will see visions and young men will dream dreams. There is nothing in the Scriptures to suggest that God has stopped speaking to his people through their dreams. Even there we may hear from God just as Jeremiah did.

31:27-30 - Jeremiah hears another message from God. It does not appear this was in a dream but came to him through the voice of God to him. The days are coming, which can mean both in the near future and in an eschatological future in the end times. In some future time God will renew the houses of Israel and Judah, again the whole people of God and not just the Jews. The Lord will give them new offspring including their animals and flocks. Jeremiah then recalls words he used in his call in *Jeremiah 1*. Just as God uprooted them and tore them down in order to bring disaster upon them and destroy them so God will watch over them to build and to plant. God has punished them but now will restore them.

Jeremiah then quotes a proverb that people used in his day. The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. *Ezekiel* quotes the same proverb in *Ezekiel 18*. Jeremiah says everyone will die for their own sin. Whoever eats sour grapes his own teeth will be set on edge. People had used this proverb to interpret why the terrible things that were happening to Judah were happening. Our ancestors sinned greatly and so we are bearing the brunt of their punishment. Passages like *Exodus 20:4-6*, the second commandment and its forbidding of idols, were used to justify this idea. God said he visited the sins of the parents on

the third and fourth generations of those who disobeyed him. The problem was the people of Jeremiah's day used that idea to avoid responsibility for their own sins. Why is God punishing us? Manasseh sinned. God had declared it. That viewpoint conveniently forgot that Jehoiachim sinned, as did Zedekiah. If they had repented things might have gone differently, just as God delayed his judgment in Josiah's day. The generation that lived through the destruction of Jerusalem had to accept responsibility for their own sinful choices and actions. Their teeth were set on edge not because of what their parents or grandparents had done but because of their own unfaithfulness and idolatry. Their own deeds deserved God's wrath and punishment. This concept of responsibility for one's own sins and bearing the consequences helped the Jews understand what happened to them and interpret events correctly. It was prophetic guidance from *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* that helped them deal with the events of 586 and survive them with their faith intact.

This concept also marks a watershed in the theology of Israel. Each person bears their own responsibility for their sin. Israel's theology was based on the community. One was part of the covenant because one was part of the people. The official theology defined the nations of Israel and especially Judah as being the people of God. Once Judah was destroyed who were God's people? How did one define them? There was no more nation. God had destroyed Judah for her collective sins. *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* begin to help the people move toward the concept of the people of God being made up of individuals who are faithful to God and who take responsibility for their own sins. Those who have a personal relationship with God are the people of God. They are the true Jews. *Jeremiah* in the next section on the New Covenant will take this concept out to its full implications.

31:31-32 - This passage in *Jeremiah* (31:31-34) outlines the fifth and final major covenant of the Old Testament and is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. The first covenant is the rainbow covenant of *Genesis 9*. Second is the covenant with Abraham in *Genesis 12*. Third is the covenant at Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Law in *Exodus 19-20*. Fourth is the covenant with David that sets the stage for all Messianic prophecy in *2 Samuel 7*. And the new covenant of *Jeremiah 31* is the fifth one. The new covenant is taken up by Jesus at the Last Supper and points us to the cross and God's plan of salvation for his people. Some would include in these covenants the covenant with Aaron and his family as priests in *Numbers 18*. However, that covenant is not related to the coming of the Messiah or the whole people of God as the others are. Nor does it have to do with God's overall plan to save the human race. Furthermore, the covenant with Aaron is set aside according to *Hebrews 5* when Jesus comes as a priest not in the order of Aaron but after the order of Melchizedek.

Jeremiah turns from the theme of responsibility for sin in the current generation to a time when God will make a new covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah, the whole people of God. This new covenant will not be like the one he made with their ancestors which they broke. Israel and Judah both rejected Yahweh, even though he brought them out of Egypt; even though he was like a husband to them and they were like his wife. They continued to worship idols and treat each other in unloving ways, violating the Ten Commandments that God had given them. The word the NIV translates husband is *baal*, which can mean master, husband or lord. In the context husband seems the best translation because it expresses God's love and care for them. It also expresses the relationship God has with his people. Notice as well that *Jeremiah* sees the old covenant in communal terms. It was between God and all of Israel as a people. Who was Israel? Israel was all those whom the Lord delivered from Egypt and those who were descended from

them. Throughout their history the prophets kept emphasizing faith and obedience to God. Now Jeremiah is going to redefine who makes up Israel. Israel in the new covenant is going to be those who "*know the Lord*". That means people will be part of the new covenant if they have a relationship with the Lord personally and individually. There will still be a people of God but they will be made up of individuals who know him rather than simply all Israelites by birth. The new covenant will require a new birth! Jeremiah implies that the new covenant God will make with Israel in the time to come will not be so easily broken as the first one.

31:33-34 - Jeremiah describes the new covenant. God will put his Law in the hearts of his people and not on tablets of stone. In other words the will of God will be planted in us internally rather than externally. From a New Testament perspective this is a reference to the Holy Spirit's work in us, growing God's character in us so we obey him as we walk in him. Obedience to God's will in us will flow from the Holy Spirit in us not from our efforts to obey God's Law. This is a fundamental difference between the old covenant and the new. Even though Jeremiah does not specifically mention the Holy Spirit here that is precisely who he is talking about. Ezekiel, writing to the exiles in Babylon in *Ezekiel 36*, speaks of a time in the future when God will put a new heart in the people by giving them his Spirit to live in them. They will no longer have a heart of stone but God will give them a heart of flesh and they will obey him and love him. The metaphors are different but the ideas are exactly the same between the two prophets. It is not insignificant that they prophesy during the same time and to the same people, one in Jerusalem and one in Babylon.

Jeremiah then says God's goal with the new covenant is the same as his goal with the old one. He will be their God and they will be his people. That is the theme God has stated again and again throughout the Old Testament. He will say the same thing in the New Testament as well. In many ways it is the main theme of all of Scripture.

The key ingredient in the new covenant besides God putting his will within us, is those who belong to the new covenant will know the Lord personally. They will have an intimate relationship with him as an individual person. If God had an intimate relationship with all of Israel as a people under the old covenant, which they broke, then he will have that same kind of relationship with each person under the new covenant. They will all know the Lord from the least to the greatest. No one will have to teach another how to know the Lord because they will all know him. Everyone who comes into the new covenant will have a personal relationship with the Lord God.

Within that new covenant God will forgive the sins of all who know him and remember them no more. Forgiveness stands at the center of this new covenant God will bring to Israel. His forgiveness will come to them through his grace and a relationship with the Lord not through any works that they do.

The new covenant will be based on a relationship with the Lord. It will be designed to build a new and faithful people of God made up of individuals with whom he has a personal relationship by faith. God will put his will into each one who knows him so that obedience will flow out of a transformed heart. God will forgive the sins of those who know him within this new covenant. All who want to know the Lord and submit to him can know him and be a part of this new covenant community. This covenant will be unbreakable unlike the first one.

The Lord Jesus during the Lord's Supper while he was eating the final Passover with his disciples on the night he was betrayed invoked the new covenant of *Jeremiah 31*. He specifically quotes Jeremiah's words and ties his death and sacrifice on the cross to the beginnings of the new

covenant. It is through Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection that the forgiveness of sins *Jeremiah* speaks of here may be given to each of us who believe in Jesus the Messiah. When we do and Jesus is now Lord of our lives, he gives us his Holy Spirit to live in us and transform us. Jesus completely fulfills the new covenant of *Jeremiah*. *Hebrews* concludes in *Hebrews 10* that God's new covenant in Jesus Christ now replaces the old covenant given at Mt. Sinai. Jesus will do what the Law could not do; help us obey God from the heart so that he is our God and we are his people.

The great irony of this passage is it is spoken by the one prophet who faithfully and unflinchingly prophesied judgment upon Judah. Jeremiah is so consistent in his message that some liberal scholars doubt he wrote this passage about the new covenant. That of course is ludicrous but it does raise the issue of how different this message is compared to the rest of his prophecy. The key to understanding Jeremiah here is to note that he prophesies the new covenant's coming in a future time a long way off. He implies that this new covenant will not even be made during the time of the return of the exiles but even farther into the future. Jeremiah does express hope but he pushes it out way past the time of punishment and return. In some future day God will make this new covenant with his people. In fact it would be some 620 years into the future when a young rabbi from Nazareth, during the key celebration of the old covenant, would invoke Jeremiah's words and signal God's people that the Lord was ready through him to bring the new covenant in his blood for the forgiveness of human sin.

31:35-37 - The Jews would have wondered if God would fulfill his words about a new covenant since they were experiencing their just punishment after breaking the covenant at Sinai God had made with them as a people. In some future time after God had made the new covenant what would prevent God from setting it aside too if Israel sinned and rejected God again? What guarantee did they have the same thing would not happen all over again? Jeremiah answers their questions and doubts.

God is the Almighty Creator. He is the one who has set the sun to order the day and the moon and stars to order the night sky. The Lord is the one who governs the seas and sets their boundaries. Only if the sun stops shining, the moon and stars fail and the seas vanish will the Lord's covenant ever stop between him and his people Israel. As sure and certain as the order of creation that God made so is his promise that the descendants of Israel shall never cease to be a nation before the Lord. This is God's guarantee that Israel will always be a people and the Jews will always have descendants who will know the Lord. God has a plan for the Jews that is fulfilled through the Lord Jesus Christ. There has always been a remnant of the Jewish people in the church, the true Israel of God and there always will be. Even today, after all that the Jews have suffered since they as a people rejected Jesus as their Messiah there are still Jews in the church. We as Gentile Christians have been grafted into God's people as Paul says in *Romans 11*. But even though we have been included into the new covenant, it was given and belongs to Israel. God has been gracious to us and allowed us as Gentiles to be included in his people by faith, even as *Isaiah* had prophesied and the Apostle Paul had foreseen and witnessed. See *Romans 15*.

God says if the heavens can be measured and the foundations of the earth below can be known and searched out then will he reject the descendants of Israel totally because of what they have done. What human being can comprehend the universe? Israel's sin will not cancel out God's new covenant with them. He may punish them but he will bring them back to him in the new covenant and they will always be his people. Even though they rejected Jesus as Messiah

and the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and Judea in 70 yet there was a remnant of Israel in the church and there has always been a remnant of the Jews in God's church his true people. Someday as *Jeremiah*, *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Zechariah* promise at the coming of the Messiah all of Israel will come back to God and be saved. Paul says the same thing in *Romans 9-11*.

31:38-40 - The Lord promises that Jerusalem will be rebuilt and never again be uprooted or destroyed. The Tower of Hananel is mentioned as being rebuilt in *Nehemiah 3*. The Corner Gate is a section of the wall that Jehoash King of Israel broke down in *2 Kings 14* after he had captured Jerusalem and King Amaziah of Judah. The hills of Gareb and Goah are otherwise unknown. The valley where the dead are thrown along with ashes is probably The Valley of Ben Hinnom or later Gehenna. *Jeremiah* says the city will be rebuilt from the Kidron Valley to the Ben Hinnom Valley and will be holy to the Lord, the holy city. The Horse Gate on the east is mentioned in *1 Kings 11* as the place where Queen Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, was put to death after her aborted and evil reign.

The point of all the description is to help the people know that the Lord knows his city and he will rebuild it and preserve it. Was this prophecy given after 586 and Jerusalem's destruction? It is possible since God speaks of rebuilding the city which was destroyed. The beginnings of this prophecy are directly fulfilled in *Nehemiah's* time in 445 when he comes to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is very difficult when one follows the history of Jerusalem down through the centuries from 586 onward. From *Nehemiah's* time in the Persian era Jerusalem was rebuilt and began to be flourish once again. Herod the Great carried on extensive construction projects in the city in the early Roman era including the massive remodeling of the Second Temple. However, the temple and the city were destroyed by the Romans in 70 during the first Jewish Revolt. Some returned to the city and stayed there until the second Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba in the 130's. Following that revolt Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina, a temple to Jupiter was built upon the temple mount by Emperor Hadrian and the Jews were forbidden by law to enter Jerusalem, except to commemorate the destruction of the first and second temples on the fast day of Tisha B'av in July of each year. Massive numbers of Jews were killed in the aftermath of the revolt as well. The center of Judaism shifted away from Jerusalem to Babylon and Galilee. After Hadrian's death in 138 a handful of Jews began to trickle back into Jerusalem but the city never had any kind of large Jewish population until the beginnings of the Zionist movement in the late 1800's. From then on the Jews have returned to Jerusalem. The question is how does one relate *Jeremiah's* prophecy here with the history of Jerusalem and the Jews, especially following the First and Second Jewish Revolts and the destruction of the city by the Romans? It is important to note that there has always been at least a handful of Jews, except for a short period following the Bar Kochba Rebellion, who have always lived in Jerusalem. The other thing that is important to note is that this prophecy of *Jeremiah's* was superseded by Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the city in 70 and his companion prophecy of the destruction of the city in the end times. The ultimate fulfillment of *Jeremiah's* prophecy here in *31:38-40* must therefore be found in the eschatological vision of John of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God in *Revelation 21-22*. John sees the dwelling of God with his people in the holy city that God has made as a home for his people forever. When that time comes *Jeremiah's* words will finally be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 32:

32:1-5 - This whole section about Jeremiah buying his cousin's field in Anathoth shows how ancient real estate deals were transacted. There was a very precise procedure that was followed. Baruch is involved in the sale process and he is probably one of the chief sources for the story.

The incident takes place in 587, in the tenth year of Zedekiah, while Jeremiah is confined in the courtyard of the palace guard and during the siege of Jerusalem by the army of Nebuchadnezzar. The siege lasted 18 months, beginning in December of 588. This is sometime during the next year, 587.

Jeremiah was in prison in the courtyard of the palace guard because he had told the king that the Lord was about to hand over the city to Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah would not escape capture by the Babylonians. In fact Jeremiah told Zedekiah that he would speak with Nebuchadnezzar face to face and see him with his own eyes. That was literally fulfilled and is ironic because after his sons were killed before his eyes Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah's eyes put out and he was taken to Babylon in chains. That is exactly what Jeremiah said would happen to the king. He tells Zedekiah that he will be taken to Babylon and if he tries to fight the Babylonians he will not succeed. The city will fall and he will be defeated. The king puts Jeremiah under arrest for treason even though he is simply speaking what the Lord told him to speak. However Zedekiah still fears the Lord enough that he does not have Jeremiah executed. He knows because of the Babylonian invasion that Jeremiah is a true prophet of the Lord. Everything he said would happen is starting to come to pass.

32:6-8a - The Word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah telling him his cousin Hanamel son of Shallum his uncle is going to come to him and ask him to buy his field in Anathoth because as nearest kin it is his right to redeem it and even his duty to buy it. Hanamel comes to Jeremiah during the siege just as the Lord had said.

Anathoth is a town in the territory of Benjamin a little north of Jerusalem that was one of the Levite towns that *Joshua* had set aside for the priestly families in each of the tribal territories. Hanamel's field had been part of the family's inheritance from the Lord, which is why he says Jeremiah has the right and the duty to redeem it. For some reason we are not told, Hanamel must sell the field. It is entirely possible that because of the siege by the Babylonian army the farm economy around Anathoth has collapsed and Hanamel is forced to sell his family land in order to feed his family and pay off his debts. He comes to Jeremiah as the only family member left who has any kind of means to buy the field and keep the Lord's inheritance, especially given the circumstances of the siege. How he gets into Jerusalem we are not told. Was he there already? Again, Jeremiah does not tell us. One would think the Babylonians were not allowing any kind of comings and goings into Jerusalem. Obviously supplies were not coming into the city. Perhaps they allowed some communication between families. It is possible they allowed it to encourage the city to surrender, since the news that anyone would bring would not be good. We simply do not know. Whatever the circumstances, Hanamel seeks out Jeremiah and meets with him in the courtyard of the palace guard where Jeremiah is under arrest. That means there were plenty of soldiers who were witnesses to this unlikely real estate transaction.

32:8b-15 - Jeremiah recognizes the voice of the Lord and knows this message is from the Lord. Why does he tell us this? The Babylonians have been laying siege to Jerusalem and attacking the city for a year. The final outcome of the siege is no longer in doubt yet the king will not surrender. Jeremiah knows Jerusalem will be destroyed and the temple burned down. He has

foreseen it. For most of his forty year career he has been prophesying God's judgment and punishment of Judah. He has told King Zedekiah personally that the Babylonians will conquer Jerusalem and if he does not surrender he will die in Babylon. He has written a letter to the exiles telling them to stop hoping they will soon return to Judah. Instead they need to settle down in Babylon because their exile will be a long one. The focus and theme of his ministry have been to pronounce God's judgment on a sinful and rebellious people for violating his covenant. Now when his entire prophetic ministry is about to come to fruition God tells him to get involved in a land deal with his cousin! It seems crazy!

Jeremiah describes in detail buying Hanamel's field. He pays him 17 shekels of silver and carefully weighs it out. He signs the deed, seals it and has it witnessed and then weighs out the silver. There are two deeds, a sealed one, probably with some kind of wax seal, for permanent record and an unsealed one for easy access. He gives the two deeds to Baruch his secretary in the presence of Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed. In *Ruth 4:9-10* Boaz buys Naomi's land which was her husband's and her sons' and also acquires Ruth, Mahlon's (Naomi's son) widow. He has this witnessed by the elders of Bethlehem. The Law of Moses said in a criminal case no one could be convicted without two or three witnesses to the crime. See *Deuteronomy 19:15*. While Jeremiah buying Hanamel's field is not a criminal case, two or three witnesses were probably standard procedure in many areas of Israelite life. We are not told who the witnesses were but they were probably people Jeremiah knew who were either staying in the courtyard of the guard or worked around the palace. Plus he says many of the guards saw him purchase Hanamel's field.

Jeremiah gives the two deeds to Baruch and then gives him instructions from the Lord as to what to do with the deed. He makes it clear that he is purchasing the land on instructions from the Lord and not just as a family matter. Jeremiah tells Baruch to take the two deeds, the sealed and the unsealed, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. It is interesting to note that the Essenes in Qumran used the same method to store their scrolls and preserve them. In that dry climate the method works! Jeremiah tells Baruch why the deeds need to be stored and preserved for a long time because, "*houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.*" This is a promise from the Lord Almighty himself! Jeremiah is telling the Jews, shut up in the courtyard of the king's guard as the Babylonians continue to lay siege to Jerusalem, that someday real estate is going to be bought and sold again in Judea. Jerusalem may be destroyed and the land laid waste as God has said but someday the people will return and life will go on. Normal economic activity will come back. The people have a future. Jeremiah's purchase of Hanamel's field is a prophetic sign that this will occur.

32:16-23 - After Jeremiah completes the purchase of Hanamel's field he prays to the Lord and his prayer is written down for us. Jeremiah addresses the Lord as Sovereign Lord, the Creator who made the heavens and the earth. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. In Hebrew he prays, *Adonai Yahweh*, literally Lord Yahweh. Jeremiah declares that God has shown love for thousands but brings the punishment of the father's sins upon their children after them. This is a reflection of the language of *Exodus 20*. It is set against the proverb of sour grapes in *chapter 31*. Jeremiah then names God the great and powerful God whose name is the Lord Almighty. In Hebrew it is *Yahweh Sabaoth*, the Lord of Hosts as the NASB reads. The NLT reads the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

Jeremiah has used two of the primary names for God in his prayer. Now he describes what the Lord does. His purposes are great and he does great things. He sees all the ways of

human beings. This is a description of God's omniscience; he knows all things. Jeremiah recounts the Lord's delivering Israel from Egypt with signs and wonders. In fact the Lord continues to do signs and wonders in Israel and with all mankind. The Lord has gained renown among the nations. The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand and gave them the Promiseland in which to live, a land flowing with milk and honey. God's people occupied the land the Lord gave them but did not obey him or follow his Law. They did not do what he had commanded them so the Lord brought "*all this disaster*" upon them.

Jeremiah rehearses in his prayer who God is, what he has done and how Israel responded to God's grace and blessing by disobeying him. Therefore God is justified in punishing them. Other places in the Old Testament also rehearse the history of Israel and the people's response to the Lord, *Nehemiah 8* being one example, as is *2 Kings 17*. The prophetic insight into Israel's history, what God had done for them and how they responded in disobedience and rebellion to God, helped Israel make sense of the calamity of 586. Jeremiah's rehearsal of Israel's history is also coupled with his theology of who God is and how powerful he is. Even though God's temple was destroyed and his people sent into exile, Jeremiah's vision of God is not one of weakness and smallness. Instead he sees God as ultimately in charge and sovereign. All the events happening during Jeremiah's lifetime are all part of God's plan and just punishment for his rebellious people. Yahweh has not forgotten Judah; he is disciplining them for their sins against him.

32:24-25 - Jeremiah observes in his prayer that the Babylonians have built siege ramps against the walls of the city to take it. The city will be handed over to the Babylonians because of the sword, famine and plague that have come against it. What God said would happen to Jerusalem is happening. Yet even though the city will be given to Nebuchadnezzar, you *Adonai Yahweh* tell me to buy the field and have the sale witnessed. Jeremiah can hardly believe God's message to him to buy Hanamel's field because God is in the middle of fulfilling his punishment upon Jerusalem. He is incredulous concerning the hopeful message God has given him when he commanded him to buy his cousin's field. One day, houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in the land. The people will come back and the land will flourish again. Jeremiah who told the people again and again abandon hope and surrender to the Babylonians is given a message of hope to share with a now hopeless people. It confused him. His prayer expresses that confusion but also declares who he believes God to be, the sovereign Creator who knows what he is doing and has a plan. It is in the end a prayer of faith in Yahweh's sovereign control.

32:26-35 - God speaks to Jeremiah in answer to his prayer. God hears his prophet and answers him. This is important to note because it encourages us too. When we pray, God answers. He will not always speak directly to us like he did to Jeremiah yet he will answer because prayer is fundamentally a conversation with God and not just us requesting things from him. Plus Jeremiah didn't really request anything directly from the Lord. He merely outlined the reasons for God's punishment of Judah and then exclaimed his surprise at God telling him to buy Hanamel's field in the middle of the Babylonian siege. God responds to his implicit question and surprise. His response to Jeremiah shows us that God wants to enter into a conversation with us and communicate with us. When we speak, he listens. If we will listen, he will speak to us as well.

The Lord reinforces Jeremiah's understanding of who he is as the Creator and God of all. He tells him he is the Lord of all mankind, not just the Jews. Yahweh is more than a petty God of

a little people. He is the Lord of all yet chose that little people as his own. Is anything too hard for him to do? He is about to hand over Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar because God's people had sinned. They had rebelled against him and worshipped other gods, especially the Baals, by sacrificing to them, even from their own homes and rooftops. Therefore the Babylonians will set Jerusalem on fire and cleanse the city by burning down the houses where the people worshipped idols. Jerusalem is defiled by its idolatry. God will purify it with the fire of an invading army.

God says Israel and Judah have done evil in God's sight, even from their youth. They have done nothing but provoke the Lord with the idols they made. From the beginning Jerusalem has aroused the Lord's anger because of their idolatry. Therefore God will remove it from his sight. The kings, priests, prophets, officials and common people have all sinned. They have turned their backs to the Lord yet still have come and worshipped at his temple as if they had not sinned at all. They have not responded to the Lord's discipline and have even set up their idols within the Lord's temple itself! They built altars in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their own children to idols, something the Lord never commanded them to do nor did it even enter his mind. In other words their child sacrifices to Molech and Baal were completely against not only God's commands but his character and heart. They had strayed so far from God they did things that God abhorred. Their leaders led Judah into sin. God will now punish them and give them what they deserve.

All of this Word from the Lord simply restates what Jeremiah has said many times and what he rehearsed again in his prayer. God is agreeing with his prophet. Jeremiah has gotten it right.

32:36-44 - God has said he will punish Jerusalem and allow the city to be taken and burned because of Judah's sin. He quotes *Jeremiah* as saying by sword, famine and plague God will hand over Jerusalem to the king of Babylon. That was the message Jeremiah was given to preach. God then says he has a new message for Jeremiah to speak to the people. The Lord will gather them from all the lands to which he will banish them in his wrath. He will bring them back to Jerusalem and they will live in safety once again. They will be his people and he will be their God.

When the Lord brings them back he will give them a new attitude. With singleness of heart and action they will fear the Lord and he will bless them and their children after them. The Lord will love to do them good and he will make an everlasting covenant with them so that he will always do them good and they will always fear him and never turn away from him again. The Lord will plant them in the land with all his heart and soul, meaning his character longs to do this. The language of an everlasting covenant is similar to the new covenant language in *Jeremiah 31*. Here the ancient promise of the land is added to the Lord's words. It is clear however, that Judah's new heart and faithfulness to the Lord will be the Lord's doing and will not come about by the efforts of the Jews to more faithfully obey God's Law. He will make this change in their hearts because this is his heart for them.

God tells Jeremiah as he has brought calamity upon this people so he will bring prosperity to them as he has promised. Now the people say the land is desolate, void of people and animals because of the Babylonian invasion. Think of ancient warfare. Invading armies lived off the land they were conquering because they had no way to bring supplies with them and keep them fresh. Armies took what they needed from the people and land they were conquering. The Babylonians would have stripped Judah bare as they invaded and laid siege to Jerusalem. That is the image God uses here with Jeremiah. The land is laid waste but God tells him once more

fields will be bought in this land. Just like you did with your cousin's field so the people will pay out their silver for a portion of land and deeds will be signed, witnessed and sealed. It will happen again in the territory of Benjamin, around Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, even in the hill country and the western foothills and down towards the Negev. In other words all over Judah the land will be restored and the Lord will restore the fortunes of his people.

God tells Jeremiah that even though Judah has broken the Lord's covenant and that is why he is punishing them, yet the Lord will restore them and renew them because he will still honor the covenants he made with Abraham and Moses. God will do something in the future when he restores his people; he will make a new covenant that will change their hearts so they will remain faithful to him. That will be the greater miracle, not restoring them from exile but restoring their faith in Yahweh their God. After all, is anything too hard for the Lord? It is not by accident that the Lord quotes the words he spoke to Abraham and Sarah when he tells them Sarah will conceive and bear Isaac in *Genesis 18*. God's grace will triumph over their sin. He will judge them but then he will restore them. God gives Jeremiah the profound insight that our relationship with God is supremely due to his grace towards us and not our faithfulness towards him. As Paul says in *1 Timothy 2:12-13*: *If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless he will remain faithful for he cannot disown himself.*

Chapter 33:

33:1-5 - Another message from the Lord comes to Jeremiah while he is still confined in the courtyard of the guard. It is similar to the message in *chapter 32*. The Lord is the Creator, the one who made the earth, who formed it and established it. He is the one who speaks to Jeremiah. God invites him to call to him, to pray to him because the Lord will tell his prophet great things he does not know. Then the Lord gives Jeremiah a message concerning Jerusalem. The houses of the city and the royal palaces of the king that have all been torn down to be used against the siege ramps of the Babylonians, they will be filled with the dead whom the Lord will slay in his wrath and anger against Jerusalem. The city is wicked and God is turning away from Jerusalem because he is judging it.

This message restates themes from *Jeremiah 32*. The Lord repeats himself to make sure Jeremiah understands what is to happen and that Judah understands as well.

33:6-9 – Once the Lord's judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah is finished he will again restore the city and the countryside. He will heal his people and bring them back to Jerusalem from their exile. Jeremiah once again expresses the Lord's promise of return for the exiles. He will bring both Judah and Israel back from captivity and rebuild them as they were before. God's promise of restoration here cannot mean that the nations of Israel and Judah would be as they once were because they ceased to exist after 721 and 586. God is saying he will restore the populations of Israel and Judah. He will once again make Jerusalem prosper and be filled with people. God will not restore their nations because the nations were not the Kingdom of God. The Lord's people and his reign over them and their hearts is what will constitute his people and his Kingdom. This theme is implicit in the new covenant idea of *Jeremiah 31* and undergirds the Lord's message of restoration here.

The Lord promises to cleanse Judah of her sins and forgive them. Then Jerusalem will once again be a city of renown and bring honor to the Lord among the nations. This will happen when the Lord restores the city and the peoples of the world hear of what the Lord has done. All

the nations will be in awe of what God will do for his city as he restores it. They will marvel at his blessings to Jerusalem. In the centuries between Jeremiah and Jesus, Jerusalem became an important city and had world-wide status as a temple city in the Persian, Greek and Roman Empires.

33:10-11 - The Lord tells Jeremiah once again that though the people say Jerusalem and Judah are desolate and without people and animals yet the days are coming when the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are now deserted will be filled with people. The sound of rejoicing will once again be heard in them. The voices of bride and bridegroom will be heard again. The Lord's temple will be filled with people singing praise to God as they bring their thank offerings. Jeremiah then quotes the refrain from *Psalms 136: Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; his love endures forever*. The word for love that Jeremiah uses in Hebrew is *hesed*, God's covenant love. It is no accident that he uses that word here as he tells the people about God's promise to restore them. The Lord will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before. Once again one needs to take into account that Jeremiah is not referring to the nations of Israel and Judah. He is talking about his people returning to the land out of which he cast them. Except for a brief time during the Hasmonean kingdom Israel was never an independent nation again all the way until 1948 when the UN declared the new state of Israel. Yet many of her people came back to the land. God's temple was rebuilt and the walls of Jerusalem were restored. By Jesus' day the population of Judea and Galilee had swollen. Most Jews still lived outside of Judea and Jerusalem, scattered throughout the Roman world because the Diaspora had begun after the Babylonian exile. Yet God continued to prosper his people and watch over them. Jeremiah's words were fulfilled just not in the way some among the Jews were hoping.

33:12-13 - God says in the days to come the places the people call desolate now will be filled with people, animals and flocks. There will be pastures for the shepherds in which to rest their flocks. From the western foothills, to the Negev, to the territory of Benjamin, to the towns around Jerusalem the flocks will return. Those who count the sheep will again be seen and heard in the land.

One has to think of the context in which Jeremiah uttered these words and what was happening in the land when he said them. The Babylonian army was raping the land, consuming its produce and crops to feed their army. They knew the land would produce again after they left because they were going to leave the poorest people to work it and take the leadership captive to Babylon. When the people of Jerusalem looked out on the land from the besieged walls of the city they understood what the invaders were doing to their land the Lord had given them. As the siege intensified and famine and disease began to threaten them it was easy to despair and believe that the land would never recover. It was easy to think the Babylonians would leave it a desert and no one would live there anymore. They could see it happening right before their eyes! Jeremiah's words were a promise from God that he would undo the damage caused by the Babylonian invasion. The land would flourish again and be the land of milk and honey God had given to them. They would return. That meant that the time of their exile had an end. God's punishment upon them was not permanent. There was hope for the future and for the Jews as God's people.

33:14-16 - God says the "*days are coming*" when he will fulfill the gracious promise he made to Israel and Judah. The phrase "*the days are coming*" means sometime in the future. It is most likely an eschatological phrase in *Jeremiah* referring to the time of the Messiah and the establishment of God's Kingdom. Jeremiah has said God has promised to bring the exiles back and that is in the near future. He has promised to prosper the land again and Jeremiah pushes that promise out a little further into the future. But the promise that will follow about a king from David's line he pushes out even further. The timeframe is indeterminate. Sometime in the future this will happen, but when specifically Jeremiah does not say.

In those days, in that future time, God will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line and he will do what is just and right. God will raise up a descendant of David who will rule over his people with justice and righteousness. Jeremiah repeats what *Isaiah*, *Micah*, and *Hosea* have all said. *Ezekiel* too has said God will bring them David their king. This prophecy has its roots in the covenant with David in *2 Samuel 7*. When the Branch comes Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. The words in the context of *Jeremiah* immediately lead to the interpretation of safety from invasion and war. Through the eyes of the New Testament one is led to the interpretation of safety from judgment over sin and the forgiveness of sin through the Messiah who will come. Both can be possible. Jerusalem or the Messiah (there is some confusion in the Hebrew text) will be called "*The Lord Our Righteousness*." This is a play on the name of King Zedekiah which means the Lord is our righteousness. Jeremiah is contrasting the weak, cowardly last king of Judah with his descendant the Messiah who will one day rule God's people. Paul in the New Testament says that Jesus as the Messiah has brought the righteousness of God to all who believe in him as Lord. He is righteous but he has also made us righteous before God and fulfilled his Messianic title.

33:17-26 - This is a difficult prophecy because it is hard to show how it has been fulfilled, especially concerning the Levitical priests. God says David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of Israel. In the immediate context of *Jeremiah* this is difficult because Zedekiah is the last king of Judah. All his sons were killed by Nebuchadnezzar after he had captured the king during the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah has already prophesied that Jehoiachin will not have one of his descendants sit on David's throne. Though the line of the kings continued, especially through Zerubbabel, the kingship of Judah ended in 586 when the nation itself was destroyed. Jeremiah repeats one of the promises God made to David in *2 Samuel 7* that he would always have a descendant of his who would sit on his throne forever. Only the risen Lord Jesus Christ fulfills this prophecy. He is alive forever and the New Testament says he has taken up his kingly authority as Messiah and Lord. Peter says in *Acts 2* that God has made him Lord and Christ or Messiah, through his resurrection from the dead. Paul says Jesus' human descent came from King David. Both *Matthew* and *Luke* show this to be true in their genealogies of Jesus. Jesus is Messiah, the king from David's line, and he sits on David's throne at the right hand of the Father. He is king now and someday he will return to take up that kingship upon the whole earth and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord and king to God's glory. *Jeremiah* furthermore says that the descendants of David will be like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. The New Testament tells us that we are heirs with Christ, adopted sons and daughters of God and we will reign with him, sharing his reign as king and Messiah forever. In that sense we, God's people, are the descendants of David, and our numbers are beyond count as John says in *Revelation 7*.

The promise here to the Levitical priesthood is more difficult. God promised Phineas, grandson of Aaron, in *Numbers 25* that he would make a covenant of peace with him and he and his descendants would have a lasting priesthood forever before the Lord. Jesus was the great high priest but not after the order of Aaron but after the order of Melchizedek. The covenant with the descendants of Phineas and the Levitical priests that Jeremiah speaks of here is no longer in effect because the New Covenant that Jesus brings supersedes it. *Hebrews 7-10* makes the case for this. However, *1 Peter 2* says that we, the church, are the people of God, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to God. The church has taken up the promises God made to Israel and the destiny and identity God gave to them as his people. We are now the people of God, Jew and Gentile together united by faith in the Messiah Jesus. See *Ephesians 2*. Through our adoption by faith into God's people, into Jesus' church, we have become God's children; joint heirs with Christ and a kingdom of priests to God. In that sense we the church fulfill God's design and his promise here to the Jews. We fulfill Jeremiah's words that David's descendants and the Levitical priests' descendants will be in number like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

God says if you can break God's laws that govern his creation, the laws of day and night and the natural laws of the created order, then the Lord will reject Israel and David whom he has chosen to rule over them. In other words *Jeremiah* tells the Jews God's Word will not be broken to them. They are still his people. He has not totally rejected them or broken his promise to their ancestors though they have broken their promise to him. The Jews are still his people and a son of David will be their king and rule over them. Almost 600 years later he would send them *THE* son of David to restore them and save them. Some of his people would recognize and accept Jesus as Messiah. Many would not. God would keep his promise and have compassion on them to save them from their sin and give them a new future. They would, through the power of the Holy Spirit he would send them, fulfill the destiny he had given them 1300 years before. They would be his people, a kingdom of priests to tell the world about the Lord. And he would be their God and would be with them always.

Chapter 34:

34:1-3 - A word from the Lord comes to Jeremiah for King Zedekiah during the final siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army. The Lord is going to hand over Jerusalem to the Babylonians and he will burn it down. The king will not escape capture. In fact he will see Nebuchadnezzar with his own eyes and speak with him face to face. Then he will go to Babylon.

When the walls of Jerusalem were finally breached in July of 586, Zedekiah fled by night toward the Jordan Valley. There he was captured along with his sons by Babylonian troops. He was taken to Riblah in Syria where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters, because he was not at Jerusalem taking part in the siege; he left that to his generals. At Riblah Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar, his sons killed before him and his eyes put out. He was then put in shackles and taken to Babylon as prisoner where he died. Zedekiah, as Jeremiah prophesied, was not slain in battle but died a prisoner in exile.

Jeremiah gives Zedekiah the message during the final siege of Jerusalem. Since Lachish and Azekah, two fortified cities of Judah had not yet fallen, it is most likely the message was delivered sometime early in the siege, perhaps in the late winter or early spring of 587.

34:4-7 - God promises King Zedekiah that he will not die by the sword. In other words he will not be killed in battle. He will die peacefully. The reality was he probably died in a Babylonian

prison. He was also blinded because Nebuchadnezzar had his eyes put out after he was captured and watched him kill all of Zedekiah's sons before his eyes.

Jeremiah says people will make a funeral fire in honor of the dead king and lament him as they did his predecessors. God himself promises this to Zedekiah. *2 Kings* only tells us that Zedekiah was taken in chains to Babylon. It would have been known to the exiles in Babylon that the last king had been taken in chains into exile. We do know Zedekiah was not killed in the siege of Jerusalem but was captured trying to escape in the Jordan Valley. After his meeting with Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah he is taken to Babylon in chains and according to *Jeremiah 52* died in prison there.

Why does God tell him that he will not die in battle or be executed by the sword? The only reason I can think of is that Zedekiah is a coward. He was only 21 when he came to the throne and did not have the character of his father Josiah. He was prone to following bad advice including rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar when he was his sworn vassal. That was the major cause of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. He was also given to lying as *Jeremiah 38* reports. God gives this message to Jeremiah because the Lord takes pity on the king. He may be unfaithful and cowardly but he still is the one who sits on David's throne. God tries to reassure him he will not die in the siege. I am not sure the message was a comfort to the king but it does show God's care for him despite his unfaithfulness. God is gracious whether we deserve it or not, which most of the time we do not!

34:8-16 - King Zedekiah made a covenant before the Lord with those in Jerusalem who owned Hebrew slaves. Everyone was to free their slaves by a certain date and no one was to hold a fellow Jew as a slave. All the officials and people who owned slaves agreed and freed their Jewish slaves. Why Zedekiah did this Jeremiah does not say. He says the action pleased the Lord because the king had done right in the Lord's eyes. My guess is however there were other motives involved in this move by Zedekiah. In the rest of Jeremiah's prophecy and in *2 Kings* he does not demonstrate a high concern for obeying the Lord and doing "*what is right*". The problem is we don't know the reason behind his action. We do know what eventually happened. The covenant did not hold and the people who owned slaves and had freed them took them back and enslaved them again. The covenant would have been popular with the slaves but eventually the officials and those with power, wealth and influence in Jerusalem broke the king's covenant and re-enslaved the people. This shows that Zedekiah was weak and did not have the political influence to stop the wealthy from re-enslaving his people. Was this an attempt by Zedekiah to exercise leadership in Jerusalem? If so, it backfired against the king and left him weaker in the eyes of his officials than before. The Lord also had an opinion about the people's behavior!

Word comes to Jeremiah how the Lord felt about the king's covenant and the people's response. Jeremiah goes back to *Deuteronomy 15* and the laws about Hebrew slaves. Like all the prophets the roots and foundation of their message are God's covenant he made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. *Deuteronomy* is a summation and restatement of that covenant. Jeremiah recalls the covenant God made with the Israelites. The Law of Moses said any Hebrew who kept Hebrew slaves must free them in the seventh year. The people ignored God's Law and did not obey it, keeping Hebrew slaves much longer, sometimes for a lifetime. Jeremiah acknowledges that led by King Zedekiah the people repented of this practice and did right in the Lord's sight, freeing the slaves. He says the covenant to free the slaves was made with the Lord as witness in the temple of the Lord itself. Now however they have turned around and violated their covenant and taken back the men and women they had enslaved. They have forced them into slavery again.

The most likely reason is selfishness. They wanted the benefit of their slave labor in their households and their businesses once again. There was no profit in freeing the slaves even though it was the right thing to do. This action of violating the covenant to free the slaves speaks to the leaders' greed and selfishness. They did not care about the Lord and his Law, and they certainly did not care that they were enslaving their own people once again. They even did not care about the desires of their king in a time of great crisis; they weakened him further.

34:17-22 - Jeremiah has reported what God thinks of their actions in re-enslaving the people. Now he outlines the Lord's judgment upon them for their immoral and selfish actions. They have not proclaimed freedom for their fellow countrymen so the Lord now declares "*freedom*" for them; freedom to be killed by the sword, plague and famine. The Lord says those who did this will not survive what is coming. He will make them abhorrent to the nations around them. The Lord will treat the men who violated his covenant like the calf they cut in two and walked between when they made the covenant in the temple to free the slaves. He will cut them in two. See *Genesis 15* where Abraham cut a heifer, a ram and a goat in two and the Lord passed between the pieces of the sacrifices in the appearance of a smoking fire pot. The Hebrew word for make a covenant is literally to cut a covenant. This practice of cutting the sacrifice in two and passing between them appears to be part of the ritual used to make a covenant either with the Lord or with other people that the Lord was called upon to witness. If so the ritual is very ancient and dates at least back to Abraham's time of around 2000 B.C. That is 1500 years earlier than Zedekiah and Jeremiah's day.

All those who walked between the pieces of the calf and swore they would free their slaves God will hand over to the Babylonians. They will be killed and become food for the birds and beasts. The Lord will hand over King Zedekiah and his officials to their enemies as well. Jeremiah makes the comment that the army of Nebuchadnezzar has withdrawn from them. The Lord will give the order to bring them back again and fight against Jerusalem, take it and burn it. He will lay waste to the towns of Judah so no one can live there.

Jeremiah's statement that Nebuchadnezzar's army had withdrawn from Jerusalem and had lifted the siege gives us a clue as to the historical context of this incident. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem beginning in December 588. Sometime the following year, 587, Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt marched with an army to attack Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army, coming to the aid of Judah. The Babylonians lifted the siege of Jerusalem briefly to deal with this threat. See *Jeremiah 37:5*. Jeremiah predicted that Egypt's help would not last however and the Babylonians would once again lay siege to Jerusalem. That is exactly what happened. Pharaoh Hophra went back to Egypt in defeat, Nebuchadnezzar resumed his siege of Jerusalem and a year later in July of 586 the city fell and everything that Jeremiah said would happen did happen. The king and all his officials were either killed or taken into exile to Babylon.

The question remains why did King Zedekiah make this covenant with the officials and wealthy people of Jerusalem at the time of the lifting of the siege? It is possible that the king was trying to curry favor with the Lord because in his mind the Lord had delivered Jerusalem from the Babylonians just as the official theology had said would happen. But the people's hearts were not with the king at this point and they rebelled. They violated a covenant they had made before the Lord in his temple and took back their slaves. They showed what was truly in their hearts and the bankruptcy of the official theology, confirming Jeremiah's words about this people. They did not honor Yahweh or their own people. They only thought of themselves. It also points out who was left as chief priests and court officials to advise Zedekiah. The best and brightest of Judah

had already been taken into exile in Babylon in 597 with King Jehoiachin. Those who were left to advise the king had little character or concern for their nation or their people. They were greedy, selfish and without integrity. They thought a vow made before the Lord to do what was right in the Lord's eyes could easily be broken when they saw no benefit to it. Did they also think there would be no consequences to their actions? They were grossly mistaken if they did as they would find out. *Proverbs* calls people who act this way fools. History shows they were.

Chapter 35:

35:1-5 - This account of the incident of Jeremiah and the Recabites takes place during Jehoiachin's reign. The Recabites comment that they have fled to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean armies. The most likely timeframe is after Jehoiachin became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal in 604 and early during the time he rebelled against Babylon three years later in 601. See *2 Kings 24:1*. That would explain the presence of troops in Israel and also the Aramean troops and why the Recabites had fled south to Jerusalem.

Jeremiah is told to go seek out the Recabites, invite them to the temple and offer them wine to drink. The Recabites were Israelites from the north kingdom, descended from Jonadab son of Recab who helped King Jehu in his slaughter of Ahab's family in *2 Kings 10*. They took a vow never to drink wine, build houses, plant vineyards or sow seed, and to live in tents as nomads in the land. Their vow was similar to the Nazarite vow in *Numbers 6*. They were zealous for the Lord and lived the way they did to express their passion for God and to harken back to the days of Yahweh caring for his people in the desert. They rejected all the civilization that Israel inherited when they conquered Canaan. They saw the land and all it offered as too great a temptation to stray away from Yahweh. Jeremiah is told by the Lord to test them in the temple by offering them wine to drink. We do not know what the Recabites thought of the house of the Lord but in Jehoiachin's day there were idols in the temple and the priests were not fully faithful to the Lord. In many ways the Recabites had a similar view of things as the Essenes did in Jesus' day.

Jeremiah finds the head of the Recabite clan living in Jerusalem, Jaazaniah, son of Jeremiah, and brings him and his whole family to the temple of the Lord. Jeremiah even tells us which room in the temple to which he brought them. It was the room of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah the man of God. It is possible that Igdaliah was a prophet. Moses is called a man of God as well as Elijah. It is a common title for a prophet in the Old Testament. Jeremiah took them to the sons of Hanan's room probably because they were associated with a fellow prophet of God. Their room was right above the room of Maaseiah son of Shallum the doorkeeper of the temple. Maaseiah was a priest who was a descendant of Shallum a doorkeeper of the tabernacle in David's day. Jeremiah takes the Recabites to the temple and puts bowls of wine in front of them and tells them to drink.

What did they think of Jeremiah's command? Jerusalem itself must have made them uncomfortable because they were forced to live in houses even though they did not build them in violation of their family's vow. It must have felt like they were toying with a line they did not want to cross. They were nomad tent dwellers and here they were in the greatest city of their country in the most massive, amazing building they had ever seen with all its gold and adornments. Their faith was a primitive version of the faith of Israel and now they were exposed to the most sophisticated version of the worship of Yahweh with the priests and all their trappings and rituals. Then to add to all that Jeremiah, the prophet of God, offers them wine to drink! Was God testing them? Was Jeremiah himself faithful to Yahweh? What was going on?

35:6-11 - Jaazaniah, the head of the Recabite clan tells Jeremiah they don't drink wine. He says they are faithful to their forefather Jonadab's command. They have not built houses or planted fields and vineyards and they live in tents. Jonadab told them if they do this they will live a long time in the land as nomads. Jaazaniah tells Jeremiah they have obeyed everything Jonadab told them to do and have lived in tents as nomads in the land. However when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land with his armies they fled south to Jerusalem to escape the invading troops. He mentions the Babylonian and Aramean armies. In 601 after Jehoiachim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar he sent some Syrian troops and Babylonian garrison troops to invade Judah and harass the land until he could bring his whole army to bear. See *2 Kings 24*. Jehoiachim died before Nebuchadnezzar could fully invade the land and Jehoiachin his son succeeded him. He only lasted three months before Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar's army and Jehoiachin was taken into exile in Babylon in 597.

35:12-16 - The Lord through Jeremiah gives a message to Jaazaniah and the descendants of Jonadab son of Recab. God uses the Recabites' obedience to Jonadab's command to not drink wine and live in tents as an example. He says the Recabites obeyed their forefather's command and to this day they do not drink wine. Jonadab lived in the latter part of the 800's. This is now around 601, some two centuries later. The Recabites had been faithful to their ancestor's command for two centuries! The Lord says Judah has not been faithful at all. He has sent them prophets again and again to speak to the people and urge them to obey. They have refused. God's prophets called the people to repent and turn from their wicked ways and abandon their idolatry and return to the Lord. They did not. They have paid no attention to the Lord and his messengers. The descendants of Jonadab carried out his command for 200 years. Judah has failed as a nation to carry out Yahweh's commands for over 200 years!

35:17-19 - Jeremiah says God will bring on Judah and Jerusalem every disaster pronounced against the city because he spoke to them and they did not listen; he called and they did not obey. This is prior to 597 and the first deportation. The official theology is still dominating the people's thinking. It was falsely keeping them from heeding the warnings of the Lord's prophets. In Jaazaniah and his family Jeremiah found a living example of what the Lord wanted from Judah, obedience. They would not do it. Therefore judgment was coming.

Jeremiah tells Jaazaniah that because they have obeyed their ancestor, Jonadab, his family will never fail to have a man to serve the Lord. God promises to preserve his family. One wonders today if there are descendants of Jonadab son of Recab among the Jews. Did any of them hear the Lord Jesus and surrender to him as Messiah? There is no way to tell. There is only the Lord's promise to their family. Jeremiah's words would have been a comfort to the Recabites because they had fled to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian armies. God was promising their family would be preserved despite all the events of the Lord's punishment of Judah that were about to unfold.

People would have looked at them and thought them primitive and strange because of their customs and fervent obedience to Jonadab's commands and to Yahweh. The Lord held them up as examples for all the Jews to follow. What the world thinks of us and what God thinks of us are most often two different things. It is paramount we stay faithful to the Lord, especially in the perilous times we live in today in America.

36:1-7 - The fourth year of Jehoiachim was 605. Jeremiah began in 626 and by his timetable that means he has already been prophesying to Judah for 21 years. In 605 Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has just won the battle of Carchemish and defeated Neco of Egypt, wresting control of Syria and Canaan from Egypt. The following year in 604 Jehoiachim appeared before Nebuchadnezzar and became his sworn vassal. This message from the Lord to Jeremiah takes place in a time of great turmoil. Egypt, who had been Jehoiachim's master was now defeated and Babylon was the new power in the Middle East. What was the king going to do?

God tells Jeremiah to write on a scroll all the words the Lord has spoken through Jeremiah to Israel, Judah and the nations around them from the time he began his ministry to the present day. He began in the 13th year of King Josiah, 626 and this is now 605. God says perhaps when the people hear all the disasters God is planning to inflict upon them for their sin they will repent and turn back to the Lord.

Jeremiah calls Baruch his secretary to write down all the words Jeremiah had spoken from the Lord on a scroll. In *verse 5* Jeremiah tells Baruch he is restricted from going to the temple. This is almost certainly because his messages from the Lord directly contradict the official theology of the king's court prophets and priests in the temple. This is after he had given his temple sermon during the days of Josiah's reforms. Jehoiachim has been king for four years and Jeremiah made no secret about his disdain for the young king who had undone much of what his father Josiah had tried to do, returning Judah to the worship of idols. The Lord told him to read the scroll in public and since he couldn't go to the temple he sent Baruch there instead. There appears to be a time gap between *verse 4* and *verse 5*. Jeremiah tells Baruch to go to the temple on a fast day and read to the people. *Verse 9* says Baruch went to the temple in the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiachim, December 604. Baruch began to write down what Jeremiah had said in the king's fourth year, 605. It would make sense that the whole project would take some time to complete. Jeremiah hopes that when Baruch reads all the Lord's words to the people they will turn from their sin and seek the Lord because the wrath of the Lord against them is very great.

This incident tells us much about how the prophecy of Jeremiah came to be the *Book of Jeremiah*. Baruch's recording of Jeremiah's words up to the fourth year of Jehoiachim was only the beginning of his work as Jeremiah's secretary and scribe. It is obvious he continued to record Jeremiah's words. He is almost certainly the final editor of Jeremiah's prophecy. The Lord guided him to write down and collect Jeremiah's words into a book. Jeremiah was basically a preacher and yet cast his messages in amazing Hebrew poetic form which made them easily remembered by the people. The whole process of writing down, collecting and editing Jeremiah's prophetic messages must have taken the better part of Baruch's life because Jeremiah had a forty year career as a prophet from 626 to 586 B. C.

36:8-10 - In December of 604, the fifth year of Jehoiachim, Baruch goes to the temple and reads all the words Jeremiah had dictated to him. He went as Jeremiah had instructed him, in a time of fasting. We do not know the reason a fast was called. It could have been part of the regular religious calendar or called for some special occasion or because of a crisis. Baruch reads Jeremiah's prophecy in or nearby the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary. It was in the upper courtyard of the temple near the New Gate, which is otherwise unknown. Shaphan was the secretary to Josiah when the book of the Law was found in the temple. Baruch uses his son Gemariah's office or quarters in the temple. Gemariah was not a priest so his room must have been an office and not living quarters which would have been reserved for priests or Levites

serving in the temple. Gemariah almost certainly knew Jeremiah because his father Shaphan would have known the prophet who had supported his master Josiah's reforms.

36:11-15 - Micaiah, the son of Gemariah and grandson of Shaphan hears Baruch's reading of Jeremiah's prophecy. He had undoubtedly heard some of Jeremiah's preaching but can you imagine hearing all of it at one time and the impact it would have upon you? Micaiah was disturbed. He immediately leaves the temple and goes down to the secretary's room in the royal palace where all the officials were sitting. They included Elishama, Jehoiachim's secretary and Delaiah. Elnathan son of Acbor is also mentioned. He was the leader of the group who Jehoiachim sent to Egypt to find and bring back Uriah the prophet for execution for prophesying the same message Jeremiah was prophesying. See *Jeremiah 26*. It is unclear whether the incident in *Jeremiah 26* is before or after this incident in *chapter 36*. *Jeremiah 26* simply says "*early in the reign of King Jehoiachim*." If this incident with Baruch is five years into his reign it is likely that the execution of Uriah was earlier than this. Jeremiah was arrested during that time for preaching in the temple that Jerusalem would be destroyed. It is possible that is why he is forbidden access to the temple and had to send Baruch to read his words. Gemariah, Micaiah's father is there with the other officials as well as Zedekiah and other officials. This Zedekiah is not related to King Zedekiah, son of Josiah.

Micaiah tells all the officials who are with his father, including Elishama the king's secretary, everything that he had heard Baruch read in the temple. The officials send Jehudi, son of Shelemiah, son of Cushi, to bring Baruch and the scroll to them. Jehudi, even though his family tree is named is otherwise unknown. Presumably he was a secretary or lower level official that served the king's advisors. Baruch comes with Jehudi and the officials invite Baruch to sit down with them and read them all of Jeremiah's words written in the scroll. This would have been the first hearing by the officials of the prophecy of Jeremiah as it was up to that time. It would have a chilling impact upon them.

36:16-19 - When Baruch finished reading the scroll the officials looked at each other in fear and said they had to tell the king everything Jeremiah had said. They ask Baruch how he wrote the scroll and whether Jeremiah dictated it to him. When he tells them yes, and that he wrote down everything Jeremiah said, they tell Baruch to go back to Jeremiah and both of them hide. Don't let anyone know where you are, which includes the officials.

The king's officials are obviously afraid of how the king will react and how the people will react when all Jeremiah's words get out. Jehoiachim has already killed one prophet and some of the officials were barely able to save Jeremiah from execution earlier in his reign. What Baruch had read to them carried the weight of God's prophetic word but the king would see it as treason. It was also in clear contradiction to the official theology that still held Judah captive. Jehoiachim was young, proud and wicked and was not faithful to Yahweh as his father Josiah had been. He did not want to hear that he needed to repent and return to the ways of his father. He saw only the political realities of the day. He had been freed from being an Egyptian vassal only to become a Babylonian one. Crazy prophets who called for a return to his father's time simply did not understand what needed to be done. Jehoiachim was not a man who trusted in Yahweh and his promises. He was a wicked man who was far from God and would do anything to keep his throne, including kill a prophet of the Lord. He is shown to be a proud man as well and ultimately not a very smart king because he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar after his defeat

by the Egyptians in the siege of Ashkelon in 601. His response to Jeremiah's words shows his character better than anything.

36:20-26 - The officials put the scroll in Elishama the secretary's office for safekeeping and go to the king and report everything to him. Jehoiachim sends Jehudi to fetch the scroll. When he returns he orders him to read it to him and to all the officials standing with him. Jeremiah, or perhaps Baruch, records that it was December and the king was in his winter apartment with a fire burning in a fire pot nearby. When Jehudi would finish reading three or four columns of the scroll Jehoiachim would cut them off with a scribe's knife and toss them into the fire pot to burn. He kept doing this until the entire scroll was burned. Perhaps he thought if he burned the scroll that would be the end of Jeremiah's words. Jeremiah comments that the king and all his attendants who heard Jeremiah's words showed no fear nor did they tear their clothes in repentance as Josiah and his officials had done when the words of the Law of the Lord had been read to them. The officials are afraid of the king and are uncertain of what he will do. The king does not fear the Lord or Jeremiah's words because he arrogantly burns them. Even though they showed no fear in the king's presence Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urge the young king not to burn Jeremiah's words. The king pays no attention to their request. Instead he sends Jerahmeel, one of his sons, along with Seraiah and Shelemiah, probably two officials of the king's court, to go find and arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. The identity of Jerahmeel is difficult. Jehoiachim is only 30 years old at this time. Any son of his could not have been more than around 13 years old. Further Jehoiachin succeeds him as king and he is eighteen when he comes to the throne. Jehoiachim was 36 when he died meaning Jehoiachin was born when the king was eighteen. Is Jerahmeel a son of Josiah or Jehoahaz and simply named a son of the king here? Or is this a younger son of Jehoiachim and the king is giving his little boy the task of arresting one of his father's enemies? It is difficult to tell and the exact relationship between Jehoiachim and Jerahmeel is not clear. The Hebrew word used here is the normal word for son, *ben*.

Baruch records the Lord had hidden him and Jeremiah and so the men sent by the king do not find them. Jeremiah remains safe. Jehoiachim still does not understand who is truly in charge of his kingdom and that he cannot defeat or silence Jeremiah because Yahweh is with him. The implication here is that Yahweh is not with the young king even though he still sits on David's throne. God's patience is running out for Jehoiachim and for Judah.

36:27-32 - After the king had burned the scroll Jeremiah had dictated to Baruch the Lord speaks to Jeremiah. He tells him to make another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll the king destroyed. Then tell Jehoiachim what the Lord says. Jehoiachim questioned why Jeremiah said the king of Babylon would come and destroy the land and kill both its men and animals. God says because you said this and questioned the Lord's Word through his prophet; therefore Jehoiachim will have no one to sit on the throne of David. His body will be thrown out and exposed to the elements. He will not have a decent burial like the other kings. The Lord will punish his children and his officials for their wickedness. He will bring on Jerusalem and Judah every disaster he pronounced against them through Jeremiah because they would not listen to the Lord.

After Jehoiachim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar in 601, Nebuchadnezzar sends garrison troops and troops from the surrounding countries to harass Judah. Finally he marshals his army and advances against Judah and Jerusalem for Jehoiachim's rebellion. Jehoiachim is captured and sent to Babylon in chains in 597 according to *2 Chronicles 36:6*. *2 Kings 24* only says he died.

Putting both accounts together it is probable that Jehoiachim died a captive on the way to Babylon. Reading between the lines of the Scriptural accounts it is also possible that Jehoiachim was handed over to the Babylonians by his court in order to appease Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiachim appears to have few friends among his people. His son Jehoiachin succeeds him but lasts only three months on the throne of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem and the young eighteen year old king surrenders along with his mother and many of his nobles. Nebuchadnezzar sends them to Babylon in chains as his captive and puts Jehoiachin in prison. He installs Mattaniah, son of Josiah, the king's uncle as king and changes his name to Zedekiah. This all takes place in the spring of 597. Jeremiah's words are fulfilled and none of Jehoiachim's sons ever sit on the throne of David.

The editor of Jeremiah's prophecy, probably Baruch, adds that Jeremiah did what the Lord had commanded him and re-dictated the scroll the king had burned. Baruch wrote down all Jeremiah's words and many similar words were added to them. This is the genesis of the *Book of Jeremiah*.

Chapter 37:

37:1-5 - This chapter takes place during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army in 587. Specifically it refers to the time when Pharaoh Hophra (Greek Apries) of Egypt marched with his army to meet the Babylonians in Gaza in support of Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar temporarily halted the siege of Jerusalem to repulse Hophra and his forces who then went back to Egypt, abandoning Zedekiah to his fate. This chapter details that time and the conversations between Zedekiah and Jeremiah.

Zedekiah had been made king by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 after the Babylonians had captured Jerusalem and sent Zedekiah's nephew, King Jehoiachin, into exile to Babylon. Jeremiah comments that neither Zedekiah nor any of his advisors paid any attention to the Word of the Lord Jeremiah spoke to them. Even so Zedekiah sent one of his aids, Jehucal and Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest to Jeremiah with a request from the king who wanted Jeremiah to pray for him. Zephaniah was the chief priest at the time of the fall of Jerusalem and was captured, taken to Riblah to face Nebuchadnezzar and executed there. See *Jeremiah 52*. Jeremiah at this time was still free to come and go as he pleased and had not yet been put in prison.

The king's request that Jeremiah pray for him shows Zedekiah's character. He worshipped Yahweh in name only and did not follow the Lord, yet he wanted God's prophet to pray for him, like someone today asking a pastor or Catholic priest to pray for them even though they don't really believe in God. It is almost superstitious, as if Jeremiah had some sort of magical powers. It shows how cowardly and afraid Zedekiah is.

One must realize as well that when Nebuchadnezzar halted the siege of Jerusalem in order to meet Pharaoh Hophra in Gaza all of Jerusalem must have been rejoicing. This is exactly what the official theology said would happen. The Lord would spare Jerusalem because they had a king from David's line on the throne and the Lord would not allow anything to happen to his temple. It must have been incredibly frustrating for Jeremiah to continue to have to fight this false and deceptive teaching. All of Jeremiah's enemies at the time would have wanted to tell Jeremiah, I told you so!

37:6-10 - When Zephaniah the priest and Jehucal the king's advisor come to Jeremiah with the king's prayer request Jeremiah receives a message from the Lord for the king. Pharaoh's army

which has marched out of Egypt to support you will go back to Egypt and the Babylonians will resume their siege, attack Jerusalem, capture it and burn it to the ground. Do not deceive yourselves and think the Babylonians will leave us alone. They will not. Jeremiah then adds, even if you, Zedekiah, were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you (an impossibility!) and only wounded men were left in their tents they would still come attack the city and burn it down. In other words Jerusalem is doomed and there is nothing you can do about it. The Lord has determined that the Babylonians will judge Jerusalem for her sins. Your official theology is false and it will be shown to be so in the next few months. Nebuchadnezzar is coming back and Pharaoh Hophra will not help you. King Zedekiah, you are on your own. The Lord himself has decreed it! This is Jeremiah's answer to the king's prayer request!

37:11-15 - When the Babylonian army withdrew from Jerusalem to confront Pharaoh Hophra's army near Gaza; Jeremiah was going to use that time to travel to Anathoth in Benjamin to get his share of the family inheritance and property. The incident in *chapter 32* when Jeremiah bought Hanamel's field takes place after this because Nebuchadnezzar's army was besieging Jerusalem and Jeremiah was kept under arrest in the courtyard of the palace guard. It is possible that the situation with his family in Anathoth was getting worse and Jeremiah was going home to see about it. If that is the case then the request from Hanamel his cousin to buy the field so it remained in the family was not a complete surprise. Jeremiah was probably already aware of the situation.

Jeremiah never leaves the city however because when he reaches the Benjamin Gate the captain of the guard accuses him of trying to desert to the Babylonians. The Benjamin Gate was probably on the north side of the city since the territory of Benjamin was to the north of Jerusalem. The captain of the guard is named Irijah, nothing more is known about him. He was however undoubtedly loyal to King Zedekiah and to his officials. He had probably been told to watch out for Jeremiah because what he had been preaching was considered by many to be treasonous.

Jeremiah denies that he is deserting to the Babylonians but Irijah does not believe him. He arrests Jeremiah and takes him to the king's officials. They are angry with the Lord's prophet and have him beaten and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary which had been converted into a prison.

37:16-21 - Jeremiah is kept at Jonathan the secretary's house in a vaulted cell in a dungeon. If the house had been converted into a prison then the dungeon might have been a storage cellar for food or other household items that worked well as a prison cell away from the light and from people. They kept Jeremiah there.

Zedekiah however sends for the prophet probably because deep down he knows Jeremiah will tell him the truth and he doubts his court prophets who are only telling the king what the official theology knows to say. Zedekiah might be cowardly but he is not stupid. He can see that at every turn Jeremiah has been proven right and his court prophets eventually proven wrong. He is afraid that the temporary respite from the Babylonian siege won't last. He is right. The king asks Jeremiah if there is any word from the Lord. Jeremiah tells him the truth; you will be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah then pleads his case with the king. He asks him what crime has he committed against the king or his officials so that they have imprisoned him. He asks Zedekiah where are his court prophets now who said Nebuchadnezzar will not attack the land. He tells the king, you

didn't imprison them for being false prophets. He pleads with the king not to send him back to the dungeon in Jonathan's house or he will die. The conditions in the dungeon must have been horrible and Jeremiah often suffered from deep depression. No wonder he didn't want to go back.

The king relents and orders Jeremiah be taken to the courtyard of the palace guard and there be kept under arrest. He is not free to move around the city or leave it but at least he is not in the dungeon. The king also gives orders that he is to be fed a ration of bread from the baker's street until the bread in the city is gone. Zedekiah has compassion on Jeremiah even though Jeremiah says very little that is favorable to the king. All he tells him is the truth! Jeremiah is spared the dungeon and is kept in the palace of the king for the rest of the siege of Jerusalem.

Chapter 38:

38:1-5 - This chapter tells the story of yet another incident where Zedekiah's officials opposed Jeremiah and tried to kill him in order to silence him.

The men listed in *verse 1* are unknown except for Jehucal, who was the king's official who read the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecy to King Jehoiachin which he burned. Pashhur, listed as the father or ancestor of Gedaliah, was a priest who returned after the exile according to *1 Chronicles 9:12*. But there is also a Pashhur son of Malkijah listed here who is a different Pashhur so it is not clear if the father of Gedaliah is the same Pashhur listed in *verse 1*.

The officials hear Jeremiah's message to the people that the people in the city will die by sword, famine and plague and that the city will be handed over to the Babylonians who will capture it. The Lord has determined this. Jeremiah also tells the people that whoever surrenders to the Babylonians will escape with his life and not die. The officials view Jeremiah's words as treasonous and undermining the army's effectiveness and morale. From their perspective they are correct. From the Lord's perspective Jeremiah is correct! This is a great illustration of how often the world's thinking and the Lord's thinking are complete opposites.

They tell King Zedekiah that Jeremiah deserves to die for saying such things and is not seeking the good of the people but their ruin. Zedekiah, who has previously sought Jeremiah's counsel and prayers, tells them the prophet is in their hands and the king will not oppose you. Zedekiah is afraid of the officials and gives Jeremiah over into their hands rather than oppose them. It is possible that he wants what they want but is too afraid of Jeremiah or the Lord to kill him. He may have seen the official's demands as a way to be rid of Jeremiah without having to do it himself. In any case he shows himself to be a coward and a man who was not a strong leader but could easily be manipulated. Zedekiah, as the last king of David's line in Judah does not represent the Davidic kingship very well at all!

38:6-13 - The officials take Jeremiah and throw him into a cistern of Malkijah, identified as the king's son. Is this Zedekiah's son or another member of the royal family who is simply identified as the king's son? Zedekiah would have been around 28 or 29 years old at the time of this incident. Did he have a son old enough to own his own cistern? I find that doubtful. It is more likely that Malkijah is the son of Jehoiachin than Zedekiah and Baruch, who probably edits the prophecy, simply identifies him as the king's son. He was a prince of Judah.

The cistern is in the courtyard of the guard where they were keeping Jeremiah under house arrest. They lowered him into the cistern by ropes. It had no water in it only mud and Jeremiah sinks into the mud. Ebed-Melech an Ethiopian in the service of the king goes to Zedekiah while he is sitting at the Benjamin Gate of the city and pleads for Jeremiah. The NIV calls Ebed-Melech an official. The Hebrew word means eunuch. He is called a Cushite which

means he is from the upper Nile region of either modern day Sudan or Ethiopia. He is a black African. He defends and rescues Jeremiah. In the New Testament Philip the Evangelist speaks to an Ethiopian eunuch from the court of Candace Queen of Ethiopia. He was returning from worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem in *Acts 8*, and Philip leads him to Christ. In both incidents the Ethiopian is cast in a good light. As a eunuch Ebed-Melech would have been denied access to the temple under the Law of Moses. Eunuchs were often trusted advisors and servants of Middle Eastern kings. Sometimes they were put in charge of the king's wives or harem.

Ebed-Melech goes to King Zedekiah and pleads for Jeremiah's life. They want Jeremiah dead, which Zedekiah knew, but instead of simply executing him with the sword they have doomed the prophet to a slow death of starvation in the mud of the cistern. Ebed-Melech tells the king what these men have done is wicked. Zedekiah conveniently doesn't tell Ebed-Melech he gave the officials permission to do with Jeremiah as they saw fit! It appears Ebed-Melech does not know of the king's complicity in Jeremiah's suffering. Zedekiah now sees a way to save face and appear merciful. He orders Ebed-Melech to take thirty men with him and pull Jeremiah out of the cistern.

Ebed-Melech takes some old rags to cushion the ropes for Jeremiah from a room under the treasury in the palace and he lowers some ropes down to the prophet. Then he and the men pull Jeremiah out of the cistern and save him. Jeremiah now remains in the courtyard of the guard. The plot to kill him is thwarted. The Lord continues to keep his promise to his prophet that he will be a bronze wall to all his enemies and that no one will be able to stop him. See *Jeremiah 1:17-19*.

38:14-18 - King Zedekiah has Jeremiah brought to him at the temple of the Lord. I do not know where the third entrance to the temple is and there is no other reference to identify it. The king must have believed that this section of the temple provided him with the privacy he needed to talk with Jeremiah without too many listening ears around them. Zedekiah wants to know what is going to happen to him and to Jerusalem. He knows Jeremiah is a true prophet even though he allowed his officials to try and kill Jeremiah and then gave permission for Ebed-Melech to try and save him. He is conflicted when it comes to the Lord's prophet! The fact that he once again brings Jeremiah to him and asks him if there is a message from the Lord says he no longer trusts his court prophets to tell him the truth.

Jeremiah responds by asking Zedekiah why he should tell him anything let alone the truth. The king will simply kill Jeremiah. Plus even if he tells him exactly what he should do Zedekiah will not listen to Jeremiah. He is going to do what he is going to do no matter what the Lord says!

Zedekiah swears an oath to Jeremiah in secret that he will not kill him or hand him over again to the officials who want to kill him. Jeremiah accepts the king's oath and tells Zedekiah what he has told him before. If he surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar his life will be spared and the city will not be burned down. Zedekiah and his family will live. If he does not Jerusalem will be burned down and the king will not escape. Jeremiah has told the king this before and has told the people the same thing. Surrender and be spared. Keep resisting and die. It is a message they don't want to hear and they choose not to believe because it so contradicts the official theology of the priests and court prophets. They cannot bring themselves to believe that God would hand them over to the Babylonians because they do not understand how sinful they truly are or how great their rebellion is against God. They have failed to grasp the Lord's heart and will.

38:19-28 - Zedekiah tells Jeremiah he is afraid of the Jews who have already gone over to Nebuchadnezzar. He is afraid if he surrenders to the Babylonians they will deliver him into their hands and the Jews will mistreat him. Zedekiah admits his fear of the Jews who have surrendered. His actions declare that he was also afraid of his officials who wanted to kill Jeremiah. He is afraid of both groups! Zedekiah is a coward. Fear marks his character, fear and rebellion. He would not surrender because he feared the Jews more than he feared the Lord.

Jeremiah tells the king the truth. He will be spared and Nebuchadnezzar will not hand him over to the Jews who are loyal to the Babylonians. He challenges the king to obey the Lord by doing what he tells him. If Zedekiah will obey God then it will go well with him and his life will be spared. If he refuses to surrender then the Lord has revealed to Jeremiah that all the women in the palace who are left when Jerusalem falls will lament to the king that he was misled. When they are brought out before Nebuchadnezzar's generals and officials they will say to Zedekiah that his "*friends*" misled him and overcame him. His feet are sunk in the mud and all his friends have deserted him. Who are Zedekiah's friends? The court officials who wanted to kill Jeremiah and the priests and court prophets who stubbornly cling to the official theology even now during the siege of the city. The king's true friend is Jeremiah who has always told him the truth even though it is a truth he does not want to hear and will not obey.

Jeremiah tells the king that all his wives and children will be captured by the Babylonians. The king himself will not escape and neither will the city. Jerusalem will be burned down. Zedekiah then tells Jeremiah not to divulge any of their conversation with anyone or he may die. If the officials come and ask Jeremiah what he and the king talked about Zedekiah instructs Jeremiah to lie. He tells him say that he was pleading with the king not to send him back to the dungeon in Jonathan's house or he would die. The officials do come and question Jeremiah. He does exactly as the king instructed him to do. He lies and says what the king told him to say. Since no one else heard his conversation with the king the officials accept Jeremiah's story and leave him alone. Perhaps Zedekiah knew his court well enough to know how to protect Jeremiah and that is why he instructed him to lie. Did Jeremiah resist not telling the truth? Did the Lord confirm to his prophet it was all right to lie in this case? Those are difficult questions that have no answers. The reality is Jeremiah followed the king's command and lied to the officials. They left him alone and he remained in the courtyard of the guard until the city fell. He was never thrown back in the dungeon or the cistern again. Zedekiah, last son of Josiah, last reigning king of the line of David in Judah, orders the prophet of the Lord to lie to a group of the king's officials whom he fears in order to spare the prophet's life. Jeremiah obeys the king and his life is spared. The Lord worked through even the king's deceptive command to spare his prophet. Sometimes God's purposes are worked out through even our sinful actions. God's will be done!

Chapter 39:

39:1-7 - Jeremiah or Baruch detail how Jerusalem fell. In the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah, December 588, Nebuchadnezzar marched his Babylonian army to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. This is after Zedekiah had revolted against Nebuchadnezzar in the hopes that Hophra, Pharaoh of Egypt, would help him against the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar temporarily left Jerusalem to meet and defeat Hophra in Gaza whereupon Hophra went back to Egypt with his army and left Zedekiah at the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar.

On July 9, 586, some eighteen months after the siege of Jerusalem began; the city fell to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar's generals and officials entered the city and took seats at the

Middle Gate. Zedekiah seeing this fled through the wall of the city by night and headed toward the Jordan Valley to escape.

The Babylonians learned of the king's escape and pursued him and overtook him and his party in the plains of Jericho. There they captured Zedekiah and his sons and took them to Nebuchadnezzar at his headquarters in Riblah on the Orontes River in Syria. Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar who ordered the king's sons and all the nobles of Judah who were with him executed while Zedekiah watched. Then Zedekiah's eyes were put out and he was bound with bronze shackles and taken to Babylon in chains where he died. Jeremiah's prophecy had been fulfilled. The king's life was spared and he saw Nebuchadnezzar with his own eyes, but he never returned to Jerusalem and none of his sons succeeded him on David's throne.

39:8-10 - Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, comes to the city a month later in August 586. He sets fire to the palace and the houses of Jerusalem and breaks down the walls of the city to make it uninhabitable. He carries into exile the people who remained in the city along with those who had gone over to the Babylonians during the siege. He leaves behind the poorest in the land to work the fields and vineyards that are left. One wonders how the poor people of Judah viewed the Babylonians. Nebuzaradan gifted them the fields, vineyards and olive groves of their rich masters. Yet the Babylonians were destroying their country and taking the king captive. They must have had mixed emotions over what was happening.

Jeremiah's prophecy does not mention here that Nebuzaradan also destroyed Solomon's temple and raided it, taking all the temple articles with him to Babylon, including whatever gold was left and the bronze sea and pillars. It is curious that he leaves out that detail in this account. In *Jeremiah 52*, which is basically a repeat of *2 Kings 25*, the temple's destruction is highlighted.

39:11-18 - Nebuzaradan had extraordinary orders concerning Jeremiah. He was not to harm him but look after him and do for him whatever he asked. It seems likely that Nebuchadnezzar had heard of Jeremiah and his attempts to get Zedekiah to surrender to him and may have wanted to treat him as an ally. It is also possible that he had seen the letter to the exiles written by Jeremiah to those taken to Babylon in the first deportation in 597. Whatever the reason his protection of Jeremiah fulfilled the Lord's promise to his prophet that his life would be spared and the Lord would protect him.

Nebuzaradan, and Nebushazban a chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar and Nergal-Sharezer a high Babylonian official with the occupying army, had Jeremiah brought from the courtyard of the guard where he had been held. They gave him into the custody of Gemaliah son of Ahikam who would become the governor of Judah on behalf of Babylon. Ahikam was an official in Josiah's court who was one of the people who read the Book of the Law to the king. Shaphan his father was the king's secretary. Gemaliah was the grandson of these men who had served under Josiah. Jeremiah had known his father and grandfather and probably had known Gemaliah all his life. Gemaliah takes Jeremiah into his own home to care for him.

During Jeremiah's time in the courtyard of the guard, the Lord gave him a message for Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian who had pulled Jeremiah out of the mud of the cistern and saved his life. The Lord tells Ebed-Melech he will see Jerusalem fall and everything that Jeremiah had prophesied come to pass but his life will be spared. He will not be handed over to the Babylonians and God will save him. He will escape with his life because he trusts in the Lord. This is a remarkable prophecy to a Gentile eunuch who was in Zedekiah's service. It shows God's grace to those who are faithful to him and prefigures God's New Covenant when his people will

be made up not just of Jews but of all those, Jew and Gentile, who are faithful to him and have a relationship with the Lord.

Chapter 40:

40:1-6 - This passage presents some difficulties in harmonizing the account here in *40:1-6* with *39:11-14* concerning how Jeremiah came to stay with Gemaliah. Is this account trying to add more detail to how Jeremiah came to be with Gemaliah or is it a completely different account? If it is a completely different explanation for how Jeremiah stayed with Gemaliah after the fall of Jerusalem it raises the question why did Baruch include this account along with *chapter 39*? Was he not present at the fall of Jerusalem and so simply reports two different sources for what happened? We do not know.

Verse 1 is curious because it says the word came to Jeremiah from the Lord yet there is no direct message from God that he is told. Nebuzaradan speaks to him about how the Lord decreed disaster upon Jerusalem because of the people's sin and that he is freeing Jeremiah. There is however no direct quote from the Lord as in the rest of Jeremiah's prophecy.

39:11-14 says Nebuchadnezzar had given orders not to harm Jeremiah and when Nebuzaradan and the other Babylonian officials found him in the courtyard of the guard they turned him over to Gedaliah for safekeeping. Here Nebuzaradan finds Jeremiah among the captives bound in chains going to Babylon. He releases him at Ramah in the territory of Benjamin north of Jerusalem. That is where he tells him that he is free to go where he chooses. Nebuzaradan tells Jeremiah that the reason all this has happened is because the people sinned against the Lord and did not obey him. It is curious that he would say this or even know it. However, Nebuchadnezzar knew of Jeremiah and his prophecies. It could be that the Babylonians played up the religious aspect of their campaign to try and convince the Jews to surrender. In their eyes Marduk was a stronger god, but this was Yahweh's land they were taking and in their pagan minds they did not want to offend the god of the land.

Nebuzaradan tells Jeremiah he can come with him to Babylon if he wishes and he will take care of him which is a generous offer and one of respect. He gives Jeremiah freedom to go where he wishes. However, just as Jeremiah turns to go he tells him go back to Gedaliah who has been appointed over the remaining towns of Judah. Live among your people there. Nebuzaradan gives Jeremiah some provisions and a gift of some kind and lets him go. Jeremiah goes to be with Gedaliah at Mizpah in Benjamin, north of Jerusalem because the city is now a smoking ruin and uninhabitable.

I am not sure one can harmonize the two accounts in *chapters 39 and 40*. They both give explanations as to how Jeremiah came to be with Gemaliah at Mizpah. The difficulty is in *39:14* Nebuzaradan turns Jeremiah over to Gemaliah in Jerusalem at the courtyard of the guard. In *40:1* he is found by Nebuzaradan among the captives in chains going to Babylon and is then released and on his own finds Gemaliah. It is possible that both accounts preserve details of what actually happened, but the stories do not agree and the question remains why Baruch, who probably edited Jeremiah's prophecy, includes both accounts. There are no easy answers to the dilemma. However, one thing is certain from both stories. Nebuzaradan frees Jeremiah and somehow he comes to stay with Gemaliah in Mizpah. That sets up the next incident with Ishmael and the assassination of Gemaliah. This story also shows how God preserves his prophet and protects him, giving him aid and compassion even from his pagan enemy. God keeps the promise he made to Jeremiah in his call in *Jeremiah 1:4-19*.

49:7-10 - Some of the Judean army were still at large in the open country after the fall of Jerusalem. Among them were Ishmael, Johanan, and Seraiah, all officers. The sons of Ephai the Netophathite were with them as well. They were of the same town or area as one of David's mighty men, one of the Thirty. The text does not say if they were directly related but it is possible. Jaazaniah was also with them. He was the son of the Maacathite, which was an area in Gilead Moses had given to the tribe of Manasseh. These officers along with the men who were still under their command came to Gedaliah at Mizpah whom the Babylonians had set over the Jews remaining in the land to govern them. Mizpah was north of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin.

When Ishmael and his officers come to Gedaliah he swears an oath to them to reassure them. He tells them to settle down in the land and serve Nebuchadnezzar and it will go well with them. He says he will represent the Jews in the land before the Babylonians. He encourages them to harvest the wine and the summer fruit and oil and store them up for the winter. Live in the towns they have taken over.

Think of the situation Gedaliah was facing. The Babylonians had killed or driven off many of the population. Many towns were deserted or had few inhabitants. Jerusalem and all the major fortified cities were in ruins and had been burned. The cream of the country's leadership had been taken into exile to Babylon. All Gedaliah had left were some of the poorer people to work the land. For them despite the disaster houses were available that had been abandoned. Crops were ready to be harvested because the landowners were gone and the olives and fruit were ripening with no one to pick them. Gedaliah is trying to encourage his people to pick up the pieces of the country they have left and go on living as best they can. Life needs to go on. People need to eat. The land needs to be worked and people need a place to live and stay. Along come Ishmael and his band of soldiers. They can help him. However, one wonders why Ishmael and his soldiers had escaped. Were they part of the contingent of soldiers who had been guarding Zedekiah who had fled with him by night out of Jerusalem when the Babylonians had breached the walls? It is possible. Yet if they were why were they still alive? Why hadn't they protected the king and sacrificed their lives? The situation raises questions as to Ishmael's character and his subsequent actions confirm the suspicions.

40:11-12 - Many Jews had fled to the surrounding territories of Moab, Ammon and Edom to escape the Babylonians. When they heard that Gedaliah had been appointed to govern the remnant of the Jews in Judah they came back to the land and to Gedaliah at Mizpah. Gedaliah steps into the leadership vacuum left by the Babylonian invasion and exile of Judah's rulers. A remnant returns to Judah and they harvest the wine and summer fruit. It was a plentiful harvest in 586.

40:13-16 - Johanan, one of the sons of Kareah, an army officer who had come to Gedaliah along with Ishmael, goes to Gedaliah and speaks to him. He tells him that Baalis, king of Ammon has sent Ishmael to kill Gedaliah. Gedaliah does not believe him. Baalis wants to take advantage of the power vacuum in Judah and take over the land for himself. If he can eliminate Gedaliah then he can step in and take the riches of the land for his own people. The Babylonians had only left a token force and they can easily be gotten around. Baalis sees an opportunity for spoils for his own land and a rich harvest ready to be taken. Eliminate the leader and the people will scatter, then he can come in and take what he wants. Johanan learns of the plot and tells Gedaliah about it. He was loyal to Gedaliah and to the remnant of Judah. Ishmael obviously was not and was open

to a murder for hire if it meant money with which to survive. He is probably also angry over Judah's defeat and Gedaliah is an easy target for his anger. He sees him as a collaborator with the Babylonians. Either Ishmael doesn't care or he doesn't see he is being manipulated by Baalis against his own people.

Johanan volunteers to go assassinate Ishmael so that no one knows what happened. Gedaliah will have none of it. He insists the reports about Ishmael are false. Johanan sees the consequences of an assassination of Gedaliah. If he is killed all the Jews who have come to Gedaliah at Mizpah will be scattered and any hope they had over restarting their lives and the bountiful harvest they have experienced will be smashed. This is an important detail for later in the story because Johanan believes what he tells Gedaliah so strongly he will even reject the counsel of Jeremiah to stay in the land.

Chapter 41:

41:1-3 - Verse 1 says in the seventh month. Jerusalem fell in the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, which was July of 586. This is most likely October of that same year, three months later. If so it is around the time of Succoth and the Day of Atonement. Gedaliah had established his administration at Mizpah to the north of Jerusalem and many Jews had begun to come to him and settle there. They had already harvested the summer fruit. Things were beginning to stabilize for people. Ishmael and ten of his men were eating with Gedaliah in Mizpah. The text says Ishmael was of royal blood and names Elishama as his father, who is otherwise unknown. Ishmael is also identified as one of Zedekiah's officers. He had fled Jerusalem some time during the siege and it is possible that he was part of the military contingent with Zedekiah who left in the night when the Babylonians breached the walls and headed towards Jericho. If so, he was not captured with the king but escaped. Was he ordered by Zedekiah to flee or did he abandon his duty and save himself? We do not know. This chapter tells us he had allied himself with Baalis king of the Ammonites to kill Gedaliah. After they assassinate him Ishmael and his men try and escape to Ammon. His loyalty and character are questionable at best.

Gedaliah is shown to be too trusting, as Johanan had warned Gedaliah that Ishmael was working for Baalis and the Ammonites. Gedaliah invites Ishmael and his officers to dinner. While they are eating together Ishmael and his men kill Gedaliah with the sword, along with many Jews who had come to Mizpah and a contingent of Babylonian soldiers who were there as well. We think it tragic they used the dinner party to assassinate Gedaliah but from a Middle Eastern perspective this was a terrible violation of Gedaliah's hospitality. It was unthinkable they would do such a thing after he had invited them into his home for dinner.

Ishmael has done what Baalis desired and sowed chaos among the Jews. He has precipitated another crisis for them because he has murdered the man the Babylonians appointed governor over the remnant of the Jews, Gedaliah. He has thrown Mizpah into chaos and further scattered the people who have begun to gather there seeking some kind of stability after the disaster. He has also forced the Babylonians to respond because he has killed their soldiers. Paul in the New Testament warned the Ephesian elders in *Acts 20* about wolves among their own number who will come among them to try and destroy God's flock. Ishmael is only doing the enemy's bidding here. He was one of the king's own officers and of royal blood, yet he is working for the interests of Baalis, an enemy of the Jews. He serves as a stark example of someone whom we should be able to trust and yet who is allied against God's people. He was not a Babylonian or even an Ammonite; he was a Jew!

41:4-10 - The day after Gedaliah's assassination eighty men from north of Judah, from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria, were coming down to Jerusalem to bring grain offerings to the ruins of the house of the Lord. It is quite possible that they are coming now in October because this was the time for Succoth or Tabernacles and they were making a pilgrimage to the site of the temple. They had shaved their beards and torn their clothes in mourning. Ishmael goes out to meet them as they approach Mizpah, weeping, feigning sympathy. He invites them to come into Mizpah and meet Gedaliah. Suspecting nothing the men comply. When they arrive at Mizpah, Ishmael and his men slaughter them and throw their bodies into a cistern. Ten of them beg Ishmael not to kill them and tell him about a hidden store of food in a field. He lets them go. The text notes that the cistern was one King Asa had dug as part of his defense against Baasha, King of Israel. See *1 Kings 15:22*. Ishmael filled the cistern with the dead, thus defiling and ruining it.

He took captive all the rest of the people who were alive in Mizpah, including the king's daughters, and he set out to cross the Jordan and climb into the hills of Gilead, into Ammon and to his patron King Baalis. Ishmael by his actions shows that he is a complete traitor to his people. Why did he do it? *Jeremiah* does not tell us specifically. His character is evil. Baalis may have given him a large sum of money to accomplish chaos. He may be taking out his anger and shame over Jerusalem's fall on anyone who was left alive. Why slaughter the mourners coming to worship at the ruins of the temple? The only thing that makes sense is he didn't want any witnesses. But if that is the case why does he let the ten men go? This is one of those incidents where evil is totally irrational and there is no logical explanation. There may be no good reason other than evil and chaos for Ishmael's behavior. It is often the case today when evil people do heinous things.

41:11-15 - Johanan and his men, also survivors of the siege of Jerusalem, heard about what Ishmael and his men had done. They pursue Ishmael and his party who are now slowed down with all their captives as they head for Ammon. Johanan catches Ishmael at the great pool in Gibeon, which was south of Bethel and north of Jerusalem. It was still in the tribal territory of Benjamin. When the captives saw Johanan they rejoiced and went over to him, escaping Ishmael and possible slavery in Ammon. Ishmael and eight of his men however escape to Ammon.

Johanan had warned Gedaliah about Ishmael's pact with Baalis king of Ammon. He had warned him that Ishmael wanted to kill him and thereby create chaos among the remnant of Jews left in Judah. Ishmael succeeded in his mission. Though Johanan freed the king's daughters and the other captives who had come to Gedaliah in Mizpah yet now the future for them was very uncertain. Should they stay in Judah, try to explain what happened to the Babylonian authorities and hope for the best? Or, should they flee to safety somewhere like Egypt and try and make a new life in exile? They choose the latter and it was a mistake as Jeremiah will tell them.

41:16-18 - Johanan and his officers lead their charges south towards Egypt stopping near Bethlehem on their way. The party includes Johanan and his men, soldiers who have survived from King Zedekiah's army, some of the king's daughters according to *41:10* and other women with them, and some court officials who had also survived and had probably been with Gedaliah trying to help him govern what was left of the people of Judah. At this point after Ishmael's assassination of Gedaliah the people are so shell-shocked they are content to let Johanan lead them wherever he is willing. No one challenges the plan to flee to Egypt. No one thinks through the fact that they did not resist the Babylonian troops or their rule over them, Ishmael did. Johanan is on the right side of the conflict with Ishmael. Jeremiah says the whole party is afraid

of what the Babylonians will do because of Ishmael's killing of Gedaliah. Rather than offer protection to a shattered remnant they fear Babylonian reprisal upon them for being Jews and being associated even in part with Gedaliah's murder. They are wrong as Jeremiah will tell them.

Chapter 42:

42:1-6 - Johanan and the officers with him along with all the people who were refugees with them approach Jeremiah who was also part of this band. Jeremiah had gone to Gedaliah after Nebuzaradan had freed him. He had witnessed all that had happened with Ishmael's treachery and is the source for this historical section of his prophecy. Was Baruch with him? It appears from the comments in 43:3 that he was. Baruch therefore is also one of the sources for this section of *Jeremiah*.

The people come to the Lord's prophet and ask Jeremiah to pray for them and ask the Lord what they should do and where they should go. It sounds like a genuine request and Jeremiah takes them at their word. He agrees to pray and ask the Lord on their behalf what to do. He then tells them that he will tell them everything the Lord tells him and will hold nothing back. This is partly a ceremonial way of saying to them I will tell you the truth and nothing but the truth. It is also telling them you might not like what the Lord says so be prepared! For their part Johanan and the people with him tell Jeremiah tell us everything the Lord says. They say may the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act as the Lord says. They promise to obey the Lord whether what he tells Jeremiah is favorable or unfavorable, whether they like the message or not. Then it will go well with us for we will obey. As we shall see these are empty words because they will disobey the Lord and flee to Egypt despite Jeremiah's warning to them. It is as if Johanan and the rest can't help themselves. They promise obedience just like their ancestors did at Mt. Sinai and then immediately turn around and disobey the Lord. They have a spiritual disease and can't help rebelling against God. Even now after all that has happened to them which *Jeremiah* and the other prophets have made crystal clear came upon them precisely because of their disobedience, they will turn against the Lord again and disobey him. Jeremiah's words in 17:9 will be confirmed once again, the human heart is deceitful above all things and who can understand it! The actions of Johanan and the remnant of the people with him are a living parable of human sin and the fact that without the Holy Spirit in us to change our hearts we cannot obey God with any kind of faithfulness. We desperately need the grace of God!

42:7-21 - Jeremiah prays for the remnant and seeks the Lord for a word from him about what to do. Ten days later it comes to him. He calls Johanan and all the people with them to gather so he can tell them what the Lord said.

God tells them if they stay in the land he will build them up and not tear them down. He will plant them and not uproot them because the Lord is grieved over what he has inflicted upon Judah. The declaration that God will build them up and not tear them down is language that is very similar to Jeremiah's call in 1:10. This is not the first time Jeremiah has received a message from the Lord that has echoed that language. The more intriguing statement is the Lord saying he is grieved over the disaster he has inflicted upon them. Ezekiel says in *Ezekiel 33:11* that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but is pleased when they turn and repent. Jeremiah shows us that when God has to judge us and punish us as his people it grieves him, it hurts him because his first inclination is love and forgiveness. His holiness will not allow sin to go unpunished yet he does not delight in doing it. His heart is to bless his people and prosper them not to punish and destroy them. God tells the remnant not to be afraid of Nebuchadnezzar

because the Lord is with them. He will deliver them from his hands. The Lord is ready to show them compassion and restore them to the land. If they had stayed they would have been the first of the faithful remnant of Judah that the Lord would have re-planted in the land even before the return of the exiles from Babylon.

However, the Lord also tells them if they elect to leave the land and disobey the Lord, if they say they will go and live in Egypt believing there they will escape war and have enough to eat, the Lord tells them the sword they fear will overtake them. The famine they dread will follow them and they will die in Egypt. If they continue their journey to flee to Egypt then the sword, famine and death will come upon them and not one of them will survive or escape the disaster the Lord will bring upon them. They will have survived the ruin of Jerusalem and the murder and sack of Mizpah only to perish in Egypt! God declares to them the way of repentance which is to stay in the land and not flee. He tells them the consequences and says his wrath will be poured out on them just as it was against all who lived in Jerusalem. The Jews who flee will be an object of cursing and reproach because they did not listen to the Lord. They will never see their land God gave them again.

Jeremiah closes his message to the remnant with a plea from the Lord. Do not go to Egypt. Then he says you made a fatal mistake when you sent me to the Lord for his Word. He says, I have told you what the Lord said and you have still not obeyed him. Be sure of this if you go to Egypt you will die there. Do not go!

Did Jeremiah know what they would do? Did he know Johanan's heart and understand what he really wanted was for Jeremiah to tell him what he was doing was right? Paul tells Timothy in *2 Timothy 4:3-4* that in the last times people will gather teachers around them that will tell them what their itching ears want to hear. That is what Johanan wanted Jeremiah to do. He wanted God's prophet to validate his decision to go to Egypt not tell him the truth. Jeremiah understands that and despite their vow to the contrary to obey whatever the Lord tells them he knows they will disobey. Johanan has made a mistake and now the responsibility for all the people's lives with him is on his head.

Chapter 43:

43:1-7 - Johanan, another officer named Azariah and "*all the arrogant men*" tell Jeremiah that he is lying. The Lord didn't say don't go to Egypt and settle there. It is curious how they knew this since none of them had ever had the experience of being one of the Lord's prophets. Plus Jeremiah had been proven accurate in his hearing of the Lord's Word since everything he had said would happen had taken place. That according to the Law of Moses in *Deuteronomy 18* is the true test of a prophet. If he proclaims the Lord says something and it doesn't happen he is no prophet of the Lord. The court prophets had been proven false and Jeremiah had been proven true. But Johanan and his officers didn't want to hear what Jeremiah had to say. They only wanted him to confirm a decision they had already made. They really didn't want to obey the Lord and do what he said. They wanted the Lord through Jeremiah to simply approve what they wanted to do. They wanted God to bless their desires so they could call it the will of the Lord. We still do the same things today!

Johanan in his fight against Ishmael appears to be someone Jeremiah and the people can trust. Here his true character shines through. He is also arrogant and unwilling to admit a mistake. He even accuses Baruch of manipulating Jeremiah to speak against them because Baruch wants to hand them all over to the Babylonians. They accuse Baruch of lying and being in league with the Babylonian army. That is completely irrational but they are now beyond

reason. Baruch is still with the remnant and Jeremiah at this point. He must have left them when they got to Egypt and returned to Judah at some unknown time in order to complete his work on Jeremiah's prophecy. If that is the case then Baruch is one of the only ones whom Johanan took to Egypt who returned and survived the abortive attempt to find safety in Egypt. Even Jeremiah died there.

Johanan and his men disobey the Lord and ignore Jeremiah's words to them. They take everyone who was with them and flee towards Egypt and away from the Babylonian army. They take the entire remnant including the king's daughters and everyone who had come from the nations around Judah to Gedaliah at Mizpah. They enter Egypt and go as far as Tahpanhes which is a city in the eastern Nile Delta. There was a fortress in that area built by Psammetichus I, father of Neco who had defeated Josiah which may be the site of Tahpanhes and where Jeremiah hid some stones to mark a prophecy about Egypt and an attack by Nebuchadnezzar. Tahpanhes would have been near the area of ancient Goshen. The symbolism of the location of Tahpanhes is not to be missed. Goshen was the land of ancient Israel's slavery and captivity. Now the remnant of Judah led by Johanan has returned to it. They are not fleeing to freedom; they are fleeing to bondage! They will all perish in Egypt and never return to the Promiseland.

43:8-13 - At Tahpanhes Jeremiah receives another prophecy from the Lord concerning what will happen to them as they try and re-settle in Egypt to escape Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. God tells him to take some large stones and bury them in clay in the brick pavement area at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. Then tell all the Jews whom Johanan has brought to Egypt that the Lord will send Nebuchadnezzar to Egypt and he will set up his throne over these stones that Jeremiah has buried. He will come and attack Egypt bringing death and destruction with him. Some of the Jews will die and others will go into captivity. He will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt and take their idols. Like a shepherd wraps his cloak around him so will Nebuchadnezzar wrap himself with Egypt and leave unscathed. In the temple of the sun, meaning Heliopolis, he will demolish the sacred pillars and burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt. The sun god's temple was in Heliopolis, which is also named On and was one of the two main capital cities of Egypt with Memphis. The sun god was Ra or Atun and On was the major center of his worship. The Pharaoh's were named the sons of Ra. Heliopolis is the Greek name for On and simply means city of the sun.

Jeremiah tells the Jews they will not be safe in Egypt from Nebuchadnezzar and his army. He will invade Egypt and destroy her temples and cities, especially in the north or Lower Egypt. Incomplete Babylonian accounts tell of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt in 567-568. He did not conquer the entire country but invaded it and sacked many of its major cities just as Jeremiah had prophesied. His invasion would have been almost twenty years after Johanan and his group had fled Judah to escape Nebuchadnezzar. By that time Jeremiah is long dead and Johanan and his company must have believed they were safe from the Babylonians. They would have settled down and started raising families again when the invasion would have taken place. Jeremiah's words would turn out to be true just as he said. In the end Johanan's attempt at fleeing the Babylonians in Egypt would turn out to be a failure.

Chapter 44:

44:1-14 - Jeremiah prophesies against all the Jews who have fled to Egypt and are living in Lower Egypt, meaning from the Nile Delta down to Memphis and On, the area near modern day Cairo where the Nile exits its narrower valley and begins to spread out into the Delta. Memphis

and On were two of the great ancient capitals of Egypt. The pyramids are in nearby Giza. Migdol was a fortress city in the north eastern Nile Delta. All the cities Jeremiah mentions here are either in the Delta or like Memphis in the far northern part of the Nile Valley.

Jeremiah rehearses all that God has done to Jerusalem and Judah because of the people's sin and idolatry. He tells them God sent them his prophets over and over again to turn them back to the covenant he made with them but they would not listen and continued to disobey the Lord. Therefore the Lord poured out on them his wrath and destroyed Judah and Jerusalem.

Jeremiah asks them why bring the same kind of disaster upon yourselves so that your men, women, children and infants will have no remnant left. Why do they continue to burn incense to the gods of Egypt to which they have fled? They risk destroying themselves by repeating the same mistakes their fathers and mothers made and so incur the wrath of the Lord. They have forgotten all the wickedness their kings and queens committed. Despite all they have experienced in the fall of Jerusalem they have not learned anything. They have not humbled themselves before the Lord or shown fear and reverence to him. They have not followed the Lord's decrees or obeyed his commandments. They are just like their parents' generation! They have learned nothing. I think Jeremiah is both incensed by their idolatry and lack of repentance and totally mystified by it. He cannot believe they have learned nothing from all that has happened!

Jeremiah tells them that God is determined to bring disaster upon all of Judah. He will destroy them. They think they have fled to safety in Egypt. They will perish there. God will hunt them down to destroy them with the sword and famine. They may think themselves safe from the Babylonians but the Lord knows where they are and they are not safe from his wrath! If they had stayed in Judah God would have cared for them and restored them but because they have disobeyed him and fled to Egypt and now have begun once again to worship foreign gods, namely the gods of Egypt, the Lord will find them and destroy them. None of the remnant who has fled to Egypt will ever escape or survive to return to Judah again. None will return except a few fugitives. This may be a reference to Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary. He did return to Judah with much of Jeremiah's prophecy.

It is interesting to note that in Elephantine, a city at the southern end of the Nile Valley to the north of the cataracts of the Nile at Khartoum, a Jewish temple was discovered dating from the Persian period. This would have placed it around a century later than Jeremiah's prophecy. Elephantine is a city on an island in the Nile. The temple was not a synagogue but had an altar and appeared to be used for sacrifices to Yahweh. What makes it more interesting is that there were also altars to pagan gods in it as well. That means the worship of Yahweh that was practiced by Jews who had fled to the southernmost reaches of Egypt was highly syncretistic and included worship and sacrifices to Yahweh but also other pagan gods at the same time. In other words the Jews of Elephantine were practicing the same kind of worship as the Jews of the remnant who had fled to Egypt with Johanan after the fall of Jerusalem. It is entirely possible that the Jews of Elephantine were descended from the Jews who fled with Johanan. The Elephantine temple and colony was destroyed sometime in the 400's perhaps when Xerxes invaded Egypt to put down a rebellion there. Cambyses had conquered Egypt for Persia in 525. Jeremiah's words were literally fulfilled and all the Jews who had fled to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem and tried to build a new life there failed. They passed from history and did not survive.

44:15-19 - The people respond to Jeremiah. All those who had been making cakes to the Queen of Heaven and burning incense to her and other gods, both men and women, the whole assembly

of all of those who fled to Egypt reply to Jeremiah. They tell him we will not listen to your message. We will continue to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven. We will pour out drink offerings to her and worship her just as our ancestors did and our kings and officials. Their reason; when they did they had plenty of food and were well off. The moment they stopped they have had nothing and have been killed with the sword and with famine. The women give the excuse that their husbands knew what they were doing and approved of it so it. Basically they tell Jeremiah that since they are under their husbands and they did not object it is all right to do.

Jeremiah warns them in the most direct terms he can that they are repeating the same mistakes their parents did and risk total destruction by the Lord. They are going back to the idolatrous ways that brought on the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. Yet their answer is no, we will burn incense and offer drink offerings because that is what gave us prosperity and food. No harm came to us until we stopped giving her offerings. They are so caught in their idolatry and sin they can't see their own evil. They have been totally deceived by the "*Queen of Heaven.*" That title is probably a reference to Asherah or Astarte, the consorts of Baal. Ishtar was the Babylonian name. She was the earth mother and fertility goddess. Many ancient pagan cultures worshipped some manifestation of the idea. The Greeks named her Dianna or Artemis and combined the Greek idea with eastern ones at the temple of Dianna in Ephesus in Paul's day.

When did the people stop burning incense to pagan gods? The only logical answer is during Josiah's reforms when he led a revival of the worship of Yahweh and stopped much of the pagan worship of his people and defiled most of the high places where they worshipped. It is obvious from these people's response to Jeremiah that the king's reforms did not reach as deeply as he had hoped. These people are so deep into their sin they look back at Josiah's revival as the beginning of their troubles!!!

44:20-30 - Jeremiah replies to all the Jews who have fled to Egypt and refuse to obey the Lord and stop burning incense to their idols. He says didn't the Lord remember what your parents and they did in worshipping idols and so bring upon them what their actions deserved, namely the destruction of Judah? Jeremiah says the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Judah is your fault. Your sins resulted in the Lord's judgment upon Judah.

Now they have promised to keep burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and their actions show they have kept that promise! Jeremiah says go ahead keep your promise but hear what God says. No one from Judah living in Egypt will ever again invoke the Lord's name because he is watching them to bring them harm and not good. They will not prosper in Egypt they will perish by the sword and famine just as the rest of the Jews in Judah did. Those who escape Egypt and return to Judah will be few in number. Then all the remnant of Judah who came to Egypt will know whose word will stand, the Lord's or theirs!

Jeremiah gives them a sign that his Word will come true and they will be judged. Pharaoh Hophra in whom they have trusted will be handed over to his enemies who seek his life, just as the Lord handed over King Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. Hophra was overly ambitious in his military endeavors. He sought to come to the aid of Zedekiah to lift the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem but was repulsed by Nebuchadnezzar's forces. He led a campaign into Libya that ended in failure and resulted in Ahmose being named co-regent. Hophra was slain in a conflict with Ahmose in 570 and Jeremiah's words were fulfilled.

Chapter 45:

45:1-5 - God gives a message to Baruch, son of Neriah, Jeremiah's secretary. This is given in the fourth year of Jehoiachim, or 603, after Baruch had written the scroll Jeremiah had dictated and the king had burned. The prophecy breaks from the narrative about the remnant that had fled to Egypt and deals with the Lord's promise to Baruch. Perhaps it is placed here to serve as a contrast to the unfaithful remnant in Egypt. Jeremiah's faithful scribe was taken to Egypt as part of that group. Jeremiah said only a handful would ever return to Judah from Egypt. It is most likely that Baruch was one of those. This prophecy confirms that hypothesis.

Baruch told Jeremiah that God had added sorrow to his pain and he was worn out with suffering. God tells Baruch that he will overthrow what he has built and uproot what he has planted throughout the land. This repeats language God used in Jeremiah's call in *1:10*. God tells Baruch to expect trouble because he lives in troubled times. This prophecy was given even before the exile of Jehoiachin in 597. Baruch would live through all the fall of Jerusalem and be taken into exile in Egypt by Johanan and his men. Should Baruch seek great things for himself during the time God is bringing disaster upon his people Judah? Yet God says wherever Baruch goes he will escape with his life. God will preserve him in the midst of the difficult times. God will not take Baruch out of the troubled times but he will preserve him in them.

The theme of preserving God's people through troubled times rather than removing them from the trouble is the pattern of the Old Testament prophets. That same pattern needs to be used to interpret all the last days prophecies of Jesus' second coming, the Great Tribulation and when the Rapture happens to the church rather than the artificial prophetic formula of the Dispensationalists that say God will take his people out of suffering all together. Baruch and God's promise to him becomes a type of how God will deal with his faithful people in difficult times.

Chapter 46:

46:1-2 - *Chapter 46* marks a major shift in Jeremiah's prophecy. From *46:2-51:54* Jeremiah's words deal with the nations of the Middle East with which Judah had contact. God had told him in his call in *Jeremiah 1:5* that he was appointing him a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah's mission was not just to God's people in Judah and the remnant of Israel. He was to speak the Word of the Lord to the nations around him because God is the only God and the Lord of all peoples, the Lord of the nations. The Jews were his special people but all the nations are his care and responsibility. *Jeremiah* like *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* and many other prophets understood that their calling expressed Israel's growing understanding of Yahweh as the only God of all peoples and that the Lord had plans for all nations and not just Judah and Israel.

Jeremiah speaks first to Egypt. He gives his prophecy to the defeated army of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt after Nebuchadnezzar had defeated him at Carchemish on the Euphrates River in northern Syria in 605. Neco was trying to aid the remnants of the Assyrian army to prop them up so they could act as a buffer against the growing power of Babylon and Neco's interests in Canaan. Jeremiah's prophecy takes place in the fourth year of Jehoiachim or 603.

It is important to note that the Septuagint places these prophecies to the nations in a different place than the Hebrew text of *Jeremiah*. The Jews who lived in Egypt in the Greek period translated the Septuagint. They place *46:1-51:64* after *25:13* which is the prophecy of the 70 years of captivity. Further the order of the prophecies against the nations is different in the Septuagint. The order is *49:34-39* (Elam), *46:2-28* (Egypt), *50:1-51:64* (Babylon), *47:1-7* (Philistines), *49:7-22* (Edom), *49:1-6* (Ammon), *49:28-33* (Arabs), *49:23-27* (Damascus), *48:1-44* (Moab). God used both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint to preserve Jeremiah's words and

gather the book into the canon of Scripture. Our modern translations follow the Hebrew text and order. Why the Hebrew text and the Septuagint are so different where these prophecies of the nations are concerned is unknown. It suggests the Hebrew text the translators had could have been fragmentary or they had several different sections of Jeremiah's prophecy with which to work. That however is only speculation.

46:3-12 - Jeremiah speaks against Egypt and Neco's army. He says get ready for battle, harness the horses, and take your positions with your helmets on. He calls Egypt's army to ready themselves. Yet what does he see? Men retreating, defeated warriors. They flee in haste without looking back. Egypt has been defeated. Nebuchadnezzar crushed Neco's and Assyria's forces at Carchemish. It was one of the great battles of the ancient world and changed the course of Middle Eastern history. Jeremiah observes that Neco's army fell in the north by the Euphrates. That is where Carchemish is located, in northern Syria on the Euphrates.

Jeremiah says Neco's army came on like the flooding Nile. Neco had men from Egypt, the Sudan, Ethiopia and Libya, a great army. He had mercenaries, archers from Lydia in Asia Minor. But God was ultimately in charge and the Lord had determined that Nebuchadnezzar would defeat Neco and the way would be opened for him to conquer Judah. God had plans for his own people and used the pagan nations of the Middle East to carry out those plans. At Carchemish Neco was defeated.

Egypt would fall to Babylon. Other Pharaohs would follow Neco but they would not be able to overcome Nebuchadnezzar. He would eventually invade and sack northern Egypt and finally the Persians would conquer Egypt all together. After the Persians came the Greeks. And after the Greeks came the Romans. Egypt would never be a viable native power again. There was no healing for the nation just as Jeremiah said.

46:13-19 - Jeremiah gives another prophecy about Egypt separate from *46:3-12*. This one is concerning the attack of Nebuchadnezzar upon Egypt which took place later in Nebuchadnezzar's reign in 568-567. The date of this prophecy is indeterminate but the remnant of Jews who fled to Egypt under Johanan came there after the fall of Jerusalem in 586. The attack on Egypt was at least 18 years later. The historical records are sketchy but it appears Nebuchadnezzar invaded Lower Egypt and went as far as Memphis but never reached Upper Egypt and Thebes. He negotiated with Pharaoh Ahmose, successor to Hophra, and reached some agreement. Babylon and Egypt became allies after that against the growing threat of Medo-Persia. By 525 both nations were swallowed up by the Persians when Cambyses conquered Egypt. Babylon had already fallen in 539. The facts are once Nebuchadnezzar died the Babylonian empire did not last. Its leaders were weak and its power was spread too thin to hold together under the threat and might of Persia.

Jeremiah says tell Migdol, Memphis and Tahpanhes that an attack is coming. Migdol and Tahpanhes are cities in the western Nile Delta. Memphis is near modern day Cairo at the base of the Delta where the Nile Valley narrows down. This is the area Nebuchadnezzar invaded and sacked. Jeremiah tells the Egyptian army to get ready but they will not be able to stand against the invader. The Lord himself will push them down. God is judging Egypt. Ahmose built his army with the help of mercenaries from Sudan, Ethiopia, Libya, Lydia, and Greece. In *verses 14-17* Jeremiah may be expressing their point of view. He says they will stumble and fall repeatedly, then say, let us go home, away from the sword of the oppressor. Pharaoh is only a loud noise and he has missed his opportunity. Mercenaries were notorious for quitting a losing battle, especially

if there was no profit in it. Jeremiah is saying the mercenaries who fight for Pharaoh will do the same.

Jeremiah says the Lord Almighty who is the true King of all nations is going to raise up a general who is above all the rest just like Tabor is above the Valley of Jezreel in the east or Mt. Carmel stands above the valley in the west. Those two mountains are distinct and are easily seen from all around the northern part of Israel rising at least 1000 feet above the surrounding valley. It is a graphic way to show how much greater Nebuchadnezzar will be than the Egyptian army. He tells the people of Egypt pack your bags for you are going into exile. Memphis is going to be laid waste and lie in ruins. Nebuchadnezzar would sack the city during his invasion.

46:20-24 - Jeremiah compares Egypt to a beautiful heifer but a horsefly or gadfly is coming from the north that will cause her mercenaries to flee. Her army will not stand and fight but will run away. The Lord's time of punishment upon Egypt is coming. An army greater than the Egyptians is coming. They will be like men coming into a forest with axes. They will chop down the trees. This is figurative language because Egypt was not a country where forests were plentiful. The Egyptians might think they are like a dense forest but the invader is like a swarm of locusts, more than they can count. The Egyptians will be put to shame. They will be handed over to the people of the north, to the Babylonians.

Babylonian policy was to take the leadership of a country into exile after they conquered it, just as they did with Judah. They were not as brutal as the Assyrians but still used exile as a way to dampen revolt and keep a conquered population in line. They did not use re-settlement as the Assyrians did, taking away whole populations and then replacing them in the newly conquered territory with another displaced people. The Babylonians took the cream of the newly conquered country's leadership into exile to rob the people of those who could rally them against the invader and cow them into submission to Babylon. If Ahmose had fled south down the Nile to Thebes he may have been driven to negotiate with Nebuchadnezzar for peace because all of Lower Egypt had been taken and the breadbasket of his nation was now in Babylonian hands. Nebuchadnezzar had Ahmose in a position of great weakness and it appears took advantage of it. Jeremiah says Egyptians would be taken away to Babylon in exile. Were there Jews among those exiles who belonged to Johanan's group? He had settled them in Lower Egypt. Jeremiah said they would not be safe in Egypt and the sword would pursue them there as well. It is possible many were killed in Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and some may have been taken back to Babylon to join their fellow countrymen in exile.

46:25-26 - Jeremiah says God is about to punish Amon the god of Thebes. Amon was the name of the sun god in Egypt's pagan pantheon and the main temple of Amon was in Thebes. Thebes was in Upper Egypt about halfway between the Nile Delta and where the Blue Nile and White Nile separate. It was the capital of Upper Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar never reached Thebes in his invasion of Egypt. God is saying that he is breaking the power of Amon, the power of Pharaoh, the power of all Egypt's gods and kings. All who rely on Egypt will be punished. God will hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar and his army. Egypt will never be the power she once was. That is exactly what happened. Egypt's power was broken. The Ptolemies restored some of it but they were Greek kings not native Egyptians.

Jeremiah adds in some future time Egypt will be inhabited as in times past. Egypt had been one of the most important and most populous nations in the ancient world. Along with the realms in Mesopotamia, Egypt was the cradle of civilization. God does not say Egypt will

recover her power. He says she will recover her population. By the Greek and Roman times two to three centuries later Egypt became the breadbasket of Rome and her population had grown under the Greek Ptolemies. Jeremiah's words tell us that God cares for the people of Egypt. His ultimate purpose for the pagan nations of the world is not to destroy them all and have only his people the Jews survive. His purpose is to save them all which he would do through the Jews by sending Jesus into the world. God punishes sin, idolatry and injustice but he also preserves in order to save. John in *Revelation 22* says the tree of life is for the healing of the nations.

46:27-28 - Jeremiah speaks to Israel. He tells them not to be afraid. God will save them from out of a distant place. He will save their descendants who have lived in exile. Jacob will once again have peace, *shalom*, and security as God had promised them when he made a covenant with them. That promise was especially related to the Davidic Covenant. David's ancestor would sit on David's throne and the land and people would have peace and freedom from enemies and invasion. God says no one will make them afraid when he brings them back from exile.

The Lord tells his people that they need not fear because God is with them. That is the issue the exiles struggled with the most. Was God with us anymore? Were we still his people? Has God forgotten us? Jeremiah says no, he is still with them. The Lord will judge the nations to which he has scattered them. Even if God destroys all the nations around them he will not completely destroy the Jews. God will discipline them and they have experienced that discipline. But the Lord's discipline is filled with justice. He will not let their sin go unpunished. Yet the Lord is with them. He is still their God and they are his people.

Even today we need to apply this lesson. God does not punish us for our sins on this side of the cross because all the punishment we deserved was put upon Jesus. Yet he still disciplines us because he loves us. He allows us to suffer the consequences of our sins in order to bring us to repentance so that he can restore us and change us.

Jeremiah's message and ones like it helped the Jews weather the disaster of 586 and the years of exile in Babylon. *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* gave the people a framework through which they could process their grief over what had happened and come through it with their faith intact. It was providential for us because without their missions the Jews would have disappeared as a people and Jesus would not have come and therefore we would still be lost and enemies of God.

Chapter 47:

47:1 - This prophecy concerning the Philistines came to Jeremiah before Pharaoh attacked Gaza. Pharaoh Hophra attacked Gaza early in the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. It would have been in late 588 or early 587. Nebuchadnezzar temporarily raised the siege and moved to stop Hophra which he did. It is unclear whether the two armies met in open battle or Hophra realized he could not defeat Nebuchadnezzar's forces and retreated. The result of the confrontation was an Egyptian retreat that left Zedekiah isolated and unable to repulse the Babylonians. Jerusalem was surrounded and doomed. Egypt never again came to the help of Judah. See *Jeremiah 37:4-8* where the incident is described. It is most likely that this is the attack on Gaza that Jeremiah speaks of in this verse, especially since the prophecy deals with an attack from the north by the Babylonians and not an attack by Pharaoh from the south. That puts the date of the prophecy sometime before late 588.

47:2-7 - Jeremiah warns the Philistines that the waters are rising in the north and will overflow the land in a flood that they will not be able to escape. Geographically this is impossible since

Philistia is on the coastland of Israel and the sea is to the west. No major rivers flowed out of the Judean Mountains into Philistia. Jeremiah is speaking in obvious symbolic terms. The flood that is coming is not Pharaoh since he would have come from the south. The flood is Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar's army.

People will be panicked when the Babylonians come. At the sound of the chariots and battle horses fathers will run away without their children. The day of destruction has come. The Lord is about to destroy the survivors of Tyre and Sidon and the remnant of the coasts of Caphtor, that is Crete. The evidence of the Scriptures is that the Philistines were a remnant of the people of Crete. *Jeremiah 47, Deuteronomy 2 and Amos 9* all say this. That implies they were all fleeing from the destruction of the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations around the time of the Exodus in 1300-1200B.C. This confirms the hypothesis that the Philistines were a remnant of the Sea Peoples.

Jeremiah says Gaza will shave her head in mourning and Ashkelon will be silenced. Gaza and Ashkelon were two of the five chief Philistine cities. The three others were Ashdod, Ekron and Gath, the home of Goliath. The Philistines will mourn over their fall, but behind the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar will be the Lord. It is his doing and he will use the Babylonians to punish the Philistines for all their idolatry and opposition to his people. Jeremiah says the Lord has ordered it!

Chapter 48:

48:1-9 - Jeremiah prophesies against Moab. The Moabites were descended from Lot and his oldest daughter after the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah. See *Genesis 19:30-38*. Moab's territory was to the east of the Jordan River in the highlands above the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. Traditionally Moab lay between the wadis Arnon and Zered. The Arnon emptied into the Dead Sea on its eastern shore about midway down the Sea. However, in many eras of Biblical history Moab's territory expanded all the way to Mt. Nebo at the northern end of the Dead Sea. The Plains of Moab where the children of Israel waited to cross the Jordan were across from Jericho on the eastern bank of the Jordan River as it flowed into the Dead Sea. Ammon was to Moab's north and Edom was to its south. The King's Highway ran through Moab, the trade route that ran along the highlands east of the Arabah and Jordan Valley and west of the Arabian Desert. It was one of the three major trade routes from Egypt and the Red Sea to Syria and Mesopotamia.

Jeremiah says Nebo will be ruined and Kiriathaim will be captured. Heshbon will fall as well. These are all cities and locales in Moab. There are many plays on words in Hebrew in these verses. For instance, in *verse 2* Heshbon sounds like the Hebrew word for plot and the town name Madmen sounds like the Hebrew word for silenced. Jeremiah is using his writing skills to great effect here. The point he is making is that Moab will fall. Destruction is coming upon her cities and the people will flee in grief over the country's fall. Jeremiah warns them that Chemosh, the pagan idol the Moabites worshipped, will go into exile together with his priests and officials. The same fate that will happen to Judah will happen to Moab. Not a town will escape and the plateau will be destroyed. It will be like someone put salt on the land. It will be laid waste. The image is important because Moab lay on the highlands above the Dead Sea and the people would have been quite familiar with the salt pans and sinks around the lake and how nothing grew there at all. They lived on the highlands to escape not only the heat of the Dead Sea but its desolate land. There was enough rain on the Moabite highlands to sustain crops and a population. Now the Babylonians will make it desolate.

48:10 - This verse seems out of place in the midst of this prophecy against Moab. Jeremiah says cursed is the one who is lax in doing the Lord's work and who keeps his sword from bloodshed. Is he talking about the people of Moab? Is he speaking to the Jews or is he speaking to the Babylonian soldier who is coming to destroy Moab and "*do the Lord's work*"? I think it must be the latter; otherwise this doesn't make much sense. Jeremiah is saying a curse will come on the Babylonian army if they don't do what the Lord has ordained, destroy Moab. The soldiers need to fight and slay because that is the Lord's purpose for Moab, destruction. It is a chilling warning that God has purposed judgment and wrath on the people and land of Moab.

48:11-13 - Jeremiah comments that Moab has dwelt in relative safety for much of her history. She was not destroyed when the Assyrians invaded the land. Moab was spared when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in the first deportation in 597. She has not gone into exile and she is now as she has always been. But a change is coming. Babylon will pour her out and empty her jars that have been full. They will smash her and the people will be ashamed of Chemosh as the Israelites were ashamed of Bethel. The Moabites will discover that Chemosh was a weak god just as the Israelites discovered that the golden calf idols of Jeroboam I he built at Bethel and Dan were no match for the might of the Assyrians. The Moabites will realize Chemosh will be no match for the might of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. They will be shamed and disgraced in their defeat.

48:14-17 - No longer will the soldiers of Moab be able to boast that they are great men of battle. They are about to face a foe they have no hope of defeating all the more because the King, the Lord Almighty, is behind the army of Babylon. They are the Lord's instrument in judging a sinful Judah and the sinful idolatrous nations around Judah like Moab.

The fall of Moab is coming. Jeremiah calls all who live in Moab to mourn for her. The scepter of the king will be broken and his staff will be broken as well.

There are no clues in this prophecy as to when Jeremiah wrote it. My best guess is he wrote it sometime after Babylon became a threat to the nations of the Middle East. That puts it probably sometime in the reign of either Jehoiachin or Zedekiah but that is only a guess. Jeremiah does not specifically name Babylon as the invading power that destroys Moab but that is the only nation and army that fits the historical context.

48:18-25 - Jeremiah calls for Moab to come down from her glory and sit on the parched ground. That is a metaphor for the Moabites coming down off the high plateau where they lived and moving down to the shores of the Dead Sea, the parched ground where it was significantly hotter and much, much drier. The one who will destroy Moab is coming. Jeremiah calls the Moabites the inhabitants of the Daughter of Dibon. Dibon was one of the major Moabite cities on the highlands to the east of the Dead Sea. Aroer is a city nearby Dibon. The Moabites are told to stand by the road and ask the people fleeing what happened. Moab is disgraced and destroyed.

The Arnon Gorge or wadi flowed down to the Dead Sea from the area of Dibon and Aroer. Jeremiah says judgment has come to the plateau and then he names many Moabite towns and cities. Judgment has come to them all. Moab's horn is cut off. The horn was a symbol of strength and often referred to the horns of an altar. Here the horn is probably linked to the worship of Chemosh, the god of Moab. The Lord has judged Chemosh and those who follow it. Moab will be destroyed. This is the Lord's doing and his judgment upon a sinful people.

48:26-28 - Moab has defied the Lord, therefore God will punish her. He will make her drunk and stagger and shame her before the other nations around her. Moab ridiculed Israel when she was destroyed. Now God will do the same to Moab. God tells the Moabites abandon your towns and go live among the rocks like a dove that makes its nest at the mouth of a cave.

The Eurasian dove is the most common species of dove in the Middle East. Its nests are made of sticks and are usually found close to a town or city because the birds feed on the grain and other food available from human habitation. Jeremiah says the Moabites need to be a like a dove that makes its nest in the mouth of a cave. That would mean the people had abandoned their towns and gone to live in caves because a dove would nest near human habitation. Where you find the people there you will find the doves.

48:29-33 - Jeremiah describes Moab's pride and arrogance. The Lord knows it and tells them it will accomplish nothing. Jeremiah says I wail over Moab and I moan for the men of Kir Haraseth. I weep for you. Is this Jeremiah talking or is he quoting the Lord? In the context I think the Lord is still speaking and not Jeremiah. That means the Lord grieves over Moab. God is judging the Moabites but it grieves him and brings him no pleasure or joy. God says something similar in *Ezekiel 18:23*. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but is pleased when they repent and turn to the Lord and his ways. God is holy and must judge sin yet his love leads him to grieve over the sinner. The Lord takes no delight in destroying a pagan, arrogant nation. It grieves him that the Moabites have come to this situation. God's first inclination is to love the sinner not judge him or her!

Kir Haraseth was a city in far southern part of Moab on the King's Highway. Jazer was a city in the far northern part of Moab almost in Ammonite territory. It was part of the tribal lands of Gad which Israel had conquered in Moses' day when they came up the eastern shore of the Dead Sea to the Plains of Moab. God is weeping over all of Moab from south to north. God weeps over the vineyards and orchards of the Moabite plateau which were rich with fruit. The Sea of Jazer mentioned in *verse 32* is probably the Dead Sea. The territory of Moab included the shore of the Dead Sea even though few people lived there. Almost the entire population lived on the high plateau above it because that is where the water was. God says he has stopped the wine presses and removed the joy from the orchards. There are shouts heard in Moab but they are not shouts of joy, they are shouts of terror and grief over their destruction. Moab's fate will be just like Israel's and Judah's.

48:34-39 - Jeremiah says the sound of the people's cry is heard all over Moab. From Heshbon and Elealeh which were cities in the northern part of Moab on the King's Highway, and Jahaz which is also in the north but a little further south than the first two cities, all the way to Zoar which is on the southern shore of the Dead Sea on the wadi of the Zered River. Horonaim and Eglath Shelishiyah are otherwise unknown but given the poetry and context are probably cities in the far south of Moab. Jeremiah is saying the cries of the people are heard from the far north to the far south in Moab.

Jeremiah says even the waters of Nimrin are dried up. Nimrin was a stream or wadi that was midway in Moab that flowed out of the highlands down to the Dead Sea. God says from the north to the south and in between he will put an end to Moab's idolatry and wickedness. The Lord will punish all those who worship idols on the high places of Moab. God is determined to punish their idolatry because they are descended from Lot and their people originally worshipped Yahweh. Plus Moab is traditionally Israelite territory and part of the Promiseland. It was given to

the tribes of Reuben and Gad as a reward for their help in conquering the Ammorite kings Sihon and Og when the children of Israel came out of the desert to Jericho.

God laments over the people of Kir Hareseth, a city on the King's Highway to the south of Nimrin and north of the River Zared. All their wealth is now gone. They are in mourning because every head is shaved and every beard cut off. They are all wearing sackcloth in grief. In every town there is mourning because the Lord has broken Moab like a piece of pottery that no one wants. She is shattered and now wails in her agony. The Lord has shamed Moab and she will be an object of ridicule and horror to all around her.

It makes sense that Nebuchadnezzar would want to conquer Moab because it sat astride the King's Highway, one of the major trade routes from the Red Sea and Arabia all the way into Syria and Mesopotamia. It not only moved trade and wealth it was a major way for Nebuchadnezzar to move his troops. Moab stood in the way of this strategic road. It also had water which was critical to survive in that arid land. Water and roads, the two things Ze'ev, our guide in Israel, said determined where the population centers would be in the ancient world.

48:40-47 - God says an eagle is swooping down over Moab, spreading its wings. Kiriath will be captured and the strongholds taken. "*Strongholds*" is in the plural and an alternative reading for Kiriath can mean "*cities*" which fits the context better. The cities and strongholds of Moab will be captured. The army will be like a woman in labor, terrified of what is happening to her. Moab will be destroyed as a nation because she has defied the Lord. Moab had been a traditional enemy of Israel from Joshua's time all the way through the time of the kings. Plus, she was a pagan nation worshipping Chemosh and not Yahweh. God has had enough and now is ready to destroy it.

Terror and a pit and a snare will confront them. Whoever flees from the terror will fall into the pit and whoever escapes the pit will be captured by the snare. In other words there will be no escape for the Moabites. God is bringing the year of their punishment. Archeological evidence shows that Moabite settlements declined significantly from the 6th century B.C. onward. That would be in the 500's about the time of the Babylonian invasion. God fulfilled his Word through his prophet Jeremiah.

Heshbon is destroyed and the fugitives stand helpless as they watch it burn. The noisy boasters are silenced. God will put an end to the people of Chemosh and they will be taken into exile just like Judah.

After all of this Jeremiah concludes his judgment on Moab with a remarkable promise. In the days to come, meaning in the days of the Messiah or the end times, God will restore Moab. Jeremiah gives no more detail than that but the Lord holds out the promise that someday this pagan nation, distantly related to Israel, sitting astride the King's Highway and part of the Promiseland will be restored. One could hardly view modern day Jordan, of which ancient Moab is now a part, as that restoration. Jeremiah must be pointing ahead even further to when Messiah returns and all the Promiseland is restored to the Jews and even the Gentiles will come and worship the Lord. He doesn't say that specifically here but that is the only major prophecy that could fulfill the Lord's restoration of the people of Moab. Someday they will come to the Christ!

Chapter 49:

49:1-6 - Jeremiah declares a message from the Lord concerning the Ammonites. Ammon was the nation directly north of Moab centered on the highlands above the Jordan Valley. It became part of the Promiseland and its territory was given to the tribes of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh

after the defeat of Og king of Bashan who was an Ammorite, a Canannite people who had taken over the territory of the Ammonites. The Ammonites were descended from Lot through his incest with his younger daughter. Her son was named Benammi, son of my people, who became the father of the Ammonites. See *Genesis 19:30-38*. Ammonite territory extended east of the Jordan from the Jabbok all the way to the Golan Heights above the Sea of Galilee. The Golan Heights was also called Bashan. The Ammonites were sometimes friends and often enemies of Israel. In the time of the kings Ammonite territory was considered part of Israel which extended all the way down the eastern highlands through Ammon and Moab to the Zered River and the border of Edom. The chief city or fortress of Ammon was Rabbath Ammon or Rabbah which became modern day Amman the capital of Jordan. The Ammonite god was Molech which Israel and Judah were often tempted to worship. It was King Manasseh who sacrificed his infant son on an altar in the Hinnom Valley called Topheth to Molech that moved the Lord to great anger and sealed the eventual destruction of Judah as a nation because of Manasseh's idolatry and evil.

Jeremiah asks if Israel has no sons and heirs because Molech has taken possession of Gad. He asks why the Ammonites are living in Gad's towns. He warns the Ammonites that battle is coming to Rabbah and it will become a mound of ruins. Its towns around it will be set afire. Jeremiah says then Israel will drive out those who drove her out. It is difficult to know when this prophecy was fulfilled. It certainly was not fulfilled in Jeremiah's day nor since then up to even modern times. Although, Israel now controls the Golan Heights at least as far as the Yarmuk River and its wadi at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. That is however hardly all of Ammonite territory. Jordan still controls most of ancient Ammon. Is Jeremiah saying in the end times Israel will take back all the territory of Jordan which belonged to the tribes of Gad and Manasseh? If so this has certainly not happened as yet.

Jeremiah tells Heshbon to wail because Ai is destroyed. Heshbon was a city in northern Moab. The Ai Jeremiah refers to here must be a city in Ammon because the city of Ai most often referred to in Scripture was near Bethel in the hill country of Samaria and was utterly destroyed by Joshua in the conquest of Canaan. The context here suggests Ai is an Ammonite city. Jeremiah tells the people of Rabbah to mourn and panic because Molech is about to go into exile together with his priests and officials. This points to the Babylonian attack upon Ammon and the Babylonian policy of taking the leadership of a conquered people into exile back to Babylon which was the same thing Nebuchadnezzar did to Judah.

God asks why the Ammonites boast of their wealth and fruitful land, thinking they are secure and that no one will attack them. The Lord will bring terror upon them through Nebuchadnezzar and his army. The Ammonites will be driven away from their land and become refugees. Nebuchadnezzar would campaign east of the Jordan moving down the King's Highway taking all the Golan Heights and the territory of the Ammonites as he conquered Judah and Jerusalem.

Yet, despite the prophecy of judgment upon them God says he will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites just as he promised to restore Moab. This prophecy also must be referring to the days of the Messiah and the Ammonites coming eventually to Christ. Why does God promise this? He loves the Ammonites even though they became a pagan nation and enemies of Israel. But for the sake of Abraham and his promise of blessing to him the Lord will save the Ammonites somehow, someday because through Lot they are related to Abraham. The modern day Jordanians are not Ammonites but Arabs descended from Arabian and Bedouin tribes who settled the former Ammonite territory. Only God knows where the original Ammonites still live and dwell.

49:7-11 - Jeremiah prophesies about Edom, the descendants of Esau, brother of Jacob. Edom's territory stretched from the Zered River and its wadi near the southern end of the Dead Sea and the border of Moab on the north to the Gulf of Aqabah on the south. It included the valley of the Arabah with territory on both sides of the valley. The main cities were on the eastern plateau above the Arabah where the King's Highway ran down to the Gulf of Aqabah at the port of Ezion-Geber or Elath. The capital was Sela on a rocky plateau directly above Petra. Other important towns were Bozrah to the north and Teman which was on the King's Highway just to the east of Sela and Petra. Edom was overrun by the Arabs in the 5th century B.C. and a century later by the Nabateans. Edom for much of its history after the conquest of Canaan by Israel was under Israelite influence or rule. However during the time of King Ahaz of Judah Edom rebelled and gained her freedom. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah Edom was an ally of Babylon and helped in the siege. This brought the wrath of the prophets of God. The little book of *Obadiah* is about God's judgment on Edom for helping the Babylonians. After the fall of Judah to the Babylonians many Edomites pressed into southern Judah. When the Arabs invaded and took over Edomite territory the Edomites were slowly absorbed into the Jewish population who had re-settled the land after the exile. Herod the Great was mostly Edomite in ancestry yet the Romans considered him Jewish.

Jeremiah asks if there is any wisdom left in Edom because the Lord will bring disaster on its people. He will punish them. When pickers pick the grapes they leave a little for the gleaners. If thieves come in the middle of the night they only steal as much they want and can carry. God however will strip Edom bare because of her actions toward Judah and God's people. He will uncover their high places so that they cannot conceal themselves. Edom's children and relatives will perish.

Verse 11 expresses the kindness and compassion of the Lord for the innocent and the helpless among the Edomites. God will judge Edom yet the Lord says leave your orphans and widows because the Lord will protect their lives. They can trust him. Even though Edom was Judah's enemy at the time of the exile yet they are children of Abraham and God has a place in his heart for the innocent among them for Abraham's sake. Judgment will come but it will not be total annihilation. God will save the widows and the orphans. The Lord is consistent in his Word about his concern for the widows and orphans. From the Law of Moses and all throughout his prophets God says he cares for them.

49:12-14 - The Lord asks, if those who do not deserve to drink the cup must drink it why should Edom go unpunished? The implication is Edom deserves to drink the cup of God's wrath over her idolatry and sin far more than Judah does. The image of the cup Jeremiah used back in *Jeremiah 25:15-38*. There the Lord told him to take the cup filled with God's wrath over sin and make all the nations to whom the Lord sent him drink it because judgment was coming upon those nations. The list is very similar to the prophecies concerning the nations in *Jeremiah 46-51*. This figure of the cup of God's wrath reappears in the New Testament. Jesus called his ordeal on the cross the cup he was receiving from his Father and begged him to take it from him in the Garden of Gethsemane. In *Revelation 16* John says Babylon the Great was given the cup of the wrath of God to drink.

The difficulty in this text is God saying if those who don't deserve to drink the cup have to drink it then why should Edom not drink it too. *Jeremiah* and the other prophets make it very clear that Judah does deserve the wrath and judgment of God for her sin. Jeremiah implies here that she does not yet Edom does. I think what he is saying is that God holds his people to a

higher standard and Edom long ago broke that standard. Judah has broken it too but Edom's fall into idolatry and wickedness happened much quicker. Otherwise it seems here like Jeremiah says Judah does not deserve all the punishment God is bringing upon her. It is clear from the rest of Jeremiah and the other prophets that is not the case. Therefore he must be implying something different.

God swears that Bozrah will become a ruin and a horror and all its towns will be ruined forever. Bozrah probably represents all of Edom. It was the first major Edomite city south of the Zered wadi and was on the King's Highway. Jeremiah has heard a message from the Lord. He has sent a message to the nations to come assemble for battle and attack Edom. Historically the Edomites were allies of the Babylonians in the sack of Jerusalem. It was a century later when Arab invaders captured Edom and scattered its people who were then absorbed into the Jews living in what had become the Persian province of Judea. Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy Edom but it was destroyed.

49:15-18 - The Lord says he will make Edom small among the nations and despised. Their pride has deceived them and they will end up living in the rocks rather than on the heights. God will bring them down. He will overthrow Edom like he did Sodom and Gomorrah so that no one will live there. Petra became the Nabatean capital and flourished for many centuries. Yet today it is abandon and no one lives there. It is a world heritage archeological site but not a settled city. People look at the territory of Edom in modern Jordan and view it as desolate, barren and uninhabitable.

49:19-22 - God says a lion will come up from the Jordan's thickets to the highlands of Edom and chase the people away from their land. The Lord asks who the chosen one will be who will carry out his judgment against Edom. He does not say who it is only that he is coming and that no king or people can stand against the Lord's will. Yahweh may be Israel's God but he is also God of history and Lord of all the nations. No one can challenge him. Edom thought it was secure in her alliance with Babylon and would get revenge on Judah for her rule over the Edomites for centuries past. Yet the Lord would carry out his judgment against Edom. When Jerusalem fell the Edomites must have thought Jeremiah's words of judgment nonsense. Yet only a century later when Arab raiders took over their country and chased them from their lands all of Jeremiah's words were fulfilled. Did they remember them then? We cannot know, but God confirmed his prophet's message.

God says he will destroy all who live in Teman, the city on the King's Highway just to the east of Sela the capital and Petra. Here it probably stands for all of Edom. At the sound of Edom's fall the earth will tremble all the way to the Red Sea. The Hebrew word in *verse 21* is Yam Suph, the Sea of Reeds which usually refers to the area of the Red Sea nearest the Nile Delta. Here however it probably refers to the Gulf of Aqabah, the arm of the Red Sea that meets the Arabah Valley coming down from the Dead Sea. At the northern end of the Gulf of Aqabah was Elath the port of Edom that in the time of Solomon and many of the kings of Judah was Judean territory. It was the sea link to the wealth of Arabia and Africa that poured into Solomon and later Uzziah before it was re-captured by the Edomites in Ahaz's day.

An eagle will sweep down upon Edom and spread its wings over Bozrah. Bozrah is the first major city and fortress on the King's Highway just to the south of the wadi of the Zered River the northern border of Edom. The eagle here is indeterminate as to a nation. Often an animal in prophecy like this will symbolize a specific nation. Historically Arab raiders conquered

Edom so the eagle eventually represents the Arabs. In context it simply represents an invader that will come and destroy Edom. At that time Edom's army will fail and their hearts will be frightened like a woman in labor. Edom was conquered but the end of the nation came more like a whimper than a bang. Its territory was taken over, many were killed and the rest were simply absorbed into the people of the Jews. That means today, 25 centuries later, there is probably some Edomite blood in modern day Jews.

49:23-27 - Damascus was the capital of Syria or Aram in Old Testament times. It has the distinction today of being the oldest continuously inhabited city on earth and is the modern capital of the nation of Syria. It lies to the east of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains near the edge of the Arabian Desert with the Mt. Hermon massif to its southwest. Damascus is at the northern terminus of the King's Highway from Elath on the Gulf of Aqabah. From there many caravan routes branched out. Some went over the mountains to the Mediterranean coast and Tyre, some east across the desert to Assyria and Babylonia, and some north to Aleppo and the cities of northern Syria and the Euphrates Valley. From the 10th-8th centuries BC it was the capital of the Aramean state of Syria that was sometimes an ally of Israel and sometimes its enemy. It was captured by the Assyrians in 732 who deported many of its inhabitants. In Jeremiah's time it was still an important commercial center because of the trade routes but was no longer as important politically. Hamath in northern Syria was the political capital of the province of Syria that included Damascus. It appears that the Babylonians did not change this arrangement. In the description of the Promiseland all of Syria to Hamath is included along with Damascus. David captured the city and garrisoned it during his reign and the city paid tribute to Solomon. Following his death it regained its independence.

Jeremiah says Hamath and Arpad are dismayed. These were two of the chief cities of northern Syria who were allied with Damascus against the Assyrian kings who conquered them all. They have heard bad news; Damascus is weak and troubled like the restless sea. The city has become feeble and panic has gripped her. Anguish and pain have seized her. The Lord asks why the city of renown has not been abandoned. Jeremiah describes Damascus as the town in which the Lord delights! That is an extraordinary description for what was the capital of Israel's enemy the Kingdom of Aram. Why does God say he delights in Damascus? He loves the people in the city but he told Israel that Damascus was also part of the Promiseland. It is possible that is why he describes the city this way.

The Lord says the young men of Damascus and its soldiers will fall in the streets. He will set fire to the walls and consume the fortress of Ben-Hadad. Ben-hadad was king of Syria in the days of Asa of Judah and Baasha of Israel around 900. Asa sent tribute to Ben-Hadad to forge an alliance with Syria against Israel after Baasha had attacked Judah and taken many of her cities.

The entire prophecy concerning Damascus is curious because the city had already been taken by the Assyrians and burned. The Kingdom of Aram had been destroyed a century and a half earlier. Damascus in Jeremiah's time still existed but it was far less important politically than it had been a century earlier. Most of the description of what would happen to Damascus had already occurred. There are three Syrian kings names Ben-Hadad in the Bible. The last of which died in the early 700's during the time of the Assyrian Empire. It is unclear to what time in prophecy Jeremiah is referring. Is he talking about the end times and even up till today? We do not know.

49:28-39 - Kedar was the firstborn son of Ishmael and represents the Arab people in the Old Testament. The identification of Hazor however is problematic. Hazor was a Canaanite fortified city in northern Galilee that Joshua conquered and burned to the ground in *Joshua 11*. It was resettled by Israelites and Solomon took it, fortified it and used it as one of his chief forts and stables for his chariots as he did at Megiddo. It was a fortress city for the Kingdom of Israel till its destruction by Tiglath Pileser III in 732. It was not settled again. The question is what does Jeremiah mean by the kingdoms of Hazor? Hazor was a Canaanite and Israelite city and was never associated with the Arabs. Plus it is in northern Galilee and not in the Negev or east nearer the desert or in the Arabah where the Arabs tended to dwell. It is possible that Jeremiah is talking about another city named Hazor. There is another town named Hazor in *Joshua 15* that was near the southern border of Judah in the Negev. It is possible this is the Hazor Jeremiah is speaking of here. A further problem is that Nebuchadnezzar never attacked and destroyed the Hazor of Galilee because it was already destroyed. Given all of those reasons the Hazor that Jeremiah names in these verses must be another city named Hazor perhaps in the region east of the Arabah, east of Edom where the Arabs lived and from which they invaded Edom in the 400's. Or it is the town near southern Judah in the Negev which would also have been an area where the Arabs lived.

The Lord tells Nebuchadnezzar to attack the people of Kedar and destroy the people of the East. He will scatter their tents and flocks with all their possessions. Jeremiah tells them to flee from Nebuchadnezzar and live in the caves because he is coming against them. God tells the Babylonians to attack the Arabs who are living at ease. They do not live in fortified cities like others do. They keep to themselves and live alone and apart. But their camels and herds will be booty for Nebuchadnezzar's army. God will scatter them and bring disaster upon them. Hazor will be desolate forever and no one will live there. If the Hazor mentioned here was an Arab city or settlement east of Edom or south of Judah then there is no archeological evidence of it. The area in the Negev today is very desolate and very few people live there. It is a barren volcanic wasteland. East of Edom and Petra in eastern Jordan is also a desolate area where no one lives. Regardless, wherever this Hazor of the Arabs was it no longer exists and the Arabs no longer live there just as Jeremiah had prophesied.

49:34-39 - Jeremiah delivers a message concerning Elam early in the reign of Zedekiah, around 596 after the deportation of Jehoiachin. Elam was in southwest Persia centered in the plain to the east of Babylon in the lower Mesopotamian Valley up against the Zagreb Mountains of Iran. It was frequently associated with the cultures of lower Mesopotamia. Susa was the chief city of the Elamites. Sargon of Assyria conquered Elam in the late 700's and Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal deported some of the Elamites to Samaria and some Israelites to Elam. After Assyria's fall Elam was first annexed by the Babylonians and then the Indo-Europeans of Persia and Susa became one of the three chief cities of the Persian Empire along with Ecbatana and Persepolis. Whoever held Elam controlled the trade routes from lower Mesopotamia through the mountains to the Iranian plateau and the wealth flowing to and from those regions. Therefore it was a strategic and desirable country because of the potential wealth to which it could lead. In Jeremiah's day Elam was part of the Babylonian Empire and Persia had not yet exerted her power over Elam or captured it. Nebuchadnezzar was at the height of his power when Jeremiah gave this prophecy. Elam would not throw off the Babylonian yoke and become part of the Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great for another 50 years.

God says he will break the bow of Elam the symbol of her power. Elamite archers were famous throughout the ancient Middle Eastern world. God will bring against Elam the four winds from every quarter of the heavens. He will scatter the people to those four winds and there will not be a nation on earth to which Elam's exiles do not go. God will bring disaster upon Elam in his fierce anger. He will pursue them with the sword until he has made an end to them. God himself will set his throne in Elam and destroy her king and his officials. It is difficult to know to what Jeremiah is referring here. One could say this prophecy is looking back to the time of the Assyrian conquest and deportation in which Assyria destroyed Elam and exiled her people. Yet the tenses of the text are future and not past. When Jeremiah writes this Elam is part of Babylon but Nebuchadnezzar had not destroyed Elam he used its strategic position to gather wealth from all over the Middle East. Susa would not become one of the three chief cities of Persia for at least another 60 years. Susa would be the winter capital and residence of the Persian kings because Ecbatana, the Median capital, was in the mountains and was the summer residence. Persepolis to the east on the Iranian plateau was the main capital of Persia.

God says in the days to come he will restore the fortunes of the Elamites. There were Jews from Elam in Jerusalem at Pentecost and Elam became a main center of Persia from the late 500's up through Alexander's time in the late 300's. It makes the most sense to me for Jeremiah to be prophesying backwards to the Assyrian conquest of Elam and their deportation to Samaria. The restoration of their fortunes then becomes Elam's rise under Persia. That however does not completely fit the text. The other option for these verses becomes a prophecy of some future time of destruction and attack. Today Elam is part of the modern nations of Iraq and Iran.

It is possible that Jeremiah says God will restore the fortunes of Elam in some future time because there were many Israelites who were deported to Elam after the fall of Samaria. Plus the Israelites who lived there had maintained at least some of their Jewish identity because at Pentecost there were Jews of Elam in Jerusalem listening to Peter's sermon. It could be God promises to restore Elam's fortunes for the sake of his people who have been scattered there.

Chapter 50:

50:1-3 - Jeremiah saves his longest prophetic message against the nations for Babylon. Based partly on Jeremiah's prophecy Babylon becomes a symbol for the godless, pagan world that opposes God and his rule. Babylon was the capital of the Neo-Chaldean Empire ruled in Jeremiah's lifetime by Nebuchadnezzar. The Hebrew text actually says Chaldeans in many places but historically it has been called the Babylonian Empire because Babylon was its capital. The city was one of the great cities of the ancient world and remained so until Xerxes king of Persia destroyed it putting down a rebellion in 478. It contained the hanging gardens built by Nebuchadnezzar which were considered one of the wonders of the ancient world.

God says Babylon will be captured one day. Bel (Baal) and Marduk are different names for the same god in the Babylonian pantheon. Marduk was the chief god and like Baal in Canaan was the weather god. God says Babylon's idols will be put to shame and filled with terror. A nation from the north will attack her and lay waste her land. In that time no one will live in Babylon any longer and her land will be deserted by men and animals. Today Babylon is an archeological site but no one lives there. The nation from the north originally was the Medo-Persians led by Cyrus the Great. The Medes originated from northern Iran and Armenia and their capital was Ecbatana. The difficulty in Jeremiah's prophecy is that Cyrus captured Babylon without a long siege or a great deal of destruction to the city. His engineers dried up the Euphrates River upstream from the city and gained entrance through the river culverts. When he

entered the city Cyrus was hailed as a liberator because he restored the worship of Marduk which the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus had abandoned. 61 years later that Xerxes destroyed the city in response to a rebellion. It fell into disrepair and even though Alexander planned to rebuild Babylon to its former glory he died before his plans could be carried out. After that the city was abandoned and fell into ruin. Jeremiah's prophecy therefore refers both to Cyrus' capture of the city in 539, Xerxes' destruction in 478 and to some future date when Babylon the Great will be destroyed. See *Revelation 17-18*.

50:4-7 - In the midst of a prophecy about Babylon Jeremiah speaks about God's people. In those days and at that time refer back to when Babylon will be defeated and deserted, after God has judged it. At that time Israel and Judah together will go in tears to seek the Lord. They will ask the way to Zion, which implies they have lost their way and do not know how to get back. They will come and make an everlasting covenant with the Lord that will never be forgotten. Jeremiah's description of the covenant the people will make with God sounds like the language of the New Covenant. He implies that the people have forgotten the covenant God made with them at Mt. Sinai but this new covenant with God will never be forgotten.

God's people have been lost because their shepherds have led them astray. The shepherds of Israel were the priests, the kings and the elders of the people. The people have wandered over mountain and hill and forgotten their own resting place, meaning they have forgot the land the Lord gave to them and they have forgotten the Lord himself their true resting place. When they wandered their enemies devoured them. Their enemies denied any responsibility for attacking and hurting the Jews. The Babylonians and others said the Jews have sinned against the Lord and we are simply carrying out the Lord's judgment against them therefore we are not guilty. God's people have forgotten their true pasture, the Lord their hope.

The land is important but even more important was Israel's relationship with God. This principle would become increasingly critical to the Jews' understanding of their status with God as more and more of them began to live outside of the Promiseland. As the definition of what it meant to be a Jew began to change away from being a citizen of Judah and one who lived in the Promiseland the Jews needed a new way to define themselves as a people. It became we are the people of God no matter where we live. That had always been implicit within the covenant of Sinai but it became explicit in post-exilic Judaism, especially that fostered by Ezra and his successors.

The question remains when will the Jews seek God and return to him. This is obviously a prophecy that is in the far future for the Jews because Babylon was not destroyed and uninhabited in Jeremiah's day. That did not happen until 478 when Xerxes destroyed the city. That leads me to believe the fulfillment of this prophecy has yet to occur. This is an eschatological prophecy of the end times and the days of the Messiah. It was partially fulfilled when Jesus came and many Jews declared him to be their Messiah. Babylon as a city had been destroyed but many Jews still lived in the area around Babylon and it remained a center for Jewish scholarship for many centuries. Plus in the New Testament Babylon becomes a symbol for Rome and its power. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy does not occur until the Lord Jesus returns and Babylon the Great the Mother of Harlots is finally destroyed. See *Revelation 17-18*.

50:8-10 - God calls upon his people to flee Babylon and come out of her because the Lord is about to stir up an alliance of nations from the north to come against her. They will take her and plunder her. The land of Chaldea will fall.

Jeremiah returns to his day or the very near future from his perspective. The forces of Cyrus the Great of Persia took the city in 539 under the leadership of the Persian general Gobryas. Cyrus entered the city as a conquering hero on October 16, 539. The Persian armies are the forces from the north.

The curious part of this prophecy is Jeremiah's call to the Jews to flee out of Babylon. To what is he referring? Is he referring to the time of Xerxes when he sacked the city and destroyed it or is he saying flee because Cyrus is about to attack? That would make little sense because Cyrus was hailed as a hero and was the one who allowed the Jews to return to Judah in 538. The other possibility is that this is an eschatological prophecy of the end times or like many prophetic passages is a mixture of events in Jeremiah's day and the end times. This is probably the most likely answer to Jeremiah's call. John takes up Jeremiah's call for God's people to flee Babylon in the judgment on Babylon in *Revelation 17-18*.

50:11-13 - God says he will punish Babylon because they rejoice over plundering Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord's inheritance. He will bring her down to disgrace and shame. Babylon will become the least of nations, a wilderness and dry land. Because of the Lord's anger Babylon will no longer be inhabited and will become completely desolate.

After Xerxes destroyed the city in 478 Babylon was never rebuilt and re-settled. It gradually fell into ruins until today it is an archeological site but no one lives there.

50:14-16 - God calls soldiers, which would have been the Persian army of Cyrus the Great, to take up positions around Babylon. He tells them shoot and spare no arrows for Babylon has sinned against the Lord. From Babylon's standpoint this was ludicrous. The Babylonians believed that Marduk and their other gods like Bel and Ishtar had blessed their efforts at conquest because they were successful. They paid no attention to the small god Yahweh of Judah. Why should they? It was obvious in their eyes that Marduk was stronger because they had prevailed. If Yahweh was stronger then Judah would have been conquering Babylon. Their paganism operated on the principle of territorial spirits. They were Marduk's servants to expand his territory. They did not understand that Marduk was no god at all and that in fact Yahweh was the only true God, Creator of all and Lord of all the nations. He had a plan for his people the Jews, who had disobeyed him and he was using Babylon to carry out that plan. But Babylon as well was accountable to God for her actions even if she did not know God. God would punish Babylon for her many sins. *Jeremiah* along with *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* were fleshing out in the midst of Judah's fall the implications of Yahweh being the Creator and Lord of nations. For us today that means America is accountable to God just as Babylon was. He alone is God!

Babylon's towers fall and her walls are torn down. The walls of Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's day were 27 kilometers (16.7 miles) around and wide enough on the top for two chariots to pass each other. They were guarded by numerous towers. It was no small thing for those walls to fall because they were as strong and massive as any ancient city in existence. That is why when Cyrus took the city by diverting the Euphrates River so his troops could enter through the river culverts and bypass having to try and tear down the walls, it was an amazing accomplishment. No one in that day could imagine how the walls of Babylon could be breached.

When Xerxes finally destroyed the city he must have destroyed the walls as well. That sealed Babylon's doom.

Jeremiah says the attack by Cyrus and later Xerxes was part of the Lord working out his vengeance and judgment upon Babylon for her destruction of Jerusalem and the killing and exile of many of his people. God invokes the *lex talonis*, the eye for an eye judgment against Babylon. Do to her what she has done to others. God says cut off from Babylon the sower and the reaper, in other words all the food grown to feed the city. Let everyone flee back to his own homeland. All the exiles Babylon had gathered will flee home. There was a significant Jewish presence in Babylon for several centuries even after its destruction by Xerxes. Evidence suggests that the temple of Bel was still used up through 75 AD so the ruined city still had some population. However, the city was no longer a political and commercial center yet there were Jews who lived in the area. That community was vibrant enough to contribute the so called Babylonian Talmud to later Jewish scholarship. Yet Babylon as a powerful city upon the world's stage never rose again after the Persians finally destroyed it. The center of world power shifted in New Testament times to Rome. But Rome is given the cryptic name Babylon, representing the enemy of God's people and its greatest oppressor, just as Babylon was the greatest oppressor of the Lord's ancient people Israel. By the time John writes *Revelation* in 95 Babylon had come to represent the world system dominated by idolatry that opposes God and his people. Its judgment is certain and will once for all finally be defeated by the return of the Lord of History himself, Jesus Christ the Messiah.

50:17-20 - Jeremiah says Israel, that is all of the people of God not just the northern kingdom, is a scattered people. Assyria and then Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon have chased them away and crushed them. Jeremiah calls Assyria and Babylon lions. Both Assyria and Babylon used lions in their artwork and symbolism.

God says because Babylon has done to his people what Assyria did he will punish Babylon as he punished Assyria. He will bring Israel back to its own pasture. Jeremiah describes God's people here as sheep grazing in the pasture. They will graze on the heights of Carmel, the ridge that rises from the sea at modern day Haifa and extends over the southern boundary of the Valley of Jezreel. They will graze on Bashan which is another name for the Golan Heights south of Mt. Hermon, the high plateau country above the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Bashan is the gateway to Syria. Israel's appetite will be satisfied in the hills of Ephraim, which would be the mountains of Samaria from Shechem to Jerusalem and in Gilead, which is the high country east of the Jordan Valley, south of the Jabbok River and north of the Dead Sea. Gilead was often part of Ammonite territory and is almost directly opposite the mountains of Samaria on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley with Ephraim's territory being on the western side of the valley.

God says in those days when his people return to the full Promiseland after God has judged Babylon people will search for Israel's guilt but they will not be able to find it. They will search for the sins of Judah but none will be found because the Lord will forgive the remnant of his people. This is language similar to the New Covenant in *Jeremiah 31* and looks forward to what the Lord Jesus would do on the cross. Even though Jeremiah does not mention the Messiah here his prophecy of a return to the land and the forgiveness of the people's sin is linked to the time of the Messiah and his mission. This prophecy therefore takes place and is fulfilled in the time of the Messiah and the founding of his kingdom.

50:21-28 - Merathaim is probably another name for Mesopotamia. Jeremiah pairs it with Pekod which was an area east of the lower Tigris River in Babylonia. God says pursue those who live there and utterly destroy them. The word for completely destroy in Hebrew is *haram*. It means to be devoted completely to the Lord. It is related to the idea of holiness but when used in this manner means to dedicate something to destruction because it impedes or resists God's work. It is accursed before God. Joshua when he conquered the Promiseland was ordered to completely destroy Jericho and other cities in Canaan because otherwise the Canaanites would lure Israel away from Yahweh and tempt them to worship idols. That is exactly what happened when they failed to eradicate the Canaanites. The idea of *haram* is linked therefore to holy war, giving everything in a conquered territory to destruction, killing all of a people and any living thing in its land. When God so ordered the Israelites to carry out *haram* against a people or nation it was always in the context of using Israel as the instrument of his justice against that nation and people. Not every nation that Israel attacked or conquered was put under "*the ban*", *haram*. Here Jeremiah says God has ordered his people to put the people of Pekod and Mesopotamia under the ban, *haram*.

It is unclear exactly who is to attack Babylon and utterly destroy it. Is God speaking to the armies of the nations like Persia or is he speaking to a revised Israel who has come back to the Promiseland? It makes more sense to see the attackers and instruments of God's justice against Babylon as the nations around it like Persia. When Babylon falls however the whole earth will feel it! God has set a trap for Babylon and it did not know until it was too late and it was caught. God will destroy Babylon because it opposed the Lord. God has opened up his arsenal and poured out his wrath upon Babylon. It will not be able to stand because it will be the work of the Sovereign Lord himself. The Lord of history has judged Babylon and declared it guilty and worthy of destruction.

God calls the nations to come against Babylon, to break open her granaries and completely destroy her remnant. This is another use of the word *haram* in *verse 26*. God says kill all her young bulls and let them be slaughtered. Winged bulls were common images used in Babylonian and Assyrian art. Persia also used this symbol. It was a symbol of strength and was linked to the gods of Babylon. God has declared that the Day of Judgment has come upon Babylon. Jeremiah says the Jewish fugitives from Babylon will declare in Zion how God has taken vengeance upon Babylon for the destruction of the Lord's temple.

The Lord had decreed that his temple in Jerusalem was to be destroyed because of Judah's sin and especially Manasseh's. This was his will and Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar were instruments of that will. Yet even though they were carrying out the Lord's orders yet the way in which they did it was unjust, cruel and wicked. They did not acknowledge the Lord as God and went about their conquest in the names of their pagan gods. Therefore even though they carried out God's will he will punish them too because the Lord is the ultimate judge of the nations and Lord of history. Babylon cannot claim it was only carrying out Yahweh's judgment upon Judah. They too have sinned and not acknowledged God as God. Therefore they are condemned and under God's wrath. No one will have an excuse!

50:29-32 - Jeremiah says summon archers against Babylon, encamp all around her and let no one escape. The main city walls were 27 kilometers (16.7 miles) around, probably impossible for any ancient army to surround in a siege. Jeremiah is using hyperbole to paint a picture of what is going to happen to Babylon. The key phrase is "*repay her for her deeds; do to her as she has done.*" John uses that line in *Revelation 18:6* when he describes God's judgment upon Mystery

Babylon, which is Rome. Jeremiah says Babylon has defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. Babylon was being judged for far more than just its unjust military and political practices. It had been a center of pagan idolatry which included divination, astrology, sorcery, temple prostitution, and the linking of their political and military rulers. Their aggressive conquests were seen as expanding the territory of Marduk and their other gods, which was very similar to Assyria and its policy. Further, disobedience to the king was disobedience to the gods; therefore vassal kings were forced to worship the gods of Babylon, which again was the same policy as the Assyrians practiced. Daniel speaks of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image in *Daniel 3*. The king commanded everyone to worship the golden image on pain of death. When Daniel's three friends did not they were thrown into the fiery furnace as punishment. The whole linking of political and religious power is one of the reasons *Jeremiah* speaks judgment against Babylon. *Daniel* reinforces the idea and John in *Revelation* links emperor worship which Domitian demanded, with ancient Babylon and its practices. That is the key reason why Rome can be called Babylon in *Revelation 17-18*. A human ruler dares to elevate himself to godhood and demand that his subjects worship him. God will not tolerate such behavior in kings and rulers. All who have sought to do so have fallen!

Jeremiah says Babylon's soldiers will fall in the streets and be silenced in the day the city is attacked and falls. This will happen because God is against Babylon. Her time of punishment has come. God will not ignore her arrogance and pride and just as there was no one to help mighty Nineveh so there will be no one to help Babylon when she falls either. God will consume her. Pride and arrogance is the reason Nebuchadnezzar is judged by God in *Daniel 4*. Nebuchadnezzar boasted he had built Babylon himself and ignored the fact that it was the Lord of history who had allowed him to come to power and accomplish all he had done. God opposes the proud and will judge nations who forget him and ignore why they have risen to power and wealth. That warning America needs to heed as well or we will suffer the same fate as Babylon.

50:33-34 - Israel and Judah have been oppressed. The people are held captive and their captor's power is so great they cannot be freed. The exiles cannot go home. But their Redeemer is stronger; the Lord Almighty is his name. He will defend the cause of his captive people and bring them back to the Promiseland. They will have rest while Babylon will be thrown into turmoil.

When Jeremiah wrote this Babylon was at the height of its power. It is unclear the precise date of this prophecy but Jeremiah does reference his people in captivity in Babylon. Therefore the earliest date can be set at 597. The latest date can be anywhere after that up through and after Nebuchadnezzar had captured the city in 586. The point is for Jeremiah to say God will rescue the exiles and send them home and Babylon will fall seemed an impossibility to the Jews. They were asking the question is God as strong and great as we thought? Perhaps Yahweh is weaker than the gods of Babylon. How can he save us if they defeated him? *Jeremiah* points to the power of God and his desire to save his people. They have been disciplined and judged by God but have not been forgotten. When Cyrus released the exiles to return to Jerusalem after he had taken Babylon it must have seemed as great a miracle to the exiles as when God rescued the Israelites from Egypt. In many ways it was. God had done the impossible. Yahweh truly was the Lord of history and the nations!

50:35-40 - God calls the nations to attack Babylon. Bring a sword against the city, against her population, her officials and wise men. *Daniel* was part of the wise men who counseled the kings

of Babylon and later Persia. The Magi of *Matthew 2* follow in that same tradition. God says he will bring a sword against the wise men and all their wisdom will not protect them. God will attack Babylon's false prophets who used divination, sorcery and astrology to tell the future. They will become fools. Her warriors will be filled with terror. Her cavalry and chariots which struck terror in the hearts of their enemies will themselves be filled with terror. Their mercenaries will become like women screaming in fear when God attacks. Babylon's treasures will be plundered and God will dry up her waters. This could be a reference to the Persian general Gobryas who diverted the flow of the Euphrates River in order to allow his army to enter the city through the river culverts rather than have to lay siege to Babylon's walls which by ancient standards were impregnable. Babylon is named a land of idols which is her greatest sin. Those idols, and in New Testament terms the demons who stand behind them, will go mad with terror when God judges the city.

After God finishes with Babylon nothing but desert creatures will dwell there. It will become a haunt for hyenas and owls. It will never again be inhabited. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah so he will overthrow mighty Babylon so that no one will ever live there again. When Jeremiah wrote this his words seemed impossible, yet within 50 years Babylon's power was broken and less than a century after that the city was destroyed by Xerxes in 478. Following that it fell into ruin. Today it is an archeological site and the main city of Nebuchadnezzar's day has still not been excavated. It is some 80 miles south of Baghdad in modern day Iraq in the desert country of southern Iraq. Jeremiah's words have been literally fulfilled.

50:41-46 - Jeremiah says an army from the north is coming against Babylon, one from a great nation and many kings. He is speaking about the Medes and Persians under Cyrus the Great. God is stirring up this army from the ends of the earth. Like in *Acts 1:8* that is a Hebrew phrase that means a long ways away. Persia already stretched from the Indus River in modern Pakistan to the former Kingdom of Lydia in western and central Turkey. From the perspective of the Jews and from Jerusalem, the Persians came from the ends of the earth. They are a cruel army and fight without mercy. Jeremiah describes a terrifying army that will come against Babylon and attack it.

Babylon's king has heard the reports about the Persians and his hands hang limp in fear and anguish. That king was probably Belshazzar, who was crown prince under Nabonidus. Nabonidus had fled Babylon because of public anger over his reforms of Babylon's religion. Civil strife had weakened the empire under Nabonidus and he was forced to flee into the Arabian Desert in exile. Belshazzar did not prove up to the task of holding the empire together against the might of Cyrus. He was killed in the capture of the city in 539 and Nabonidus was forced to remain in permanent exile. The Neo-Chaldean Empire was gone never to rise again.

Jeremiah says it is God who will destroy Babylon and chase her from her land. God has appointed someone for this task, though Jeremiah does not name him. *Isaiah* boldly prophesies that Cyrus is the Lord's servant to subdue Babylon and help rescue his people in *Isaiah 44*. If Babylon doubts that Yahweh can do this *Jeremiah* asks who can challenge him? What king or shepherd can stand against the Lord? The Lord will destroy Babylon and at its destruction the whole world will tremble. The nations will cry out because of Babylon's fall. Cyrus was hailed as a conquering hero when he entered Babylon because he restored Babylonian religion to its former form before Nabonidus tried to change it. He also allowed the people whom the Babylonians had conquered and taken into exile the chance to return to their homelands. The Jews were just one of those peoples. Thus the nations did cry out in celebration that Babylon had

fallen and also in joy over Cyrus' change in the way he tried to govern conquered peoples in his empire. Jeremiah says the Lord was behind Cyrus and brought him to power to execute his judgment against Babylon and to benefit God's people, the Jews.

Chapter 51:

51:1-5 - Jeremiah continues his prophecy against Babylon. God will stir up a destroyer against Babylon and the people of Leb Kamai, which is a cryptogram for Chaldea, or the land of Babylon and southern Mesopotamia. John uses the image of a destroyer in *Revelation 9*, the angel over the Abyss whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon or Appolyon in Greek. The Hebrew word here however is different.

God will send foreign armies to Babylon to devastate her land. Those armies will completely destroy Babylon's army. The Hebrew word for completely destroy is *haram*, which means that which is totally dedicated to God and his holiness, sometimes to destruction. Jeremiah has already used this image against the land and people of Babylon in *50:21* and *50:26*. Here God says completely destroy her army. God will leave nothing of Babylon to ever oppress and attack his people again. He has not forsaken Israel and Judah even though they are guilty before the Lord because of their sin. Yet God will not let Babylon go unpunished for all she has done even though she was the instrument of God's judgment against Judah.

51:6-10 - God tells his people to flee from Babylon lest they too be destroyed. God is about to take vengeance upon Babylon because of her many sins. He will pay her back for what she deserves. Babylon was not only a military power that conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem she was a religious power that was full of occult practices and her religion corrupted the Jews and tempted them to abandon the worship of God. That is also the reason God is going to judge Babylon.

Jeremiah uses the image of a golden cup in the Lord's hand. That was Babylon and she made the whole earth drunk with her madness. Yet Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. God tells the people to wail over her and try and find some balm that will heal her wound and lessen her pain.

John in *Revelation 17-18* uses many of Jeremiah's images and words to describe God's judgment of eschatological Babylon or Rome. One could take some of Jeremiah's words as describing that eschatological Babylon as well. In *Revelation* Babylon or Rome represents the godless and pagan culture of the world that worships Satan rather than God and opposes God and his people. John characterizes the leader of that culture as the beast who is a representative of Satan in the world. Rome herself or "*Mystery Babylon the Great*" is portrayed as a great whore that has corrupted the nations of the world with the wine of her sorceries. The cup that she drinks is both filled with the wine of her sorceries and idolatry and filled with the wine of God's wrath. Here in *Jeremiah 51* the cup is Babylon herself. God uses Babylon to tempt the nations with her idolatry and sorceries.

Jeremiah says we would have healed Babylon but she can't be healed. Is he speaking of the Jews who lived in her or the nations? I think he means the nations because he calls the people who have lived in Babylon in exile to return to their own lands because Babylon has been judged.

The Lord has done this and has vindicated his people. Jeremiah calls the exiles to proclaim the Lord's judgment against Babylon in Zion. Tell the people what the Lord has done! Their conqueror and oppressor has been destroyed never to rise again!

51:11-14 - God says he has stirred up the kings of the Medes to destroy Babylon. Cyrus the Great took Babylon in 539 and let the Jews return from exile in 538. Cyrus maintained the city as one of the chief cities of the new Medo-Persian Empire. Xerxes captured the city in 478 after a rebellion and destroyed it. These may be the two "*kings*" to whom Jeremiah refers. The Lord will take vengeance for the destruction of his temple and its looting by the Babylonians. God is going to carry out his decree that Babylon be destroyed. The city's time has come and her doom is certain because the Lord holds the city in his hand and governs its future not the kings of Babylon or even of Persia. Babylon's end has come because the Lord will accomplish it.

51:15-16 - How could Jeremiah proclaim that the God of the little nation of Judah, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar who had taken her king and leading citizens into exile in Babylon, be the Lord of all the nations and history itself? He is the Creator. The Lord alone founded the world by his own wisdom and counsel. He did not need help nor seek anyone's advice when he created the heavens and the earth. He is the one who is still present in his creation. When the clouds roll with thunder it is his voice. He is the one who sends the lightning in the thunderstorm and sends the wind to blow across the earth. God is in charge of all the processes of the weather. He is in charge as well of all the nations of the earth. There are not many gods there is only one God and his name is Yahweh! He is the Lord of creation and the Lord of history. Yes he is the God of the Jews not because they were worthy but because he chose them out of all the nations of the earth to be his people. He chose them to work out his purpose in the world and to bear witness to himself.

Jeremiah has thought through the implications that God is the only God and taken Israel's monotheism to its logical conclusion just as *Isaiah* before him did and *Ezekiel* will do in exile in Babylon. Yahweh is the moral God who is one. He is the Creator of all and the king of all. Nothing thwarts his ultimate will. Nations, even the mightiest ones like Babylon and Persia are simply servants under his direction and rule to carry out his purposes in the world. They rule at his command and pleasure.

51:17-19 - Jeremiah brings an indictment against those who make and then worship idols. They have no breath, no life, no *ruach* (spirit in Hebrew) in them. People who make and worship idols are senseless and without knowledge. Their idols are a fraud. They are worthless and worthy of mockery. When God's judgment comes they will all perish. The Lord is the living God and is not like the idols of the nations. He is the Creator of all things and has chosen Israel as his own people.

Jeremiah's words are very similar in tone and message to *Isaiah 44* and his message to the exiles. When you think about to whom Jeremiah is speaking, his message is remarkable. Every great nation of his day worshipped idols. Babylon who conquered Judah and was the instrument of the Lord's discipline against his people worshipped idols. The Persians who would conquer Babylon worshipped idols. The Egyptians to whom the Jews often looked to help them in the days before Judah's fall worshipped idols. Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria, Tyre and Sidon and the Philistines all the nations around Judah worshipped idols. When Jeremiah wrote these words Judah as a country was about to be destroyed or it had been destroyed by Babylon. Yet the most enduring words and message against all these nations all of whom have now disappeared into the dust of history is that they were fools to worship idols and reject the living God. The Jews are still here and still worshipping God. The great nations of Jeremiah's day along with all their pagan idols and worship have disappeared. *Jeremiah's* and *Isaiah's* critique of idolatry

showed how bankrupt paganism really is. Their words still apply today to those who would resurrect paganism and its nature worship. People who do so are fools and without knowledge. They will perish along with their idols!

51:20-24 - This is a confusing passage. Who is the war club, the weapon for battle? It appears the Lord is the one who is speaking rather than Jeremiah, but even that is not entirely clear. The Lord speaks of someone with whom he will shatter nations, armies, men and women, young men and maidens. He will shatter the shepherd and the flock, the farmer and the oxen and governors and officials. The words for governors and officials are loan words from Akkadian which would have been the language of Babylon and lower Mesopotamia. The question still remains; about whom is the Lord speaking? In the context I think he must be speaking of Babylon. But who is the war club and weapon? Historically Persia conquered Babylon and that is probably who is referred to here. However, the language suggests another power, perhaps angelic that God will use to fuel the armies of Persia and other nations who will come against Babylon. The text does not say that explicitly but the idea is possible. If that is the case then this might be a veiled reference to the angels of the nations that Daniel speaks of in *Daniel 10*. That however is only speculation. It is more likely that Jeremiah is using poetic language to describe Persia and how the Lord will use the Persians to bring down Babylon.

That idea is reinforced in *verse 24*. God will repay Babylon and all who live in it for all the wrong they have done in Zion. God's justice is always balanced. He used Babylon to punish Judah and the Jews for all their sins. Yet just because God used Babylon did not mean that Babylon was excused from responsibility to the Lord for any atrocities she committed. God judged her just as he had Assyria. God holds the pagan nations of the world to his standards of justice and righteousness just as he did his people. The Jews had a greater responsibility to God because they were his covenant people, especially when it came to worshipping other gods. God however did not let Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Persia or any other nation act as they pleased killing and destroying at will without holding them accountable. That accountability was enforced within history because God is the Lord of history. As the old Bethel Series said, history itself is the judgment of God. We in the USA need to remember that lesson!

51:25-26 - God says he is against the destroying mountain which will destroy the whole earth. This is almost certainly Babylon given the context even though Jeremiah does not explicitly say so. A mountain is often used in the prophets as a metaphor for a government or a power. It could also be a double edged image to refer to the ziggurats that were a common form of temple in Babylon. These were probably the idea behind the Tower of Babel in *Genesis 11*. The destruction that Babylon sows among the nations of the earth is not only political and military it is religious as well. This viewpoint agrees with John in *Revelation 17-18*.

God says he will stretch out his hand against Babylon and roll it off the cliff. When God destroys Babylon no rock will be left for people with which to re-build a foundation. It will be desolate forever. This prophecy has also been fulfilled. Often in the ancient world people would re-build a city upon the ruins of the previous city because of the proximity of roads and water. They would use the bricks and stones of the ruined city as building material for the new city, building right on top of the ruined site. That did not happen with Babylon. New cities were founded in the area of southern Mesopotamia that were not on the ancient site of Babylon after Xerxes destroyed the city in 478. Today there is no city of Babylon. It is a ruin buried under centuries of rubble.

51:27-32 - This section is very similar to *Isaiah 13* which also speaks of the Lord raising up the kings of the Medes against Babylon to destroy her. *Isaiah* wrote about 730 while *Jeremiah* writes this section around 590. They write a century and a half apart yet have the same message. Was Jeremiah familiar with *Isaiah's* prophecy? Probably, yet it is impossible to tell whether he had *Isaiah's* writing in front of him. However, there must have been a revival in *Isaiah's* prophecy because *Isaiah 40-66* is written to the exiles in Babylon and it would have started to be circulated around the end of Jeremiah's life as *Isaiah's* disciples had preserved his prophecy for distribution at the proper time.

God says he is about to summon the nations to do battle against Babylon. He speaks of the kings of the Medes, which is probably a reference to Cyrus and the kings of Persia. He also says summon three specific nations against Babylon; Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. Ararat is the volcano in northeastern Turkey south of the Caucasus Mountains near Lake Van. Ararat is the name given to the territory of Armenia and is probably a name for the ancient kingdom of Urartu which was in that area and still existed in Jeremiah's day. Minni is probably the name for a people named the Mannai whose territory was to the south and east of Lake Van and Lake Urmia in modern day Armenia. They were allied with the Assyrians and the Medes against Babylon when Cyrus attacked it in 539. Ashkenaz is the name for a people who populated the lands between the Black and Caspian Seas, north of the Caucasus Mountains, in the plains of southern Ukraine. There is evidence to suggest that Ashkenaz is also a name for the Scythians who were warlike horse nomads who invaded Armenia and northern Assyria. In the mid 600's they made incursions into Syria-Palestine. Some scholars believe that a portion of those Scythians settled in the area around Beth Shan and that is why the city was named Scythopolis in Jesus' day. The point of the three nations mentioned by Jeremiah is that the Lord would summon the nations north and west of Media all the way to the Steppes of Russia to help Cyrus in invading and destroying Babylon. Cyrus invaded and took the city in 539. Xerxes and his army invaded and destroyed the city in 478 in putting down a rebellion in Babylon.

God says bring all the countries the Median kings rule to help them invade Babylon. That is why Jeremiah mentions Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz because they would have been subject to or at least paid tribute to the Medo-Persian kings. God is going to use them to judge Babylon so that no one will ever live there again. Jeremiah says Babylon's warriors have stopped fighting and have become exhausted. When General Gobryas, the commander of Cyrus' armies, successfully diverted the flow of the Euphrates River granting the Persian armies access to Babylon through the river culverts the city fell without a protracted battle. Cyrus entered the city as a conqueror and hero. Jeremiah speaks here as if Babylon was sacked and burned. That did not happen under Cyrus who preserved the city and restored the worship of Marduk the chief Babylonian god. It did happen 60 years later when Babylon rebelled against Persia and Xerxes brought his army to quell the rebellion. He captured the city and burned it to the ground. After that time Babylon gradually fell into ruin and was never settled again. Alexander wanted to restore it when he came to the city in 323 but he died of malaria before he could carry out his plans. Jeremiah's prophecy was finally fulfilled even though it took a century to complete.

51:33 - God says the daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor when it is time for it to be trampled during the harvest. Think of the image of the threshing floor where the oxen or donkeys were led around the wheat or the people walked on the wheat pulling a wooden sled to separate the kernels from the stalks. The wheat sheaves were piled about a foot thick on the threshing floor which also had a stone barrier at its edges to keep the wheat on the floor. Then the grain

was all tossed in the air with rake-like fans to separate the wheat from the chaff and the straw was gathered to be burned or fed to the animals while the kernels of wheat were gathered to be made into bread for food. God says Babylon is piled high ready to be threshed because the time for her harvest has come.

When Jeremiah wrote this Nebuchadnezzar was probably at the height of his power. See *verse 34*. The Jews would have had a very difficult time believing that any power could overcome Babylon. Yet God looks into the not too distant future and sees a day when even the conqueror of Judah and destroyer of Jerusalem will himself be destroyed. God is still the Lord of history and his justice will prevail over even mighty Babylon.

51:34-35 - Jeremiah says Nebuchadnezzar has devoured the Jews. He has thrown them into confusion; militarily, economically, socially and religiously. Is God still for us? Are we still his people? What are we to do? Jeremiah uses the image of a snake that swallows its prey, filling its stomach and then spitting out what it does not want. Judah is like that under Babylon's rule.

He expresses a lament and a curse similar in tone to *Psalms 137*. May the violence done to their flesh be upon Babylon! May the blood of those who live in Jerusalem be upon those who live in Babylon! The people are asking God to take vengeance upon the Babylonians for what they have done, for all those who died in the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the city. It is likely that this passage was written right after the fall of Jerusalem.

The fact that these words of vengeance and grief are in Scripture show us that the most appropriate place to express these feelings is with God. When we are filled with rage, grief, and revenge the best thing we can do is tell God about those feelings. It was appropriate that Jeremiah expressed them to God because only God has the moral strength and right to deal with them and to deal with Babylon in any kind of a just way. It is too easy in our pain to think we can take vengeance for some horrible immoral act done to us in a just way. Only God is strong enough to always act in justice and love. We cannot. When we feel the need for revenge and are so hurt by what some people did to us when we did not deserve it we need to express those feelings to God and only to him. Even when we are deserving of God's justice and discipline like the Jews were they did not deserve all that the Babylonians did to their country, especially those like Jeremiah who were faithful to God. Jeremiah does the only thing he can do with his own feelings of revenge. He tells God about them. We need to do the same.

51:36-40 - God in response to the cries of his people for revenge against Babylon says he will carry out his revenge on the Babylonians for all they have done. He will defend the cause of his people and avenge them. The Lord will dry up her sea and make her springs dry. That could be a veiled reference to the Persian General Gobryas' tactic of diverting the flow of the Euphrates River to gain entrance to Babylon.

As Jeremiah has said numerous times already in *chapters 50-51*, Babylon will become a ruin and a haunt for jackals. No one will live there. The Lord will make them drunk and shouting with laughter and then bring them down so they sleep forever and do not wake. He will punish the people of Babylon and slaughter them like lambs and goats. God will have his vengeance on Babylon for all she did to his people Israel. No nation will stand who attacks the Jews. God will execute his justice in history and events themselves will cause any nation who harms his people to fall. The Jews may suffer much for their stubborn refusal to follow God and their rejection of the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, but God will always look out for his people.

51:41-44 - Sheshach is a cryptogram for Babylon. The method is known as Athbash. In English one would use the alphabet backwards, replacing a with z, b with y, c with x and so on. The Hebrew consonants s-s-k really represent b-b-l, Babel or Babylon. Jeremiah isn't being secretive just clever. It is also possible that Sheshach was actually used in his day as a name for Babylon.

Babylon will be captured and seized. The sea will rise over Babylon and its waves will cover the city. This is not to be taken literally since the site of Babylon is a long ways from the Persian Gulf. In other prophetic books the sea often represents the Gentile powers of the nations, here Persia. This interpretation is reinforced in the next verse which talks about Babylon's towns becoming desert where no one lives. A land cannot be covered by the ocean waves and be desert at the same time.

God says he will punish Bel in Babylon and make him spit out what he has swallowed. Bel or Baal was the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon. In Jeremiah's day Marduk was the name used for Bel. What he has swallowed is probably the territories of the nations the Babylonians have conquered. Many pagan religions saw their gods as territorial. They expanded their influence by their followers expanding their territory. Military conquest was often related to their pagan religion. To bring glory to their gods they expanded their empire thus making their gods bigger. When God, the true and living God, destroys Babylon the nations will no longer stream into the city to worship Marduk. His power and influence will be stripped. The walls of Babylon of which the Babylonians were so proud, will fall. This finally happened under King Xerxes of Persia in 478.

51:45-48 - God tells his people to come out of Babylon and run for their lives from the fierce anger of the Lord against the city. This same command John uses against Mystery Babylon, Rome, in *Revelation 18*. Is this a call for God's people to return to the Promiseland? Jeremiah had written to the exiles telling them their captivity would last a generation or more, 70 years. He told them to seek the peace and prosperity of Babylon where God had sent them. Here he tells them to flee and get out now. It almost sounds contradictory. However, when one considers that Cyrus did not destroy Babylon but took it as a hero and it was Xerxes who finally destroyed the city after Babylon rebelled against Persia, this prophecy may be pointed at the people living in Xerxes' day, in 478, rather than the exiles who actually came home under Cyrus' decree.

Jeremiah says there will be rumors of rebellion and war. When they come do not lose heart. What did the exiles want more than anything? They wanted to go home. They wanted Babylon to fall. God tells them the day will surely come. Wait patiently for it. God will punish the idols of the land and Babylon will be disgraced. Many will be slain. Heaven and earth will rejoice over her fall because out of the north destroyers will come to attack her and destroy her. God himself has declared it. From a geographical perspective the Persian army would come from the north to attack Babylon. It was the most likely and efficient way to lay siege to the city. When Jeremiah says heaven and earth will shout for joy over Babylon's fall he is saying that God is behind the Persian army. God has purposed to shame and destroy Marduk and the pagan gods of Babylon. Paul says that behind all pagan idols are demons wanting worship. That means that the fall of Babylon was more than a political-military event. It also had a spiritual warfare component to it. God was defeating demons that stood against his purposes in the world. This part of Jeremiah's prophecy also could be applied to the ultimate end of Mystery Babylon in *Revelation 17-18* which represents not only Rome but all godless culture and power. God will execute his just judgment on all spiritual and political powers that oppose him in his world until

every knee bows to Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That day will surely come when the Lord Jesus returns.

51:49-50 - God says Babylon must fall because of all the slain in Israel. God used Babylon to punish the Jews but when they killed many Jews the Babylonians were not excused morally. God holds them responsible for their violence and murder. Plus it is not just in Israel that the Babylonians have killed many. All over the Middle Eastern world they have conquered territories and sacked cities. They have killed thousands and taken many into exile back to Babylon. God has not forgotten that.

Jeremiah says to those who have escaped death by the sword, leave Babylon and do not linger in the city. In *51:45* he tells the exiles in Babylon to come out of her and run for their lives. This command in *verse 50* is a repeat of that earlier command.

Jeremiah tells them remember the Lord in a distant land and think on Jerusalem. The Jews had to learn a new way to practice their faith and fulfill their covenant with Yahweh as exiles in Babylon. They could not worship at the temple or offer sacrifices. The exile forced them to remember the Lord in a distant land. It led to the development of the synagogue as the center of Jewish worship. Yahweh was not the God of the land of Israel he was the God of Israel and its people. He promised the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the land is important in his covenant. But the core of God's covenant with his people is his relationship with them just as the core of the New Covenant of *Jeremiah 31* is his relationship with his people. One can know God anywhere because the Lord is not the God of one particular land like an idol. He is the Lord of all!

51:51-53 - Jeremiah contrasts the Jewish people with Babylon. God's people feel disgraced and insulted. They have been shamed before the world because the Babylonians have entered the holy places of the temple and destroyed it. This points to the timing of Jeremiah's prophecy. He must have written this part after the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. God's judgment has fallen on Judah and the Lord has allowed the Babylonians to destroy his temple.

But the days are coming when God will punish the pagan gods of Babylon. Even if Babylon reaches to the sky yet the Lord will send destroyers against her. He will bring Babylon down. *Verse 53* could be a veiled reference to the Tower of Babel or one of the ziggurat temples in Babylon. Many temples to the Babylonian gods used the ziggurat as a model. The idea being that by building the tower higher than the surrounding buildings the idol was lifted up higher than anyone or anything around it. The walls of Babylon were also built higher and stronger than any other ancient city of the time, yet they could not withstand the ingenuity of the Persian armies and their attack. God used the Persians to bring down mighty and proud Babylon. She would be shamed just as Judah and Jerusalem had been shamed.

51:54-58 - Jeremiah restates his theme throughout *chapters 50 & 51* that God will destroy Babylon for her many sins. The Lord himself will bring enemies against Babylon and she will not survive. Babylon's armies will be captured and defeated because God is going to pay back Babylon for all she has done. The Lord will bring judgment upon Babylon for her brutal conquests, for forcing many into exile and especially for her corrupting idolatries. Her officials and wise men, her governors and warriors will sleep and never awake. They will die. The king, the Lord Almighty declares this.

God says Babylon's great walls and her high gates will be leveled and set on fire. The walls of Babylon were 23 kilometers (16.7 miles) around and thick enough on top for two chariots to pass. The people of Babylon will be fuel for the flames. God will bring his judgment against the city. Cyrus the Great captured Babylon in 539. Xerxes captured and burned the city in 478 after Babylon rebelled against the Persian king. Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled in two stages. First God stripped Babylon of her power under Cyrus and then the Lord destroyed the city 61 years later under Xerxes.

51:59-64 - Baruch includes this incident about Babylon to close out Jeremiah's prophecies against the Babylonians. In the 4th year of Zedekiah's reign, 593, the king was called to Babylon to re-affirm his loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar after an unsuccessful rebellion in Babylon which many of the other nations of the Middle East had hoped would throw off the Babylonian yoke. Zedekiah finally did rebel in 589 which led to Jerusalem's final destruction by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. *Jeremiah 52* details all these events.

Jeremiah gave a message to Seraiah, a staff officer of Zedekiah, and brother of Baruch Jeremiah's secretary. Baruch's relationship with Seraiah is confirmed in *Jeremiah 32:12*. Their fathers and grandfathers have the same names. Jeremiah had written on a scroll all the disasters that would come upon Babylon, all that he had recorded up to that time. It is probable that much of the material in *Jeremiah 50-51* was on that scroll. Jeremiah gives the scroll to Seraiah and tells him when he gets to Babylon read all these words aloud. To whom was he to read them? The most likely group of people would have been the first group of exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon with King Jehoiachin in 597. Seraiah was then to tell the exiles that the Lord has promised to destroy this place so that neither man nor animal will ever live in it again. When he finished reading the scroll he was to tie a stone on it and throw it into the Euphrates River and say, "*So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall*" (*Jeremiah 51:64*). The most amazing thing about this prophecy and prophetic act is that Jeremiah gave this message to Seraiah at the height of Babylon's power. It would have been almost inconceivable for the exiles to imagine Babylon destroyed. They had never seen a city of such wealth, power and beauty. It made Jerusalem look like a peasant's hovel. Who could stand against the might of Nebuchadnezzar's armies and his power? Yet God said Babylon would fall never to rise again.

The reality is Jeremiah's words were literally fulfilled. Cyrus captured the city in 539 and took away its political and military power. Xerxes destroyed the city after a rebellion in 478 and tore down its walls and burned its houses and temples. The city fell into ruin. Alexander the Great had designs to rebuild Babylon to its former glory but he died there in 323 of malaria. The Seleucian kings built a new city on the Tigris River named Seleucia and made it the capital of the region rather than rebuilding Babylon. The city never recovered and by New Testament times was a ruin, although the temple of Bel-Marduk still stood until around 75AD. Today Babylon is an archeological site but only the outskirts of the city have been thoroughly excavated and explored. The city center with its temples and palaces still remains under centuries of rubble. No one lives there today just as Jeremiah said.

Baruch adds at the end of *verse 64* that the words of Jeremiah end here. It is a declaration that the inspired words of the prophet are now completed. *Chapter 52* is a re-statement with a few additions of *2 Kings 24:18-25:21*, which detail how many of Jeremiah's prophecies were fulfilled.

Chapter 52:

52:1-3 - Baruch or another editor adds an historical appendix to the *Book of Jeremiah* that is essentially 2 *Kings* 24:18-25:21. The historical section confirms Jeremiah's prophecies about the fall of Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when Nebuchadnezzar changed his name from Mattaniah and installed him as king in 597. He reigned for 11 years. His mother's name, Hamutal, is the same as Jehoahaz, another son of Josiah his father. Jehoahaz was exiled to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco after his defeat of Josiah at Megiddo. Zedekiah was half-brother to Jehoiachim and uncle to Jehoiachin. He was 9 and a half years old when his father Josiah was killed in 609 and his brother Jehoahaz was exiled. The text comments that Zedekiah did evil in the eyes of the Lord just like his half-brother Jehoiachim had done. The circumstances of his life worked against him. He was only 9 when his father the faithful king Josiah died. He could hardly have understood all the reforms his father had attempted and the reasons behind them. He lived in the court at a time when Judah's kings were vassals either of Egypt or Babylon. He himself was enthroned as king by Nebuchadnezzar and forced to swear allegiance to him. Plus the best and most capable of Judah's leadership had been carried off into exile to Babylon when he came to the throne. Zedekiah's advisors were not the best and he was young and inexperienced. Jeremiah paints him as a weak and cowardly king who was easily swayed into rash decisions, including the decision to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. In the end his refusal to follow Jeremiah's counsel to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar cost him the life of his sons and eventually his own life as he died in prison in Babylon.

52:4-11 - On January 15, 588 in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem with his whole army to crush Zedekiah's ill-fated rebellion against Babylon. *Note:* The Hebrew calendar was based on lunar months so the calendar references do not always synch with our modern calendars. The Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem for the next 2 and a half years.

The Babylonian army had cut off the food supply to Jerusalem and the famine inside the city was severe. Then on July 18, 586 the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem and Nebuchadnezzar's troops poured into the city. Zedekiah along with what was left of his army fled the city by night through a gate near the king's garden, avoided detection by the Babylonian troops who had surrounded the city and fled towards the Arabah, or Jordan Valley. It is possible he was seeking to escape down to Aqaba and take ship somewhere. However, the Babylonian army caught up with the king and his party and apprehended him near Jericho. His soldiers were scattered and separated from him and King Zedekiah was captured. Jeremiah tells us that one of those soldiers, Ishmael, assassinated Gedaliah the Judean governor the Babylonians had appointed over the remnant of the Jews at Mizpah. Another of Zedekiah's officers, Johanan, led a group of survivors to Tahpanhes in the Nile Delta in Egypt to escape the Babylonians. They took Jeremiah with them despite his protests. See *Jeremiah 40-44*.

Zedekiah was taken to Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters at Riblah in Syria near the Orontes River. There the Babylonian king pronounced sentence on Zedekiah. His sons were slaughtered before his eyes along with the other officials of the Jews who were with the king. Then Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah's eyes put out and bound in bronze shackles, and the now blind king was taken to Babylon and put in prison where he died. So ended the last ruling king of the line of David and the Kingdom of Judah was no more.

52:12-19 - On August 17, 586, Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's imperial guard came to Jerusalem with orders to torch the city. There is a slight discrepancy with the precise date as *2 Kings 25:8* lists the date as August 14, 586. Nebuzaradan ordered the temple to be set afire along with the royal palace, the important buildings and all the houses of Jerusalem. While the city was burning the Babylonian troops who had laid siege to the city broke down the walls of Jerusalem. The city was no longer protected and thus only the poorest of people would live there. It was not until 445, 140 years later, that *Nehemiah*, with permission from Artaxerxes the Persian king, led the effort to rebuild the ruined walls of Jerusalem.

Nebuzaradan also carried off more people into exile to Babylon. The text comments that they were some of the poor in the land, along with those who remained in the city, the rest of the artisans or craftspeople and any who had deserted to the Babylonians during the siege. He left some of the rest of the poorest people to work the land. The result of this policy was that the land would still be inhabited but since the country's leadership was now dead or in exile the chances of rebellion would be small. The Babylonians did not want the fertile farmland of Judah to go to waste. They simply wanted a subservient population that was easy to govern.

Verses 17-19 detail what the Babylonians did to the temple, especially those things made of bronze, gold and silver. These were metal articles that had value and could add to Babylon's wealth. One of the ways conquering nations of that time grew richer was through booty captured during military campaigns. Nebuchadnezzar had already raided the temple in 597. Now under his orders Nebuzaradan took whatever of value that was left back to Babylon.

52:20-23 - The great bronze pillars that Solomon had ordered the craftsman Hiram of Tyre to cast that stood as the front pillars of the temple, Nebuzaradan broke up and took to Babylon along with the bronze sea with the twelve bulls and the bronze capitals for the pillars. See *1 Kings 7* for their making. The pillars had stood for 374 years, since 960, the 11th year of Solomon's reign when the temple was finished. Nebuzaradan carried a massive amount of bronze back to Babylon. There it would have been displayed as captured booty or simply melted down for other building projects.

52:24-27 - Nebuzaradan also took prisoners to Riblah in Syria, the location of Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters for his Judean campaign. He probably chose Riblah because it was midway between Judah and Babylon. If something went wrong in Babylon Nebuchadnezzar could easily have returned home to put down any insurrection or trouble.

The text lists Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the priest next in rank along with the three doorkeepers in the temple as prisoners of Nebuzaradan. They were priests during the reign of Zedekiah. Zephaniah was the priest who came with some other officials to Jeremiah to ask the prophet to pray for the king in *Jeremiah 37*. Nebuzaradan also took the officer in charge of the fighting men in the city and seven other royal advisors. These advisors were probably some of those who had given the king the foolish counsel to rebel against Babylon. Now they were captives. The secretary, who was the chief officer in charge of conscripted labor, or slave labor, was also taken prisoner along with sixty of his men found in the city. Zedekiah was still forcing his own people to work for him like his ancestor Solomon had done. In Zedekiah's case it was probably related to the defense of Jerusalem and fortifying the city's walls.

Nebuzaradan took all of his prisoners to Riblah in Syria and brought them before Nebuchadnezzar. There they were executed. The result of the exile and execution of Judah's leadership was that the nation was completely destroyed. Imagine the president, vice-president,

cabinet officers, presidential advisors, military commanders, the congress and all the major officials of the government either killed or taken prisoner by a foreign power. There would be no government left. That is what happened to Judah. Not only was Jerusalem destroyed but everything that constituted any political authority was also eliminated. By August of 586, Judah as a nation simply ceased to exist.

52:27-30 - The text lists the number of people that Nebuchadnezzar sent into exile to Babylon. The numbers reported here are difficult to harmonize with the 42,360 that the *Book of Ezra* says returned to Judah after the decree of Cyrus. Jeremiah reports only 4600 people went into exile. Further *2 Kings 24* reports that in 597 Nebuchadnezzar exiled 10,000 people to Babylon. It is unclear how the *Book of Jeremiah* arrives at these figures. 4600 people total taken into exile is not that many out of a population of thousands. The rest of the Scriptures make it clear that not only were the exiles the cream of Judah's leadership that survived, they were also a considerable number. Jeremiah's criteria are obviously different. It is possible he is only referring to the men taken, though the number still seems small, or perhaps he is referring to officials in the court of the king or priests in the temple. The answer to the discrepancy is still unclear today.

The text lists three distinct times when Nebuchadnezzar or the Babylonians took Jews into exile to Babylon. The first happened in his 7th year, which would have been 597. He took 3023 Jews to Babylon. The second happened in his 18th year, 586, when he took 832 people into exile. The final time was in his 23rd year when 745 Jews went into exile under Nebuzaradan. This event is especially difficult because the date of the text puts it at 582. Jerusalem was in ruins by that time and there is no evidence of a later exile after the fall of the city. Nebuzaradan sent the remaining captives into exile in August of 586 according to *Jeremiah 52:15*. It is difficult to know to what event the text is referring to here in *52:30*. Was this a later editorial addition to *Jeremiah* and that is the reason it is out of synch with *chapter 52* and the *Book of Ezra*? The discrepancy in the numbers does not change the fundamental message of Jeremiah's prophecy. It is simply a difficult puzzle to solve as to why the numbers are so different than the other Scriptural passages that refer to the exile. The conclusion of the *Book of Jeremiah* is that only 4600 people were carried into exile. 4600 does not appear to be a symbolic number either because if one divides it by 3, 7, or 12 there are no symbolically significant results. The most important point of the text however is at the end of *verse 27*: "*So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.*" Everything that Jeremiah had said would happen to the Jews had happened. His prophecy was fulfilled and his words were vindicated. Jeremiah was a true prophet of the Lord.

52:31-34 - Baruch or another editor of Jeremiah's prophecy included this postscript about Jehoiachin's release from prison. Evil-Merodach or Amel-Marduk came to the throne in 560. He was the son of Nebuchadnezzar and only reigned two years before he was assassinated by Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law, Neriglissar. The date given of the 25th day of the 12th month of the Hebrew calendar is March 31, 561. By cross checking the Hebrew dates with the surviving Babylonian chronicles archeologists can fix the Biblical dates quite accurately during this period.

Evil-Merodach took pity on Jehoiachin, freed him from prison, gave him royal clothes to wear again and a place at the king's table. Jehoiachin stayed in the king's palace in Babylon for the rest of his days and Evil-Merodach provided him with a regular allowance. He never returned to Judah. Jehoiachin was 18 when he became king and only reigned three months before Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and he was sent into exile in 597. He spent the next 37 years in prison which means he was 55 when Evil-Merodach freed him. Perhaps the new

Babylonian king freed Jehoiachin because he wanted to soften some of the policies of his father. He might have taken pity on Jehoiachin because Judah as a nation no longer existed and the Jewish exiles had settled down in Babylon and were not a problem for the Babylonians. *Daniel* would have been a court advisor to the king and it is possible he had some influence in the matter of Jehoiachin's freedom as well. We do not know. Jehoiachin's grandson, Zerubbabel led the exiles back to Judah and Jerusalem after Cyrus' decree in 538.

The *Book of Jeremiah* ends with this small note of compassion on the exiled, imprisoned former king of Judah. Like the end of *Kings* it is hardly a ringing promise of restoration. That would come in the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* and in the second half of the prophecy of *Isaiah*. The hope Jeremiah expresses is found in his New Covenant and his prophecies of the Messiah, the Branch from David's line not the release of an old imprisoned king.

A Final Note: If Baruch was the editor of *Jeremiah* as seems likely, then the earliest he could have finished putting the book together was 561 when Jehoiachin was released. It is possible Baruch also wrote *Kings*, or more likely that he had access to its manuscript. A third possibility is he was one of several scribes who put *Kings* together to complete the prophetic history of Israel and Judah. *Kings* validates Jeremiah's message and ministry and is a vindication of Israel and Judah's prophets and their warnings of judgment on all Israel for her idolatrous violations of God's covenant. If Baruch is one of those who is behind the compilation of *Kings* then Jeremiah is the ultimate source and his influence in shaping the Hebrew Scriptures goes far beyond just the words of his prophecy.