

# **STUDIES IN JEREMIAH**

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# STUDIES IN JEREMIAH I

## Introduction and Background

The era of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was one of the most turbulent in the history of the Ancient Near East. It witnessed the fall of Assyria and the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and along with it the final destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In preparation for our study of selected passages from the prophecy of Jeremiah, we will today look at the historical context in which the book was written, along with some of the leading characteristics of the book and its author.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After the death of Hezekiah, his son Manasseh ascended the throne and became the longest-reigning and worst king in the history of the Southern Kingdom, promoting idolatry and the unspeakable practices associated with it. He joined an alliance against Assyria, the enemy that had almost destroyed Jerusalem in his father's time, was defeated and captured, and near the end of his life repented of his wickedness. He was succeeded briefly by his wicked son Amon, who undid his father's late reforms and was murdered after two years on the throne.

Amon was succeeded by his eight-year-old son Josiah, who, upon reaching maturity, initiated a thorough religious reform, removing places of pagan worship, cleaning out the Temple, which had been reduced to deplorable condition, and restoring the worship of the true God. The decline of Assyrian power allowed Josiah a measure of independence not enjoyed by his predecessors, and he quickly refused tribute to Assyria, which was then under assault by the rising power of Babylon. As Babylon grew more powerful under Nabopolassar, conquering the Assyrian stronghold of Nineveh in 612 BC (according to Nahum's prophecy), the Egyptians, led by Pharaoh Necho, allied themselves with the Assyrians in order to counter the Babylonian threat. Josiah, unwilling to see his kingdom become a vassal of the Egyptians, mobilized his army to stop the Egyptian advance at Megiddo. Here Josiah was defeated and killed in 609 BC.

After the death of Josiah, God's predicted judgment came quickly. The four kings who presided over the last 23 years of Judah's history were little more than puppets. After Josiah's death, the pro-Babylonian party in Jerusalem succeeded in placing his second son, Jehoahaz (called "Shallum" in Jeremiah) on the throne. But when Necho returned from Carchemish, where he had temporarily forestalled a Babylonian advance, he removed Jehoahaz and replaced him with his pro-Egyptian brother, Eliakim. Jehoahaz, after reigning only three months, was imprisoned at Riblah in Syria, then taken to Egypt, where he died. When Necho placed Eliakim on the throne, he changed his name to Jehoiakim (reigned 609-597 BC).

In 605 BC, the balance of power shifted for good. Necho again moved northward to challenge Babylon. But the Babylonian army was now under the leadership of crown prince Nebuchadnezzar, and he delivered a crushing defeat to the Egyptian army at Carchemish. He then swept down into Palestine, exacting tribute from the kingdoms in the region. Jehoiakim was

captured and put in irons for deportation to Babylon. Just then, however, Nebuchadnezzar received word that Nabopolassar had died and he was now king. He released Jehoiakim and hurried home, commanding that the choicest young men in Israel be brought after him (e.g., Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah).

Jehoiakim, meanwhile, had succeeded in making himself enormously unpopular. He had imposed a heavy tax to raise tribute for Necho, then built himself a new palace using public funds. He killed a prophet named Uriah, twice imprisoned Jeremiah, and even cut up and burned a written prophecy sent to him by that same prophet. In his final act of folly, Jehoiakim ignored Jeremiah's warning and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian king sent troops from Syria, Ammon, and Moab against him, and it appears that Jehoiakim was killed during one of these raids, for, as Jeremiah predicted, he was buried "with the burial of an ass" (Jeremiah 22:19).

In reality, Jehoiakim died just in time - Nebuchadnezzar himself was on the way westward to put down the rebellion. Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah or Coniah), who, like his uncle Jehoahaz, only reigned three months. He became king at the age of eighteen. When Jehoiachin was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, ten thousand capable men were carried off with him (including a young priest named Ezekiel). Jehoiachin himself was imprisoned in Babylon, where he lived out the rest of his life, eventually being given a large measure of liberty and privilege by Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Abel-marduk (Evil-merodach). He was replaced on the throne of Judah by his uncle Mattaniah (reigned 597-586 BC), the third son of Josiah to reign in Jerusalem.

Mattaniah was renamed Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar and forced to swear an oath of loyalty in the Lord's name. Zedekiah was not recognized as king by the exiles, who continued to date events by the reign of the imprisoned Jehoiachin. In fact, the only ones who recognized Zedekiah were the leaders of the pro-Egyptian party in Jerusalem, made up of noblemen, false prophets, and many priests (these are the same men who consistently accused Jeremiah of treason when he advised submission to Babylon). When Nebuchadnezzar faced a revolt in his own army in 594, these men were sure the captivity of their countrymen was about to end. Against Jeremiah's advice, they turned to Egypt for help and rebelled against Babylon. Eventually (588 BC), Nebuchadnezzar retaliated and besieged Jerusalem. After a two-year siege that brought horrible hardships to the inhabitants, the city fell in 586 BC. Tens of thousands were deported; Zedekiah was forced to witness the executions of his own sons, then had his eyes put out and was taken to Babylon. Nebuzaradan was given the responsibility of destroying the city, which he did with great thoroughness.

Meanwhile, Nebuchadnezzar appointed the honorable Gedaliah (a friend of Jeremiah and thus pro-Babylonian) as governor of the new Babylonian province. Gedaliah, however, was murdered within months by a group of pro-Egyptian nobles who had avoided the siege by hiding in the wilderness, then fleeing to Egypt. The Jews who fled to Egypt never returned, but became the progenitors of Jewish settlements in such places as Alexandria (the city where the Septuagint was produced, and the home of such notables as the proto-Gnostic Philo and the eloquent Apollos) and Elephantine.

## THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET

Jeremiah was born near the end of the reign of Manasseh, the wicked son of Hezekiah. He was from Anathoth, a priestly town about three miles from Jerusalem. This was the town to which Solomon had exiled Abiathar, an ally of David; Jeremiah may well have been one of his descendants. Though of a priestly family, we have no indication that he ever exercised priestly functions, but he was called and began his public ministry in 526 BC, shortly after the beginning of the revival initiated by Josiah, the last good king of the Southern Kingdom. Jeremiah was an outspoken supporter of that revival, and often preached against the idolatry and oppression targeted by his sovereign. Even then, however, Jeremiah was warning the people of the coming fall of the kingdom at the hands of Babylon. His prophetic contemporaries included Zephaniah and Habakkuk in Judah and Ezekiel and Daniel in Babylon.

When Josiah was unexpectedly killed in battle, however, Jeremiah began the life of struggle that would earn him the name “the weeping prophet.” He was persecuted by the evil Jehoiakim, who changed his political loyalties as often as a chameleon changes its color. Jeremiah’s consistent message was one of divine judgment, which he knew was coming from his thorough understanding of the Pentateuch, especially the covenant curses and blessings in Deuteronomy. He advised submission to Babylon, arguing that only with submission could the nation survive. He was ignored, imprisoned, persecuted, and his writings, dictated to his faithful scribe Baruch, were arrogantly torn up and burned by the king himself.

After Jehoiakim’s death, Jeremiah gained some relief from incessant persecution, but Zedekiah was so weak that the pro-Egyptian nobles who remained in the land saw to it that Jeremiah got little public support or royal attention. After another attempt to forge an alliance with Egypt brought the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar down on Jerusalem and the Temple, Jeremiah was given the choice of remaining in the charred ruins of the city or receiving an honorable escort to Babylon (now his enemies *knew* he was a traitor), and chose to stay. When his friend Gedaliah was assassinated, however, the fractious nobles seized Jeremiah and Baruch and forced them to flee with them to Egypt, where according to Jewish tradition he was murdered.

Jeremiah was, like his Savior, a “man of sorrows” who wept over a doomed city that refused to listen to his call for repentance (the connection was such that some in the first century, when asked to identify Jesus, thought that He was Jeremiah - Matthew 16:14). He was a devoted patriot who advised his people to surrender to their enemies, a man who longed for human companionship but who was denied the right to marry and spent most of his life hated by the people around him and lacking sympathy from even his own family, and a faithful man of God who frequently, as did the Psalmist, complained to God of the suffering he was called upon to endure. He was also the author of the five acrostic dirges that we know as the book of Lamentations.

## LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

Jeremiah is the longest book in the Old Testament and one of the most difficult to grasp. Like Ezekiel, the prophecies in the book are not in chronological order; unlike Ezekiel, many of them are not identified by chronological markers. We know that the actual writing of the book was entrusted to Baruch, who served as Jeremiah's scribe, and that the original compilation of prophetic oracles was burned by Jehoiakim. Baruch's recopied version was thus the foundation for our present book, to which he must have added after the flight into Egypt. Structurally, the book can be divided into four broad sections, plus a Prologue and an Epilogue:

Prologue - The Call of Jeremiah (chapter 1)

- I. Prophecies from the Reign of Josiah (chapters 2-20)
- II. Prophecies from the Reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (chapters 21-39)
- III. Ministry After the Fall of Jerusalem (chapters 40-45)
- IV. Prophecies Against the Nations (chapters 46-51)

Epilogue - Historical Addendum (chapter 52)

Stylistically, the book contains a mixture of poetry and prose, history, sermon, and biography. The content of Jeremiah was clearly influenced by his study of Deuteronomy, particularly the summary of the Covenant between God and Israel and the curses and blessings it contains. He also has much in common with Hosea, who spoke mournfully of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom much as Jeremiah does with regard to Judah. As far as New Testament references to Jeremiah are concerned, the section on the New Covenant certainly is given considerable attention in the book of Hebrews, but more than half of the fifty or so quotations from and allusions to Jeremiah are found in the book of Revelation, where John often borrows his description of the judgment of Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51 for eschatological purposes.

## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH II

### Jeremiah 1

We will begin our study of the text by looking at the call of Jeremiah to his prophetic ministry. This chapter constitutes the prologue to the book of Jeremiah's prophecies. Having studied both Isaiah and Ezekiel in previous courses, comparisons with their calls might be instructive.

#### INTRODUCTION (verses 1-3)

The book begins by chronicling the basic information - author, place, date - that gives context to the messages contained in the prophecies.

Verse 1 - Jeremiah was from a priestly family in Anathoth (about three miles northeast of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin; the town still exists today as an Arab village). His father was Hilkiah, but is not to be confused with the Hilkiah who served as High Priest in Jerusalem during Josiah's reforms. While by birth Jeremiah was a priest, by calling he was a prophet; we have no indication that he ever functioned in the priestly office. In fact, some of Jeremiah's harshest criticisms were directed toward the priesthood because of their complicity in the idolatry that filled the land and their failure to teach the people the Law of God as they should have done; this caused him to be rejected by his own family, which at one point called for him to be silenced.

Verses 2-3 - Jeremiah here is said to possess the identifying mark of the prophet - he was the recipient of the Word of the Lord. Like other prophets, he spoke not of his own volition, but spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit of God. These verses also establish the chronology of Jeremiah's ministry, from 626 BC, just a few years after the beginning of Josiah's reforms, through 586 BC, the year of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Note that two kings, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, are not mentioned, probably because their reigns were only three months each in length. The endpoints of Jeremiah's ministry are important; because the reforms fail to bring about fundamental change in the people, exile is inevitable. Note, too, that Jeremiah continued to minister for a number of years after being forcibly taken to Egypt, but his ministry was for all practical purposes completed when the nation was taken away to Babylon.

#### THE CALL (verses 4-10)

As we look at the call of Jeremiah to his prophetic ministry, we will compare and contrast it with other similar calls found in Scripture.

Verse 4 - The call begins with the Word of the Lord coming to Jeremiah. Unlike the calls of Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, this call lacks a spectacular theophany. Jeremiah sees no burning bush or fantastic Temple vision or wheels within wheels, but God speaks to him no less assuredly. Like Elijah, he hears the still, small voice rather than the wind and fire.

Verse 5 - God's sovereignty, foreknowledge, and predestination are all in view here. Like Samson (Judges 13:5), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), and Paul (Galatians 1:15), Jeremiah had been chosen by God before birth for the task to which he has been called (note that this language is not unique to the Bible; in the literature of the Ancient Near East, a number of kings are spoken of as having been chosen by the gods before birth). The reference here is unique in that it speaks of Jeremiah being set apart by God before conception rather than simply before birth, but since the foreknowledge of God is in view here, the difference is hardly significant - God knows all things from the very beginning. We should note, however, that the use of this verse as an argument against abortion (i.e., as indicating the existence of human life prior to birth) is inappropriate because it proves too much - no Christian would legitimately argue that human life exists prior to *conception*.

Verse 6 - What follows is the typical excuse similar to those given by Moses (Exodus 4:10) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), though while Moses spoke of a lack of natural gifts and Isaiah was concerned with his sinfulness and that of his people, Jeremiah's concern seems to be with his inexperience. Note that while we have no way of knowing exactly how old Jeremiah was when he received his call, we may conclude that the youth of which he speaks is relative to the practice of beginning priestly ministry at the age of thirty. Jeremiah was not a child in the sense in which we use the word, but was probably somewhere between twenty and thirty (cf. I Timothy 4:12).

Verses 7-8 - Jeremiah's qualifications don't matter; it's the Lord's presence that counts. Jeremiah is simply to obey and trust God to do the work. Note that the injunction to shun fear because of the Lord's presence is a familiar one received by Abraham (Genesis 15:1), Moses (Numbers 21:34), Joshua (Joshua 1:9), Daniel (Daniel 10:12), Mary (Luke 1:30), Joseph (Matthew 1:20), Peter (Luke 5:10), and Paul (Acts 27:24). In Jeremiah's case, he is to avoid the fear of man. This is important because of the nature of his ministry, which is largely condemnatory. He will face opposition on all fronts, and the temptation to keep silent rather than court persecution will be a strong one. The promise of rescue in the face of strong opposition reminds one of the deliverance experienced by Jeremiah's contemporaries, Daniel and his three friends.

Verse 9 - The mouth is the instrument used by the prophet to speak the words of God and it must be prepared for the task. The cleansing of the mouth in preparation for proclaiming the prophetic word is again paralleled in some Ancient Near Eastern texts, but what we see here is less like the experience of Isaiah, which was one of cleansing (Isaiah 6:6-7), and is more like that of Ezekiel, who is told to eat a scroll in preparation for proclaiming its message (Ezekiel 3:1-3). This need not suggest, of course, that Jeremiah's mouth was any less sinful than that of Isaiah.

Verse 10 - Here Jeremiah is given the essence of his ministry. First of all, it is not a ministry restricted to Israel. He speaks God's judgment on the nations - another indication of God's sovereignty, in that He is not merely the God of one people, but judges all - though there is no indication that the messages found in chapters 46-51 were actually delivered *to* the nations for which they were intended. Secondly, we see here that Jeremiah's principal message is to be one of judgment; the wickedness is to be uprooted and destroyed, not only in Israel, but in the surrounding nations as well. Yet because God is a merciful God, judgment is not proclaimed without extending



hope for the future. Though the words of hope are few and far between in Jeremiah, he nonetheless speaks powerful words of God's restoring grace.

#### THE TWO VISIONS (verses 11-16)

Visions are commonplace among the prophets of Israel and Judah, and here Jeremiah sees the first two given him by God. Both speak of aspects of Jeremiah's message of impending judgment.

Verses 11-12 - The almond tree was (and still is) commonplace in the region where Jeremiah grew up. It is the first of the trees to blossom, sometimes as early as January or February, and is thus a harbinger of the approach of spring. In this case, the vision pictures it as a harbinger of judgment. Verse 12 also uses a pun, since the words for "almond tree" and "watching" contain the same tri-consonantal root. The promised judgment will not be long in coming.

Verses 13-14 - The boiling pot is tilted away from the north, i.e., toward the south. Things are about to get very hot in Judah, and the heat will be coming down from the north. We should note here that, while Babylon is east of Judah, all invasions of Palestine from Mesopotamia came from the north because of the impassable desert east of the Holy Land and the existence of well-traveled trade routes coming down from Syria through the coastal plain into Egypt.

Verse 15 - Note the universality of the scope of the foreseen destruction. "All nations" and their kings (by the time of the fall of Jerusalem many nations had fallen under Nebuchadnezzar's suzerainty) will set up their courts in the gates of Jerusalem (the city gate was the place where business was done and justice meted out, and foreign kings are pictured as doing so in the conquered city). Furthermore, the judgment will fall on "all the towns of Judah." One of the more stirring accounts of the destructive power of Nebuchadnezzar's army comes from the Lachish ostraca, messages written on potsherds by a soldier in the city of Lachish when the town was under Babylonian siege.

Verse 16 - Here we find the fundamental cause of the judgment that is about to fall - idolatry.

#### THE COMMISSION (verses 17-19)

God here fortifies Jeremiah to face the opposition that is bound to come in the face of such a disagreeable message.

Verse 17 - Like Joshua (Joshua 1:6), Jeremiah is told to be strong. He is to be prepared for whatever may come and is warned that failure on his part to maintain his courage will lead to his own destruction (cf. Esther 4:12-14). God's purpose will never fail, but His servants sometimes can and do.

Verses 18-19 - God, however, does not leave Jeremiah to stand alone against the opposition he will face, but promises to fortify him and be with him. The multiple images of strength reinforce the message of assurance; note that the physical characteristics that will fail to keep Jerusalem safe from the invading Babylonians will metaphorically keep Jeremiah safe from the opposition of his own people, which will come from all walks of life - the monarchs, the nobles, the priests (even his own family), and the common people. Yet God is stronger than all human opposition.

## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH III

Jeremiah 7:1-8:3

After Jeremiah is called to his prophetic ministry, he begins to preach against the wickedness of the people. The oracles in chapters 2-6, delivered during the reign of Josiah, show both the need for that great king's reforms and how shallow those reforms really were in terms of their impact on the people. In these chapters, the Lord accuses the people by saying, "They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (2:13). He also speaks of them as a faithless wife who has committed adultery against her true husband and accuses the religious leaders, who should have been turning the people away from their sin and warning them of judgment, of instead proclaiming "'Peace, peace' when there is no peace" (6:14). The next section of the book records a sermon preached by Jeremiah at the gate of the Temple, the first part of which will occupy our attention today.

### THE SIN OF THE PEOPLE (7:1-11)

This may have been Jeremiah's first public address to the people (others argue that what is recorded here is the same sermon mentioned in 26:1, since the location is the same and the contents are similar). In any case, the reaction was strong and negative. The prophet made many powerful enemies as a result of this sermon, and the persecution he was to experience throughout his ministry began shortly thereafter (see next week's lesson).

Verses 1-2a - God ordered Jeremiah to address the people in the place where he would be assured the maximum audience - the gate of the Temple that separated the inner and outer courts. The location was appropriate not only because of the desire for maximum impact, but also because the abuse of the Temple is at the heart of Jeremiah's message.

Verses 2b-3 - The message is addressed to all the people, not just the religious leaders. Jeremiah probably delivered the sermon on a major feast day. The essence of the sermon is the need for immediate change as the only way to avoid disaster ("this place" refers to the land, not the Temple itself).

Verse 4 - A false view of the Temple and its role in worship appears to have arisen in Judah. Pagan temples were built, not so much as places of worship, but as dwelling places for the gods, who were thought to be fiercely territorial. Thus, a temple that was well cared for would keep the god happy, and thus ensure the safety and security of the people who tended it. Such superstitions were not unknown in Israel, even in the early days (e.g., the taking of the Ark of the Covenant into battle in I Samuel 4:3), and clearly had been enhanced through the corruptions of syncretistic religion. The threefold repetition here either represents an intensive ("Surely the presence of God's Temple in our midst will protect us!") or some sort of incantation. The assurances given by the false prophets had been reinforced in the minds of the people by the fact that the Holy of Holies was often referred to as the dwelling place of God and the miraculous deliverance from foreign invasion that had occurred

during the reign of Hezekiah. But the theology of God as omnipresent and omnipotent forbids tying Him to any particular place.

Verses 6-8 - The contradiction between ethical behavior (or the lack thereof) and religious profession demonstrates the shallowness of the latter. Oppression of the weak and idolatry are prime indicators that the professed religion of the people is worthless. They not only neglect the central provisions of the law, but also listen to the false assurances of worthless “prophets.”

Verse 9 - Jeremiah quickly rattles off six of the Ten Commandments as having been violated by his hearers (this does not, of course, suggest that they were guiltless with regard to the other four . . . ).

Verse 10 - Jeremiah’s words here allude to a perverted view of *sanctuary*. Rather than viewing the Temple as a place of safety for those whose lives were in jeopardy, the people were treating it as a safe haven in the sense that, as long as they regularly cared for the sanctuary of their God, they could expect protection from *His* judgment for their misdeeds. After all, God would not destroy His own house, so the people are free to do whatever they please as long as they maintain it (note that such a perverted view of assuring God’s cooperation despite blatant misdeeds has its Christian counterpart in the Catholic practices of penance and indulgences). Penance is, indeed, much easier than repentance.

Verse 11 - A robbers’ den was a place of safety where they could hide out from potential dangers. Jesus borrows this language (Mark 11:17) for quite a different purpose.

#### HISTORICAL PRECEDENT (7:12-15)

Jeremiah then reminds the people of the sanctuary at Shiloh, which housed the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant during the time of the Judges. Though the Bible does not specifically record the destruction of that sanctuary, it probably occurred during the Philistine conquest in I Samuel 4. Archaeology confirms that the town was burned at that time. Historical precedent thus proves that the Lord is not tied to any geographical location or any manmade building. He is quite willing to destroy any city or temple that has been perverted by the disobedience of the worshipers. As He scattered the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel for their idolatry, so He will cast out the citizens of Judah.

#### NO POSSIBILITY OF REMEDY (7:16-29)

Despite the fact that Jeremiah is told to offer deliverance in response to reform, God knows perfectly well that such change is not going to happen. The people are simply too immersed in their wickedness to change at this late date.

Verse 16 - The state of the people is so bad that God tells Jeremiah not to pray for them (a demand that the prophet ignores, by the way). After all, who knows whether or not God will relent, as He did in the case of Nineveh (much to Jonah’s displeasure)?

Verses 17-18 - The sin of the people is endemic, both with regard to place (verse 17) and participants (men, women, and children). Note that the Queen of Heaven is a female deity who has been identified by commentators with the Egyptian Ishtar or the Canaanite Asherah; both were goddesses of fertility who were worshiped with despicable rites. Archaeologists have discovered molds for making the cakes described here, shaped either in a naked female form or as a star, indicating the connection with the practice of astrology.

Verse 19 - Who is being hurt here? Not God, but the people themselves, who are engaged in acts of debasement and self-destruction leading to the fall of the Temple, the city, and the nation.

Verse 20 - As universal as the sin is, so will the destruction be. In the same way that the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden brought a curse on the very ground on which they walked, so the sin of the people of Judah will be visited upon the land itself and all its inhabitants, both human and animal.

Verse 21 - In this section of the sermon, Jeremiah gets sarcastic. For all that the sacrifices offered by the people are worth, they might as well eat them themselves instead of burning them on the altar.

Verses 22-23 - Jeremiah notes that the commands regarding obedience were given before those regarding sacrifice - the Ten Commandments were given before the provisions of the ceremonial law.

Verses 24-26 - The judgment being pronounced by Jeremiah is the culmination of a long process; disobedience is not a new thing in the history of God's people, but began as soon as the Law was given. The people did not listen to the prophets sent by God, and got progressively worse instead of better.

Verse 27 - Jeremiah is warned, as was the case with other prophets (Isaiah and Ezekiel come to mind), that the people would not listen to him - his words would be spoken in vain.

Verse 28 - Even while the Word of God is being spoken by the lips of the prophet, the word of truth is absent from the lips of the people.

Verse 29 - The allusion here is to the Nazirite vow. God is not telling Jeremiah to go into mourning (the Weeping Prophet will do this in any case), but is telling the people that, since any vows of obedience they may have made have been thoroughly violated and they have become unclean, they might as well cut off their hair - they are no longer "dedicated to the Lord."

#### THE VALLEY OF SLAUGHTER (7:30-8:3)

A clear example of the extent of the people's disobedience can be seen just outside the walls of Jerusalem, in Tophet, also known as the Valley of Hinnom.

7:30-31 - The valley outside of Jerusalem had been used since the time of Solomon for pagan temples to pacify his many idol-worshipping wives, and had during the time of Manasseh been used for human sacrifice in the worship of the Moabite god Molech.

7:32-33 - Josiah desecrated the temples and their altars and turned the valley into the city dump, but God intends to desecrate it even further with the carcasses of those who die during the fall of Jerusalem. The horror of the picture painted here is enhanced in view of the importance of care for the bodies of the dead that was part of Israelite (and Ancient Near Eastern) culture. Leaving corpses out in the open to rot was inconceivable sacrilege.

7:34 - Joy will depart from the land - no more laughing, no more marriages; it will become a depopulated place because of the judgment of God upon it.

8:1 - Worse than the exposing of corpses will be the exhumation of the dead. Though the belief in the resurrection of the body receives little attention in the Old Testament (e.g., Job 19:26), care for the bodies of the dead was considered important (cf. the treatment of Joseph's body in Genesis 50:26; Exodus 13:19). Heathen rulers would often exhume the bodies of their dead enemies in order to keep their souls from finding rest after death, or to search for plunder in the graves.

8:2 - The gods of the heavens will do them no good then; the folly of astrology is revealed in passages such as these.

8:3 - The plight of the survivors will be little better (as seen in Ezekiel); they will envy those who die in the siege.

Mixing the worship of God with idolatry clearly brings disastrous results, but trying to warn people against such practices also brings about difficulties, as Jeremiah will find out in the passage to be considered next week (11:18-12:17).

## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH IV

Jeremiah 11:18-12:17

The remainder of Jeremiah's Temple address speaks of the disastrous consequences of Judah's sin. The prophet tells the people that the harvests will fail in language similar to that used by Habakkuk (8:13), indicates that the people will be afraid of their impending doom even after successful harvests ("The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" - 8:20), and warns them that no healing for their wounds may be found ("Is there no balm in Gilead?" - 8:22). Jeremiah then goes on to condemn the idolatry of the people, speak of the destruction that is to come, and, contrary to God's direction, prays for their deliverance. The address ends with a charge that the people have broken the covenant that God has made with them.

### JEREMIAH'S FAMILY PLOTS AGAINST HIM (11:18-23)

Such a harsh sermon was not heard with pleasure by the people or their leaders. The result is a plot against Jeremiah's life engineered by the citizens of his hometown and the members of his family.

Verse 18 - The plot against Jeremiah was formulated in secret; Jeremiah only knew about it because the Lord revealed it to him. A number of reasons may be cited as possible explanations for the plot. First of all, the Temple address had not spoken kindly of the priesthood - not a palatable message coming from a member of the priestly family. Secondly, Jeremiah, as a supporter of Josiah's reforms, would have favored shutting down local and regional shrines, such as the one at Anathoth from which his family derived its living (somewhat ironically, Muhammad faced the same sort of opposition from his family in Mecca 1200 years later). Thirdly, the priests of Anathoth were descendants of Abiathar, whose priestly family had been displaced in the time of Solomon by the family of Zadok. Jeremiah, by arguing that only the Jerusalem priesthood should be recognized, favors his family's rivals over his own kin.

Verse 19 - The language here is reminiscent of Isaiah 53:7-8 and is one of the reasons Jeremiah's life is sometimes compared with that of Christ (cf. Acts 8:32-35). False prophecy was a capital offense in Israel, but no one was suggesting that Jeremiah's prophecy was false. Instead, we see here two other motives: "Kill the messenger" (the idea that unpleasant words can be brushed aside if the bearer of the news is silenced), and the more superstitious notion that a prophecy does not exist if it is not spoken, so that destroying the speaker will keep the prophecy from coming to pass (cf. Jehoiakim's burning of Jeremiah's scroll in chapter 36).

Verse 20 - Jeremiah's response is not one of seeking divine retribution, but of entrusting his cause to the One who is the real target of his family's vengeance (cf. the imprecatory psalms).

Verses 21-23 - God's answer is that the plot will not succeed, and those who engineered it will be destroyed. Anathoth, located northeast of Jerusalem, would bear the brunt of Nebuchadnezzar's

invasion before he ever reached Jerusalem. Those who are not killed in battle will die in the ensuing famine. According to Ezra 2:23, only 128 men of Anathoth returned from captivity.

#### JEREMIAH PLEADS WITH GOD (12:1-4)

Jeremiah's complaint to God is a familiar one in the annals of the Old Testament. He asks an age-old question: "Why do the wicked prosper?"

Verse 1 - The question is the same asked by Job, by Asaph in Psalm 73, and by Habakkuk, though with a different thrust. Job was largely concerned with finding an explanation for his own suffering, while Asaph saw wicked rich men getting away with flaunting their wealth and ignoring God while he and other righteous men struggled to get by. Habakkuk, writing in the same era as Jeremiah, wonders how God can punish the wicked men of Judah by using the even more wicked men of Babylon. For Jeremiah, however, the question arises in the context of the plot against his life. How can those who openly practice idolatry think they can get away with murder, and of God's faithful servant at that?

Verse 2 - He is particularly irritated by the hypocrisy of his enemies, who mouth pious sayings while harboring murder in their hearts (cf. Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8).

Verse 3 - Jeremiah is confident that God knows the inner workings of his heart and is content to leave the judgment of his enemies in God's hands. He does, however, want to see God's enemies put in the position in which they intend to put him.

Verse 4 - Jeremiah complains that the land is parched and barren, the birds and animals have fled the drought, yet the people remain cynical. The context here is Deuteronomy 32:20, where God promises to "hide His face" from His people if they disobey Him. In the Ancient Near East, the gods were unpredictable and needed to be mollified constantly. If the people failed to meet the needs of the gods, they would remove their protection, and all sorts of horrible things would befall them. The wicked men of Judah, however, are convinced that, even should God hide His face from them so that He does not see what they do, they will nonetheless make out just fine on their own.

#### GOD ANSWERS JEREMIAH'S COMPLAINT (12:5-17)

As usually happens when the problem of evil is raised, God gives no direct answer. Some things are beyond human understanding and are the province of God alone. What is important is not that we understand the ways of God, but that we trust Him. This is a lesson that Jeremiah needs to learn.

Verse 5 - God's immediate response is not encouraging: "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" How can Jeremiah hope to endure the persecutions yet to come if he despairs when faced with a two-bit plot engineered by a small group of country bumpkins? God here uses an *a fortiori* argument: If you are tired after running from men on foot, what will happen when they chase you on horses? If you fall



down when pursued over even ground, what will happen when you are forced into the dangerous thickets surrounding the Jordan River (watered by seasonal flooding, lush with undergrowth, and thus the domain of lethal predators, including lions)?

Verse 6 - Jeremiah is not to trust his own family, even if they mouth encouraging words. He is truly alone in the world and must rely on God alone for consolation and protection.

Verses 7-8 - God is still speaking here, and pronounces His intention of destroying His chosen people. Are not these words spoken in great agony by the loving Father who has chosen a people for Himself?

Verse 9 - The word here is a *hapax legomenon* - a word used only here in the Bible and in the literature of the Ancient Near East in general - therefore its meaning is uncertain. Most translators take it as a reference to a bird with odd-colored plumage that is attacked by its own flock because it is different; others see a reference to a wounded jackal that is destroyed by its fellow-predators. In any case, the application is clear - Judah, different from its neighbors because it worships (at least allegedly) the true God and weakened by the judgments of that same God, will become prey for the neighboring nations.

Verses 10-11 - God now focuses on the unfaithful leaders, wicked shepherds who care nothing for the people they are supposed to oversee. The kings, the priests, and the false prophets are all subject to this indictment.

Verse 12 - God leaves no doubt as to who is the cause of the desolation that is to come - it is ultimately neither the false shepherds nor the invading hordes, but the sword of the Lord Himself, which will be wielded by Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 13 - The people may think they will make out just fine when God turns His back on them, but they are fooling themselves - their efforts will be in vain.

Verse 14 - The God of all nations will judge Judah's neighbors as well. The Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites will also fall before the invader.

Verses 15-17 - The God who judges all nations is also the God who shows mercy to all who repent. Israel's enemies will be restored to their land as well and receive God's blessing if they turn from their idols to worship the living and true God. If instead of teaching God's people to worship Baal, they instead turn from him and learn of Israel what it means to worship God alone, then they, too, will become God's people (cf. Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:16-18). If they fail to listen and repent, however, they will be wiped off the face of the earth.



## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH V

Jeremiah 18:1-20:6

In chapters 13-17, the message of judgment continues. The Lord speaks to Jeremiah of the impossibility of reform on the part of the people; they can change their hearts no more than an Ethiopian can change his skin or a leopard its spots (13:23), and their hearts are incurably wicked (17:9). Destruction is to come by drought, famine, sword, and captivity. Meanwhile, Jeremiah is told not to marry (16:1-2) or mourn or feast with the people, since utter destruction will put an end to all these things. At the end of chapter 17, the Lord singles out the people's failure to observe the Sabbath as a reason for their coming judgment. In today's passage, we will see the messages based on Jeremiah's visit to the house of the potter.

### THE VISIT TO THE POTTER (18:1-10)

Pottery was ubiquitous in the ancient world, so much so that archaeological finds are generally dated by the style, color, and materials used in the pottery fragments that are discovered on the sites. Pottery was shaped on double wheels connected by an axle, with the lower wheel being operated by the feet of the potter while the clay was placed on the upper wheel and shaped by the hands.

Verses 1-4 - During his visit to the potter's workshop, Jeremiah observed that the pot that was being made had some defect in it, so the potter collapsed the clay into an amorphous lump and began the task of reshaping it.

Verses 5-6 - The significance of the symbol is that God is the Potter and His people are the clay; He can reshape them however He pleases. This figure portraying the sovereignty of God is a common one in the Scriptures (e.g., Job 10:9; Psalm 2:9; Isaiah 45:9; Romans 9:20-21; Revelation 2:27) as well as in the literature of the Ancient Near East. While it is often associated with the right of God to judge and destroy, we should note that here it serves as a sign of ultimate mercy - the pot is to be reshaped during the coming captivity and fitted for better use.

Verses 7-10 - The sovereign power that God exercises over Judah He exercises over the other nations as well. God's sovereign power is ethical rather than arbitrary. He does not polish or crush at a whim, but is consistent with His character, sparing those marked for destruction if they repent and destroying those set apart for special favor if they disobey (note that this is what is meant in this and other passages of Scripture that speak of God as "repenting").

### THE JUDGMENT OF JUDAH (18:11-17)

In these verses God gives to Jeremiah the application of his sermon illustration.

Verses 11-12 - Judah is to repent while the clay is still malleable and the planned destruction can be averted. Despite His gracious offer, however, God knows how the people will respond. They have no desire to change; even if they openly acknowledged their evil, they would not turn from it.

Verse 13 - Such carelessness toward one's God is unheard of, even in the pagan world. Note that the mention of "Virgin Israel" here is ironic, since the nation has behaved in a shameful manner. In another sense, however, the appellation is legitimate, since Israel is still under the legal authority of her Father.

Verse 14 - This is another difficult verse to translate, and a variety of suggestions have been made by scholars over the years, but the gist of it seems to be to contrast the faithfulness and predictability of nature with the fickleness of God's people. Mount Hermon *always* has snow and produces fresh, cool waters, but God's people are unfaithful to the purpose for which they have been called.

Verse 15 - The worthlessness of the idols to which God's people are paying homage is illustrated by the difference between an elevated causeway (rare in the ancient world because of the expense associated with it - cf. Isaiah 40:3-4) and a well-trodden path, which is lower than the surrounding fields and therefore easily reduced to a muddy, impassable bog.

Verses 16-17 - The state of the land by the time God is done with it will make it a byword among the heathen, and the people will be scattered as if by a sirocco, the hot wind from the desert that causes all in its path to seek shelter.

#### ANOTHER PLOT AGAINST JEREMIAH (18:18-23)

Before we saw that Jeremiah's family and the inhabitants of his hometown were seeking his death; now it is the citizens of Jerusalem.

Verse 18 - The people are content with the messages they are hearing from their appointed leaders, the priests, wise men, and prophets. Jeremiah is therefore expendable; they need not listen to his message of gloom and despair any longer.

Verses 19-20 - Jeremiah turns to the Lord in his frustration over the people's response to his teachings. He pictures them as digging a pit for him; pits were used for many things in the ancient world, including the disposal of garbage, broken pottery, or corpses, or as a temporary holding place for prisoners (cf. Genesis 37:24) - here the reference is to a pit dug to trap large animals. Jeremiah cannot understand this, especially since his warning is intended to help them *avoid* the disaster he is prophesying.

Verses 21-23 - Another imprecatory passage where Jeremiah seeks the vindication of the Lord's Name by means of the destruction of His enemies.

## THE PARABLE OF THE BROKEN VESSEL (19:1-15)

In chapter 19 we see another parable involving pottery, but the image is a very different one, perhaps in response to the refusal of the people to listen and their determination to destroy God's prophet.

Verses 1-2 - This time Jeremiah is to buy a finished pot, a wide-bodied, narrow-necked flask called a *baqbuq* (an example of onomatopoeia, the flask was named because of the sound liquid made when being poured out of it). He was then to take the pot, along with a representative group of leaders, out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom (recall that the valley, previously a site of idol worship, had been turned into a dump by Josiah and was now a place where broken pottery and many other undesirable things were discarded and burned - thus the Potsherd Gate, also called the Dung Gate in Nehemiah). This was the same location referred to as Gehenna by Jesus in Mark 9:43-48.

Verse 3 - The message is addressed, not only to the current leaders, but to the entire dynasty, which had contributed to the disaster that was about to befall the city and people.

Verses 4-6 - The words here are very similar to 7:30-32. Jeremiah, like Jesus, often repeats himself.

Verses 7-9 - The devastation will be so complete that the people will descend to practicing cannibalism. Lamentations 4:10 indicates that this actually happened; note that it had also occurred during the siege of Samaria (II Kings 6:28-29) and the siege of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus in 70 AD (according to Josephus).

Verses 10-11a - Jeremiah then smashes the pot. While malleable clay can be smashed and reshaped into something useful, a hardened pot that is flawed cannot be repaired, only destroyed. The hardness of the people's hearts in the face of Jeremiah's call for repentance shows that they are no longer malleable clay, but fatally flawed pottery hardened beyond the hope of repair.

Verses 11b-13 - Tophet was an unclean place, suitable only for disposing of the bodies of beggars and criminals, but it was to become the graveyard of the thousands for whom no other burial place could be found. In fact, the entire city was to become a graveyard, since even the private homes of the city were used for libations and incense offerings to the gods of the heavens.

Verses 14-15 - This narrative interlude, presumably penned by Baruch, tells us that Jeremiah returned from the Valley of Hinnom to the Temple, where he pronounced the judgment against a people as hardened as the pot he had just destroyed.

## RESPONSE TO JEREMIAH'S PARABLE (20:1-6)

The response to this parable is that Jeremiah is beaten and placed in the stocks overnight, after which the prophet tells his tormentor, Passhur, that he and his family will die in exile after witnessing the slaughter of those who listened to his false prophecy.



## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH VI

### Jeremiah 29

In the chapters following the encounter with Passhur, we find Jeremiah crying out to the Lord because of the opposition he is facing and, like the Psalmist, expressing at the same time confidence in the Lord's deliverance (20:7-18). Though the prophet wishes he could resign from his prophetic ministry, he acknowledges that he cannot because the Word of God compels him (20:9). In chapter 21, Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to pray to the Lord for a miraculous deliverance from Nebuchadnezzar, but Jeremiah refuses, indicating that the Lord has already determined upon the destruction of the city. Chapter 22 incorporates words of judgment against Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin, all of which later came to pass. Chapter 23 includes the promise of the coming Branch, who will rule over a people restored to the land from captivity, along with a condemnation of the false prophets who tell the people that the Captivity will never occur. The vision of two baskets of figs occupies chapter 24; the vision means that those who submit to captivity (the good figs) will survive and prosper, while those who resist (the rotten figs) will be cast out and destroyed. Chapter 25 contains the prophecy indicating the length of the Babylonian Captivity (seventy years) and proclaims God's judgment on Judah's neighbors as well as Judah itself. In chapter 26, Jeremiah is arrested and threatened with execution for prophesying against the city, but defenders speak up and indicate that earlier prophets who spoke the word of the Lord did much the same and were respected. Jeremiah is told to put on a yoke in chapter 27, indicating that Judah and the surrounding nations will serve the Babylonians (after which Babylon itself will be destroyed), but in chapter 28, the false prophet Hananiah breaks the yoke, proclaiming in the Lord's name that the captives would return from Babylon within two years. Jeremiah then tells Hananiah that he won't survive even that long, and later that year the false prophet dies. This brings us to this week's chapter, in which we find correspondence between Jeremiah and the exiles in Babylon.

#### THE SENDING OF THE LETTER (verses 1-3)

This is the first letter mentioned and recorded in the Bible, chronologically speaking. This letter was apparently preserved and remembered among the exiles (cf. Daniel 9:2).

Verses 1-2 - The exile referred to here is the one that occurred in 597 BC. At this time Jehoiachin, the members of the court, the nobles, and all the important leaders of the people, along with the skilled artisans, were carried off to Babylon - a total of about 3000 people (52:28). The queen mother was Nehushta, the wife of Jehoiakim (II Kings 24:8).

Verse 3 - The letter was sent by means of a royal embassy, possibly bearing tribute payment from Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar. In any case, Zedekiah must have been aware of the contents, though he was too weak to object to the things Jeremiah said in his missive. Note that what follows could have constituted several letters, and not necessarily a single piece of correspondence.

## ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE EXILES (verses 4-14)

The message here is unique in the annals of prophetic words in the Ancient Near East. Many such messages have been preserved among the extrabiblical literature, but both the tone and content of this one separate it from all similar writings.

Verses 4-6 - The Lord, who is the one who sent the captives into exile in the first place, now gives them instructions for how they should conduct themselves while they are away from home (note that Ezekiel was charged with conveying similar messages from his place among them). Rather than expecting quick deliverance, the captives should settle in for the long haul. They should establish homes and families so that the nation would grow stronger rather than weaker while in captivity (note that the exhortation to take wives for themselves meant *Jewish* wives, not foreign ones). The content of the message indicates that the citizens of Judah were neither slaves nor prisoners, but were free to build lives for themselves, which was what Nebuchadnezzar intended. He wanted to take advantage of their skills, not oppress them.

Verse 7 - As Jesus exhorted His followers to pray for their enemies, so Jeremiah indicates that the captives should pray for the prosperity of the city in which they lived. One commentator notes that such has been the practice of Jews of the Diaspora for the thousands of years during which they have been scattered among the nations, even to the point of being included in the synagogue liturgy.

Verses 8-9 - The exiles, too, had prophets among them, and not all were as faithful as the youthful Ezekiel. God, through the pen of Jeremiah, warns the captives not to listen to those false prophets who speak lies to them, telling them what they want to hear (they apparently were seeking oracles from these popular seers).

Verse 10 - Here the length of the Captivity is indicated. Various attempts have been made to make this prediction fit the chronology (from the first deportation in 605 BC to the initial return of captives under Cyrus in 535 BC is the best fit, though other suggestions have been proposed), and some have tried to solve the problem by claiming that Jeremiah is simply giving a round number (not unheard of in prophetic literature), but in any case, the letter makes the point clearly that the captives are not to expect a rapid return to their homeland. When the end of the seventy years drew near, Daniel began to pray to God for deliverance (Daniel 9).

Verse 11 - One of the most popular verses in Jeremiah, this is often taken out of context. The plans spoken of are those for the return of the captives to Judah. Of course, God always has plans of ultimate blessing in store for His people.

Verses 12-13 - Notice that the promise of restoration is contingent on repentance - something God Himself will place in the hearts of His people (again, Daniel's prayer of confession in Daniel 9 fits this pattern).



Verse 14 - The expansiveness of the prophecy in this verse has been seen by many to foreshadow a greater regathering in the eschaton.

#### CONCERNING THOSE WHO REMAIN IN THE LAND (verses 15-19)

Jeremiah is still addressing the captives, though some have suggested that this text represents a different letter. It is difficult to imagine a missive so condemnatory of Zedekiah being carried by royal ambassadors. The exiles wonder why they need to pay attention to letters from Jeremiah, since the Lord has given them prophets of their own in the land to which they have been exiled. Jeremiah warns them that, contrary to what those prophets have been telling them, those who remain in the land will be cast out and destroyed like bad figs (cf. Jeremiah 24). They will die, either in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, or else in Egypt, the land to which many will flee. If this is what happens to those who refuse to heed the Lord's words in Jerusalem, how can the captives expect their fate to be any different if they fail to pay attention to Jeremiah's written correspondence?

#### CONCERNING FALSE PROPHETS (verses 20-23)

Jeremiah now gets personal - he names two particular false prophets among the captives.

Verses 21-22 - Ahab and Zedekiah are to suffer death at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (presumably for treason); note that Jeremiah uses a pun here - the word used for "burning" (verse 22) is very similar to the name of Ahab's father Kolaiah (verse 21). Daniel 3 confirms the use of burning as a form of execution in the Babylonian Empire.

Verse 23 - The two notorious false prophets had apparently been engaging in sexually immoral behavior along with their blatant lies. Self-aggrandizement was the name of the game they were playing. Note that the words here emphasize God's omnipresence; the captives may be far from Jerusalem, but that does not mean that God is far from them. He hears and sees everything.

#### THE LETTER OF SHEMAIAH AND JEREMIAH'S ANSWER (verses 24-32)

Correspondence flowed freely, and one of the false prophets targeted by Jeremiah's written prophecies here seeks revenge.

Verses 24-28 - We know nothing of Shemaiah except that he was a false prophet among the captives, but he appears to have arrogated to himself considerable authority. Here he presumes to order the chief priests in Jerusalem to deal with Jeremiah. He is to be put into the stocks because of the discouraging correspondence he had sent to the captives (note that insanity was often associated with second sight in the Ancient Near East; this is the explanation used for Jeremiah's so-called gift of prophecy).

Verse 29 - Zephaniah, the priest to whom Shemaiah wrote, ignores the order and takes the letter straight to Jeremiah himself.

Verses 30-32 - Jeremiah's answering missive indicates that Shemaiah's judgment will be an appropriate one - neither he nor his descendants will ever see the deliverance that Jeremiah prophesied as occurring at the conclusion of the seventy years of captivity. Obviously the discouraging message was not the one that advised patience and spoke of a long-delayed deliverance, but one that spoke instead of instant relief. How can we benefit by understanding that the Lord's time schedule is not the same as ours - that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years?

## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH VII

Jeremiah 30:1-31:22

Jeremiah 30-33 stands out as an oasis of hope in the midst of a message of almost unrelenting gloom and condemnation. This section, known as the Book of Consolation because of its message of God's mercy and promised restoration, will be the subject of our attention for the next four weeks. Because Jeremiah usually does not date his prophecies, the words in these four chapters may have been brought together from various periods of the prophet's ministry. Most scholars, however, date the Book of Consolation to the period immediately before the fall of Jerusalem.

### PROMISE OF RESTORATION (30:1-11)

As we will see, the scope of the promise of restoration found in these verses goes far beyond the immediate problem of impending captivity.

Verses 1-2 - The command to write down the words of the prophecy is unique to the Old Testament, though obviously other writing prophets did the same. These words thus might not have been spoken at all, but recorded for posterity. The medium of choice for keeping such records was papyrus (in Egypt), parchment (treated animal skins - the most likely referent here), or clay tablets (in Mesopotamia).

Verses 3-4 - The phrase here is one often used in eschatological contexts, and the prophecy here fits that pattern. Note that both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms are in view.

Verses 5-7 - Pain must come before joy, and the pain is to be excruciating, compared here to the pain of childbirth. The fact that the trouble described here is beyond anything before or after suggests an eschatological referent (cf. Matthew 24:21) extending beyond the Babylonian Captivity.

Verse 8 - God's deliverance is pictured here as release from bondage. Though the experience of the captives in Babylon was a relatively peaceful one, they were still ruled by foreigners. Note again that the statement that the foreign yoke will be thrown off forever extends the significance of the prophecy beyond the return from Babylon, since Israel was later governed by the Medo-Persian, Macedonian, and Roman Empires (to say nothing of the Arabs, Turks, and British). The ultimate freedom is a new yoke - that of the Messiah (cf. Matthew 11:28-30).

Verse 9 - Needless to say, the Davidic monarchy has never been restored; the referent is clearly messianic.

Verses 10-11 - God's people are to be punished for their sins, but the punishment will not result in utter destruction, as it will for Israel's oppressors.

## CURING THE INCURABLE (30:12-17)

Jeremiah here describes the hopelessness of Israel's condition using a variety of metaphors.

Verses 12-13 - A mixed metaphor combining medical and legal jeopardy. God's people are so sick they cannot be cured, and the legal case against them is so strong that they cannot even find a lawyer to represent them.

Verse 14 - Furthermore, everyone is against them. Their allies have turned from them (an attempted alliance against the Babylonians fell through when Egypt was defeated again by Nebuchadnezzar in 588 BC and minor allies such as Edom became turncoats, switching over to the side of the Babylonians). Ultimately, however, God is the source of the judgment that is about to fall. The people need not deceive themselves about who is in charge of the mess in which they find themselves.

Verse 15 - The people should have no illusions, either, about the fact that the judgment is deserved.

Verse 16 - The application of the *lex talionis* (cf. Exodus 21:23-25) to Israel's enemies.

Verse 17 - God is the miracle-worker, the healer of the incurable, the hope of the hopeless. He is faithful despite the fact that His people are faithless.

## JERUSALEM REBUILT (30:18-24)

The attention here is directed particularly toward the capital city.

Verse 18 - The city and the palace are to be rebuilt. The picture here is one of a stable and prosperous life for the people and their ruler. Note that the building of a city on earlier ruins (the word here is *tel*) was common practice in the Ancient Near East.

Verses 19-20 - Thanksgiving, joy, prosperity, honor, and protection will be the lot of God's people when He fulfills His promises to them.

Verse 21 - A leader from among their own people instead of a foreign ruler; though Herod the Great claimed this as his own, rabbinical scholars always recognized this as messianic.

Verse 22 - A restatement of the essence of the covenant established centuries before between God and His people.

Verses 23-24 - Before the promise must come the judgment, however. The fierce storm of God's wrath must break upon the city and its people, fully carrying out the necessary destruction. How the same God can do both was hard for the people to understand, but one day they would. We, of course, can see in this God's mercy revealed as He pours out His wrath on His own Son.

## EPHRAIM TO BE BROUGHT BACK (31:1-14)

The remainder of today's passage speaks largely of the restoration of the Northern Kingdom.

Verse 1 - The promise is given in the context of the restoration and uniting of *all* of God's people. The North and the South will no longer be divided.

Verse 2 - Those who are taken into captivity will be the survivors, though they may not see it in their generation.

Verse 3 - God's covenant is again in view; His attitude toward His people is one of compassion and lovingkindness.

Verses 4-5 - The phrase "Virgin Israel" is not used ironically here as elsewhere in Jeremiah's prophecy. Israel will once again be the favored daughter dancing with joy (note that tambourines were made of skins stretched on frames and did not involve the bits of metal that provide the jangling sounds in today's instruments). The picture of the farmer enjoying the fruit of his fields and vineyards again argues for the peace and stability needed for a regular agricultural cycle.

Verse 6 - The watchmen are those who observe the lunar cycles that marked the Jewish calendar, thus indicating when the feast days were to be observed. The fact that the people of Ephraim would worship in Jerusalem indicates that the abominations of Jeroboam's rival shrines devoted to calf worship are gone forever.

Verse 7 - The restoration described here is a cause for praising God.

Verse 8 - They will return from the far reaches of the known world. All will return, even the weakest and most fragile.

Verse 9 - Their return will be with tears of repentance and joy. God will lead them back by the well-trod paths of the *wadis* - the stream beds that were dry for most of the year and were thus used for footpaths. God's compassion for His people is like that of a father for his firstborn son; both Joseph and his son Ephraim, though not biologically firstborn, achieved this status by God's decree.

Verses 10-11 - God's restoring grace will be a testimony to the nations. God is not only a Father to His people, but also a Shepherd and a Redeemer.

Verses 12-14 - Joy for sorrow, bounty instead of famine - even the priests will have more sacrifices than they can handle.

## WEEPING AND COMPASSION (31:15-22)

The poetic portion ends with the assurance that mourning will be followed by consolation.

Verse 15 - Ramah was located about five miles from Jerusalem. The town was used as a staging point for the exile (40:1) and was also near the location of Rachel's tomb. Here the prophet envisions Rachel mourning for her descendants, both those who have died and those who are being taken into captivity. The use of the verse in Matthew 2:18 in connection with the Slaughter of the Innocents in Bethlehem is a literary rather than a prophetic connection; Matthew sees the appropriateness of Jeremiah's words as a description of what happened in the nearby town where Jesus was born.

Verses 16-17 - Mourning is not needed because the Captivity will not be permanent.

Verses 18-20 - Ephraim's repentance will lead to her restoration. God cannot cast off His people forever, and He will hear their cries and bring them home again to their own land.

Verse 21 - The idea here is that, like Hansel and Gretel going into the forest, the people of Israel should mark the path they take so they will know how to go when God brings them back. Again the metaphor is mixed - setting up stone markers to designate a path would not be the job of a virgin daughter, but of the men of the household.

Verse 22 - This is perhaps the least-understood verse in the entire book of Jeremiah. What is clear is that God is going to do something new in bringing His people back from their wanderings. While some commentators have gone so far as to see here words that prefigure the Virgin Birth (many of the Church Fathers, and even Calvin), the real meaning remains a mystery. Could it refer to God's people, like a woman, seeking out and clinging to their true Father and Husband? I'm really not willing to speculate on this one.

## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH VIII

Jeremiah 31:23-40

Today we continue our look at the Book of Consolation, including one of the most important passages in the entire Old Testament - the announcement of the New Covenant.

### THE RESTORATION OF JUDAH (verses 23-30)

The earlier section of the Book of Consolation had spoken much of Ephraim, i.e., the Northern Kingdom. Jeremiah now turns his attention to Judah itself.

Verses 23-25 - The restoration will not merely be a physical one - return to the land - but spiritual as well, because the land will again be the site of God's blessing and His dwelling place (the "sacred mountain" may refer to the Temple Mount, but more likely is a reference to Jerusalem as a whole, built as it was on the top of a mountain). Normal life will be restored, farmers and shepherds will ply their trades, and God will comfort and strengthen His people (cf. Isaiah 40:31).

Verse 26 - The revelations recorded here were received in a dream. Given the contents, and especially the contrast with most of what Jeremiah is called upon to proclaim, the fact that he awoke refreshed is no surprise.

Verses 27-28 - Here both Northern and Southern Kingdoms are addressed. Both will be restored to the land, so that the land will be repopulated by both man and beast. In a direct allusion to the words of Jeremiah's prophetic call (1:10), God indicates that building and planting will follow the inevitable destruction.

Verses 29-30 - Apparently this was a common complaint among the exiles (cf. Ezekiel 18:1-2) - that God was punishing them for the sins of their fathers rather than because of anything they themselves had done. But God had promised never to do this (Deuteronomy 24:16 contra. Exodus 20:5-6), and Jeremiah, like Ezekiel (18:3-4), affirms that individual moral responsibility is the order of the day. What people do may have consequences for the following generations, but punishment is individual.

### THE NEW COVENANT (verses 31-34)

We now turn to one of the most important passages in the Old Testament. It is so important, in fact, that it is the source of the name we give to the books of Scripture written after the time of Christ.

Verse 31 - This New Covenant is to be made between God and the houses of Israel and Judah. Both Northern and Southern Kingdoms are included as one in this new relationship God is to establish with His people.

Verse 32 - The Old Covenant failed, not because of anything in the agreement itself, but because the people failed to keep it. One of the great insights of the New Covenant, of course, is that the Old Covenant was impossible to keep because people with wicked hearts could never please God. A heart change was needed in order for a permanent relationship to be established and maintained. God cared for His people as Father and Husband, leading them gently and loving them unconditionally, but they turned away from Him repeatedly.

Verse 33 - The language here is interesting. The words used by Jeremiah come from the contemporary pagan practice of *extispicy* - the practice of slaughtering an animal and examining its entrails in order to find a message from the gods. As we have seen before, the connection is purely literary; Jeremiah has in mind no such practice, though he borrows its language. The basic idea is that, as in the case of extispicy, the Word of God will be written on the heart rather than on tablets of stone. The law will no longer be something external to which the people must conform, but an inner desire emanating from a transformed will. The formula of the Old Covenant - "I will be their God, and they will be my people" - will thus be fulfilled in a way that could never have happened with the Mosaic law.

Verse 34 - The result of the New Covenant will be universal knowledge of God among His people. This does not, of course, mitigate against the need for religious instruction, but instead indicates that the knowledge of God will be a personal, individual relationship based on the forgiveness of sins. Human mediators will no longer be needed, and even the weakest and most insignificant will claim a personal relationship with God.

The writer of Hebrews quotes this entire section of Jeremiah (Hebrews 8:7-11 cf. 10:15-18) and connects it to the saving work of Christ. He is the only one who can bring to God's people the forgiveness of sins, and He is the perfect Mediator and Heavenly High Priest through whom the New Covenant is administered. The law is written on the hearts of God's people through the presence of the Holy Spirit, who makes internal what before had been external only. How, one might ask, can Gentiles like ourselves be participants in a covenant that is explicitly made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah? As Paul explains in Romans 11:17-24, the Gentiles were grafted into the trunk of the olive tree of Israel and thus have become participants in the New Covenant along with them. New Covenant language is also used by Jesus at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-28) and quoted by Paul when he discusses the observance of the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:25).

#### THE PERMANENCE OF THE COVENANT (verses 35-40)

We are so used to thinking of the New Testament application of the New Covenant that we often overlook the promises given in the closing verses of the chapter.

Verses 35-36 - The certainty of God's covenant is expressed here in strong language reminiscent of Genesis 8:22. What God promised would never happen after the Flood becomes here the basis for an assertion of the permanence of the nation of Israel.



Verse 37 - The promise of permanence here takes another form - God will only reject Israel again if the knowledge that God said was inaccessible to Job will somehow become known. Only One who knows and controls all things could give such a firm promise.

Verses 38-40 - For the third time in this passage, we find the eschatological formula “The days are coming.” The geographical locations given here cannot all be defined with certainty, but the basic idea is to give a description of the four corners of the city of Jerusalem. It will be rebuilt, and even the places polluted by despicable practices will be cleansed and will be “holy to the Lord.” The fact that this rebuilt city is never to be destroyed again indicates the eschatological context, because the city rebuilt at the time of Nehemiah and the Temple rebuilt under Zerubbabel and refurbished by Herod the Great were destroyed so thoroughly by the Roman legions in 70 AD that “no one stone was left upon another.” No, some future city must here be envisioned.

The tendency among Christians, of course, is to spiritualize this passage and speak of the Church as the holy city of God that will never be destroyed (Matthew 16:18; Revelation 21:10). While this is clearly true, we must ask ourselves why, then, does Jeremiah give geographical details? Are we to conclude that they have no meaning in themselves? Or should we look at the ongoing existence of Israel through many trials over thousands of years as a partial fulfillment of this promise and look forward to the promised spiritual engrafting spoken of by Paul in Romans 11?



## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH IX

### Jeremiah 32

After repeated proclamations of judgment and utter destruction, the command at the beginning of chapter 32 seems incongruous, but, as we will see, is an indicator, both of the certainty of God's promise and the strength of Jeremiah's faith.

#### JEREMIAH'S IMPRISONMENT (verses 1-5)

Jeremiah had been warned that the plot against him by his family was nothing compared to what he would face later, and here we find another manifestation of the opposition encountered by the prophet, though things would later get much worse for him.

Verse 1 - The year is 587 BC, the second year of the siege of Jerusalem; the city would fall less than a year later.

Verse 2 - Jeremiah was in custody, either for his own protection or to keep him from preaching to the people. Though he is confined, his situation is relatively comfortable. He lives in the guardhouse and is able to receive visitors and carry on correspondence.

Verses 3-5 - Zedekiah simply did not like the content of Jeremiah's prophecies: the fall of Jerusalem, the capture of the king, and his eventual death in Babylon.

#### JEREMIAH BUYS A FIELD (verses 6-15)

The seemingly-incongruous heart of the chapter now appears. God tells Jeremiah to do something that makes no sense whatsoever in the light of the truth He has been communicating through the prophet.

Verses 6-7 - The act is a divine command, but is also congruent with the law of land tenure found in connection with the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. Land was given to each clan by God at the time of the Conquest, and that land was to be kept within the family. The overall purpose was one of social justice through equitable land distribution, preventing land purchases that, over time, would create a situation where a few people were very rich and most were landless and poor.

Verse 8 - Why Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel wanted to sell his land is unknown. The land had already been overrun by the Babylonians, so perhaps crop prices were down and he could no longer afford to maintain it, or perhaps he simply wanted to get something out of it before the Babylonians destroyed everything. Whether his motive was legitimate or not, he did the right thing according to the law by coming to Jeremiah rather than selling it to someone outside the family.

Verse 9 - Jeremiah goes through with the purchase because he knew it was God's command, not because it made sense (in fact, Jeremiah's response later in the chapter shows he did not understand

the command). Nonetheless, he acts in faith and obedience. We are able to draw no conclusions about the purchase price. Coinage had not yet been invented, so purchases were often made by weighing out precious metals. In this case, seventeen shekels is a little less than half a pound of silver. Since we know nothing about land prices at the time and have no idea of the size of the property involved, nothing is accomplished by speculating about whether Jeremiah got a good deal or was taken advantage of by his cousin. It is interesting to note, however, that a similar exchange is recorded in connection with the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage, where historians tell us that auctions were held in the city of Rome for land that held the encampment of Hannibal and his army.

Verse 10 - The transaction is carried out scrupulously according to the dictates of the law. The silver is weighed out on scales in comparison to a standard balance, the transaction is witnessed, and the deed is signed.

Verse 11 - Common practice in those days involved making duplicate copies of legal documents. One would be sealed after being signed by the parties involved and the witnesses, and the other would be left open for public inspection. Such duplicate copies of legal documents have been found by archaeologists in the ruins of the Jewish community on the island of Elephantine in the Nile - a place where some Jews fled to escape the Babylonian Captivity.

Verse 12 - This is the first mention of Baruch in the book of Jeremiah. He was Jeremiah's personal secretary, but he appears to have come from a well-known scribal family, since the name appears on several bullae discovered from the period.

Verses 13-14 - Baruch is entrusted with the documents, which are to be sealed in clay jars. These, sealed with pitch, served as a sort of safe-deposit box. We know that such storage provisions were very effective; after all, the Dead Sea Scrolls were kept safe for almost 1900 years under such conditions.

Verse 15 - Here God reveals the meaning of the seemingly-foolish action - it is a visible sign that God's promised restoration of the people to the land would indeed occur. In short, God forces Jeremiah to put his money where his mouth is, and to do so in a very public and costly way.

#### JEREMIAH'S PRAYER (verses 16-25)

Jeremiah, for obvious reasons, doesn't understand the sense in such a purchase, so he prays to the Lord about it.

Verses 17-19 - Jeremiah starts by speaking of the character of God, since it is to that character that he intends to appeal. God is pictured as omnipotent in creation, blessing, and judgment, both in his dealings with Israel and with other nations.

Verse 20 - God is a God of wonders, extending His reputation, not only among His own people, but among all the nations of the earth.

Verses 21-22 - The Exodus and the Conquest are evidences of God's power and love for His own.

Verse 23 - Disobedience was the response of the people to all God had done for them, so judgment inevitably results.

Verses 24-25 - Everything God said has come to pass - the city is about to fall (siege ramps were common in the ancient world; ones raised by the Assyrians at Lachish and the Romans at Masada are still visible today). How, then, can it make any sense at all to buy a piece of property?

#### GOD'S ANSWER - JUDGMENT (verses 26-35)

God's answer is divided into two parts. The first acknowledges the inevitability of the judgment that is about to fall.

Verses 26-27 - Jeremiah had already said much the same thing (verse 17), so God throws his own words back in his face. If God is indeed omnipotent, can He not bring about circumstances such that the purchase of property is actually a wise investment?

Verses 28-29 - The destruction and the provocation we have seen before - idolatry on the housetops leads to destruction of the houses. In short, "You burn incense to other gods, I burn your homes." Ironically, what is about to happen to Jerusalem is what God commanded the Israelites to do to idolatrous towns at the time of the Conquest (Deuteronomy 13:12-16).

Verse 30 - The provocation has been continuous and of long duration. The periods of revival, sadly, were few and far between in Judah and practically non-existent in Israel.

Verse 31 - Jerusalem, of course, existed before it became David's capital. It originally was a Jebusite town, and as such was the site of idolatry from its very inception.

Verses 32-33 - The leaders of all stripes are guilty, but so are the people. They have not been lambs led to the slaughter, but have been willing participants in their own corruption, and they have not responded to repeated entreaties and warnings.

Verses 34-35 - The Temple and the Valley of Hinnom are again singled out, as is so often the case in Jeremiah's prophecies.

#### GOD'S ANSWER - RESTORATION (verses 36-44)

The whole purpose of the chapter, however, is not to emphasize judgment but to emphasize hope. This is the ultimate meaning of Jeremiah's seemingly-bizarre action.

Verses 36-37 - Judgment is not the final word. In one of many great “buts” in Scripture, banishment is followed by regathering, judgment by mercy.

Verse 38 - The essence of the covenant again reaffirmed.

Verse 39 - Instead of punishment being poured into the laps of the children (verse 18), singleness of heart (cf. James 1:6-8) and the fear of the Lord will characterize the people. No longer will they be double-minded, speaking of God out of one side of their mouths while pursuing idols as fast as their legs can carry them. Instead, the children will know the blessing of safety and stability.

Verses 40-41 - Note here that the everlasting covenant that God will establish depends on Him doing what is necessary to “inspire them to fear me.” Only a heart changed by God can turn from idols to the living and true God and be steadfast.

Verses 42-43 - God will restore the nation to peace and prosperity. The land again will be worth much instead of being a barren waste.

Verse 44 - This, of course, is the point of Jeremiah’s land purchase. What seems folly in the light of God’s judgment is wise in the light of His promise of prosperity, and the one who acts in faith is the one who is truly wise. Jeremiah, by putting feet to his prophecy of ultimate restoration, gives his hearers a visible sign of hope.

## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH X

### Jeremiah 33

Today's chapter ends the Book of Consolation and contains one of the most beautiful Messianic promises in the book of Jeremiah.

#### EFFORTS TO RESIST ARE IN VAIN (verses 1-5)

The message here is given in the same context as that of the previous chapter, and thus probably at the same time - the last days before the fall of the city to Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 1 - Jeremiah is still in custody in the guardhouse.

Verse 2 - The manner in which God here presents Himself fits well with the affirmations at the end of the chapter, rendering unlikely the fragmentation in which critics so readily engage (see comments on verses 14-26).

Verse 3 - God knows that Jeremiah is easily discouraged by the nature of the message he is called upon to deliver, so He encourages his prophet by beseeching him to bring his troubles before the throne of the Almighty. The word used here to describe the mysteries God is about to reveal is one used in reference to impenetrable walled cities (cf. Deuteronomy 1:28) - something that Jerusalem clearly is not.

Verses 4-5 - The Hebrew here is difficult, but the gist of the passage is clear - resistance is futile! The specific reference appears to be to dwellings built along the city wall itself (cf. Rahab's house in Joshua 2:15), often houses of the poor, which had been commandeered by the military and demolished to build an interior siege ramp to strengthen the wall against the siege ramp constructed by the Babylonians (remains of such a structure can still be seen at Lachish), or to be used as a hospital facility to care for the wounded and dying.

#### RESTORATION AND BLESSING (verses 6-13)

While destruction is inevitable and will be devastating, God is nonetheless a merciful God who will forgive and restore His covenant people.

Verse 6 - The Captivity, which is undoubtedly punishment for the sins of the people, will have a healing effect - chastisement rather than irrevocable judgment and destruction.

Verses 7-8 - The promised restoration applies to both Northern and Southern Kingdoms and will restore the status quo prior to the division after the death of Solomon. Political, economic, and geographical restoration are not most important, however; forgiveness of sin and a cleansing of the heart are the most important part of the restoration to come.

Verse 9 - The worldwide renown of the restored Jerusalem will bring glory to God, who did these things. In the same way that the nations will be amazed at God's judgment of His own people, so they will be amazed at the extent to which He restores their good fortunes and brings them prosperity.

Verses 10-11 - The condition of land and city after Nebuchadnezzar is done with them is here envisioned; even animals won't want to live in the ruins that remain. Yet when the Lord has fulfilled His promise, joy will return to the land, and the ceremonies that would stop (cf. Jeremiah 16) would once again be celebrated openly by the joyful inhabitants of Judah (note that verse 11 continues to be part of the wedding liturgy in Jewish synagogues today).

Verses 12-13 - The return of shepherds and their flocks gives a picture of peace and prosperity. No longer will the land have to fear attack from marauding armies. Interestingly enough, shepherds on the hills near the villages around Jerusalem were among those who were summoned to witness the birth of the Messiah; not only that, but the Targums written by rabbis commenting on this text replace the phrase "the one who counts them" with the word *Messiah*, perhaps because of the promises in the verses that follow.

#### PERPETUAL MONARCHY AND PRIESTHOOD (verses 14-26)

These verses are not found in the Septuagint version of Jeremiah and are thus often questioned by critics, but are completely coherent with the message of other parts of the book.

Verse 14 - God's gracious promise is to be fulfilled, but how and when? This again is eschatological language.

Verses 15-16 - The reference to the Messiah as the Branch is familiar in prophetic literature (e.g., Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; later used in Zechariah 3:8; 6:12), indicating his relationship to the royal line of David. The name "The Lord Our Righteousness," here applied to Jerusalem, was used of the Branch Himself in Jeremiah 23:6. God's people will be at peace and prosperous because they will have taken on the identity of their Ruler and become the exemplars of divine righteousness they were always intended to be. This is one of the consequences of the transformation of heart wrought by the New Covenant.

Verses 17-18 - Note that the promise here is not one of continuous monarchy or priesthood; the Davidic monarchy ended with the Babylonian Captivity and has never been restored, while the Levitical priesthood continued through the Captivity up to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD. The promise is therefore that the monarchy and priesthood will be everlasting rather than continuous. Christ as the fulfillment of this promise seems obvious - He is the King who will sit on the throne of David forever and He will be High Priest forever. The difficulty comes with the explicit and repeated mention of the *Levitical* priesthood, which is clearly said in the book of Hebrews to be abolished, no longer needed because human mediation is redundant with Christ at the right hand of God. Reconciliation is difficult here. While Christ is clearly the eternal High Priest,



He is in the order of Melchizedek rather than Aaron. Some simply argue continuity of the priesthood because the order of Levi was supplanted by the eternal priesthood of Christ, while others would seek a solution in a Millennial priesthood under a renewed Levitical order in a rebuilt Temple (the typical Dispensational solution to the dilemma). While a definitive explanation may not be possible, Scripture is clear in affirming the everlasting priesthood of Christ, and therefore we must seek in Him the fulfillment of this prophecy even if we are unable to sort out all the details.

Verses 19-21 - The reference to the Creation order here underlines the permanence of what is being promised in this passage - certainly an argument often used to support the Dispensational interpretation.

Verse 22 - The language here is reminiscent of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15:5, and points forward to the glorious scene in Revelation 5:9-10 where a numberless multitude from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation serve as a kingdom of priests in service to the Lamb.

Verses 23-24 - The people are discouraged, for obvious reasons, and think themselves abandoned by God. Despite his seemingly unending message of judgment, Jeremiah also offers them a message of hope. God has not abandoned them, nor has He given them up as a nation before Him.

Verses 25-26 - God will deny His people when day and night cease and the law of gravity fails. God's compassion will take the form of an eternal ruler from the House of David to govern them. And as we know, the descendants of Abraham include Gentiles as well as Jews.



## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH XI

### Jeremiah 35

Jeremiah 34 contains Jeremiah's prophecy against Zedekiah, in which God tells the king that the city will be destroyed and he will be taken away to Babylon, but will not be killed, and will die peacefully there. The second part of the chapter concerns a royal decree to free all Hebrew slaves. When the people do this, they quickly change their minds and take them back again, after which God condemns them for their covenant breaking, noting that the provisions of the Sabbatical year had long been ignored.

#### TESTING THE RECAPITES (verses 1-5)

Jeremiah is here ordered by God to prepare an object lesson. The target of the illustration is the faithless nation of Judah rather than the Recabites themselves.

Verse 1 - Today's chapter and the next one are out of chronological order and occurred during the reign of Jehoiakim (probably at the time of the second Babylonian invasion around 597 BC).

Verse 2 - We know virtually nothing about the Recabites beyond what is contained in this chapter. II Kings 10:15-31 tells of the involvement of Jonadab son of Recab in the bloody eradication of Baal worship under Jehu (c.840 BC), while I Chronicles 2:55 notes that the Recabites were the descendants of the Kenites.

Verses 3-5 - Jeremiah, in obedience to God's command, brought the entire Recabite clan into one of the side rooms of the Temple complex - probably one used for the storage of wine - and set wine before them, offering them a drink. It would appear from the passage that Jaazaniah was the head of the clan, while Hanan ran a prophetic school and presumably was sympathetic to Jeremiah's ministry.

#### THE RESPONSE OF THE RECAPITES (verses 6-11)

Jeremiah is not here setting a stumblingblock before the Recabites (cf. I Corinthians 8:9-13), but creating a living parable for the people of Judah.

Verses 6-7 - For the last 250 years, the Recabites had lived a nomadic existence. One may only speculate about the reasons for Jonadab's command. Perhaps the prohibition of wine was a reaction against the excesses of Baal worship with its drunken orgies, and the command to live as nomads may have been a reflection of a desire to be like the wilderness generation, dependent entirely upon God rather than upon the soil. Others have speculated that the Recabites had become metalworkers, craftsmen traveling from place to place repairing farm implements, chariots and weaponry, and were nomads because they traveled wherever work was available (cognate literature from the period mentions the name of Recab in connection with metalworking, though from an entirely different

culture). Or perhaps the prohibition of wine was simply because nomads could not grow vineyards? The lifestyle that resulted, in any case, had at least something in common with the Nazirite vow.

Verses 8-10 - The Recabites had kept the command of their forefather faithfully for 250 years.

Verse 11 - The clan had presumably migrated from the Northern Kingdom at the time of the Assyrian invasion and now had been forced to move to the protective environment of Jerusalem because the Babylonians and their Aramean allies were rampaging throughout the countryside.

#### THE LESSON OF THE RECABITES (verses 12-17)

Now we arrive at the lesson - the real reason Jeremiah invited the Recabites to sit down for a drink in the Temple precincts.

Verses 12-13 - The target of the exercise is the people of Judah, not the Recabites.

Verses 14-16 - The condemnation of the people of Judah is expressed in a series of contrasts with the Recabites: the clan had received a command from a human forebear, while Judah had received one from God; the command given by Jonadab had been a matter of moral indifference, but God's command was a matter of spiritual necessity; Jonadab had given his command once, while God sent His repeatedly through the mouths of the prophets; and finally, the Recabites had obeyed, while Judah had disobeyed God's command.

Verse 17 - This again becomes a justification for the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Note here that, contrary to frequent applications of this passage, God is not commending the chosen lifestyle of the Recabites, but their faithfulness. While often used as such, this chapter does not serve as an exhortation to temperance.

#### THE REWARD OF THE RECABITES (verses 18-19)

The reward is the survival of the clan (note that the wording of the promise, though often used in connection with priestly service, need not be used in that sense, and certainly is not in this case). Nehemiah 3:14 indicates that the promise was fulfilled, as do occasional mentions of Recabites in the Ancient Near East in the later literature of the region.

## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH XII

### Jeremiah 36-38

The chapters before us today, though separated by seventeen years and taking place during the reigns of two kings, are probably grouped in the text because of their similar themes - the persecution and frequent incarcerations of God's faithful prophet.

#### JEHOIAKIM BURNS JEREMIAH'S PROPHECIES (36:1-32)

This is the only record in the Old Testament of the writing down of the words given to God's prophets.

Verse 1 - This was the crucial year of 605 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish and returned to Babylon after the death of his father. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry had now been going on for more than twenty years.

Verses 2-3 - In an age when extensive memorization was commonplace among scholars, Jeremiah's feat was nonetheless prodigious - recalling twenty years' worth of prophetic messages. The purpose was the same as delivering them in sermonic form - to get the people to repent and experience God's forgiveness.

Verse 4 - Baruch was a professional scribe, probably employed by the palace, and was Jeremiah's loyal assistant for many years, even following the fall of Jerusalem. Writing down words from dictation was a highly-skilled profession and was much valued when written documents were intended to provide permanent records of commercial and diplomatic transactions, as well as prophecies such as this one.

Verses 5-7 - Jeremiah had apparently been barred from the Temple grounds, perhaps because of his inflammatory sermons given there earlier, so Baruch had to serve as his representative, reading the scroll to the people. A day of fasting was chosen to get the largest possible audience. The only formally-designated day of fasting in the Old Testament Law was the Day of Atonement, but this was a different time of year (December). The fast therefore must have been called in the face of national crisis - in this case, the return of Nebuchadnezzar's army to put down a rebellion in Ashkelon, a Philistine city that had refused to pay tribute to the new power in the region.

Verses 8-10 - Baruch followed instructions, reading the scroll from a room at the side of the Temple that served as the office of a sympathetic official.

Verses 11-15 - The royal officials, upon hearing the contents of the scroll from one of their number, asked Baruch to give them a private reading. His high standing is indicated by the respect with which he was treated - sitting down to speak was the posture of a respected teacher (cf. Luke 4:20).

Verse 16 - The officials are not here acting as spies, but are terrified by the content of the message they have heard and realize that the king must be made aware of it (this implies, of course, that they had not been paying a great deal of attention for the previous years of Jeremiah's ministry).

Verses 17-18 - They first want to confirm the source of the scroll. Note that the ink mentioned here was carbon-based, made by mixing lampblack with gum and diluting it with water.

Verse 19 - That the officials were sympathetic to Jeremiah and his assistant is clear here - they know the danger to which the two men will be exposed when the king hears the contents of the scroll.

Verses 20-21 - The officials tried to protect the scroll itself, but the king insisted on hearing it personally.

Verse 22 - The winter apartment in which the king was living would have been equipped for cold weather - in Palestine, the rainy season in which even a light snowfall might occasionally be encountered.

Verse 23 - Jehoiakim's actions suggest that the scroll was papyrus rather than parchment. Scribes had knives for cutting the former, while the latter could be cut only by slicing the seams where the skins were sewn together. Besides, burning parchment would have filled the king's chamber with a horrible smell. The action here was a deplorable act of blasphemy. Jehoiakim apparently thought the words could be made of no effect if the paper on which they were written was destroyed. God, of course, cannot be stymied so easily.

Verses 24-25 - The reaction of the king and his officials (not the same ones who had heard the original reading) is in marked contrast to that of his father Josiah when the long-lost scroll of the Book of the Law was discovered in the Temple (II Chronicles 34:19-21).

Verse 26 - The attempt to arrest both Jeremiah and Baruch shows the wisdom of the courtiers who had warned them to conceal themselves.

Verses 27-28 - God's Word cannot be destroyed by man, no matter how hard he tries. The incident here is reminiscent of the attempt of the Bishop of London to purchase and burn on the dock an entire shipment of an English translation of the Bible prepared by William Tyndale while in hiding on the Continent. All the bishop accomplished, of course, was to give tremendous publicity to Tyndale's work while financing the next few printings.

Verses 29-31 - Jeremiah's message to Jehoiakim is unflinching in its pronouncement of judgment. No descendant of Jehoiakim will ever sit on the throne (his son Jehoiachin, who reigned only three months and was quickly deposed by Nebuchadnezzar, hardly counts), the king himself will die without a proper burial - a very serious matter in those days (we have no record of how Jehoiakim died; speculation is that he was murdered by his own officials), and the people of the city will experience utter devastation.

Verse 32 - The result of the king's futile effort to destroy God's Word is that another scroll is prepared with an even more extensive record of God's prophetic judgment against His disobedient people.

#### PROPHECY CONCERNING THE LIFTING OF THE SIEGE (37:1-10)

The incidents in chapters 37-38 occur near the end of Zedekiah's reign, in the years 588-587 BC, but the narrative starts by mentioning the accession of the last king of Judah.

Verses 1-2 - Zedekiah came to the throne in 597 BC. He was a puppet of Nebuchadnezzar, given a new name by the Babylonian ruler, and was a political weakling. He could not stand up to his advisers, nor could he make up his mind whether to side with Babylon or Egypt despite the fact that he owed his throne to Nebuchadnezzar. He and his advisers showed no interest in the words of God given through the mouth of Jeremiah.

Verse 3 - His spiritual indifference did not, however, prevent him from asking Jeremiah to pray that the Lord would give success to what he had already determined to do - in this case, refuse tribute to Babylon while seeking help from Egypt.

Verse 4 - At this time, Jeremiah was free to move about the city - a situation that was not to last much longer.

Verse 5 - Hophra had succeeded his father Psammetichus II as Pharaoh and was determined to resist Babylonian hegemony. He brought his army out of Egypt and into Palestine in order to confront the Babylonians, who were already besieging Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar ordered his army to withdraw and meet the new threat. Zedekiah, of course, hoped the withdrawal would become permanent.

Verses 6-8 - Hophra was almost as weak as Zedekiah himself. When faced with the might of Babylon, the Egyptians quickly retreated and Nebuchadnezzar returned to besiege Jerusalem once again.

Verses 9-10 - Jeremiah has nothing but scorn for the false hopes of the king; he sarcastically tells him that, even if Babylon sent only their wounded into action, the city would still fall.

#### JEREMIAH IN THE DUNGEON AND THE GUARDHOUSE (37:11-21)

The result is by now predictable - Jeremiah's enemies try to get revenge on him rather than paying attention to what he has to say from the Lord.

Verses 11-13 - When the siege is temporarily lifted, Jeremiah decides to visit his hometown to see to his family property (this is too early for him to be checking out the field he bought from his relative in chapter 32). He is improbably accused of treason for attempting to defect to the Babylonians, even though they are not around at the time!

Verses 14-16 - Despite his denials, his enemies arrest him, beat him, and throw him in prison. Note that prisons in the Old Testament were not used as a form of punishment, but rather as places where those who were awaiting trial or execution of sentence would be kept (Joseph in Egypt is an exception). Thus the basement of the home of a high official would not be an unusual place for a prisoner to be kept.

Verse 17 - Zedekiah seeks a private audience, but imprisonment has not softened Jeremiah at all - his message is still the same.

Verses 18-20 - Jeremiah tries reasoning with the king, noting that he had committed no crime, that the false prophets who had been wrong time and time again were free to roam the streets, and that the conditions in his place of imprisonment were unhealthy at best.

Verse 21 - Zedekiah relents and, despite his reluctance to cross his advisers, moves the prophet to a minimum-security facility where he can be placed under protective custody. He was also given a food ration (something his enemies were unlikely to have provided). Note that the mention of Baker Street corresponds to the ancient practice of gathering tradesmen who practiced the same craft in one location in the city (though I doubt that any of the houses was numbered 221B!).

#### JEREMIAH IN THE CISTERN AND THE GUARDHOUSE (38:1-13)

The problem with a minimum security facility, of course, is that Jeremiah still had access to the people, albeit limited. His enemies could not tolerate this.

Verses 1-3 - To Jeremiah's enemies, this sounded like fomenting treason, ruinous to the morale of the people as they faced the shortages associated with any siege.

Verses 4-5 - They recommended the death penalty, and Zedekiah was too weak to resist them.

Verse 6 - Cisterns were important for water collection and storage in cities, whose water sources were usually located outside the walls. This was particularly the case during sieges (cf. Hezekiah's tunnel, built to connect the Gihon spring with the city inside the walls in preparation for the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib - II Kings 20:20; II Chronicles 32:30). Cisterns were generally shaped like flasks, with a small opening at the top that could be easily blocked off to prevent evaporation or pollution. The sides sloped inward, so that escape by Jeremiah would have been impossible. The muddy bottom (in rainy season, no less) indicates the extremity to which the siege had reduced the city's water supply.

Verses 7-9 - A court official named Ebed-Melech ("servant of the king") pleads for Jeremiah's life; Acts 8 is not the only record of an Ethiopian eunuch (the literal meaning of the word translated "official") who plays a small but significant role in Scripture. Ironically, a foreigner recognizes Jeremiah's value and has compassion on him while the leaders of the people care nothing for God's prophet except to plot his demise.



Verses 10-13 - Ebed-Melech takes thirty men with him, not because he needed that many to pull Jeremiah out of the cistern, but to serve as a guard to protect the prophet from the vengeful officials. He was then returned to the courtyard of the guard.

#### ZEDEKIAH INTERVIEWS JEREMIAH (38:14-28)

The insecure king again seeks out the prophet he has repeatedly ignored (cf. Ahab summoning Micaiah in I Kings 22).

Verse 14 - Zedekiah summons Jeremiah to a secret meeting at the private royal entrance to the Temple. Now, finally, he wants the truth.

Verses 15-16 - Jeremiah is reluctant to speak, given the history of his relationship with Zedekiah. He fears with good reason that he will either be ignored or killed outright. The king, however, swears an oath to protect the prophet.

Verses 17-18 - The message remains unchanged - surrender will spare the city and the royal family, but continued resistance will lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and the capture of the king.

Verses 19-20 - Zedekiah fears being handed over to the Jews who have already surrendered; they would be understandably furious with him for his stubbornness that led to all the suffering the people have experienced. Jeremiah assures him that this will not happen if he obeys the Lord's command.

Verses 21-23 - The prophecy now becomes more specific - Zedekiah will be mocked by the women of the palace for subjecting them to the whims of the invaders (the outcome for such women usually was not pretty) because he listened to his faithless advisers. Note the irony here: Jeremiah had been imprisoned in the miry bottom of the cistern, but Zedekiah is the one who will be stuck in the mud, while the advisers he trusted will flee like rats from a sinking ship, leaving for Egypt at the first opportunity.

Verses 24-26 - Zedekiah pleads with Jeremiah to keep their conversation secret. Though he claims, with some legitimacy, to fear for Jeremiah's life, he also has his own interests in mind, since he is afraid of his own court officials. If questioned, Jeremiah is only to reveal part of the conversation.

Verses 27-28 - Zedekiah's fears were not without warrant - spies quickly became aware of the "secret" meeting. Jeremiah complied with the king's request, and from then on no one tried to remove him from the guardhouse. God thus continued to protect His prophet from his enemies.



## STUDIES IN JEREMIAH XIII

### Jeremiah 50-51

The intervening chapters speak of the fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath. The city is destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC; when Zedekiah and some of his nobles flee the city, they are pursued and captured. Zedekiah is forced to watch as his sons and officials are slaughtered before his eyes; he then has his eyes put out, and he is led in chains to Babylon (chapter 39). Jeremiah is treated with honor and is given the choice of going to Babylon with the captives or remaining in the land. He chooses the latter, and goes to advise Gedaliah, the royal governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar. Gedaliah, however, is soon assassinated by a group of rebels led by Ishmael son of Nethaniah (chapters 41-42). Nobles under the leadership of Johanan son of Kareah pursue Nethaniah, who plans to flee to Ammon, and free his captives, including Jeremiah and Baruch, who are then forced to accompany the victors into Egypt, despite Jeremiah's warning that those who flee to Egypt will die by the sword or by famine (chapters 42-43). The Jews who settle in Egypt continue to practice idolatry, arguing that disaster came upon them in their own land when they stopped sacrificing to the Queen of Heaven and worshiped the Lord alone, but Jeremiah warns them that the might of Nebuchadnezzar will overcome Egypt as well (chapter 44).

Jeremiah 45 contains a brief message to Baruch given in 605 BC, warning him against the evils of ambition but assuring him of God's protection for him as long as he remains faithful. Chapters 46-51 then contain prophecies against the nations - two against Egypt, given twenty years apart (chapter 46), and prophecies against the Philistines (chapter 47), the Moabites (chapter 48), and Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and the Elamites (chapter 49). Chapters 50-51, today's passage, contains Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the fall of Babylon. As we will see, this message was taken to Babylon and read among the captives in the year 593 BC, long before the persecutor of God's people was destroyed by the Medo-Persian empire under Cyrus.

#### BABYLON'S FALL ANNOUNCED (50:1-10)

As so often in the prophets, the instrument of God's wrath against His own people is finally to be judged for its deeds.

Verses 1-2 - Babylon's fall is also the defeat of her gods. Bel simply means *lord* (cf. Baal), and was used as a title for the head of the Akkadian pantheon, the storm god Enlil. With the rise of the Old Babylonian empire, the title was transferred to the patron deity of Babylon, Marduk. Before the Lord, however, these "little pieces of dung" (the literal meaning of the word translated *idols* here) will cringe in terror.

Verse 3 - The invasion will come from Medo-Persia. Note the irony here, since Jeremiah at the beginning of his ministry had proclaimed that Judah would be destroyed by an invasion from the north.

Verses 4-5 - The destruction of Babylon is inseparable from the repentance of God's people. God will restore their relationship to Him and bring them back to their land.

Verses 6-7 - While Jeremiah blames the faithless shepherds who led the people astray, the Babylonians are not guiltless. Judah may have deserved what she got, but the Babylonians remain culpable for their actions.

Verses 8-10 - The people of God are warned to flee the coming destruction. As will be noted later, this is somewhat strange given the fact that Babylon fell without violence, the people of the Southern Kingdom were allowed to return to their homes peacefully by the decree of Cyrus, and most in any case refused to leave.

#### THE REASON FOR HER FALL (50:11-20)

God never judges without a reason, and here He explains His judgment against the might of Babylon.

Verses 11-13 - The main reason is the devastation wreaked on God's people, despite the fact that God had commanded it in the first place. The result will be that one of the greatest cities in the known world of that day would become a wasteland, so that archaeologists would have to dig its remains out of the desert.

Verses 14-15 - Here we have the *lex talionis* of God's justice - an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Though the walls of the city were eventually torn down during the Seleucid dynasty (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), the reason was because of disuse rather than conquest. Some have looked at this and similar descriptions in this section, noted that they do not in any way correspond with known history, and concluded that the reference must be to some new city in the Last Days (cf. Revelation 17-18), though the references in the Apocalypse are generally considered to be metaphorical, referring either to the might of Rome or some political-religious power arrayed against God's people at the end of time.

Verses 16-20 - Babylon's captives will return to their homes - this happened under a decree issued by Cyrus after he captured the city in 539 BC. The geographical boundaries in verse 19 encompass the fertile lands of the Northern Kingdom, while verse 20 speaks of a spiritual renewal and forgiveness of sins.

#### THE MEANS OF HER DESTRUCTION (50:21-32)

How is the destruction to occur? Jeremiah gives hints to his listeners long before the actual battle occurs.

Verse 21 - The references to Merathaim and Pekod allude to regions of Babylon with similar names, though the meanings of the words used by Jeremiah are derogatory. The inhabitants are to be devoted to the Lord - utterly destroyed, as was to have happened in Jericho.

Verses 22-24 - The hammer of the earth is to be hammered, but by trickery. The invading army, with the collaboration of Babylonian priests who objected to the fact that Nabonidus, the king, favored the moon god rather than Marduk, diverted the waters of the Euphrates and crept into the city through one of its water channels. They did this in the middle of the night while the regent, Belshazzar, was drinking with his friends from the vessels looted from the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Daniel 5). The city fell with hardly a shot being fired.

Verses 25-28 - Certainly some soldiers died in the action, but the city remained intact, becoming a regional capital of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Verses 29-32 - While Babylon suffered relatively little violence, the outlying cities guarding the fords of the Tigris and Euphrates were totally demolished.

#### GOD AS THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER (50:33-40)

Here God uses a familiar symbol from the Old Testament Law - that of the Kinsman-Redeemer - to describe Himself.

Verses 33-34 - The Kinsman-Redeemer had the responsibility of protecting the family's inheritance, hunting down anyone who killed a family member, and marrying or making arrangements for childless widows (cf. Ruth 3). God here restores His people's inheritance, takes vengeance against their murderers, and brings them again into His family.

Verses 35-38 - The repeated proclamation of "a sword" spells the doom of the oppressor. The strong will become weak, the wise will become fools, the protecting gods will flee in terror.

Verses 39-40 - Like Sodom and Gomorrah, which wound up under the waters of the Dead Sea, so Babylon will wind up under the sands of the desert.

#### THE COMING INVASION (50:41-46)

Verses 41-42 - Cyrus came at the head of a great coalition more than twenty years in forming, resulting from his conquest of the Medes and subsequent control of all their subject peoples.

Verse 43 - Nabonidus never really wanted to be king, and spent most of his reign in a monastery in the desert. When he returned shortly before the conquest of the city, he panicked upon hearing of the Medo-Persian incursion and announced a feast in honor of the rejected deity Marduk. Too little, too late.

Verse 44 - The reference to Cyrus as “the chosen one” is similar to what Isaiah says about him in Isaiah 44:28.

Verses 45-46 - The people of the earth will be appalled at the fall of the mighty empire.

#### WARNING TO GOD’S PEOPLE (51:1-10)

Jeremiah again warns the captives from Judah about what is to come.

Verse 1 - The reference to Leb Kamai is a cryptogram form of “Chaldea” called an *Atbash*, formed by replacing each letter by the one the same distance from the end of the alphabet as it is from the beginning (in English, replacing A with Z, B with Y, C with X, etc.). Jeremiah uses the same form of cryptography in 25:26 and 51:41, where Sheshack is the Atbash form of Babylon. The fact that the city is named elsewhere throughout the proclamation of destruction means that the choice was not for the purpose of secrecy, but perhaps to mock the might of Judah’s oppressors.

Verses 2-4 - Like a winnowing fork scatters the chaff to the winds, so will the might of Babylon be scattered.

Verses 5-6 - God’s people have not been forgotten, and are to flee the coming destruction.

Verse 7 - Note the similarity to the apocalyptic language of Revelation 17-18.

Verses 8-10 - God’s people will find balm in Gilead, but for Babylon there will be no healing. The language of verse 9 is reminiscent of the description of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, and Babylon will face the same judgment.

#### THE DESTROYER TO BE DESTROYED (51:11-26)

Again the coming Medo-Persian invasion is described. Note that Persia is never mentioned; at the time of Jeremiah, the Medes were far more prominent, though the Persians under Cyrus led the invading force.

Verse 11 - The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem is here the cause for God’s judgment.

Verses 12-14 - The watchmen see nothing as the invading forces creep under the walls through the water channels.

Verses 15-16 - The sovereign power of God is here cited; He is as much responsible for the fall of Babylon to her conquerors as He was for the Babylonian conquest of Judah.

Verses 17-19 - The idols of the wicked are impotent and lifeless, while the true God is the Protector of His people.

Verses 20-24 - Note again the repetition of a phrase - "I shatter" - indicating that the hammer of God is now to be hammered.

Verses 25-26 - The mighty mountain that overshadowed the known world is to become a spent volcano. Even the mighty walls - a double row of casemate walls twenty and twelve feet thick, respectively, enclosing more than 200 square miles according to Herodotus - would be leveled.

#### ARMIES FROM THE NORTH (51:27-33)

Verses 27-29 - The nations listed here were conquered by the Medes, who in turn were conquered by the Persians.

Verses 30-32 - The city fell without a fight; the king had to be roused from his drunken revels to be told that the city had been taken; the cities guarding the fords of the Tigris and Euphrates had been destroyed by the invaders. The city of Babylon was also protected by a system of moats and marshes to impede an attacking army; apparently Cyrus set these marshes on fire when he took the city.

Verse 33 - A powerful image of a city about to be trod underfoot.

#### JERUSALEM TO BE AVENGED (51:34-58)

Verses 34-40 - The people of Jerusalem cry out for vengeance and will receive it. Note the appropriateness of the language in verses 36 and 39 to the circumstances surrounding the fall of the city during Belshazzar's feast.

Verses 41-44 - Utter destruction is here described. Note the Atbash in verse 41 and the punishment directed at the so-called king of the gods in verse 44.

Verses 45-48 - God's people are warned to run for their lives because of the coming destruction, at which all the earth will rejoice.

Verses 49-51 - God is avenging His people and His holy city.

Verses 52-58 - Babylon too will be punished because of her idolatry; because God is the Lord of all the earth, He holds even pagan nations accountable for worshiping Him alone. The language of verse 53 alludes again to the Tower of Babel, verse 57 to Belshazzar's feast, and verse 58 to the destruction of her mighty walls.

#### THE MESSAGE DELIVERED (51:59-64)

While some scholars argue that the details found in this section, despite the problematic aspects of it, indicate that Jeremiah couldn't have written it, and so ascribe it to a later author, we have at the end of the prophecy a clear date to indicate when it was delivered.

Verse 59 - Seraiah, the brother of Baruch, was the bearer of this message, delivered to the captives when Zedekiah visited Nebuchadnezzar in 593 BC.

Verses 60-61 - Seraiah was to read the scroll to the captives when he got to Babylon.

Verses 62-64 - He was then to tie a stone to the scroll and throw it into the Euphrates, indicating that Babylon would sink like a rock from the stage of history.

The final chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy is a historical epilogue virtually identical to the end of II Kings, retelling the story of the fall of Jerusalem, recounting the carrying away of the Temple treasures (the passage makes no mention of the Ark of the Covenant, leading to rumors that Jeremiah had taken it with him into Egypt - a tradition that served as the foundation of the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*), numbering the captives taken to Babylon, and finally detailing the release and position of honor accorded Jehoiachin thirty-seven years after he had been taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.