PART ONE
SIN UNMASKED
Jeremiah 1-12

The first major unit in the book begins and ends with a dialogue with deity. In the first conversation with Yahweh Jeremiah complains about the prospect of ministry; in the second he complains about the persecution within his ministry. Between these two bookends of the Jeremiah library are seven messages. None of these messages is given specific dating (but cf. 3:6); none is addressed to specific individuals. These messages are put together in a chiastic arrangement that highlights the temple sermon in ch 7. The major theme in these chs is that of Judah’s sin; the minor themes are coming judgment and the need for repentance.

SECTION ONE
CALL OF THE PROPHET
Jeremiah 1:1-19

The prophets of Israel were launched upon their prophetic careers by a definite call. Amos, the herdsman from Tekoa, declared that God took him from following the flock and inducted him into the prophetic ministry (Amos 7:14-15). He felt a divine compulsion to preach (Amos 3:8). Isaiah, the aristocrat, saw a vision of divine glory and heard the voice of his God calling for a messenger. Isaiah knew that the call was meant for him. He volunteered: Here am I! Send me! (Isa 6). Ezekiel saw the dazzling and mysterious throne-chariot of God. From this experience he came to realize that he was to preach the word of God (Ezek 2:8ff.).

An essential mark of a true prophet and “a primary element in the prophetic consciousness” was the assurance of a divine call. “Logically and chronologically the prophet’s career begins with a call.” It is therefore most appropriate that the account of the call of Jeremiah stands first in the book.

Section One has five distinct units. The first four are introduced by the phrase the word of Yahweh came (1:2, 4, 11, 13); the last is indicated by a direct commission to the prophet (1:17-19).

PREFACE
1:1-3

A great deal of information is packed into the brief preface with which the Book of Jeremiah opens. These vv contain literary, personal, theological and chronological data relating to Jeremiah’s ministry.

A. Literary Information (1:1a): The words of Jeremiah… The preface opens with the formal title of the book: The Words of Jeremiah. Usually prophecies are entitled the word of Yahweh. Here the term words (debarim) is broad enough to include both the prophecies and the events of Jeremiah’s life. The more usual expression follows in v 2. The biographical narrative notwithstanding, words is an appropriate title because the emphasis throughout is on the preaching of Jeremiah. He was first and foremost a preacher of the word.

B. Personal Information (1:1b): Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, from the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin… Concerning Jeremiah personally the preface relates that (1) he was of the family of Hilkiah; and (2) he was a priest before he was a prophet; and

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1Scott, RP, 88.
2Longacre, PS, 92.
(3) that he lived in the priestly town of Anathoth. As a priest—possibly the son of the high priest—the prospect before him was that of a quiet and probably uneventful life teaching the torah of God in his hometown and serving periodically at the temple in Jerusalem. God, however, had other plans for this timid young priest. From the obscurity of priestly service Jeremiah was catapulted by the call of God into a position of national and even international responsibility.

C. Theological Information (1:2a): to whom the word of Yahweh came... The main function of the preface is to sound forth the note that Jeremiah had received divine revelation. The phrase to whom the word of Yahweh came describes that mysterious process by which the prophet of God received divine revelation. This expression occurs some twenty times in the Book of Jeremiah.

Many attempts have been made to explain how God spoke to the prophets. Did the revelation come to the prophet while in a state of mental unconsciousness and inactivity? Or did prophets receive their oracles while in complete possession of their rational consciousness? It is interesting to notice that the NT is silent as to the manner in which God spoke to the prophets. Peter declared: Men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). To go beyond this simple statement is to become involved in useless speculation.

D. Chronological Information (1:2b-3): The preface is full of valuable chronological information. Three kings are named: Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, both of whom reigned only a matter of months, are omitted.

1. Beginning of his ministry (1:2b): in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. The year of Jeremiah’s call is pinpointed as the thirteenth year of King Josiah. This was one year after Josiah began to purge Jerusalem and five years before the discovery of the lost law book.

2. Conclusion of his ministry (1:3): Also it came in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, until Jerusalem was carried away captive in the fifth month. The preface seems to imply that the ministry of Jeremiah terminated with the fall of Jerusalem in the eleventh year of Zedekiah. The problem is that Jeremiah continued to perform his prophetic duties for some time (possibly years) after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 41-44). Probably the preface simply means that the active or official ministry of Jeremiah closed with the destruction of Jerusalem. A minister today who has officially retired and terminated his active ministry might still preach occasionally. Here, then, in Jeremiah's ministry was a service for God of more than forty years.

The exile to Babylon occurred in the fifth month (Ab) of Zedekiah eleventh year (2 Kings 25:4-10). On the tenth day of that month the Babylonians burned the city. On the modern calendar the date was August 3, 586 BC. Apparently for Jeremiah this date marked the beginning of the captivity.

Jerusalem carried away captive (inf. const. r. glh) is the theme of the book. In the concluding paragraphs of the final ch the same Hebrew word is used three times (52:27, 28, 30). So the entire book is bracketed between allusions to the captivity. Jeremiah warned of the exile, explained its significance, stipulated its duration, and announced Yahweh’s plans for the rebuilding of the nation following the exile. By the last ch of the book the threatened exile is a reality.

3 Such was the position of Philo the Jewish philosopher who believed that the prophet was to the Spirit what a flute would be to a musician. See Harry A. Wolfson, Philo (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 2:28-30.


5 Holiday, (Her, 1:17) takes the reference to be to the date of Jeremiah’s birth rather than his ministry.
CALL OF THE PROPHET
1:4-10

The call of Jeremiah is disappointing to those who love the spectacular. The account of how Jeremiah became a prophet of God is marked by stark simplicity. He was not privileged to see the grandeur of the heavenly throne room and hear the majestic praises of celestial beings as was Isaiah. Nor was he granted a vision of the throne-chariot of God with its intriguing wheels within wheels as was Ezekiel. The call of Jeremiah seems to have occurred on an ordinary day and in an ordinary place.

Jeremiah’s call is presented in the form of a dialogue between the Lord and his prospective prophet.

The change from the third person used in the preface to the first person in v 4 is striking and indicates that the following vv are autobiographical. The preface probably was prefixed to the book by Baruch, the faithful secretary of Jeremiah. The account of the prophetic call, however, was either written (or dictated) by the prophet himself.

A. Time and Manner of the Call (1:4): Then the word of Yahweh came unto me saying… Then refers back to v 2, the thirteenth year of Josiah. Thus v 4 indicates that, from the human standpoint, the call and appointment of Jeremiah occurred in 627 BC. Some see in this v a visionary experience. The prophet, however, does not say that he saw the Lord; rather he simply says, the word of Yahweh came unto me. Did he hear the word of God within his mind or with his ears? The question can never be answered.

What is more important is that the call was a genuine experience on the part of Jeremiah, and not something that he conjured up in his imagination. God, not Jeremiah, took the initiative in the call. Amid the tumult and clamor of four decades, Jeremiah never wavered in the claim that God had called him. One may open the book at random and find the same claim repeated time and again with only slight variation: The word of the Lord came unto me.7 Jeremiah was called upon again and again to suffer for that claim. No one in his right mind would endure what this man endured unless he knew that God had spoken.

B. Divine Summons (1:5): Jeremiah needed to know at the outset the identity of the One who was commissioning him. In the four verbs of v 5—formed, knew, set-apart, appointed—the Lord identified himself as the rightful sovereign of Jeremiah's life. Each of these verbs is rich in theological overtones. Here in turn are the concepts of creation, election, consecration and installation.8

1. Creation (1:5a): Before I formed you in the belly… The birth of Jeremiah was no accident. God takes credit for forming him in the belly of his mother. The verb formed is used as in Gn 2:7 where God formed man from the dust of the earth. God’s creative activity is like that of a potter whose handiwork reveals his design (see Jer 18:1-4). The fact that God formed Jeremiah in the womb of his mother does not mean that his birth was supernatural like that of Jesus. Rather the thought is that God needed a prophet and so providentially planned that one should be born who could fulfill such a ministry. The implication is that God gave the child the character, the temperament, the gifts, and the talents that would qualify him for the office of a prophet.

A similar concept appears in one of the grand Servant poems of Isaiah. The Servant, none other than the Messiah himself, declares to the nations: Yahweh called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he has mentioned my name (Isa 49:1b). The Psalmist David declared much the same thing when he

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6Hebrew hayah in this context means happen, occur, be extended to.
7Of the 359 occurrences of this phrase in the OT, 157 are in the Book of Jeremiah. See Thomson, WLJ, 6.
8Hall, WBC, 185.
wrote: My unformed substance your eyes saw; in your book all of them were written, even the days that were ordained when as yet there was none of them (Ps 139:16). John the Baptist was to be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb (Lk 1:15); Paul declared that God had separated him from his mother’s womb (Gal 1:15).

At first glance, v 5 seems to involve an almost mechanical notion of predestination. But this cannot be what is meant, otherwise the whole dialogue between God and the prophet would have no point. Jeremiah is being told that God has had his eye upon him for a long time—even before he was born—when he was still just a thought in the mind of God.⁹

The distinction must be drawn between personal predestination and professional predestination.¹⁰ It is the latter that is involved in this passage. The predestination here has nothing to do with eternal salvation. Professional predestination is illustrated by the case of Samson in the Book of Judges. Prior to Samson’s birth specific instructions were given as to how this lad should be reared. Definite predictions were made as to what this lad would accomplish (Judg 13:2-5). This was professional predestination. Samson was the right man, at the right time and the right place in the plan of God. So it was with Jeremiah. Even before his birth, God had been directing affairs in such a way as to make this man uniquely qualified to perform the work to which he was now being called.

2. Election (1:5b): I knew you... The verb to know involves intellectual knowledge. In the case of Jeremiah, this would be foreknowledge. Since the future is always the present to the Omniscient One, God knew the fact that Jeremiah would be born.

The Hebrew verb is not limited to mere intellectual knowledge; it embraces also intimate knowledge. This is the word that is used of the most intimate of all human experiences, the relationship between husband and wife. Thus God did not merely know about Jeremiah; He knew—intimately knew—Jeremiah himself. God knew his strong points and his weaknesses, his abilities, his deficiencies and his potentialities. It was as though God had met him and fellowshipped with him for long years before he was ever born.

The Hebrew verb to know also involves selective knowledge. Through Amos the prophet God said to Israel, You only have I known of all the families of the earth (Amos 3:2). The verb to know is part of the terminology of election.¹¹ God’s I knew you, is equivalent to his having said I selected you.

Finally, the verb to know implies commendatory knowledge. In Nah 1:7 God knows those that trust him. In Ps 1:6 God knows the way of the godly. In both passages the implication is that God knows and approves of the godly ways of the righteous. Thus God knew Jeremiah intellectually, intimately and selectively. God approved of his life before he was ever born.

3. Consecration (1:5c): and before you were born, I set you apart... God had separated, sanctified or set apart Jeremiah for holy service before he was born. Here is the only use of this term in connection with a prophet in the OT. While the word primarily involves vocational sanctification, the idea of ethical sanctification is not absent. God alone is holy. A man being made holy or sanctified means that a person is to be exclusively devoted to God for his purposes and in his service. Jesus spoke of himself as sanctified and sent into the world by the Father (Jn 10:36).

Looking on the call of Jeremiah from the divine standpoint, v 5 indicates that his appointment long antedated the birth of the prophet. In these first three verbs Yahweh makes an affirmation about the past. The divine purpose for his life was revealed to Jeremiah.

4. Installation (1:5d, e):

⁹Harrelson, JPN, 17.
¹⁰The concept of professional predestination also appears in literature outside Israel. Ashurbanipal in the opening of his annals declares that the gods made him to rule Assyria while he was still in the body of his mother.
a. **Time of it (1:5d): I have appointed you...** The word translated *appointed* literally means to give, to put or place. Implied in the meaning is an appointment that carries with it the impatation of spiritual gifts that enable one to perform the tasks for which he was appointed.  

Did the Lord appoint Jeremiah to his prophetic office prior to his birth, or at the very time this statement was made? This is the only verb in v 5 that is not positively antecedent to the birth of Jeremiah. Nevertheless, in the light of the implications of the preceding three verbs, it seems likely that the appointment also took place in the mind of God before the prophet’s birth.  

From the time of his call, Jeremiah realized that a combination of things happened even before his birth that prepared him for prophetic ministry. Jeremiah’s endowments, and all the influences of heredity and education have shaped, molded and prepared his life for his prophetic career. The consciousness that he had been planned by God before his birth must have stirred the sensitive young man from Anathoth to the depths of his being. In the opinion of Freedman, "This consciousness must have sustained him and enabled him to triumph over the moods of despondency to which he was subject."  

It is useless to speculate as to whether Jeremiah could have refused the call of God. As a matter of fact he did not; and God in his infinite knowledge knew that Jeremiah would not spurn the summons to service. However, the principle that is affirmed by biblical revelation in general may be affirmed confidently, viz., prescience on the part of God does not demand compulsion on the part of man.  

b. **Scope of it (1:5f): a prophet to the nations.** What is intimated in general in the earlier part of the v is now made clear: Jeremiah is called to accept an appointment to be a prophet (*nabhi*').  

The Hebrew word translated *prophet* occurs some three hundred times in the OT. The precise etymology of the word is uncertain. As the term is used in the OT, a *prophet* is one who is “qualified, called, and commissioned to speak God’s truth to men.” A prophet was a mouthpiece, a spokesman. He was one who stood in the divine inner council of God and then went forth to speak of what he had seen and heard. A prophet was a man who spoke to men on behalf of God, and to God on behalf of men.  

By virtue of its position in the Hebrew sentence, the phrase *a prophet to the nations* receives emphasis. Here is something unique about Jeremiah, for he is the only prophet to be designated by this title. His ministry was to embrace nations other than Judah. But since Jeremiah only left his native land on one occasion, how can he be said to have performed an international ministry? The v need not mean that Jeremiah was to go to the nations to proclaim his message. It may only mean that he was to include the nations within the scope of his prophecies. He was to be the exponent of God’s world plan in that age of convulsion and upheaval.  

Several observations with regard to the title *prophet to the nations* need to be made:  

1. Prophetic concern with foreign nations can be traced back through Isaiah and Amos to Elijah and Elisha and even to Samuel himself. Samuel commissioned Saul to destroy the Amalekite nation (1 Sam 15). Elijah was commissioned by God to anoint Hazael as king “of Damascus (1 Kgs 19:15) and this task was discharged by his successor Elisha (2 Kgs 8:7-15). Jonah was sent on a mission to Nineveh to proclaim the doom of that city. Amos and Isaiah uttered numerous oracles against foreign nations. Both of these eighth century prophets developed the theme that mighty Assyria was but a tool in the hands of God. Jeremiah himself described his prophetic predecessors as men who had “prophesied against many lands and great kingdoms” (Jer 28:8).  

2. The issues with which Jeremiah was to deal of necessity involved the nations of his day. In the late seventh and early sixth centuries before Christ, it was no longer possible to treat Judah as though that nation existed in a political vacuum. A judgment upon Judah involved an international
upheaval in which some powers went down, and others rose up. These were the political realities of that day.

3. A large portion of the Book of Jeremiah is devoted to oracles of doom against the nations. These oracles have been collected in chs 46-51. In 25:15-29 Jeremiah addresses the small states of Syria-Palestine, warning them that they must submit to the authority of Nebuchadnezzar or be destroyed.

4. Jeremiah foretold blessings that would come upon the nations through the advent of the Messiah (e.g., 23:5; 33:15). Those commentators who limit “unto the nations” to pronouncements of judgment on the heathen are proved to be wrong by the fact that positive as well as negative terms are used in v 10 to describe Jeremiah’s ministry to the nations.

5. Jeremiah on one occasion did address foreign nations directly in the person of their ambassadors in Jerusalem (27:1ff.). On another occasion he sent a scroll to be read in Babylon, and then sunk in the river Euphrates as a symbolic portrayal of the fall of that empire (51:59-64).

6. Hebrew prophecy was universalistic in its scope. “God’s message is to all people and for all times.” Again and again Jeremiah emphasized that the sovereignty of the Lord extends to the ends of the earth. Jeremiah has lessons, then, for the present nations of the world.

C. Response of Jeremiah (1:6): The hesitation of Jeremiah is placed over against the decisiveness of God in the previous vv. Those called to special service by God were always humbly hesitant to accept their commission. Jeremiah was no exception. His response to the divine call was both emotional and logical.

1. Emotional response (1:6a): Then I said, Ah, Adonay Yahweh! Staggered by the responsibility of his call, Jeremiah relates that he heaved a deep sigh to God, Ah! The cry is not an entreaty that God change the circumstances, but a lament that circumstances are what they are. It is a cry of alarm and pain. In this emotional response there is hesitation, not rebellion. Jeremiah was fond of the word Ah and used it in three other passages. The weeping prophet was acquainted with the vocabulary of lamentation.

2. Logical response (1:6b): Jeremiah’s response to the divine summons is not purely on the emotional level. He disclaims any adequate preparation for the task to which God is calling him. To Jeremiah the call seemed impractical because of his age, and his lack of natural gifts.

a. His aptitude (1:6b): Behold, I do not know how to speak... Jeremiah felt a keen sense of inadequacy. Literally he says, I do not know to speak. The word know in Hebrew frequently means to be skilled or experienced in doing anything. Like Moses he felt he did not have the powers of oratory that would win the attention of vast throngs or sway the conduct of hostile multitudes.

b. His age (1:6c): for I am only a youth. A youth in antiquity was expected to be seen and not heard. Who would listen to him if he presumed to preach the word of God? In the Hebrew word order, the emphasis is on the youth of the prophet. The word translated youth or child has a wide range of usage in the OT. It is used of an infant (e.g., Ex 2:6), a small boy (e.g., Gn 21:12) or a young man of marriageable age (e.g., Gn 34:19). The same word is used of Joshua at age forty-five (Ex 33:11) and of Solomon when he succeeded his father as king (1 Kgs 3:7). The Jewish rabbis defined the word as referring to a youth of his fourteenth year. Estimates on the age of Jeremiah at the time of his call range from seventeen to twenty-five.

Jeremiah is not rejecting the heavenly call in this v, but is, in effect, pleading for delay. It is as if he had said, May I not wait till I can speak with the wisdom and authority that comes with years? He was not saying I will not, but I cannot; not now at any rate.

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16Skinner, PR, 30.
17Freedman, SBB, 2.
19Skinner, PR, 34.
Jeremiah may have mentioned his youth because he had not yet reached the age when he, as a priest, would be permitted to serve the Lord. During the wilderness wandering, the years of service for the Levites were fixed from age twenty-five to fifty (Nm 8:23-25). Later this age restriction was changed by David from twenty to fifty (1 Chr 23:24-32). One family of Levites—the Kohathites—could only serve from ages thirty to fifty. Could it be that Jeremiah was still a youth in the sense that he had not yet reached the age of priestly service? Still this was not a legitimate excuse as far as the prophetic ministry was concerned. The office of prophet was not limited to any definite number of years. God called men when he pleased, and retained them as long as he desired.

D. Divine Assurance (1:7-10): When called of God Moses brought forth excuse after excuse; but Jeremiah only needed reassurance. The Lord took steps to give that timid and hesitant young prophet the encouragement he needed. The assurance in these vv is fourfold. He received assurance of direction, deliverance, power, and authority.

1. Assurance of direction (1:7): The divine assurance begins not with promises of assistance, but with a gentle rebuke and a reaffirmation of God’s will.
   
a. A rebuke (1:7a): But Yahweh said to me, Do not say, I am only a youth; Jeremiah’s focus was wrong. He had been looking at himself, whereas he should have had his focus on obedience to God. The emphasis throughout these vv is on the divine I and not the weak human you: I send you . . . I have commanded you . . . I am with you . . . I have placed my words in your mouth . . . I have made you an overseer. Thoughts of self are out of place in one who has received a divine commission. It was Jeremiah’s duty simply to obey the instructions of his Sovereign. The objections raised by Jeremiah are beside the point. Often men try to set feeble excuses against the plain call of God. They imagine that they are being modest. They plead a lack of qualification, or strength, or ability, when in fact they may be mistrusting the power of God to provide for his own work.

   b. A reaffirmation (1:7b): but unto whomever I send you, go! and all that I have commanded you, speak! Jeremiah’s focus needed to be lifted from self to God. He need not worry about where he will go or what he will say. The Lord will direct his ways and his words. All Jeremiah needs to do is follow the leading of the Lord. He is to go where God sends him and speak what God commands him.

   The verbs go and speak are not imperatives, but imperfects in Hebrew. For this reason most translators render them in English as futures. But the imperfect sometimes has imperative force. In the present context an imperative seems to fit best. After all God’s wills are in reality musts. When God is directing a ministry, he will provide both the place and the power for service. God in effect is saying here, Where you will go and what you will say is my business. A great burden lifted off the shoulders of the young priest, when he heard these reassuring imperatives.

   The limits of Jeremiah’s preaching are clearly defined. He is to preach what God commanded. He is not called to propagate the philosophies of men or to concoct and say what is clever, interesting and amusing. Jeremiah was called to preach the word! The greatest temptation that any preacher faces is that of identifying his own desires, interests and opinions with those of God. If every preacher would make his preaching as broad and as narrow as the expressed commandments of God, he would avoid this pitfall.

2. Assurance of deliverance (1:8): Do not be afraid of them; for I am with you to deliver you (oracle of Yahweh). Do not be afraid in this v matches the do not say in the

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20Nm 4:3, 23, 30-35, 47.
21Hall, WBC, 186.
22The sequence Ah Lord Yahweh followed by do not be afraid is identical with that in Gideon call (Judg 6:22, 23).
previous v. Jeremiah had not said he was afraid, but the Lord saw the fear in his heart. Sinful men never had welcomed a message of judgment. There was strong possibility of reprisal.

Fear might be appropriate were it not for one fact. The Lord will be with his prophet, i.e., available to him. The Hebrew reverses the English order and has it with you am I. What words of comfort! The words stress divine protection for Jeremiah; but they also hint at divine scrutiny. The Lord will be near Jeremiah to mark his words and deeds.

God promises to deliver Jeremiah. Deliver him, but from what? From hardship? From trial? From discouragement? From slander and attack? Hardly! The promise is not that Jeremiah will be free from danger, but that God will be his Deliverer. It is not that Jeremiah would remain unhurt physically, mentally, emotionally throughout his ministry. Rather it is that God will deliver him from destruction at the hands of his enemies. He will not be delivered from trial, but will be enabled to pass through trial.

The expression oracle of Yahweh (ASV saith Jehovah) marks the preceding words as direct utterance from Yahweh. This is the first of 168 occurrences of this expression in the Book of Jeremiah. The expression is one of the strongest possible claims of inspiration in the OT.

3. Assurance of power (1:9):
   a. Experience of the touch (1:9a): Then Yahweh put forth his hand and touched my mouth... The touch is not purely metaphorical (as in Ps 51:15); it represents a real experience on the part of the prophet. This experience, however, must have been a visionary one analogous to what Isaiah experienced at the beginning of his ministry. The hand is the symbol of making and doing.
   b. Explanation of the touch (1:9b): and Yahweh said unto me, Behold, I have placed my words in your mouth. In Isaiah the touch of the lips was for purification; here, for communication. The act symbolized the fact that God was taking over Jeremiah's mouth. Henceforth Jeremiah would speak with the tongue (authority) of God.

4. Assurance of authority (1:10):
   a. His authoritative position (1:10a): See, I have appointed you an overseer this day over the nations and kingdoms... The divine summons closes with assurance that Jeremiah will have divine authority. Appointed (Hiphil of pāqad) an administrative term (cf. 40:11). As God’s overseer Jeremiah’s words will set in motion God’s plans for the kingdoms of that day. The word nations of v 5 is now expanded by the parallel word kingdoms.
   b. His authoritative proclamation (1:10b): Jeremiah’s ministry will have both a negative and a positive emphasis.
      (1) His ministry of deconstruction (1:10b): to uproot, tear down, destroy, and raze... Four verbs describe the negative work that the prophet must perform: to uproot like a noxious weed; to tear down; to destroy; and to raze or overthrow. The prophet himself would not have the power to do these things; but it would be his mission to announce what God was about to do. Jeremiah fulfilled this part of his commission by preaching divine judgment upon the nations of his day. Sinful Judah must be destroyed. So too must God uproot the foreign nations that proudly had lifted up themselves against their Creator. No human measures

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23 God spoke these words to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:12), Joshua at Jordan (Josh 1:15) and Jacob at Bethel (Gn 28:15). They are reminiscent of the parting words of Jesus: Lo I am with you always (Mt 28:20).
24 In only two other passages is God the subject of this verb: Ps 109:6; Lv 26:16.
25 In eleven of the fourteen uses of the verb uproot (nāṭāṣ), God is the subject. The meaning is almost always metaphorical.
26 The verb tear down (nātats) is rarely metaphorical. It only has God as its subject three out of thirty-one times it is used in the OT.
can secure a community against destruction when that community is under the judgment of Yahweh.

(2) His ministry of reconstruction (1:10c): to build and to plant. Jeremiah is not merely a prophet of destruction; he is also a prophet of construction. Two infinitives describe the positive aspect of his ministry: to build, and to plant. Beyond the tumult of war and destruction, Jeremiah was permitted to see the dawn of a new day. In the most hopeless situations Yahweh can create newness.

Certainly the majority of Jeremiah’s ministry emphasized the negative. Four verbs are used to describe the destructive side of his ministry, while only two verbs are used to describe the constructive aspect. Furthermore, the negative elements are listed before the positive. In this book threatening is much more in the foreground, and promise in the background. Yet somehow one gets the impression that the ultimate purpose of this prophet was to pave the way for that new day. The old must be swept away in order that the new can be inaugurated. In the words of Jensen: “Jeremiah was to pluck up dead ritual and plant living worship, pluck up vile ways and plant straight paths, pluck up degenerate hearts and plant new hearts of a new covenant.”

FIRST CONFIRMATORY VISION
1:11-12

In the last half of ch 1, the call of Jeremiah is confirmed and amplified through two visions, and further words. The two visions are of particular interest. The first one expresses a general principle of prophecy; the second deals with a concrete application.

A. What Jeremiah Saw (1:11):

1. Question (1:11a): And the word of Yahweh came unto me saying, What are you looking at, Jeremiah? As Jeremiah held in his hand an almond walking stick or rod, God caused the prophet to come to a tremendous realization. The almond tree that blossoms in January was poetically named by the Hebrews the wakeful tree because it was the first to awake from winter sleep. The almond watches for spring.

2. Response (1:11b): And I replied, I am looking at a rod of almond. When God asked Jeremiah what he saw, his purpose was not only to direct the attention of the prophet to the almond rod, but also to get the prophet to pronounce the word for almond. The Hebrew word for almond tree is shaked and the Hebrew word for watch (or wakeful) is shoked. This appears to be deliberate paronomasia or word play. This is the first of numerous allusions to nature in the Book of Jeremiah.

B. What Jeremiah Learned (1:12): Then Yahweh said unto me, You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it. God used the rod of wake-tree wood to show Jeremiah that he is wakeful. But aside from the word play, what is the import of this vision?

First, the vision speaks of God’s concern. Since the days of wicked Manasseh, no judgment had befallen the nation of Judah. As in the winter season, all was at rest. But the Keeper of Israel does not slumber or sleep (Ps 121:4). Amid the moral and spiritual deadness round about, God was awake. He was concerned about the corrupt condition of the nation. At times things seems to go unchecked, evil seems to triumph and men assume that God is dead or unconcerned. But the winter of moral desolation cannot last forever; the Lord is wakeful. When the season of judgment has fully come, the Wakeful One will manifest himself as the God of wrath.

The almond rod also suggests the chastisement of the nation. As Aaron’s almond rod that budded in the wilderness was a token of God’s wrath against the rebellious (Nm 17:8), so now the almond rod that Jeremiah observes presages the outpouring of God’s judgment upon the apostate people of another time. It is not a

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27Jensen, JPJ, 20.
28Skinner, PR, 32.
29Paronomasia in the context of a vision also occurs in Amos 8:1-2.
branch with twigs and leaves that the prophet saw, but rather a stick used for walking or striking. This was an appropriate symbol of an instrument of chastisement. The symbolic significance would not be lost upon a prophet who knew the writings of Isaiah: *Ho Assyrian, the rod of my anger, the staff in whose hand is my indignation!* (Isa 10:5).

The third focus of the almond rod vision is the certainty of prophetic revelation. God is watching with persistent care to see that his word is performed. He sees to it that his word does not return unto him void, but rather accomplishes his good pleasure (Isa 55:11). Whether it is judgment or salvation, threat or promise, his word will come to pass. Jeremiah need have no fear that he will ever be embarrassed, or proven to be wrong, if he preaches the word of God. Thus the prophet can be absolutely confident that what he predicts through divine revelation will be fulfilled. Such confidence enabled Jeremiah to preach with boldness, power and assurance. Every preacher should remember that he is the messenger of him who watches over his word; no promise shall fail, no threat shall go unfilled.

Implicit in the first vision is the calendar of divine judgment. When one in Palestine sees the almond tree blossom, he knows that spring is hastening inevitably onward. As the almond tree hastens to put forth its leaves, so God was hastening (note the translation of the KJV) to perform his word of judgment. On God’s calendar, judgment was imminent.

SECOND CONFIRMATORY VISION

1:13-16

The almond rod vision emphasized the nearness of the judgment; the second vision portrays its nature and direction.

A. What Jeremiah Saw (1:13):

1. Question (1:13a): *And the word of Yahweh came unto me a second time saying, What are you looking at?* At some undetermined time subsequent to the almond rod revelation, Jeremiah experienced another vision. Again by means of a question God fixed Jeremiah’s attention on an object that was before him.

2. Response (1:13b): *And I said, I am looking at a boiling pot, and its face is from the north.* He observed a large cooking or wash pot over an open fire. Jeremiah described the pot as *boiling*. The Hebrew word here means literally *blown up*. The idea seems to be that the fire beneath the pot had been fanned into a fierce flame by a blast of wind, thus bringing the contents of the pot to a boil. So much is clear.

More difficult is the phrase *its face is from the north*. Its face probably refers to the side of the pot facing Jeremiah. The face of the pot was *from*, i.e., away from, the north. If the pot is tilting away from the north, it must be tilting toward the south. How the pot got in this precarious position is anyone’s guess. Perhaps it had been set unevenly on the fire at the start; or perhaps as the materials on which it was standing were consumed, the pot settled unevenly.

B. What Jeremiah Learned (1:14-16): Nothing could be more appropriate in describing the political conditions in the days of Jeremiah than a seething caldron. The whole Fertile Crescent was seething with plans for revolt after the death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 627 BC. The Assyrian Empire was tottering. The Neo-Babylonian kingdom lurked on the horizon. The description of the coming enemy is deliberately vague and imprecise, and therefore are the more ominous.

30Such was the interpretation of the great Jewish commentators Rashi and Kimchi.
31The same kind of pot was used by a whole company of prophets to cook their meals (2 Kgs 4:38). It probably was made of metal (Ezek 24:11). The pot may have been earthenware, or it may have been iron or copper.
32Bright, *HI*, 5.
33The KJV translation *to the north* has been rightly corrected by more recent English versions.
34Others think the face of the pot was what one would see as he looked into the pot, i.e., the contents.
1. Direction of the calamity (1:14): And Yahweh said unto me, From the north calamity is unleashed upon all the inhabitants of the land. This is the first disaster declaration in the book. Shortly the calamitous contents the political caldron will be unleashed (lit., opened)\textsuperscript{36} against the inhabitants of Judah. Cheyne suggests that the caldron had a lid, and the removal or falling off of this lid is the opening to which the prophet alludes.\textsuperscript{37} The evil (ASV) or calamity that is envisioned is the invasion of Judah\textsuperscript{38} by hordes of Babylonian soldiers. The evil of Judah must be punished by evil (calamity) from Yahweh.

The key word in v 14 is the word north. Previous to the battle of Carchemish, the Babylonians are only mentioned vaguely by Jeremiah as a northern people.\textsuperscript{39} Strictly speaking, they were an eastern people from the point of view of Palestine. However, the caravan route that the armies of Babylon would follow as they swept southward entered Palestine at Dan (cf. 4:15 and 8:16), and then proceeded due south. Jerusalem could be attacked successfully only from the north, as the west, south, and east sides of the city were rendered practically impregnable by deep valleys. Thus the ominous, and as yet unidentified, enemy is pictured as coming from the north.

2. Nature of the calamity (1:15): The significance of the boiling caldron pouring forth its contents toward Judah is now explained.

a. A vast army (1:15a): For, behold, I am about to call for all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north (oracle of Yahweh)... God will summon against Judah all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north. The army of King Nebuchadnezzar was made up of mercenaries of the various kingdoms that he had conquered. This vast throng will attack Jerusalem and the cities of Judah.

b. A victorious army (1:15b): and they will come and place each man his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls round about, and against all the cities of Judah. The details of the attack on Jerusalem are omitted. Jeremiah scrolls forward to depict the total subjugation of the city. Each man his throne refers to formal military tribunals where judgment was passed upon the inhabitants of the conquered city by the victorious Babylonian generals. The gates of a city were centers of business and civil administration. Fulfillment of this prediction is recorded in 39:3.

On the formula oracle of Yahweh, see 1:8.

3. Reason for the calamity (1:16):

a. General wickedness (1:16a): Then I will pronounce against them my judgments, because of all of their wickedness. The coming conquerors are but instruments of God who is sending his divine judgment upon an apostate people. The expression pronounce judgments is peculiar to Jeremiah,\textsuperscript{40} occurring elsewhere only in 2 Kgs 25:6. The judgment falls upon Judah because of all of the wickedness of that nation.

b. Specific sins (1:16b): They have forsaken me, made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their hands. Three specific examples of Judah’s wickedness are cited: (1) They had deserted the true God and were thus guilty of infidelity; (2) they had burned incense to false gods; and (3) they had worshiped graven images.

The Hebrew word translated offered incense has a general sense (to make sacrifices smoke) and a specific sense (to offer incense). It is difficult to know in

\textsuperscript{36}ASV, shall break forth.
\textsuperscript{37}Cheyne, PC, 3. It is also possible that the evil or calamity in the north was opened in the sense of revealed. See Freedman, SBB, 4.
\textsuperscript{38}The word translated land in this v can also mean earth. Here the former meaning is intended as v 15 indicates.
\textsuperscript{39}See Jer 4:6; 6:1; 10:22.
\textsuperscript{40}See Jer 4:12; 12:1; 39:5; 52:9.
many passages which sense is intended. Bright has proposed that the word be rendered sending up offerings. The phrase other gods refers to false gods. It does not imply that Jeremiah recognized the actual existence of other deities beside God.\textsuperscript{41}

SPECIAL NOTE ON THE VISIONS

Two matters need to be discussed further: (1) the time of the visions, and (2) the nature of them.

1. Time of the visions. Hyatt\textsuperscript{42} calls the visions “inaugural visions,” but it really is not certain that they were part of the call experience, or even that they followed immediately after the call. The fact that each vision has a separate introductory formula would suggest a certain time interval between the call and the visions, and between the two visions as well. But if these visions did not come immediately upon the call of Jeremiah, they were given very early in his career. God used them to assure Jeremiah of his prophetic call. They are confirmatory tokens. The visions also serve to create within Jeremiah awareness that momentous events affecting the kingdom of Judah were imminent.

2. Nature of the visions. God made known his purpose through two kinds of visions in the OT. In the first type of vision, the prophet saw with his mind (or perhaps with his eyes, who can say?) an object or scene that had no external reality. In this type of vision, God produced what was seen, and also provided the interpretation of it.

In the second type of vision, the prophet happened to notice, or was directed to notice, an object or scene. He meditated upon what he saw, and as he did so God revealed to him the prophetic significance of it. In the first case God caused the prophet to see a significant object; in the second, God caused the prophet to see significance in an object. Into which one of these two vision categories do the visions in Jer 1 fall?

It is difficult to decide whether God showed the almond rod and the boiling pot in mental visions, or whether Jeremiah happened to see the external objects, and then learned their symbolic significance through divine revelation. In both visions God asked Jeremiah, What do you see? The same language is used in Jer 24:3 where the problem again arises as to the nature of what the prophet saw. The absence of the words the Lord showed me, that are present in other similar passages,\textsuperscript{43} might suggest that Jeremiah did not receive a mental vision. However, the phrase the Lord showed me is sometimes absent in contexts where mental vision is mandatory (e.g., Zech 4:2; 5:2). Exegetically, then, decisive evidence with regard to the nature of what Jeremiah saw in ch 1 is lacking. Probably, as Jeremiah meditated on these common objects, God caused him to see in them a mystic or prophetic significance.

COMMISSION OF THE PROPHET

1:17-19

But as for you… (1:17a): After a brief preview of the fate of Jerusalem, the divine eye again focuses on the key man for the hour. These words set Jeremiah apart from the general judgment envisioned for the nation. Promises made to Jeremiah can be claimed by all the faithful.\textsuperscript{44}

A. Words of Exhortation (1:17): Three positive commands are followed by one prohibition.

1. Positive commands (1:17a):

a. Preparation (1:17a): gird up your loins! Before beginning a journey, starting a race, or engaging in conflict, an oriental bound up his loose flowing robes so as not to be hindered in his movement.\textsuperscript{45} Girding up the loins then implies (1) readiness for action and (2) energy in action. God is saying to the prophet Prepare for a strenuous ministry. In modern idiom God might say to a preacher, Roll up your sleeves! Brueggemann\textsuperscript{46} characterizes the command as a summons to dress for combat.

\textsuperscript{41}Jeremiah’s own strict monotheism is proved by such passages as 2:27; 8:19; 10:1-16 and 16:20.
\textsuperscript{42}Hyatt, JB, 5:798f.
\textsuperscript{43}E.g., Jer 24:3; Amos 7:8; 8:2.
\textsuperscript{44}Brueggemann (CJ, 30) points out a similar but you passage addressed to the faithful Baruch in 45:5 at the conclusion of Jeremiah’s oracles pertaining to Judah. The two passages may be intended as an envelope for his message. Both passages encourage the faithful to anticipate the day when Yahweh will build and plant.
\textsuperscript{45}Cf. Gehazi on an urgent mission (2 Kgs 4:29); Elijah racing from Mount Carmel to Jezreel (1 Kgs 18:46). Jesus also advised his disciples in Lk 12:35: Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps be burning.
\textsuperscript{46}Brueggemann, CJ, 30.
b. **Action (1:17b): Stand up!** This command continues the forward movement into action. Jeremiah was to begin his prophetic ministry immediately. The king’s business is urgent and there is no time for loitering.

c. **Communication (1:17c): Speak unto them all that I have commanded you!** The primary task of the prophet was to communicate the word of God. As in v 7, the prophet is directed to preach nothing more and nothing less than what the Lord has commanded.

2. **Negative prohibition (1:17d): Do not be panicked because of them…** This command is a variation of *do not be afraid* of v 8. The verb *chatat* is used twice in succession, the first time in the *Qal* or *Niphal*, the second time in the *Hiphil*. The verb is used of physical shattering in Isa 9:3. It points to psychological paralysis, or inability to function at all. It is often used for the collapse of warriors.\(^{47}\) Because of them is lit., to their face. It was their faces that threatened Jeremiah with paralysis.

   God knew that during his ministry Jeremiah on numerous occasions would face hostile crowds, angry shouts, mocking, taunting, jeering, and insolent opponents. The message of divine judgment always stirs such reactions among godless sinners. True preachers of the word must constantly battle the temptation to be intimidated by their audience and to compromise their message. Thus the Lord commanded his prophet not to break down before his audience, or show any signs of fear, or let his fear cause him to alter the message.

3. **A warning (1:17e): lest I shatter your nerve before them.** If Jeremiah shows the least bit of fear of his enemies, they will be able to get the best of him. One moment of weakness will finish him as God’s messenger. Only fear of the Lord will save a man of God from the fear of his congregation.\(^{48}\)

B. **Words of Encouragement (1:18-19):**

1. **Metaphors of empowerment (1:18a): And as for me, behold, I have made you today a fortified city, and iron pillar, a wall of bronze against all the land…** The challenging *as for you* to Jeremiah (v 17) is balanced by the assuring *as for me* of Yahweh (v 18).\(^{49}\) God does not make demands without supplying needs. When God gives the prophet a message to deliver, he also gives him the courage to deliver it, and the strength to withstand the reaction it provokes.

   Jeremiah is fortified by divine strength. Three metaphors are used to portray the protection that Jeremiah would experience. Yahweh makes him (1) as invincible as a *fortified city* that might withstand enemy bombardment for years; (2) as indestructible as an *iron pillar* or *bolt,*\(^{50}\) i.e., a gate that could withstand the heaviest attack; and (3) as impregnable as a *wall of bronze*, the toughest metal known to the ancients. Walls of wood might be destroyed by fire, and walls of stone might ultimately be battered down; but all the weapons of ancient warfare would be ineffective against walls of bronze.\(^{51}\)

2. **Identification of opposition (1:18b): against the kings of Judah, against her princes, against her priests and against the people of the land.** Jeremiah will need the triple line of defense pictured in the first half of v 18. He will be facing a quartet of adversaries. Though all segments of the population—the kings, princes, priests and people of the land—might oppose him, yet God will give him the strength to endure. *People of the*

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\(^{47}\)Isa 8:9; 37:27; Obad 9.


\(^{50}\)The term *‘ammud* normally means column; but the word appears in post biblical Hebrew for a cylinder in any position. See Holiday, *Her*, 1:45.

\(^{51}\)Laetsch, *BCJ*, 32.
3. Promise of deliverance (1:19): They shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you (oracle of Yahweh) to deliver you. Metaphorical language gives way to literal warning and promise. Jeremiah will be famous, but he will not be popular. All the powerful figures of the nation will fight against him, but they will not prevail. God will come to his rescue. His adversaries might win the skirmishes, but they will not win the war.

Jeremiah is not promised deliverance from persecution and suffering, but from being defeated by persecution and suffering. Though he may be hated and attacked by men, Jeremiah will be loved and protected by his God. The invincible Lord will stand with him; he cannot be defeated. On this positive note the call narrative concludes.

OVERVIEW OF JEREMIAH 2-6

Chs 2-6 contain several discourses uttered at different times in the early years of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry. Some of these messages seem to be addressed to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. The material is cast in poetic form as can be seen from the verse arrangement in the NASB.

The theme that runs through chs 2-6 is that of past faithfulness and present apostasy. Several times Jeremiah amplifies the contrast between the implicit faithfulness of Israel during the early stage of national existence, and the present state of backsliding.

Only a summary of the actual words of Jeremiah has been preserved. It is impossible to tell whether this section contains two or three longer addresses, each given on a specific occasion, or a number of shorter speeches or excerpts from sermons that were gathered up by Jeremiah or Baruch at a later time. The second alternative is more probable.

Nearly all commentators are agreed that the messages in chs 2-6 should be assigned to the reign of King Josiah, A reference to that king appears in 3:6. Certain vv seem to point to the period of Josiah’s reformation that fell between the years 627 and 621 BC.

SECTION TWO
JUDAH’S MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS
Jeremiah 2:1-3:5

If ch 2 does contain Jeremiah’s first sermon (or at least excerpts from his earliest sermons), it is apparent that this young man from the very beginning did not pull any punches. The language is tough and hard-hitting. The logic is impeccable, and the conclusion is inevitable: Judah is deserving of divine judgment. This section consists of eight parts. All except the last concludes with the words oracle of Yahweh. Five of the eight begin with an imperative directed to the prophet or to the people by the prophet. The theme of this unit is Yahweh’s unreciprocated love for his people.

INEXCUSABLE APOSTASY
2:2b-3

A. Background (2:1-2a): Now the word of Yahweh came unto me, saying, (2) Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem and say, Thus Yahweh has said: The clause the word of Yahweh came unto me signals the opening of the first message (or collection of messages) in the book. Apparently Jeremiah did not have to wait long to receive the first message from the Lord that he was to deliver to his people. While still at Anathoth, instructions came to go and preach in Jerusalem the capital city. There he was to proclaim in an authoritative manner the message that God had given to him. The phrase cry out in the ears of suggests an

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52The infinitive absolute functions as an emphatic imperative.
address or a reading to a large assembly. The messenger formula *Thus Yahweh has said* appears here for the first of dozens of times in the book. In the OT this formula is used exclusively by Israel’s prophets.

Jeremiah’s message opened with a nostalgic note that no doubt gained him a favorable hearing initially. The introduction to his sermon was psychologically sound. Jeremiah painted a beautiful picture of the tender relationship that in past years had existed between God and his people.

**B. Israel’s Past Regard for God (2:2b):**

1. **Bridal figure (2:2b): I remembered for your sake the fidelity of your youth, the love of your bridal days...** The verb *remembered* is perfect and emphasizes a particular past action with present consequences. The act of remembrance is not simply inner reflection, but involves an action. God brought to mind an image of the past that influenced his present action.

   The words *for your sake* (lit., *for you*) point to a judicial scene. Judah stood guilty of disregarding the covenant with Yahweh. Severe consequences for that covenant violation were in order; but past association mitigated or postponed the judgment. The second person references in the v are feminine. God addressed his people under the image of a bride.

   Yahweh remembered the fidelity (*chesed*) that characterized the early relationship with his people. Presumably the reference is to Israel’s fidelity to Yahweh. The noun *youth* (*ne’urim*) for a woman is that stage of life prior to marriage (Lv 22:13). *Love* (*’ahabhah*) has a wide range of meanings. Here the word reflects marriage imagery. *Bridal days* (*kelulot*) is parallel to *youth* and refers to the time when a woman is a bride. Following the lead of Hosea, Jeremiah has idealized the exodus from Egypt as a honeymoon period.

2. **Historical allusion (2:2c): how you walked after me in the wilderness in a land that was not sown.** During the nation’s formative years Israel had shown tender and affectionate fidelity to Yahweh. Because of bridal love Israel had *walked behind* Yahweh. In that region a woman walked behind a man with whom she was associated.

   So Israel followed the Lord from Egypt, a land of comparative plenty (Nm 11:5), into the wilderness (*a land not sown*), i.e., an area receiving insufficient rainfall for rain-fed farming. As a bride in loving trust follows her husband into a strange land, so Israel had followed God into the barren wastes of Sinai.

   Warmth, love, and purity marked Israel’s first relationship with Yahweh. The golden-calf incident (Ex 32:1-29) excepted, Israel’s failures in the wilderness came from lack of faith rather than overt infidelity. Jeremiah was not ignorant of the wilderness failings of Israel. He apparently felt that these shortcomings did not detract in the least from the loving trust displayed by Israel in venturing into the desert with God.

   For Jeremiah, and other prophets as well, the wilderness wandering was the honeymoon period of Israel’s history. In the wilderness Israel was completely dependent on God. Yahweh had no rivals for their affections. Israel was completely devoted to him.

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53Translations struggle to find an English word adequate to express the meaning of *chesed*, that outer conduct that reveals a deep inward affection. RSV normally renders *chesed* as *steadfast love*.

54So most commentators. But Holiday (Her, 1:83) thinks that *chesed* refers both to Yahweh’s gracious support of Israel as well as Israel’s fidelity to him.

55Gn 24:5; 1 Sam 25:42, a custom that reflected loyalty. In a religious context to *walk after* Yahweh (or a false god) is to worship him. See Dt 13:5; Hos 2:7; Jer 2:5; 1 Kgs 18:21.

56The figure of a bride is also used in Hos 2:19-20, Isa 54:4-5 and Ezek 16:8.

57Cf. Isa 1:26; Hos 11:1, 3, 4; Ezek 16:6-14.
**C. God’s Past Regard for Israel (2:3):** God reciprocated the loving care of Israel in three ways. The marriage image of v 2 now becomes the metaphor of the harvest offering.

1. **Divine possession (2:3a):** *Israel was Yahweh’s holy portion…* The Lord regarded Israel as his holy portion (*qôdeš*). The noun refers to what is within Yahweh’s sphere. Israel was like a consecrated gift to Yahweh to be used exclusively in his service. According to Isaiah, God was the holy one of Israel; according to Jeremiah, Israel was the holy one of God. Israel was set apart as sacred to God, because she was the first nation to worship the true God (cf. Ex 19:5-6).

2. **Divine preparation (2:3b):** *the first fruits of his increase;* Israel belonged to God just as did the *first fruits* (*rē’sîth*) of the harvest. The term refers to whatever is the first of the yield, whether of grain, wine, oil, or fruits. The use of the term first fruits in reference to Israel implies that God expected a later harvest among the nations of the world. With the spread of the gospel, such has been the case.

3. **Divine protection (2:3c):** *all who devour him shall be held guilty, calamity comes against them (oracle of Yahweh).* Foreigners were forbidden to eat of consecrated things; by breaking this law they became guilty of a trespass. Since Israel was consecrated to God, that nation could not be harmed with impunity. Though elsewhere Jeremiah regards the nations as agents used of God to punish Judah, here he lays down the general principle that any that attacked God’s people will be punished. *Devour* (*‘āchal*) is metaphorical for military conquest (Nm 24:8). *Held guilty* (*‘āšam*) means to make oneself culpable, punishable. The verb *comes* is imperfect suggesting that calamities against Israel’s enemies is a regular feature of past history.

**Inexplicable Apostasy**

2:4-8

**A. Introduction (2:4):** *Hear the word of Yahweh, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel.* These words are a characteristic introduction to a prophetic oracle. The formula occurs at least twenty-three times in Jeremiah with slight variation. Jeremiah called upon all the families of the house of Israel to hear his message. He apparently regarded Judah as the representative of the entire covenant nation. It may be that the prophet is also addressing the exiles of the northern kingdom, as well as some Israelite families who were still left in Samaria.

**B. A Question the Backslider will not Answer (2:5):** *This is what Yahweh has said: What fault did your fathers find in me that they went far from me and have walked after vain things, and have themselves become vain?* The fathers are the forebears of the audience. They are without justification for the apostasy. There is no reason or fault on God’s part that can account for the infidelity of the nation. Yet they went far from Yahweh. This is defined as having walked after (i.e., worshiped) vain things (lit., a breath, a vapor). The hebel is the same regularly translated in Ecclesiastes vanity. It refers to vapor or unreality, an appearance that has no real substance. With all of its pomp and pageantry, idolatry in the

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58 Ex 19:5-6; Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:19.
59 Ex 23:19; Nm 18:12-13.
60 Lv 22:10, 15, 16.
61 Cf. NEB no one who devoured her went unpunished; and JB anyone who ate of this had to pay for it.
62 Near-Eastern treaties show the phrase walked after meant to serve as a vassal (EBC).
eyes of Israel’s prophets was nothingness. It was utterly futile, useless and vain. In v 2 the phrase *walked after* refers to Israel’s fidelity; it refers to Israel’s infidelity. Following after these vain deities, the men of Israel became vain. The thought that men become like the object of their worship can be traced back to Hosea. Concerning the initial apostasy of the nation, Hosea declares: *They came to Baal-peor, and consecrated themselves unto the shameful thing (i.e., the idol) and became abominable like that which they loved* (Hos 9:10). A man is no better than the god that he worships.

C. A Question the Backslider will not Ask (2:6-7): *They did not say, Where is Yahweh?* To ask this question is to seek God, to search out his teaching, to enter into fellowship with him. The backslider loses contact with the Lord, and he has no desire to restore that contact. The failure to seek the Lord is inexplicable in view of all that the Lord had done for his people. *Did not say* appears also in v 8. Brueggemann comments: “The recital of Yahweh’s story was no longer on their lips.” The content of the Israel’s unspoken testimony of faith is outlined in the vv that follow. In these vv the word *land* is prominent. *Land* was Yahweh’s special gift to Israel. To forget or defile that gift is requires Israel to forfeit it.

1. *God had freed them* (2:6a): —the one who brought us up from the land of Egypt... Egypt was the house of bondage. But the Lord had brought his people out of that bondage with a mighty hand.

2. *God had guided them* (2:6b): *who guided us in the wilderness, in a land of waste and ravine, a land of drought and deep darkness, a land that no one crossed and in which no human being dwelled.* Several phrases are added to the word *wilderness* to paint a picture of the Sinai Peninsula through which the Israelites had passed so many years before. *Waste* (*ārabāh*) refers to the depression that extends from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Arabah was a *ravine* or pit out of which it was difficult to come. The Israelites passed through this area when they came out of the wilderness.

The area through which Israel traveled It was a land of *drought, deserts, and darkness*. The word *deep darkness* (*tsalmāveth*) is a rare compound word that means lit., *shadow of death*. In the OT the word frequently connotes distress or extreme danger (cf. Ps 23:4).

The perfect verbs in the last two clauses suggest action completed before the Exodus. The region through which Yahweh guided his people had never before been crossed by such a large host.

3. *God had blessed them* (2:7): *I brought you unto a Carmel-land to eat of its fruit and its goodness. But you came and polluted my land, and my inheritance you made an abomination.* The switch to second person you emphasizes that the present generation was the recipient of God’s blessing. Out of the barren wilderness God had brought Israel into a beautiful land. A *Carmel-land* is a land planted with vines and other choice plants. Bright translates the phrase *a land like a garden*, while Freedman renders it *a land of fruitful fields*.

The land into which God brought Israel belonged to Yahweh (cf. Lv 25:23). *My inheritance* conveys the idea of land or property gained by inheritance. In spite of all that God had done for them, the Israelites were still unappreciative. They took that holy land...
that God had consecrated to his own purposes and polluted (tāmē’ Piel) or defiled it.\(^{67}\)

The Mosaic material lists the offenses that pollute the land. Abomination is used in Lv 18 in reference to sexual misconduct; it is also used of idolatry and everything offensive to Yahweh.

D. A Question the Leaders will not Ask (2:8): The entire leadership structure of Judah is included in the indictment.

1. Priests (2:8a): The priests did not say, Where is Yahweh? They that handle the law do not know me; The apostasy extended even to the spiritual leaders of the nation. The priests are those who handle torah, i.e., were skillful the law. One can know the Book but not really know the Lord of the Book! When religious leaders are not seeking Yahweh, asking about him, looking for him, then they have failed their task. To know Yahweh is to practice justice (22:16).

2. Politicians (2:8b): the shepherds transgressed against me… The shepherds\(^{68}\) are rulers of the nation. They have transgressed (rebelled) against Yahweh by not restraining apostasy.

3. Prophets (2:8c): the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after the useless ones. Many prophets began to walk after\(^{69}\) idols and prophesy by Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. The reference is to prophets like those in the court of Ahab, who actually had gone over to the cult of Baal (1 Kgs 18:19). The plural (useless ones) suggests Judah’s popular prophets were polytheists. The loyal prophets, like Jeremiah, viewed all idols as lifeless, worthless and therefore useless.

Since Jeremiah himself was both a priest and a prophet, it must particularly have grieved his heart to point out that apostasy had infected both orders. The entire nation had ceased to follow the Lord who brought them to Canaan. They were following after useless things— gods that had not done, nor could do, anything for them.

E. Divine Sentence (2:9): Therefore, again I present my case against you (oracle of Yahweh), and with your children I must contend. As a prosecutor arguing his case before a jury, Yahweh presents his case against Israel. Contend is a technical legal word that means to plead in a legal sense, or to present one’s case. Again (’od) suggests a prior occasion of divine prosecution of Israel, perhaps through the mouths of previous prophets. You probably refers to the past generation of apostates, about whom the prophet has been speaking in vv 4-8. The children were the generation to which Jeremiah was preaching. Repeated acts of rebellion through the years had called forth repeated reproach and punishment on the part of God.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE APOSTASY

2:10-12

A. Entirely Unprecedented (2:10-11):

1. Gentiles cling to their gods (2:10-11a):
   a. Challenge (2:10): For pass over to the isles of Kittim and look! To Kedar send and make serious investigation\(^{70}\)! See if there was ever the like. The prophet argues that

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\(^{67}\)The land is polluted by incest, sodomy, child sacrifice (Lv 18:19-30); murder (Nm 35:34); failure to properly dispose of a corpse (Dt 21:23).

\(^{68}\)The term shepherds in the OT generally refers to civil, not spiritual, leaders. See Jer 3:15; 10:21; 22:22; 25:34; Zech 10:3; 11:5, 8, 16; Isa 44:28.

\(^{69}\)This portion of the oracle contains the phrase walk after at its beginning (v 2), middle (v 5) and end (v 8).

\(^{70}\)Hithpolel of root bin. Cf. 1 Kgs 3:21.
the apostasy of Judah is unprecedented. He challenges those who are witnesses to the divine prosecution to go westward to Kittim and eastward to Kedar to see if they could uncover another example of a nation that had changed deities. Kittim refers to the isles of the Mediterranean,\(^{71}\) and perhaps also the coasts of Italy and Greece (cf. Gn 10:4). Kedar refers to Arabia in general.\(^ {72}\) The two peoples represent the extremes of west and east.

b. Question (2:11a): Has a nation exchanged\(^ {73}\) gods (and they are non-gods)?
Though Kittim and Kedar were both renowned traders, they certainly would never exchange their gods for those of their trading partners. A pagan nation will not voluntarily change gods even though they have the best reason in the world to do so, viz., their gods are non-entities. The irony is this: Israel has a faithful partner, yet engages in partner swapping; the nations have unreliable partners but do not change.

2. God’s people abandon their Glory (2:11b): But my people have exchanged their Glory for the useless one. Other peoples had many gods, but Israel had but one God, Yahweh. He was their Glory. Israel has changed their Glory\(^ {74}\) for the useless one (Baal). When a nation ceases to trust in God that nation has lost its true glory.

2:12)
Be appalled, O heavens, at this! Bristle and be exceedingly amazed (oracle of Yahweh). It is characteristic of the divine lawsuit that God or the prophet calls upon the heavens to bear testimony in the case.\(^ {75}\) Thus in v 12 the prophet calls upon the heavens to be appalled (be desolate like some unpopulated area), to bristle (lit., make your hair stand on end) and be exceedingly amazed (lit., become stiff with horror) over the sin of Judah. The heavens had looked down upon the original prophetic admonition and warning to Israel (Dt 32:1). Now they look down upon the willful and reckless transgression of the divine will. Nature that functions in perfect obedience to the will of the Creator is, as it were, horrified at the thought of God’s highest creatures rebelling against his will.

B. Utterly Astonishing

INDEFENSIBLE APOSTASY

2:13-19

A. Plainly Deliberate (2:13a): For two evils my people have done: Two specific charges are leveled against the people of God in v 13. They have forsaken the Lord, a fountain of living water,\(^ {76}\) in order to hew out for themselves cisterns.

1. Forsaking the Fountain (2:13b): me they have forsaken, a fountain of living water…
   God is compared to an ever-flowing spring of refreshing water. Who in their right mind would prefer an unwholesome and inadequate water supply to the sweet and wholesome water of a bubbling fountain? Why do men prefer man-made systems of salvation to the overflowing, ever-fresh and invigorating fountain of divine grace? God satisfies the needs of the whole man both for time and eternity. One who truly drinks at this fountain shall never thirst again (Jn 4:13).

2. Constructing cisterns (2:13c): to hew for themselves cisterns, cracked cisterns that cannot contain water. A cistern in antiquity had three fundamental deficiencies: (1) the

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\(^{71}\) Cf. Nm 24:24; Dan 11:30. Specifically Kittim is Cyprus.

\(^{72}\) The name of one of the sons of Ishmael was Kedar (Gn 25:13). Kedar was a major player in international trade in this period (Ezek 27:21).

\(^{73}\) Hiphil of mur means exchange/barter.

\(^{74}\) The use of Glory for God occurs in Ps 106:20, Ps 3:3 and Hos 4:7. A similar title for God is the Pride of Israel (Amos 8:7; Hos 5:5).

\(^{75}\) E.g., Mic 6:1f.; Isa 1:2.

\(^{76}\) Jeremiah uses the figure again in 17:13. Many years earlier David had said of the Lord: With you is the fountain of life (Ps 36:9).
best cisterns in Palestine, even those cut in solid rock, were prone to crack, thus causing the precious water to be lost. (2) Even if by constant care the cistern was made to hold, yet the water collected from clay roofs had the color of weak soapsuds, tasted like dirt. (3) A cistern at its best is limited in the amount of water it can hold. In the hour of greatest need, during the long dry spells, it fails to supply the life-giving water.

B. Ultimately Disastrous (2:14-17): In this unit the verb forsake (repeated from v 13) is found twice (vv 17, 19). Israel has walked out on the marriage relationship described in v 2.

1. Predicament of Israel (2:14-15): In making the transition from considering the condition of apostasy to considering the consequences of apostasy, Jeremiah points to the example of the northern kingdom of Israel.
   a. Sons now slaves (2:14a): Is Israel a bondman? Is he a house-born slave? Israel had been dragged away into slavery by the Assyrians. By means of two rhetorical questions, the prophet drives home the point that Israel had not been born to be a slave to nations. Israel was in fact a member of the Lord’s family, the firstborn son of the Lord (Ex 4:22). That Israel should be captive in another land was an unnatural state of affairs. It demanded an explanation.
   b. Powerful now a prey (2:14b-15a): Why does he become booty? Against him the young lions roar, they let their voices resound... Why has Israel become booty to the nations, helpless to resist the advances of neighboring states? Human beings could become booty in war or raids (Nm 14:3). Israel’s enemies, like lions, have roared against God’s people. Lions roar over the catch when the catch is dying, or already dead (Amos 3:4). So the lions are not threatening Israel, they have already subdued Israel.

   The lion is a symbol of the Mesopotamian powers, Assyria and Babylon (49:19; Isa 5:29). The reference here may be to the Assyrian conquest of the northern tribes in 722-721 BC (2 Kgs 15:19-20, 29; 17:4-26) and to Assyria's abuse of Judah as well (Isa 10:24-32). Pharaoh also is compared to a lion (Ezek 32:2). So the Egyptians may be among the lions that intimidate, harass and ravish Judah.
   c. Delightful land now desolate (2:15b): they have made his land a desolation, his cities are laid waste without inhabitant. The lions (enemies) have made the land of Israel a desolation (lit., horror); they have laid waste the cities. The irony is that the beautiful land into which Yahweh brought his people (v 5) has become like the uninhabited wilderness through which he had led their fathers (v 6).

2. Prophecy pertaining to Judah (2:16): Also the children of Noph and Tahpanhes have cracked your head. From Israel in the north, Jeremiah turns his attention to Judah in v 16. The v is best regarded as a prediction written as though it had been fulfilled already. The translation cracked your skull is based on a slight alternation in the Hebrew vowel points that, in effect, the ASV has also followed. Noph (Memphis) is about 12.5 miles south of Cairo on the west bank of the Nile. The city had once been the capital of mighty Egypt. Tahpanhes (modern Tel Defneh) is on Lake Menzaleh in the Nile Delta. It was a fortress commanding the road to Palestine.

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77Thompson, LAB, 287.
78Heb 'ebed is a general term for slave or servant. The OT does not have separate terms for one who was owned by a master, and one who was free to terminate his relationship with his master.
79A servant born in the house of the master as opposed to a slave acquired through purchase, captivity in war, or foreclosure on debt.
80The Hebrew language has no past, present and future tenses as does English. Hebrew is concerned only with whether a certain action is complete or incomplete. In English translations predictive prophecy has often been obscured by past tense.
81Jer 44:1; 46:15.
Head (lit., crown, skull) may stand for the ruler of Judah. The prophecy is that Judah will receive a mortal blow at the hands of Egypt. The fulfillment is to be found in the defeat of Josiah at Megiddo, the deportation of Jehoahaz and the consequent subjugation of Judah (2 Kgs 23:29). Unable to learn from the fate of the northern kingdom, Judah was doomed to repeat that fate.

3. Principle in both cases (2:17): Did you not bring this upon yourself in that you forsook Yahweh your God when he was leading you in the way? Why had Israel suffered? Why was Judah yet to suffer? You have brought it upon yourself, said the prophet. From the time of the wilderness wanderings to Jeremiah’s day, they had refused to follow the leading of the Lord. At the very time Yahweh was leading them, Israel abandoned him.

C. Always Disappointing (2:18-19):

1. Political uncertainty (2:18): And now, what advantage is it to you to go to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile, or what advantage is it to you to go to Assyria to drink of the waters of the River? Having turned from the Fountain of Living Water, Judah was drinking desperately from the waters of the Nile and from the River, i.e., the Euphrates in Assyria. These broken cisterns could not provide the life-giving water the nation needed. Waters denotes security, specifically foreign military aid. In the view of Jeremiah there was no advantage whatsoever for Judah to become entangled in international politics. The historical books of the OT bear witness to the fact that Israel’s vacillation between Egypt and Assyria proved disastrous.

2. Divine chastisement (2:19):

a. What they will experience (2:19a): Your wickedness shall chastise you and your backsliding shall rebuke you. Since they had forsaken the Lord, they were doomed to chastisement and punishment at the hands of their enemies.

b. What they will learn (2:19b): Know and see that bad and bitter is your forsaking of Yahweh your God, and my fear you do not possess (oracle of the Adonay, Yahweh of host). Through the depths of their suffering they would come to realize how heinous their crime against God was. They had sowed the wind, and they were about to reap the whirlwind.

Pictures of Apostasy

2:20-22

In a series of brilliant metaphors, Jeremiah sharpens his accusation against Judah. The unit contains five quotations of apostate Judah, all of which are false. The strategy is to let Judah condemn itself out of its own mouth. Because Judah has so grossly distorted reality, Judah is doomed to destruction.

A. Ox Breaking his Yoke (2:20):

1. Metaphor (2:20a): For from of old you have broken your yoke, burst your cords, and you said, I will not serve. V 20 presents some difficult textual problems, and consequently the differences between English translations of the v are considerable. The

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82 The verb is imperfect. Some would date these vv after 609 BC and since the passage is not dated, this possibility cannot be ruled out.

83 The Euphrates River was regarded as the boundary between Syria-Palestine and Assyria. Gn 15:18 points to the fact that the River is the Euphrates.

84 Isaiah (30:2-5; 31:1) and Hosea (7:11, 16) had inveighed already against an Egyptian alliance.
Hebrew permits, and the ancient Greek and Latin versions support, the reading you have broken . . . you have burst. This is also the marginal reading in the ASV. Like a stubborn ox, Israel refused to submit to the yoke of divine restraint and the cords of ethical obligation. Israel categorically declared, I will not serve. The Greek and Syriac versions support the reading serve rather than the alternate translation transgress.

2. Application (2:20b): For upon every high hill, and under every green tree you reclined, committing harlotry. Having demanded freedom from the Lord, Israel became the slave to the passion and lust of idolatrous worship, and to foreign nations (Egypt; Babylon) that embraced idolatry. On the bare treeless heights, Israel offered sacrifices to the Baals. The groves and leafy trees provided the necessary privacy for the lewd rites of Asherah and Ashtoreth. Sacred prostitution was part of the rites of these fertility cults. For this reason Jeremiah likens the national apostasy to harlotry and adultery.

B. Vine with Strange Fruit (2:21):

1. Planting (2:21a): But as for me, I planted you a choice vine of wholly reliable stock. To produce choice grapes takes many years of patient tender care of the vines. The divine Horticulturist planted a choice seed in the soil of human history. Over the years he had trained the temperamental vine, pruned it, and had given it the tender and loving care it required.

2. Production (2:21b): How sad it is that you have become a degenerate, strange vine unto me! When the vine reached the age of productivity, it bore strange fruit of inferior quality. The vintage was not commensurate with the time and effort expended by the one who had planted the vine. It was a degenerate plant worthy only of destruction.

In this brilliant metaphor, Jeremiah surveys God’s dealings with Israel. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was the choice seed. During the years of the Patriarchal journeying, the Egyptian bondage and the wilderness wandering God lovingly had watched over the tender young plant. When the people reached Canaan, they refused to yield the fruit of service and obedience to the Lord. On the contrary, Israel rendered allegiance to other gods. How sad it is expresses the amazement of the prophet at what had become of the noble vine.

C. An Indelible Stain (2:22): But if you scrub with lye and multiply to yourself soap your iniquity has been splotched upon you before me (oracle of the Adonay Yahweh). The nation's iniquity is clearly visible to the Holy One of Israel. It is an indelible stain that cannot be removed through human effort. Has been splotched renders a Hebrew word (Niphal of ktm) that appears only here. In later Hebrew the root is connected with bloodstains. The metaphor of this v is of a murderer spattered with blood, desperately attempting to remove the stain as one scours stained clothes. Iniquity is like a bloodstain that best cleansing agents of were not able to remove. Though the outward man may be scrubbed clean, yet the ugly stain of iniquity remains upon the soul. Only God can wipe it away. What

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85. The cords were those leather straps that secured the yoke to the ox.
86. The Hebrew says God planted a Sorek vine, the choicest kind of Oriental vine. The word Sorek refers to the deep red color of the grapes that this type of vine produced.
87. The Hebrew interjection used here is one of the distinctive words in the vocabulary of lamentation as can be seen in Ezek 26: 17; Jer 48:39; 2 Sam 1:19, 26, 27. English translations have failed to capture the spirit of the word by rendering it how. The translation how sad it is better conveys the melancholy force of the word.
88. Piel of the root kbs. Normally refers to washing clothes, but is used in Ps 51:5, 9 for God’s washing away sin.
89. Lye (neter) refers to mineral deposits of sodium carbonate imported from Egypt. Soap (borit) was a derivative from the ashes of a local plant. Modern soap had not yet been invented.
joy it is for the Christian to know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin (1 Jn 1:7).

More Pictures of Apostasy
2:23-30

The denials continue. Jeremiah presents even more devastating evidence in the form of graphic pictures of Judah’s apostasy.

A. A Roving Dromedary (2:23):

1. Pathetic denials (2:23a): How sad it is that you say, I have not defiled myself; after the Baals I have not gone. Baal worshipers apparently did not regard their actions as apostasy as long as they went through the formal acts of worshiping the Lord. Perhaps they even went so far as to claim that the rites of Baal were performed in the service of God. Judah was indeed defiled, a violation of the covenant holiness envisioned in v 3.

2. Pointed accusation (2:23b): Look at your conduct in the valley! Understand what you have done! Jeremiah calls their attention to what was taking place in the Valley of Hinnom. From the days of Ahaz this valley had been used for the rites of Molech, a god who demanded human sacrifice.

3. Powerful metaphor (2:23c): A swift camel running hither and yon90! The prophet compares their conduct to that of a swift (lit., light) young camel running hither and yon. Most commentators have interpreted this figure to be that of a female camel in heat, driven by lust. Kenneth Bailey, who spent seventeen years in the Middle East, argues that this is not the point of comparison in v 23. As a matter of fact, says Bailey, the female camel does not come into heat; rather it is the male camel that experiences rut. It is true that the word camel in this v is feminine, but all references since v 16 have been feminine singular. It is not the femaleness that is being stressed in this v, but rather the youthfulness of the camel. On the basis of his personal observation Bailey writes: "The young camel is the perfect illustration for all that is ‘skittery’ and unreliable. It is ungainly in the extreme and runs off in any direction at the slightest provocation, much to the fury’ of the camel-driver.” 91

B. A Wild Donkey in Heat (2:24): A wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness, in her desire, sniffs the wind; in her occasion [of heat] who can restrain her; all who seek her will not become weary; in her month they shall find her. The prophet compares the apostasy of Israel to the vulgar actions of a female donkey in heat. In the month of mating, sires need not weary themselves in seeking out the female donkey; on the contrary she will eagerly seek them out. So Israel eagerly turns to the lewd rites of the Baals.

The impact of this metaphor becomes even more forceful when one studies it in detail. Bailey, from his own personal observation, has thrown considerable light on the phrase in her desire, (she) sniffs the wind. She sniffs the path in front of her trying to pick up the scent of a male (from his urine). When she finds it, she rubs her nose in the dust, straightens her neck and, with head high, closes her nostrils and sniffs the wind. What she really is doing is sniffing the dust that is soaked with the urine of the male donkey. With her neck stretched to the utmost she slowly draws in a long, deep breath. She then lets out an earthshaking bray and doubles her pace, racing down the road in search of the male.92

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90 Running hither and yon renders the Piel participle of the root šrk used only here. Since a related noun means sandal thong, the verb must mean something like to be interlacing; entangling; crisscrossing.


92 Ibid.
C. A Desperate Lover (2:25):
1. Ernest exhortation (2:25a): Withhold your foot from barreness and your throat from thirst. The divine Husband pleads with his adulterous wife, Israel, to cease from her wild pursuit of illicit lovers. Withhold your foot from barreness, i.e., barefootedness possibly alludes to the fatiguing practices of the Baal cult—the barefoot dances. The endless repetition of the name Baal (see 1 Kgs 18:26) would lead to parched, dry throats. In a more general sense, the admonition might be taken to be: Do not run till your sandals wear out and you faint with thirst chasing your gods.

2. Stubborn refusal (2:25b): But you say, It is no use! No! for I love strangers and after them I will continue to go. Israel rejects this earnest appeal. She cannot be turned from the paths of apostasy. The lure of false worship was too great to be resisted. It is no use, she cries. I love the strange gods, and I will continue to go after them. Yahweh’s evidence forces Israel to admit what she is doing.

D. An Embarrassed Thief (2:26-28):
1. Shame of their leaders (2:26): As the shame of a thief that is found, thus the house of Israel acted shamefully—they, their kings, their primes, their priests and their prophets—A thief caught in the act is ashamed. A thief, if apprehended in the act, had to restore what he had stolen and pay a stiff fine (Ex 22:1, 4). In addition to the shame of public exposure, he would then experience the shame of disappointment in having his anticipated gain result in a substantial loss. All segments of the Israelite population would experience the shame of embarrassment and disappointment when the folly of their ways became manifest.

2. Shame of their worship (2:27):
   a. They turn to idols (2:27a): who say to wood, You are my father, and to stone, You brought me forth! Who say is a participle, implying continuous action. They bowed down before wood (lit., the tree), a sacred pole or an idol made of wood. They piously confessed, You are my father, i.e., my guardian, my protector. Before the lifeless stone pillar (lit. the stone), they bowed and said, You brought me forth, i.e., you are my mother, my creator.
   b. They away from God (2:27b): For they turn unto me the back and not the face… In times of prosperity, the Israelites turned their back upon God to experiment with idolatry.
   c. They will turn to God again (2:27c): but in the time of their calamity they shall say, Rise up, save us! In the hour of national or personal calamity, when their idols of wood and stone proved utterly worthless, the Judeans will cry out to the living God in their desperation.

3. Shame of disappointment (2:28): But where are your gods that you have made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in the time of your calamity; surely according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah. With Elijah-like sarcasm Jeremiah taunts the idolaters: Your gods are as numerous as the cities of your land!93 Surely among the multiplicity of the gods they had made for themselves there was one deity who could aid them in the day of their calamity!

E. A Devouring Lion (2:29-30):

93The famous Ras Shamra texts indicate that the Canaanites venerated fifty gods and half as many goddesses. No doubt many, if not most, of these native gods were adopted by the Israelites during the wicked reign of Manasseh.
1. Their complaint is unreasonable (2:29a): Why do you continue to complain to me? The brazenfaced apostates actually attempted to justify themselves before God. Complain (rîb) is the same technical legal term used in v 9. It means to go to court with, to present a legal case against. The evidence against Judah is overwhelming, so why do they continue the disputation.

2. Their guilt is transparent (2:29b): All of you have transgressed against me (oracle of Yahweh). The people think that they have a legal case against God; but he replies by resuming his case against them. All of the people of Israel had transgressed against God!

3. Their obduracy is demonstrable (2:30a): In vain I have smitten your sons; they have not received correction… The Israelites cannot blame God for their failures. He had done everything in his power to keep them in the narrow paths of fidelity. As a concerned Father, he had attempted to discipline his wayward children. He had smitten them with sword, drought, famine and pestilence. But these disciplinary disasters had not brought the nation to its senses.

4. Their viciousness is unparalleled (2:30b): your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravening lion. God had raised up mighty men to call his people to repentance. Instead of heeding the message of God, the people killed the messengers. Jeremiah probably has reference here to the reign of Manasseh, when much innocent blood was shed (2 Kgs 21:16). According to Josephus, Manasseh’s persecution extended especially to the prophets. Isaiah is said to have died a martyr’s death during the reign of this tyrant.

Inconsiderate Apostasy

2:31-3:1

In the closing vv of the inaugural sermon, Jeremiah drives home his final arguments against the apostasy of the people.

A. Israel an Ungrateful Wife (2:31):

1. Introduction (2:31a): O generation, see the word of Yahweh! Rather than the usual Hear the word of the Lord, Jeremiah calls upon the people to see the word of the Lord. He wants his hearers to get a mental picture of the ingratitude of their rebellion against God.

2. Ingratitude implied (2:31b): Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness? God had not been a wilderness to his people, nor a land of thick darkness, i.e., he had not failed to provide for them. He had not been a land of darkness, lit., land of the darkness of the Lord, i.e., that deep kind of darkness such as the Lord sends in judgment upon the wicked (Ex 10:21-23). This thick darkness is symbolic of misery and uncertainty. God did not leave Israel to grope in such darkness without guidance.

3. Ingratitude expressed (2:31c): Why do my people say, We are free; we will not come again unto you? In spite of the Lord’s provision and guidance, the people of Israel declared, We are free. The word translated free means basically, to wander restlessly, to roam. It is equivalent to a declaration of independence from God. As far as the people were concerned, the estrangement from God was permanent: We will not come again unto you! God was asking his people, How can you say such terrible things? How can I be deserving of such treatment?

94The KJV has taken this word to be from an entirely different root, and has translated it we are lords.
B. Israel an Adulterous Wife (2:32-34):
1. She had forgotten she was married (2:32): Does a virgin forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. A maiden will not forget the ornaments or jewels that are part of her dowry, nor will a bride forget the girdle or sash that was a token of her married state. The ornaments and girdle would be objects in which any woman would take pride. Just so, God is the source of Israel’s glory. Yet Israel has forgotten him.

2. She had pursued lustful ways (2:33): How skillfully you set your course to seek love! Therefore even the wicked women you have taught your ways. The evidence in the case against Israel is clear. Israel was so skillful, so brazen, so experienced in the ways of the licentious and immoral love of the Baal cult that she became a teacher to the prostitute of the street.

3. She had abused those who remained faithful (2:34): Also in your skirts is the blood of the innocent poor; you did not find them in the act of breaking in; but it is because of all these things. The garments of the people were stained, as it were, with the blood of poor innocent people. No doubt the reference is to the persecutions that spring up during the wicked reign of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:16). What a paradox! Those who were most skillful in pursuing love were intolerant of those who tried to remain faithful to the laws of God.

To a large degree, the populace must have supported their king in his attacks upon the faithful. Had these folks been caught red-handed attempting to break through (lit., dig through) the mud brick sides of a house, perhaps homicide might have been justified (Ex 22:2). But this was not the case. Those who had been slain were innocent of wrongdoing. They were executed because of all those things, viz., the apostasy and zeal for the false gods.

C. Israel a Sassy Wife (2:35):
1. She brazenly denied her guilt (2:35a): But you say, I am innocent; surely his wrath has turned from me! In spite of the clear evidence against them, Israel continued to raise strong protestations of innocence of any wrongdoing (cf. v 23). Their argument was simple: We cannot be as guilty before God as the prophets say we are, because God’s wrath has turned from us. The nation had been undisturbed for so long by foreign powers that they thought they were pleasing to God, or at least not offending him. If we were sinners, God would have punished us; God has not punished us; therefore we must not be sinners.

2. She boldly argued her innocence (2:35b): Behold, I am entering into judgment with you because you have said, I have not sinned. To enter into judgment is a technical expression similar in meaning to the term contend in v 9 and complain in v 29. It means to argue one’s case. In v 29 Judah had no case. Because Judah continued to deny any guilt, Yahweh continues his case against them.

D. Israel an Unpredictable Wife (2:36-37):
1. She had made sudden shifts in foreign policy (2:36a): Why is it such a very light thing for you to change your way? Yahweh accuses Judah of changing alliances on a whim. A light thing is something one does casually, or impulsively. The political history of both Israel and Judah since the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 BC had been characterized by frequent and often disastrous shifts in foreign policy. One king yielded to Assyria; his successor secretly negotiated with Egypt. The Egyptian party seems to have held sway in Jerusalem at the time Jeremiah was preaching his first sermon. The
guiding principal among the royal advisers seems to have been that a strong Egypt to the south would mean a free and independent Judah. Jerusalem was not in danger of attack from the north so long as Egypt was a friendly ally.

2. **She would be disappointed in this policy (2:36b): Also because of Egypt you shall be ashamed as you were ashamed because of Assyria.** Jeremiah warned these political optimists that Egypt would disappoint them, just as Assyria had done many years before. The prophet probably had in mind that episode when king Ahaz urgently called upon Tiglath-pileser III to come and rescue him from an attack by neighboring kings. The king of Assyria was more than glad to comply with this request. At the same time, however, he demanded that the king of Judah render tribute to him. King Ahaz stripped the temple and his own palace to bribe Tiglath-pileser (2 Chr 28:20).

3. **She would be punished for this policy (2:37):**
   a. **Prediction (2:37a): Indeed from this place you shall go out with your hands upon your head…** Political alliances with Egypt could not deliver Jerusalem from destruction. Hosea had warned against alliance with Egypt (Hos 7:11, 12:1), and Isaiah had repeated the warning (Isa 31:1). The prophetic warning against trusting Egypt was justified more than once in the history of both Israel and Judah. The most dramatic demonstration of Egyptian ineffectiveness came during the final siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Pharaoh Hophra tried to march to the aid of Jerusalem; but the great Babylonian monarch easily defeated him (Jer 37).
   b. **Explanation (2:37b): for Yahweh has rejected your mainstays, and you shall not prosper because of them.** Mainstays are those things in which a nation puts its confidence. The day was coming when the Jews would go out from Jerusalem with their hands upon their heads. This was a gesture of shame and surrender (cf. 2 Sam 13:19). They would not prosper because of their political schemes, for God had rejected that nation in whom Israel trusted, viz., Egypt.

F. **A Beloved Wife (3:1):** After the blistering indictment of his inaugural sermon, Jeremiah calls Israel to repentance.

1. **Restoration legally impossible (3:1a): They say if man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man’s, may he return unto her again? Would not that land become greatly polluted?** Is it possible for Judah after years of spiritual harlotry to return to the Lord? According to the law of Moses, a woman who had been divorced, and who had married another, could not be reclaimed by the original husband (Dt 24:1-4). In the light of this law, was it legally possible for the Lord to take Judah back again? The answer is No!

2. **Restoration lovingly invited (3:1b): But you have committed harlotry with many partners; yet return unto me (oracle of Yahweh).** Judah’s case was much worse than that envisioned in the divorce law. In the Law of Moses, the woman who has been legally married to a second husband could not be reclaimed. But Judah had cavorted around with many partners, i.e. false gods, and therefore no longer had any legal claim on the Lord. But grace triumphs over law. In spite of the legal impossibility of reconciliation, God calls upon Judah to return to him.

**Final Picture**

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95The particle *hen* in Hebrew means *behold*; in Aramaic it introduces a hypothetical situation on which a question is based. Cf. Hag 2:12.

96The word *rēʾîm* in Song 5:16 means *lovers*, but here the word probably has the more general connotation. Love had nothing to do with Judah’s liaisons.
God has called upon his adulterous wife to be reconciled. But reconciliation seems an impossible dream. In the final picture of his first message Jeremiah paints the word picture of the brazen harlot.

A. Rampant Infidelity (3:2):
   1. Prevalence of infidelity (3:2a):
      a. In the hills (3:2a): *Lift up your eyes unto the bare heights* and look! Where have you not been sexually abused? That the guilt of Judah might clearly be established, Jeremiah calls upon the people to lift up their eyes to the high places, where their illicit religion was being practiced. One cannot find a prominent knoll in all the land that had not been defiled by the licentious rites of Baal. *Sexually abused* (r. ṣgl) is a verb that is used in the context of sexual violence. Israel is mistreated by those she takes as sexual partners.
      b. Along the roads (3:2b): *Along the ways you have sat for them as an Arabian in the desert*… Like a lonely Arab in the midst of the desert who eagerly joins himself to any passers-by, Israel had embraced every form of idolatry that had come along.
   2. Pollution of infidelity (3:2c): you have polluted a land with your harlotry and with your iniquity. Yahweh’s inheritance, the holy land, had been polluted by harlotry (idolatry) and other forms of iniquity.

B. Ineffectual Discipline (3:3):
   1. Nature of discipline (3:3a): *So the showers were withheld, and there was no latter rain*… God had punished them by withholding the showers, and especially the latter rain of early spring that was so essential to an abundant harvest.
   2. Response to discipline (3:3b): *yet the forehead of a harlot you possessed. You refused to be ashamed.* No amount of divine discipline made Israel feel the shame of her wantonness. *Forehead* is the symbol for obstinacy (Isa 48:4; Ezek 3:7). As a prostitute remains brazen and shameless when confronted with her deeds, so Israel gave no evidence of shame even when suffering the consequences of her sin.

C. Superficial Conversion (3:4-5):
   1. She had spoken flippantly (3:4): *Did you not recently call me, “My Father! You are the Husband of my youth!”* Recently lit., from now, i.e., from the time when the drought began. Instead of calling the idols of wood and stone my father, in their desperation they turned to Yahweh. He was the Father (founder) of the Israelite nation. Judah acknowledged Yahweh husband (*’allūph*) since the days of national youth. The term is nowhere else used as a designation for God. Both terms—Father, Husband—connote intimacy. While Yahweh’s wayward daughter/wife cavorted with many

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97 The meaning of the word translated *bare heights* (*šephāyim*) is debated. It occurs six times in Jeremiah, three times elsewhere. Some have opted for the meaning *caravan-tracks.*
98 *Dt 28:30; Isa 13:16; Zech 14:2.* The word traditionally has been regarded as obscene. In public reading of the text the word connoting simply sexual intercourse (r. ṣkb) is substituted.
99 It is possible that the phrase *forehead of a harlot* refers to so distinctive band that prostitutes wore about their foreheads such as is document in Babylonia.
100 *Ashamed* (r. ḫlm) is used of profound inner humiliation and of the outer manifestation of that emotion. It is used of a state that can continue for seven days (Nm 12:14) and of the reaction of David’s envos when their beards were shaven and their skirts cut off by the king of Ammon (2 Sam 10:5). The term goes beyond mere blushing or momentary embarrassment.
101 The translation *husband* is justified on the basis of Prov 2:17. The word can also mean *intimate friend* and even *guide* as in the ASV and KJV.
partners, the old harlot expressed her claim on Yahweh by the use of these overly familiar relational titles.

2. **She had spoken presumptuously (3:5a):** *Will he keep his anger forever? Will he keep it always?* Judah regards Yahweh as an overindulgent Father who gives warnings but never administers discipline, and a hen-pecked Husband who will take whatever abuse his renegade wife may heap upon him. To *keep anger* is to keep a record of sins, to hold a grudge. Judah counts on Yahweh’s grace, that he will not keep a record of her wrongs.

3. **She had spoken hypocritically (3:5b):** *Behold, you have spoken, but you have done evil things; and you have succeeded.* Behold introduces a jarring contrast. Judah’s words and works did not match up. Judah had spoken that superficially indicated faith and commitment, but in reality were sheer hypocrisy. Even while the Judeans were ostensively turning to Yahweh they continued to do evil things. Thus far they had been successful in religious syncretism. Yahweh desires reconciliation with his people; but the reconciliation must be on his terms, not theirs.

### SECTION THREE

**ISRAEL CALLED TO REPENT**

**Jeremiah 3:6-4:2**

*And in the days of Josiah the king, Yahweh said unto me: Though it is not entirely clear, this passage probably dates after the reformation of the good King Josiah in 627 BC.* In the vv that follow Jeremiah relates the sad tale of two sister kingdoms. The focus in this second message is on Israel, the former northern kingdom. The message is organized into five units that are identified by *oracle of Yahweh.*

**Need for Repentance**

3:6b-10

A. **Illustration of Israel (3:6b-8a):** *Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done?* The need for repentance in Judah was made manifest by what had happened in the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel was backsliding personified.

1. **She committed spiritual adultery (3:6b):** *She continuously goes upon every high mountain and under every green tree; and you commit harlotry there.* Throughout her history, Israel recklessly had pursued the false gods upon every hill where they would feel closer to the deities, and under every green tree. The trees furnished welcome shade for the practice of their lustful desires.

   The last clause of v 6 is actually in the second person, though this has been obscured in the standard English translations: *and you commit harlotry there.* This is either a parenthetical direct address to the northern tribes that were presently in exile, or else the prophet points to his hearers and declares you too have engaged in such licentious acts.

2. **Israel refused to return (3:7):** *And I said, After she has done all these things, she will return unto me; but she did not return. And the faithless one, her sister Judah, saw it.*

   Through the two hundred years of the history of the northern kingdom, God waited patiently for his foolhardy people to tire of roving from him. God is not willing that any should perish. He was hopeful, even anxious, that wayward Israel would return to him.

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102 The r. *ntr means to keep, watch.* It appears five times in the OT with the connotation *keep one’s anger, bear a grudge:* Jer 3:4, 12; Lv 19:18; Nah 1:2; Ps 103:9.

103 The word has been paraphrased *gone unchallenged* (NEB); *had your way* (NJV).
If God knows the future, did he not know Israel would refuse to repent? Jeremiah
does not bother to deal with this question. He has no interest in working out a systematic
theology. He is not concerned with questions of omniscience and foreknowledge in this
passage. Jeremiah is not attempting to be a logician but an artist. He is painting a picture
of a loving and gracious God on the one hand, and a stubborn and rebellious people on
the other. Judah saw what transpired in the north, and yet refused to profit from that
experience.

3. Israel was divorced by God (3:8a): *And I saw, when, because of the fact that
Backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I put her away, and I gave a writing of
divorce unto her...* Eventually God divorced his adulterous wife Israel by sending
her into Assyrian captivity.

B. Indictment against Judah (3:8b-11):
1. Judah learn nothing from the example of her sister (3:8b): *yet the Treacherous One,
Judah her sister, did not fear, but she went and committed harlotry.* Judah observed
what had happened to her northern sister, but she did not fear. She chose the path of
idolatry for herself.
2. Judah went deeper in harlotry (3:9): *And it came to pass that, because of the lightness
of her harlotry, she polluted the land, and she committed adultery with stones and
stocks.* Apostasy in Judah was regarded rather lightly, and consequently the land was
polluted. Judah forsook her Bridegroom, and committed adultery with gods of wood and
stone. *Committed adultery* (r. n'ph) is the same term used in the Ten Commandments
(Ex 20:14). It is used in the Piel (Intensive) stem in reference to Israel and in the Qal
stem in reference to Judah, perhaps indicating that Judah’s unfaithfulness did not reach
the extreme of Israel’s.
3. Judah acted hypocritically (3:10): *And even in all of this, her treacherous sister Judah
did not return unto me with all her heart, but insincerely (oracle of Yahweh).* The
wickedness of idolatry is only exceeded by the folly of it. Like an adulterous wife who
promises to be faithful to her husband while at the same time perpetuating liaison with
her lover, so Judah deceitfully pledged herself to the Lord. The Treacherous One had not
returned to the Lord with her whole heart. This may be Jeremiah's assessment of the
reformation of Josiah, that it was hypocritical.

First Invitation to Israel
3:11-18

*And Yahweh said unto me...* These words mark the beginning of the second unit in Jeremiah’s
second message. In this unit Jeremiah has the audacity to invite Israel, the former northern
kingdom, to return to Yahweh. He does this to make the point that no sinner’s condition is hopeless
if he will repent. By making this point he signals to the hardened sinners in Judah that they too can
repent and enjoy God’s blessings once again.

A. Justification of the Invitation (3:11): *More righteous is Backsliding Israel than
Treacherous Judah.* Jeremiah had a warm regard for the exiles of the northern kingdom.
The sins of Israel, though considerable, were less than those of Judah. God regarded Judah
as more guilty because Judah had before her the example of Israel. More light brings greater
responsibility in the sight of God.

B. Presentation of the Invitation (3:12-13):
1. Invitation to return (3:12a): Go and call these words to the north and say, Return, O Backsliding Israel (oracle of Yahweh). God still yearns for Israel’s return even after a hundred years of punishment in exile. So the prophet is instructed to cry out toward the north, i.e., Assyria, where the ten tribes had been deported (2 Kgs 17:6; 18:11). The word return in the OT carries the idea of going back to the original point of departure. This shocking directive to Jeremiah is reinforced by the strongest possible claim of direct revelation.

2. Incentives to return (3:12b): I will not frown on you, for I am faithful (oracle of Yahweh): I will not keep anger for ever. If Israel repents they will find that God is faithful, i.e., he keeps his promises. Yahweh is anxious to receive them. He will not frown (lit., let my face fall for you) upon them and continue to be angry with them if they will but repent. Again the shocking revelation that reprobate, cast-off Israel can be restored to Yahweh’s good graces is reinforced with the strongest possible claim of direct revelation.

3. Instructions about returning (3:13):
   a. Admit transgression (3:13a): Just admit your iniquity, that against Yahweh your God you have transgressed… The return to God must be accompanied by sincere acknowledgement of sin. Admit is lit., know. Confession, that always precedes forgiveness, is telling God what he already knows about us. In the present case the confession was to involve acknowledgement of transgression.
   b. Admit profligacy (3:13b): and you scattered your ways to strangers under every green tree… To come home the ex-wife must acknowledge her promiscuity. The transgression manifested itself in pursuit of idolatry. They had scattered their ways in the sense of wandering in every direction, seeking gods whose service was deemed more enjoyable and beneficial than the service of the Lord. Ways (derāchîm) means virility as in Prov 31:3.
   c. Admit disobedience (3:13c): and you did not obey my voice (oracle of Yahweh). The commandments called for recognizing only Yahweh as their God. The phrase obey the voice (of Yahweh) appears eighteen times in both Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. Realizing how controversial his invitation to the northern tribes will be in Judah, Jeremiah again reinforces his words with the strongest claim of revelation.

Second Invitation to Israel
3:14-18

A. Tone of the Appeal (3:14):
   1. Appeal as to wayward sons (3:14a): Return, O Backsliding sons (oracle of Yahweh)… The compassionate Father of Israel yearns for the wayward sons to come home, i.e., to restored fellowship with him.
   2. Appeal as to an unfaithful wife (3:14b): for I am married to you… As a loving Husband, the Lord pleads with Backsliding Israel to return. The marriage relationship to the nation Israel may have been severed (v 8); but God is still the husband of every individual Israelite. The plural you in the Hebrew refers to individuals.
   3. Appeal as to alienated exiles (3:14c): and I will take you one of a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. Not many will accept the gracious invitation to

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104 The background of this appeal may be the overtures toward reunion with those who resided in territories of the defunct Kingdom of Israel by Hezekiah (2 Chr 30:6-21) and more recently by Josiah (2 Chr 33:34).
106 The adjective appears thirty-two times in the OT, but as a description of God it appears only here and in Ps 145:17.
repent. Mass conversion was no longer a live option. God knew that most of those exiled Israelites would not return to him. But if only one from a whole city or two from a whole clan or tribe repents, the Lord will not overlook those individuals. He will bring back to Zion everyone who turns to him in sincere repentance.

God clearly is concerned with individuals. Only a few from the northern tribes would actually return to Palestine. The post-exilic records in Ezra and Nehemiah reveal that a few, but only a few, of the exiles from the northern tribes did return after the collapse of Babylon in 539 BC.

The prophecy has a higher fulfillment. Zion in prophecy frequently represents the messianic kingdom. Zion is not a geographical location, but a spiritual condition. The passage then speaks of the conversion of sinners and the incorporation of the redeemed into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Incentive of Future Blessing (3:15-18): If individuals of the ten northern tribes are brought by God into spiritual Zion, they will experience many wonderful blessings.

1. New leadership (3:15): *And I will give you shepherds according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and wisdom.* Restored Israel will be blessed with a new leadership. After evangelism must come education and conservation. God is not just concerned to win back his people, but also to preserve them in the faith. Thus he will provide for them shepherds—spiritual leaders who will be in harmony with his will and who will impart to the converts wisdom and knowledge of God. One thinks of Christ, the Good Shepherd (Jn 6:35-63), and the faithful men of God who have fed the flock through the centuries.

2. New growth (3:16a): *And it shall come to pass when you have multiplied and grown numerous in the land in those days (oracle of Yahweh)…* The second blessing is that of prosperity and growth. The rapid increase of the spiritual Israel of God is one of the characteristic traits of messianic prophecy. The Book of Acts records the thrilling fulfillment of this prediction. The number of the New Israel of God grew from 120 souls (Acts 1:15), to 3,000 souls (Acts 2:41), to 5,000 souls (Acts 4:4). And that was only the beginning! Surely God has kept his promise and blessed the New Israel numerically.

3. New covenant (3:16b): *they will no longer say, The ark of the covenant of Yahweh! It will not enter the mind; they will neither remember it nor miss it, nor shall one be made again.* In the messianic age, a new covenant will replace the cherished ark of the covenant (v 16). This gold-covered chest was vital to the religious life in OT times. It must have come as a shock to the Jews to learn that God intended for the ark to disappear in the New Israel.

The ark is represented in the Law of Moses as the throne of the Lord. It was the visible symbol of God’s presence. But worship of the new Israel would be internalized and spiritual. A symbol of God’s presence would no longer be needed, for God himself, in the person of his Son, would dwell in the midst of his people. The once for all time sacrifice on Calvary would make unnecessary and superfluous the mercy seat upon which blood was sprinkled annually for the sins of the people.

When the Jews returned from Babylon to rebuild their temple, they had no ark to place in the holy of holies. The absence of that ark was an evident token to those who were spiritually wise that the Old Covenant was ready to vanish away and make way for the New.

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107 See Gn 15:5-6; 17:2; 28:14; Jer 23:3; Ezek 36:11; Hos 1:10; 2:23.
108 A legend grew up in the intertestamental period that said that Jeremiah was told take the tabernacle, the ark and the altar of incense to Mount Nebo and seal them in a cave (2 Macc 2:1-18).
4. **A new city (3:17):**
   a. **Its name (3:17a):** In that time they shall call Jerusalem “The Throne of Yahweh”… Jeremiah envisioned a new city that would replace earthly Jerusalem. The throne of God will no longer be the ark of the covenant, but rather the holy city, the new Jerusalem. The New Covenant Jerusalem is none other than the Church.

   The Apostle Paul calls it the Jerusalem that is above, i.e., spiritual Jerusalem of which all believers are citizens (Gal 4:24-31). Jesus Christ sits on the throne of God and rules over his church (Eph 1:20-23). Ezekiel speaks of that same city when he says, *the name of the city from that day shall be, 'Yahweh is there'” (Ezek 48:35).

   b. **Its citizens (3:17b): and all nations shall be gathered unto it…** Jeremiah foresaw the day when Jerusalem would become the spiritual center of the world. All nations gather there. The gathering of Gentiles into the Church of Christ is another frequent theme in messianic prophecy (e.g., Isa 60; 62).

   c. **Its attractiveness (3:17c): to the Name of Yahweh and to Jerusalem…** What is it that attracts Gentiles to the New Covenant Jerusalem, the Church? The v seems to suggest that it is the Name of the Lord that attracts them. The name of God in the OT revealed something of the character and nature of God. The Name of God in this v is not an abstract idea, or even a personification, but a person. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world to reveal to men the character and nature of God. The Name here is virtually equivalent to the Logos or Word of Jn 1.

   d. **Its atmosphere (3:17d): and they shall not any more walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart.** Because they have experienced genuine conversion, Gentiles would no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart. This phrase occurs eight times in the book.

5. **New fellowship (3:18):** In those days the house of Judah shall walk along with the house of Israel, and they shall come together from the land of the north unto the land that I caused your fathers to inherit. A new fellowship would characterize the Israel of the future. Israel and Judah would be reunited for the first time since the great schism of 931 BC. The reunion of these two estranged sister nations is also a major theme in the messianic prophecy of the OT. The Israelites and Jews are depicted returning together from the land of the north, i.e., Assyria and Babylonia, to the land of Canaan.

   The Apostle Paul quotes a similar “reunion” passage from Hosea. He applies it to the unity of believers that exists in the church of Christ (Rom 9:25-26). Therefore, while the present passage may have had a “prefillment” in the days of the restoration from Babylon, its fulfillment came in the messianic age.

### Foundation of Repentance

3:19-20

In this short unit Jeremiah sets forth a starting point for repentance. Those who wish to get back on track with God must grasp were they stand with God.

**A. God Loves Backsliders (3:19):**

1. **Quandary God’s love creates (3:19a): But I said, How can I put you among the sons, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of the nations?** Jeremiah

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109The ark of the covenant is never called in the OT the throne of God, yet it was in fact no less than that.
110Note the language of Isa 30:27; 26:8; 59:19 where the name of God is personalized.
111Jer 2:4; Isa 11:12; Ezek 37:16ff; Hos 2:2; 1:11.
pictures Yahweh yearning for his son to show the maturity to receive the inheritance that he has wanted to give the child from the beginning. God asked\(^{112}\) rhetorically how he could treat Judah as sons qualified for possession of a pleasant land. The reference is to the kingdom of God. This pleasant land is further described as the most beautiful inheritance of the nations. The most wonderful inheritance that can befall a person is to be part of the kingdom of heaven. Yahweh desires to bequeath to his people a wonderful inheritance, just as a father bequeaths land to his sons. But alas, the son is a disappointment, and the father is broken-hearted.

2. Solution to the quandary (3:19b): Then I said, You must call me “my Father,” and you must not withdraw from me. God then answered his own question. One is entitled to the pleasant land or beautiful inheritance when he is able by virtue of the new birth to call God my Father. The image of God as father is very old in the Near East, older even than Moses.\(^{113}\) But biblical texts directly calling Yahweh father are rare, probably because of the prominence of such imagery in Canaanite theology. Withdraw from me is lit., turn back from after me. The terminology often suggests shrinking under pressure (cf. 2 Sam 11:15).

B. Backsliders Sin against Love (3:20): Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, thus you have dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel (oracle of Yahweh). From an idealistic view of the distant future, the prophet returns in v 20 to a realistic view of the present. As God looked upon the nation, all he presently saw in the whole house of Israel was unfaithfulness. Treacherously departs (r. bgd) means to betray, act faithlessly against. The betrayal may be in marriage, in solemn commitments, or in rebellion against the created order. Just as a faithless wife departs from her husband, so had the covenant nation departed from the divine Husband.

Ideal Repentance
3:21-4:2

A. Godly Sorrow (3:21): A voice is heard upon the bare heights, the weeping of the supplication of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their ways, they have forsaken Yahweh their God. The sad description of the present state of affairs ends abruptly. The prophet moves on to a graphic description of the repentance for which God yearns. Like a father listening for the faintest cry of a lost child, so God listened for some sign that the long apostasy had ended. Finally, he heard it.\(^{114}\) From the high places, where once their boisterous idolatrous festivities were conducted, now came lamentation and prayers pleading for forgiveness.

B. Divine Invitation (3:22a): Return, O backsliding sons, I will heal your backsliding. Lest they feel that their sin was too grievous and their repentance futile, the Lord immediately offered words of encouragement. He addressed them as sons and called upon them to return to him. He, the Great Physician, will heal them of their spiritual maladies. He will restore them to spiritual health, if they will but come unto him.

\(^{112}\)The ASV and a number of commentators prefer to render the first half of v 19 as an exclamation rather than a question. Either rendering is possible.

\(^{113}\)Names compounded with 'ab, father are common in Mesopotamia and the Ugaritic materials. Similarly in the OT theophoric names compounded with 'ab are common in all periods. But the father/son imagery does appear in Ex 4:22; Deut 32:6 and Isa 1:2.

\(^{114}\)Holladay (Her, 1:123) has proposed that the voice is that of the Father weeping for his children, a rendering that the Hebrew would support.
C. Sincere Response (3:22b-24):

1. Motive (3:22b): *Here we are, we have come to you because you are Yahweh our God.*

   In 2:31 the people denied being willing to come to Yahweh. Here, however, they willing respond to the gracious invitation that the Lord has just offered in the first half of the v. The recognize Yahweh for who he really is, viz., *our God.*

   The exact nature of these vv has puzzled commentators. Does this forthright confession represent the longing of the Lord? Do these vv indicate the wishful thinking on the part of the prophet? Are these words the confession of a few converted people within the nation? Is this confession predictive of a time when men would realize the folly of idolatry, and turn in true allegiance to God?

   This much is certain. The confession gives all the appearances of being sincere. The prophet probably intended these vv to be an ideal prayer of repentance—the kind of prayer that God expected and demanded of those who would truly return to him. It is, to use the words of Laetsch, “a future ideal still far removed from the present reality.”


   a. Admit being deceived (3:23a): *Truly the hills are a swindle, the tumult of the mountains;* Pagan high places were scenes of boisterous worship of the fertility gods. All manner of debauchery and immorality was practiced there in the name of religion. *Tumult* (ḥāmôn) indicates the steady noise of a crowd, the confusion that a crowd manifests, and the large numbers of people in a crowd. The word usually has negative connotations.

   b. Admit Yahweh alone is hope (3:23b): *truly in Yahweh our God is the salvation of Israel.* Salvation (tešûʿāh) is deliverance, rescue.

   c. Admit squandering resources (3:24): *But shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.* Shame (bosheth) often serves in the OT as a euphemism for the god Baal. Jeremiah uses the word to mock Baal. This god promised fertility; but for as long as these folks can remember, Baal worship had devoured the resources of the nation. *Labor* (yāgîʿa) means toil, and then the gain that comes from toil, especially agricultural produce. Their livestock, and even their children, had been offered as sacrifices to the pagan deities.


   a. Shame for personal and present sin (3:25a): *Let us lie down in our shame and let our reproach cover us…* Because of their idolatry, divine punishment had come upon them that destroyed the labor of their hands, their animals and children. Thus the foolish people had to pay double for the worship of Baal: the initial sacrifice that Baal demanded, and the subsequent punishment that the Lord exacted. The penitent sinners were so ashamed that they resolved to prostrate themselves, an expression of the deepest sorrow. Their guilt was so intense that it seems to enshroud them. Their *shame* is their bed, and they must lie in it.

   b. Shame for past and persistent sin (3:25b): *for against Yahweh our God we have sinned, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day; we have not hearkened to the voice of Yahweh our God.* What they denied in 2:35, they are able now to admit. This is the godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Cor 7:9-11). When one realizes the true nature of sin and the true nature of the God against whom he has sinned, he cannot help but feel such agonizing shame.

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115 Laetsch, *BCJ*, 64.
116 For examples where *bosheth* is substituted for Baal, see Jer 11:13; Hos 9:10; 2 Sam 11:21; Judg 6:32; 2 Sam 2:8 and 1 Chron 8:33.
A. **Change of Life** (4:1-2a): A genuine return to the Lord would involve three distinct actions on the part of the nation.

1. **Return to Yahweh (4:1a):** *If you turn, O Israel (oracle of Yahweh), unto me turn…* Israel was capable of turning from God to evil, or from evil to God. If she was to reap the rewards of repentance, Israel must make sure that she turned unto the Lord. The pronoun *me* is in an emphatic position. Israel had turned to other gods and to other nations. She was constantly turning in one direction or the other. Now she must make sure she returns to *me*.

2. **Removal of what offends God (4:1b):** *and if you will remove your filth from before me, and never waver…* A changed life requires removal of all their filth (*šiqqûtsîm*), i.e., their idols and pagan worship, from before the face of Yahweh. From that point on they must *never waver*, i.e., run to and from other gods, but rather remain steadfastly faithful to the Lord.

3. **Renewal of commitment to God (4:2a):** *and you swear, As Yahweh lives, in truth, in justice and in righteousness…* Those who repent must swear by the life of the Lord. *As the Lord lives* was the common OT oath form. The men of Israel must swear to the Lord, and by the Lord. They must renew their covenant to the Lord by swearing allegiance to him.

   To swear by the Lord means to call him to witness to the truth of a statement. Lest one take this matter of swearing lightly, three qualifications are placed upon the act. The oath must be made (1) *in truth*, i.e., in sincerity; (2) *in justice*, i.e., in keeping with what is right; and (3) *in righteousness*, i.e., in accord with the commandments of the law of God (Dt 6:24-25). Therefore, one must swear truly, justly and rightly.

B. **Change of Circumstances** (4:2b): *then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him they shall glory.* Following this lengthy statement of the stipulations concerning repentance, the Lord added a beautiful promise. If Israel truly repented, then the Lord would make them a blessing to the whole world. The promise of 3:17 would be fulfilled. The heathen would come to bless and glorify the Lord, when they see the way that he will bless penitent Israel.

### SECTION FOUR
**DISASTER FROM THE NORTH**  
Jeremiah 4:3-6:30

For thus says Yahweh to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: Clearly a new message (or collection of messages) begins at this point. Following his treatment of repentance Jeremiah takes up at length the subject of divine judgment.

### Warning to Judah  
4:3b-4

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117 A related noun (*šeqets*) is used of what is ceremonially unclean (Lv 7:21), especially creeping things that were legally unclean animals (Lv 11:41).

118 The formula occurs forty-three times in the OT, nine times in Jeremiah.

A. First Call for Repentance (4:3): *Plow up your unplowed ground! Do not sow among the thorns!* From the explicit promise of reward in v 2, the prophet develops two metaphors that contain implicit promises to penitent sinners. In the first metaphor, borrowed from Hosea (10:12), the heart of the men of Judah had become like a field that had not been cleared of dense brush in order to be plowed for planting. It was no easy task to clear the land of thorns and plow that virgin soil. Superficial plowing would not do, for the roots of the weeds can only be destroyed as the ground is worked again and again. But no harvest of any consequence can be reaped from a field that has not thoroughly been prepared. So must the sinner laboriously work to root up and kill the thorns of wickedness and idolatry. The seed of the word of God does not stand a chance in a heart that harbors the roots of sin. The more thorough the plowing, however, the richer the harvest.

B. Second Call for Repentance (4:4a): *Circumcise yourselves to Yahweh. Remove the foreskins of your heart, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem...* In a new metaphor Jeremiah calls upon the men of Judah to circumcise themselves *to the Lord.* Here the prophet is taking a slap at ritualistic circumcision. All Jews were circumcised; but not all were *circumcised to the Lord.* Jeremiah is certainly not advocating that the outward act of circumcision be abandoned. God himself had commanded his people to perform this act. But the prophet is demanding that circumcision be carried out in the right spirit. Israel must not only circumcise the foreskin of their flesh, they must also circumcise their hearts (Dt 10:16). While the outward act of circumcision made a man a member of the commonwealth of Israel, it was the circumcision of the heart that made a man part of the true Israel of God. The outward act was of no consequence, if the heart was unchanged.

C. Alternative to Repentance (4:4b): *lest like a fire my wrath goes out and burns, and there be no one to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.* The earnest entreaty of the Lord closes with an ultimatum. If these men fail to live up to their circumcision, then the consuming fire of God’s *wrath* would break forth against them, and no one would be able to extinguish that fire. *Wrath* (*chēmāh*) sometimes is used of human anger, but Jeremiah uses the word twenty times in reference to divine wrath. Burning wrath is a frequent metaphor in Scripture. When Yahweh’s wrath burns, there is no escape from it.

**Pictures of Panic**

4:5-9

*Declare in Judah and publish in Jerusalem, and say:* Mentally projecting himself into the future, Jeremiah describes the frenzied activity throughout the land of Judah as the foe draws near. The dramatic quality of the passage is enhanced by the use of a series of rhetorical imperatives addressed by God to the prophet, by the prophet to the people, and by the people to one another. There are eight of these masculine plural imperatives in v 5, and three more in v 6. Several are verbs of saying or shouting.

A. People Fleeing (4:5b-6):

120The phrase can also be rendered: *be circumcised by Yahweh.*
1. **Alarm (4:5b):** *Blow the trumpet in the land; cry out boldly*¹ and say: *Gather yourselves, and let us go unto the fortified city.* Jeremiah mental hears heralds urging the people to sound the alarm throughout the land by means of trumpet (Amos 3:6; Joel 2:1) and word of mouth. They urge their countrymen to cry out as loudly² as they possibly can, in order that the scattered population might gather, i.e., rush to safety in the fortified cities of the land. Fortified cities were considered places of safety in times of war³ (v 5).

2. **Destination (4:6a):** *Set up a standard toward Zion. Take refuge.* The Judeans are urged to set up a standard, a signal flag or signpost, to guide the fleeing refugees to Zion or Jerusalem.

3. **Urgency (4:6b):** *Do not hesitate; for I am about to bring calamity from the north, and great destruction.* The fugitives must not hesitate (lit., stand around). They should not tarry in order to secure their possessions. It is an urgent hour. Yahweh is about to bring upon them calamity from the north, the Babylonian forces. This force will bring great destruction⁴ to Judah. Destruction (šebher) is used of the shattering of bones (Lv 21:19), pottery (Isa 30:14), and walls (Isa 30:13). When a city falls, all three types of shattering take place.

B. **Destroyer Approaching (4:7):**

1. **A figure (4:7a):** *A lion has gone up from its thicket, yes, a destroyer of nations has set out...* Jeremiah borrows a figure from Hosea 5:14-15 and compares Nebuchadnezzar to a lion that has gone up from its thicket. The lion, being the symbol of irresistible might and royalty, is a fitting figure for the invincible Chaldean conqueror. Destroyer (mašchît) also is used of a raider (1 Sam 13:17; 14:15). Unlike the literal lions that might attack individuals, this mighty and ruthless lion attacks and destroys whole nations. Set out (r. nš') is used elsewhere of people moving from one camping spot to another in the wilderness. But nowhere else is this word used of a wild animal.

2. **Intent (4:7b):** *it has gone out of its place to make your land a desolation.* Jeremiah’s metaphorical lion does not move against Judah by impulse, but deliberately, by plan. So certain is Jeremiah that this enemy from the north will descend on Judah that he can declare that Nebuchadnezzar has gone out of his place. His purpose is to make the whole land of Judah a desolation.

3. **Result (4:7c):** *Your cities shall fall to ruins, without inhabitant.* The destroyer will succeed in his mission. He will leave the cities in ruins. He will send the population into exile.

C. **People Weeping (4:8):**

1. **Call for lamentation (4:8a):** *Because of this, gird on sackcloth, mourn and howl...* In view of the impending disaster, Jeremiah urges the people to gird on sackcloth, a sign of extreme distress. They should howl as in lamentation over the dead.

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¹This is the traditional rendering of a difficult phrase. The expression consists of two verbs. D. Winton Thomas (JJS 3:1952, 47-52) suggests the phrase has a military connotation; he proposes for the two verbs assemble and assembly, i.e., declare a mobilization of troops.

²The Hebrew says literally, *Cry out! Fill!* Sometimes in Hebrew a verb is used to convey an adverbial idea. Jeremiah is then urging them to cry out with the fullness of their strength.

³The remnant of the Amorite forces entered into the fortified cities to escape the Israelite forces under Joshua (Josh 10:20).

⁴Great destruction (šebher gādhôl) is a favorite expression for Jeremiah (6:1; 14:17; 48:3; 50:22; 51:54). Jeremiah may have borrowed this expression from Zephaniah (Zeph 1:10).
2. **Explanation (4:8b):** *for the fierce anger of Yahweh has not turned away from us.* The destruction of the land is inevitable because the fierce anger of the Lord has not *turned away* from Judah as the people naively believed (2:35).

**D. Leaders Trembling (4:9):** Four classes of leadership will be demoralized by the forthcoming disaster.

1. **Political leaders (4:9a):** *And it shall come to pass in that day (oracle of Yahweh) that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes as well.* The heart in the OT is the center of the intellect, the will and the emotions. Hence the civil rulers who should be a tower of strength in the national emergency, will lose their reason and their courage.

2. **Religious leaders (4:9b):** *The priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall be dumbfounded.* The spiritual leaders confidently had been predicting that God would not destroy Jerusalem. In the coming day they will be utterly dumbfounded at the extent of the calamity. *Astonished* (Niphal of r. šmm) means desolate, horrified, made to shudder. In 2:12 the word is used to describe the reaction of the heavens to the conduct of the Judeans. *Dumbfounded* (r. tmh) means stunned or in a panic.

**Prayer of Complaint**

4:10

Jeremiah reacted to the vivid scenes of the future judgment that he has just faithfully related to the people.

**A. Jeremiah’s Exasperation (4:10a):** *And I said, Ah Adonay Yahweh!* Adonay means Sovereign, Master, Ruler. This expression of deep exasperation, shock, and dismay is found first on the lips of Joshua after his troops were defeated at Ai (Josh 7:7). Gideon made use of it when he realized that he had encountered the angel of Yahweh (Judg 6:22). Jeremiah used the expression three times (cf. 14:13; 32:17), and Ezekiel used it four times.  

**B. Jeremiah’s Accusation (4:10b):** *Surely you have completely deceived this people and Jerusalem…* Surely (*ākhēn*) is a conjunction implying a strong contrast in point of view. Appropriate translations might be: to the contrary; or yes, but…. The term is part of the vocabulary of argumentation.

Shocking as it may seem, Jeremiah accused God of deceiving or beguiling the nation. This is the same word (*r. nš‘*) that Eve used to describe what Serpent did to her (Gn 3:13). The Assyrian leaders used this term to mock what Hezekiah and God had done to the people of Judah (2 Kgs 18:29; 19:10). For Jeremiah to use this strong verb with its sinister associations indicates the depths of his emotion. The verb is made stronger by the accompanying infinitive absolute that can be translated completely, thoroughly. This is not the only passage where Jeremiah charged God with deceit (cf. 20:7).

**C. Jeremiah’s Citation (4:10c):** *saying, You shall have peace, while the sword reaches to the soul.* Yahweh had promised the Judeans peace (safety/security) while the sword of divine retribution was about to reach to the very soul of the nation. But what is the basis of the accusation against God? Where had God promised peace to the nation? Perhaps Jeremiah has reference to the messianic promises of 3:14-18. He is not able to reconcile those glorious

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125 Ezek 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 20:49.
126 In this context the word soul (*nepheš*) means breath or throat, a meaning attested in Ugaritic. Cf. Isa 5:14.
promises of a golden age to come with his present prophecy of the total destruction of Judah. On the other hand, Jeremiah may be alluding to the prophecies of the false prophets who had been confidently predicting peace for the land. In this case the Lord is held responsible for those predictions of peace because He did not immediately punish the men who delivered the prophecies. In other words God is said to have done what he only permitted to occur. Upon complaining about these other prophets in a later passage (14:18), Jeremiah was told that they are prophesying lies in the name of God.

Scenes of Devastation
4:11-17

In that time it shall be said to this people and to Jerusalem... When the destroyer begins to move of Judah there will be those who will understand the dimensions of the coming disaster.

A. Figure of the Wind (4:11-12): When the judgment falls upon Judah, people will use the figure of a blasting wind to describe what has befallen the land.

1. Source of the wind (4:11a): A scorching hot wind of the bare heights in the wilderness [is coming] toward the daughter of my people... The wind in view is called the sirocco. It is a dry wind off the desert that wilts the vegetation. Scorching (tsach) means dazzling, glowing, apparently a reference to the visible heat waves on a hot day (cf. Isa 18:4). For bare heights, see on 3:2. The daughter of my people is lit., my daughter people, is a title of endearment that individualizes the collective population. Of sixteen occurrences of this title in the Old Testament, fifteen are in the writings of Jeremiah.

2. Strength of the wind (4:11b-12a): not to winnow, not to cleanse; (12) a wind too strong for these things shall come for me; The foe sweeping down upon Jerusalem will not be like the gentle wind that separates the grain from the chaff. Repeating his figure for the sake of emphasis, Jeremiah declares that the coming wind of retribution will be too strong for these things, i.e., it will be a more violent wind than could serve for winnowing the grain. For me means that the devastating wind comes at Yahweh’s bidding.

3. Message of the wind (4:12b): now also I will speak judgments against them. God had spoken in times past through his prophets. Now God would speak to his people in the only language that they will understand, the language of judgment.

B. Figure of the Storm (4:13):

1. Picture painted (4:13a): Behold, like clouds he comes up, and like a whirlwind are his chariots. His horses are swifter than eagles. The hosts of God’s warriors will come up like the clouds (Ezek 38:16) that accompany a violent whirlwind (Isa 5:28; 66:15). The horses of the enemy are swifter than eagles (Hab 1:8; Dt 28:49).

2. Reaction to the picture (4:13b): Woe to us, for we are devastated. News of the approaching enemy cavalry and chariotry demoralizes the Judeans. The wail of lamentation will be taken up in the land. Devastated (r. šdd) is one of the favorite words in the vocabulary of Jeremiah. The word can be used of the killing of a single person (Judg 5:27) or of the ruin of a whole nation (cf. 4:20). This is the only time in the book when a lament of the people follows a speech by Yahweh.

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128 Ten occurrences in Jeremiah, five in Lamentations. The only non-Jeremian usage is in Isa 22:4.
129 This verb in its Qal and Pual forms appears twenty-six times out of a total of fifty in the entire OT.
C. Appeal for Repentance (4:14):

1. Imperative (4:14a): Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you might be saved. Jeremiah appeals to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse themselves from evil. Amid the crashing threats of divine judgment, it is easy to overlook these quiet and sincere appeals. Washing the hands in 2:22 was hopeless; but here there is a hopeful note. Jerusalem can be saved from coming destruction if the citizens if they will cleanse their hearts. The verb saved (r. ̀yš’) was used in 2:27-28 to mock the inability of pagan gods to rescue from danger. This is the only place in the OT where the metaphor of washing the heart is employed. Like the circumcision metaphor of 4:4, this metaphor calls for radical renovation of character, will and attitude.

2. Interrogative (4:14b): How long will you harbor in your midst wicked thoughts? Jeremiah was perplexed by the obstinacy of his countrymen. In view of the impending disaster Jeremiah asks rhetorically, How long will you harbor (lit., cause to lodge) in your midst (within you) wicked thoughts. Wicked (‘āven) describes empty, evil and destructive schemes.

D. Figure of the Watchers (4:15-18):

1. Alarm sounded (4:15-16a):
   a. Alarm for Jerusalem (4:15): For hark! A messenger from Dan, one who announces bad tidings from the hills of Ephraim! Repentance is urgent, for Jeremiah can see in prophetic vision the rapid advance of the enemy. He dramatically depicted a messenger arriving from Dan, the northern border of Palestine. Almost as quickly as the first messenger reached Jerusalem, a second runner from the hills of Ephraim ten miles from Jerusalem arrived with equally bad tidings. The enemy was rapidly advancing toward Jerusalem.

   b. Alarm for the nations (4:16a): Report it to the nations: Behold! Publish concerning Jerusalem… Even the neighboring nations were called upon to take heed to what is taking place at Jerusalem. The divine visitation there had universal significance.

2. Cause for alarm (4:16b-17):
   a. Approach of watchers (4:16b): Watchers are coming from a distant land… Watchers, i.e., the besieging army, stationed themselves around the cities of Judah.

   b. Taunts of watchers (4:16c): and they shall give forth their voice against the cities of Judah. The watchers lifted up their voices against the besieged cities in ridicule, in taunts and demands for total surrender.

   c. Siege of watchers (4:17a): Like watchmen of a field they are against her round about… The enemy erected pavilions, booths and tents about the besieged city, like unto those erected by those who guard a field (cf. Isa 1:8). The enemy has claimed possession of the land, and they are guarding their new possession. The enemy watched the city lest any within make good their escape.

3. Explanation (4:17b):
   a. Rebellion (4:17b): for she has rebelled against me (oracle of Yahweh). Invading armies had come upon Judah because she has rebelled against the Lord. The verb (r. mrh) means to be obstinate against.

   b. Self-destruction (4:18a): Your way and your deeds have done these things to you; this is your evil. Evil in v 14 referred to moral evil; the same word here refers to the forthcoming calamity, i.e., the invasion from the north. The physical calamity that Judah faced results from the moral calamity in the nation.
c. National death (4:18b): *Surely it is bitter! Surely it has touched your very heart.*
The sin of Judah was bitter indeed. It has reached to the very heart of the nation
dealing a deathblow to her.

**Disturbing Vision**

4:19-26

In the last half of ch 4, Jeremiah described the coming judgment. The passage emphasizes that
the prophet was troubled by what he saw in store for his people.

A. Jeremiah’s Agony (4:19):

1. Description of his agony (4:19a): *O my bowels, my bowels! I writhe! O walls of my heart! My heart roars within me! I cannot remain silent!* Let no one think that
Jeremiah enjoyed preaching his message of judgment. He was no sadist who took delight
in the suffering of others. Jeremiah was emotionally shaken. His heart pounded; his
bowels—considered by the ancients to be the seat of emotion—were in agony. He was
psychologically and physically shaken. He could not remain silent. He had to give vent
to his intense feelings.

2. Explanation of the agony (4:19b-20):

a. Sounds of war (4:19b): *for the sound of the trumpet you have heard, O my soul, the battle cry!* The trumpet
was used by ancient armies to coordinate unit
movements. The battle cry refers to the shouting of the combatants—officers
shaping orders, soldiers shouting slogans of self- and mutual exhortation. Within his
soul (mind), Jeremiah has heard the sounds of battle.

b. Results of war (4:20): *Destruction upon destruction is called for; the whole land is spoiled; suddenly they have spoiled my tents, in a moment my curtains.* Jeremiah
saw in his mind’s eye wave after wave of
destruction sweeping across his land. The
entire land has been spoiled by the enemy. Suddenly, in a moment, the land and all
its tents and curtains (metaphor for dwellings) fall into the hands of the enemy.

B. Jeremiah’s Impatience (4:21): *How long must I see a standard, hear the noise of a trumpet?*
The agony of the prophet reached a climax. He was rebelling against the visions of
divine judgment that he had so frequently seen. The trumpet and standard may be those of
the enemy who attacked Jerusalem, or those of the Judeans who were defending their
capital. Jeremiah hoped for some breakthrough in divine revelation, some note of hope. Yet
all he had received thus far in his ministry were revelations of death and destruction. He
asked the question, *How long?* He really meant *Why?*

C. Yahweh’s Explanation (4:22):

1. Foolishness of the people (4:22a): *For my people are foolish, they know not me; they are stupid sons! they are senseless ones.* Yahweh calmly replies to the emotional
outburst of Jeremiah. God described the mental/spiritual aptitude of the Judeans in a
three-fold manner. The Judeans were (1) foolish; they no longer truly knew God in
their hearts. A foolish person is a blockhead, especially a foolish talker (Prov 10:8, 10).

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130 Holladay (*Her*, 1:162) embraces the suggestion of Kumaki that the tents and curtains refer to the temple buildings.
131 Jer 30:18; 2 Sam 20:1; 1 Kgs 8:66; 12:16; Ps 132:3.
132 Foolish (*ēwīl*) is used nineteen times in Proverbs, and twice in Job.
When it came to spiritual things, God’s people were (2) stupid sons, and they were (3) senseless.

2. Experienced in evil (4:22b): They are wise to do evil, but they do not know how to do good. These people were brilliant in planning further evil, but did not know the first thing about how to do what is right. Jeremiah wanted to know how long he would continue to receive revelations of destruction. The implication of v 22 is that these revelations would continue so long as the people continued to be foolish and disobedient.

D. Revelation Shared (4:23-26): Jeremiah regained his composure after the emotional outburst of vv 19-21. God’s explanation of the forthcoming destruction in v 22 satisfied the reluctant preacher. He now shares with his readers what he foresaw for Judah after the invasion by enemies. Four times in vv 23-26 Jeremiah declared that he saw what he described to his hearers. What he saw was not a pretty picture. Four words summarize the vision.

1. Unformed (4:23): I looked at the land, and behold, it was waste and void; and unto the heavens, but there was no light. I looked (רָעִי) responds to Jeremiah’s protest in v 21 (כַּל = must I see). Jeremiah saw a vision of a land that was waste and void (טֹהוּ wābōhû), formless and unfilled. This combination of terms is used in Gn 1:2 to describe the earth before the creative hand of God began to form it and fill it. Jeremiah saw darkness prevailing over the land (as in Gn 1:2), as the heavens refused to give forth light. The land of Judah has been reduced to a trackless land with all familiar landmarks obliterated.

2. Unstable (4:24): I looked at the mountains, and behold, they were shaking; and all the hills shook themselves. Jeremiah observed that the mountains and hills, despite their massive weight, were shaking (lit., to be light or move lightly), swaying, tossing and heaving. Shaking mountains point to instability.

3. Uninhabited (4:25): I looked, and behold, there was no man and all the birds of the heavens had fled. Not a man could Jeremiah see! Not even a bird remained in the land. When birds flee a land, the desolation is complete. Jeremiah must have been fond of birds, for he mentions them more than once.

4. Unproductive (4:26a): I looked, and behold, Carmel was a wilderness, and all his cities were pulled down… Carmel, the fruitful field, is a symbol for the land of Judah. That land had become a wilderness. All the cities of the land were in ruins. Cities point to civilization, trade, social life, protection in times of war. The second half of the v explains the wilderness metaphor.

5. Explanation of the vision (4:26b): because of the presence of Yahweh and his fierce anger. Presence is lit., face. Behind all the destruction that Jeremiah envisions is Yahweh. All had been destroyed by the wrath of the God of judgment. As Yahweh was the Creator of the land, so also is he its Destroyer.

Disturbing Message
4:27-31

For this says Yahweh: introduces another unit in message three. Jeremiah was troubled by what he heard from Yahweh as well as by the visions he had received.

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133 Senseless (sekhel) is used in 5:21 and in Ecclesiastes six times.
134 Stupid (sekhel) appears an antonym of wise (chākhām) in Ecc 2:19.
135 This term occurs another seventeen times in the OT. In Dt 32:10 it is parallel to wilderness (midbār).
A. Yahweh’s Message (4:27-28):
1. Desolation (4:27a): All the land shall become a desolation… Desolation (šömāmāh) was a favorite word of Jeremiah, appearing twelve times. Moses said that Yahweh would not drive out the Canaanites quickly lest the land should become a desolation and wild animals take it over. Jeremiah may have picked up the phrase land shall become a desolation from Isa 1:7.
2. Hope (4:27b): but I will not make a full end of it. However severe the punishment of Judah may be, God will not make a full end of it. A remnant will escape, and become the seed for a holier nation. Without such a conviction, the work of the prophet would be meaningless.
3. Lamentation (4:28a): On account of this the land shall mourn, the heavens above shall be dark… Both earth and heavens were pictured as entering into mourning. The verb dark (r. qdr) is often associated with mourning because of the clothing a mourner wears and the mood that he experiences. The figure of the earth mourning may mean that the soil will not produce its fruit.
4. Explanation (4:28b): because I have spoken, I have purposed it, and I have not relented, nor turned back from it. Jeremiah uses four words, two positive, two negative, to underscore the inevitability of the forthcoming judgment. Such mourning is appropriate because Yahweh (1) has spoken, and (2) purposed it (r. zmm). The verb expresses thinking that leads directly to action. So the desolation of Judah is a decision on Yahweh’s part. Two things Yahweh has not and will not do. He (3) has not relented (r. nchm) means to be sorry to the point of retracting what one already has declared. He has not (4) turned back, i.e., reversed course.

B. Jeremiah’s Description (4:29):
1. Flight (4:29a): From the noise of the horsemen and bowmen, all the city flees. The Hebrew term pārāšîm can mean horses, or horsemen, i.e., cavalry. Either understanding is appropriate here. The lamentation on the part of nature was justified. Screaming, galloping horses (or horsemen) and expert bowmen will sweep down upon the city. The linkage of horses (horsemen) and bowmen is explained by military procedures of that time. Assyrian chariots of this period carried two men, a driver and an archer. Assyrian cavalrymen also rode in pairs, the horseman holding the reins of both horses, leaving the Bowman free to shoot. The sound (warning?) of the approach of horsemen and archers for some unexplained reason caused inhabitants of the fortified city to flee to open country. It is every man for himself.
2. Refuge (4:29b): They go into the thickets, and go up into the rocks. Jeremiah identifies two places of refuge: thickets and rocks, i.e., the limestone caverns that abound in Palestine.
3. Desertion (4:29c): Every city is forsaken, and there is not a man dwelling in them. The forsaken cities were deathly silent. The inhabitants have taken refuge in the wilderness.

C. Judah’s Response (4:30-31):
1. Judah’s seductive efforts (4:30a):
   a. Desperate efforts (4:30a): And you who are about to be spoiled… The verb is used ten times in Jeremiah in the passive form in reference to tents (dwellings) and lands, whether Israel or Gentile. To be spoiled is a catastrophe of monumental proportions

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137Yadin, AWBL, 2:298.
(cf. 4:13; 9:19). The participle indicates that what was anticipated as part of a vision in 4:13, 20 is now about to happen.

b. Audacious efforts (4:30b): *what are you doing…* In view of the impending national disaster, Jeremiah cannot comprehend the nonchalance of his countrymen. *What are you doing* is equivalent to the modern expression, What do you think you’re doing? The question implies that Judah’s conduct is irresponsible and inappropriate in the light of what was about to happen to the nation.

c. Ludicrous efforts (4:30c): *that you clothe yourself with scarlet, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with eye shadow.* Like the wrinkled old Jezebel, who painted her face in a desperate attempt to seduce her antagonist Jehu (2 Kgs 9:30), Judah was using every device to gain the favor of the world powers. To make herself attractive a woman of that day might take three actions. First, she puts on scarlet robes. *Scarlet* (šānî) refers to a dye obtained from certain insects that attach themselves to the leaves of the kermes oak. Clothing made of such dye was considered expensively elegant. Second, she adorns herself with *gold ornaments*. Saul is credited with giving the women of Israel scarlet and gold ornaments to wear (2 Sam 1:24). These items were associated with affluence and status. Third, she applied cosmetics to her eyelids in order to make her eyes seem larger. The eyes were the focus of beauty and sexual appeal in that day. *Eye shadow* (pûkh) then as now came in more than one color.

d. Futile efforts (4:30d): In vain you primp! Your lovers despise you, they seek your life. All Judah’s primping was in vain. Judah’s political lovers actually despised her. Judah had entered into adulterous liaison with Egypt, Assyria (2:33f) and, most recently, Babylon. But history was about to prove again that Judah’s lover was her implacable foe. The foreign powers of antiquity were completely unimpressed by the seductive wiles of Zion. On *in vain*, see on 2:30. Primp (r. yph = be beautiful) for the only time in the Bible is in the Hithpael stem. It probably has the nuance, *attempt to beautify yourself*. Lovers (‘ōgbhîm) almost requires the coining of an English word to capture its connotation, something like “lusters.”

2. Judah’s belated realization (4:31):

a. Illustration (4:31a): *For a sound like a woman in labor I have heard, anguish as one who brings forth her firstborn, the sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, spreading forth her hands.* Judah is no longer an alluring prostitute; he is a helpless, exposed woman in labor. The dying daughter of Zion will experience agony akin to that experienced by a woman giving birth to her first child. She will gasp for breath and spread forth her hands in desperate appeal for help. In a woman bearing her firstborn there is fear of the unknown, unimagined pain, and helpless capitulation to an irreversible process. Yet at the same time for an Israelite woman the birth of a firstborn son was an occasion of pride and a sense of fulfillment. The metaphor implies that Judah is approaching the climatic moment of her national life. Out of that painful event something new would emerge. *Daughter of Zion* occurs three times in Jeremiah and further delineates the more frequent *daughter of my people*. See on 4:11. Spreading forth the hands is a gesture of entreaty, whether to Yahweh (Isa 1:15) or those standing nearby.

b. Quotation (4:31b): Woe is me now for my soul faints before the murderers. The language echoes that of 4:13. At last Zion realized that her “lusters” (‘ōgbhîm) were

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139 The finite form of this participle appears six times in Ezek 23 for lusting after sexual partners.
really her murderers (hōrgīm). Those from whom she sought assistance were trying to kill her.

Causes of Judgment
5:1-11

In ch 5 Jeremiah discusses the various reasons why God must judge his people. The ch could be entitled “A Nation Worthy of Destruction.”

A. Jeremiah’s Investigation (5:1):
1. Commission (5:1a): Roam through the streets of Jerusalem, look and find out for yourself! Seek in her broad places… In order to impress upon the mind of the prophet the necessity for divine judgment, the Lord instructs Jeremiah to walk to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem. He needs to make a personal observation of the moral condition of the city. Specifically he is to search in the broad places (i.e., marketplaces). These broad places were often near the gate. It was a gathering-place for the citizens.
2. Challenge (5:1b): [See] if you can find a man, or if there is one who does justly, seeking truth, that I may forgive her. Jeremiah was to search for a man, i.e., someone who was worthy to be called a man; a single man. Abraham prayed that Sodom be spared, if there were ten righteous men. But God here goes even further. If Jeremiah can find one worthy man in the city, Yahweh would withhold the execution of his wrath.

The worthy man is one who does justly. Doing justly is one of the three requirements that God set forth as the minimum expectation of his people (Mic 6:8). King Josiah was a man who did justly (Jer 22:15). If just one man like Josiah could be found the city would be spared.

The worthy man also seeks truth or faithfulness. Truth (‘emûnāh) often refers to the faithfulness of a man in performing his duties to God and his fellowmen. The prophet is looking for a man who was true to God, true to man, and true to himself.

Sometimes in the OT the word truth has a more specialized meaning. It refers to faith in the promise of God to bring a Redeemer into the world. Faith in the gospel promise sustained the OT heroes. It may well be that Jeremiah is to search for a man who possessed messianic faith.

B. Jeremiah’s Discovery (5:2-3):
1. He found shocking hypocrisy (5:2): And though they swear, As Yahweh lives, surely they swear falsely. With the zeal of Diogenes, Jeremiah searched for a real man in the streets of Jerusalem. He found many who used the name of the Lord in their oaths, but only to swear to what was untrue. To use God’s name in a solemn oath, and then lie, was tantamount to blasphemy against the holy name.
2. He found obstinate resistance (5:3):
   a. Yahweh’s desire (5:3a): O Yahweh, are not your eyes on truth? God was looking for truth, or faithfulness, or faith in the hearts of men. By roaming through the city in his search for a man, Jeremiah was illustrating the actions of God.

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140 Chr 9:22, 26, 31; 2 Chr 31:15, 18, etc.
141 Justice and faithfulness are said to be attributes of God in Dt 32:4.
143 Gn 4:1; 5:29; 49:18; 2 Sam 7:18-29; Heb 11.
144 Laetsch, BCI, 73.
b. Yahweh’s discipline (5:3b): You have smitten them, but they felt no pain; you consumed them, but they have refused to accept instruction. Not finding truth in the men of Judah, God brought disciplinary disasters upon them. The judgments of God are sometimes rehabilitative, and sometimes retributive. Here the former class of judgments is intended. God had smitten them, but they felt no pain; God had destroyed them almost completely, but they refused to accept the correction.

c. Judah’s obstinacy (5:3c): They have made their faces harder than a rock. They refused to repent. With stoic determination the Judeans endured the discipline of God, hardening their faces, and refusing to repent. Refused to repent is a phrase that appears first in Hos 11:5.

C. Jeremiah’s Excuse (5:4-5a):
1. He acknowledged the sin of the common people (5:4): And as for me, I said, Surely these are poor! They are foolish, for they do not know the way of Yahweh, the judgment of their God. Jeremiah could not believe what he saw among the common people on the streets of Jerusalem. He made three excuses for them. First, these people were poor. The hardship of their poverty had caused them to harden their hearts in unbelief. Poor (dallîm) are the opposite of the rich (Ruth 3:10), those who are powerless and insignificant (Lv 19:15). Second, they were foolish. They rushed into actions without considering the implications or consequences.145 They act impulsively and without regard to long-range consequences. Third, they acted as they did because they knew nothing of the judgment, i.e., religious law of their God. It is their lack of education that caused them foolishly to sin.

2. He still had confidence in the upper classes (5:5a): I will go up unto the great ones and speak to them, for they know the way of Yahweh, the judgment of their God. Jeremiah was confident that he would not find a real man among the down and out; but he was not ready to relinquish his search. He decided to check on the great ones, the wealthy and cultured of the nation. Use of the definite article suggests that these men were the establishment, i.e., those who shaped opinion and set the community standards. They had all the advantages of instruction in the way of the Lord. I will go suggests that these great ones or leaders lived in a different section of town. Way (derek) previously has referred to a physical road (2:18) and the false way of the people (2:23). But Yahweh too has a way, a standard of conduct, a set of principles by which one should live his life. They were literate; they could read the law of God for themselves.

D. Jeremiah’s Second Discovery (5:5b): But they likewise together [with the poor] have broken the yoke, they have burst the straps. The but presents a contrast to Jeremiah’s theorizing. Likewise together adds a second social class to the poor/foolish named earlier. Jeremiah found that the up and out were worse than the down and out. Among the elite he found nothing but lawlessness and license.

E. Judah’s Judgment (5:6): Therefore... Therefore (‘al kēn) introduces established facts. Judgment is coming. A trio of vicious animals is already on its way toward Judah.

1. Approach of beasts (5:6a): Presumably the lion, wolf and leopard are metaphorical for the calamity Judah faced. On the other hand, numerous prophecies make it clear that the land would be overrun by wild creatures after the Jews had been deported.146 The

145The verb ya’al is also used of Miriam and Aaron when they attacked the leadership of Moses (Nm 12:11).
146Ezek 14:16, 21; Lv 26:22; Dt 32:24; 2 Kgs 17:25ff.
singular words are probably to be regarded as collective singulars. Only here are these three animals brought into conjunction with one another.

a. **a lion from the forest shall smite them** (5:6b): The first beast to attack Judah is *a lion from the forest*. Lions were common in Palestine in biblical days. *Forest* (ya'ar) can refer to anything from a true forest to a thicket of scrub bushes.

b. **a wolf from the desert** (5:6c): The wolf is known for its boldness and fierceness of attack. The wolf was well known in biblical days (Jn 10:12), yet nearly every reference to wolves is in a figurative sense (Gn 49:27; Ezek 22:27). The wolf and the lamb feeding together is one of the signs of the messianic age (Isa 65:25).

c. **a leopard watches over their cities** (5:6d): The leopard is a large cat with yellow fur with black spots that form patterns. This animal was one of the most dangerous both to animals and human beings. Leopards were common in Palestine in OT times, especially in the forests of Lebanon. The large cats still survive in Israel and are protected by the government. In Hosea 13:7, the lurking, noiseless movement of the leopard symbolizes God's wrath. Isaiah illustrated the serene peace of God's kingdom as creating the seemingly impossible occurrence of a leopard lying down with the goat (Isa. 11:6). Yahweh was watching over his word (1:12); but a fierce beast was looking over Judean cities, viz., the enemy from the north.

2. **Action of the beasts** (5:6b): *Anyone who goes out from thence shall be torn...* Leaving the fortified cities will be disastrous. *Torn* (r. trp) is the usual word used to describe the action of a wild beast like a wolf (Gn 49:27) or a lion (Mic 5:7; Nah 2:13).

   Previously Jeremiah announced that the cities would be destroyed (4:5), that people would flee cities for the open places (4:29). Yet here those who leave the cities are met by wild beasts. The point is, there is no escape.

3. **Explanation** (5:6c): *because their transgressions are many, their backslidings are without number.* *Transgressions* (peše') is used here for the only time in Jeremiah. On *backslidings*, see on 2:19, 3:22.

**F. Yahweh’s Justification (5:7-9):**

1. **Spiritual adultery** (5:7a):
   a. **A question** (5:7a): *Wherefore should I forgive you?* *Wherefore* ('ê lâzôt) is lit., *on what basis?* Persistent unbelief makes divine forgiveness of Judah impossible.

   b. **An accusation** (5:7b): *Your children have forsaken me, and have sworn by no-gods; and when I fed them full, then they committed adultery...* The children of Judah have *forsaken* God. They have indicated their allegiance to idols by swearing in the name of these non-entities. In 5:2 the people swear in Yahweh’s name falsely, i.e., insincerely. When they mean an oath to be taken seriously, they employ the name of some pagan god.

      This abandonment of Yahweh displayed gross ingratitude. Yahweh, not the fertility gods, had *fed them full*; he granted to them prosperity. *Fed full* (r. šk’) is a word play on *swear* (r. šb’). But instead of gratitude, they manifested depravity. They had committed the sin of *adultery*. The prophet may be referring to literal adultery, or he may be using adultery as a metaphor for apostasy.

2. **Physical adultery** (5:7b-8): *and they flocked to the house of a harlot.* (8) They have *become well-fed, lusty stallions; each man neighs unto the wife of his neighbor.* The men of Judah flocked (lit., *assembled in troops*) to the house of the harlot, i.e., a brothel

147 Following the marginal reading in the ASV.
(v 7b). The men of Judah were utterly unashamed of their actions. They made no attempt to hide their immoral acts. The reference here may be to the obscene orgies that characterized the Canaanite cults. In any case, the immoral acts of the Baal cult could not be confined to “religious” exercises. The men of Judah roamed about like stallions, each one neighing to the wife of his neighbor. The verb *neighs* comes from a root (*tshl*) that means to make a loud and clear noise of excitement or joy.

The stallions are described with two adjectives. First, they are *well-fed*. The meaning of the Hebrew word (*m'yuzāznīm*) is obscure. Some think it means *weighty* i.e., heavy (of testicles), or *equipped* (like a war-horse). Second, the stallions were *lusty* (*maškîm*). Again the meaning is questionable.¹⁴⁸ The figure of the stallions alludes to sexual promiscuity and shameless self-assertion.¹⁴⁹

3. Theme question (5:9): On account of these things shall I not punish (oracle of Yahweh)? Shall not my soul take vengeance on a nation that is like this? The morals of a nation have sunk to rock bottom when sexual desire becomes merely an animal appetite to be satisfied in any manner and with anyone. The rhetorical questions answer the rhetorical question of v 7, Wherefore should I forgive you? The word translated *punish* (r. *pqd*) means to *deal with* or *take care of* whether in a positive or negative way. Here obviously punishment is in view. This is the same word used in Ex 20:5 where Yahweh declared that he would punish the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.

*My soul* is equivalent to *I*. Divine vengeance in Scripture is just retribution for sins that are an affront to God. A *nation* (*gôy*) seems to imply that Judah has sunk to the level of any other Gentile nation. Therefore, Judah has forfeited any considerations of derived from her past special relationship to Yahweh.

**Attack Scene**

5:10-18

A. Directives to Attackers (5:10):

1. Attack destination (5:10a): Go up against her rows and destroy… Frequently in prophetic literature the Lord, through his prophet, will exhort the enemy to get busy with the work of judgment against Israel. Judah is compared to a vineyard, or perhaps an olive orchard. The enemy is instructed to go up against the rows¹⁵⁰ or terraces¹⁵¹ of vines.

2. Attack limitations (5:10b): but do not make a full end… The enemy was not to destroy the vine completely. Through the process of their pruning, the degenerate members of the nation will be removed; the believing kernel of the nation will be left. Here again is the idea of the remnant that plays such an important role in the OT (cf. 4:27).

3. Attack purpose (5:10c): Remove her shoots, for they do not belong to Yahweh. The attackers are urged to perform a ruthless pruning operation. The degenerate and dead shoots¹⁵²—the apostate people who no longer render allegiance to the Lord—are to be removed.

¹⁴⁸ Among the suggestions: dragging (the phallus); roaming about; rising early; or Meshech, a region producing war horses.

¹⁴⁹ Brueggemann (*CJ*, 65) points out that horses are regularly associated in the OT with those who assert their own power, often in an attempt to usurp legitimate authority.

¹⁵⁰ The *ASV* and *KJV* have rendered this Hebrew word as *walls*. While this translation has the support of some of the ancient versions, the translation *rows* is equally possible and fits better the imagery of the verse.

¹⁵¹ The hill country of Judah is so broken up by little hills and wadis that terracing was the only practical way to prevent erosion. Terraces are particularly appropriate for rows of vines.

¹⁵² The rendering of the *ASV*, *branches*, is much to be preferred to that of the *KJV* battlements.
B. Explanation by Yahweh (5:11-13):

1. Judah’s lies against Yahweh (5:11): For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been thoroughly treacherous with me (oracle of Yahweh). Why must any judgment against Judah take place? Both kingdoms (Israel/Judah) have been treacherous with the Lord. The word carries the idea of violating the most sacred relationships as, for example, marriage vows (Mal 2:11).

2. Nature of the lies (5:12):
   a. Denial of God’s nature (5:12a): They have lied against Yahweh and have said, He is not, and the calamity shall not come against us. The people of Judah had lied against Yahweh. They were saying, No calamity of any kind shall befall us for his is not” (lit., not he!). Were they denying the very existence of God? This is not likely. Were they saying, God has nothing to do with either our well-being or our misfortune? In view of the prevailing religious attitudes of that day, this again seems unlikely. Were they saying, It is not he who is speaking through prophets like Jeremiah? This seems to be reading too much into the text. The people seem to be saying, God will not turn against us; he will not bring calamity upon us.
   b. Denial of God’s threat (5:12b): We shall not see sword and famine. The notion that God could not destroy Judah because of his covenant with them was deeply rooted in the popular theology of that time. Whatever it was that they were saying about God, he regarded it as a lie.

3. Judah’s ridicule of Jeremiah (5:13): And the prophets are windbags, and the word is not in them. Thus let it be done to them. Not only were the people lying against God, they were ridiculing his prophets. They regarded the prophets, who claimed to be men of the Spirit, as nothing but windbags. The word of God is not in them (lit., he who speaks is not in them). Let these prophecies of doom fall upon those who utter them, sneered the people.

C. Announcement of Judgment (5:14-18):

1. Certainty of future judgment (5:14): God will not let the slanderous words of the people go unchallenged.
   a. Response by Yahweh (5:14a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh God of Hosts: Because you have said this thing... The title Lord God of Hosts appears in v 14 for the first time in the book. This title, frequent in Isaiah, became even more popular in the period of the exile and restoration. The identity of the hosts is uncertain. Is he Lord of the hosts of angels, the hosts (armies) of Israel, or the hosts of the nations? God is Lord of all hosts; he is sovereign over all men and angels.
   b. Promise to Jeremiah (5:14b): behold, I am about to place my words in your mouth as fire... Yahweh acknowledges Jeremiah as his spokesman. He affirms that he, the Almighty, has placed his words upon the lips of the prophet. These words are an extension of the promise made to Jeremiah at the time of his call (1:9). God’s words on Jeremiah’s lips become like fire. This is equivalent to the four negative infinitives describing God’s words in 1:10. Fire is a common biblical metaphor for judgment.
   c. Threat to the people (5:14c): and this people as wood, and it shall consume them. The judgment words spoken by Jeremiah will eventually consume the people as fire.

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153 The same Hebrew word can be rendered spirit or wind.
consumes dead timber. Perhaps the thought of v 10 is extended: the vine (the people) is broken up into pieces of fuel to be consumed by the fire of God’s judgment.

2. **Nature of future judgment (5:15-16):** The threat of divine judgment, so repugnant to the people of Judah, is repeated. Five facts about Jerusalem’s attackers are listed.
   a. **A distant nation (5:15a):** Behold, I am about to bring against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel (oracle of Yahweh)... God is about to bring a distant nation against the house of Israel, i.e., the kingdom of Judah. After the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC, Judah became the sole representative of the people of Israel.
   b. **A powerful nation (5:15b):** a powerful nation... The attacking nation is powerful. The word used here is one used primarily of rivers that flow the year around. The enemies have inexhaustible resources, and therefore do not fail in the purpose that they undertake.
   c. **An ancient nation (5:15c):** an ancient nation... The attacking nation is ancient (lit., from long ago) dating back to the very dawn of history.
   d. **A foreign nation (5:15d):** a nation whose tongue you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. The attackers speak a language that the men of Judah cannot comprehend. Jeremiah seems to borrow the terminology used earlier by Isaiah to describe the Assyrians (Isa 28:11; 33:19).
   e. **A militant nation (5:16):** Their quiver is like an open grave; all of them are mighty men. The quiver of the enemy, which normally gives forth arrows, is an open grave, i.e., the expert marksmen will send massive numbers of Judeans to their graves. Every man in the enemy army is a mighty man of valor.

3. **Result of future judgment (5:17a):**
   a. **Consumption (5:17a):** They shall eat your harvest and your bread; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall devour your sheep and your cattle; they shall eat your vines and your fig tree... In 2:3 those who ate of Israel was punished, but not anymore. The armies of the enemy will sweep over the land like a plague of locusts. They will devour the crops and the cattle. The phrase, they shall eat up your sons and your daughters, is metaphorical, meaning they shall eat the food that the children normally eat. This means, of course, that the children will then die of starvation. The image of an enemy eating what belongs to the people may go back to Isa 1:7 where aliens devour your land.
   b. **Battering (5:17b):** they shall batter with the sword your fortified cities in which you are trusting. With the sword, i.e., with their weapons of war, they will batter down the walls of the cities in which the men of Judah placed their confidence. A nation that trusts in externalities must face God’s judgment. On fortified cities see on 4:5.

4. **Note of hope (5:18):** But even in those days (oracle of Yahweh), I will not make a full end of you. Yet as terrible as the coming judgment will be, the nation will not be utterly destroyed. For the third time Jeremiah hints that a remnant will survive (cf. 4:27; 5:10).

**Guilt of Judah**

5:19-31

A. **Guilty of Rebellion against God (5:19-31):**
   1. **Judah’s impudence (5:19):**
      a. **Anticipated question (5:19a):** And it shall come to pass when you shall say, For what reason did Yahweh our God do all these things to us? Once the divine calamity begins to fall upon Judah, men will inquire of the prophet as to why their nation is suffering.
b. Supplied answer (5:19b, c):

(1) Past rejection (5:19b): Then you shall say unto them, Just as you have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land... Jeremiah’s answer was to be honest and uncompromising: The Judeans had forsaken Yahweh. They had replaced him with strange gods, i.e., gods of foreign nations. Judah’s abandonment of Yahweh is the justification for the forthcoming judgment.

(2) Future exile (5:19c): so you will serve strangers in a land not your own. The divine punishment corresponds to the crime that the people have committed against God. They have chosen strange gods; they will serve strangers in another land. On at least four occasions, Nebuchadnezzar led away captives from Jerusalem—in 605, 597, 586 and 582 BC. Yahweh would not make a full end of Judah (v 18). Instead of extinction, Judah’s sentence is exile.

2. Judah’s impairment (5:20-21):

a. Commission (5:20): Declare this in the house of Jacob, and make it known in Judah, saying... In order to emphasize once again the seriousness of the national apostasy, Jeremiah was commissioned to deliver another oracle to the house of Jacob, i.e., Judah.

b. Accusation (5:21): Now hear this: O foolish people who are without understanding, who have eyes, and see not; who have ears, and do not hear. Hear now this connotes impatience. The people of Judah were foolish, without understanding (lit. without heart) as in Hos 7:11. The vocabulary is similar to 4:22. They had eyes and ears, but they did not see or hear. This same terminology is used in Ps 115:5f where it refers to idols. Perhaps by applying this familiar terminology to the people of Judah, Jeremiah is suggesting that people become like the object of their worship (cf. Ezek 12:2). These people are blind to the omnipotence of God revealed in nature. In the Hebrew me and my presence are placed in an emphatic position as if to stress how incomprehensible it is that people cannot recognize the might and majesty of the Creator.


a. Proper response to God’s greatness (5:22a): Do you not fear me (oracle of Yahweh)? Do you not writhe from before my face... All men should fear God, because this is the appointed duty of man (Ecc 12:13); but before my face or presence points to God’s fury. When confronting the wrath of the Almighty a person should writhe or tremble. This same verb is used to describe the turmoil in Jeremiah’s bowels as he contemplated judgment (4:19), and the pangs of the woman in travail (4:31).

b. Power of the Creator (5:22b): [the One] who placed the sand as a border to the sea, an eternal statute, and it shall not cross over it. As but one example of God’s handiwork, Jeremiah mentions how the Creator has placed the sand as an impassable barrier to the sea. This is an eternal statute, i.e., a law of nature. Clearly the word sand (chôl) plays off the word writhe (r. hôl) in the first line of the v. The implication is that though the ocean writhes, it respects the boundary that the Creator has placed for it. Thus the people respect Yahweh less than the mighty sea, as the next line suggests.

4. Judah’s insurrection (5:23): But this people has a revolting and rebellious heart; they have revolted and gone. While inanimate nature is submissive to the divine will, Israel had a rebellious heart. They actually had defied their God. They had gone away from his will. This is the third time in vv 21-23 that the heart has been mentioned. Clearly God’s people were no longer serving him with their whole heart.
5. **Judah’s ingratitude (5:24):**
   a. **Ungrateful for rain (5:24a):** They did not say in their heart, Let us fear now Yahweh our God, who gives us the rain in season, even showers of autumn and spring… The citizens of Judah were utterly blind to their dependence upon God for their sustenance. Say in their heart means say to oneself. To fear or reverence God is an act of the will. Men should fear God (v 22); but the Judeans never encouraged one another to do so. God had faithfully given to his people the autumn and spring rains upon which the agricultural prosperity of Palestine depends.
   b. **Ungrateful for harvest (5:24b):** who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Year in and year out, God kept the weeks of the harvest for the benefit of his people. Appointed (chuqôt) usually refers to things prescribed, statues. The same term is used for the fixed order of moon and stars (31:35) and the ordinances of heaven and earth (33:25). Use of the term here suggests that the harvest pattern is as dependable as movements of the heavenly bodies. This expression may simply mean that God granted to his people an annual harvest in late April or early May. On the other hand, God may have kept the harvest in the sense of preserving the harvest period from rain until the crops were gathered. In other words, God gave them rain when they needed it, and he restrained the rain when it would have been harmful to them. Yet, in blind ingratitude, they never thought of rendering to God the reverence due to him.

B. **Guilty of Social Injustice (5:25-29):**
   1. **Penalty for Judah’s sins (5:25):** Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good from you. The iniquities of the people of Judah have deprived them of continued divine blessing. The judgment envisioned by Jeremiah was not wholly in the future. A foretaste of that judgment was already being given in the form of disciplinary disasters designed to shake the people up and bring them to repentance (cf. Amos 4). Good sometimes is used in the context of fertility (Dt 30:9). Specifically the good may refer to the rain that brings with it a bountiful crop.
   2. **Persecution of Judah’s helpless (5:26):**
      a. **Perpetrators found (5:26a):** For wicked men are found among my people. Judgment is necessary because there are wicked men among the people of God, men who will stop at nothing to enrich themselves. Wicked men (rššā’im) in legal contexts means the guilty (Dt 25:1-2). These are not people who do bad things, but criminals. Found (r. mts’) is often used in legal contexts meaning to be discovered, caught (cf. 2:26, 34).
      b. **Innocent trapped (5:26b):** They watch, with the crouching of fowlers; they set the traps; they catch men. Watch (r. šūr) means to look around, or about; to lie in wait (Hos 13:7). Like the fowler (cf. Mic 7:2), they crouch and wait until a helpless victim is ensnared in their trap. By wicked schemes they are attempting to catch men. Traps (mašchît) is usually destroyers, raiding parties (1 Sam 13:17; 14:15). This is a military term. If the word has its usual meaning, then Jeremiah is using a mixed metaphor: (1) watching like a fowler; and (2) going to war against someone. In favor of the translation traps, however, is the immediate context that seems to envision capturing birds. Bird-catchers catch birds; but these exploiters catch men.
   3. **Proof of Judah’s guilt (5:27):** As a cage full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit. Therefore, they become great, and they become rich. As the home of the successful fowler is full of caged birds, so the homes of the wicked schemers give evidence of their
prowess. Their homes are full of deceit, i.e., objects obtained through deceit, ill-gotten gain.

   a. Their overindulgence (5:28a): They have become fat, they are sleek… The wicked men grow fat as their riches increase.
   b. Their surpassing evil (5:28b): they have surpassed the deeds of the wicked. Their wickedness grows ever more bold and reprehensible. They go beyond the deeds of the wickedest men. No crime is out of the question, if it serves to enhance their power.
   c. Their callous non-involvement (5:28c): They do not plead the case, the case of the orphan that they might prosper, and the cause of the poor they do not judge. The powerful leaders were totally inconsiderate of the rights of helpless minorities, i.e., the poor and the fatherless. Never would one of them intervene to help the less fortunate get justice in the courts.

5. Theme question (5:29): On account of these things, shall I not punish (oracle of Yahweh)? Shall not my soul take vengeance on a nation that is like this? Jeremiah repeated the rhetorical question of v 9. Acts of injustice are offences against God. He must avenge them. The intervention of God on behalf of the helpless (and judgment upon those who oppress them) is one of the major themes of prophetic literature.

C. Guilty of Embracing Delusion (5:30-31):
   1. Preferring delusion is astonishing (5:30-31a): An astonishing and horrible thing has come to pass in the land. What is commonplace among men often is shocking in the eyes of God. As the Lord evaluated the religious situation in Judah, he regarded what was taking place as astonishing (šammāh). This word is quite common in Jeremiah. See on 2:15. The situation in Judah was also horrible (šaʿrūrāh). Jeremiah uses this word but twice (cf. 23:14), both times of the behavior of false prophets.
   2. Preferring delusion was prevalent (5:31a): Not only the political rulers (v 28), but the spiritual rulers as well, were utterly corrupt. Jeremiah was both prophet and priest. Jeremiah criticized those who held both offices.
      a. Sin of prophets (5:31a): The prophets have prophesied falsehoods… The prophets were prophesying falsehoods, promising the people that God would permit no misfortune to befall them. They peddled a false security based on empty forms and rituals. They promoted a superficial religion—a religion that did not get in the way of one’s everyday life.
      b. Sin of priests (5:31b): and the priests rule at their side… The priests were at the beck and call of the prophets.
      c. Sin of the people (5:31c): and my people love it so! The people were as guilty as their religious leaders, for they encouraged them. Falsehood is generally far more pleasant to the ear than truth. The men of Judah were quite anxious to hear the assurances of peace and prosperity.
   3. Preferring delusion is ruinous (5:31b): And what shall you do at its end? What will all of these men do at the end, when they ultimately face the God of judgment and truth? The word end might refer to the death of the individual apostates, or to the end of the national existence, when Judah would stand face to face with God.

Coming Distress
6:1-8
The population of Jerusalem is likened to a female child. She is pictured under attack by ruthless foes.

A. Facing Great Calamity (6:1-2): Projecting himself mentally into the future Jeremiah describes the scene as the foe from the north sweeps toward Jerusalem. In 4:6 the people of the countryside are exhorted to flee to Jerusalem. But the capital now no longer is considered safe. The prophet can see refugees streaming southward from her gates.

1. Exhortation (6:1a):
   a. To those in Jerusalem (6:1a): Seek refuge, O children of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem... Being himself a Benjamite, Jeremiah called for his fellow tribesmen to get out of the midst of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was actually located on the border between Judah and Benjamin and hence many Benjamites made that city their home. In 4:5-6 the people were told to flee to Jerusalem; but in 4:29 and here they are to flee away from the city. There is no safety anywhere. As the calamity unfolds places initially considered safe would be found to be inadequate.
   b. To those in Tekoa (6:1b): and in Tekoa blow a trumpet! Tekoa was twelve miles south of Jerusalem. A trumpet was to be sounded to assemble the people in their flight to the wilderness of southwestern Judah. For blow a trumpet, see on 4:5.
   c. To those in Beth-Hakkerem (6:1c): At Beth-Hakkerem rise up a fire-signal! Beth-Hakkerem is thought to be a hill east of Bethlehem. There a fiery beacon was to be set up to give further guidance to fugitives. In 4:6 it was a standard or flag that was to be set up.

2. Explanation (6:1b): for calamity peers down from the north, great destruction. The flight from Jerusalem is wise and necessary because the ugly monster of calamity is peering down (r. šqp) literally means bending forward. The verb is used of a person or geographical prominence that overlooks a locale from a height (cf. 1 Sam 13:8). Calamity is virtually personified in this v. From the north indicates the direction from which the disaster was coming.

B. Facing a Ruthless Foe (6:2-5):

1. Comparison (6:2): To the pasture and the delicate place I have compared you, O daughter of Zion. The pasture and the delicate place is a delicate pasture. Delicate place (m’umāngāh) appears only here in the OT, but this participle comes from a root that suggests the meaning exquisitely cared for, pampered. For daughter of Zion, see on 4:31. Zion was the hill chosen by the Lord as his earthly abode. It was part of the city of Jerusalem.

2. Description to the invaders (6:3):
   a. Arrival (6:3a): Unto her shall come shepherds with their flocks... Unto the daughter compared to a pasture shepherds will come. These shepherds are foreign commanders who come with their flocks (armies) to the Zion pasture. No longer will the delicate lady (Zion), the bride of God and daughter of Jerusalem, receive the loving and tender treatment of the past.
   b. Camping (6:3b): they shall pitch against her tents round about... The shepherds camp round about the pasture. This suggests that the shepherds are (1) comfortable, (2) numerous, and (3) irresistible.
   c. Grazing (6:3c): they shall graze each man what is at his hand. Each “shepherd” will allow his flock to graze that part of Judah that is at his hand, i.e., had been assigned to his jurisdiction. As in Mic 5:4-5 the grazing will be with the sword. As
sheep graze a pastureland until nothing but bare soil remains, so will these shepherds and their flocks utterly devastate Judah.

3. Portrayal of the attack (6:4-5):
   a. Preparation for attack (6:4a): Sanctify against her war. The attacking forces are exhorted to sanctify war against Jerusalem. War in antiquity was a sacred undertaking. Sacrifices were frequently offered before battle (e.g., 1 Sam 7:9; 13:9) and inspirational addresses were given (e.g., Judg 7:18). The invaders are urged to undertake a holy war against the Judeans.
   b. Initial attack (6:4b): Rise up! Let us go up at noontime. Following the exhortation that he addresses to the enemy, Jeremiah takes his audience into the very camp of the enemy. The invaders encourage one another to rise up and go up, i.e., attack. The enemy is planning a surprise attack at noontime, a time when usually both sides in a conflict rested.
   c. Lull in attack (6:4c): Woe to us when the day turns for the shadows of evening are stretching out. As the shadows of evening lengthen, the enemy forces lament the fact that they have not been able to complete their work of destruction.
   d. Final assault (6:5): Rise up that we may go up by night, that we may destroy her citadels. Rather than retire to the camp for rest and refreshment the enemy commanders urge their men forward in a daring and decisive night attack (cf. Judg 7:9, 15) designed to bring them within the walls of Jerusalem. They will not wait till morning for the final assault (v 5). Citadels (‘arm’nòt) are the inner fortresses within a walled city that were the last defense of the king and his cronies. So it appears here that the invaders have breached the walls and are rallying for a final assault on the inner fortress.

C. Facing Divine Retribution (6:6-7):
   1. Exhortation to the invaders (6:6): Yahweh is the Lord of the enemy hosts. He issues the commands; they are merely instruments in his hands.
      a. Trees (6:6a): For thus says Yahweh of hosts: Cut her trees… For the messenger formula, see on 5:14. Assyrian kings boast of how they cut down the trees of the enemy. The timber was sometimes taken home, sometimes used to construct battering rams, catapults and other weapons used in the siege. God’s law forbade the cutting of trees by the Israelites when besieging an enemy city (Dt 20:19-20).
      b. Mound (6:6b): and pour out against Jerusalem a mound! Baskets of earth were poured out to form high mounds from which missiles the more easily could be hurled against the walls or into the besieged city.
      c. Explanation (6:6c): This is the city to be punished… The siege operations are divine retribution inflicted upon Jerusalem.
   2. Accusation against Judeans (6:6d-7): The indictment that justifies the invasion is summed up in six words: oppression, evil, violence, destruction, sickness, and wounds.
      a. Oppression (6:6d): everywhere there is oppression in her midst. Jerusalem is to be punished by God because oppression (‘ôšeq) exists throughout that city. The term in some contexts (e.g., Lv 5:23) refers to the seizing of goods. It is akin to extortion. In v 1 people are exhorted to flee from the midst (qerebh) of Jerusalem; here there is criminal extortion in the midst of the city. The strong exploit the weak.

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154 Others think the idea is that the enemy is so casual and confident that they can delay their attack, normally launched at dawn, until noon.
155 Some believe that the lament is that of Yahweh’s people in the face of the attack. If the enemy can attack at noon, the Judeans see their chances slipping away.
b. Illustration (6:7a): *As the well causes its water to bubble forth, so she bubbles forth her evil…* A well keeps producing water, a concern for any city during siege. Yet Jerusalem was like a well that keeps on producing evil (rāʾāh), that from which Jerusalem was told to cleanse herself in 4:14.

c. Evidence (6:7b): *violence and destruction are heard in her; before me continually are sickness and wounds.* Deeds of violence and oppression against the less fortunate were commonplace. Violence (chāmās) involves brutality that may involve violent words, or bloodshed. Destruction (šōd) involves violent theft and pillage as well as devastation. As a result of this mistreatment, people suffer physical agony. Sickness produced by deprivation, want and wounds resulting from violent deeds cause the people to cry out to God about their plight.

D. Facing the Truth (6:8):

1. Appeal (6:8a): *Be corrected, O Jerusalem…* Jeremiah earnestly appeals to Jerusalem to accept divine chastisement, to amend her ways, and to repent. The implication is Judah can still be reshaped to avert judgment.

2. Threat (6:8b): *lest my soul be removed from you; lest I make you an astonishment, a land not inhabited.* My soul is Yahweh himself. If they fail to heed this appeal, God would completely, finally, and totally remove (lit., pull out, tear away) himself from their midst. The land of Judah will become uninhabited, an astonishment to all who might look upon the desolation.

A Preacher under Distress
6:9-15

A. Discouraging Prospects (6:9):

1. Thorough gleaning (6:9a): *Thus says Yahweh of hosts: They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel…* Once again Jeremiah compares Israel to a vineyard. Gleaning points to a complete and thorough judgment. Only a remnant of once powerful Israel remained after the ten northern tribes were ravished and deported by the Assyrians. Yet now even this remnant, i.e., Judah, would undergo a severe sifting process.

2. Repeated gleaning (6:9b): *turn again your hand like a grape gatherer over the basket.* The enemy would thoroughly spoil sinful Judah as a grape gatherer who leaves nothing but leaves behind. The hand of the grape gatherer moves incessantly back and forth from the vine to the basket until the final grapes are picked. Here is a picture of the repeated calamities, deportations, and attacks that Judah experienced in the twenty years following the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. So the remnant of Israel, i.e., Judah, itself became a remnant.

B. Discouraging Obtuseness (6:10):

1. Jeremiah’s question (6:10a): *To whom may I speak and give warning that they may hear?* No one will listen to the prophet as he sounds the warning of impending judgment.

2. Jeremiah’s observation (6:10b, c):
   a. An illustration (6:10b): *Behold, their ear is uncircumcised; they are not able to pay attention.* The verb ‘rl (circumcise) was used in 4:4 in reference to the heart, the seat of the will. The ear is the seat of obedience. The ear of the people seems to be uncircumcised, i.e., covered as it were with a foreskin that prevents the prophetic
word from penetrating the mind (cf. Acts 7:51). The Judeans were unable to pay attention. Their ears were, as it were, plugged.

b. An explanation (6:10c): **Behold, the word of Yahweh has become a reproach to them; they do not delight in it.** The word of the Lord is treated with derision. Reproach (cherpāh) is the taunt that an enemy hurl's against one, and by metonymy, the object of scorn and contempt. The Judeans should be as attracted to Yahweh’s word as one is attracted to his beloved. But they have no delight in Yahweh’s word.

C. Discouraging Occupation (6:11):
1. His attitude toward it (6:11a): **But with the wrath of Yahweh am I filled...** This v contrasts Jeremiah’s attitude toward God’s word with the standoffishness of the Judeans. Yahweh’s word of the previous v is equated with the wrath of Yahweh. He is filled with the message of divine wrath; it burns within him.
2. His restraint in preaching it (6:11b): **I weary myself containing it!** Jeremiah tries very hard to hold back that word of wrath, but he only succeeds in making himself weary (cf. 20:9). Containing (r. kûl) is used in 2:13 of cisterns that cannot hold in water. Jeremiah is so filled with God’s word of wrath that he was beginning to leak. He cannot keep silent.
3. His self-exhortation (6:11c): **Pour it out upon the child in the street, and upon the gathering of young men.** Discouraged though he is, Jeremiah cannot refrain from preaching the word of judgment. Pour (r. spk) is used of pouring out bulk or liquid. In Hos 5:10 Yahweh pours out his fury like water. To whom and by whom is the imperative pour it out spoken? Some think God is talking to Jeremiah, urging him to pour out his message of doom upon the population. Others think Jeremiah is talking to God, urging him to hasten the day of judgment. The best view seems to be that Jeremiah is talking to himself. These are words of self-exhortation. He calls upon himself to announce the terrible day of God’s wrath.

D. Discouraging Scene (6:11b-12):
1. Effect upon the people (6:11b): **For a husband, along with his wife, shall be taken captive, the old man, along with the one full of days.** Whether or not the people listen, Jeremiah must sound the alarm. He must pour out his message to all segments of the population, from the very youngest to the very oldest, for all will ultimately be involved in the outpouring of divine judgment. Taken captive (r. lkd) was used in 5:26 of the capture of the poor by the rich; here the wrath of Yahweh will catch everyone.
2. Effect upon property (6:12a): **And their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields; and their wives together.** Their houses, and fields, and wives will be turned over to the invading soldiers. This triad is also found in the command against covetousness (Dt 5:21).
3. An explanation of the disaster (6:12b): **For I shall stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land (oracle of Yahweh).** The hand of the Lord, once stretched out against the enemies of Israel (Ex 3:20; Dt 7:19), is now stretched out against Judah.

1. Leaders were greedy (6:13):

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156 In 9:4 the people are weary (r. l’h) of repenting; in 15:6 Yahweh is weary of relenting.
a. Greed of the populace (6:13a): For from their least to their greatest, everyone is greedy for gain... The judgment described is appropriate to the root sin of the men of Judah, viz., covetousness. From least to greatest expresses totality, from the bottom to top of the community. Everyone in the nation, from the least to the greatest, was greedy for illicit gain. Greedy for gain is lit., cutting a cut. It means that everyone was in on a cut of the action. Graft, corruption, padded expenses, palms greased were all prominent in Judean business practices.

b. Deception of religious leaders (6:13b): from the prophet even unto the priest, everyone practices deception. Even the prophets and priests practice deception to curry favor with the populace and thereby secure their good will and their gifts. Practices deception is lit., doing a lie. The idea is that of practicing fraud.

2. Leaders were guilty of platitudes (6:14): They have healed the fracture of my people with platitudes, saying, Peace! peace! when there is no peace. For the love of filthy lucre the religious leaders offer flattering pictures of the future prospects of the nation (cf. Mic 3:5). Healed (r. rp'), with its medical connotations, suggests that the religious leaders were like quack physicians. Fracture (lit., breaking) is a metaphor for the violent break-up of the community. Platitudes ('al n'qallāh) is lit., as a trifle. For peace (šālôm), see 4:10. Repetition of the word emphasized that all was well. These soft-soaping, self-seeking clergymen completely failed to come to grips with the serious ailment of the nation. The pious platitudes of these leaders would no more cure the wound of Judah than mercurochrome could heal a skin cancer.

3. Leaders were brazen in sin (6:15a): They acted shamefully because they have committed abomination; they neither are ashamed, nor do they know how to blush. On acted shamefully, see 2:26. These leaders feel no shame; they have no conscience; they do not know how to blush. For abomination (tō'ēbhāh), see 2:7; 4:1. Committed abomination is a strong term in Hebrew. It is used of forbidden sexual relations, acts considered abhorrent and taboo (Lv 18:27; 20:13). The verb translated blush (r. klm) appeared in 3:3. The basic meaning is be humiliated.

4. Leaders were destined to fall (6:15b): Therefore they shall fall among the fallen. At the time that I punish them, they shall be thrown to the ground said Yahweh. The leaders will eventually share the fate of those they had misguided. They will fall among the fallen (hannōph/uni0259lîm). This term is used for those who have fallen in battle (Josh 8:25; Judg 8:10), deserters (2 Kgs 25:11), and those in low condition or morale (Ps 145:14). They will be thrown to the ground disrespectfully by the ruthless conqueror.

Prescription for Deliverance
6:16-18

A. Back to the Old Paths (6:16a):
1. Imperatives (6:16a-d):
   a. Stand (6:16a): Thus said Yahweh: Stand alongside the ways... Jeremiah calls upon the people to stand (r. 'md). The word has a military connotation. Thus Jeremiah calls upon Judeans to halt their headlong rush to destruction.
   b. Observe (6:16b): and observe. In the view of Jeremiah, the nation was at a crossroads. Judeans should observe the options available to them, and the consequences of choosing one course of actions over another.
   c. Ask (6:16c): Ask for the old ways where the good way is... Jeremiah urges them to select the old path of fidelity to God, and then to walk in that path. The old paths are those that previous generations have trodden to find salvation and divine blessing.
True reformers are not those who are advocating new things, but those who give due weight to old truths.

d. *Walk* (6:16d): *and walk in it...* There is but one way that has the blessing of the Lord, and that is the way of obedient faith. But people must begin to walk in that path, i.e., to live by the principles of God’s will.

2. *Incentive* (6:16e): *and you will find rest for your soul.* The person who walks the old path will find spiritual rest for his soul. He will live a life free from anxiety about the here-and-now, and the hereafter as well.

3. *Response* (6:16f): *But they said, We will not walk in it!* In spite of this tender and gracious appeal on the part of God the people of Judah persist in stubbornly refusing to yield to his will. They were defiant in their response to the prophet’s appeal. Walking in the old paths clashed with the values to which the Judeans were committed.

**B. Heed the Alarm (6:17):** In vv 17-18 the dominate thought is that of *heed.*

1. *Watchmen* (6:17a): *I have set over you watchmen.* The watchmen are faithful prophets. Prophets have been called to their position by Yahweh. They have been set over you because they have a vantage point that no others have. They have been given the ability to see the future. Like watchmen scanning the horizon for danger, so God’s watchmen would constantly be on the lookout for any danger to the continued existence of the nation of Judah.

2. *Imperative* (6:17b): *Hearken to the sound of the trumpet.* God appeals to Judeans to hearken or give heed to the alarm sounded by the prophetic watchmen. At the first appearance of danger these faithful watchmen would sound the alarm by blowing the trumpet of God’s warning word throughout the land.

3. *Response* (6:17c): *But they have said, We will not hearken!* God’s second appeal is also rejected. The hardened people declare that they will not hearken to the alarm of the watchmen.

4. *Summons* (6:18): *Therefore hear, O nations! Know, O congregation, what is in them.* In view of the double rejection of the appeal of God, sentence must be pronounced against Judah. The nations of the world are called upon to hear the pronouncement (cf. Mic 1:2; Isa 18:3). The ultimate objective of this instruction to the nation is didactic. God is about to teach a lesson to all the nations of the world by punishing his own people for their national sins. If the nations really know what is going on in Judah, they would be able to apply the lesson to themselves.

**Justification for Judgment**

6:19-21

**A. Disobedience Rebuked** (6:18-19):

1. *Summons* (6:18): b. *Announcement* (6:19a): *Hear, O earth. Behold, I am about to bring calamity unto this people, the fruit of their thoughts...* The whole earth hears the horrible sentence of judgment against Judah. The nations should note the sin and ingratitude that dwells in the heart of God’s chosen people. This punishment is the ripe fruit—the direct result—of their wicked and rebellious schemes.

2. *Explanation* (6:19b): *for they have not paid attention to my words, and as for my law, they have rejected it.* The Judeans have not paid any attention to the word of God spoken through the prophets. Furthermore, they had rejected his written law. Everywhere the

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157 For prophets as watchmen, see Hos 9:8; Ezek 3:17; 33:1-7.
Jews were scattered among the nations, they became witnesses to their own guilt and the righteousness of the divine retribution against them.

B. Hypocrisy Rebuked (6:20):
   1. Their zeal in worship (6:20a): Why should you bring incense from Sheba, and sweet cane from a distant land? Continued perfunctory observance of temple ritual will not save the people from destruction. Someone has said, “The less religion a man has in his heart, the more he puts into his buildings and ceremonies.” Whether or not that statement is universally true, the men of Judah certainly had an elaborate external religion completely divorced from personal holiness and morality. They went to much trouble and considerable expense to import the ingredients for the incense and anointing oil.

      Sheba was fifteen hundred miles south of Jerusalem in southwestern Arabia. This may well have been the nearest location from which the proper ingredients specified in the law (Ex 30:34) could be obtained. Sweet cane or calamus (Ex 30:23)—an ingredient of the holy anointing oil—was imported from a distant land, perhaps India.

      2. Their ineffectual worship (6:20b): Your burnt offerings are not pleasing, and your sacrifices do not satisfy me. There was nothing wrong with the zeal of the Judeans in obtaining rare materials for worship activities. Yet their burnt offerings and sacrifices were completely unacceptable to God. Jeremiah was not opposed to sacrifice. As a matter of fact he specifically approved of it. But Jeremiah, like all the prophets before him, regarded sacrifices without obedience as worthless. The men of Judah were prone to make up in the outer what they did not possess in the inner. God has never been satisfied with mere externalities, with ceremonialism, with formalized and fossilized ritual.

C. Judgment Announced (6:21):
   1. A stumbling block (6:21a): Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to give unto this people stumbling...

      The men of Judah thought they were keeping God happy by going through the outward motions of worship. It was a tragic theological miscalculation, one that ultimately resulted in the destruction of the nation. They might be able to sidestep or rationalize the various disciplinary disasters that God had brought upon them. But shortly God would place before them a stumbling block (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar) which they would not be able to sidestep.

      2. A stumbling (6:21b): and they shall stumble over them, [even] fathers and sons together. The neighbor and his friend shall perish. The whole nation would stumble over the divinely placed obstacle. All would fall to their ruin. Neighbor and his friend connotes people living next door to one another.

**Description of the Foe**
6:22-26

A. Zion’s Foe (6:22-23): In order to impress once again upon the minds of the people what the nation of Judah is up against, Jeremiah describes in terrifying detail the foe from the north.

   1. They came from afar (6:22): Thus said Yahweh: Behold, a people is about to come from a northern land, a great nation shall be aroused from the farthest bounds of the earth. Again, as in 4:13, the description of Judah’s enemy is introduced with behold. In contrast to the incense that came from the far south (v 20), Judah’s enemy comes from

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158 Jer 17:26; 27:21, 22; 33:10, 11, 18.
159 1 Sam 15:22; Isa 1:11; Amos 5:21-24; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8.
the far north. Heretofore in the book people has been used seventeen times, always of Israel. Use of the term for the enemy suggests that God was now working with that foreign people rather than with the Judeans. Aroused (‘ûr) elsewhere is used by Jeremiah for the whirlwind (25:32) and kings (50:41). In contrast to tiny Judah, the northern foe is a great nation. They come from the farthest bounds of the earth. In 31:8 this phrase is used of Babylon.160

2. They are well-armed (6:23a): Bow and kidôn they bear. The enemy soldiers carry both bow and spear. Ancient armies had units of bowmen and spearmen. But Jeremiah envisions an enemy that is double armed. The kidôn is mentioned nine times in the OT. Some think this weapon was a scimitar, a sword with a single-edged curved cutting blade on its outer, convex side. Others under a kidôn is a javelin—a hurled weapon to be differentiated from the close range thrusting spear of the foot-soldier. Usually made of wood or reed, some javelins had one or both of two features that aided its flight: some had a leather cord wrapped around its shaft that caused the released weapon to spin when the cord was retained in the hand, and a counterweight was sometimes fixed on the butt of the shaft.

3. They are heartless (6:23b): They are ruthless, and have no compassion. The cruelty of the Mesopotamian armies in antiquity is well documented in the monuments. They were feared throughout the ancient Near East.161

4. They are numerous (6:23d): Their sounds roar like the sea. The noise of the approaching army—thundering hooves, rumbling chariots, tramping feet—sounded like the roar of the waves of the sea.

5. They are intimidating (6:23e): Upon horses they ride equipped as men for war against you, O daughter of Zion. Assyrian cavalrymen rode in pairs, one with bow, the other on his own horse beside the first, grasping the reins of both horses (cf. 4:29). Cavalry forces were especially intimidating to the Judeans who relied mostly in infantry. This vast and invincible army will shortly come to make war against the daughter of Zion, i.e., the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

B. Zion’s Anguish (6:24):

1. Cause of anguish (6:24a): We have heard the rumor of them. Jeremiah imagines the reaction of the populace as the enemy approaches. The village squares are full of rumors. It is not the action of the enemy, but simply reports about them that produce terror in Judah.

2. Manifestation of anguish (6:24b): Our hands fall slack. Fall slack (r. rôph) occurs fourteen times in the OT. The phrase hands fall slack is a standard phrase depicting panic (cf. Ezek 7:17-18). The Judean soldiers lose their courage; they are too scared to resist.

3. Intensity of anguish (6:24c): Anguish grips us, pain as a woman in childbirth. While enemy soldiers grip (r. chzq) their weapons (v 23), anguish grips (same verb) the Judean soldiers. Throughout Jerusalem there is panic that can only be compared to what a woman experiences in childbirth (4:31; 49:24).

C. Zion’s Plight (6:25):

1. Imperative (6:25a): Do not go out into the field, or walk in the way... No one is safe; the enemy is everywhere. No one should venture outside the walls of Jerusalem to work the surrounding fields or go on a trip.

2. **Explanation (6:25b): for the enemy has a sword, terror round about.** Terror surrounds the city in that day of judgment. Judah is in profound trouble. **Terror round about** later becomes a threat against the priest Pashur (20:1-6).

The people under attack have been told to flee the walled cities (4:5), to get out of Jerusalem (5:17), yet everyone who goes out will be torn by the lion (4:7). The point is: there is no escape from God’s judgment no matter what they do.

**D. Zion’s Lament (6:26):** In view of the spoiler’s rapid descent on Jerusalem, Jeremiah calls his countrymen to bitter lamentation.

1. **Manifestation (6:26a): O daughter of my people, Gird on sackcloth, and wallow in the dust…** Jeremiah loves his nation as a father loves his daughter. For this reason he addresses Judah as the daughter of my people.

2. **Demonstration (6:26b): make for yourselves the mourning of an only son, most bitter lamentation…** The bereavement for the loss of an only son was the most severe that an Israelite could suffer.\(^{162}\) The people refused to shed the tears of repentance; they will now be forced to shed the tears of lamentation.

3. **Explanation (6:26c): for suddenly the spoiler shall come upon us.**

**Jeremiah’s Hopeless Task**

6:27-30

The major collection of oracles that began in 4:5 concludes with a personal word to Jeremiah concerning his calling.

**A. Enemies Fail (6:27): A tower have I made you among my people, a fortified city that you may know, then test their way.** God has made his prophet as strong as a tower,\(^ {163}\) i.e., a fortified city. The people will not be successful in attacking him. Jeremiah can then fearlessly test or try the way of the people by his preaching.\(^ {164}\)

**B. People Hardened (6:28): They are all rebellious revolters, those who go after slander; brass and iron [are] all of them, corrupters are they.** In this and the following vv, metallurgic phraseology is employed with a moral application. The men of Judah are unfaithful to God, for they are in open rebellion against him. They are unfaithful to their fellowmen, because they engage in malicious slander. These wicked men are as hard as brass and iron. Their way of life is corrupt; all of them are rotten to the core.

**C. Preaching Futile (6:29): The bellows are scorched! The lead is consumed by fire. In vain the refiner refines, but the wicked are not removed.** Try as he may the assayer is not able to extract any precious metal from the worthless ore that is Judah. The fire is so hot that the bellows are scorched. The lead that served as a flux to carry away the impurities melts. The smelter in this v is Jeremiah. He is putting his people to the test on behalf of Yahweh. But no silver remains. There were no righteous ones from whom the wicked could be separated. The refining process is a failure.

\(^{162}\) Cf. Amos 8:10; Zech 12:10.
\(^{163}\) Another possible rendering is smelter, prover or trier. For lengthy discussion and defense of the translation tower, see Laetsch, *BCJ*, 89-90.
\(^{164}\) Elsewhere in Scripture men are tested in fire in order to refine and purify them from the dross of sin. See Prov 17:3; Zech 13:9; Jer 6:29; 9:7.
D. Judeans Refuse (6:30): \textit{Refuse silver they shall call them, for Yahweh has rejected them.} Once Israel had been as precious to God as silver (Dt 5:27-29). Now that silver had become \textit{refuse silver}, i.e., worthless silver, good-for-nothing dross. In 6:19 the people had rejected Yahweh’s law. Now Yahweh has rejected them.

SECTION FIVE
TEMPLE SERMON

Dating the materials in ch 7 is a vexing problem. Laetsch is probably correct in assigning this material to the days of King Josiah early in the ministry of Jeremiah. Whether the materials in 7:1-8:3 come from one of Jeremiah’s discourses, or from several of them, is difficult to determine. In either case the theme of worship unifies the entire section.

Introduction
7:1-2

A. Revelation (7:1): \textit{The word that came unto Jerusalem from Yahweh, saying…} Jeremiah claims that he was acting upon the definite instructions from Yahweh when he delivered the message of this ch. These words signal the beginning of the fourth message (or collection thereof) in Part One of the book.

B. Location (7:2a): \textit{Stand in the gate of the house of Yahweh…} Jeremiah went to one of the eight gates of the temple to deliver a blistering sermon. The location is appropriate because the theme of this section is worship.

C. Proclamation (7:2b): \textit{and proclaim there this word. Say: Hear the word of Yahweh all Judah, [all] who are entering these gates to worship Yahweh.} Jeremiah was to proclaim the word to \textit{all Judah}. During the three annual festivals of Israel all the males were obligated to come to the temple in Jerusalem to worship.\textsuperscript{165}

Some commentators have identified this “temple sermon” with the sermon preached in ch 26. Four points of similarity are generally pointed out: (1) both sermons were preached at the same place, one of the gates of the temple; (2) both seem to have been preached during some festival; (3) both sermons present the demands for national repentance; and (4) both sermons allude to the destruction of Shiloh.

To conclude from these similarities that the sermon of ch 7 is identical with that of ch 26, and therefore to assign ch 7 to the reign of Jehoiakim, is pressing the evidence too far. Jeremiah as well as others chose the temple gates and courts as the location for public discourse.\textsuperscript{166} It would be \textit{a priori} likely that the prophet would select a festival on more than one occasion as the time to present his message. What better time to reach the masses? As for the theme of repentance, Jeremiah utilized it quite frequently. The allusion to Shiloh was a tremendous illustration that God is no respecter of religious shrines. Jeremiah probably utilized this historical note many times during his ministry. Ch 26, then, probably represents a later sermon of Jeremiah preached during the days of King Jehoiakim. Ch 7 represents an earlier sermon from the reign of good king Josiah.

Presumptuous Worship
7:3-11

The men of Judah, like the majority of all ages, took worship for granted. They were content simply to show up at the temple and participate in the prescribed ritual. They assumed that God was

\textsuperscript{165}Lv 23:1-44; Dt 16:1-17.
\textsuperscript{166}Jer 19:14; 35:2, 4; 36:5-10; 28:1, 5.
pleased with their conduct. In the opening paragraph of his temple sermon Jeremiah deals with the theme of smug worshipers.

A. Smug Worshipers Must Repent (7:3): Thus says Yahweh of host, God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds that I may cause you to dwell in this place.⁶⁶⁷ For the messenger formula, see on 2:2. Jeremiah’s sermon opens with a call for repentance. Amend (lit., cause to be good) your ways and your deeds, i.e., change the whole pattern of your conduct. Only if such a fundamental change took place, would God continue to allow them to inhabit the land of Judah.

B. Smug Worshipers have Misplaced Trust (7:4): For your own sake, do not trust in the words of the lie: The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh are these. In 5:17 the Judeans were trusting in fortified cities. Here the security gimmick is a security mantra. Many believed that the presence of Yahweh’s temple was a guarantee of Jerusalem’s safety. Jeremiah begs his hearers for their own sakes not to give any credence to this superstition. The people were acting as though merely the repetition of the phrase temple of the Lord was some sort of a magical charm to ward off all evil. What a dramatic moment it must have been. Jeremiah thrice⁶⁶⁸ repeated the phrase for emphasis, gesturing as he did to these, the courts and buildings that were part of the temple complex. Jeremiah was mocking the vain repetitions of the worshipers (cf. Mt 6:7). Besides the present passage, the word temple (hêkhāl) appears only in three other places in Jeremiah (24:1; 50:28; 51:11). Elsewhere the temple is referred to as the house (bayit). Perhaps the former word was selected because of its use in reference to the Shiloh sanctuary (1 Sam 1:9; 3:3).

C. Smug Worshipers must Practice their Faith (7:5-8):
   1. Things they must do (7:5a-b):
      a. Repentance (7:5a): If you thoroughly amend your ways and your deeds… This v picks up the command of v 3 and further emphasizes it with an infinitive absolute. They must thoroughly amend their ways and their deeds.
      b. Justice (7:5b): if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbor… They must make sure that justice is executed in the courts. Again the infinitive absolute reinforces the verb. Much of what passes for justice is really injustice, hence the stipulation that justice must be genuine. A man and his neighbor refers to social peers.
   2. Things they must not do (7:6):
      a. Oppression (7:6a): if you do not oppress sojourner, orphan and widow… Oppress (r. 'šq) suggests extortion. The triad of the powerless—stranger, orphan or widow—is found frequently in the OT.⁶⁶⁹ One has duties toward those on a lower rung of the social ladder. The OT enjoined Israel to show respect for a sojourner (gēr—resident alien)—simply because he was a fellow human being. The rights of those of foreign extraction under the law were to be respected. There was to be a concern for the weak, and for those who had lost their natural protector. An orphan had no father and a widow, no husband. No other code of laws from antiquity is marked by such humanity in respect to the unfortunate.

⁶⁶⁷ Another ancient reading is then I might dwell with you.
⁶⁶⁸ Triple utterances are found elsewhere in Isa 6:3, Jer 22:29; Ezek 21:32.
⁶⁶⁹ Dt 16:11, 14; 24:19, 20, 21; Ps 146:9.
b. Bloodshed (7:6b): and if you do not shed innocent blood in this place… Innocent blood must no longer be shed in the land through violence and miscarriage of justice. See on 2:34.

c. Idolatry (7:6c): and if you do not walk after other gods to your own hurt… Walk after other gods appears five times in Dt. The words point to misplaced loyalties. They must cease to follow after other gods to their own hurt. The irony is that people follow after other gods to fill some perceived void in their lives, or to guarantee success in life. But idolatry leads deeper and deeper into sin. It has unintended but dire repercussions both on the national and personal levels.

3. Blessings they could claim (7:7): then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. If the Judeans fulfilled these five fundamental requirements, God would cause them to continue to dwell in the land. Land that I gave to your fathers appears some eighty times in the legal and historical books. It conveys a fundamental concept in OT religion. See on 2:5, 7. God had given that land to their forefathers for ever and ever (lit., from the most remote antiquity to the most distant future). But that divine promise was conditional. If the present generation was to continue to enjoy the land gift of God, they must meet the conditions that God specifies here.

4. A charge repeated (7:8): Behold, you are trusting to your own hurt in the words of the lie to no avail. Behold express shock in the light of the previously stated conditions. Trusting is a participle, which indicates an on-going condition. Ignoring the conditions of the divine land grant, the Judeans were continuing to embrace the lie that the land was theirs regardless. But God could not continue to allow his people to dwell in the Promised Land, so long as they continued to trust in deceitful words. In v 4 the prophet has given already an example of the words of the lie. To no avail (l’bhiltî hô’îl) is lit., so as not to profit, i.e., with unprofitable results.

D. Smug worshipers Engage in Reprehensible Conduct (7:9-11):

1. Social conduct (7:9a): Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely… The syntax of the v carries the nuance, “How dare you!” The series of infinitives in this v reflects several of the prohibitions of the Decalogue. Steal (r. gnb) includes a range of activity from kidnapping to illegally taking the possessions of another person. Murder (r. rtsch) has the connotation of intentional and evil violence. The term is never used of community sanctioned executions or killing in war. Commit adultery (r. n’p) means to break a marriage bond. A man breaks a marriage bond by sleeping with the wife of another man. At the same time, a wife violates the bond with her husband by consensual sex with a man other than her husband. On swear falsely, see 5:2. The phrase certain means to take an oath insincerely or dishonestly. But it may also include misusing Yahweh’s name in cursing someone. The fact that the Lord has his temple in Jerusalem will profit them nothing if they continue to live godless lives.

2. Idolatrous conduct (7:9b): offer incense to Baal, walk after other gods that you do not know… To their sins against their fellowman, the On offering incense to false gods, see 1:16. Walk after other gods is repeated from v 6. Whom you have not known, referring to the other gods, is a common phrase in Dt used three times by Jeremiah (cf. 19:4; 44:3). Known refers to intimate association, i.e., covenant relationship (Am 3:2). So the reference is to gods with whom Israel had no covenant connection. They embraced the fertility god Baal and every other deity to which they were exposed.

3. Blasphemous conduct (7:10): then come and stand before me in this house that is called by my Name and say, We are safe; in order to do all these abominations? To
stand before God is the posture of worship. It is based on the principle that the king sits, servants stand. The sinners thought that because they had expressed outward concern for the Lord they were completely safe from all harm. We are safe is lit., we have been saved/delivered. The regular visits to the temple made no difference in the lives of these hypocrites. They went to the services to keep God on their side. As long as he was on their side they could practice their abominations with immunity. What a distortion of religion! What a fallacious assumption! Commit abominations is a strong expression having sexual connotations. The temple had become a hiding place for those who were openly disobedient to provisions of Yahweh’s law.

4. Embarrassing questions (7:11a): Has this house that is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? The temple had become to the people of Judah no more than a refuge where they would flee after committing their criminal acts. A den or cave in the OT was frequently a refuge for men or beasts (1 Sam 22:1; 1 Kgs 19:1). Robbers (pāritīm) are violent criminals. If the house (temple) is to continue being called by Yahweh’s name, i.e., be regarded as belonging to him, then conduct appropriate to it is required. But the temple has become the headquarters for thugs. In your eyes means in your opinion, i.e., is this how you regard this temple?

5. An implied warning (7:11b): Behold, I even have seen this (oracle of Yahweh). Behold indicates that the retort to follow is unexpected, shocking. How they see the temple is how God sees it too. God had seen all. He knew their hearts. He was aware of their evil intentions and sinful attitudes. He was not deceived by the outward manifestations of religious zeal.

A History Lesson
7:12-15

A. A Lesson from Shiloh (7:12-14):

1. God had destroyed the sanctuary at Shiloh (7:12): For go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I caused my name to dwell at the first, and observe what I did to it, because of the evil of my people Israel. If the people of Judah had been more aware of their history, they would have been more correct in their theology. In v 12 Jeremiah attacked the popular false confidence in the temple by pointing to another sacred sanctuary that had been destroyed.

When the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan under Joshua they erected the tabernacle at Shiloh north of Bethel. Shiloh remained the center of worship for over three hundred years. The old tent that had been transported through the wilderness wanderings was eventually replaced by, or perhaps encased in, some type of permanent structure that is called a house (Judg 18:31; 19:18) or temple (1 Sam 1:9).

   The historical books of the OT do not specifically mention the destruction of Shiloh. The place was probably captured and destroyed by the Philistines after the battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam 4:1ff) in the days of Eli. On the basis of their excavations archaeologists have dated the destruction of Shiloh about 1050 BC. If God not only permitted, but even instigated, the destruction of the shrine at Shiloh, it is sheer folly to think that in the present instance he was under some solemn obligation to preserve Jerusalem.

2. Judah had refused to heed the words of the prophets (7:13): And now because you have done all these things (oracle of Yahweh), and I spoke earnestly and persistently unto
you, but you did not hear; and I called you but you did not respond; In spite of the fact that God had earnestly and persistently called the people to repentance, they had not responded to the appeal. To emphasize the zeal of the Lord in speaking to his people, Jeremiah uses the idiom earnestly and persistently, lit. rising early and speaking. It is an expression peculiar to Jeremiah.  

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171 It means that the appeals were often and eagerly repeated.

3. **God will do to the temple what he did to Shiloh (7:14): therefore, I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you are trusting, and to the place that I gave to you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.** In view of this rebuff and rejection, God will destroy the temple in Jerusalem just as he destroyed Shiloh (v 14). Jeremiah does not deny that the temple is God’s house; nor does he deny that the temple had been given to the people of God as a place of worship. But he emphatically denies the conclusion to which the men of Judah had jumped viz., that God would never allow the temple to be destroyed. History had proved that God was no respecter of sanctuaries.

**B. A Lesson from Ephraim (7:15): And I will cast you forth from my presence as I cast forth all your brethren, all the seed of Ephraim.** In more recent history Jeremiah found another analogy. Just as God had cast forth (r. šlkh) into exile the seed of Ephraim, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, 172 so now he will cast forth the inhabitants of Judah. Use of the term brethren for the northern tribes is rare and striking. The land of Israel belonged to the Lord. 173 The two kingdoms were brothers in crime and apostasy as well as brothers in the flesh. Here the divine Landlord is issuing an eviction notice to his tenants.

**Prayer and Worship**

7:16-20

A caption for this unit might be “When Prayer is Useless.”

**A. Useless when God will not Hear (7:16):**

1. **A directive (7:16a): Now as for you, do not pray for this people, nor lift up entreaty, nor make supplication; and do not plead with me on their behalf…** Attention shifts from the nation to the prophet. A prophet not only represented God to the people, he also represented the people before God through intercessory prayer. Abraham prayed for Sodom (Gn 18:23-32); Moses prayed for Israel, 174 as did Samuel. 175 In three synonymous clauses Yahweh instructs Jeremiah not to pray for his people. Conditions in Judah were so bad that such prayer was useless. Still Jeremiah prayed. One of his great intercessory prayers is recorded in 14:19-22.

Four words for prayer are used in v 16. The first Hebrew word, translated pray, means to intercede on behalf of someone. God told Abimelech that Abraham would pray for him (Gn 20:7). In Nm 21:7 the people asked Moses to intercede on their behalf. Moses interceded on behalf of Aaron (Dt 9:20). Samuel assured the people that he would not cease to intercede on their behalf (1 Sam 12:23).

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173 Hos 9:3; Lv 25:23.
174 Ex 32:11-14; 17:11; Nm 14:13-20.
175 1 Sam 7:9, 10; 12:17, 18, 23.
The second Hebrew word (rinnāh) denotes a loud cry of any kind. It is sometimes used of a ringing cry of praise to the Lord. In the present context the word conveys the idea of a loud, vehement prayer. The third word, translated supplication (ťphilāh), is often used synonymously with the preceding word.

The fourth word, translated plead (r. pg'), lit. means to meet, or encounter with request or entreaty. Ruth said to Naomi, Entreat me not to leave you (Ruth 1:16). Abraham asked the children of Heth to intercede for him with Ephron that the Hittite might sell Abraham a cave (Gn 23:8).

2. A declaration (7:16b): for I am not listening to you. This startling clause appears in two other places in the book (11:14; 14:12). The same construction is used in Isa 1:15 where God announces that he does not hear the prayers of his people. Usage suggests that the clause means that Yahweh has made up his mind. He has determined to ignore any further intercession on behalf of Judah.

B. Useless when People are Wrapped up in Idolatry (7:17-19):

1. Their idolatry was obvious (7:17): Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The question is addressed to Jeremiah. In effect the rhetorical question justifies the prohibition against intercession. If Jeremiah would open his eyes he would see the paganism that was rampant. Both outside the capital, and even in the streets of the Holy City one could observe pagan practices. The prohibition of intercession is justified.

2. Their idolatry was pervasive (7:18):
   a. Actions of the people (7:18a): The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the wives knead dough to make sacrificial cakes... Participles are used to convey the notion that the pagan observances were ongoing. The entire population is engaged in the service of the false gods. The children gathered the wood for the cooking fires; the men kindled the fire and the women baked some kind of sacrificial cakes.

   The exact nature of the cakes that were baked is unknown, because the word used here is found elsewhere only in 44:19. Apparently they were made in the likeness of the goddess or one of her symbols. With these pastries, liquid refreshment was also served. An ivory carving dating to the eighth century BC suggests that the whole ceremony was performed to accompaniment of music played entirely by women.

   b. Objects of worship (7:18b): to the queen of heaven; and they pour out libations to other gods... The queen of heaven, in whose honor all this frenzied activity takes place, is probably to be identified with the pagan goddess Astarte or Ashtoreth. This goddess was the Canaanite version of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, the planet Venus. Statuettes of Astarte have been found all over Palestine, indicating how widespread her cult was.

   The Judeans did not confine their worship to the queen of heaven. They venerated other gods as well. Libations or drink offerings of wine were offering up to the fertility gods in an effort to magically induce a good harvest. To pour out drink

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176Pss 17:1; 88:2; Jer 11:14; 14:12.
177In Dt 21:18, 20 a rebellious sons will not listen to his parents. Elsewhere the people are not listening to Yahweh (Jer 32:33; 44:16; Ezek 20:39).
178A mold in the shape of the goddess was found in a kitchen in Mari. See A. Malamat, “Mari,” BA 34 (1971): 21.
179Mazar, IWBL, 3:102-103.
offerings can be used of legitimate worship (Nm 28:7). But all usages in Jeremiah refer to idolatrous worship.

c. Consequences (7:18c): in order to provoke me. This expression generally points to purpose, and some think that is how it should be understood here. But sometimes this language indicates the logical or sequential consequence of some illicit action, and that is what it most likely means here. Provoke (r. k's) in this context may have more of the meaning of offend.

3. Their idolatry was destructive (7:19):
   a. Initial result of their idolatry (7:19a): Is it me they are provoking (oracle of Yahweh)? Jeremiah viewed such open idolatry as deliberate provocation of the Lord. To him it was inconceivable that men could really believe that an object of wood or stone was a god. The only plausible explanation of idolatry was that the people were attempting in some way to hurt God, to provoke him.  
   b. Ultimate result of their idolatry (7:19b): Is it not themselves to the shame of their faces? Though they knew that their idolatry would eventually call forth the wrath of God, they continued to engage in the practice. Like a youngster who engages in all manner of lawlessness in order to show hostility towards his parents, they were really hurting no one but themselves. Shame and faces are often connected. The idea is that the face reveals confusion and humiliation. These idolaters will not be able to conceal their shame in the day of judgment.

C. Useless when God has Determined to Pour out his Wrath (7:20):
   1. Certainty of the outpouring (7:20a): Therefore, thus says Adonay Yahweh: Behold, my anger and my wrath are about to be poured out upon this place—God’s burning wrath was about to be poured forth upon Judah. No one will be able to extinguish it. This outpouring was certain because God is Adonay, i.e., Sovereign. He has no rivals. Therefore what he determines to do he does. Mercy is shown in that Yahweh announces this outpouring in advance so that all may be warned and turn back to him. Anger is God’s abiding antipathy for evil; wrath is the climax of God’s anger, the breaking point as it were. Both are poured out, as from a bowl. This concept gives birth to the bowls of wrath in the Book of Revelation. This place suggests the whole land. While the people pour out (r. nsk) libations to their pagan gods (v 18), God was about to pour out (r. ntk) on them his wrath.
   2. Extent of the outpouring (7:20b): upon man, cattle, the tree of the field, and the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn and shall not be quenched. Using the technique of emphasis by enumeration, Jeremiah underscores the thought that the outpouring of God’s wrath will affect the entire land. The cattle, trees and crops will be consumed as well as the wicked apostates of Jerusalem. Scripture emphasizes frequently that all creation suffers because of the sin of mankind. For burn and not be quenched see 4:4.

Ritual vs. Obedience
7:21-29

As Jeremiah looks at the current religious observances, he sees only perfunctory compliance with outward ritual.

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180 Provoke, one of the characteristic words of Jeremiah, is used here for the first time.
181 E.g., 2 Sam 19:6; Isa 29:22; Ps 44:15.
182 Cf. Isa 24:4; Hos 4:3.
A. A Shocking Exhortation (7:21): Thus says Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat the meat. For the messenger formula see 2:2. By means of a sarcastic imperative, Jeremiah urges the men of Judah to increase (Lit., add onto, pile on to) their already numerous sacrificial offerings. Normally the burnt offerings were wholly consumed on the altar. In other sacrifices (e.g., the peace offering), parts of the animal were eaten by the priests and/or by worshipers.

In view of the attitude and actions of the worshipers of Judah their burnt offerings were merely meat and nothing more. They might as well eat the meat of those burnt offerings. Thereby they would derive some benefit from them. The offerings certainly had no religious value.

B. A Shocking Explanation (7:22-23):

1. Sacrifice is not the essence of Mosaic faith (7:22): For I did not speak with your fathers, nor did I give commandment in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning the matters of burnt offering and sacrifice. Contrary to the popular theology of the day, the sacrificial ritual was not the core of their covenant obligations to God. In the Pentateuch sacrifice is instituted by Moses in compliance with the instructions given by God. According to the modern critical view of the OT, the so-called priestly legislation of the Pentateuch is a product of the postexilic age, a thousand years after Moses. This v seems to deny that the Lord gave any instructions concerning sacrifice at Mount Sinai. In interpreting this v several points need be kept in mind:

   1. Elsewhere in his book, Jeremiah seems to recognize the importance of the sacrificial system. He promises in 17:26 that if the people of Judah will hallow the Sabbath, then God would continue to permit them to come to Jerusalem bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, meal offerings, and incense . . . unto the house of the Lord. As he looks beyond the destruction of Judah to the Israel of the future, Jeremiah sees the priests more than satisfied with the meat from the abundant sacrificial offerings (31:14). He specifically predicts that once the captivity is over, the men of Judah will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord (33:11).

      It is true that these vv say nothing of the origin of the sacrificial system; but they do seem to imply that the Lord and his prophet regarded that system with favor. To these passages may be added 33:17-24 that speaks of the covenant with the priests. This is the portion of the Sinai covenant that included the sacrificial regulations for the priesthood.

   2. Jeremiah seems to have supported the reforms of King Josiah. These reforms included the observance of the Passover ritual (2 Chron 35:1-9).

   3. Jeremiah was never charged by his enemies with opposing the temple ritual as such.

   4. As early as the days of Samuel, the principle had been laid down that sacrifice without obedience to God is worthless (1 Sam 15:22).

   5. Context makes it clear that Jeremiah is drawing a contrast between sacrificial ritual and the moral laws of the Decalogue (v 9). It is of course true that there is no mention of sacrifice among the Ten Commandments.

   6. Perhaps the emphasis in the v is upon the phrase your fathers. Those courageous men, who by faith had gone out from Egypt, were no relation to the present generation of apostates. The v then would not be denying that commandments concerning sacrifice were given at Mount Sinai, but rather that such commandments were given to the spiritual progenitors of the present generation.

   7. Strictly speaking, individuals were not commanded to bring sacrifices in the law of Moses. Burnt offerings and peace offerings were optional (cf. Lv 1:2; 3:1); sin offerings and guilt offerings were only required when transgression had to be expiated.

   8. The expression translated concerning is actually a somewhat peculiar Hebrew expression occurring only six times in the OT.\(^{183}\) When one checks these passages carefully, it becomes clear that the expression really means out of concern for or in the interest of; or for the sake of. If this be the case, v 22 is not denying the existence of Mosaic legislation concerning sacrifice. God is simply saying, When your

\(^{183}\)Dt 4:21; 2 Sam 18:5; 2 Kgs 22:13; Ps 7:1; Jer 7:22; 14:21.
fathers came out of Egypt I did not give legislation in the interest of or for the sake of sacrifices. The v would then be denying that sacrifice was the chief goal or purpose of God in the Mosaic system.  

9. Another possibility is that the denial of v 22 is not absolute. God did not command their fathers to sacrifice, i.e., to sacrifice as they were currently doing—mere outward form divorced from the practice of piety.

When all of these factors are taken into account, v 22 falls into proper perspective. Jeremiah is not repudiating the Mosaic origin of the sacrificial system; rather he is simply denying that sacrifice is the essence of the OT religion.

2. Obedience is the essence of Mosaic faith (7:23): But this word I commanded them: Hearken to my voice, and I will be your God, and you will be my people; walk in all the ways that I command you in order that it might be well with you. The fundamental requirement of the Sinai covenant was that of obedience. See Ex 19:5; cf. Jer 3:13. The people of Israel had to hearken to the divine voice if they were to maintain their special relationship to the living God. They must yield to the demands of the Almighty, if they would receive his blessing. The phrase that it might be well with you is characteristic of Jeremiah. The obedience that God demands is for the ultimate benefit of man.

C. A Fundamental Demand (7:24-26):

1. First accusation (7:24):
   a. What they would not do (7:24a): But they would not hearken, and they did not stretch out the ear... The people of Israel had a record of obstinacy (cf. 6:10, 17). They had no desire to listen to the commandments of God. To stretch out the ear suggests eagerness to hear accurately what is being said. In vv 24-28 the verdict they would not hearken occurs four times.
   b. What they did (7:24b): but walked in the counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart... Instead of listening to God, Israel followed instead the counsels (inclinations) of their own evil hearts. The concept of stubbornness of (evil) heart appears at least seven times in the book. See on 3:17.
   c. Result (7:24c): and they went backwards, and not forwards. In relation to God, Israel had gone backward and not forward. In other words, they had turned their back to God not their faces. Religious experimentation always masquerades as progressive development. In the view of Jeremiah, to depart from the old paths of truth and fidelity was retrogressive.

2. Second accusation (7:25-26):
   a. God’s repeated efforts (7:25): Even from the day when your fathers went out from the land of Egypt unto this day, I sent unto them all my servants the prophets (urgently and persistently sending). From the days of the Exodus from Egypt, God had continually and earnestly communicated with his people through prophets. The Exodus marked the beginning of the nation Israel. So from the first day of their national existence God had communicated with them. The phrase sent my servants suggests the picture of a great king dispatching ambassadors to a subject people.
   b. Israel’s continued obstinacy (7:26): But they did not hearken unto me, nor did they stretch out their ears, but made hard the neck, and committed evil more than their fathers. The first part of this v essentially repeats v 24. The people paid no heed to Yahweh’s servants. Rather than inclining their ears in the direction of these messengers of God, they made their necks hard. Made hard the neck appears two

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184 Allis, FBM, 168ff.
other times in the book (17:23; 19:15). It appears to be a figure for obstinacy equivalent to *stiff-necked people* used six times of the generation of Moses. Each generation seemed to become more sinful than the preceding one.

D. Realistic Appraisal (7:27-28):
1. They will not listen (7:27): *When you speak unto them all these words, they will not hearken unto you; when you call unto them, they will not answer you.* The people will not listen to Jeremiah any more than they listened to his predecessors in the prophetic ministry. The prophet’s task is hopeless.
2. They stand condemned (7:28):
   a. They refuse correction (7:28a): *Therefore, you shall say unto them: This is the nation that will not hearken to the voice of Yahweh their God, nor will they accept correction.* All Jeremiah can do is accuse the citizens publicly of obstinacy. No other nation had been so blessed, so honored, so trained and guided. Yet this is the nation that refuses to heed the word of God. Normally Israel is called a *people* (*’am*); but here they are a *nation* (*gôy*), no different from the many other nations of the world. For accept correction, see 2:30.
   b. They fail to exhibit true faith (7:28b): *Faith has perished; it is cut off from their mouth.* Faith or truth had vanished from their prayers and from their praise.

Perilous Worship
7:29-34

Again Jeremiah takes up the subject of corrupt worship. He emphasizes the consequences of such worship.

A. Call for Lamentation (7:29):
1. Shearing the hair (7:29a): *Cut off your hair, cast it away...* Jeremiah resorts to one of his most devastating oratorical devices, viz., the sarcastic imperative. He urges the daughter of Jerusalem\(^{186}\) to shave off her long hair. The word for *hair* (*nēzer*) means *consecration*. Here it is used by extension for the hair that symbolized consecration to Yahweh in a Nazirite. A Nazirite was not to cut his/her\(^{187}\) hair during the duration of the vow. The picture is of a woman who has defiled herself and so must shave off the symbol of her consecration. In v 15 it was God who cast away his people; here the same verb urges the people to cast away the symbol of their devotion to Yahweh. The daughter of Jerusalem is no longer consecrated to the Lord.
2. Making lamentation (7:29b): *and take up a lamentation upon the bare heights...* Shaving the hair also is associated with lamentation in the OT. For the image of lamenting on the bare heights see 3:21.
3. Explanation (7:29c): *for Yahweh has rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.* Jeremiah’s generation had been rejected and forsaken by God. In ancient times the divorce of a woman was a very sad affair, since the former wife was left destitute. For her innumerable acts of spiritual adultery, the daughter of Zion has been divorced by God. She should realize her plight and lament it. This is the generation that will experience the wrath of the living God.

B. Explanation of the Disaster (7:30-31):

\(^{186}\)The pronoun and the verb are feminine.

\(^{187}\)That women could take a Nazirite vow as well as men is indicated in Nm 6:2.
1. General charge (7:30a): *For the children of Judah have done evil in my eyes (oracle of Yahweh)*... The language of this line can be traced throughout the OT back to the time of Moses in Dt.

2. Abominations in the temple (7:30b): *they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name to defile it.* Denial apostasy was impossible, for it was open and flagrant. The *abominations* of heathendom—the cult objects used in pagan worship—had been set up in the temple of the Lord. Manasseh built altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the temple. He even went so far as to set an image of the Canaanite goddess Asherah in the temple (2 Kgs 21:5-7). This was the height of insolence, the crowning act of apostasy. The temple of the Lord was defiled by the presence of these pagan images and cult objects. For *house called by my name* see 7:10, 11.

3. High places of Topheth (7:31):
   a. Place (7:31a): *And they have built the high places of Topheth, that are in the valley of the son of Hinnom...* The people of Judah had built special high places in the valley of the son of Hinnom.\(^{188}\) Not much is known about the nature of high places. Scripture says only that at a high place (*bāmāh*) one could find an altar, a wooden pole representing Asherah (2 Kgs 21:3), and one or more upright stone pillars (2 Kgs 23:13-14). There may also have been a shrine in which sacrificial meals could be eaten (1 Sam 9:19, 22).

   The meaning and etymology of the word *Topheth* are uncertain. The term is used in four passages of a definite location.\(^{189}\) It seems to be akin to a word meaning *fireplace*. Most likely Topheth was the pit in which human victims were burned.\(^{190}\)

   The valley of *Ben Hinnom* is a north-south valley on the western side of the old city, which curves eastward to link up with the Kidron Valley south of Jerusalem.

   b. Purpose (7:31b): *to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire...* In the valley of Hinnom human sacrifice was openly practiced. Such human sacrifices were to the god Moloch who sometimes generically is called Baal (Jer 19:5).

   c. Perversion (7:31c): *that I did not command nor did it even enter my mind.* God had never commanded the wretched practice of offering children as burnt offerings. Never did he condone this practice. When the people turned aside from God’s law, they embraced heinous practices that totally distorted everything Yahweh stood for.

4. Divine Sentence (7:32-34):
   1. Unprecedented slaughter (7:32-33):
      a. Corpses buried in Topheth (7:32): *Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh,) when it shall no longer be called the Topheth or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter; for they shall bury in Topheth for lack of place to bury.* Behold, *days are coming* is one of Jeremiah’s favorite expressions. He uses it fifteen times. The phrase stresses that profound changes in the *status quo* are about to take place in the near future. The polluted worship of the people of Judah will be punished in a most decisive way. A disaster will befall Judah whereby so many people will be slain that even the pagan shrines will be converted to cemeteries. The valley of the son of Hinnom will be renamed the valley of slaughter because of the vast numbers that will be buried there.

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\(^{188}\)Since the days of Joshua, this valley near Jerusalem had been known as the valley of the son of Hinnom. See Josh 15:8; 18:16
\(^{189}\)Jer 7:31-32; 19:6-14; 2 Kgs 23:10; Isa 30:33.
b. Corpses consumed by animals (7:33): And the carcasses of this people shall become food for the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field, and no one shall cause them to be afraid. The very spot where they had tried to court the favor of a pagan deity by offering their own children as burnt offerings will become a permanent monument to the folly of idolatry. But even this huge valley will not provide enough burial space for all the slain. Many corpses will be left unburied. The birds and beasts of prey will come and feast upon the decaying flesh and no one will be left to drive them away. In antiquity the lack of proper burial was the worst indignity that could befall a man. The thought of a corpse exposed to the elements of nature horrified the ancient Hebrews.

2. Unprecedented despair (7:34a): I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the sound of delight, the sound of the bridegroom, and the sound of the bride... The cities of Judah will experience the same fate as Topheth. All the normal sounds of joy—especially wedding joy—will be removed.

3. Unprecedented desolation (7:34b): for to a desolation the land shall become. The entire land will become a desolation (chorbāh). The term is used only of places that, having once been inhabited, have fallen into ruin. It is a gloomy picture indeed that the prophet paints.

   a. Bones disinterred (8:1): In that time (oracle of Yahweh) they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of his princes, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. Not only will the enemies of Judah leave the dead unburied (7:33), they will also violate the graves of those who had been interred. The motive for opening graves was sometimes greed, since many valuables were buried with the deceased. But other times tombs were opened simply to debase the memory of the deceased occupant (cf. 2 Kgs 23:16).
   b. Bones scattered (8:2): And they shall spread them to the sun, to the moon, and to all the host of the heavens that they loved, served, and went after, sought and worshiped. They shall not be gathered nor buried; they shall become dung upon the face of the ground. The Babylonians will scatter the bones of the disinterred across the face of the ground. All the hosts of the heavens that the men of Judah had worshiped in life will be helpless to prevent such desecration. For dung upon the face of the ground see 9:21.

   The biblical account of the fall of Jerusalem does not record the fulfillment of this particular prediction; but there can scarcely be any doubt that the ruthless Babylonians acted in the manner here described. The apocryphal book of Baruch (2:24f.) does allude to acts of desecration at the fall of Jerusalem.

5. Unprecedented calamity (8:3): Death shall be chosen rather than life by all the remnant of this evil family, who remain in all the places where I have driven them (oracle of Yahweh of hosts). For those who are taken into exile, life will be so miserable that they will wish they were dead.

   Practically nothing is known about the Jews who scattered into the neighboring countries of Syria-Palestine during the war with Babylon. Something of the despair of the Jewish exiles in Babylon shortly after 586 BC can be seen in Ps 137.

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191V 33 echoes the threat of Dt 28:26.
Time, of course, softened the utter despair of the exiles. The deportation to Babylon was for them a tremendous religious shock. They were forced to rethink their whole theology. As the exiles changed their hearts in respect to God, their lot improved. They adjusted to their surroundings. Many Jews actually prospered in exile. Verse 3 must be describing the initial reaction of those who would be carried away captive.\footnote{Laetsch (BCJ) views v 3 as a conditional threat that was unfulfilled because of the repentance of the exiles.}

SECTION SIX
DISASTER FROM THE NORTH
Jeremiah 8:4-9:26

Section Six mirrors Section Four. Both messages depict terrifying scenes of an invasion by a northern enemy. Both depict the Judeans urging one another to flee into the fortified cities (4:5; 8:14). In both sections an alarm is heard in Dan involving horses, and the alarm is accompanied by exhortations to weep and mourn (4:15; 8:16). This message repeats verbatim what was earlier said about the false hopes of Judah (6:12-15; 8:10-12).

The oracles in this section are undated. They may represent excerpts from the sermons of Jeremiah preached in the streets of Jerusalem between 608 BC and 597 BC, i.e., before the Babylonians captured the city at the end of the reign of Jehoiakim. Many would date these oracles in the very early years of Jehoiakim, before the important battle of Carchemish in 605 BC.

The sermon excerpts in this section are characterized by the technique of asking and answering questions. Among these bits of sermons is found a beautiful poem in which Jeremiah expresses his personal distress over the prospects of the nation (8:18-9:9).

Backsliding is Stupid
8:4-7

Stubborn apostasy ultimately was responsible for the downfall of Judah. It is no wonder that Jeremiah returns to this subject repeatedly. Jeremiah says that those who turn away from God are displaying less sense than do the birds of the air. Backsliders do not have the sense that God gave geese! Various forms of the verb *turn* (šâb) appear six times in this unit. These uses are supported by the use of *repent* (r. nchm).

A. Men without Bird Sense Refuse to Repent (8:4): 

*And you shall say unto them, Thus says Yahweh: Do men fall and not rise again? Does one turn away and not return?* In attempting to jar the people into a realization of their stubborn apostasy, Jeremiah appeals to common sense. He states a general truth of human nature. A man who has fallen will not remain quietly on the ground without attempting to arise. A man who accidentally wanders from the pathway will not persist in traveling in the wrong direction.

B. Men without Bird Sense Cling to Deceit (8:5): 

*Why has this people, Jerusalem, turned away with perpetual backsliding? They cling to deceit, they refuse to return.* Yet Jerusalem has turned away from God and refuses to turn back to him. Tenaciously they *cling to deceit* (tarmît). Some take the term to refer to idols that, in the mind of Jeremiah, were outright frauds. But in 14:14 and 23:26 this noun is used in reference to the assurances by false prophets that Judah would have peace. So deceit is that their relationship to Yahweh guaranteed that no harm would come to their land or temple. Even after this folly had been
pointed out to them, the Judeans refused to return to Yahweh. To Jeremiah this was unreasonable behavior.

C. Men without Bird Sense Speak Untruth (8:6a): *I have been attentive and listened, but they continue to speak what is not right.* The prophet listened attentively for some word, some slight indication that the people intended to repent. No such word was forthcoming.

D. Men without Bird Sense do not Perceive their Plight (8:6b): *There is not a man who repented of his evil, saying, what have I done?* Instead of a word of repentance the people continued to speak what was inappropriate. There was no sorrow for sin, no acknowledgement of wrongdoing, no request for forgiveness.

E. Men without Bird Sense are Reckless in Sin (8:6c): *Everyone turns away in his course as a horse rushing into battle.* The people of Judah were rushing to their idolatry like a horse charging recklessly into battle.

F. Men without Bird Sense Ignore Fundamental Laws (8:7): *Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times, and the dove, the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming, but my people do not know the ordinance of Yahweh.* The unreasonableness of the apostasy of Judah is further emphasized by citing the example of the birds of the heavens. Migratory birds like the dove, the swallow, the crane and the stork obey their instincts without fail. At their appointed times, these birds travel hundreds—even thousands—of miles to return to nesting areas. Never do they assert themselves against the will of their Creator. Not so God’s highest creation. Men ignore the fundamental laws of God and the principles of behavior that he has ordained. Men stifle the instinct to worship their Creator. Instead they produce gods of their own making, gods they can manipulate and control, gods made in man’s image.

**Backsliding is Shameless**

8:8-10

These vv display the structure of a covenant lawsuit speech.

A. Indictment (8:8-9):

1. Shameless boasting (8:8a): *How can you say, We are wise! The Torah of Yahweh is with us.* The wise men of Judah felt that they had no need for the preaching of Jeremiah. They had the Torah, the written precepts of the law. What use did they have for this agitator from Anathoth? Their attitude was: *Let Jeremiah keep his advice to himself; for we are wise and we are the divinely appointed teachers of the people.*

2. Shameless action (8:8b): *But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has labored falsely.* Among the wise men, the scribes are singled out for special comment. The scribes in OT times were men who could write. They often served as officials of the royal court (2 Kgs 12:10), and sometimes as military officers (Jer 52:25). The pen (‘ēt) was probably made from a reed.

   The scribes in Jeremiah’s day were corrupt, like the priests and the prophets. Somehow through their writings the scribes were attempting to nullify the written word of God. Perhaps they were publishing the false teaching of the prophets and priests. Perhaps they were making comments upon the Pentateuch that in effect warped its
teaching. Some have proposed that these scribes were even guilty of altering the very text of the word of God. Whatever they were doing, these perverse scribes were distorting the truth. The lying pens of scholars through the ages have been directed against the Scriptures. Through false interpretations and insidious criticism, these wolves in sheep’s clothing have attempted to escape the absolute authority of God’s word. Yet in spite of these attacks, Scripture still cannot be broken (Jn 10:35).

B. Initial Sentence (8:9a): The wise shall be put to shame, they shall be dismayed when they are captured. The worldly wise will be put to shame (bôš), i.e., they display out manifestations of shame (as in 2:26). Be dismayed (r. chtt) has the same meaning as the previous verb. Captured (r. lkd) is probably to be taken metaphorically, meaning something like ensnared. Their worldly wise schemes and political strategies would all backfire and produce exactly the opposite results that were intended.

C. Further Indictment (8:9a): Behold, they have spurned the word of Yahweh, and what kind of wisdom do they possess? When men reject the wisdom that comes from the word of God, what kind of wisdom do they possess? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all true wisdom (Prov 9:10). How utterly humiliated these wise men of Judah will be when calamities fall upon the nation.

D. Final Sentence (8:10):
1. Announced (8:10a): Therefore, I will give their wives to others, their fields to dispossessors… Human wisdom, human logic, human theology had declared Jerusalem to be inviolable. How embarrassed these learned men will be when they are captured, and all they possess falls into the hands of the Chaldean conquerors. Dispossessors are the new masters of the land who take possession of all property.

2. Justified (8:10b):
   a. Illicit gain (8:10b): for from least to the greatest, everyone of them is out for illicit gain… Lust for unjust gain permeated society. But in the end they will lose all that they had accumulated.
   b. Religious deceit (8:10c): from the prophet even unto the priest, everyone of them practices deceit. Because of their greed the prophets and priests had deliberately deceived the people. They delivered oracles or judgments that resulted in their gain. They support the national policy of resisting Babylon with messages of reassurance delivered in the name of Yahweh.

Shameless Leaders
8:11-13

The theme of shamelessness is developed further in the covenant lawsuit format. The focus now is on shameless leaders.

A. Indictment (8:11): They heal up the hurt of the daughter of my people lightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace. Instead of dealing with the spiritual maladies of the nation, these religious leaders were merely concealing the impending disaster by assuring the people of peace.

B. Initial Sentence (8:12a, b, c):
1. Announced (8:12a): *They shall be put to shame…*

2. Justified (8:12b):
   a. Abomination (8:12b): *because they have committed abomination…* In misleading the people the prophets and priests had committed abomination.
   b. Shamelessness (8:12c): *yea, they do not at all feel ashamed, nor do they know how to blush…* These “wise” men should be ashamed of the misleading advice they had dispensed, but they were not. When people do not blush it means that they have no external authority to whom they are responsible. They are a law unto themselves.

C. Final Sentence (8:12c-13):

1. Announced (8:12c):
   a. Stumbling (8:12c): *therefore, they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their visitation they shall stumble, says Yahweh.* When the judgment falls on Judah, these proud men will stumble and fall before the sword of the enemy.
   b. Consumed (8:13a): *I will utterly consume them (oracle of Yahweh).*

2. Illustrated (8:13b): *No grapes are on the vine, and no figs are on the fig tree. The leaves are withered…* In 2:21 Judah is compared to a vine with bad grapes. In the present figure, no fruit at all can be found on the vine or on the fig tree. The leaves are even withered. The plant is dying.

3. Explained (8:13c): *and I will appoint for them those who overrun them.* Because it is worthless, it must be destroyed. God already has appointed the destroyer. An army shall sweep through that worthless garden like a raging stream overflowing its banks. All will be destroyed.

**Backsliding is Serious**

8:14-17

A. Painful Words from Judah (8:14-15):

1. Resignation to death (8:14a): *Why are we sitting? Assemble yourselves that we may go unto the fortified cities, that we may perish there…* The dominate figure in this unit is military. Resorting to one of his favorite rhetorical devices, Jeremiah projects himself into the future to dramatically portray what will happen when Judah comes under enemy attack. *Why are we sitting* means *why should we sit here waiting to die.* The inhabitants of the countryside, in gloomy despair, urge one another to move into the fortified cities. They feel that they are under the curse of God, that they shortly will perish (lit., *be put to silence*). They are resigned to death. If they move to the cities, they would die of some pestilence or plague. But at least that is better than falling into the hand of the enemy.

2. Recognition of sin (8:14b): *for Yahweh our God has put us to silence; he has caused us to drink poison water because we have sinned against Yahweh.* The people knew that God was making them drink of the poisonous water, lit. *water of poison* (*mē rʾōš*) or *water of the head,* i.e., tears. Some take the poisonous waters to be a metaphor for divine judgment; others point out that a city’s water supply was often poisoned during times of siege. Now that it is too late, they admit that they have sinned against the Lord.

3. Realization of deception (8:15): *We hope for peace, but no good came, for the time of healing, but behold, terror.* The people had listened to their false prophets. Consequently they had expected peace and national healing. But good times did not

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193 On the phrase *those who overrun,* see Isa 8:7; Dan 11:10, 40.
come; only the terrors of ruthless war. Hope (r. qwh) has the nuance of waiting with longing. Peace is not merely the absence of war, but total well being. Healing (r. rp’) points to national problems as wounds that need attention.

B. Painful News from Afar (8:16-17):
1. A mighty force (8:16a): From Dan is heard the snorting of his horses; from the sound of the neighing of his stallions, all the earth shakes. Jeremiah must have been a spellbinding preacher. He makes his audience almost hear the snorting and neighing of the enemy horses as the Chaldean cavalry bears down upon Dan, the northern-most city of Palestine (cf. 4:15-16). All world trembles at the news that the mighty northern enemy is sweeping southward. The thundering hoofs of warhorses had a demoralizing effect upon the Judeans. For shakes see 4:24.
2. A destructive force (8:16b): For they shall come, and they shall consume the land and its fullness, the cities and their inhabitants. The land and its produce, the cities and their inhabitants will be consumed by this mighty army. For the image of consuming the land and its contents see 2:3; 5:17.
3. An irresistible force (8:17): For behold, I am about to send against you serpents, poisonous snakes, for which there is no charmer; and they shall bite you (oracle of Yahweh). Behold points to a sudden, unexpected declaration. The metaphor changes to snake. Like venomous serpents the enemy will sink their death-dealing fangs into the inhabitants of Judah. No one will be able to charm those snakes; no one will be able to control them. The doom is unavoidable. The scene is reminiscent of what Israel experienced during the wilderness wandering (Nm 21). Jerusalem will be poisoned to death if it does not first die of fear.

Jeremiah’s Lament
8:18-9:3

A. Address to Yahweh (8:18): O my Comfort against sorrow! My heart is faint within me! Two things make Jeremiah heartsick: (1) the apostasy of his people; and (2) their impending destruction. He casts himself upon God, his comforter. The word comforter means lit., the one to cause me to smile, to be cheerful or be bright. Sorrow (yāgôn) denotes a profound affliction of the emotions. The word is used of Jacob’s reaction to not seeing Benjamin again (Gn 44:31). On heart, see 4:4. Faint (davāy) is used but three times in OT, always in reference to the mental effects of weakness.

B. Cries from Babylon (8:19-20):
1. Cry of doubt (8:19a): Behold, the sound of the cry of the daughter of my people from distant places: Is not Yahweh in Zion? Is not her king in her? Jeremiah hears as it were a dialogue between the daughter of my people (see on 4:11) and God. First he hears a cry (šav’āh) for help. The cry comes from distant places (lit., a land of distances). Some take this to be an idiom meaning far and wide (NRSV); others think the reference is to a distant land, the land of captivity. In either case God’s people cannot comprehend how Zion, the temple mount, can be so humiliated and degraded, if God is really still on his throne. The assertion that Yahweh dwells in Zion is based on statements made in several Psalms (46:5; 84:7; 99:2).
2. Yahweh’s response (8:19b): Why do they provoke me with their images, with their strange vanities? To the astonished cry, God makes answer. Whatever has befallen Zion has come about because of the idolatry of the people there. On the matter of offending
Yahweh by idolatry see 7:18-19. Images (p'šilîm) is something hewn or carved. Strange vanities or nothings is lit., nothings of strangeness. On vanities (habhîlē) see comment of the singular form in 2:5. On strangeness (nēkhâr) or alien gods see on 5:19.

3. **Cry of despair (8:20): The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we have not been saved.** Ignoring the explanation of God, the people continue with their complaint by citing a popular proverb. Once the summer harvest was over a farmer looked forward to a period of deliverance from arduous toil. But in the case of the Judeans, the hot summer of toil was only followed by the cold winter of despondency. Their national deliverance, confidently predicted by the false prophets, did not materialize. They were beginning to realize that no speedy deliverance was in the offing. *We* is emphatic, i.e., we of all people; we the privileged people; we the chosen people.

C. **Personal Agony (8:21-22):**

1. **He shares the hurt of his people (8:21): Because of the hurt of the daughter of my people, I have been hurt; I mourn, anguish has seized me.** The unbelief and despair of the people causes even deeper despair in the heart of the prophet. Hurt is literally shattering. Jeremiah loved his people as a father might love a daughter. Though Jeremiah sternly rebuked the people of Judah throughout his ministry, yet all the while his heart was broken because of them. He did not want to see his people destroyed. Mourn (r. qdr) is lit., become dark. A mourn refrained from washing body or clothes (cf. 2 Sam 19:25). Anguish (šammâh) is the emotion of horror. The word was used earlier of a horrible thing (5:30) and a horrible place (2:15).

2. **He longs for healing of his people (8:22): Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? For why does not healing come to the daughter of my people?** Gilead, located east of the Jordan River, was famous in OT times for its balm. It is not certain just what this balm was. The suggestion has been made that it was the juice of the turpentine tree. The material was exported (Ezek 27:17) and was very costly (Gn 43:11). The balm of Gilead was prized for its medicinal properties.

   There was no healing ointment that could be applied to the spiritual wound of Judah. There were no physicians who might be able to deal with the difficulty. Nothing can cure the ailment of Judah except a whole-hearted return to the divine Physician (Ex 15:26).

D. **Jeremiah’s Wish (9:1-2):**

1. **First wish: tears (9:1): Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tear, then I would lament day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.** Jeremiah wishes that his head could produce an inexhaustible supply of tears that he might lament the inevitable doom of his people. In spite of their sin—in spite of the way they had rejected God’s message—the inhabitants of Judah were still *my people* as far as Jeremiah was concerned. Slain (lit. pierced) is a common term for the violently killed.

   Jeremiah does not allow himself to be overcome by his personal feelings regarding the gloomy future of his people. The destruction of Judah is a punishment well deserved. The prevailing corruption (9:2-8) has brought into prospect the impending destruction (9:9-21).

2. **Second wish: isolation (9:2):**

   a. Wish expressed (9:2a): *Oh that I were in the wilderness in a traveler's inn, that I might leave my people and depart from them…* It is always nauseating for a righteous man to continue in daily contact with corrupt company. Jeremiah longs to leave the city with all its vices. He wants to take up residence in one of the desolate
wayside shelters that dotted the major highways of antiquity. Heretofore it has been the people who have abandon (r. 'zb) Yahweh; now it is Jeremiah who wants to abandon his people. In 3:1 it was a wife who departed (lit., walked away from) her husband; here Jeremiah wants to walk away from society.

b. Wish explained (9:2b): because all of them are adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men. All of the people of Judah participate in spiritual and literal adultery at the Canaanite shrines. Even when gathered in their religious assemblies, these men are treacherous, hypocritical and untrustworthy. The sensitive Jeremiah would rather live the life of a monastic. He preferred to sit in an isolated shack, there to bemoan the fate of his people. But God had called him to preach to that godless generation, and preach he must! The phrase all of them are adulterers is taken from Hos 7:4. Assembly is normally used of a religious assembly. For treacherous see on 3:8.

E. Yahweh’s Response (9:3): They bend their tongue, their bow, for deceit; they are mighty in the land, but not for truth; for from evil to evil they proceed and they do not know me (oracle of Yahweh). Jeremiah’s description of the corruption of Judah is truly remarkable. The tongue of the men of Judah is a bow that hurls falsehood and deceit. These mighty warriors do not contend for truth or faithfulness ('êmûnâh), but for lawlessness. Their starting point is evil, so is their ultimate goal. They march on from one wicked deed to another. This deplorable situation has developed because they do not know or have regard for the living God.

Warning to Jeremiah
9:4-6

A. Slanderous Tongues (9:4):
1. Warning (9:4a): Be on guard each man from his friend, and do not trust any brother… A willful ignorance of God and his word was at the root of Judah's national corruption. No one could be trusted, not even the members of one’s own immediate family.

2. Explanation (9:4b): for every brother is very crooked and every friend goes about as a slanderer. Every brother was very crooked (‘āqôb ya‘qôbh) is a play on the name Jacob. The phrase means lit., to follow at the heel, assail insidiously, trip someone up. Everyone was out to defraud and cheat his brother. Friends went about carrying slanderous tales about friends. On go about as a slanderer see 6:26. The expression harks back to Lv 19:16-18.

B. Lying Tongues (9:5):
1. Extent of the lying (9:5a): Every man deceives his neighbor; they do not speak truth; their tongues have learned to speak lies. Deceives or cheats (r. tll) is another reminiscence from the Jacob story (cf. Gn 31:7). Self-protection demanded that everyone be viewed with suspicion. These people had learned, i.e., they had accustomed themselves, to speaking lies and falsehood.

2. Result of the lying (9:5b): With iniquity they weary themselves. The Judeans actually wearied themselves in sinning. The sinner may have his wild fling, but in the end he

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winds up exhausted, a physical, mental and moral wreck. The more abundant life is that of faithful and loving obedience to the divine will.

C. Hypocritical Tongues (9:6): Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit; in deceit they refuse the knowledge of me (oracle of Yahweh). Deceit or fraud (mirmāh), is a third verb link to the Jacob narrative (Gn 27:35; 34:13). God addresses Jeremiah. He tells the prophet what he already knew viz., that he should trust no one, since he is surrounded by deceit. Hypocritical men have no desire to really know God. They deliberately shut the Lord out of their lives.

Punishment Necessary
9:7-11

A. Judah Must be Refined (9:7):
1. A divine process (9:7a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh of hosts: Behold! I am about to refine them by fire and test them… Therefore introduces the divine sentence following the indictment of vv 4-6. For the messenger formula see 5:14. Behold introduces the unexpected. Refine appeared in 6:29 and test or assay in 6:27. In ch 6 Jeremiah was appointed to refine and test his people; here it is Yahweh who engages in the process.195
2. A necessary process (9:7b): for what else shall I do in view of the fact that she is the daughter of my people. God is about to purify his people in the fires of judgment even as silver is purified from dross by smelting. He will then test them to see if all the impurities have indeed been removed. How otherwise could God act? He has no other choice. God could not leave his people in their sin, for they were intended to be a holy people. On the other hand because they are his people, he cannot utterly destroy them. The only solution is to purge them through tribulation such as they had not hitherto experienced. The metaphor of refining may suggest that God will find and save the good elements of society.

B. Judah Speaks Treacherously (9:8): Their tongue is a sharp arrow, it speaks deceit; with his mouth he continues to speak peace with his friends; but in his heart he plans treachery. In v 3 the tongue was compared to a bow. Here people use their tongue as an arrow to smite their neighbors. Words can kill. For deceit, see on v 5. For peace see on 6:14. They talk of peace, but plot treachery (lit., set an ambush). His heart is lit., his inner self (qerebh).

C. Judah Deserves Punishment (9:9): On account of these things shall I not punish them (oracle of Yahweh)? Shall not I take vengeance on a nation that is like this? Punish is lit., visit. In this case, it is a harsh visitation of judgment that is contemplated. In view of the terribly corrupt conditions that prevail in Judah, God is perfectly justified in taking vengeance upon that land. God’s honor is at issue. He will not be mocked. Almost identical vv punctuated Jeremiah’s sermon in 5:9, 29.

D. Emotion of the Prophet (9:10-11):
1. Rural areas a waste (9:10):
   a. Announcement of lament (9:10a): Upon the mountains I shall lift up weeping and lamentation, and in the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation… Jeremiah knows

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195 Yahweh is the tester and assayer in 11:20; 12:3; 17:10 and 20:12.
what will befall his beloved land.\textsuperscript{196} He knows that when the judgment falls, he will be lamenting the desolation that will befall that once proud little country.

b. **Reason for lament (9:10b):** *for they are burned up so that no man passes by, and they do not hear the noise of the cattle. The birds of the heavens, as well as the cattle, have fled, have gone away.* The pasturelands of the wilderness i.e., the uninhabited regions, that once were covered with flocks and herds, will become so utterly waste that even the birds will depart for lack of food. Birds and beasts are linked as early as Gn 2:19. For disappearing birds, see 4:25.

2. **Cities desolate (9:11):** *And I will make Jerusalem heaps, the habitation of jackals, and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.* The cities of Judah will not escape the desolation. Their ruins will become the habitation of wild creatures. The jackal haunts waste places far from human habitation (Isa 34:13-14). The first person of this v is no longer Jeremiah, but God.

### Explanation of Judgment

9:12-16

A. **Call for Explanation (9:12):** Three rhetorical questions make the point that the previously described judgment on Judah is inexplicable apart from divine revelation.

1. **Wise men cannot explain it (9:12a):** *Who is the wise man that he may discern this?* The wise men were teachers and political advisers who relied on political savvy, knowledge of world affairs, and traditional wisdom to give counsel. The announced judgment violated common sense.

2. **Prophets cannot explain it (9:12b):** *and to whom has the mouth of Yahweh spoken that he may declare it?* Jeremiah challenges those who claimed to have received divine revelation to explain why the land has become desolate. The false prophets predicted that Yahweh would never let the temple and Jerusalem fall into Gentile hands. They will be at a loss to explain the judgment when it begins to unfold. Jeremiah borrows from his predecessor Isaiah the expression *the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.*\textsuperscript{197}

3. **Can anyone explain it? (9:12c):** *Why is the land destroyed, burned like a wilderness so that no one passes by?* Aside from revelation about to be presented by Jeremiah the Judeans will not reach the proper conclusions about why their land became a wilderness.

B. **Plain Answers (9:13-14):** Because the wise men and prophets are unable to explain the devastation, God himself gives the explanation. The reason for the judgment on Judah is stated in three negatives and two positives.

1. **Forsook law (9:13a):** *And Yahweh said: Because they forsook my law that I placed before them...* God had placed his law before this people at Sinai. The Judeans forsook that law; they had violated the terms of the sacred covenant with Yahweh. They had substituted some inferior law for the holy law of Yahweh.

2. **Ignored voice (9:13b):** *and they did not hearken to my voice...* Through the preaching of the prophets, Yahweh had amplified his law. He kept it before the people. But the Judeans had refused to listen to God’s prophets.

3. **Perverse walk (9:13c):** *nor walk in it.* The metaphor of walk points to one’s lifestyle. The Judeans refused to walk in Yahweh’s way as stipulated in the Mosaic Law and in the living voice of contemporary prophets like Jeremiah.

\textsuperscript{196}Others think it is Yahweh who weeps in these vv for his land.
4. Autonomy (9:14a): But they walked after the stubbornness of their heart... The first result of rejecting Yahweh’s covenant law is independence. The Judeans were stubborn. Refusing to submit themselves to Yahweh’s will, they defied their own desires.

5. Idolatry (9:14b): and after the Baals that their fathers taught them. Idolatry was the second result of rejecting God’s law. In their stubborn rebellion Judah followed after the Canaanite fertility deities—the Baals. This idolatry they had learned from their fathers. Where fathers go, sons will follow. The point is that Judah had a long history of involvement in idolatry.

C. Judgment Announced (9:15-16): Therefore, thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold! Therefore is the customary introduction to a judicial sentence that follows an indictment. Yahweh of hosts emphasizes authority to control all the armies of heaven and earth. Behold alerts the reader to something that is unexpected and urgent. The coming judgment is outlined in a five first person statements.

1. Bitter food (9:15b): I am about to cause them--this people--to eat wormwood... What an ungodly legacy the fathers had left to their descendants! The iniquities of fathers are often magnified in the lives of sons. When iniquity is full, the punishment is inevitable (cf. Ex 20:5). The sons must now eat the wormwood, a bitter and noxious substance that symbolizes affliction. Wormwood is mentioned again in 23:15. The term refers to a low shrub with extremely bitter leaves and fruit used in folk medicine.

2. Poisoned water (9:15c): and cause them to drink the poisoned water of gall. The sinners must drink the poisoned water of gall. The meaning is the same as the wormwood. On poisoned water see 8:14.

3. Scattering (9:16a): And I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have known... Judah will become desolate because she will be depopulated. God will scatter the Jews among the far-distant nations.

4. Pursuit (9:16b): and I will send after them the sword... Even in captivity the sword of divine retribution will pursue the sinners.

5. Destruction (9:16c): until I have consumed them. Those who will be consumed in captivity are the unbelieving and unrepentant (cf. Amos 9:9-10). Those who sincerely turn to God will be restored to their homeland.198

Call for Mourning
9:17-22

A. First Call for Mourners (9:17-19):

1. Summons (9:17): Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Consider, and call for the mourning women, that they may come, and unto the wise women send, that they may come. Consider (hitbôn’nû) is capable of more than one connotation. It may mean take a good look and draw you conclusions or be prudent. In view of the impending national disaster, Jeremiah calls for professional mourning women199 to bewail the death of the nation. Such women were wise or skillful in the ways of leading public lamentation.

2. Sorrow (9:18): And let them hurry; let them lift up over us wailing, that our eyes may flow with tears, and our eyelids stream with water. By helping others to weep and thus give vent to their emotions these women rendered a public service. One can find some measure of relief from anguish only as he outwardly expresses it. Jeremiah can seem to hear the wailing coming forth from Zion.

198 Jer 16:14-15; 31:9, 18-19.
199 This is the only reference in the OT to professional mourning women.
3. Sound (9:19): For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: How sad it is! We have been despoiled! We are put to great shame; for we have forsaken the land; for they have cast down our dwellings. The people of Judah have been despoiled and humiliated. They have been forced to forsake the land of their birth. Their homes have been cast down by the enemy. They are confounded and confused. On we have been despoiled or ruined, see 4:13. On put to shame, see 2:26. In 4:29 cities were abandoned; now it is the entire land that must be left behind.

B. Second Call for Mourners (9:20-22): In v 10 there was an invitation for public mourning. That theme is now developed more extensively.

1. Exhortation (9:20): For hear the word of Yahweh, O women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and everyone her neighbor lamentation. Jeremiah calls upon the women who had been so zealous in the worship of false gods to give heed to the word of God. The day is soon approaching when the women of the nation would have to teach their daughters how to lament. So great will be the national tragedy that there will not be sufficient professional mourners. All the women will have to become involved.

2. First explanation (9:21): For death has come up into our windows, it has entered into our palaces, to cut down children in the street, young men in the broad places. Why this need for universal lamentation? Death personified will reign supreme in the land in that day. The Grim Reaper creeps through the windows of homes and palaces. The Grim Reaper stalks the streets and broad places or market places of the city. Innocent children are cut down, young men in the flower of their youth. The coming of death cannot be fended off. It will penetrate behind every barrier.

The figure of death entering through the windows was a common one in the ancient Near East. In the Ugaritic epic of Baal, death is also described as entering by the window. Baal gave orders that no window was to be made in his palace until he had beaten his rival Moth, the god of death. After the victory over Moth, Baal issued a new order to the craftsman to construct a window. Apparently the entrance of death by the windows eventually became a common figure of speech in the Canaanite and Hebrew languages.

3. Second explanation (9:22): Speak thus! (oracle of Yahweh): The phrase, Speak thus! is abrupt and forceful. It serves to draw the reader's attention to the previous dramatic announcement.

a. First picture (9:22a): The carcasses of men shall fall like dung upon the surface of the field… The picture of death throughout the land reaches its climax in v 22. In 8:2 the dung was lying on the surface of the ground. Jeremiah is using an image applied in 2 Kgs 9:37 to Jezebel’s corpse. Jeremiah now intensifies the crude simile by the even cruder image of falling dung. The carcasses of those who fall in battle will be left unburied. The dead bodies will be scattered over the surface of the ground like fertilizer spread by a farmer. It is not just Jewish corpses that fall like dung; the carcasses of men, i.e., humanity/people.

b. Second picture (9:22b): and like sheaves behind the reaper; and there is no one to gather them. A reaper in his haste to glean the harvest leaves many handfuls of grain in the field to rot. So would it be with the bodies of the dead. Those who survive the battles will be too few in number and too fearful to venture forth from the walled cities to give the fallen a decent burial.

Word of Appeal
The brief, but beautiful, treatment of true glory serves the purpose of an appeal for a change of priorities on the part of the doom nation.

A. Stated in the Negative (9:23): Thus says Yahweh: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, nor the rich man boast of his wealth. Men throughout history have been tempted to magnify the importance of wisdom, strength and wealth; they fall down in adoration before this trinity in unholy worship. Wisdom (chokhmāh) embraces knowledge (both practical and theoretical), intelligence and experience. Might (g'bhûrāh) takes in physical prowess, as well as military and political power. Wealth and strength are ephemeral; wisdom, if it is not rooted in reverent fear for God, is vain (cf. Ps 111:10). Destruction and death await those who place undue confidence in wisdom, might or riches.

B. Stated in the Positive (9:24):
1. Identification of true glory (9:24a): But let him that glories glory in this: The understanding and knowledge of me... True glory belongs not to the wealthy, the strong or the wise, but to those who know the Lord. To understand God means to have the correct insight into his divine nature; to know him means to walk in intimate fellowship with him day by day.
2. Explanation of true glory (9:24b, c):
   a. God’s work (9:24b): for I am Yahweh who establishes kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth... In contrast to the life that focuses on wisdom, might and riches is the life with a very different orientation. The verb establishes (r.’śh) also carries the meaning practices. Both concepts are true. Kindness, justice and righteousness are grounded in the nature and practice of God. This triad of values leads to life. Kindness is steadfast love. Nothing in the v restricts earth (’erets) to the land of Israel alone.
   b. God’s delight (9:24c): because in these things I take delight (oracle of Yahweh). In these could refer to the triad of virtues, to the people who practice them, or both. On delight see 6:10. Those who understand and know the Lord practice daily those things that are pleasing to him. They demonstrate kindness (chesed) to those who are of the household of faith. See on 2:2. They strive for justice for the underprivileged and weak. They walk in the paths of righteousness, i.e., right conduct. These are the qualities that make the relationship between God and man; these are the qualities that must characterize the relationship between the man of God and his fellowman.

Word of Warning
9:25-26

In vv 23-24 Jeremiah presented the choices Judah was called upon to make. These vv give Yahweh’s verdict concerning the lifestyle choices that the Judeans have made.

A. Punishment Coming for the Uncircumcised (9:25): Behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will bring punishment upon all circumcised in their uncircumcision. Circumcision was given by divine command to Abraham and his descendants. It was a sign of the covenant between God and that people (Gn 17:10). The men of Jeremiah’s day, while outwardly bearing the sign of the covenant, had drifted far from God. Spiritually, they were
uncircumcised. Their hearts were closed to the word of God. They were members by birth of the nation Israel; but actually they were no part of the spiritual Israel. Shortly, warns Jeremiah, God will bring his punishment upon all those who, though outwardly circumcised, were really uncircumcised.

B. Judah Punished with the Uncircumcised (9:26):
1. Identification of condemned nations (9:26a): Upon Egypt, Judah, Edom, the children of Ammon, Moab and all those who cut the corners (of the hair) who dwell in the wilderness… Other nations of antiquity practiced circumcision as well as did the Jews. Five such peoples are named, probably because they were linked by treaty to Judah as an anti-Babylonian coalition. Egypt was the leader of the coalition, and so is listed first. Edom occupied the area southeast and southwest of the Dead Sea, on opposite sides of the depression known as the Arabah. Edomites were descended from Esau, son of Jacob. Children of Ammon is the self-designation of a portion of Lot’s descendants. They lived northeast of the Dead Sea in the area surrounding the city of Rabbah. Moab occupied a narrow strip of land directly east of the Dead Sea. The Moabites were descendants of Lot. Those who cut the corners of the hair were Arab tribes that shaved the temples at puberty and consecrated the hair to their deities. They occupied the desert regions east of Ammon and Moab. These Gentile peoples practiced circumcision.
2. Explanation for God’s action (9:26b): for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised of heart. The circumcision practiced by these heathen nations was not done in obedience to the command of God. Therefore, their circumcision was regarded by God as uncircumcision. God’s judgment would fall upon them. But God’s judgment will also fall upon the house of Israel, which in this respect was no different from pagan neighbors. Judah is distinguished from house of Israel in that the former is a political term, and the latter a covenant designation. The covenant people were physically circumcised, but not spiritually so. The heart is the organ of response and covenant-making. An uncircumcised heart is insensitive and incapable of functioning.

SECTION SEVEN
CONDEMNATION OF IDOLATRY
Jeremiah 10:1-25

Ch 10 contains a longer message on the subject of idolatry. Three times in this ch Jeremiah refers to idols as hebel (vv 3, 8, 15), which means vapor, nothingness, vanity. Throughout the ch he contrasts the living God of Israel with these lifeless, worthless entities and concludes that there is none like Yahweh (vv 6, 7, 16).

Idols are Incredible
10:1-5

Ch 10 opens with a litany of five things that idols cannot do. They cannot move, speak, walk, do evil or do good.

\[\text{References:} 200 \text{ Ammonite inscriptions offer several occurrences of the caption children of Ammon. See IDBSup, 20.} \]
\[\text{201 Herodotus 3:8. This practice was forbidden to the Israelites. See Lv 19:27; Dt 14:1.} \]
\[\text{203 See Dt 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:25-29.} \]
A. Introductory Formula (10:1): *Hear the word that Yahweh spoke against you, O house of Israel.* Through his prophet God exhorts the people not to learn, i.e., become accustomed to, the idolatrous ways of the heathen.

B. Heavenly Signs are Meaningless (10:2):
1. Avoid pagan ways (10:2a): *Thus says Yahweh: Unto the way of the nations do not resort...* The house of Israel (covenant people) should not resort to (lit. learn; r. lmd) the way of the Gentiles, i.e., their customs, habits, manner of life. The term way (derek) was used in 2:23 with the implication of Canaanite religious practices.
2. Avoid pagan superstitions (10:2b): *and do not be dismayed because of the signs of the heavens; for the nations are dismayed because of them.* The people of God need not become dismayed or upset by the signs of the heavens—eclipses, meteors, and the like—that other nations regarded as portents of evil. Numerous tablets from the ancient Near East have been found that indicate how closely the heavens were observed. Every movement of the heavenly bodies was charted. Modern astrology had its origins in the pagan temples of Mesopotamia.

C. Idols are Lifeless (10:3-4):
1. General characterization (10:3a): *For the customs of the people are vanity...* Customs (chuqqôt) is equivalent to way in the preceding v. Those who worship the God who created the heavens need have no superstitious fears regarding the position of the sun, moon and stars. The religious customs, practices and rituals of the heathen are vanity (chebhel), utterly empty.204
2. Specific illustration (10:3b): *for it is a tree that one cuts out of the forest, the work of the hands of the craftsman with an ax.* Astrological signs have no more reality than idols. Idols are in reality nothing more than a tree that has been cut out of the forest by the ax of a woodsman. They are man-made. Craftsman (chārāš) can refer to one who works with wood, stone or metal. But here the term clearly refers to a carpenter.
3. Humorous observation (10:4): *With silver and gold he adorns it; with nails and hammers they secure them so that it might not be made to totter.* Since there is no inherent value in a piece of wood, the craftsman adorned his caved image with silver and gold to give it value. But this only makes the object attractive to thieves. An idol cannot stand on its own two feet or defend itself. It must be fastened down with hammer and nails in order to prevent it from tottering or being stolen.

D. Idols are Harmless (10:5):
1. A comparison (10:5a): *They are like a post in a cucumber patch.* The idol is as harmless as a post erected in a cucumber patch for the purpose of scaring away the birds. Rags hung on a post served as a pathetic scarecrow to scare off silly birds. But thinking humans should not be intimidated idols that are not one whit more powerful than a scarecrow.
2. Assessment of capabilities (10:5b): *They cannot speak. They must even be carried about, for they are immobile.* Idols cannot speak, nor can they move about without being carried by someone. How, then, can they communicate any revelation to their devotees? How can idols sustain worshipers when they are not capable of any mobility.

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204 On vanity, see 2:5. Cf. Isa 40:19f; 44:12ff.
3. **Logical admonition (10:5c):** *Do not fear because of them, for they cannot do evil nor can they even do good.* Idols cannot harm anyone, nor for that matter, can they bring blessing upon anyone. For this reason there is no particular advantage in serving an idol, and no harm in failing to do so.

**God is Incomparable**

10:6-10

A. **He is Omnipotent** God (10:6): *There is none like you O Yahweh; great are you and great is your name in power.* Jeremiah turns from the ridiculous to the sublime (Holliday). None of the idols can compare to the Lord in greatness and in power. In support of this thesis Jeremiah makes several contrasts between Yahweh and the idols.

B. **Contrast #1: universal sovereignty vs. local veneration** (10:7a): *Who would not fear you, O King of the nations; for you are worthy of it.* Yahweh is not merely a tribal deity restricted theologically and geographically to his sphere of influence. He is worthy of reverence by all mankind.

C. **Contrast #2: all-wise vs. stupid** (10:7b-8):
   1. **Uniqueness of Yahweh (10:7b):** *Because among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their royalty, there is none like you.* No wise man of the earth can equal him in wisdom. No prince of mankind is his equal in majesty and power.
   2. **Ignorance of idols (10:8):** *They are altogether stupid and foolish; the instruction of vanities is wood.* On the other hand, the idols are nothing but lifeless lumber. *Stupid* (r. b’r) and *foolish* (r. ksl) are synonyms. Idols are utterly unable to render intelligent counsel. From an idol of wood one can only obtain wooden, lifeless, worthless guidance.

D. **Contrast #3: living vs. lifeless** (10:9-10):
   1. **Idols are superficial (10:9):**
      a. **Substantial investment (10:9a):** *Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz.* Men go to no little trouble in producing their idols. *Beaten silver* suggests that the silver was imported in plates. The wooden image is covered by the finest silver and gold sheets. Silver is secured from *Tarshish,* generally thought to be located on the southwest coast of Spain. Gold is imported from *Uphaz,* the location of which is unknown. Since Tarshish is in the extreme west in relation to Palestine, Uphaz is perhaps equally far in the opposite direction. Some think that Uphaz, also mentioned in Dan 10:5, is to be identified with Ophir.205
      b. **Skilled construction (10:9b):** *They are the work of a craftsman and the hands of the goldsmith...* Embellished with precious metals, an image was in reality a work of art produced by cunning and skillful men. It was no wiser and no more powerful than the craftsmen who produced it. **Hands of** is equivalent to *handiwork.* **Goldsmith** (tsôrēph) is lit., *smelter, refiner.* The term can be used for both the silver- and goldsmith.
      c. **Gorgeously adorned (10:9c):** *blue and purple is their clothing, all of them the work of wise men.* Once the beautiful metal had been shaped and molded to fit the wooden base the image was clothed in blue and purple, the most expensive cloth in antiquity.

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205This interpretation of Uphaz appears in the Syriac versions of the OT and in the Aramaic Targum.
Blue/purple are two dyes that mentioned side by side in the OT. Exact differentiation between the two is impossible. The use of wise men is ironic, for these wise men are laboring to produce things that essentially worthless.

2. Yahweh is real (10:10):
   a. His stature (10:10a): But Yahweh is the true God. He is the living God and eternal King. What a contrast exists between the God of Israel and the idols of the nations! They are false gods, but he is the true God; they are lifeless, but he is living; they are temporal, but he is eternal; they are provincial, but he is sovereign over all the earth.
   b. His wrath (10:10b): Before his wrath the earth trembles; nations cannot endure his indignation. All nations tremble before his indignation.

Israel’s Testimony
10:11-16

A. Contrast #1 (10:11-12):
1. Idols are of earth (10:11): Thus you shall say to them: the gods that did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from beneath the heavens. The v is in the Aramaic language rather than Hebrew. You is plural, suggesting that the vv that follow are designed to be Israel’s testimony of faith. The v may reflect some proverb that was current in the Aramaic language. The basic idea of the v is clear. All the gods of the nations that were in reality false gods will eventually perish. In the Aramaic sentence the verbs make (r. ’bd) and perish (r. ’bd) come back to back. The similarity in sound between these two verbs makes a nifty word play. These gods perish from beneath the heavens. The phrase is not redundant to from the earth. Rather beneath suggests that these gods do not dwell in the heavens. Their origin and domain is strictly this world.
2. Yahweh is above the heavens (10:12): It is he who made the earth by his power, who founded the world in his wisdom; and in his understanding he stretched out the heavens. In this v Jeremiah uses the first three action verbs to describe Yahweh. Four more will follow in the next v. All sever verbs emphasize that Yahweh is powerful, purposeful, and engaged in the functions of this world. The triad earth/world/heavens stresses that all that exists anywhere is due to the creative genius of Yahweh. Another triad (power/wisdom/understanding) points to the testimony of Creation respecting the Creator.

B. Contrast #2 (10:13-14):
1. Yahweh controls the wind (10:13): When he gives forth his voice, there is the noise of the waters in the heavens, and he causes the vapors to go up from the ends of the earth; lightnings he makes for the rain, and brings forth wind from his treasures. Yahweh’s power manifests itself almost daily in the mighty storms that come upon the earth. One example of how God gives forth his voice (i.e., communicates with mankind) is through the power of storm. Four manifestations of a storm are enumerated. (1) Noise of waters is a pounding rain. (2) Vapors are mist. (3) Lightning he makes for (i.e., to accompany) the rain. (4) He brings forth wind from his treasures or storehouses (cf. Dt 28:12; Ps 33:7; Job 38:22). With this fourth statement the description of the storm reaches its climax. Jeremiah contradicts the pagan belief that all aspects of the storm were under the control of Baal or Hadad.
2. Idols are windless (10:14):
a. Idolaters are stupid (10:14a): Every man is stupid, without knowledge! Every man who engages in idolatry is stupid (r. b’r) conveys the idea of having no more sense than a dumb beast. Without knowledge means too stupid to know the truth. Only when men accept the self-revelation of God through his word do they have any insight into the true meaning of life.

b. Idol makers will be humiliated (10:14b): Every goldsmith is put to shame because of his image… Image (nesekh) in the narrow sense is something poured out, i.e., a molten image. Those who make the idols will be utterly ashamed in the day of judgment as they will be forced to admit that their images are powerless.

c. Explanation (10:14c): for his molten image is a fraud, and there is no breath in them. In spite of the elaborate ceremonies in which the spirit of the god supposedly came to make its abode in the images, Jeremiah declares there is no breath (rûach) in them. The idols have no rûach while in v 13 Yahweh brings forth rûach (wind). Idols are utterly vain, empty, ridiculous.

2. Stupidity of idolatry (10:15): They are vanity, a ridiculous work; in the time of their visitation they shall perish. Idols are vanity (hehbel), empty, a great big zero. A ridiculous work is lit., a work of mockery. They are a joke in what their adherents claim about them; they are a joke in what their admirers promise and what they are able to deliver. The idols, along with their worshipers, will experience the visitation of judgment by the true God. This terminology is elsewhere used only for the punishment of ungodly men.206 The implication is that Yahweh will treat the idols like he will treat those who oppose him. In that time the images shall perish, unable to save themselves, let alone those who held them in esteem.

C. Final Testimony (10:16):

1. Yahweh is unique (10:16a): Not like these is the Portion of Jacob… None of the gods so popular in the days of Jeremiah remain on the scene today. They have indeed perished. Portion (chēleq) is possession. This title is used also in 51:19. The concept of Yahweh as portion goes back to the days of Moses where the Levites received no land apportionment because Yahweh was their portion (Nm 18:20).207 The name Portion of Jacob links Yahweh to the ancient tradition that God chose Israel as his own people—the so-called election tradition.

2. Yahweh is God of creation (10:16b): for he is the Maker of everything… Maker is a participle from a verb root meaning shape or form. The term refers to a potter in 18:2-6. Everything (hakkōl) is equivalent to the universe.

3. Yahweh is God of covenant (10:16c): and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance… This statement is the flip side of the concept of Yahweh being the Portion of Jacob. Though Yahweh is God of all nations, yet he belongs to Israel in a special way, and Israel is his special people. The great Creator has chosen to bestow his favor and his word upon an otherwise insignificant people. Inheritance is a frequent term for Israel. An inheritance should support its owner. So Yahweh’s inheritance (Israel) has the responsibility of standing up for him among the nations, witnessing for him, raising his praises boldly and continually.

4. Yahweh is all powerful (10:16d): Yahweh of hosts is his name. This martial title appears over seventy-five times in the book emphasizing the power of Yahweh. On the significance of the title, see on 2:19.

207Yahweh is called portion also in Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; Lam 3:24.
Folly of Forsaking God
10:17-22

Idolatry has inevitable consequences as far as God is concerned.

   1. Exhortation (10:17): Gather your bundle from the land, you who dwell in the siege. Jeremiah sadly addresses his people in the feminine singular form of the imperative. Jerusalem is personified as a woman, probably a daughter. The Judeans are to be thrown off the land. Therefore, Jeremiah urges them to gather together their possessions, and to prepare for captivity when the siege of the land has ended. Dwell (r. yšb) can also mean sit. Perhaps the picture is of a refugee woman sitting among her possessions (Holladay).208
   2. Explanation (10:18):
      a. Expulsion (10:18a): For thus says Yahweh! Behold, I am about to hurl out the inhabitants of the land at this time… On the messenger formula see 5:14. Behold points to an unexpected announcement. Hurl out (r. ql’) is the term that is applied to the discharge of a sling stone. At this time suggests that the expulsion is at hand. The inhabitants of Judah are about to be expelled violently from their land, hurled forth as a rock is hurled from a sling.
      b. Reclamation (10:18b): and I shall distress them in order that they might be found. Because of their idolatry, God himself becomes their antagonist. He will bring them into this distress.
         The last phrase of v 18 is very difficult, that they might be found. Literally the phrase might be translated, that they might find. Find what? Perhaps the voice of the prophet trailed off, and he never completed that sentence. On the other hand, it is permissible to translate the last verb as a passive, that they might be found. Only when Judah has been purged of wickedness through the ordeal of captivity, will God be able to find or accept his people once again.

B. Reflection (10:19-20): The collapse of Judah is painful to the prophet.
   1. Self-pity (10:19a): Woe to me because of my hurt! my wound is grievous. As he contemplates the future of his people, Jeremiah bursts forth into another lamentation. On woe is me, see 4:13, 31. The knowledge of what will befall his people is compared to a hurt (šebher), lit., a break or fracture. The figure refers to the collapse of the nation. The hurt is further described as a wound, suggesting that it was inflicted from without. Grievous in this context means something like incurable.
   2. Self-exhortation (10:19b): But as for me, I said, Alas, this is a grief that I must bear. Wound (makkāh) and sickness/grief (chôlí) are linked in 6:7. Jeremiah tells himself that he must simply live with his mental suffering.
   3. Lamentation (10:20): The collapse of Judah is irreversible. Jeremiah may be engaging in prophetic lamentation in which he imagines how people will react to the devastation of Judah once it occurs. On the other hand, these words may reflect his personal devastation over what is about to befall his people.

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208 Others think the picture is of a queen sitting enthroned. Jerusalem considered herself as having regal prerogatives.
209 Others think that it is Jerusalem personified who cries out in this v. Supposedly the people admit their guilt. They express their determination to endure their punishment. See rsv.
a. Fallen tent (10:20a): *My tent is destroyed, and all my cords have been snapped...* The prophet compares Judah to a tent that has collapsed because the cords have been snapped or cut.

b. Dispersed family (10:20b): *my children have gone away from me, and they are dead; there is none to stretch out my tent any longer, and to raise up my curtains.* My children are citizens of Jerusalem that Jeremiah regards as his students. Those who once occupied that tent have been taken into exile, or else they are dead. No one remains to help raise up the national tent once again.

C. Explanation (10:21): The collapse of Judah can be blamed on the national leaders.

1. Leaders ignore Yahweh (10:21a): *For the shepherds are stupid, and they do not seek Yahweh.* The calamity has come on Judah because the shepherds—the political and religious leaders—have not sought the Lord. On stupid, see on v 14. The word seek is a technical word meaning to inquire of, to seek an oracle from the Lord.

2. Leaders act unwisely (10:21b): *Therefore, they have not acted wisely, and all of their flock is scattered.* Spurning divine revelation, these leaders were making decisions that were most unwise. Jeremiah is probably alluding to the scheming, plotting and outright revolt against Babylon the superpower. Because of the policies of the national shepherds, the flock—the people of the land—were being scattered. Innocent people often suffer when national leaders spurn divine revelation.

D. Announcement (10:22): The collapse of Judah is effected by an enemy from the north.

1. Rumors of war (10:22a): *Hark! A report! Behold, it comes!* Even as he points this finger of accusation at the national leadership, Jeremiah dramatically pauses and puts his hands to his ears. Hark! he cries. A report! He seems to hear rumors or reports of the dreaded enemy from the north.

2. Sounds of war (10:22b): *A great shaking [coming] out of the land of the north, to make the cities of Judah a desolation, the habitation of jackals.* The rumors of war are followed quickly by the sounds of battle. The earth itself seems to rumble to the cadence of marching feet. The Chaldeans are on the march. Jerusalem, and indeed all the cities of Judah, would shortly be desolation, inhabited only by wild creatures.


1. An admission (10:23):
   a. Admission of weakness (10:23a): *I know, O Yahweh, that a man's way is not his own...* The solemn description of the impending desolation of Judah (v 22) sent the prophet of prayer to his knees in intercession for his people. He acknowledges man’s weakness and waywardness. He uses this as the grounds upon which to appeal for the mercy of God. A man’s way is not his own; a man belongs to God. He is under the obligation to walk in the path that God has marked out for him in the word.
   b. Admission of waywardness (20:23b): *and that a man in walking cannot direct his step.* If a man fails to acknowledge his relationship to God, he denies the fundamental reason for his existence. One who walks the path of life is not able to give moral and spiritual guidance to his own steps. He will inevitably stray from the straight and narrow. He therefore requires divine discipline and correction.

2. A plea for mercy (10:24):

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210 Others speculate that the reference is to the tabernacle that may have been erected within the holy of holies of the temple.
a. Measured punishment (10:24a): *Chastise me, O Yahweh, but in measure...* Jeremiah feels himself to be one with his people. The *me* of v 24 is really *us*. The prophet knows that God must discipline his people; he only prays that God will be merciful. let God punish Judah *in measure*, i.e., only with enough punishment to bring about the reformation of Judah.

b. Tempered anger (10:24b): *not in your wrath, lest you cause me to become small.* Let God punish his people, but not in the *wrath* they deserve lest the nation *become small* and dwindle into insignificance. Rather, Jeremiah is willing to endure all that God intends to do to Judah so long as the judgment stops short of absolute annihilation of the nation.

3. A call for justice (10:25):

   a. Those who deserve judgment (10:25a): *Pour out your wrath upon the nations that do not know you, and upon tribes that have not called on your name...* Jeremiah admits that Israel deserves punishment. But the nations by whom God would bring judgment upon Judah also deserve divine judgment.

   b. Reason they deserve judgment (10:25b): *for they have consumed Jacob, they have consumed him, and finished him, and his habitation they have made desolate.* The Gentile nations had gone beyond the appointed bounds. God intended for these nations to punish Israel; instead they aimed at destroying the people of God. Quoting Ps 79:6f, Jeremiah calls upon God to *pour out* his wrath upon them as well as Israel.

SECTION EIGHT
CONVENTIAL
UNFAITHFULNESS
Jeremiah 11:1-17

As a result of more stern preaching, a plot against Jeremiah surfaced in Anathoth.

Words from Yahweh
11:1-13

Jeremiah was no innovator; he was a restorer. He wanted to see the ancient Sinai covenant restored to its rightful place in the life of the people of Judah. In three messages Jeremiah exhorted his people to fulfill their covenant obligations.

Covenant Foundation
11:1-5

*The word that came unto Jeremiah from the Yahweh* (11:1): For this idiom see 1:2. Three great covenant themes are articulated in this first message. The exhortation to keep the covenant of the Lord is usually dated by commentators just after 621 BC, that crucial year in the reign of King Josiah when the lost law book was discovered in the temple. The material may come, however, from the early years of King Jehoiakim. The truth of the matter is that either date remains somewhat speculative.

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211 The Hebrew word is usually translated *justice* or *judgment*. That it also means “measured amounts” is indicated by 1 Kgs 4:28 where the same word is used.

212 Isa 10:6-7; 47:6; Zech 1:15.
A. Theme of Listening (11:2-3a):

1. Exhortation to listen (11:2a): **Hear the words of this covenant...** Six times in vv 1-8 Jeremiah calls upon the people of Judah to *hear* the words of the covenant, i.e., the Sinai covenant (cf. Ex 19:5-9; Dt 6:4; 15:5). Listening in the OT tradition is not just an auditory response; it involves obedient application.

2. Exhortation to speak (11:2b): **and speak unto the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.** The imperative *speak* in v 2 is plural. Jeremiah is exhorting the people to submit to the words of the covenant, and then go out and convince others to do the same. The prophet is attempting to organize an evangelistic campaign to spread the word of the Lord to every inhabitant of the land. Only when preachers learn to enlist others in the task of proclamation will the God's word make maximum impact upon a generation.

3. Commission to preach (11:3a): **Then you shall say unto them: Thus says Yahweh God of Israel...** Jeremiah is commissioned to begin his message with the traditional messenger formula.

4. Penalty for not listening (11:3b): **Cursed is the man who does not hear the words of this covenant.** Jeremiah’s message on the covenant begins on a negative note. Utilizing the language of Dt 27:26 Jeremiah pronounces a curse upon any one who refuses to *hear* (obey) the words of the covenant.

B. Theme of Mutual Obligation (11:4-5a):

1. Deliverance from Egypt (11:4a): **that I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them from the land of Egypt, from the furnace of iron...** The covenant to which Jeremiah alludes is that ancient covenant that God had made with the Israelites when he *brought them from the land of Egypt*. This language is repeated in 7:22; 34:13. The trying and bitter experience of bondage in Egypt is metaphorically called the *furnace of iron*, i.e., a furnace used for smelting iron. The heat required for smelting iron (over 1500 degrees C) is far greater than for metals like copper. So the figure points to an ordeal of the most intense affliction. As was true of the captivity of the past, so also the captivity of the future would be a furnace of affliction (Isa 48:10).

2. Expected obedience (11:4b): **and said: Obey my voice and do according to all that I have commanded you.** Two kinds of treaties or covenants were known in the ancient Near East. Parity treaties were drawn up between two parties who were equals. Vassal treaties were issued by a superior king to an inferior. The Sinai covenant was of the latter type. Man’s part in the treaty of the Great King is, in essence, obedience.

   Men do not bargain with God; they submit to him. God *commands*, and men obey. For the prophets, obedience was the fundamental duty of man. God expected Israel to heed his voice. He expected them to observe the individual commands that he had given them. All that I commanded you is frequent in Dt and appears also in 1:7.

3. Special relationship (11:4c): **Then you will be my people, and I will be your God...** Israel’s unique relationship to God would continue only so long as the nation was obedient. Cf. 7:23.

C. Theme of Inheritance (11:5a): **in order to establish the oath that I swear to your fathers to give to them a land flowing with milk and honey as at this day.** Establish means *fulfill*. An oath is a solemn commitment. Your fathers are the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Jacob’s sons. The land promises made to the Patriarchs were conditional. Judah would continue to dwell in the Promised Land only if they continued to be faithful to the covenant (cf. Dt 7:8ff; 8:18ff.). *The land flowing with milk and honey* occurs twenty times in the OT (cf. 32:22). It was the traditional way of referring to Canaan as a region congenial to
generous food production. The expression is only appropriate when Canaan is contrasted with the barren desert lands that surround it. As at this day indicates that the oath regarding the land had been honored over the centuries following Sinai to Jeremiah’s day.

D. Jeremiah’s Response (11:5b): And I answered and said, Amen, O Yahweh. In Dt Moses instructed the children of Israel to gather at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim in Canaan. There they were to renew the covenant with God. As the Levites pronounced certain prescribed curses upon those who were covenant breakers, all the people were to respond by saying Amen. (Dt 27:11ff.). Since God has just pronounced a curse upon those who disobey the covenant, Jeremiah responds in the prescribed manner, Amen, O Lord. So be it! Amen is a formula of asseveration indicating that the statement just made is true, faithful and trustworthy. Jeremiah is ready to do what God has commanded.

Past Covenant Violation
11:6-8

A. Commission (11:6a): And Yahweh said unto me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Proclaim (lit. call) is used of prophetic proclamation in 2:2. Jeremiah is to travel the length and breadth of the land in preaching his message of obedience to the covenant. He is to call, cry, proclaim or perhaps read aloud these words of God in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem.

B. Appeal (11:6b-8):
1. Yahweh pled with his people (11:6b-7):
   a. Present appeal (11:6b): Hear the words of this covenant and do them. The objective of Jeremiah’s street preaching is to influence the people to obey the law of God.
   b. Previous appeals (11:7): For I earnestly testified to your fathers in the day I brought them up from the land of Egypt even unto this day (rising early and testifying): Obey my voice! Jeremiah’s message is nothing new. Over and over again, ever since the day he brought them out of Egypt, God had exhorted the children of Israel through their prophets to obey the divine voice. Earnestly testified (r.’ûd) means to admonish (cf. 6:10). The phrase rising early and testifying, a favorite expression of Jeremiah, means to earnestly and incessantly undertake a task.
2. Israel rejected God’s demands (11:8a): But they did not hearken nor did they incline their ear, but went on, every man in the stubbornness of his heart. God had been very zealous in urging his people to be obedient. But the people of God did not hearken to his messengers. They continued in their own stubborn ways, each person doing whatever he set his heart to do.
3. Israel received chastisement (11:8b): Therefore, I brought against you all the words of this covenant that I commanded them to do, but they did not. Because they had rejected God’s demands, all of the penalties for covenant breaking stipulated in the law of Moses had come upon the people.

Present Covenant Violation
11:9-13

A. Accusation (11:9-10):
1. General charge (11:9): And Yahweh said unto me: Conspiracy is found among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Sin is treason against the heavenly King! The people of Judah are accused of national conspiracy to renounce their allegiance to the Lord. This is not a cloak and dagger conspiracy carried on in secret, but an open revolt against God. The men of Judah were encouraging one another to engage in idolatry. This, in the eyes of God, constituted a conspiracy.

2. Specific indictment (11:10):
   a. Backsliding (11:10a): They have returned to the iniquities of their first fathers who refused to listen to my words… For awhile under the influence of the godly Josiah, the men of Judah had discontinued the sin of their fathers; but now, says the prophet, they have returned to the sins of their first fathers, i.e., the Israelites of the wilderness and judges periods.
   b. Idolatry (11:10b): and they walked after other gods to serve them… Like their forefathers the present generation has walked after other gods to serve them.
   c. Covenant violation (11:10c): the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. The house of Judah as well as the house of Israel had violated the terms of the ancient covenant made at Sinai. In linking the two houses together, Jeremiah may be suggesting that Judah will experience the same fate as her sister kingdom to the north.

B. Announcement (11:11-15):
1. Curse of inescapable calamity (11:11a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to bring unto them a calamity that they will not be able to escape… Therefore indicates consequence. Behold suggests the unexpected. For bring … calamity see 4:6; 5:15. Not be able to escape (lit., exit) suggests that efforts to avoid or minimize the calamity will not avail.
2. Curse of unanswered prayer (11:11b): and they will cry unto me, but I will not hearken unto them. Rebellion against the crown brings inevitable punishment. In that hour of calamity the men of Judah desperately will try to call upon God, but he will not answer their prayers. When Israel was experiencing the oppression of Egypt the reverse of this v was true. The implication is that the Judeans will no longer be treated with the special favor Yahweh had shown them in the past.
3. Curse of impotent idols (11:12-13):
   a. Appeals for help notwithstanding (11:12a): And the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall go and cry unto the gods to whom they continue to make offerings… The Judeans will turn in the time of crisis to the gods they have continued to worship.
   b. National calamity notwithstanding (11:12b): but they shall utterly fail to save them in the time of their calamity. The man-made gods will be powerless to save.
   c. Number of gods notwithstanding (11:13): For according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah; according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have made altars to Shame, altars for making offering to Baal. Every city had its tutelary deity. Altars to Shame, i.e., Baal, could be found on every street of

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213 Others think that there is a political background to this conspiracy—some proposed political alliance that in Jeremiah’s view was rebellion against Yahweh.
214 Others think the reference is to the fathers prior to the Josiah reform.
215 The Hebrew participle suggests that even while they were crying to God, they continued to make offerings to their gods.
Jerusalem. Like the men of Athens, the population of Jerusalem was very religious. But their religiosity will not save them from the wrath of the God of judgment.

**Harsh Words of Judgment**

11:14-17

In this unit Judah faces harsh judgment, and the end of the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

A. **Prayer of no Avail** (11:14):

1. **Prohibition** (11:14a): *But as for you, do not pray on behalf of this people, and do not raise up a cry or prayer on their behalf...* Because of the apostate condition of the men of Judah it is useless for Jeremiah to continue to pray on their behalf. God will not hear.

2. **Explanation** (11:14b): *for I will not hear in the time of their calling unto me, because of their calamity.* The Hebrew uses a participle that implies that God will continue to refrain from hearing no matter how hard or long the people might cry unto him.

B. **Expulsion Necessary** (11:15):

1. **Judah’s continued treachery** (11:15a): *What business does my beloved have in my house since she commits treachery?* Because of her adulterous apostasy, God’s beloved (Judah) no longer has any business in the house of God.

2. **Judah’s empty ritual** (11:15b): *Will a multitude [of sacrifices] and holy flesh remove [sin] from you?* As long as the nation continues in this treachery no amount of sacrifices will be able to remove their sin. Sacrifice without contrition is valueless.

3. **Judah’s perverse joy** (11:15c): *When you do evil, then you rejoice.* Far from feeling any remorse or shame because of their evil, the people of Judah actually rejoiced in wrong doing.

C. **Tree Analogy** (11:16-17):

1. **Yahweh had planted the tree** (11:16a): *Yahweh has given you the name “a green olive tree, beautiful, with well-formed fruit.”* In earlier days God had regarded Israel as beautiful green olive tree, because the nation had produced the finest fruit. The figure is derived from Hos 14:7. The olive tree is one of the most hardy and productive trees of Palestine. But that tree was now worthless. The branches were dead and unfruitful.

2. **Yahweh would burn the tree** (11:16b): *At the noise of great tumult, he has kindled a fire against it, and its branches are broken.* When the tumult of battle is heard in the land, the enemy soldiers will break off the branches of that tree and use them for firewood.

3. **Yahweh has been provoked by their unfaithfulness** (11:17): *For Yahweh of host, who planted you, has spoken evil against you because of the evil of the house of Israel and Judah, that they have committed to their own harm in order to provoke me by offering to the Baal.* The Lord of hosts, who had planted that olive tree, has the power also to uproot it. That is just what he plans to do. The house of Israel and the house of Judah—the two branches of the olive tree—engaged in evil practices to their own hurt. They provoked God by offering sacrifices to Baal. The Lord, therefore, has pronounced evil, i.e., calamity, against his people. One branch—Israel—already had been destroyed by the Assyrian empire. The second branch—Judah—was about to experience the same fate at the hands of the Chaldeans.
The first collection of messages concludes as it began with Jeremiah engaged in dialogue with Yahweh. Clearly this unit is meant to be the counterpart of Section One (the call narrative). Some of the parallels are illustrated in the following chart.\(^{216}\)

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**Plot against Jeremiah**

11:18-23

Jeremiah suffered much during his ministry. At times his enemies almost got the best of him. But God kept his promise to deliver Jeremiah from his enemies. In the present paragraph, Jeremiah experiences his first personal crisis. He learns through revelation that the men of his hometown are plotting against him. These developments caught Jeremiah by surprise. In great distress he cried out to God in the first of his complaints or confessions. Probably this material is to be assigned to the early years of wicked king Jehoiakim.

**A. Jeremiah’s Complaint (11:18-19):**

1. **Revelation of the plot (11:18):** *And Yahweh made known to me that I might know; then you showed me their deeds.* Through special revelation Jeremiah learned that the men of his hometown were plotting against him. God caused Jeremiah to interpret correctly the deceitful deeds of the cunning adversaries.

2. **Shock of the plot (11:19a):** *But as for me, I was like a sacrificial lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they were devising plans against me...* Jeremiah had never suspected that his neighbors were plotting against him. He was as unsuspecting as a lamb being led to the slaughter. *Against me* is emphatic in the Hebrew sentence.

\(^{216}\)Chart based on Dorsey, *LSOT*, 238.
3. **Intention of the plot (11:19b):** It is not clear whether these words were actually spoken to Jeremiah by the conspirators, or whether Yahweh is revealing to him what they are saying behind his back. In either case the vicious intent of the conspirators is clear.
   
   a. **Stated metaphorically (11:19b):** *saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit…*
   Because Jeremiah had been comparing Judah to a tree that God will destroy (vv 16-17), the men of Anathoth contemptuously refer to Jeremiah as a tree that must be destroyed. They wish to rid themselves of that tree and its fruit. Since Jeremiah had no children, the fruit of the tree probably refers to his work, i.e., his prophetic ministry. Dt 20:19 prohibited the cutting down of a fruit tree when a city was under siege. Such an act was considered a war crime. So Jeremiah conceives of the conspiracy as a war in which the enemy does not abide by the rules of warfare.
   
   b. **Stated forthrightly (11:19c):** *and let us cut him off from the land of the living…*
   The conspirators plotted in an effort to find an opportunity to assassinate Jeremiah, or have him publicly executed. *Land of the living* appears thirteen times in the OT, but only here in Jeremiah. This v. may be influenced by the language of Isa 53:7-8.
   
   c. **Stated viciously (11:19d):** *that his name be remembered no longer.* If they could slay Jeremiah, there would be no descendant to perpetuate his name. The language here is very similar to Ps 83:4.

B. **Jeremiah’s Petition (11:20):** Upon learning of the plot against him, Jeremiah turns immediately in prayer to God.

1. **Competence of the Judge (11:20a):**
   
   a. **His regal power (11:20a):** *But, O Yahweh of host…* Yahweh has the power to deal with those who oppose Jeremiah. He is in a position to do something about the prophet’s situation.
   
   b. **His righteous judgment (11:20b):** *who judges with righteousness…* Yahweh actively intervenes on behalf of the faithful to see that they are fairly treated. Jeremiah clearly sees himself as an innocent victim who is entitled to such intervention. He believed that the Judge of all the earth would always do what is right (Gn 18:25).
   
   c. **His omniscience (11:20c):** *who tries the kidneys and heart…* God alone can test or try the innermost feelings and thoughts of a man. Because of their position within the body kidneys (*k'lāyōṭ*) represent the deepest aspects of one’s character. Yahweh knows that Jeremiah has been utterly sincere in his ministry. There has been no guile or bitterness in his heart. In 6:27 it was Jeremiah who tries or tests (*bōchēn*), but here it is Yahweh.

2. **Confidence of the petitioner (11:20d):**
   
   a. **Statement of confidence (11:20d):** *I will see your vengeance upon them…* God knows the hypocrisy and the evil intent of the men of Anathoth. Jeremiah is confident of the verdict that the righteous Judge will be rendered in his behalf. Divine vengeance will be poured out upon the evil schemers. Thus the cause of God and his prophet will be vindicated. Vengeance comes from a root (r. *nqm*) that refers to the exercise of sovereignty. By challenging the credibility of Jeremiah the conspirators were attacking the sovereignty appointment of Yahweh. Therefore, their conduct calls for divine action to punish their brazen rebellion against the sovereign Lord.
   
   b. **Reason for confidence (11:20e):** *for I have revealed my case unto you.* Jeremiah needs only to reveal his case to God and the just verdict will be rendered. God, of course, was aware of the plight of the prophet; Jeremiah was not telling God
something that he did not already know. To reveal one’s case is to plead formally one’s case before the bar of justice.

C. Yahweh’s Response (11:21-23):

1. Identity of plotters (11:21a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh concerning the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life… The guilt of those who were scheming against Jeremiah is established in this v. When the conspiracy against Jeremiah was exposed, the men of Anathoth openly began to threaten the life of the prophet.

2. Threat of plotters (11:21b): saying, Do not prophesy in the name of Yahweh and you will not die at our hand… The men of Anathoth were guilty of trying to silence a prophet, a covenant ambassador of the Great King. Prophesy in the name of Yahweh appears also in 26:9, 20.217 Only if Jeremiah ceased to prophesy in the name of the Lord would his life be spared.

Other prophets had been threatened. Amos was ordered to leave Bethel (Amos 7:10ff). Elijah had to flee for his life to Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:1-4). Some prophets had died because they fearlessly preached in the name of God. Zechariah was slain in the temple (2 Chr 24:20-22). According to tradition, Isaiah was sawn asunder during the reign of King Manasseh.

In Jeremiah’s own day a prophet by the name of Uriah, who spoke words similar to those of Jeremiah, was slain by King Jehoiakim (26:20-23). The threats made by the men of Anathoth were not idle. These men meant business. From this day forward Jeremiah would be putting his life on the line every time he uttered an oracle in the name of the Lord.

3. Fate of plotters (11:22-23): The Righteous Judge sentences those that Jeremiah has accused in the heavenly court.

a. Announcement (11:22a): therefore thus says Yahweh of host: Behold, I am about to punish them! Therefore is the traditional introduce to a divine sentence in a covenant courtroom. The righteous Judge was quick to render his verdict in favor of the plaintiff. Punishment is about to fall upon the inhabitants of Anathoth. The verdict confirms that Jeremiah is a genuine prophet and has the full support of the Great King.

b. Description (11:22b): The young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters will die by the famine… The young men of military age would die by the sword of the enemy. Younger children would die in the famine that would result because of prolonged siege.

c. Outcome (11:23):

(1) Extermination (11:23a): and they shall not have a remnant…

(2) Explanation (11:23b): for I will bring calamity unto the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment. No remnant of those conspirators will survive the calamity that God was about to bring upon the land. The year of their visitation or punishment is upon them. They will not be able to escape the ruthless armies of Nebuchadnezzar.

Complaint Registered
12:1-4

Some time elapsed after Jeremiah committed his case confidently to God (11:20). The verdict had been rendered in favor of the prophet (11:22-23); but the sentence had been delayed. The

217 Prophesy in my name appears in 14:14, 15; 23:25; 29:9, 21 is used of the activity of the false prophets.

218 That the threat is limited to the conspirators is indicated by the fact that some men of Anathoth did survive the exile and returned to their home city. See Ezra 2:23. Remnant (š’ērīt) occurs in 6:9 in reference to Israel as a whole.
enemies of the prophet continued to prosper. They lived a life of ease, while the circumstances of the prophet became ever more difficult. Jeremiah reopened his case in the heavenly courtroom.

A. Approach to God (12:1-2a):
   1. He approaches God in faith (12:1a):
      a. Fundamental premise (12:1a): Righteous are you, O Yahweh, when I present my case unto you... Jeremiah’s prayer is built on the fundamental premise of faith, viz., God is righteous. This means that Yahweh will keep his promises, and he will intervene in powerful ways when a promise appears to be failing. Yahweh is the logical one to whom Jeremiah can present his case or complaint. Yahweh made promises to Jeremiah; the promises were running amok. Yahweh is just enough to discern the injustice and powerful enough to correct the inequity.
      b. Fundamental issue (12:1b): yet I will speak to you regarding matters of judgment. Jeremiah admitted that God is just, yet he is perplexed and wishes to inquire concerning his judgment, i.e., his dealings with the sons of men. The term judgment in this context is essentially equivalent to the term government.
   2. He asked God tough questions (12:1b): Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do those who practice treachery live peacefully? Those who have received divine revelation—who have experienced the most intimate communion with the Almighty—are not immune to moments of doubt and spiritual distress. Jeremiah case has to do with the issue of theodicy, i.e., why the wicked prosper. The first question assumes that the wicked do prosper, and that assumption is not disputed anywhere in Scripture. Those who practice treachery is lit., treacherous committers of treachery. This verb is used of treacherous desertion by a wife in 3:20. Live peacefully (r. šlh) is used of what a believer experiences (Ps 122:6). But Job said he lacked it (Job 3:26). Even robbers (Job 12:6) and Jerusalem’s enemies (Lam 1:5) enjoy it much to the chagrin of the devout. By means of these two questions Jeremiah is not soliciting a theological lecture. In reality, he is making an accusation against Yahweh, as the next v clearly shows.
   3. He blamed God for the status quo (12:2a): You have planted them, yes they have taken root; they grow, yes they produce fruit. Jeremiah can only conclude that evil men prosper because God blesses them. God has planted them, and they have taken root; they continue to grow (Hebrew imperfect), ever expanding into new areas of influence. They have produced fruit, i.e., their plans seem to be successful.

B. Defense of Himself (12:2b-3a):
   1. He disparages his adversaries (12:2b): Near are you in their mouth, but far from their hearts. While it is true that these men were outwardly pious, God is far distant from their hearts.
   2. He defends himself (12:3a): And as for you, O Yahweh, you know me; you see me, and you have tested my heart in respect to yourself. Jeremiah disparages his foes as he stands before the bar of divine justice; he also defends himself. He presents himself as a righteous petitioner seeking redress of grievances from a righteous God. God knows his prophet (cf. 1:5); he observes him continuously (Hebrew imperfect). God knows that Jeremiah was not hypocritical when he spoke about God. How then can God allow his faithful servant to continue to be harassed by his adversaries? On testing the heart, see on 11:20.

C. Petition for Aid (12:3b-4):
1. He calls for immediate execution of the sentence (12:3b): Drag them away as sheep to the slaughter; set them apart for the day of slaying. There is no doubt in the mind of the prophet what he would do if he were the judge. He wanted these adversaries removed from the scene. What his adversaries are plotting against him, he desires for them. Is Jeremiah simply giving vent to the spirit of retaliation? Do the crimes committed against Jeremiah personally produce this imprecation?

It should be noted that God has already pronounced sentence against these wicked men (11:22-23). Jeremiah then is simply asking that the sentence be executed speedily.

2. He points out how the innocent are suffering (12:4): The complaint in this v is offered in support of the petition just presented.
   a. His question (12:4a): How long shall the land mourn, and the vegetation of the whole field wither? The rhetorical question is in reality a complaint. The reference here is probably to some disciplinary drought that God has sent upon the land in order to cause the people to realize the folly of sin.
   b. His observation (12:4b): Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it, the cattle and the birds are snatched away… Nature itself—the land, the vegetation, the cattle and the birds—suffers because of the wicked inhabitants of the land. But if the land suffers, so do the few righteous ones who still live in it. As Jeremiah views the matter, this is unjust.
   c. His illustration (12:4c): because they say, He shall not see our end. One example of the wickedness of his opponents is the taunting God’s messenger. At the very least they were confident that they would outlive Jeremiah. Perhaps they were hinting that they would see to it that they outlived Jeremiah, i.e., they would get rid of him.

   The enemies regarded the predictions of Jeremiah as delusions. Since Jeremiah was but a mouthpiece for God, these ungodly men were in reality mocking the message of the Lord. Such a state of affairs called for an immediate execution of the sentence of judgment against them. With these words Jeremiah has presented his case once again before God.

Correction Received
12:5-13

A. Further Difficulties Revealed (12:5-6): God replies to his prophet, but not in the way that Jeremiah anticipated. He had received supportive answers to his past complaints (1:8, 9); this hard-nosed response is essentially a reprimand. Yahweh makes use of two questions to make his point.

1. Footmen vs. horses (12:5a): If with foot racers you have run, and they have made you weary, then how shall you hotly contend [in a race] with horses? God does not explain the delay in the execution of the sentence against the ungodly. He does not promise any cessation of hostilities against his servant. The divine reply is designed to correct the impatience of the prophet. God does not deny that Jeremiah has been having a time of it. Things have been bad; but they are going to get worse. Run (r. rûts) points to Jeremiah’s function as a messenger of Yahweh (cf. 51:31). Foot racers (raglîm) are those on foot (Ex 12:37), especially infantry (1 Kgs 20:29). One who runs should have no difficulty competing with those who are walking. If Jeremiah is not able triumphantly to face the relatively minor hostility of the present, how will he endure the severe trials of the future?

2. Peaceful land vs. pride of Jordan (12:5b): And if you are trusting in a peaceful land, then what will you do in the pride of Jordan? Jeremiah is currently passing through a
peaceful land, i.e., a land where one is secure; but shortly he will be forced to fight his way through the tangled brush of the pride of Jordan. The pride of Jordan is that ribbon of lush vegetation that grows on either side of the twisting, winding Jordan River. This area was infested with vicious wild animals and dangerous outlaws. Days are coming in comparison with which the present troubles of the prophet will appear as days of peace. Jeremiah faced danger that might be likened to traversing an uncharted jungle.

3. His own family cannot be trusted (12:6): For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously against you; even they have cried aloud after you. Do not trust them when they speak good words to you. As one example of what was ahead for the prophet, God reveals to him that even the members of his own family cannot be trusted. Brothers are kinfolks in a wide sense; house of your father are more immediate family members. These relatives have plotted against him. They have cried aloud (lit., full) after Jeremiah as one cries after a criminal who is being hunted down. Even though they speak kind words to the prophet, he should not be deceived. Such outward manifestations of cordiality are but a cloak for their nefarious schemes.

B. Divine Pain Revealed (12:7-10): When faced with issues of fairness, the believer must come to see the situation through God's eyes.

The answer to the prayer of Jeremiah here is expanded. God is describing the destruction that will shortly befall his people. The future is known to God; he, therefore, can describe in the past tense what to man is yet future.

One of the basic ways in which God deals with self-pity in the Scriptures is to place his heaviness of heart in contrast to the sometimes petty and inappropriate depression of his servants. By learning that God suffers because of the sin and consequent destruction of his people, the man of God comes to realize that the trials he experiences are really nothing compared to what God must bear.

1. He has forsaken his possession (12:7): I have forsaken my house, I have left my inheritance; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. One can feel the pain of God as he speaks of the ruination of my house, my inheritance, and the beloved of my soul. These terms refer to the land of Israel. From the beginning, Israel (land and people) had been Yahweh’s special, intimate treasure (Dt 32:9). It was unthinkable for any property owner in the Near East to think of abandoning his ancestral lands. But that is what Yahweh was about to do. Jeremiah, wallowing in self-pity because his family and friends were opposing him, needed to learn how much God suffers when his beloved people rise up in open rebellion against him. Jeremiah, who had called for the hasty execution of divine judgment upon his enemies, needed to realize how much it grieves God to pour out his wrath. Brash young preachers and discouraged old saints would do well to meditate long on this paragraph.

Only with great reluctance did God give his beloved nation over into the hands of their enemies.

2. His inheritance has become hostile (12:8-9): Yahweh compares his inheritance (land and people) to a lion and a bird of prey. Both images convey a picture of antagonism, hostility and alienation from Yahweh.
a. Lion (12:8): *My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the woods; she has raised against me her voice; therefore, I hated her.* As the lion in the woods challenges those who come near, so Judah had raised up her voice in open defiance against God. God therefore *hates* Judah, i.e., he treats Judah as though she were an object of his hatred. To interpret *hate* in the absolute sense would be to contradict what has just been said, viz., that Judah is the beloved of God. *I hate her* is the strongest possible way of saying that God withdrew his love from Judah when he gave her into the power of her enemies.

b. Bird of prey (12:9): *Has my inheritance become to me a many-colored bird of prey? Are birds of prey gathered against her? Go, gather all the beasts of the field, bring them to devour.* The question makes an accusation. Judah had become in respect to Yahweh a bird of prey ready to spring and hunt and devour. But she was a *many-colored bird of prey.* Other birds of prey will gather about such a queer looking bird; they will pluck it to pieces. All the scavenger beasts of the field are bidden to come and join in devouring the strange looking bird. In Isa 56:9 the wild beasts are symbolic of the heathen powers employed by God to chastise his people (cf. Ezek 34:5).

3. His vineyard trodden down by shepherds (12:10): *Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard; they have trodden underfoot my portion. They have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.* Four times in this and the preceding v the emphasis falls on desolation. One can sense the pathos as God continues to describe what will befall Judah. Human *shepherds*—political rulers both foreign and native—have destroyed the vineyard of the Lord, i.e., Israel and Judah. By their actions they have made the pleasant portion of God—the land of Judah—a *wilderness.*

C. Judah’s Fate Revealed (12:11-12):

1. Judah’s total desolation (12:11): *He has made it a desolation, it mourns before me being desolate; desolate is all the land, for there were none who took it to heart.* A desolate land is one that has no life-giving potential, and one where life cannot be celebrated. Because he, i.e., the enemy, has made it a desolation, the land mourns. It is unable to produce its fruit. The land mourns before me, literally, *upon me.* Freedman suggests that this phrase be rendered *to my grief.* God is grieved over the condition of his land. Yet none of the leaders of the nation are concerned about the impending disaster for *there were none who took it to heart.*

2. Yahweh’s inescapable sword (12:12):
   a. Spoilers (12:12a): *Upon all the bare heights in the wilderness, the spoilers have come…* Even in the most remote areas of the land, the sword of divine judgment will do its deadly work. No one is safe from the spoiler. On *bare heights* see on 3:2; 4:11.
   b. Explanation (12:12b): *for Yahweh has a sword that devours from one end of the land unto the other; so there is no safety for anyone.* Judah’s invaders are in instrument of Yahweh’s government. Yahweh has gone to war against his hostile inheritance. For the devouring *sword* see 2:30. The idea of Yahweh’s *sword* is an old one in Israel (cf. Judg 7:20); it is used also in the oracle against the Philistines in 47:6. In v 9 the beasts were summoned to *devour*; now it is Yahweh’s sword that *devours.* Anyone is lit., *all flesh,* i.e., all humanity.

3. Judah’s inevitable harvest (12:13a): *They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns; they pained themselves, they do not profit.* Why will all of this tragedy befall Judah? By

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222 A lion normally represents God or his agents.
223 Freedman, *SBB*, 90.
use of a common proverb, Jeremiah gives the answer. The leaders of Judah formulated what they believed was an adequate national policy. Unfortunately, they had planted their wheat without divine direction; consequently their harvest would be one of thorns, i.e., humiliation, ruin, destruction and death. Usually the penalty for unfaithfulness is inadequate harvest; but here the threat is of a negative harvest. For thorns, see on 4:3. Pained themselves (r. chlh in Niphal) means to work to the point of exhaustion; to wear themselves out. The reference is to the arduous work of tilling the ground. They do not profit is used in reference to the Baal gods in 2:8, 11.

4. Yahweh’s fierce anger (12:13b): Be ashamed because of your increases, because of the fierce anger of Yahweh. Of such a harvest they would be ashamed, for it clearly indicates that they are under the wrath of God. Ashamed is common in the book. For use of this verb in the context of drought see 14:26.

Ultimate Plan Revealed
12:14-17

At the time of his call, Jeremiah had been appointed a prophet to the nations. He was commissioned through his preaching to pluck up and ... to build (1:10). To Jeremiah, God was no respecter of persons. He would bring destruction on Judah as well as on the foreign nations; he would show compassion to the foreign nations as well as to Judah. The main thrust of this brief paragraph is that one day foreign peoples will have the opportunity of being incorporated into the covenant people.

This unit is a continuation of God’s answer to the prayer of Jeremiah. The prophet had called for God’s wrath to be poured out on the wicked (12:1-4). God had revealed that he would punish the wicked, but only with much personal sadness and suffering (12:7-13). In 12:14-17 God went a step further.

Jeremiah was greatly concerned about justice and judgment. God wants him to see the ultimate objective of that judgment. Jeremiah must realize that national judgment is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The judgment will cleanse Judah. They will again be the people of God.

Even the heathen, i.e., the wicked, will have an opportunity to become part of the community of faith. Jeremiah wants the wicked destroyed immediately and permanently; God wants them redeemed. Thus in God's response to his bitter prayer of complaint, Jeremiah came to learn much of God’s judgment— the pain of it, and the purpose of it.

A. Judgment on Neighbors (12:14): Yahweh asserts his sovereignty over the nations. While Jeremiah has had much to say about the plucking up of Judah, he now applies that terminology to surrounding nations.

1. Description of the neighbors (12:14a): Thus says Yahweh concerning all my wicked neighbors who touch the inheritance that I caused my people Israel to inherit...

2. Announcement to the neighbors (12:14b): Behold, I am about to pluck them up from upon their ground, and the house of Judah I will uproot from their midst. Behold

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224 Nowhere else does Yahweh ever speak of my neighbors.
points to the unexpected. The wicked neighbors will be plucked up, i.e., deported into captivity. Judah also will experience this deportation at the hands of the Babylonian armies. Pluck up (r. ṳš) is one of the key verbs for Jeremiah (cf. 1:10).

B. Restoration of Neighbors (12:15):
1. Compassion declared (12:15a): And it shall come to pass, after I have plucked them up, that I will again have compassion upon them… God’s purpose in bringing this judgment upon both Judah and the nations is that they might experience the Lord's salvation. After the judgment God will have compassion upon these displaced peoples.
2. Compassion demonstrated (12:15b): and I will cause them to return each one to his inheritance, and each man to his land. Yahweh will restore displaced peoples to their native lands. Specific prophecies of the restoration of Moab and Ammon are found in 48:47 and 49:6.

When Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in 539 BC, it was his policy to allow all the captive peoples to return to their native lands. The Jews were just one of the beneficiaries of his generosity (cf. Ezra 1:2-4). A great deal is said today about the restoration of Israel to the Holy Land. Here neighboring nations are included in a restoration passage.

C. Alternatives for Nations (12:16-17): Jeremiah employs two “if-then” statements to spell out what awaits the Gentiles. The nations are treated as potential covenant partners, subject to the same obligations as Israel (cf. Isa 19:23-25).
1. Positive “if-then” (12:16):
   a. Criteria of conversion (12:16a): And it shall come to pass if they completely learn the ways of my people to swear by my name, as Yahweh lives, even as they taught my people to swear by Baal… Not only does the Lord promise the nations restoration, he also holds out to them the prospects of conversion. Three benchmarks of conversion are named. First, Gentiles must thoroughly learn the right ways of God’s people. The ways of God’s true people are indicated in his word. This includes worshiping only the Living God. Second, Gentiles must swear by the name Yahweh. To use the name of a deity in an oath implied recognition of the claims of that deity (cf. 4:2). Third, Gentiles must be as zealous for the claims of Yahweh as they once were for their god Baal.
   b. Reward of conversion (12:16b): then they shall be built up the midst of my people. Built up can mean prosper (Mal 3:15) or produce descendants (Gn 16:2). This is the opposite of pluck up in 1:10. The converted Gentiles will dwell in the midst of my people. By their conversion they actually become part of the people of God. My people is used two ways in this v. My people prior to corruption followed the law of God. But then my people became corrupted by surrounding nations. It is the ideal, pre-corruption my people that the Gentiles must imitate. It is that ideal my people into which converted Gentiles are incorporated.
2. Negative “if-then” (12:17): But if they do not hear, then I will pluck up that nation, uprooting and destroying (oracle of Yahweh). If Gentile nations refuse to hear, i.e., obey the Lord, then God will uproot and continually bring destruction upon them. Disobedient nations will be eliminated from the scene of history.

PART TWO
JUDAH’S EXILE AND SUFFERING
SECTION ONE
PRIDE OF THE NATION
Jeremiah 13:1-27

Arrogant, willful, stubborn pride was at the root of all Judah’s sins. In ch 13 Jeremiah issues five stern warnings concerning pride and its consequences. Each parable makes the same point; each ends with judgment.

Parable of the Loincloth
13:1-11

Prophets frequently relied upon object lessons to attract attention to their message and to enforce the point they were trying to make. These men of God were following sound principles of teaching long before the study of pedagogy as a science.

A. Execution of the Parable (13:1-7): Yahweh issues three commands to Jeremiah, each of which the prophet obeys.
   1. First commission (13:1-2):
      a. Substance (13:1): Thus said Yahweh unto me: Go and purchase for yourself a loincloth of linen; put it about your loins, and do not put it into water. The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and instructs him to purchase (r qnh) a loincloth or loincloth. Purchasing was done by barter or by weighing out silver. The loincloth was a strip of cloth, sometimes leather, wound several times around the waist, with its ends hanging down over the thigh. The loincloth served the purpose of holding in the loose upper garment when walking or working.
         Jeremiah was to wear his new linen loincloth both to attract the attention of people, and to provide the basis for the symbolism that he will later explain. The prophet specifically is instructed not to put his new loincloth in water.
      b. Compliance (13:2): And I purchased the loincloth, according to the word of Yahweh, and I put it about my loins. No doubt Jeremiah was puzzled by this instruction to purchase and wear a new loincloth. But he obeyed the Lord in full confidence that further revelation would be forthcoming.
   2. Second commission (13:3-5):
      a. Time of it (13:3): And the word of Yahweh came to me a second time, saying… After wearing the garment for an unspecified amount of time, Jeremiah received additional directives from the Lord.
      b. Substance of it (13:4): Take the loincloth that you acquired that is upon your loins. Arise, and go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a rock crevice. Jeremiah was to take his new loincloth, and hide it at the Euphrates River in the crevice of a rock.

Ancient depictions indicate that there was also another type of loincloth (ʾezôr) made up of narrow strips of overlapping cloth which passed between the legs. Nothing in the text indicates which type of loincloth is intended.
c. **Compliance (13:5):** And I went and hid it at the Euphrates as Yahweh commanded me. Once again Jeremiah complied with the commandment of the Lord even though he must have thought it very strange.

3. **Third commission (13:6-7):**

a. **Time of it (13:6a):** And it came to pass at the end of many days that Yahweh said to me... After many days Jeremiah received still further instruction from the Lord. The exact time between the second and third commissions cannot be determined.

b. **Substance of it (13:6b):** Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from that place the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there. He was to retrieve his loincloth. From Anathoth to the nearest point on the Euphrates was a trip of at least three hundred miles.

c. **Compliance (13:7a):** And I went to the Euphrates, and I dug. I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it... Jeremiah returned to the spot where he had hidden his garment, dug away the earth with which he had covered the crevice in the rock, and removed his loincloth.

d. **Observation (13:7b):** and, behold, the loincloth was ruined and good for nothing. Naturally a garment exposed to moisture and soil over a long period of time was moldy, rotted, filthy and utterly worthless. Ruined (r. šcht) is used of the clay vessel of the potter in 18:4. This behold statement signals the end of the command/compliance format. It serves as a verdict that prepares the reader for the interpretation.

Commentators are divided into two major schools of thought in regard to this episode. Some think that the story has no foundation in fact. The account is to be interpreted as a vision, or perhaps a parable, that was related for purely didactic purposes. But if this were the case, would Jeremiah have represented the events as actually happening?

Other commentators regard this as an actual experience of the prophet; but these commentators are themselves divided into two schools. The point of contention is the place where the waistcloth was buried. Did Jeremiah actually make a trip to the Euphrates River as suggested in the standard English versions? Many conservative—and many liberal commentators for that matter—answer that question in the affirmative.

Other equally competent scholars argue that two trips to the Euphrates River some 300-400 miles north of Anathoth are out of the question. These scholars translate the Hebrew word perathah, to Parah. According to this view Jeremiah buried his garment in the rocky environs of the little village of Parah a few miles from his home. They contend that, in the Hebrew text at least, a trip to the Euphrates River is both unlikely and unnecessary.

The position taken here is that Jeremiah did make a journey to the Euphrates to bury his waistcloth, and that he returned later to retrieve the tattered garment. For additional comments see the special note that follows.

**SPECIAL NOTE**

**JEREMIAH’S TRIP TO THE EUPHRATES**

Five arguments can be advanced to support the position that Jeremiah actually made two trips to the Euphrates River during his ministry. Some of these arguments, however, have little weight.

ARGUMENT ONE: Jeremiah was forced to go into hiding after the fifth year of Jehoiakim (36:9-32). He probably would have been safe only in the far north. Another prophet who tried to take refuge from Jehoiakim in Egypt was extradited and executed (Jer 26:20-23). RESPONSE: The present narrative gives no hint that Jeremiah was fleeing to the north to escape the wrath of Jehoiakim, or anyone else for that matter. There are many adequate hiding places much nearer than the Euphrates River, as is made clear from the narratives of Saul and David.

ARGUMENT TWO: The silence regarding the activities of Jeremiah during the last part of Jehoiakim’s reign suggests that he was absent from Jerusalem. This would be the ideal time to place his trip to the Euphrates. RESPONSE: Several gaps in the knowledge of Jeremiah’s activities exist. Does every silent gap indicate that Jeremiah was absent from Jerusalem? Even if the prophet were temporarily absent from the city, this in itself would not prove that he made the trip to the Euphrates. Furthermore, the material of this section seems to date to the late years of Josiah or, more likely, to the early years of Jehoiakim.
ARGUMENT THREE: The Chaldean officers who conquered Jerusalem seemed to know Jeremiah (39:11-14). This would suggest that they had met the prophet on some previous occasion. Jeremiah’s trip to the Euphrates could have been that occasion. RESPONSE: No evidence actually exists that the Chaldean officers knew Jeremiah personally. They could have learned of the prophet through those who were deported in 605 BC and/or 597 BC. Those Jews who deserted to the Chaldeans during the siege were certainly interrogated by their captors. Since Jeremiah was perhaps the one most responsible for those desertions, his name must have been frequently mentioned. The Chaldeans probably knew Jeremiah by reputation only.

ARGUMENT FOUR: The Euphrates River is “the essential point of the parable” representing the corrupting religious influence of Mesopotamia on Judah. RESPONSE: This argument is strange in that Jeremiah does not once mention the Euphrates, Babylon, Mesopotamia or the north in his inspired application of the parable. While the Euphrates may play a part in the symbolism, it certainly is not the “essential point.”

ARGUMENT FIVE: The normal meaning of the Hebrew word Phrath is Euphrates. The original readers would have understood the term to refer to the great northern river. RESPONSE: This is perhaps the best argument to back the position that Jeremiah actually made a trip to the Euphrates River. However, even this argument is not without its difficulties. The Hebrew word Phrath, when it refers to the Euphrates, usually has the Hebrew word for river following. This is true twelve out of the fifteen times the word Phrath occurs in the Hebrew Bible. Yet the very fact that in three passages Phrath refers to the Euphrates when the word for river is not present indicates that this is proper usage. In no other passage does the word Phrath mean anything other than the Euphrates River.

All things considered, the best view is that Jeremiah actually made two trips to the Euphrates River. The alternate view that he buried the waistcloth near his hometown at Parah cannot be ruled out altogether. The distance to the Euphrates still remains a problem. Yet it should be remembered that the prophets often did curious, and sometimes almost impossible acts, in order to dramatize their messages.

B. Application of the Parable (13:8-11): And the word of Yahweh came unto me, saying… (13:8): These words signal the transition from the action to the interpretation of the action. The interpretation can be read in reverse order to the commands of vv 1-7. The loincloth is a commentary on the life of Judah/Jerusalem.

1. Judah is ruined (13:9): Thus says Yahweh: Like this I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. When Jeremiah returned from the Euphrates, he carried (or perhaps even attempted to wear) his tattered loincloth through the streets of Jerusalem. Naturally people asked about the filthy piece of cloth. Then Jeremiah related the story narrated above. He explained that Judah and Jerusalem were guilty of sinful pride and self-exaltation that made them unfit for any further use by Yahweh. God will ruin, i.e., rend, Judah as easily as a rotten piece of cloth is torn. Perhaps as Jeremiah uttered these words, he actually tore the old loincloth to illustrate his point.

2. Judah estranged from Yahweh (13:10): The burial of the loincloth by the Euphrates illustrated Judah’s estrangement from Yahweh. Judah was as far from Yahweh as the loincloth was from Jerusalem. Three actions removed Judah from Yahweh’s presence.
   a. Disobedient ear (13:10a): This evil people who refuse to hear my words… Judah’s pride manifested itself in refusal to hear, i.e., obey, the word of God.
   b. Stubborn heart (13:10b): who walk in the stubbornness of their heart… The Judeans wanted no part of the old stern God of Sinai with his prohibitions.
   c. Wayward feet (13:10c): and follow after other gods to serve them, and bow down to them, will be like this loincloth that is good for nothing. Yahweh was tolerable as long as they wandered in the wilderness. But now they had settled down to become farmers. They wanted new gods who would guarantee them fertility of the soil—gods that would condone their sensuality. For this reason the children of Israel began to serve the gods of Canaan. The corrupting influence of idolatry slowly had eaten away at the strength of the nation. Judah finally had become utterly worthless, like Jeremiah’s loincloth. The nation was fit for nothing but destruction.

226 Leslie, JCA, 86, 87.
227 Brueggemann, CJ, 127.
3. **Intimacy with Yahweh (13:11):** The third interpretative comment is related to the first command of the action, viz., to wear the loincloth that it clung to his body.

   a. **Selection (13:11a):** *For as a loincloth clings unto the loins of a man, so I caused all the house of Israel and all the house of Judah to cling unto me (oracle of Yahweh)*... In this action parable, Jeremiah represents God. The lovely new linen loincloth represents the covenant people, both Judah and Israel. As Jeremiah had chosen his waistcloth, so God had selected Israel from among all the nations as his special possession. Three times Jeremiah noted that the loincloth was worn close to the body. The prophet wished to emphasize the intimate and beautiful relationship that had once existed between God and his chosen people. Israel was his people.

   b. **Adornment (13:11b):** *to be my people and a name, a praise and a glory*... In the ancient Near East the loincloth was the principal ornament of a man’s dress. This article of clothing was one of the most prized possessions of a man. Name, praise, and glory refer to a people whose passive condition and active testimony bring recognition to Yahweh. The Israelites were the means by which God’s name would be made known throughout the world. They were a source of glory to God.

   c. **Refusal (13:11c):** *but they would not listen.* Unlike the inanimate loincloth, Israel had a choice regarding the fulfillment of Yahweh’s purpose. Israel did not obey the word of God. They continued to deteriorate spiritually and morally until they were of no more value to God. An Israel that did not listen is as useless as a rotten loincloth.

**Parable of the Wineskins**

13:12-14

A. **Confrontation with Skeptics (13:12):**

1. **His saying (13:12a):** *And you shall say unto them this word: Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: Every jar shall be filled with wine.* The exact background of this little passage is not known. Perhaps Jeremiah was addressing those who were assembled at some festival. The presence of some empty earthen jars or wine skins might have provided the occasion for the parable that he offered. Jeremiah solemnly pronounced the formula, *Thus says the Lord*. The crowd of merrymakers became hushed and listened with rapt attention to what the eloquent orator from Anathoth might have to say. They no doubt expected a colorful sermon filled with biting sarcasm, pungent metaphors and daring attacks upon the unpopular king Jehoiakim. Instead they heard the commonplace and obvious truth: *Every bottle shall be filled with wine*.

2. **Their scoffing (13:12b):** *Then they shall say unto you, Do we not know very well that every bottle shall be filled with wine?* In shocked silence the crowd awaited for something more. But that was it. The prophet was through, for the moment at least. Someone in the crowd chuckled then all enjoyed a hardy laugh. They began to heckle the prophet: What marvelous wisdom! But tell us something we do not already know Jeremiah! Have you nothing more profound to say in the name of the Lord than this childish ditty?

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228 When Jonathan made a covenant with David, he gave him his robe, his armor, *even his sword, his bow and his loincloth* (1 Sam 18:4).

B. Condemnation of Skeptics (13:13-14): Then you shall say unto them, Thus says Yahweh... (13:13a): Jeremiah did have something more to say and when the crowd had finished its laughter he drove home his point in an oracle of judgment.

1. Filling with drunkenness (13:13): Behold, I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land, the kings that sit on David’s throne, the priests, the prophets and all the residents of Jerusalem with drunkenness. Empty bottles are meant to be filled and that is just what God is about to do with the population of Judah. They are empty bottles and they will be filled with the wine of God’s wrath (cf. 25:15).

The sinners of Judah will be filled with drunkenness, a metaphor for destruction. When men depart from the Lord they blunder, stagger and fall like a Skid Row drunk. Drunkenness suggests bitterness, lack of control, and shame. Men who are mentally and spiritually intoxicated are oblivious to danger, insensitive to warning, devoid of moral scruples, inconsiderate of and offensive to others. The drunk is dazed, confused, befuddled. What a perfect picture of the man who has rejected God.

To emphasize the universality of this forthcoming judgment Jeremiah mentions five different segments of the national population: The inhabitants of the land, the residents of Jerusalem, the prophets, the priests and the kings who occupy the throne of David. The plural kings is used no doubt to refer to all the kings who reigned during the final years of the history of Judah.

2. Falling to destruction (13:14a): And I will dash them against one another, the fathers and sons together (oracle of Yahweh). The significance of the drunkenness is now made clear. Reeling helplessly as drunken sots the inebriated inhabitants of Judah will crash into one another. They will all fall; they will all perish. The reference is probably to the internal confusion within Judah at the time she is under attack by her enemies. The entire community disintegrates.

3. Forfeiture of divine grace (13:14b): I will not have mercy, nor will I pity, nor will I have compassion to prevent them from being destroyed. God will have no pity upon the fallen sots; he will not intervene to prevent them from being destroyed. Three synonymous negative similar-sounding Hebrew verbs hammer home the message of abandonment. The grace period had ended. Those who through the years had rejected the infinite mercy of God will now face his fierce wrath.

Parable of the Path
13:15-17

A. Pleading (13:15-16a): Hear and give ear! Do not be so high and mighty; for Yahweh has spoken. (16) Give to Yahweh your God glory... After predicting the eventual outpouring of the wine of God’s wrath, Jeremiah earnestly appeals to his audience to hear i.e., obey, the word of the Lord. He points out that it is stubborn and inexcusable pride that prevents these leaders from really hearing God’s word (v 15).

If a man will only humble himself, God will speak to him. Every Christian who opens a Bible should be uttering the prayer of Samuel: Speak for your servant is listening. Jeremiah urges his hearers to give glory to Yahweh.230 Men give glory to God, when they acknowledge his claims and submit to his will.

B. Warning (13:16b): before he causes it to grow dark, and before your feet stumble upon the dusky mountains when you hope for light but he turns it to deep darkness, and makes

230 This expression is not common in the OT. Cf. 1 Sam 6:5; Mal 2:2; Ps 29:1; 115:1
Life at best is a craggy mountain route over which a man must walk. Even when the sun is brightly shining, the way is tricky and dangerous unless the Lord is leading the way. Stumble (ngph in Hithpael) carries the idea of stumble repeatedly, or stumble against each other. Dusky mountains is lit., mountains of twilight. The term nešeph can be used for the partial light of morning or evening.

Light points to the day of grace ends. When the sunshine of God’s benevolent protection sinks over the horizon, then those dangerous mountain paths become even more difficult to follow. The traveler hopes for more light; but the sky grows ever darker. Finally, impenetrable darkness envelops the traveler. He is caught in Stygian darkness with no Guide. On deep darkness (tsalmāvet), see 2:6. Deep darkness/pitch darkness ('arāphel) point to God’s judgment. The point of the parable is that repentance must take place before it is too late.

C. Weeping (13:17):
1. Private weeping because of pride (13:17a): But if you do not hear it, in secret places my soul will weep because of pride; yes, it will weep bitterly… If the men of Judah refuse to heed the admonition to hear the word of God, Jeremiah will be broken hearted. He is not ashamed to admit it. Well has he been called the weeping prophet. Behind his uncompromising messages was a broken heart. My soul will weep, i.e., I will weep, because of the pride that prevents these men from hearing the word of God.
2. Bitter weeping because of captivity (13:17b): and my eye will flow with tears, because Yahweh’s flock has been taken captive. Jeremiah will weep because he knows that stubborn pride will lead inevitably to captivity. So certain is he of this truth that he can speak of the captivity as though it already had taken place.

Parable of the Royals
13:18-19

A. A Fallen Crown (13:18): Say to the king and the queen mother, Sit down in abasement for your headdress, your glorious crown has come down. The language of dethronement is similar to that of Isa 47:1-3, only there it was addressed to Babylon personified as a queen. Three problems face the interpreter in these vv. The first problem is the identity of the king to whom this brief oracle was addressed. A likely candidate is Jehoiachin, who was deported to Babylon after a brief reign of three months. If this identification is correct, then the queen-mother (lit., mistress) is Nehushta, the widow of Jehoiakim and mother of Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:8). Nehushta was taken captive with Jehoiachin in 597 BC (2 Kgs 24:12, 15).

In the kingdom of Judah, the position of queen-mother seems to have been a position of great prestige. The Book of Kings is always careful to mention the name of the mother of the reigning king in all but two cases. Scripture commends Asa for removing the wicked Maachah from this position (1 Kgs 15:13). Athaliah was able to use this position as a steppingstone to the throne (2 Kgs 11).

The tone of this passage is the second problem to be addressed. Is Jeremiah sincerely urging the king and queen-mother to humble themselves, or is this a sarcastic imperative intended to drive home a warning concerning pride? Sarcasm is often difficult to recognize. Only the voice inflection and facial expression indicate when sarcasm is being employed. When sarcasm is used artistically, one must ponder many moments before he is sure that this rhetorical device has been employed. If sarcasm is difficult to detect in speech, how much more in writing! However, a comparison with the sincere invitation to repent in v 15 would lead one to conclude that v 18 falls into the category of a sarcastic imperative. The meaning then would be that the king and queen-mother would be dethroned. They had refused to humble themselves before God. Therefore, God would dishonor them in the sight of all men. A king who sits in a lower position is no longer king. The royal
crown and headdress of which they were so proud will topple from their brow.\textsuperscript{231} If the king is Jehoiachin, the fulfillment of this prediction is recorded in 2 Kgs 24:15.

The third problem concerns the tense of this utterance. Was Jeremiah predicting something that would take place in the future, or was he describing what had happened recently? Frequently in the English Bible, Hebrew predictive prophecy is couched in past tense. The prophet was so sure of what would transpire that he could describe it as though it already had happened. If v 18 is indeed sarcastic imperative, then it is predictive for such is the nature of this rhetorical device.

\section*{B. A Fallen Kingdom (13:19):
1. Judah occupied (13:19a): \textit{The cities of the south have been shut up, and there is no one to open them.} It is impossible to determine whether the two statements are descriptive or predictive. If the former, then Jeremiah was speaking at a time when the northern enemy had overrun the entire land, even as far as the remote southern cities.\textsuperscript{232} These may have been Jehoiachin’s store cities. The idea would then be that the king’s supplies were cut off, hence his days were numbered. These cities are spoken of as shut up, i.e., under siege. All of Judah, i.e., the outlying regions of the land, had fallen to the enemy. This would fit quite well the situation that existed just prior to the surrender of Jehoiachin in 597 BC. If v 19 is predictive, then it could be dated to almost any year between 609 and 586 BC.

2. Citizens deported (13:19b): \textit{All Judah is carried captive, everyone is taken captive.} Exile was announced in v 17, but in that v there was some slight chance that it might be avoided. Here the threat is decisive. Eventually virtually all Judeans were taken captive to Babylon. The process started in 605 BC. Ten thousand were taken in 597 BC, and many more in 586 BC.

\section*{Parable of the Delinquent
13:20-27}

These vv are related topically, if not chronologically, with the preceding two vv. In v 19 all the outlying districts of Judah are depicted as having fallen to the enemy; only Jerusalem remains. Jerusalem is addressed.

\section*{A. Introduction (13:20a): \textit{Lift up your eyes. See those who come from the north.}} The delinquent daughter of Zion\textsuperscript{233} is urged to take note of the invading armies from the north. The combination of lift up your eyes and see appears first in 3:2. On the enemy from the north, see 1:15; 4:16; 6:3, 22; 8:16.

\section*{B. Rhetorical Questions (13:20b-23): In a series of rhetorical questions, the prophet tries to make Jerusalem see the folly of her past pride. Five such questions are asked.
1. Scattered flock (13:20): \textit{Where is the flock that was given to you, your glorious flock?} Flock (‘ēder) as a designation for God’s people appears first in v 17. In Jeremiah’s question Jerusalem is regarded as the shepherd of the rest of the cities of the nation. God has placed his flock under the care of the rulers of Jerusalem. The question, of course, already has been answered in the preceding v. All the cities of Judah have fallen under

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{231}The crown in Judah was probably a golden diadem, perhaps worn over a turban. For illustrations of royal crowns in the ancient Near East see L.E. Toombs, “Crown” \textit{IDB} 1:745-46.
\textsuperscript{232}There is also evidence that the Edomites were threatening the southern Judean cities in this period. They may have been acting on their own, or as agents of the Babylonians. See J. Myers, “Edom and Judah in the Sixth-Fifth centuries B.C.,” \textit{Near Eastern Studies} ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971), 390-91.
\textsuperscript{233}The Hebrew has a feminine singular verb, but a masculine plural suffix on the object. This seems to be a clear indication that the person addressed is a collection of people.}
enemy control. Glorious (tiph’eret) was used in v 18 to describe the king’s crown. Both the crown and the flock were glorious, beautiful and prized; both are lost!

2. Turncoat friends (13:21a): What will you say when he shall appoint over you for a head the ones you trained to be your friends. What will you say when he, i.e. God, shall appoint as your head those you have cultivated as friends? The word translated head also means poison. Perhaps a deliberate play on words is intended. Those you thought to be your allies, twill become your head, master, or perhaps, your poison.

3. Travailing woman (13:21b): Will not pains seize you like a woman in childbirth? What a frightening thing it must be to see friends turn away or turn against one in an hour of need. The figure already has appeared in 4:31 and 6:24.

4. Barefoot captive (13:22): And if you say in your heart, Why do these things happen to me? In the multitude of your iniquity, your skirts are uncovered, your heels treated with violence. The phrase say in your heart appeared in 5:24. The fourth rhetorical question is placed in the mouth of the astonished daughter of Zion. As she begins to taste of the bitter hemlock of divine judgment, she will cry out, Why has all this happened to me? Jeremiah had been giving the answer to that question for many years. Jerusalem must suffer disgrace because of her enormous iniquity.

The skirts being uncovered is a figure taken from the public shaming of a woman caught in the act of harlotry (cf. Hos 2:10). Before being executed an adulteress seems to have been stripped of her garments in order to shame her. Even the sandals of the daughter of Zion will be removed. She will be forced to walk barefoot into captivity. What humiliation for the proud daughter of Zion!

5. Unchangeable skin (12:23): Can an Ethiopian change his skin? and a leopard his spots? Then also you, who are accustomed to evil, shall be able to do good. The fifth rhetorical question is intended to offer further reason for the impending humiliation of Jerusalem. An Ethiopian cannot change his skin or a leopard his spots. Likewise it is impossible for the people of Judah to do good. Evil has become second nature to Israel. Leopard (nāmēr) was mentioned in 5:6.

Men who are unwilling to submit to God can do nothing good (cf. Rom 8:7-8). The inhabitants of Judah were accustomed i.e., taught or trained, to the ways of evil. They were students of evil! It was impossible that they could do anything to please God so long as they were in rebellion against him. Jeremiah is not saying that people cannot choose to do good. Rather he is underscoring the mesmerizing effect of sinful pleasure. He offers alternatives to Judah; but he realistically faces the truth that the people will most likely choose to continue their evil ways.

C. Metaphors (13:24-27): The result of Judah’s second-nature disobedience is presented in three metaphors.

1. Scattered chaff (13:24): And I will scatter them, as the chaff that passes away before the wind of the wilderness. Because Judah will not submit to God so that they might be enabled to do that which is good, God must bring judgment upon his people. They will be scattered as the chaff (qaš) or stubble blown by the wind. Broken straw had to be separated from the wheat after the grain had been trampled out by oxen. The wind was used to blow away the worthless particles of chaff. The metaphor recalls Ps 1:4. Scattering by the wind is another way of speaking of exile.

As recently as the beginning of the present century, there were still leopards in the mountains of Galilee, on Carmel, in the hills around Jerusalem, and in the Jordan valley. Only a few survive today in the Galilean hills. See Mazar, *IWB*, 3:109.
2. Assigned portion (13:25): This is your lot, the portion of your measure from with me (oracle of Yahweh) inasmuch as you have forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood. Because they had forgotten God and trusted in falsehood, i.e., false gods, therefore, God had measured out the appropriate amount of judgment to be poured out upon Judah. Lot (gôrâl) refers specifically to the lot that was cast for the division of land. More generally, it refers for recompense or retribution (Isa 17:14).

3. Humiliated adulteress (13:26-27a):
   a. God’s action (13:26): And also I will lift up your skirts over your face, and shame shall be seen. And also I contrasts with then also you in v 23. The enemy from the north humiliates Judah (v 20); but then so does Yahweh. Jerusalem’s punishment is that of the adulteress caught in the act. She is stripped, that her shame might be exposed to all. Shame refers to private parts (cf. Nah 3:5).
   b. Explanation of God’s action (13:27a): I have seen your adulteries, your neighings, the lewdness of your harlotry, and your abominations upon the hills in the field. God knows of Jerusalem’s adulteries (n’ûphîm). The people of Judah are noted for their neighings, i.e., their passionate cravings for illegitimate objects of worship. He has observed the lewdness (zimmâh) of the pagan rites practiced in the hills. The term in general means a plan, but it became a technical term for sexual misconduct (Judg 20:6). For harlotry (z’nit), see on 3:2, 9. Abominations (šiqqûtsîm) is used of pagan idols in 4:1; 7:30, while here the term refers to Jerusalem’s misconduct in the pursuit of those idols. Upon the hills and in the field is a slight variation of on every high hill and under every leafy tree (2:20).

4. A dead city (13:27b): Woe to you, O Jerusalem! In view of all this corruption, Jeremiah can only pronounce a woe on Jerusalem. Woe to you is derived from Nm 21:29 (cf. Jer 48:46; Ezek 16:23). Jerusalem has become a corpse to be mourned.

5. An unclean city (13:27c): You will not be clean; how long shall it yet be? Jerusalem the corpse is unclean. For years God had been offering cleansing to the scarlet daughter of Zion, if she would but turn to him in sincere repentance. But even after all this time, Jerusalem still prefers her filthy ways to the purity that God offers. Be clean (r. thr) is the opposite of be unclean (r. tm’) in 2:23. Both terms refer to ritual status, but this ritual status is created by the moral status of the nation in committing spiritual harlotry.

SECTION TWO
DROUGHT AND DISTRESS
Jeremiah 14:1-15:21

The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah concerning the matters of the drought (14:1): Sometime during the ministry of Jeremiah a terrible drought or series of droughts (the Hebrew word is plural) struck Palestine. This national crisis forms the background of most of the materials in chs 14-15, and possibly through ch 17.

No date for the drought is given. Since in these chs Judah’s punishment is still future, and since no reference is made to the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597 BC, it is likely that these events transpired in the reign of Jehoiakim.

Droughts were not uncommon in OT Palestine. Numerous references to them occur in the Scriptures. In Dt the Lord threatens to use drought as one of the disciplinary disasters that he will

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235 This plural noun is used elsewhere only in Ezek 23:43. But the related verb n’ph occurs in 5:7; 7:9; 23:14.
236 Neighings (mitsh’lot) is used in a literal sense in 8:16. The verb root of this noun refers to a sign of sexual excitement in 5:8.
237 Others interpret the word as a plural of intensity.
238 Gn 12:10; 26:1; 42:1-2; Ruth 1:1; 2 Sam 21:1; 1 Kgs 8:37.
bring upon his people if they are unfaithful to him.\(^{239}\) Growing out of this crisis is a personal crisis—the second one—in the ministry of Jeremiah.

One of the hallmarks of a prophet is that he prayed on behalf of his people. During the time of the terrible drought (14:1-6), Jeremiah prayed three times for his countrymen (14:7-9, 13, 19-22). Three times God rejected the petition of his prophet, the third time emphatically so (14:10-12, 14-18; 15:1-9). Jeremiah was to learn through this frustrating effort that intercessory prayer without prior repentance on the part of the sinners is futile.

**Drought Described**

14:2-6

Whether or not vv 2-6 are a part of Jeremiah’s prayer or a background to it is not clear. In either case these vv are a masterful description of the national plight created by the drought. This is Hebrew poetry of the first rank. By describing the drought Jeremiah is lodging a complaint before the righteous Judge.

### A. Citizens Suffer (14:2): **Judah mourns; her gates languish. They make themselves black to the ground. The cry of Jerusalem has gone up.** Jeremiah pictures the whole nation engaged in lamentation. Even the gates of cities are said to be participating. Perhaps they were bemoaning the absence of those who formerly had assembled there to transact business. By heaping dust upon themselves both the people and their garments became black. This blackening of oneself was one of the customary signs of mourning in antiquity.\(^{240}\)

### B. Nobles Suffer (14:3):

1. **Desperate search (14:3a): Their nobles have sent their inferiors for water. They have come to the pits, and have not found water; their vessels return empty...** Attention now shifts from the population in general to the nobility. Because they could afford more elaborate water systems, these wealthy people were unaffected by ordinary droughts. Nobles (’addîr) are lit., majestic, glorious. It is a term used in the OT of those in authority (Judg 5:13). The nobles will send their inferiors (lit., their little ones) to the cisterns for water, but they find none. The term can refer to those who are young or to those lower on the social ladder.

2. **Dejected shame (14:3b): they are ashamed and they have been humiliated, and they cover their heads.** The subject of the sentence is probably the nobles, rather than the inferiors. In some cultures rage, frustration or panic is the usual reaction to emergencies. But in Israel shame (r. bôš) seems to have been the reaction. Humiliated (r. klm) is synonymous with shame. To cover the head is a demonstration of shame.\(^{241}\) Shame arises from a sense of being out of control, helpless in the face of the national devastation.

### C. Farmers Suffer (14:4): **Because of the ground that is dismayed—for there is no rain in the land—the ploughmen are bewildered; they cover their heads.** Dismayed (r. chtt) is another synonym for shame. The ground is embarrassed because of its pitiful production. The farmers are as confused as the nobles. The ground can no longer fulfill its function of producing fruit because of the absence of rain. Ploughmen (’ikkār) refers to small farmers on

\(^{239}\)Dt 11:10-17; 28:23-24.

\(^{240}\)See 2 Sam 13:19; 21:10; Job 2:12; Lam 2:10.

\(^{241}\)2 Sam 15:30; 19:4; Esther 6:12.
royal estates. They were at the bottom of the social ladder. Yet their reaction to the drought is the same as that of the nobles.

D. Animals Suffer (14:5-6): Even the wild animals are suffering in the drought.
1. Deer (14:5): For even the doe in the field gives birth, then forsakes her kid because there is no grass. The tender doe gives birth in the field far from her usual habitat deep in the woods. Her search for food has caused her to withdraw from her natural habitat. The doe’s natural affection for her young is forgotten as she desperately seeks food for herself.
2. Wild donkeys (14:6): And the wild donkeys stand on the bare hills; they gasp for air like jackals; their eyes fail because there is no herbage. The rough wild donkey, accustomed to the harsh realities of desert life (cf. 2:24), desperately sniffs the air in an attempt to pick up the scent of water. Finally, with no water and no food the animal languishes and dies. For bare hills see on 3:2. Grasp refers to the labored breathing of a dying animal.

The situation is desperate: no water (v 3), no rain (v 4), no grass (v 5), no herbage (v 6). The effects cut across community categories. Nobles, farmers, cows, donkeys and jackals alike fight for survival.

Jeremiah’s First Petition
14:7-9

A. Grounds of Petition (14:7-8a):
1. God’s name (14:7): If our iniquities testified against us, act, O Yahweh, for the sake of your name; for our backslidings are many; against you we have sinned. From his narration recounting the plight of the nation, Jeremiah moves to formal intercession. He makes no excuses. He openly confesses the sin and guilt of his people. Yet he calls upon God to intervene on behalf of the drought-stricken nation for the sake of your name. He is asking God to act in his own self-interest. Should God allow his people to be overcome by the drought, the heathen will boast.

In antiquity the esteem in which a deity was held by the world community was in direct proportion to the national well-being of the people who worshiped that deity. The thought may also be present that the Lord’s name pledges him to be merciful toward his people, even when they have sinned against him.

2. Israel’s hope (14:8a): O Hope of Israel! His Savior in the time of distress! The word translated hope (miqvēh) can also mean pool, a meaning that might be appropriate in a time of drought. The prophet still trusts in God in spite of the terrible drought. The concept of God as savior goes back to the period of the Judges when God raised up saviors or deliverers for his people. King Jehoahaz, who was able to break the yoke of Aramean oppression, is also called a savior (2 Kgs 13:5, 25). God is first called savior in 2 Sam 22:3, a psalm attributed to David. The name savior was one of the favorites of the prophet Isaiah. He uses it at least eight times. God in the past had proved himself to be a savior to Israel. Jeremiah is confident that God will so reveal himself again in the present crisis. Judah waits on Yahweh’s deliverance; Yahweh must not let his people down!

B. Perplexity of Petition (14:8b-9a): While he believes in God’s ability to save, Jeremiah is unable to comprehend why the Lord delays his intervention on behalf of Israel. Two

242Ex 7:19.
243Judg 3:9; Neh 9:27.
questions are directed to God, both of which are in reality complaints portraying Yahweh as ineffective in dealing with the drought. Four negative pictures of God emerge.

1. A stranger (14:8b): Why should you be like a stranger in the land... On stranger, see on 7:6.

2. A sojourner (14:8c): and like a wayfaring man who has turned aside for lodging? A wayfaring man is one who merely passes through a country. Like the stranger, he takes no active interest in the affairs of that land. It seems to Jeremiah, that as far as Israel was concerned, God had become a disinterested bystander, unwilling to get involved.

3. A confused man (14:9a): Why have you become like a man astounded... Jeremiah knows that God has the power to intervene; but God seems to have become like a man who becomes terrified to the point of paralysis. The Septuagint renders the phrase like a man in a deep sleep.

4. An inept warrior (14:9b): like a mighty warrior that cannot save? Yahweh is like one who, for whatever reason, is unable to fight on behalf of his people. The point is that God has not acted on behalf of his people.

C. Confidence in Petition (14:9b): But you are in our midst, O Yahweh, and we are called by your name; do not let us down. In 8:19 a question was posed about Yahweh’s presence with his people. But here there is strong affirmation. Jeremiah knows that God is still in the midst of the nation. He knows that Israel still wears the name of God as his national bride. Therefore, he calls upon God not to disappoint his people. Yahweh’s presence alone should be enough to deal with anything that threatened his people. Jeremiah may be trying to use praise to prod Yahweh into action.

Response to Petition 14:10-12

Thus says Yahweh to this people (14:10a): Yahweh gave a crushing response to Jeremiah’s petition. He addressed a message to this people. The warmth of my people is missing. Yahweh’s answer must have been both unexpected and unwelcome. The answer takes the form of another covenant lawsuit.

A. Indictment (14:10b):

1. Their love (14:10b): Thus they love to wander! Yahweh has something to say to his people; yet he speaks about them rather then to them. Perhaps they no longer have a conversational relationship. God does not deny that he has in fact abandoned his people. He has forsaken them because they first abandoned him. They love to wander after other gods.

2. Their feet (14:10c): Their feet they have not refrained. Neither the national leaders, nor the people themselves, have made any effort to curb that quest for idolatry.

B. Judgment (14:10d):

1. Yahweh’s displeasure (14:10d): Therefore, Yahweh takes no pleasure in them. God cannot accept or countenance such a people. Any thought that he would intervene to save Israel is out of the question. Judah’s waywardness finally has put the nation outside the boundaries of Yahweh’s grace.

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244 The temple bears Yahweh’s name (7:10), and Jeremiah bears Yahweh’s name (15:16). The idea that the people bear Yahweh’s name appears beside here in Dt 28:10; Dan 9:19; 2 Chr 7:14.

245 So Brueggemann, CJ, 135
2. **Yahweh’s memory (14:10e):** *Now he will remember their iniquity that he may punish their sins.* Yahweh reminds Jeremiah of the threat he had earlier spoken concerning Israel. It is time to punish Judah for her sin. *Remember* implies taking action (cf. 2:2). *Punish* (r. *pqd*) is lit., visit, deal with (cf. 5:9).

C. **Rejection (14:11-12a):**

1. **Prohibition (14:11):** *And Yahweh said unto me, Do not pray for the welfare of this people.* The prohibition of 7:16 and 11:14 is repeated. Because the judgment already had been decreed, it is useless for Jeremiah to continue to pray for his people. With prophetic intercession at an end, all avenues of communication with Yahweh are cut off.

2. **Explanation (14:12a):** *When they fast I will not hear their cry, and when they offer up burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them…* God will not be influenced by the ritualistic cries for help that might accompany the burnt offerings and meal offerings. God is not ruling out the possibility of sincere repentance. Later, in the eleventh hour of the final siege, Jeremiah left open the possibility of survival, if the people would only submit to the Lord. The thrust here is that God knows the heart of a man. He will not accept outward forms in place of genuine repentance. Ritual will not work any longer. On *burnt offerings* (‘ōlāh) see 6:20. *Meal offerings* (minchāh) in Jeremiah’s day referred to non-bloody offerings.

D. **Warning (14:12b):** *but with sword, famine and pestilence I am about to consume them.* Since divine intervention has been ruled out, only the traditional covenant curse remains: *sword, famine and pestilence.* God is about to consume the sinners with war and all of its accompanying calamities. This is the first occurrence of this triad of disasters that appears thirteen times in the book. The end of conversation with Yahweh means the end of the national existence of Judah.

**Jeremiah’s Second Petition**

14:13

In his second petition Jeremiah attempts to make a defense of the conduct of his people.

A. **Jeremiah’s Exasperation (14:13a):** *And I said, Ah Adonay Yahweh…* *Behold* introduces something shocking or unexpected. In spite of God’s refusal to hearken to his first petition, Jeremiah prays again on behalf of his people. The cry of dismay is the same as used by Jeremiah at the time of his call (1:6).

B. **Jeremiah’s Explanation (14:13b):** *Behold, the prophets are saying to them, You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine; for I will truly give you peace in this place.* The prayer calls attention to extenuating circumstances that might mitigate the guilt of the nation. Jeremiah calls God’s attention to the false prophets who are deceiving and misleading the people. These influential religious leaders were saying that God would never bring the *sword* and *famine* upon Judah as predicted repeatedly by Jeremiah. In their view Judah was under the special protection of God. The Lord would see to it that his people had *peace.*

Jeremiah was concerned about these prophets and the damaging message that they brought. But Jeremiah is not merely complaining to God; in reality he is again interceding. He is placing the responsibility for the condition of the nation squarely on the shoulders of
the false prophets. The implied petition of v 13 is for God to be merciful to the people as a whole because they have been misled by their leaders.

Yahweh’s Second Response
14:14-16

A. About the Prophets (14:14):
1. False prophets speak falsehood (14:14a): And Yahweh said unto me: Falsehood the prophets are prophesying in my name. The Lord concurs with Jeremiah’s evaluation. The false prophets are guilty of speaking falsehood to the nation in the name of the Lord. Jeremiah has taken up the charge originally set forth in Mic 2:11. Jeremiah’s point is that prophets that speak in this manner are deceiving the people.
2. False prophets have no commission (14:14b): I did not send them, nor did I command them, nor did I speak unto them. In denying that the false prophets had any divine authority behind them, Jeremiah sets forth three negative synonymous verbs. God did not send the false prophets; he did not command them, speak to them or dispatch them. They are acting strictly on their own initiative.
3. False prophets offer worthless counsel (14:14c): To emphasize the worthlessness of what the false prophets were peddling, Jeremiah piles up a series of synonyms for emptiness.
   a. A lying vision… Vision (ch‘zōn) often refers to visionary revelation; but it can also refer to auditory revelation (Ezek 12:2). Jeremiah only uses the term in connection with false revelation (cf. 23:16). Lying vision points to delusions of peace and prosperity. Such a vision is spurious and utterly worthless.
   b. divination… Yahweh likens what these prophets are saying to divination (qesem). The term is used in the OT only in reference to forbidden religious practices (Dt 18:10). It may be that some of these prophets were using the methods of pagan diviners to attempt to pry into the future. On the other hand, the term divination may be used as a means of showing the emptiness and futility of the message of these men.
   c. a worthless thing… The term *ēlīl in other passages refers to idols (cf. Ps 96:5). The point is that the word of the false prophets has no more vitality than a lifeless statue.
   d. and the deception of their heart they prophesy to you. On deception (tarmît) see 8:5. Heart in this context means mind. Jeremiah means either the prophets themselves are deceived or they are conjuring up in their own minds a deception to perpetrate on the people. In either case the words of the false prophets is worthless.

The Hebrew uses slightly different forms of the verb prophesy in v 14. At the beginning of the v the verb is in the Niphal form, a form that is characteristic of prophetic speech. The second occurrence is in the Hithpael form, which in earlier texts seems to convey the idea of acting under the impulse of a higher power. For example, Saul prophesied/raved while under the influence of an evil spirit (1 Sam 18:10). It is not clear whether Jeremiah uses the two forms synonymously, or whether in invests in the Hithpael form some of the connotation of the earlier usage.

B. About Punishment (14:15-18):
1. Punishment of the prophets (14:15):
   a. Address (14:15a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets… The Lord assures his perplexed prophet that the false prophets will be punished for the role they have played in misleading the nation.
b. **Accusation (14:15b):** *who are prophesying in my name (although I did not send them), and they are saying, Sword and famine shall not come upon this land…* Yahweh identifies two accusations. First, the false prophets were prophesying in Yahweh’s name even though Yahweh had not dispatched them. They were then impersonating true prophets like Jeremiah. Second, the false prophets categorically denied that the *sword and famine* anticipated by Jeremiah would not come upon the land of Judah.

c. **Announcement (14:15c):** *By sword and famine those prophets shall be destroyed.* For falsifying Yahweh’s word, these prophets stand under heavy judgment. The punishment that the false prophets will experience is appropriate. They have said that sword and famine will not come upon the land. Therefore, they shall meet their death by sword and famine. Destroyed (r. *tmm*) appears again in 44:12.

2. **Punishment on the people (14:16):**
   a. **Shocking in desecration (14:16a):** *But the people to whom they prophesied shall be cast out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword…* Judgment will also fall upon the people of the land. Though they have been misled, their iniquity is not excused. Those who die defending Jerusalem and those who die of the famine during the siege will simply be *cast out* (r. *šlch*) in the streets. The same verb is used of King Jehoiachin in 22:28 and of King Jehoiakim in 36:30.
   b. **Total in impact (14:16b):** *and there will be none to bury them, neither they, nor their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters…* No one will have the courage, inclination or strength to bury the slain. Even close relatives will be petrified to undertake proper burial for their loved ones. Even mass burial will be out of the question.\(^\text{246}\) Lack of proper burial was considered a great tragedy.\(^\text{247}\)
   c. **Divine in origin (14:16c):** *and I shall pour out upon them their evil.* The language is similar to 6:11. The divine Judge has rejected again the appeal of Jeremiah on behalf of the people of Judah. Their evil deeds demand the outpouring of divine wrath.

Vv 15-16 announce a judgment upon prophets and people that fits the circumstances of their sin. At the same time these vv are designed to reassure Jeremiah that his only message was on target.

**Jeremiah’s Lamentation**

14:17-18

A. **Directive to Preach (14:17a):** *Now tell them this word.* Some take these words to refer to the lament that follows. But it is perhaps better to refer this directive to the message immediately preceding. It was a sad message, one that stoked deep emotional response in Jeremiah.

B. **Depth of Emotion (14:17b):** *My eyes shall drip tears night and day, and they shall not cease…* Because such a dire fate awaits both the leaders and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Jeremiah voices a lamentation over them. The feeling is real, but the lament also serves a secondary purpose. Jeremiah’s uncontrollable weeping warns the people concerning the depth of the tragedy they were facing.

\(^{246}\text{Bury is in the Piel stem, suggesting mass burial.}\)

\(^{247}\text{Jer 7:33; 8:2; Dt 21:23; 2 Sam 21:10.}\)
C. Focus of the Lament (14:17c): *for with a great fracture the virgin daughter of my people is utterly shattered, a very grievous wound.* For (*ki*) in the context of lament could mean *surely.* Shortly Jerusalem would suffer a *great fracture* from which she would not recover (cf. 4:6; 6:1). It is generally thought that Jerusalem is called a *virgin* because hitherto no enemy had completely conquered her.\(^{248}\) In 10:19 it was Jeremiah who experienced a *grievous (psychological) wound.* Here that phrase describes the condition of the population of Jerusalem after they have been shattered.

D. Dimensions of the Tragedy (14:18): Projecting himself into the not too distant future, Jeremiah describes the situation that will exist when the siege of Jerusalem begins. He sees what others refuse to see.

1. **Outside the city (14:18a):** *If I go out to the field, then behold, the slain of the sword!* Outside the safety of the city walls, the sword of Babylon already has done its deadly work.

2. **Inside the city (14:18b):** *And if I go to the city, then behold, those who are famished with famine.* Inside Jerusalem people are starving to death.

3. **Outside the country (14:18c):** *For both the prophet and priest will rove about in a land they do not know.* Religious leaders are forced to *rove about* (lit., *peddle their wares*) in a foreign land. So those who survive the slaughter in the land will be forced to reside in a distant land. The phrase *both prophet and priest* also appears in 23:11.

Some commentators connect the verb translated *to rove about* with a verb in Aramaic that means *to go about like a beggar.* If this be the meaning, then Jeremiah sees these ex-nobles begging their way into the unknown land.\(^{249}\)

**Jeremiah’s Third Petition**

14:19-22

A. Three Desperate Questions (14:19a): *Will you completely reject Judah? Will your soul loath Zion? Why have you smitten us when there is no healing for us?* Again Jeremiah voices a complaint to Yahweh in the form of two questions. Twice Jeremiah had his intercession rejected by God; but still Jeremiah prays. With increased fervency he asks God how he can utterly reject Judah? How can he smite Judah, but provide no divine healing for the wound? Judah points to a political entity; Zion points to the center of religious activity. How could Yahweh reject the nation that was committed to maintaining his worship in the Jerusalem temple? In these lines Jeremiah was thinking the unthinkable, viz., that Yahweh might through with Zion, David and the temple.

B. Frustrated Expectations (14:19b): *We hope for peace, but there was no good, and for a time of healing, and behold, terror.* Misled by the false prophets, the nation was confident of peace and a time of healing. But the drought continued. Nothing appeared on the horizon but the terror that accompanies any national calamity.

C. Forthright Confession (14:20): *We know, O Yahweh, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you.* In language similar to 3:25 Jeremiah confesses the sin of the nation. The people are worthy of chastisement. The iniquity of Judah stretches back over the centuries to the fathers, the early ancestors of the nation.

\(^{248}\) Freedman, *SBB*, 103-104.

\(^{249}\) Cheyne, *PC*, 1:356.
D. Earnest Appeal (14:21): Jeremiah cannot ask for divine mercy on the grounds that Judah has taken the first feeble steps in the right direction. Nonetheless, he does make an appeal for divine intervention based on three grounds.

1. Name appeal (14:21a): For the sake of your name do not spurn… Hope against rejected is grounded in the character of God. Jeremiah asked God not to spurn the nation for the sake of your name. When Israel suffered humiliation, the reputation of Israel’s God also suffered in the eyes of the nations. A similar appeal was made by Moses. The verb spurn (r. n ’ts) was first used by Moses to describe Yahweh’s reaction to being forgotten by the people (Dt 32:19).

2. Election appeal (14:21b): do not demean your glorious throne. Jeremiah asked God not to demean, disgrace or dishonor his glorious throne. The glorious throne is either Jerusalem (Jer 3:17), or the temple. According to the OT, Yahweh was enthroned between the cherubim in the holy of holies of the temple.

3. Covenant appeal (14:21c): Remember, do not forget your covenant with us. Jeremiah urged God to remember (i.e., have regard to) his covenant. It is Yahweh’s commitments to Israel that the prophet wants God to remember. This prayer is dangerous, for in 14:10 Yahweh declared that he did remember the covenant and it brought to might only Israel’s transgressions.

E. Ultimate Praise (14:22):

1. Pagan gods cannot bring rain (14:22a): Is there any among the vanities of the nations who can produce rain? Can the heavens give showers? Jeremiah returns to the theme of drought, which was last mentioned in v 6. The two questions are assertions that obliquely call on Yahweh to send the rain. Jeremiah acknowledged that there is no one else to whom the people of Judah can turn. None of the vanities, i.e., idols, of the nation are capable of sending the much needed rains. The heavens (i.e., heavenly bodies), that were the objects of worship in Mesopotamia and Canaan, certainly could not send the rain.

2. Yahweh is Creator (14:22b): Are not you he, O Yahweh our God? And we wait for you, for you have made all these things. It is the Lord who created the heavenly bodies. He alone controls the processes of nature. He is the only hope for the nation.

Yahweh’s Third Response

15:1-4

A. Rejection of Intercession (15:1a): And Yahweh said unto me: If Moses and Samuel were standing before me, I would have no affection for this people. For Jeremiah to continue to intercede for the people of Judah was useless. Not even Moses and Samuel — the two greatest intercessors the nation had ever known — would be able to move God to show any pity to the present sinful generation. God had hearkened to Moses and Samuel. He had extended his mercy to previous generations, but only after Israel had manifested repentance. Jeremiah’s generation was so steeped in sin that repentance seemed impossible. Consequently, intercessory prayer was useless. The outcome of silenced intercession is covenant curse.

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250Ex 32:11-12; Nm 14:13-16.
251Jer 17:12; Ezek 43:7.
B. Rejection of the Nation (15:1b): *Cast them away from my presence; let them go out.*
Jeremiah was to quit praying for them. He was to go back to preaching the message of judgment that God had commissioned him to preach. Through his preaching he must *cast away* the inhabitants of Judah from the presence of the Lord. This means that he would announce the coming exile. The people must *go out* from before the Lord.

C. Rejection of Mockery (15:2-3):
1. Question of the people (15:2a): *And it shall come to pass if they say unto you, Where shall we go?* If the people ask him to explain this cryptic statement *go out*, the prophet is to have a ready answer. The question does not suggest indecision, but requests an explanation. It means *Where are we being taken?*
2. Four destinies (15:2b): *Then you shall say unto them: Thus says Yahweh: Those for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for famine, to famine; and those for exile, to the exile.* The entire arsenal of covenant curses will be unleashed against Judah; there is no hope for national survival. Every man will go out to the punishment that has been decreed for him. *Death* (*mavet*) in this context means *pestilence* (cf. 18:21; 43:11). Cities under siege experienced devastating outbreaks of plague due to deteriorating sanitary considerations and scarcity of food and water. Some will die in battle and others will perish with hunger. Some will survive the horrors of siege and battle to be taken into foreign captivity.
3. Four agents (15:3): *I have appointed against them four types of punishment (oracle of Yahweh): the sword to slay, the dogs to tear, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field to devour and to destroy.* A second four-fold judgment blast is announced. *Appointed* (r. *pqd* in Hiphil) was used in 1:10 in reference to the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. *Types* (*mišpāchōt*) usually means *clans*; but it refers to species of animals in Gn 8:19. All will suffer; none will escape. Four types of punishment have been decreed for many of the inhabitants of Judah, viz., *sword, dogs, birds and beasts*. The verbs used are terrifying: *slay, tear, devour destroy*. They will be slain by the sword of Babylon. Their unburied bodies will be ripped, torn and eaten by wild animals.

D. Explanation (15:4): *And I will make them a sight that will horrify all the kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.* The nations of the world would witness the terrible things that happen to Judah. They will fear for their own safety. All of this must befall Judah because of the sins of Manasseh, the wickedest king who ever sat on the throne of Judah.

Merciless Judgment
15:5-9

A. Description (15:5): From speaking about the people, God begins to speak directly to the people. By means of three rhetorical questions, he drives home the point that no one in the world will really care when Judah falls. The three questions indicate a gradation of indifference toward Jerusalem.
1. Without pity (15:5a): *For who shall have mercy upon you, O Jerusalem?* No one will show any mercy over Jerusalem’s fate. To exercise *mercy* (r. *chml*) suggests some effort at intervention to prevent or mitigate disaster.
2. Without lament (15:5b): *And who shall mourn for you?* Even after the disaster no one will be moved to perform mourning rites over the dead city. *Mourn* (r. *nûd*) means
wander, or sway back and forth. Apparently people expressed condolence by rocking their bodies or heads back and forth. The universal is restricted to those not immediately affected by the disaster, i.e., neighboring people.

3. Without inquiry (15:5c): Who shall turn aside to ask concerning your welfare? No one will have enough interest in the once proud city to turn aside, i.e., interrupt normal routine, to even ask about the condition of the city. Welfare (šālōm) was God’s special gift to Jerusalem. The point is that when Yahweh ceases to care, there is no one left to care.

B. Explanation (15:6):
1. Treatment of Yahweh (15:6a): You have abandoned me (oracle of Yahweh); backward you go. In 12:7 it was Yahweh that abandoned (r. ntš) his people. But if he abandoned them it was because they had abandoned him first. The expression backward you go is unique in the OT. Apparently the idea is that they have walked away from God (cf. 7:24).

2. Response of Yahweh (15:6b):
   a. His hand (15:6b): Therefore, I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you. Many times Israel had forsaken God, and thereby had incurred the threat of divine wrath. In the past, however, God always had withheld the threat when the people showed some evidence of repentance. Now it is too late. For stretch out my hand against see 6:12. Yahweh once had stretched out his hand to save (Dt 26:8); now he extends that same hand to destroy.

   b. His compassion (15:6c): I am weary with having compassion. Yahweh cannot forgive them any more. Using anthropomorphic language, He is weary with this business of making threats, and then withholding the stroke at the last possible instance. The v reflects a history of frustration and disappointment with the conduct of Israel. Yahweh’s decision to destroy national Judah is not arbitrary and hasty. But there are limits to divine patience.

C. Catalog of Catastrophe (15:7-9): Eleven verbs express Yahweh’s past efforts to discipline his people; the twelfth verb is future. As in Amos 4:6-11 these disciplinary disasters reveal Yahweh’s strenuous efforts to bring his people to repentance.

1. Children slain (15:7): And I winnowed them with a winnowing-fork in the gates of the land; I deprived them of children, I destroyed my people. From their ways they did not turn. The first triad of verbs refers to a thinning out of the population. The verb winnow (r. zrh) appears in 4:11. A winnowing-fork (mizreh) resembled a pitchfork, but with thicker teeth. The winnowing process is a metaphor for judgment. As the winnowing process separates the chaff from the grain, so God caused the parents to be separated from their children. The judgment winnowing took place in the gates of the land. The children who served as soldiers were slain as they attempted to defend the gates of their cities from the invading enemy. In spite of these disasters the inhabitants of Judah did not turn from their sinful ways. Destroy (r. ’bd in Piel) in the sense of wipe out already appeared in 12:17.

2. Widows increased (15:8a): Their widows became to me more numerous than the sand of the sea. Wives were deprived of their husbands. This left the land defenseless. In 5:6 it was the backslidings of the Judeans that had become more numerous (r. ’tsm); here it is widows. Sand of the sea recalls the promise made to the Patriarchs (Gn 22:17; 32:12).

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253 KJV, NIV, NASB, NJPS translate the verbs in the future tense, understanding the Hebrew perfects as prophetic; NRSV translates the perfects as past tense.
But here that promise has been reversed. If widows become more numerous, then there has been a diminution of total population.

3. Mothers distressed (15:8b-9):
   a. Danger she faced (15:8b): I brought against them, against the mother of the young men, a destroyer at high noon; I caused distress and terrors to fall upon her suddenly. The mother of young men is Jerusalem. Against that mother God will bring a destroyer at the most unexpected time—at high noon, when military operations temporarily ceased (cf. 6:4). Distress will fall upon the mother, when she realizes the danger that she faces. Young men (bāchûr used collectively) are those in their prime for fighting wars (cf. 11:22).
   b. Terror she endured (15:9a): The one who had borne seven languished, her soul gasped. Her sun went down while it was yet day; she was ashamed and confused.
      The woman with numerous children—usually the most proud and joyous inhabitant of the city—was filled with consternation. Languished (‘umʕlāh) was used in 14:2 of the gates of Jerusalem. The language reflects the thought of Hannah’s song (1 Sam 2:5). With the loss of her children, her sun had gone down. While it was yet day (prime of life) all became dark and dreary for her. All of her hopes, dreams, and aspirations were dashed to pieces when the enemy killed her sons (cf. 14:3f).

4. Fate of the remnant (15:9b): I will give their remnant to the sword before their enemies (oracle of Yahweh). The long series of verbs recalling previous disciplinary disasters has come to an end. After each of those previous judgments a remnant had survived; now that remnant will also be destroyed. I will give ... to the sword refers to a fate yet to befall the remnant, i.e., those who have survived all previous calamities. For Mother Jerusalem the shame of losing sons becomes the greater shame of childlessness. On the destruction of the remnant see 6:9.

Prophetic Lament
15:10-14

Jeremiah suffered a great deal of mental anguish during his ministry. The rejection of his prophetic intercession on three successive occasions plunged Jeremiah into the depths of despair. This is the second personal crisis in the ministry of this great man of God.

A. Lament Voiced (15:10): The divine refusal to hearken to the intercession of the prophet has caused Jeremiah to sink into the slough of despondency. He begins to reflect upon his ministry and to think of the trouble that has come to him because of his message.
   1. A man overwhelmed by misery (15:10a): Woe to me, O my mother, because you gave birth to me… Woe expresses unbearable misery. Jeremiah wished he had never been born (cf. 20:14-18; Job 3).
   2. A man surrounded by controversy (15:10b): a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole land. Jeremiah’s preaching had produced no repentance. He had only succeeded in arousing the animosity of those to whom he preached. This timid soul from Anathoth had become the center of controversy. To bring a thundering message of accusation and condemnation was contrary to the personality of this man. Debate, confrontation, and argument surrounded him.
   3. A man unfairly treated (15:10c): I have not lent, nor have they lent to me; yet every man curses me. People viciously curse him just as they might curse a hardhearted

254 She that has borne seven is a proverbial expression meaning one who bears numerous children. See 1 Sam 2:5 and Ruth 4:15.
255 The shame of childlessness is repeatedly mentioned in the OT. See Jer 50:12; Isa 54:4; Gn 16:4; 30:1, 23.
creditor. Dealings between moneylenders and debtors in antiquity were anything but cordial. This is the kind of relationship that now exists between Jeremiah and his countrymen. Yet Jeremiah has not engaged in exploitive behavior; he has not abused anyone, or taken advantage of them.

B. Lament Answered (15:11-14):
1. Relief from harassment (15:11a): Yahweh said, Surely I will set you free for good… The introductory formula the Lord said occurs only in v 11 and in 46:25. Surely is a free rendering of what in Hebrew is part of an oath formula. God in effect is taking an oath to perform his promises to the prophet. The translation of the first verb describing what God will do for Jeremiah is difficult. The ASV in the text renders it strengthen and in the margin offers the alternative release. The KJV has, it shall be well with thy remnant. Probably the best rendering is set free or release. God promises to release Jeremiah from the hostility that he had been experiencing in this phase of his ministry.

2. Petition by enemies (15:11b): surely I will cause the enemy to entreat you in the time of evil, and in the time of distress. Those who were currently so bitter against Jeremiah humbly will come to him to seek his advice when the calamity befalls Jerusalem. They may question his prophetic credentials now, but before long they will be forced by the fulfillment of his prophecies to recognize Jeremiah as a true prophet of God.

King Zedekiah on numerous occasions during the siege of Jerusalem consulted with Jeremiah, sometimes personally (e.g., 21:1-2), and sometimes through intermediaries (e.g., 37:3). After the assassination of the governor Gedaliah, the remnant came to Jeremiah to seek an oracle from the Lord (42:1-3).

2. His prophecies cannot be broken (15:12): Can iron break iron from the north and bronze? It is not clear whether God is still speaking to the prophet in this enigmatic v, or whether these words are addressed to the people. Iron from the north — the region of the Black Sea — was the strongest sort. Bronze — a mixture of copper and tin — was one of the strongest metals known to the ancients.

Common iron cannot break iron from the north, or bronze for that matter. But who is this unbreakable metal? Is it Jeremiah himself? God told him at his call that he would be an iron pillar and a bronze wall (1:18). Is God reminding Jeremiah of that promise? Possibly so. But it is more likely that v 12 is a transition to the two vv that follow. God would then be assuring Jeremiah that his prophecy of an invincible foe from the north would indeed be fulfilled. The fulfillment of that prophecy would serve to vindicate Jeremiah as God's spokesman.

3. His threats will materialize (15:13-14): The description of the invincible foe from the north continues in vv 13-14.
   a. Wealth plundered (5:13): Your wealth and your treasures I will give for plunder without price, even for all of your sins and in all of your borders. The enemy will roam throughout the land plundering because of all of the sins that the inhabitants had committed. The phrase without price has been understood in more than one way. Perhaps it means that the enemy will not need to be paid for attacking Judah. On the other hand, the phrase may be taken to mean that God will give Judah to the enemy without receiving any compensation in return. The former interpretation is preferable.

   b. Exile enforced (5:14a): And I will cause you to serve your enemies in a land you do not know… The inhabitants of Judah will be forced to serve their enemies in a foreign land. Borrowing an expression from Dt 32:22, God declares, (lit., in my
The judgment described in the Song of Moses centuries earlier is now about to fall on Judah.

c. Fire ignited (5:14b): *for a fire is kindled in my anger; against you it will burn.* Fire symbolizes divine judgment. That is a fire that cannot be extinguished until it has run its course.

What consolation was it to the despondent Jeremiah to know that his land and his people will be destroyed? Perhaps the thought is this: if he continues to preach this message of doom, he certainly will not be discredited. His message was controversial to be sure. But it was a true message and it had to be preached. The warning had to be sounded. Jeremiah needed this reassurance at this juncture in his ministry.

**Complaints of Jeremiah**
15:15-18

In v 15 the second of the so-called *confession* of Jeremiah begins.

**A. A Positive Opening** (15:15a):

1. **Yahweh’s knowledge** (15:15a): *You, O Yahweh, know...* The confession opens on a positive note. The prophet affirms the omniscience of God, when he says, *You know, O Yahweh.* The fact that God knows what the prophet has been going through comforts Jeremiah.256

2. **Jeremiah’s request** (15:15b): *remember me, visit me, and avenge me of my persecutors.* Because of his relationship with Yahweh, and the previous commitments of Yahweh to him, Jeremiah can make bold requests of God. Jeremiah’s petition contains three positive requests. (1) He wanted God to *remember* him. For the verb *remember* (r. zkr) see 2:2. (2) He needed to see some visible sign of God’s continued care; he wants God to *visit* or *deal with* (r. pqd) him. This is the first example in the book of this verb used in a positive sense. The verbs *remember/visit* both request active intervention. (3) Jeremiah asked God to *avenge* his persecutors. God executes vengeance on behalf of his people. This is why God’s people are forbidden to act in a vengeful way toward others. Jeremiah was asking that these persecutors receive their just deserts.

**B. Complaint about Inaction** (15:15c, d):

1. **His life was in danger** (15:15c): *Do not take me away by deferring your anger.* Jeremiah made one negative request of Yahweh. He asked that he not be taken away, i.e., that he not be allowed to die a premature death. If God continued to exercise longsuffering with regard to his enemies, Jeremiah feared that he would be killed.

2. **His ministry endures reproach** (15:15d): *Know that for your sake I have been bearing reproach.* From petition Jeremiah moved in his prayer to narrative that serves as motivation for divine intervention. Even though God knows all, still Jeremiah rehearsed before his God the particular difficulties that he has recently been experiencing. First, he asked God to take note of the *reproach* that he bears daily for his sake. The prophet’s personal crisis is a result of his faith, of his unswerving loyalty to the message he had been charged to deliver.

**C. Complaint about Loneliness** (15:16-17):

1. **His early enthusiasm** (15:16):

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256 Others regard you know as words of complaint. Yahweh knows what Jeremiah is experiencing, but does not intervene to help him.
a. He ate God’s word (15:16a): Your words were found and I ate them... When the Lord initially put his word in the mouth of the prophet (1:7), Jeremiah ate them. To eat words means to absorb them, to make them the constant food of one’s spiritual life.257

b. He rejoiced in God’s word (15:16b): and your words were to me the joy and delight of my heart... Jeremiah’s whole life revolved around the word of God. The word pair joy/delight earlier was used in the context of wedding celebrations (7:34).

c. He relished being God’s man (15:16c): for I have been called by your name, O Yahweh God of hosts. It was to him a source of great joy to learn that he had been called of God to be his messenger. The expression indicates being owned or possessed by Yahweh (cf. 7:10).

2. His isolation (15:17): As time went on, Jeremiah found that being God’s man had distinct disadvantages.

a. Description (15:17a): I have not sat in the assembly of the merrymakers, that I might rejoice. The word assembly (sōd) refers to a circle of the leading men in the community who gather to discuss politics and community business. Merrymakers (m‘sach‘qîm) comes from a root that is used of a wide-range of jesting, joking, mockery, and play. Later Jeremiah will complain of being a laughingstock, a word that comes from the same root. The merrymakers were probably not partiers in general, but those in public assemblies were making merry at the expense of Jeremiah.258 The false prophets with their optimistic forecasts have made life miserable for Jeremiah in places of normal social interaction.

b. Explanation (15:17b): Because of your hand — because you filled me with indignation — I sat alone. Jeremiah could not count himself among the circles of those who celebrated every tidbit of good news. He was filled with God’s indignation against sin. His messages centered in the wrath of God. His views were always in the minority. In fact, his message brought his theology and his political allegiance into question in the community. One can imagine that neither Jeremiah nor his contemporaries enjoyed socializing with one another.

Jeremiah lived a lonely life because the touch of God’s hand had set him apart. The OT contains numerous references to a prophet being touched by the hand of God.259 The hand of the Lord came upon is an idiomatic expression meaning that the irresistible power of God came upon the life of a man. Because he possessed the prophetic spirit, Jeremiah was different. He sat (r. yšb) alone (bādād). The combination of these two words is used of Jerusalem (Lam 1:1) and a penitent (Lam 3:28). The only other use refers to the isolation of a leper during his uncleanness (Lev 13:46). So Jeremiah is like a leper in respect to his neighbors, a social outcast.

D. Complaint about Pain (15:18a): Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Jeremiah asked the question that many other discouraged saints through the ages have asked, Why? In earlier passages,260 Jeremiah was asking how God could finally forsake Israel. But now Jeremiah felt that God had forsaken his servant; and so the question Why? is renewed, but this time with a personal application.

257Cf. Ezek 3:1ff; 1 Tim 4:14-16.
258Holiday, Her 1:459.
259Prior to Jeremiah’s time this expression is used of Elijah (1 Kgs 18:46), Elisha (2 Kgs 3:15 and Isaiah (Isa 8:11). The expression appears seven times in Ezekiel.
260E.g. 12:1ff; 14:8-9, 19.
Thus far Jeremiah’s ministry had not been blessed with success. He faithfully had sown the word of God, but had reaped only hatred and opposition. His mental anguish was perpetual, like a wound that will not heal. The word *pain* is used in Gn 34:25 to describe the pain of the Shechemites after their circumcision. *Perpetual* was first used in 3:5. The concept of the *incurable* (*'ānûš*) wound (*makkāh*) first appeared in Mic 1:9. He wanted to preach salvation, but instead he must preach damnation. Several times in the book Jeremiah employs medical terminology.261

E. Complaint about Abandonment (15:18b): You have surely become unto me like a deceptive stream, like waters that fail. The imagery shifts from an incurable wound to a river or wadi. Jeremiah publicly had preached that God was a fountain of living water (2:13); now privately he accused God of being a dried up stream! He is accusing God of being unreliable, untrustworthy and unfaithful. In essence Jeremiah is claiming to be more faithful to Yahweh than Yahweh has been to him. Cf. 20:7 where Jeremiah accuses God of deception.

To soften the thrust of the last part of v 18, some make this sentence a question. While this is a possible translation, there is no indication in the Hebrew that a question is intended. Jeremiah had simply reached the breaking point. In this moment of weakness, Satan had placed this blasphemous thought in the mind of Jeremiah.

Reply of the Lord
15:19-21

God does not bother directly to answer the accusation of his prophet. If Jeremiah expected to hear reassurance or comfort he was disappointed. Yahweh’s reply consists of an invitation to reenter the ministry, an exhortation to remain steadfast, and a repetition of a wonderful promise. Jeremiah has gone too far. As far as God is concerned, Jeremiah’s accusation is tantamount to his resignation from the prophetic ministry.

A. An Invitation to Repent (15:19a-e): The Hebrew word *šûb* is used four times in v 19, translated variously, *turn, return, restore*.

1. Repentance required (15:19a): Two pictures of the repentance that Jeremiah needed are articulated.
   a. Returning (15:19a): Therefore thus says Yahweh: If you return … In 4:1 the words if you return were addressed by Jeremiah to the Judeans. Now Yahweh addresses that same challenge/appeal to his spokesman. God does not chide or rebuke his prophet, not directly at least. He simply suggests that Jeremiah needed to return, i.e., go back to the original point of departure.
   b. Purging (15:19b): and if you cause the precious to come forth from the vile… Jeremiah needed to separate the precious from the worthless within his own heart. Within the heart of Jeremiah, the refuse of doubt somehow had gotten mingled with the precious gold of faith, love and trust. Inward purification is now essential.

2. Reinstatement possible (15:19b): The reinstatement in the prophetic ministry is described in three expressions in v 19.
   a. Restoration (15:19c): then I will restore you… Reinstatement is not automatic. Only God can make a prophet. If Jeremiah returns to God, then the Lord can restore him to a right relationship to himself so that he might continue to be God’s minister.

261Medical terminology: 6:7; 8:21-22; 20:12, 15.
b. Continuation (15:19d): before me you shall continue to stand … The figure here is of a servant standing in the presence of his master waiting for commands (cf. 15:1). Counselors and courtiers are said to stand before a king (2 Kgs 12:6; Prov 22:29). Angels are said to stand before God (Luke 1:19). Elijah and Elisha used this expression to describe their relationship to God (1 Kgs 17:1; 2 Kgs 3:14). To be permitted to minister before the Great King would be the highest privilege accorded a man.

c. Articulation (15:19e): you shall be as my mouth. The prophet is not only the servant of God to carry out his commands he is also the mouthpiece of God to proclaim his word. Jeremiah can occupy this high and holy office once again if he will only repent. At the prophet’s call Yahweh had said he would put his words in Jeremiah’s mouth (1:9). Now that task is reaffirmed.

So in order to continue his prophetic service, Jeremiah needed to repent. If Jeremiah complies with these conditions God will take him back. It is interesting that God does not even ask whether or not Jeremiah wants to reenter the ministry. That he so desires is taken for granted.

B. Challenge to be Resolute (15:19f): Let them turn unto you;262 but as for you, do not turn unto them. The invitation to repent is followed by the exhortation to remain steadfast. Jeremiah must not allow the skeptical inhabitants of Judah to drag him down to their level. For the first verb (they shall return/let them return) there is an emphatic subject pronoun (hēmmāh) which refers to the merrymakers of v 17. By his continued preaching, he should raise them up to a higher plane. In effect God is saying, Do not join them; let them join you! Jeremiah is displaying weakness. His enemies are getting to him. He must remain steadfast. This exhortation implies that Jeremiah will in fact repent and be reinstated in his prophetic office.

C. Promise of Rescue (15:20):

1. Jeremiah’s strength (15:20a): And I will make you to this people a fortified brazen wall. They shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you… The accusation that God had forsaken Jeremiah simply was not true. God had warned him at the time of his call that people would fight against him. But God had promised to make Jeremiah like a fortified wall against which the assault of the persecutors would ultimately fail. The v constitutes a reassurance that Yahweh will renew the prophet’s strength (cf. 1:18).

2. God’s presence (15:20b-21):
   a. Declaration of God’s presence (15:20b): for I am with you to save you and to deliver you (oracle of Yahweh). God assured him at the time of the call that he would always be near him to deliver him from death at the hands of the enemy. God has not forgotten that promise; neither should Jeremiah. So God simply quotes the promise as originally given in 1:18f, but he adds at the end the powerful formula, oracle of the Lord. The verbs save (r. yš’) and deliver (r. ntsl) explain what it means for Yahweh to be with Jeremiah.

   b. Result of God’s presence (15:16): And I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the power of the ruthless. As if it were not enough to cite the original promise, God rephrases that promise in more specific terms. The ruthless men who attempted to suppress the message of God will not prevail over Jeremiah. God will deliver him from their power. Though times were

262The last sentence of v 19 is not a simple future as in the ASV, but a jussive as in the KJV.
difficult, and no way of escape seemed apparent, God will bring his prophet through. God is no deceptive stream! On the wicked (rā‘îm) see 6:29. The verb redeem (r. pdh) technically means to pay a ransom to free someone. But the word came to be a synonym for deliver.

SECTION THREE
PROPHETIC CONDUCT
Jeremiah 16:1-17:3

Jeremiah came through his personal crisis. He repented. God took him back. Now that the rebellious prophet was humble and contrite, God gave him further instructions.

Directions to the Prophet
16:1-9

A minister must live a life that is consistent with the message he brings, else he will be charged with hypocrisy. Jeremiah had for the most part been preaching a message of doom and judgment. His life must reflect the gloomy prospects of the nation. A man preaches by what he does and does not do as well as by his words. There is a great deal of truth in the old adage What you are speaks so loud I cannot hear what you say. In order to ensure that the life of Jeremiah was in harmony with the message, God laid down three prohibitions for his prophet.

A. Not to Marry (16:1-4):

1. Because God prohibited it (16:1-2): And the word of Yahweh came unto me, saying, (2) Do not take a wife for yourself, nor shall you have sons and daughters in this place. In the first prohibition Jeremiah is commanded not to marry and father children. Hosea was married, as were Isaiah and Ezekiel. Probably most of the prophets had helpmates. But Jeremiah was denied wifely companionship. He had complained of his loneliness; now a greater burden was laid upon him. But it was necessary that he abstain from marriage in order to get across to his contemporaries the message of how terribly desperate were the times.

In OT times marriage was regarded as the natural state. To remain unmarried would cause the people to realize how serious the times really were. Jeremiah’s non-marriage was a symbolic act with predictive overtones. Shortly the time would come when there would be no more thought of marriage.

2. Because family members will be slain (16:3): For thus says Yahweh concerning the sons and the daughters who are being born in this place, and concerning their mothers who are bearing them, and concerning their fathers who are begetting them in this land: Painful deaths they will die. The nation was about to go through a period of brutal warfare. Children as well as their parents will die painful deaths (lit., deaths of sickness), including starvation. The expression refers not so much to identifiable diseases as to massive death resulting from all manner of pain and suffering. This place/this land reiterate this place in the previous v. The land itself, as well as its occupants, will experience divine judgment.

3. Because the dead will be left unburied (16:4): They will not be mourned, nor shall they be buried. They will be as dung upon the face of the ground. They will be consumed by the sword and famine; and their corpses will be food for the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the land. Those who died of sword and famine (cf. 14:12-18) will be left as dung upon the ground (cf. 9:21). Their corpses will be eaten by bird and beast (cf. 7:33).
This was no kind of a world in which to rear a child. While, therefore, it may seem harsh to disallow marriage for Jeremiah, the prohibition is fundamentally beneficent. Jeremiah was spared the added agony of seeing wife and little ones destroyed. One thinks immediately of the attitude of the Apostle Paul toward marriage in similar circumstances (1 Cor 7:26).

B. Not to Attend Funerals (16:5-7):

1. Because God will show no compassion (16:5): Because of the abnormalities respecting final rites for the dead (v 4), Jeremiah received a second prohibition. He is forbidden to attend funerals. Again Jeremiah’s action would have predictive significance. His absence from normal funeral visitation provided an opportunity for him to describe the great slaughter that would shortly take place in Judah.
   a. Prohibition (16:5a): For thus says Yahweh: Do not enter the house of mourning, nor go to mourn or bemoan them… House refers, not to a specific building, but to any house where mourning was taking place. The term translated mourning (marzēach) is used in Amos 6:7 in the context of excessive drinking and revelry. Perhaps funerary banquets were marked by excessive drinking. On mourn (nûd) see 15:5. Failure to attend funerals would be almost as shocking to his neighbors as his celibacy.
   b. Explanation (16:5b): for I have taken away my peace from this people (oracle of Yahweh), lovingkindness and compassion. Slaughter will befall Judah because God had withdrawn his peace (šālōm), lovingkindness (chesed) and compassion (rachamîm) from the nation. Judah is forsaken by her God. She is helpless and hopeless.

2. Because of numerous slain (16:6): Both great and small will die in this land; they will not be buried, nor will lamentation be made for them, nor will one cut himself, nor make himself bald for them. Without any manifestation of Yahweh’s faithfulness, Judah cannot survive. Many—both the great (powerful) and the small (underclass)—will die in that God forsaken land. The few survivors would not be able to conduct the normal funeral services. Whether the dead were nobles or commoners, no one would take up a lament over them. The pagan rites of showing remorse by cutting oneself or shaving the head will not be performed. Both of these latter customs were forbidden in the Law of Moses.263

3. Because no courtesies will be given the bereaved (16:7): Neither will men break bread for them in mourning to comfort anyone for the dead; neither will they give them the cup of consolation for one’s father and for one’s mother. The funeral feast, normally conducted in the home of the bereaved after the burial, will be suspended. This meal no doubt was accompanied by lamentation and prayers for comfort.264 These formalities would have to be abandoned. Death would be so common that men could not participate in such observances even if they wanted to do so. How difficult it must have been for the prophet to abstain from the customary extension of sympathy to the family of those who were dear to him.

C. Not to Attend Parties (16:8-9):

1. Because God prohibited it (16:8): And to the house of feasting do not go to sit with them, to eat and to drink. A third prohibition forbade Jeremiah to attend joyous feasts

263Dt 14:1; Lv 19:28; 21:5.
264Cf. 2 Sam 3:35; Ezek 24: 17; Hos 9:4.
and festivals as, for example, a wedding meal. Again Jeremiah’s abstinence is to have a didactic purpose. While the prohibition had a useful objective, it nonetheless added to the burden that Jeremiah had to bear. The phrases house of mourning (v 5) and house of feasting form a polarity meaning that all social interaction is terminated.

2. Because joyous sounds will cease (16:9): For thus says Yahweh of Hosts the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to cause to cease from this place before your eyes and in your days the sound of joy and gladness, the sound of bridegroom and bride. Jeremiah’s reclusive lifestyle testified that Judah was crumbling to destruction. This was no time for rejoicing. In the very near future, all joyous activities would cease (cf. 7:34). Before your face and in your days means something like here and now. When faced with extermination, men would no longer think of feasting and banqueting.

Defense of his Message
16:10-13

A. Challenge by the People (16:10):
   1. Reason for it (16:10a): And it shall come to pass when you declare to this people all these things that they will say unto you… Provoked by the strange anti-social behavior of the prophet and the accompanying explanations the people become defiant.
   2. Form of it (16:10b): For what reason does Yahweh speak against us all this great evil? What is our iniquity? What is our sin that we have committed against Yahweh our God? As is frequent in the Book of Malachi, the people challenge the message of God’s prophet by means of questions. The three questions for what (why) what, what are really assertions of national innocence. Either these people were self-righteous and totally blind to their iniquity, or they were attempting to bluff the prophet into silence by this brazen challenge.

B. Response by the Prophet (16:11-12):
   1. Past record (16:11): Jeremiah had a ready answer for those who challenged his message. The history of Israel had been one continuous record of apostasy (cf. 2:5, 13). Twice Jeremiah states that the fathers forsook (r. ’zb) Yahweh.
      a. Charge #1 (16:11a): You shall say unto them: Because your fathers forsook me (oracle of Yahweh), and went after other gods; they served them, and bowed down to them. Forsaking Yahweh is interpreted in terms of substitution. They replaced Yahweh with other deities. There seems to be a gradation of allegiance to pagan gods. First, they went after other gods, i.e., they sought them out, pursued them. They asked about them, learned about them. Second, they served (worshipped, venerated) those gods in their hearts and private lives. Finally, they bowed down before them unashamedly in public rituals.
      b. Charge #2 (16:11b): They forsook me, and did not keep my law. In the second charge forsaking Yahweh is defined in terms of disobedience to my law, i.e., the Mosaic code. Once the fundamental prohibition against venerating other deities has been breeched, the other requirements of God’s law were disregarded or taken lightly.
   2. Present rebellion (16:12):
      a. What they had done (16:12a): But you have done greater wickedness than your fathers… The present generation is worse than their predecessors (cf. 7:25). Contrary to the optimistic analyses of some historians, one generation may be worse than another in the sight of God.
b. What they were doing (16:12b): *and behold, you are continuing to walk each man after the stubbornness of his evil heart so that you do not listen unto me.* There were no signs that the present generation was about to change. They were continuing to be stubborn when he came to the demands of Yahweh. They were not listening to the contemporary voice of Yahweh as he spoke through Jeremiah.

C. Threat by Yahweh (16:13): *So I will hurl you from this land unto a land that you have not known, neither you, nor your fathers. There you will serve other gods by day and by night, because I will not give grace to you.* An earlier generation had sinned against God in the wilderness. They were denied access to Canaan. The present generation would be denied the privilege of remaining in Canaan.

The greater guilt of the present generation may lie in the fact that they had the advantage of greater revelation. They had been warned by countless prophets. They had seen the wrath of God poured out upon their sister kingdom to the north. Still they persisted in apostasy. For this reason God would hurl (r. tûl) them from their land as a man hurls a javelin (cf. 1 Sam 18:11). *On a land that you have not known* see 15:14.

Sarcastically Jeremiah adds that there in that foreign land they can serve idols to their heart’s content. God will not show favor to his people by delivering them from the hand of their enemies. The word translated grace (chanînāh) appears only here in the OT.

Yahweh’s Ultimate Plan
16:14-15

Vv 14-15 serve a dual purpose in ch 16. First, these vv provide confirmation of the coming judgment. The introductory word *therefore* usually introduces a statement of judgment in the OT. It is unnecessary then to follow most commentators in regarding vv 14-15 as an interpolation, or even to regard these vv as a misplaced fragment intended to soften the threat of vv 11-13.

While these vv do speak of restoration, at the same time they underscore the fact that a total deportation of the Jews was imminent. The deportation will be so complete that the only people who will live in the Promised Land in the future will be those who have been brought from Babylon by God.

Vv 14-15 have a second and no less important function. They are intended to console the prophet who was heartbroken over the ruin and destruction of his people. The deportation to Babylon would not be the final curtain in the history of Israel. God’s people would come home. While this promise is not entirely new to Jeremiah (cf. 3:18-19), it needed to be reiterated at this particular time.

A. Old Exodus Fades (16:14): *Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when it shall no more be said, As Yahweh lives who brought us up from the land of Egypt…* At some point God will bring his people home from the exile into which he was about to hurl them. The new exodus from Babylon will be of such glory that it will eclipse the old exodus from Egypt. Since the Exodus from Egypt was the foundation of the OT covenant, the implications of this statement is that a new covenant was coming.

B. New Exodus Focus (16:15):

1. More glorious gathering (16:15a): *but, As Yahweh lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from the lands to which he drove them.* When one uses an epithet for God in an oath, in the future he will make mention of this new manifestation of divine power. In the view of the OT prophets, the restoration from
Babylon culminated in the work of the great liberator, the Messiah. When viewed in these broad terms, the new Exodus did exceed the old in significance. The new Exodus involves all lands where people live in exile from God as opposed to the single land of Egypt. All sinners are held in sin’s bondage, outside God’s kingdom, alienated from the Creator.

2. More glorious destination (16:15b): For I will cause them to return unto the land that I gave to their fathers. The day will come when the Jews taken to Babylon will be brought back to physical Canaan. That was the land promised to their fathers, the land flowing with milk and honey. But OT Canaan was a type or preview of the NT Canaan, the church of Christ. Thus, when sinners are brought out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of his dear son, they are being brought into the true Canaan. Those who come to Christ by faith can claim Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as their fathers as much as Israelite (Rom 4; Gal 3:6-18).

**Thoroughness of Judgment**

16:16-18

A. A Figure (16:16): Behold, I am about to send for many fishers (oracle of Yahweh). They will fish for them. And after this I will send for many hunters. They shall hunt them from every mountain, from every hill and from the clefts of the rocks. The threat against Judah is continued. The Chaldeans are compared to fishermen and hunters who search every nook and cranny of the land to take captives. The prophet Habakkuk also compared the Chaldeans to fishermen who drag in their nets full of helpless captives (Hab 1:15; cf. Lam 4:18-19).

B. A Fact (16:17): For my eyes are upon all their ways; they are not hidden from before me; yea, their iniquity is not concealed from before my eyes. The ruthless fishing and hunting are punishment for the iniquity of the men of Judah of which God has been and is constantly aware. The pair their ways/their iniquity appear already in 3:13.

C. An Explanation (16:18): First I will recompense their sin and iniquity double, because they have profaned my land; with the carcasses of their abominations and their detestable things, they have filled my inheritance. Before he can restore the Jews to their homeland, God must first recompense their iniquity double. In 17:18 Jeremiah prayed for a double measure of punishment for his tormentors. Here the word refers to the invasion by the fishermen/hunters (the Babylonians). On numerous occasions, and by a variety of means, God had punished his people in the past. Judah had experienced war, famine, pestilence, plague, and invasion. But now, to the horrors of war, God will add the penalty of mass deportation to a foreign land. What else can God do with these people in view of the fact that they have profaned his land with their abominations and detestable things, i.e., their idols? The term detestable things (šiqqûtsîm) was used already in 4:1 and 7:30. Their lifeless images, like dead carcasses, defile the land.

**Affirmation by the Prophet**

16:19-21

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265Holiday (Her 1:478f) thinks that the fishermen were the Egyptians, and the hunters the Babylonians.
A. Faith in Yahweh’s Protection (16:19a): O Yahweh my strength, my fortress and my refuge in the day of trouble: In his first prayer since the bitter complaint of 15:15-18, Jeremiah indicates how completely he has changed. His whining accusation against God has given way to triumphant faith. He realizes now that God is his strength, his fortress and his refuge. This soldier is ready to get back on the firing line. He is ready to face insurmountable odds and attempt impossible feats because he knows that God is with him. He is ready to perform whatever duty God might lay before him.

As God has reminded him that restoration will follow deportation, Jeremiah is able to place the whole matter of national judgment in proper perspective. He comes to realize that the destruction of old Israel is but a prelude to the founding of new Israel. Suddenly he remembers the wonderful promise that God had made concerning the conversion of the Gentiles (12:15-16).

B. Faith in Gentile Conversion (16:19b-20):

1. Gentiles come (16:19b): Unto you the nations shall come from the ends of the earth… Jeremiah’s mind leaps forward to that glorious day when, chastened and redeemed, Israel will be joined by peoples from distant lands. This v makes clear that the people who come to the land in v 15 are Gentiles, not Jews.

2. Gentiles renounce idolatry (16:19c):
   a. Deception of the fathers (16:19c): and they say: Our fathers have inherited nothing but a lie, vain things that are good for nothing. Converted Gentiles renounce forever their ancient attachment to idolatry. They realize that they had inherited nothing from their fathers, religiously speaking, but false and vain gods that are utterly worthless. All of the pejorative terms used by the Gentiles concerning their idols have appeared earlier in the book. Good for nothing is lit., there is not in them anything profitable.
   b. Rejection of the idols (16:12): Shall a man make for himself gods? They are no-gods! The converted Gentiles are amazed that anyone could ever have thought that the work of their own hands was deity. The fundamental error of idolatry is that it reverses the revelation of Gn 1:26.

C. Faith in Israel’s Restoration (16:21): Therefore, this time I will teach them! I will teach them my might and my power, and they shall understand that my name is Yahweh. God responds to the prophet’s prayer of faith by revealing a little more of his grand purpose. The forefathers of Israel had learned the significance of the name Yahweh (ASV, Jehovah) when they were delivered from Egypt. So in the deliverance from Babylon/the world the new Israel will come again to learn the significance of that name. This time may mean something like once and for all. God’s power in preserving his people in a foreign land will prove that he is universal sovereign, and also a God of love. To understand God’s name is to confess and acknowledge that name.

Sin in the Heart
17:1-4

This unit has the lawsuit format of indictment followed by announcement of judgment.

A. Indictment (17:1-2):

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267 Holiday, Her 1:482.
1. **Sin patently obvious (17:1):** The sin of Judah is permanently engraved in the ultimate places of memory.
   a. **Permanently engraved (17:1a):** *The sin of Judah is written with a stylus of iron; with a diamond point it is engraved…* A stylus of iron with diamond point was used by the artisans of Egypt and Babylon to chisel into solid rock the glorious records of their civilizations. Those records of rock have survived ravishes of time. Sin also leaves a record. Jeremiah points to two areas where the record of Judah’s sin could be found.
   b. **Privately engraved (17:1b):** *upon the tablet of their heart…* The inhabitants of the land had made their hearts as hard as stone. Consequently, the word of God could not penetrate their lives. If the people will but examine their own hearts, they will see clearly the record of every rebellion and disobedience. On every heart there must be engraven either Yahweh’s teaching, or a record of human failure.
   c. **Publicly engraved (17:1c):** *and upon the horns of your altars…* Both the altar of incense and the huge altar of burnt offering had projections at the four corners upon which the blood of the sacrificial victims was smeared. These horns were regarded as the most sacred part of the altar, and, for the purposes of this unit, a place of public record. How ironical it is that in the very spot where one should have been able to find forgiveness of sin, the record of sin was obvious to any observer. Jeremiah no doubt here alludes to the hypocrisy and pagan practices that had perverted true worship.

2. **Openly flaunted (17:2):** *while their children remember their altars and their Asherahs beside the green trees and on the high hills.* From their earliest days, all that the children could remember was pagan worship. They remembered the Asherahs (not groves as in KJV) — a sacred pole erected beside pagan altars. They remembered the green shady spots on the hilltops where the licentious rites were conducted in honor of the fertility gods.

**B. Punishment Announced (17:3-4):**

1. **Land spoiled (17:3):** *O my mountain in the field! Your wealth and all of your treasures I will give for a spoil, your high places in all of your boundaries, because of sin.* Jerusalem is here addressed as *my mountain in the field.* The word *field* here is best understood as meaning an open place rather than a level place. Mount Zion, upon which Jerusalem is built, rises abruptly, like a mountain, out of the midst of the surrounding valleys. Because of her record of sin and rebellion, all the wealth of Jerusalem, and all her high places, will be given as spoil to an enemy.

2. **Inheritance lost (17:4a):** *And you even in yourself shall lose your hold on your inheritance that I have given to you…* The inhabitants of Judah will lose their inheritance, the land God gave Israel in the days of Joshua.

3. **Servitude forced (17:4b):** *and I will cause you to serve your enemies in a land that you do not know…* They will be deported to a distant land, i.e., Babylon.

4. **Wrath kindled (17:4c):** *for you have kindled a fire in my anger that shall burn forever.* By their perpetual rebellion the Judeans have kindled the fire of divine wrath. People who play with the fire of sin are bound to get scorched!

**SECTION FOUR
INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION

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268 Others think that the heart here refers to Jerusalem, the capital of the nation.
Jeremiah 17:5-18

Ch 17 contains a series of utterances more appropriately called Jeremiah’s sayings than Jeremiah’s sermons. Perhaps these sayings were excerpts from the preaching that Jeremiah did during the drought.

Choice of the Heart
17:5-8

In vv 5-8 Jeremiah draws a picture of contrast between the unbeliever and the believer.

A. Curse on Worldly Trust (17:5-6):
   1. Characteristics of the unbeliever (17:5): Two characteristics of the unbeliever are described.
      a. He trusts in flesh (17:5a): Thus says Yahweh: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength… The unbeliever continuously (Hebrew imperfect) puts his trust in flesh i.e., he puts his trust in what is weak, sinful, mortal and temporal. Trusting in the flesh was always a temptation for Judah’s political leaders; it may also have been a temptation for Jeremiah in these days of lonely service.
         The Hebrew uses two words for man in v 5. The first word, gever, refers to man in his strength, man as he was intended to be. The second word, adam, signifies man in his creaturely weakness. Thus, cursed is the man (gerer) who trusts in man (adam).
      b. He departs from Yahweh (17:5b): and whose heart departs from Yahweh. While the unbeliever may give lip service to the Almighty, he has departed from Yahweh in his own heart. For heart in the sense of mind/will see 4:4.
   2. Conditions of the unbeliever (17:6):
      a. His existence (17:6a): For he will be like a juniper in the Arabah, and he will not see when good comes… The unbeliever is like the juniper, a twisted, gnarled, dwarfed little tree that grows in the most barren parts of the Arabah. The Arabah is the barren rift valley that extends south of the mouth of the Jordan River to the Gulf of Aqaba. The roots of the juniper constantly grope for water, but find precious little. That starved and stunted shrub just hangs on to a miserable existence. So it is with the unbeliever. He is always searching for the more abundant life; but he never finds it. In spite of the riches he might possess, he is not living; he is only existing. Good in this context may refer especially to rain.
      b. His surroundings (17:6b): but he will dwell in the parched areas of the wilderness, in a land of salt that is not inhabited. The unbeliever exists in a parched wilderness, a land of salt, i.e., a land absolutely barren (cf. Dt 29:23) and under a curse (Judg 9:45). Such is the world without God.

B. Blessing on Heavenly Trust (17:7-8):
   1. Characteristics of the believer (17:7): Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, so that Yahweh becomes his object of trust. In contrast to the life of the unbeliever, the one who puts his trust in God is blessed. In terminology reminiscent of Ps 1:3, Jeremiah describes the life of the believer. He is like a tree that puts its roots down alongside a perennial stream.

269 Others think good is deliverance from enemies.
2. Conditions of the believer (17:8):
   a. Metaphor (17:8a): He will be as a tree transplanted alongside of waters; alongside of the river he puts forth his roots. The imagery of this v is similar to that of Ps 1:3. That tree will flourish because the supply of water is never exhausted. So the believer has put down his roots beside the inexhaustible stream of divine grace.
   b. Implications (17:8b): He will not fear when heat comes. His leaf shall be green. In the year of drought he will not be anxious, nor will he cease from producing fruit. Heat (chōm) is the heat of summer. The green leaf is the opposite of the fading leaf of 8:13. Drought (batstsōret) recalls 14:1. Even during the droughts in life — the times of severe testing and trial — he does not wilt, i.e., he does not fear. On the contrary he continues to flourish and bear fruit.

   For people dwelling in an environment desperate for water the contrast between a withered shrub and a watered tree is even more powerful. In Palestine water is a matter of life and death; so is trusting in Yahweh.

   Deceitfulness of the Heart
   17:9-11

   Like the previous unit, this unit is a wisdom saying. It serves as a commentary on the previous wisdom saying. The unit consists of two affirmations.

   A. Man Deceived by his Heart (17:9): The heart is deceitful more than anything and incurable; who can know it? The heart (lēbh), according to Hebrew psychology, was the center of one’s intellect, emotions and will (cf. 4:4). Use of the article (the heart) generalizes the observation. It is any heart and every heart that is intended. Deceitful (‘āqōbh) may be a pun on the name Jacob (ya‘qōbh). The adjective means something like devious, difficult, tricky. The adjective incurable (‘ānūš) has medical connotations. In the present context it means something like perverse or perhaps even inscrutable.

   Who can know it? implies perplexity about the heart of men. Modern psychology agrees with the observation of Jeremiah that the heart is deceitful. Few have insight into their real motivations. The point is that human beings are frequently untrustworthy and unfaithful.

   What drove Jeremiah to his pessimistic assessment of the human heart? Was it the heart of the nation? That heart needed washing (4:14); it was stubborn (5:23); sin was etched on it (17:1). Jeremiah may have been totally perplexed by the condition of the heart of his people.

   B. Yahweh Searches the Heart (17:10):
   1. Affirmation (17:10a): I am Yahweh who searches the heart, who tries the mind… When Yahweh searches the heart in previous contexts (11:20; 12:3) it is Jeremiah’s heart that is under scrutiny. For this reason some have proposed that it was Jeremiah’s own heart condition that drove him to his generalization about the human heart in v 9.

   There is within man a tendency, a natural inclination to do that which is wrong. Only when one allows the Holy Spirit to dwell within the heart, can he hope to walk in the paths of righteousness. While the natural man is unable to know his own heart, God does

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270 This is the only place in the OT where the article is used with lēbh.
271 This adjective is used in Isa 40:4 to describe the opposite of level ground (miṣōr).
272 This is true in six of the seven other occurrences: Jer 15:18; 17:16; 30:12, 15; Isa 17:11; Mic 1:9; Job 34:6.
search the hearts of men. He tries the mind (lit., the kidneys), a term that in Hebrew psychology indicated the emotional aspect of man.

2. Implication (17:10b): in order to give to man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. On the basis of his divine knowledge of the inner thoughts of men, God is able to dispense justly both rewards and punishments. Fruit of deeds is a concept borrowed from Isa 3:10. Jerusalem was on a collision course with destruction because their heart could not withstand scrutiny from Yahweh.

C. Example of Deception (17:11):

1. Illustration (17:11a): A partridge that broods, but does not hatch… Jeremiah offers an illustration of the kind of deceit that is referred to in v 9. Those who acquire wealth unjustly are like a partridge that broods, but does not hatch her eggs. The verb broods (r. dgr) appears elsewhere only in Isa 34:15. It signifies sitting on eggs or hatchlings to keep them warm. The verbs broods and hatch (r. yld) are both masculine. Some of the eggs laid by the female were incubated by her male counterpart.

2. Application (17:11b): is he who acquires wealth unjustly; in the midst of his days he shall leave it, and in his end shall be a fool. The partridge lays many eggs, but also has many natural enemies who hunt her nest and destroy her eggs. So is the man with ill-gotten gain. Wealth acquired unjustly refers to riches acquired contrary to the principles of God’s Law. In the midst of his days refers to the prime of life. This man must ultimately leave it (his unjustly gained wealth) when he departs from this life. He shall be deprived of his wealth as swiftly as the partridge that begins to sit upon the nest, but is soon robbed of the eggs. The worldly man’s attachment to the material and temporal will prove him to be a fool in his last desperate hours. A fool in the OT is not necessarily one who is stupid, but one who is lacking in moral understanding.

One cannot read this passage without thinking of the foolish farmer spoken of in the parable of Jesus (Lk 12:16-21). Building bigger barns was uppermost in his mind. He had forgotten that life is but an uncertain vapor. In an unexpected moment this fool was summoned into eternity.

Jeremiah’s Angry Prayer
17:12-18

A. His Fourfold Address (17:12-13a): It is difficult to know in v 12 whether throne of glory and place of our sanctuary refer to Jerusalem or to God himself. The ASV and KJV suggest the former interpretation; but the Hebrew allows just as well for the latter view. If the reference is to Jerusalem, it is difficult to see how the v relates to the rest of the prayer. The v fits well, however, as part of the address of the prayer.

1. O Throne of Glory on high from the beginning (17:12a): The concept of throne of glory appeared already in 14:21. This title suggests that God from the beginning of time was the exalted ruler over all the earth.

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273 Heart/mind are previously paired in 11:20. The portrayal of Yahweh as tester of heart/mind is already present in Ps 7:9; 17:3. Searches/tries are paired in Ps 139:23 in a similar context. Ways/deeds are paired in 4:18.

274 Cf. 32:19; Ps 62:12; Job 34:11.

275 The meaning of the verb (r. dgr) is of uncertain meaning (brood, gather, or lay). Thus a partridge sits on eggs that will not hatch (KJV); gathers chicks it did not hatch (RSV); sits on eggs it did not lay (REB); hatches eggs it did not lay (NASB, NIV, NRSV, TEV). The KJV interpretation is an apt picture of riches that come to nothing. In other interpretations, the partridge that steals eggs or chicks is no less fortunate than any bird whose chicks grow and leave the nest.

276 Freedman, SBB, 120.
2. **Place of our Sanctuary!** (17:12b): God is called the place of our sanctuary because true worship is grounded in him.

3. **O Hope of Israel** (17:13a): Hope can also mean pool, i.e., source of living water.

4. **Yahweh!** (17:13b): The throne, sanctuary and hope of Israel is Yahweh himself, not the temple, not Jerusalem or anything else.

B. **His Confidence** (17:13b):

1. **His enemies: quickly obliterated** (17:13b): All that forsake you shall be put to shame. Those who turn from me shall be written down in the land... The idea of forsaking Yahweh appears already in 1:16. Jeremiah is confident that anyone who turns from God will be put to shame. So confident is Jeremiah that he is the true spokesman for God, that he can equate turning from God with turning from himself. To depart from Jeremiah—to refuse to hear his message—is to turn away from the Lord. Such as refuse to hear the word of God will be written in the land or ground. A name scratched in the dust of the ground is soon obliterated. So it is with the unbeliever. For a while he may hold the limelight; but in short order he fades from the scene.\(^{277}\)

2. **His enemies: God’s enemies** (17:13c): for they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, Yahweh. The unbeliever dries up and blows away because he has chosen to forsake the source of living water. The prophet who called God a deceitful stream in a recent prayer (15:18), now refers to him as the fountain of living waters.

C. **His First Petition** (17:14): From invocation and declaration of faith in the Lord, Jeremiah moves in his prayer to petition.

1. **For healing** (17:14a): Heal me, O Yahweh, and I will be healed! Jeremiah cries out for healing, but not the healing of the body; he yearns for the spiritual and mental healing. This request must be understood in the light of 15:18 and v 9 above in which Jeremiah referred to the human heart—his included—as incurable. Only the Great Physician can provide the healing for the heart of man. Jeremiah’s heart is broken because the people he loves reject the message.

2. **For deliverance** (17:14b): Deliver me, and I shall be delivered! The nature of the healing Jeremiah seeks is indicated by the second verb. He cries out for deliverance from the sneers of the apostates. This petition must be understood in the light of God’s promise in 15:20 to deliver his prophet.

3. **Basis of petition** (17:14c): For you are the object of my praise. The second person pronoun is emphatic as it is also in vv 16-17. Jeremiah knows that God can and will heal and deliver him. For this reason he makes God the object of his praise. Yahweh was his only hope! This statement of praise is a motivation for Yahweh to respond positively to Jeremiah’s petition.

D. **His Narration** (17:15-18):

1. **Challenge of the enemies** (17:15): Behold, they are saying unto me: Where is the word of Yahweh? Let it come! Jeremiah moves on in his prayer to narrative. He describes to God his situation. The people are mocking Jeremiah. They are demanding that his prophecies be fulfilled. According to Dt 18:22 one whose prediction did not come true was to be treated as a false prophet.

At this point none of Jeremiah’s dire predictions concerning the fate of Jerusalem had come to pass. Some, no doubt, were charging Jeremiah with being a false prophet.

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\(^{277}\)M.J. Dahood suggests another interpretation. On the basis of certain Ugaritic evidence, he takes earth here to refer to the underworld or death. The apostates will be listed for death. *Biblica* 40 (1959): 164-166.
Others may have even gone so far as to question whether the Lord had the power to carry out his threats. The recent drought that God had sent upon the land had failed utterly to impress the hardened sinners of Judah. Instead of heeding the warnings issued by the prophet of God, the inhabitants of Judah chuckled and said Let it come!

2. Commitment of Jeremiah (17:16): In his prayer Jeremiah defends himself. He calls attention to his loyalty to God. The first person pronoun is emphatic in this v, and in v 18.
   a. Did not resign his office (17:16a): And as for me, I did not hasten from being a shepherd after you... Jeremiah had not hastened or hurried away from his responsibility of being God’s shepherd to Israel. Even though he faced opposition, almost from the outset of his ministry he had not quickly abandoned his work. He did not quit when the going got tough. He continued in his position as an under-shepherd following after the Lord. Jeremiah walked in the footsteps of his God. Jeremiah sought to lead the flock of God in the old paths that the Lord had so clearly identified in his word.
   b. Did not change his message (17:16b):
      (1) He was faithful in what he preached (17:16b): and the incurable day I did not desire. You yourself know! Jeremiah did not desire the incurable (same word used in v 9) or woeful day. The day of Judah’s punishment is metaphorically called sick or incurable because from it there will be no recovery. Jeremiah took no malicious delight in announcing the doom that was to befall Judah. He was not merely giving vent to his own hostilities. He preached judgment because that message was laid upon him by the Lord. In spite of the fact that the message was personally distasteful, Jeremiah kept preaching.
      (2) He was sincere in what he preached (17:16c): That which came out of my lips was before your face. Jeremiah was utterly sincere in his ministry. God knew that. Every word that the prophet uttered was known to the Lord. He had not altered in any way the word that was laid upon his heart. He had been a faithful messenger.

E. His Second Petition (17:17-18):

1. Regarding Yahweh (17:17):
   a. Stated negatively (17:17a): Do not be to me a terror! Following the narrative portion of his prayer, Jeremiah adds further petition. Many years earlier God had commanded Jeremiah not to be dismayed or terrified before his enemies (1:17). But by delaying the punishment that the prophet had been threatening, God was allowing Jeremiah to become the object of ridicule. He therefore prays that God will keep his word, that he will not be a terror to his prophet, i.e., a source of terror. In effect Jeremiah is praying that he will not be embarrassed, dismayed or terrified because of his loyalty to God.
   b. Stated positively (17:17b): You are my refuge in the evil day. Refuge (mach‘seh) is used eleven times in Psalms for Yahweh (e.g., 46:1). The evil day or day of distress is probably not referring to Judah’s day of judgment, but to Jeremiah’s day of personal peril. This statement of needful trust is the second motivation for Yahweh’s positive response to Jeremiah’s petition.

2. Regarding enemies (17:18):
   a. Their shame (17:18a): Let my persecutors be put to shame, but do not let me experience consternation. Persecutors has appeared earlier in 15:15. In 2:26 the house of Israel is put to shame like a thief caught in the act. Jeremiah called upon
God utterly to silence the sneering enemies by sending the threatened judgment. He asked that his enemies be confused. Jeremiah believes that God’s judgment is sure, and he wants it administered soon.

b. Their shattering (17:18b): Bring upon them the evil day, and with double shattering shatter them. Jeremiah asked that they receive double destruction, i.e., total destruction. In v 16 Jeremiah said that he did not desire the evil day; here he calls on God to send it. The solution to this apparent contradiction is simple. Jeremiah prayed for the salvation of Judah as a nation. But within the nation are certain hardcore, utterly perverse antagonists, who are the enemies of God as well as the enemies of God’s prophet. Evil day refers to a time of judgment upon the persecutors, especially the false prophets. When the prophet asks God to pour out his wrath upon these hardened sinners, there is no personal vindictiveness. Rather, here as in similar prayers Jeremiah is jealous for the Lord his God. Shatter (r. šbr) was first used in 8:21.

SECTION FIVE
SABBATH SERMON
Jeremiah 17:19-27

This section is the mirror of Section Three. Both sections focus on the failure of ancestors; both urged the current generation to obey God’s law. Both sections look forward to future blessings. Both end with a threat of fire.

Ch 17 ends with a prose discourse urging Sabbath observance. Like Amos (Amos 8:4-6) and Isaiah (Isa 56, 58) before him, Jeremiah regarded violation of the Sabbath as a serious offense. This sermon, addressed to the royal house, makes Sabbath observance the condition for national survival.

Directive to the Prophet
17:19-20

A. Trip to the King’s Gate (17:19): Thus said Yahweh unto me: Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, through which the kings of Judah come in and go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; Jeremiah is commissioned to preach this sermon in one of the gates of the city of Jerusalem. The specific gate cannot be identified. Apparently it was the gate that was most frequently used by the kings.

B. Message to all Judah (17:20): and say unto them, Hear the word of Yahweh, O kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are coming in these gates. Jeremiah addresses his message to the kings of Judah, the population of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The question has been raised as to why Jeremiah uses the plural kings. Perhaps the message was to be applied to successive kings of Judah. More likely, Jeremiah was addressing the entire royal house under this title. There is evidence in this period that the members of the royal family exercised considerable authority. Zedekiah, for example, seems to have been completely dominated by this group. Thus the word kings is used loosely to refer to all the princes of the realm.

Sabbath Law Exhortation
17:21-22

Following Dorsey, LSOT, 239.
Sabbath observance was a badge of covenant membership. It was a conspicuous manifestation of obedience to Yahweh, and a sign of trust in his providential provision.

A. Negative Appeal (17:21-22a):
1. To merchants (17:21): Thus says Yahweh: Watch out for your souls! Do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring them into the gates of Jerusalem. For watch out (hiššomrî), see on 9:3. Jeremiah’s objective in this message is to get the people to hallow the Sabbath day. Apparently the Sabbath law was being disregarded. Goods from far and near were being transported into the city. Business was being conducted as usual on the seventh day. For this reason Jeremiah calls upon the merchants to cease bringing goods into the city on the Sabbath.
2. To customers (17:22a): Do not bring out a burden from your houses on the Sabbath day… The customers were just as guilty as the merchants. Jeremiah calls upon the people to cease bringing articles from their houses. These articles were used in barter for the produce of the merchants.

B. Positive Appeal (17:22b): and cease all work. Sanctify the Sabbath day as I commanded your fathers. Jeremiah exhorts the all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to sanctify the Sabbath in the way in which God commanded their fathers to do in the Decalogue (Ex 20:10; Dt 5:14). I commanded your fathers repeats the language of 11:10.

Indictment for Disobedience
17:23

But they did not hearken, nor did they incline their ears, but made their neck stiff, refusing to hear or receive correction. The fathers had rejected the commandment of God and as a result had suffered divine correction. But even this divine correction had not induced repentance on the part of the previous generation. The nation had continued on the path of disobedience until now Judah was faced with the inevitable national destruction. Refusing to listen and stiffening the neck repeats concepts from 7:26. Refusing to accept correction repeats the emphasis of 7:28.

Alternatives Regarding Sabbath
17:24-27

Judah is given another change to comply with the terms of God’s covenant by Sabbath observance. The options are presented in two “if…then” statements, the first positive, the second negative.

A. Possibility of Survival (17:24-26):
1. Conditions of survival (17:24): And it shall come to pass, if you fully hearken unto me (oracle of Yahweh) not to carry a burden into the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, and to sanctify the Sabbath day not to do in it any work… If there was any manifestation of national repentance with regard to the Sabbath observance, the city would be spared.
2. Promise of survival (17:25-26):
   a. Routine business continues (17:25): then there shall pass through the gates of this city kings and princes who sit upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses — they, their princes, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem;
and this city shall be inhabited forever. Things would continue as usual with kings and their entourages passing through the gates of the city. The monarchy would survive. The optimistic forecasts of the false prophets can become reality, but the promise is conditional.

b. Routine worship continues (17:26): And they shall come from the cities of Judah, from the environs of Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country and from the Negev bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, meal offerings, incense, and thank offerings to the house of Yahweh. Sabbath observance would result in the preservation of the temple. From all parts of the territories of Judah and Benjamin, men would continue to come to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice. The enumeration of the six regions is repeated in 32:44 and 33:13. The Shephelah, the Negev and the hill country are the three geographical regions of Judah. The Shephelah was the lowland region that separated the coastal plains from the hill country. The Negev was the region south of Beersheba.

The different types of sacrifice or offerings enumerated prove conclusively that Jeremiah was not opposed to sacrifice as such. In burnt offerings an animal was burned completely. In sacrifices or peace offerings a portion of the sacrificial animal was eaten by the worshiper (cf. 6:20). Meal offerings were of grain (cf. 14:12), and incense was associated with them (cf. 6:20). A thank-offering consisted of cakes added to a sacrifice (Lv 7:12).

B. Possibility of Destruction (17:27):

1. Condition (17:27a): But if you do not hearken unto me to sanctify the Sabbath day, and not to carry a burden while going through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day... Failing to sanctify the Sabbath by cessation of business activity is viewed by Yahweh as failing to hearken unto, i.e., obey, Yahweh.

2. Threat (17:27b): then I will place a fire in her gates, and it shall consume the strongholds of Jerusalem, and shall not be extinguished. If the exhortation to sanctify the Sabbath is ignored, then God would kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem (cf. 11:16). Fire here as in Amos 1:4—2:5 is symbolic of war. For strongholds, see 6:5.

Jeremiah’s sermon on Sabbath observance underscores the fact that prophecies, no matter how final in tone, are conditional. God is always ready to receive the penitent sinner and forgive him. While Jeremiah on numerous occasions had spoken of the judgment to come as inevitable, here he makes it clear that he had a program for the people. That program if followed could in fact avert the disaster.

Jeremiah had been pleading with the people to put their trust in God alone. Now he urges them to show their faith by their works. By sanctifying the Sabbath day, the inhabitants of Judah could demonstrate their faith in God. Yahweh had promised to so bless their six days of labor that they could afford to set aside the seventh day for his service (Dt 28:1-14). If they really had faith in God they would not hesitate to sanctify the Sabbath.

The generation of Jeremiah’s day did not comply with the conditions stipulated in this sermon. Consequently, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar,

SECTION SIX
POTTER’S HOUSE MESSAGE
Jeremiah 18:1-23
Chs 18-20 are composed of various types of literature centering on the common theme of the potter’s vessels. It is impossible to date with precision the events of this ch. These chs are probably to be assigned to the early years of Jehoiakim, for it is hard to imagine that Jeremiah would have been arrested and mistreated (20:1-2) during the reign of good king Josiah.

Section Six is the mirror of Section Two. Section Two indicated that Yahweh will not relent regarding Judah’s judgment; this section makes clear that Yahweh will relent if the people repent. Section Two deal with the topics of famine and sword; the same topics appear in 18:21. Section Two concludes with Jeremiah’s prayer concerning his enemies (15:10-21); this section ends with a similar prayer (18:18-21).

**Indictment: Potter Parable**

18:1-12

Jeremiah learns an important theological truth through visiting the workshop of a potter. The first twelve vv are prose narrative.

A. **Observing the Potter** (18:1-4):

1. **A directive (18:1-2):** *The word that came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying, (2) Arise and go down to the house of the potter. There I will cause you to hear my word.*

   The unit is introduced in language previously appearing in 7:1 and 11:1. Jeremiah received instructions from the Lord to go down to the house of the potter where God will reveal to him something of vital significance for his people. The verb *arise* indicates urgency. The verb *go down* suggests that the potter’s workshop was located in the lower part of the city. The word potter is a participle of a verb (r. ytsr) that means to shape or form. The verb is frequently used of Yahweh (e.g., Gn 2:7, 8). Thus a comparison between a potter and Yahweh is natural.

2. **Compliance (18:3):** *And I went down to the house of the potter, and behold, he was busy at work upon the wheels.*

   When Jeremiah arrived the potter was at work on his wheel — two circular stones connected by a vertical axis. The lower disk was worked by foot. This in turn set in motion the upper disk upon which the potter worked the clay. Thompson has given the classic description of the operation:

   Taking a lump in his hand he placed it on the top of the wheel and smoothed it into a low cone; then thrusting his thumb into the top of it, he opened a hole down through the center, and this he constantly widened by pressing the edges of the revolving cone between his hands. As it enlarged and became thinner, he gave it whatever shape he pleased with the utmost ease and expedition.  
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3. **Observation (18:4):**

   a. **A marred vessel (18:4a):** *And the vessel that he was making with the clay was marred in the hand of the potter.* As Jeremiah observed the potter at work, he noticed that the emerging vessel developed some imperfection that displeased the eye of that artisan. The verb *marred/spoiled* (r. šcht) appeared in 13:7 to describe what happened to Jeremiah’s waistband when he buried it at the Euphrates River. The narrative does not reveal the cause of the ruination of the original vessel. This is not the point.

   b. **A new vessel (18:4b):** *And again he made it into another vessel as it was fitting in the eyes of the potter to make it.* The potter rolled the clay into a lump again. He

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279 Following Dorsey, LSOI, 239.
280 Thompson, LAB, 520.
reshaped it into an object that met with his approval. The major lesson here is that the potter can do with the clay as he pleases. When the wet clay becomes marred he can finish that vessel in its imperfection, cast it aside, or create a new vessel out of the clay. The new vessel might be similar to the original vessel, or it might be something entirely new. It is all in the potter’s hands to do as he sees fit. If he so desires he can crush that emerging object into a shapeless mass of mud. Then he can begin the whole process over again.

B. Applying of the Lesson (18:5-10):

1. Yahweh’s sovereignty (18:5-6): And the word of Yahweh came unto me, saying, (6) Am I not able to do to you as this potter (oracle of Yahweh)? Behold, like clay in the hand of the potter, thus are you in my hands, O house of Israel. The nation of Israel is but clay in the hands of the divine Potter. He can dispose of his people as he wills. If the nation yields to the working of the divine hand, he would produce from it a beautiful and useful vessel. But if Israel refuses to allow the Potter to have his way, then Israel would be discarded. In that case God would start all over again with a new creation.

A word of caution is in order on this passage. Analogies, when pressed beyond their intended purpose, yield bad theology. One should not conclude from this episode that in his dealing with Israel, God has been at fault in the ruination of the vessel. The potter that Jeremiah watched may have made an error of judgment in the amount of clay he selected, or in some other respect that caused the first vessel to be inadequate. But no one should attribute such errors of judgment to the master Potter.

The analogy breaks down in another respect. Clay is inanimate and material. The human heart possesses the power willfully to rebel against the Potter. Man can choose to be pliable in the hands of the Creator, or to be a hard as sun-baked clay. Every child of God should be praying: Have your own way Lord, Have your own way. You are the Potter, I am the clay.

2. Yahweh’s responses (18:7-10): A most important principle of biblical interpretation emerges in vv 7-10. Simply stated the principle is this: Neither God’s threats, nor his promises, are unconditional. The attitude of God toward any people depends entirely upon their response to him. He is not an arbitrary God ruled by whims or fancies. He is the God of unchanging justice and mercy.

a. Potential divine decree (18:7): Suddenly I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, to tear down and to destroy… God may decree the destruction of a nation. He may give no hint that the nation can survive.

b. Potential national response (18:8a): but if that nation repents of its evil of which I have spoken… One thinks immediately of Jonah’s mission to Nineveh. Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown, he cried. The message was absolute and unequivocal. There was no hint of hope in Jonah’s message. Yet Nineveh repented.

c. Outcome (18:8b): then I will relent concerning the evil that I had thought to do unto it. If a nation repents of its sin, God will suddenly rescind the execution order. Relent (r. nchm) in the sense of retract one’s announced plans appears in 4:28. Yahweh responded to Nineveh’s repentance by canceling the threat. Jonah’s prophecy of doom went unfulfilled.

d. Potential divine decree (18:9): Suddenly I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant… Yahweh’s promises to nations are as conditional as his threats.
e. Potential national response (18:10a): *but if it does evil in my eyes that it does not hearken to my voice...* The unstated condition of every promise is that men will remain faithful to Yahweh. God’s promises have strings attached. 281

f. Outcome (18:10b): *then I will relent concerning the good that I have spoken to benefit it.* The principle enunciated by Jeremiah in these vv helps to explain why some prophecies in the Bible have not been fulfilled. Biblical prophecies must be interpreted as conditional even when the conditional element is missing.

C. Announcing the Decision (18:11-12): *And now just say unto the men of Judah, and unto the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says Yahweh!* (18:11a): The divine Potter has made a sovereign decision about what to do with the clay (Judah). Theological truths are not to be jealously guarded; they must freely be shared with all who will receive them. So it is that Jeremiah is told to proclaim the great truth that he discovered at the potter’s house. *Just say* ( "mor nā") suggests emotional urgency. The key to national survival is so simple if the Judeans will only listen. The pairing of men of Judah/inhabitants of Jerusalem appears earlier in 4:3.

1. Announcement: (18:11a):

   a. A calamity (18:11a): *Behold, I am about to form calamity against you...* Behold introduces something shocking or unexpected. The verb translated *form* is identical with the word translated *potter* in the preceding vv. No doubt the verb has been deliberately selected here to suggest the connection between what is now said and the episode of the potter just described. The Lord is in the process of forming (Hebrew participle) the destruction of Judah. The Potter is not obligated to continue working with the clay if the clay refuses to yield to his skillful hands. At last the Potter will quit working, and without the Potter the clay has no future.

   b. A plan (18:11b): *I am about to formulate a plan against you.* This verb has the implications of planning. The potter crushed the marred vessel in his hand and began anew. So God is about to destroy Judah and start over again. The *plan* includes the destruction of Jerusalem; but the word hints that Jerusalem’s downfall is but an episode in a larger program for God’s people.

2. Appeal (18:11b): *Turn now each man from his evil. Amend your ways and your deeds.* In view of this impending disaster, God pleads through his prophet for the people to repent and make a new start. It is not too late if they will only turn to God.

3. Answer (18:12):

   a. Exasperation (18:12a): *But they say, It is hopeless...* The men of Judah respond to this last-ditch effort to secure their repentance in the same language that they used in 2:25. *It is hopeless,* they say. The mood here is not one of despondency, but one of defiance.

   b. Determination (18:12b): *for after our plans we will walk, each man according to the stubbornness of his evil heart we will do.* The leaders are warning the prophet that it is useless for him to continue trying to convert them. The *plans* (machshield) of the people stand in contrast to the *plan* (sing.) of Yahweh in v 11. The plural hints of divided allegiance; polytheism is implied. Whatever we please is literally, *every man according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.* The expression is common in Jeremiah. They are saying, *We have chosen our path, and we will continue to walk in it regardless of what you say the consequences will be.*

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281 In 1 Sam 2:30 Yahweh admits that his promises to Eli’s house seemed unconditional. But Yahweh rescinded those promises by stating a fundamental principle: *Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained* (NIV).
Announcement: Judgment
18:13-17

*Therefore, thus says Yahweh* (18:13a): The opening words of this v occur twenty-six times in the book usually as a declaration of judgment.

A. **Accusation** (18:13b-15): Jeremiah presses the point that the nation has a serious flaw. God is acutely aware of that flaw.

1. *Unprecedented among Gentiles* (18:13b): *Ask now among the nations, Who has heard such things?* Judah’s horrible sin, unheard of among foreign nations, is that she has rejected her God.

2. *Unthinkable in life* (18:13b): *An exceedingly horrible thing the virgin of Israel has done!* A virgin should keep herself undefiled for her future husband; but the virgin of Israel has defiled herself with the worship of heathen deities.

   a. *Lebanon snow (18:14a): Does the snow of Lebanon depart from the rock of the field?* The summit of Lebanon is snow-capped the year around. The snow does not leave the mountain even in the hottest weather.
   b. *Mountain streams (18:14b): Shall the strange, cold flowing waters be dried up?* The reference is probably to the mountain streams that perpetually flow down the slopes of the Lebanon Mountains. These waters are called strange (foreign) because they are not of Israel.

   The basic implication of the two questions is that nature pursues her course unchanged, whereas God's people unnaturally have changed their course.

   a. *Forgotten Yahweh (18:15a): Yet my people have forgotten me…* The concept of God’s people forgetting him is repeated from 2:32.
   b. *Embraced idols (18:15b): they offer incense to vanities that caused them to stumble in their ways…* False worship is one mode of forgetting Yahweh. The people of Judah have offered incense to vanities or nothingness, i.e., nonentities. These idols have been major stumbling blocks in the paths of the men of Judah.
   c. *Chose new paths (18:15c): [they stray from] the old paths to walk in bypaths, a way that is not built up.* Another mode of forgetting Yahweh was departing from tradition. The Judeans have forsaken the old paths (cf. 6:16) to walk in bypaths. A great deal of effort went into preparing a first class roadway in antiquity (see Isa 40:3-4). But the people of Judah preferred to travel a way that is not built or cast up, i.e., a road that was not properly constructed. Instead of the ancient, well-marked paths of righteousness, God's people had chosen to walk in footpaths that were not clearly defined, and that led no place. Such paths are unfit for any child of God to tread!

2. **Announcement (18:16-17):**
   a. *Desolation (18:16a): The result of this is that they will make their land a desolation, an object of everlasting derision.* The inevitable result of abandoning the God-ordained way is national destruction. For the phrase make their land a desolation see 4:7. Derision is lit., hissing. The hissing is either a gesture of contempt or amazement.

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282 The Hebrew says plucked up. The reading dried up that is followed by the ASV necessitates reversing two letters in the word in question.
b. Derision (18:16b): Everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will shake his head. All who pass by desolate Judah will be amazed at what had befallen the once proud little nation. They will wag their heads in a scornful sneer at the wicked folly of the people who had forsaken their God. On the shaking of the head see on 15:5 (cf. Lam 2:15).

c. Dispersion (18:17a): Like the east wind I will scatter them before their enemies; God will scatter the men of Judah before their enemies just as men scatter to seek refuge before the torrid east wind. Cf. 4:11; 13:24. From time to time, weather patterns reverse. The so-called sirocco sweeps in from the desert, wilting all vegetation and making life miserable for man and beast. That wind here depicts judgment. For I will scatter them see on 13:24.

d. Disdain (18:17b): I will show them the back, not the face, in the day of their calamity. In that difficult day, God will turn his back upon them just as they have turned their backs on him (2:27). He will not listen to their cries for help. Where God’s face is not seen, his power is not available. Without divine intervention Judah faces national death. Calamity (ʾēd) occurs four other times, all in the oracles against foreign nations (46:21; 48:16; 49:8, 32). The day of calamity is a time of both national and personal calamity.

Battered Servant
18:18-23

Jeremiah experiences the third personal crisis of his ministry.

A. Plot against Jeremiah (18:18):

1. Origin of the plot (18:18a): And they said, Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah… Already in 11:19 Jeremiah became aware that his opponents were devising plans against him. Their patience exhausted, the enemies of Jeremiah secretly began making plans to rid themselves of the prophetic pest. The language makes clear that opposition to Jeremiah was not a knee-jerk, irrational, emotional reaction to the prophet’s hard-hitting sermons. The evil plans made against Jeremiah parallel the evil plans made in resistance to Yahweh in v 12. The Judeans show their opposition to the message from God by plotting against the messenger.

2. Aim of the plot (18:18b): that instruction may not perish from the priest, counsel from the wise or a word from the prophet. The aim of the plot was to protect their sources of man-made wisdom. After all, they had the priests, the wise men and other prophets. This triad of dispensers of wisdom is mentioned in Ezek 7:26. Instruction, counsel, and prophetic word were three modes of authority that had been taken over by pretenders who had no divine guidance. In Israel wise men were viewed as having access to divine insight as well as prophets and priests. Why should these leaders tolerate a dangerous preacher like Jeremiah? They seemed to fear that, if left alone, Jeremiah might gain popular support. The regular leaders of the nation might loose their positions of influence.

3. Nature of the plot (18:18c): Come, let us smite him with the tongue in order that we might not have to listen to all of his words. The enemies planned to make lying

283 An alternate translation of the last part of v 17 is: On their back, and not their face, I will look in the day of calamity. In this case the meaning would be: When they flee before their enemies, I will see their backs; I will not intervene save them.

284 Day of calamity is similar to day of trouble (16:19), day of disaster (17:17), time of trouble (14:8), and time of disaster (2:28; 11:12, 14; 15:11).
accusations against Jeremiah. By twisting his words, they hoped to turn the masses against the prophet. Perhaps they hoped to lay the groundwork for legal action against the prophet. Clearly they planned to kill him (cf. v 23). The plot here seems to be more widespread than the plot that Jeremiah faced from family and friends in Anathoth in ch 11.

V 18 is instructive in pointing to the three groups within ancient Israelite society from which one might receive divine instruction.

1. Priests. It was the special duty of the priests to give instruction based on the Law of Moses. The priests of Jeremiah’s day had not been mindful of their high mission.

2. Wise men. The wise men of the Bible were religious and moral teachers. In the period of the United Monarchy, the wise men Ahithophel and Hushai were prominent members in the court of David. Some of the wise men of ancient Israel, being gifted by the Holy Spirit, produced the wisdom literature of the OT. But the wise men in Jeremiah’s day had become worldly wise. They were strictly political counselors or statesmen who judged matters purely from the standpoint of logic, not faith.

3. Prophets. Prophets were to deliver to the people the message that was revealed to them by God from time to time. Throughout his ministry Jeremiah seems to have been in constant conflict with the prophets. These men had not received a heavenly call to the prophetic office, nor did they receive genuine revelations from God. They were mere professionals. They maintained their positions by giving oracles that were pleasing both to the general populace and the ruling powers.

B. Prayer of Jeremiah (18:19-23).

1. Complaint (18:19-20):
   a. Enemy’s pit (18:19-20a):

      (1) Petition (18:19): Give ear unto me, O Yahweh, and hearken to the voice of my adversaries. The text does not indicate how Jeremiah became aware of the new plot against him. When he heard what his enemies had planned for him, the prophet cried out to God. He asked Yahweh to take note of the threat against his messenger.

      (2) Question (18:20a): Shall evil be recompensed instead of good? This question is designed to point out the unfairness of the attacks against Jeremiah. He viewed himself as having nothing but the best interest of the people in view. He had done good to them by frankly and boldly proclaiming the truth about what the future held for Judah. The formula recompense evil for good or its equivalent appears several times in the OT.

      (3) Narrative (18:20b): For they are digging a pit for my soul! In 2:6 the word pit (šûchāh) was used in the description of the wilderness. Jeremiah was both perplexed and perturbed by this turn of events. He senses legal entrapment or worse in the offing. Borrowing the terminology from the Psalmist, he cries, they are digging a pit for my soul!

   b. Jeremiah’s intercession (18:20c): Remember that I stood before you to speak good on their behalf, and to cause your wrath to turn from them. As a ground of seeking Yahweh’s intervention, Jeremiah speaks of the good he had done for his adversaries. In 15:15 Jeremiah asked God to remember him. Now he asks Yahweh to remember his ministry of intercession. Besides the truthfulness of his preaching, Jeremiah had performed another service for his people. He had wept for his people, pled with

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285 Dt 33:10; 17:9-11.
286 Holiday (Her, 1:531) understands this question to be a quote from Jeremiah’s enemies challenging his message. Evil refers to the disaster Jeremiah was threatening for Judah; good is what the false prophets assume the people have done to fulfill their obligation to Yahweh.
287 Gn 44:4; Ps 35:12; 38:20; 109:5; 1 Sam 25:21; Prov 17:13.
288 See Ps 57:6; 35:7.
them and interceded for them at the throne of grace. He was the only true friend that Judah had. When the people should be honoring him for what he had been doing, they are instead plotting against him. For the concept of standing before Yahweh see on 15:19.

2. Imprecation (18:21-22a): The prayer moves from narrative to petition that takes the form of bitter imprecation. The objects of this petition are not named, but the context suggests that they are the opposition identified in v 18.
   a. Disaster on enemies (18:21): The phraseology in this v is similar to that in 6:11-12 where they are used in Jeremiah’s self-exhortation to preach a difficult message. The v means that there will be widespread death from a variety of causes as a result of Yahweh’s judgment.
      (1) Their sons (18:21a): Therefore, give their children to famine; deliver them to the power of the sword. Therefore has the connotation of under these circumstances. Jeremiah prays that the sons of his enemies might experience famine, that they might be delivered over to (lit., poured out to) the power of the sword, i.e., violent death. Children (lit. sons) are youth of pre-military age. Famine and sword are linked in 4:13-16, 18.
      (2) Their wives (18:21b): Let their wives become childless and widows… Jeremiah prays that the wives of his enemies will become childless and widows.
      (3) Their husbands (18:21c): and let their husbands be slain by death… Death (māvet), as in 15:2, probably refers to pestilence.
      (4) Their sons (18:21d): their chosen young men smitten by the sword in battle. Jeremiah is asking that the young soldiers be thrust upon the sword until their life-blood had been poured out.
   b. Terror on all houses (18:22a): Let a cry be heard from their houses when you bring a troop suddenly upon them… The bitter imprecation continues. The cry is one of distress; it is a cry for help. Jeremiah prayed that the homes of his enemies might be plundered by a troop of soldiers. Troop (g’dûd) refers to a raiding party or a contingent of soldiers. Jeremiah frequently uses the word suddenly (pit’ōm) when he describes battle scenes (4:20; 6:26; 15:8).

3. Justification (18:22b): for they have dug a pit to capture me; snares they have hidden for my feet. This is narrative prayer in which Jeremiah described to the Lord the situation as he perceived it. Digging a pit is a metaphor for plotting evil. Capture (r. lkd) appeared already in 5:26. Snares (pachîm) are bird traps.

4. Submission to God (18:23): Narrative prayer does not aim to inform God of something about which he is unaware. Rather, the petitioner describes his predicament to God in order to request divine intervention.
   a. God knows all (18:23a): But as for you, O Yahweh, you know all of their counsel against me for death. You know is a statement of praise, and a statement of profound trust in Yahweh. Jeremiah was always confident of Yahweh’s awareness of any situation (cf. 17:16). In v 18 the enemies allude to the counsel of the wise; but here the counsel is against Jeremiah. They want him dead. Perhaps that was the advice that these enemies were receiving from their “wise men.” Jeremiah entrusts to Yahweh the response to his opponents.
   b. God should deal with them in his anger (18:23b):
      (1) No pardon (18:23b): Do not cover their guilt; do not blot out their sin from before your face… Jeremiah asked God not to pardon the men who were plotting

290Cf. Ps 63:10 and Ezek 35:5.
against him. Such a prayer is rare in the OT but not unique (cf. Neh 3:37). The verb *cover* (r. *kpr*) appears some ninety-two times frequently refers to the actions of a priest in effecting a covering through sacrificial ritual for sin. Only in eight cases is God the subject of this verb. Jeremiah does not want God to ignore or forget about the vicious plots of his enemies. Under Mosaic Law only sins done in ignorance can be covered. Jeremiah does not want God to treat his enemies as unintentional sinners.

(2) No assistance (18:23c): *but let them be made to stumble before you! Deal with them in the time of your anger!* Stumble at the very least means to fail in their plot. It implies being humbled, broken, and brought to ruin. Jeremiah wanted God to deal with them (lit., *take action*) in the time of divine anger, i.e., to show them no mercy.

Several points need to be considered in interpreting this difficult prayer.
1. The imprecation is not hurled at the nation as a whole, but at those enemies who plotted Jeremiah's death.
2. “The prophets were neither vegetables nor machines, but men of like passions with ourselves” (G. A. Smith).
3. This outburst does not represent Jeremiah at his best. It is uttered in a moment of exasperation.
4. The anger of the prophet is aroused, not so much because he personally is being attacked, as because God was being rejected in the person of his prophet. To blaspheme the Lord’s messenger is to blaspheme the Lord himself.
5. The particular blasphemy that the enemies hurled at Jeremiah was that his prophecies had not been fulfilled. Unfulfilled prophecy marked a man as a false prophet. Jeremiah is calling upon God to execute those threats that he so boldly had proclaimed.\(^\text{291}\)
6. The prophet does not pray for these hardened people because the Lord has already indicated His unwillingness to forgive.\(^\text{292}\)
7. Precedents for such prayers of imprecation can be found in the Psalms. Jeremiah may have been borrowing the language of the Psalms in formulating this prayer.

### SECTION SEVEN

**SYMBOLIC ACTION:**

**BREAKING OF A JAR**

**Jeremiah 19:1-15**

In the parable of the potter, the point was the possibility of remaking a vessel that did not meet with approval; in ch 19 the emphasis is on the destruction of a vessel that proves useless.

**Message to the Elders**

19:1-9

Jeremiah gathered the elders of the people and took them to the edge of the valley of Hinnom. There he preached to them.

**A. First Directive (19:1-2):**

1. **Acquisition (19:1a):** *Thus said Yahweh: Go and purchase the clay vessel of a potter.*

   Jeremiah needed to make certain preparations before he preached his next message. First, he is told to *purchase* (cf. 13:1) the clay vessel of a potter, i.e., a vessel fashioned by a potter. The vessel (*baqbug*) was a wide-bellied bottle with a narrow neck.

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\(^\text{292}\) Cf. 7:16; 14:10, 12; 15:1, 6; 16:5b.
2. *Audience (19:1b): Take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests…* Jeremiah was told to gather the elders of the people (lay leaders) and the elders of the priests (senior priests) to hear his message. Just how Jeremiah secured the cooperation of these leaders is not indicated in the text.

3. *Destination (19:2a): and go out unto the valley of the son Hinnom that is in front of the gate Harsith.* The exact location of this message is specified by the Lord. Jeremiah is to take his audience to the edge of the valley of Hinnom (cf. 7:31). The valley of Hinnom, where human sacrifice had been practiced, must surely have been a source of embarrassment to these leaders of the people. The gate Harsith (Potsherd Gate) at which the sermon was delivered got its name from the scraps of pottery that were thrown there. The ancient Aramaic Targum suggests that this was the gate elsewhere known as the Dung Gate through which the city rubbish was taken.

4. *Proclamation (19:2b): Proclaim there the words that I will speak unto you.* The strange procession—Jeremiah and his bottle leading the ruling priests and civil authorities—must have attracted a curious crowd of onlookers as it made its way through the streets of Jerusalem toward the gate of the potter. When he arrived at the prescribed destination, Jeremiah was told to proclaim God’s message.

**B. First Announcement (19:3-9):**

1. *Intended audience (19:3a): And you shall say, Hear the word of Yahweh, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel…* Jeremiah delivered a message of doom to that group of dignitaries. As in 17:20 the word kings seems to be used in the non-technical sense for all the leaders of the nation.

2. *Intended action (19:3b): Behold, I am about to bring calamity upon this place so that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.* This simple statement announces the theme of the entire speech. Behold introduces an announcement that was unexpected and shocking. A calamity is about to fall upon the land so severe that when people hear of it their ears will tingle. The figure of tingling ears is used in connection with threats of severe judgment. It probably represents the emotions of astonishment and fear. This place here, as often, refers to a cultic place.

3. *Accusations (19:4-5):*

   a. *Desecration of holy land (19:4a):* [This will happen] because they have forsaken me… The language recalls that of 1:16 and 2:13. The verb is part of the vocabulary of marital unfaithfulness.

   b. *Worship of strange gods (19:4b): They make offerings here to other gods that they do not know, neither they, their fathers nor the kings of Judah.* Worshiping other gods (cf. 1:16; 5:19; 8:19) is one factor that made Jerusalem a foreign place to Yahweh. They refers primarily to the kings who made no effort to stop paganism, and therefore are condemned for condoning it. For gods they do not know see 7:9. The other gods had been introduced into Judah relatively recently under the Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian influence.

   c. *Child sacrifice (19:4b-5):*

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293 Sam 3:11; 2 Kgs 21:12.
(1) It involved innocents (19:4b): They have filled this place with the blood of innocents. They refers to the kings of Judah who both practiced and tolerated child sacrifice. The kings who were mainly involved in this abominable practice were Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:16; 24:16) and Jehoiakim (Jer 22:17). The blood of innocents may refer to the murder of those who opposed the wicked idolatry, or it may refer to the children who were offered as sacrifices to the pagan gods.

(2) It was part of pagan worship (19:5a): They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as a burnt offering to Baal. V 5 is repeated from 7:31. See discussion there. The burning of sons may have been a practice borrowed from the Assyrians.

(3) It was unthinkable to Yahweh (19:5b): This is something that I did not command, nor did I speak of it, nor did it enter my mind.

   a. Valley of slaughter (19:6): Therefore behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when this place will no longer be called Topheth, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. V 6 is repeated from 7:32. See discussion there.
   b. Empty counsel (19:7a): And I will empty out the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place... The first person verbs in vv 7-9 stress that what is about to befall Jerusalem is the direct action of Yahweh. The agents he will employ fall into the background. In 18:23 the enemies of Jeremiah take counsel to slay God’s prophet. Here God will empty out the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem, i.e., show it to be worthless. The verb translated empty out is derived from the same Hebrew root as the word for bottle in 19:1. It may have been chosen by the prophet for this reason. Perhaps Jeremiah slowly poured out the contents of the bottle as he referred to the emptying out of the counsel of Jerusalem.

   The word counsel points to worldly wisdom, i.e., counsel that is grounded in political expediency rather than in commitment to God. In particular Jeremiah has in mind the tangle of political alliances by which Judah thought to avoid enslavement to the Babylonian world power. No doubt the counselors in the royal court of Judah thought there was more benefit to be derived from treaties with foreign powers than from complete reliance on the power of God. But their counsel will fail.

   c. Ruthless slaughter (19:7b): and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their lives... The devastation in Judah will be brought about by a military invasion.

   d. Unburied corpses (19:7c): and I will make their corpses food for the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the land. So many will fall by the sword of the enemy that burial will be impossible. The bodies of the fallen men of Judah will lie exposed to the birds and beasts of the land.

   e. Desolate cities (19:8): And I will make this city a desolation and an object of derision. Everyone who passes by will be astonished; they will hiss over all the smiting she has suffered. Object of derision is lit., hissing as in 18:16. Jerusalem will become such a desolation that all who pass by its ruins will hiss or whistle in astonishment at the extent of the devastation.

   f. Siege cannibalism (19:9): And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters and each man will eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress that their enemies and those who seek their lives will
administer to them. In the desperate hour of siege, the last vestige of parental love will disappear. People will resort to cannibalism. God had warned his people in the Law of Moses that they might be brought into such straits if they were unfaithful to him. Cases of cannibalism during siege are documented in the OT (2 Kgs 6:24-31). The terrible picture of parents eating their own flesh and blood also appears in the writings of Jeremiah’s great contemporary Ezekiel (Ezek 5:10). The Book of Lamentations records the horrible fulfillment (Lam 4:10). Warned by the law and by the prophets, yet the hardened citizens of Judah persisted in the apostasy that would bring upon them this terrible curse.

C. Second Directive (19:10): Then you shall shatter the bottle in the presence of the men who are accompanying you… In Egypt the names of enemy nations were written on pots or jars that were then smashed. The idea behind the practice involved sympathetic magic. The smashing of the bottle was magically transferred to the nations whose names were written on the jar. There is, of course, no thought of sympathetic magic here. Rather this act is illustrative and confirmatory. The prophet wished dramatically to make his point that the nation would be smashed as easily as the brittle Palestinian pottery is smashed when it falls to the ground.

D. Second Announcement (19:11-13):
1. Explain the action (19:11a): and you shall say to them, Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Like this I will break this people and this city, as the potter might break a vessel that can no longer be repaired… V 11 is based on 7:32. The words are absent in the ancient Greek version though they are appropriate here. No longer be repaired indicates that the coming judgment was not a disciplinary disaster. Judah will come to an end.
2. Details of the threat (19:11b-13):
   a. Topheth made unclean (19:11b): and they shall bury in Topheth because there will be no room for burial. When the nation is broken, the dead will be so numerous that even the unclean site of Topheth in the valley of Hinnom would have to be used for a burial site.
   b. Jerusalem a Topheth (19:12): Thus will I do to this place (oracle of Yahweh) and to its inhabitants, even making this city as Topheth. The entire city of Jerusalem will become as Topheth, unclean by virtue of the slaughter that will transpire there. Yahweh will no longer be able to dwell there.
   c. Houses become Topheth (19:13): The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will become unclean like this place of Topheth, even all the houses where they offered incense upon their roofs to all the host of heaven, and poured out libations to other gods. The houses of Jerusalem upon which incense was offered and libations poured out to pagan gods will be desecrated by the dead bodies that fall in the city. The roofs of buildings were flat and could be used for various purposes including religious exercises. Several passages make mention of the fact that idolatry was practiced upon the roofs of the houses. Tablets have been found at Ras Shamra in Syria containing a ritual to be followed in making offerings to the heavenly bodies upon the housetops. On host of heaven see 8:2. Poured out libations to other gods recalls 7:18.

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295 Lv 26:29; Dt 28:53.
296 Jer 32:29; 2 Kgs 23:12; Zeph 1:5.
297 Freedman, SBB, 134.
A. Movement of Jeremiah (19:14):
   1. Left Topheth (19:14a): And Jeremiah went from Topheth where Yahweh had sent him to prophesy... The prophet had pronounced his message of doom so courageously that no one dared to interrupt him, or raise a hand against him. So he left the valley of Hinnom.
   2. Went to temple court (19:14b): he stood in the court of the house of Yahweh, and spoke unto all the people. Jeremiah returned to the temple area to preach to the throngs there. Court (chātsēr) refers to the walled-in enclosure around a building.

B. Message of Jeremiah (19:15): Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel... (19:15a): It is impossible to determine whether v 15 is merely a summary of what Jeremiah said in the court of the temple, or whether on the other hand he only had begun to preach when he was interrupted. The former alternative seems more likely. In either case the message preached in the temple court was one of judgment.
   1. Announcement (19:15b): Behold, I am about to bring against this city (and against her cities) all the evil that I have spoken concerning it... Behold introduces what is shocking or unexpected. Evil refers to calamity, in this case the calamity of war and destruction. Previously Jeremiah has mentioned repeated the idolatry that was practiced in the cities of Judah. Those cities along with the capital will face the destruction previously prophesied.
   2. Explanation (19:15c): for they have stiffened their neck that they might not hear my words. The accusation of stiffening the neck was made in 7:26. Clearly this is a figure for obstinacy and disobedience. Failing to listen was the climactic indictment. Failing to listen denies the authority of Yahweh, undercuts morality, and necessitates disaster.

SECTION EIGHT
ARREST AND DESPAIR
Jeremiah 20:1-18

Ch 20 forms a conclusion to Part Two. In this section the persecution against Jeremiah is renewed, and Jeremiah files his final complaint with Yahweh.

Arrest of the Prophet
20:1-3a

The confrontation between Pashur and Jeremiah is not unlike that between Amos and Amaziah (Amos 7:10-17). These two rivals are champions of two very different readings of history, two very different theologies, two very different visions of the future.

A. Reason for Arrest (20:1): Now Pashur the son of Immer, the priest who was chief overseer in the house of Yahweh, heard Jeremiah prophesy these things. Pashur the priest, who was chief overseer in the house of the Lord, heard that sermon. Pashur was second in authority to the high priest (29:26). His duty was to see that no unauthorized person entered the temple area, and that no disturbance was committed within the courts. The name Pashur was common in Jeremiah’s period (cf. 21:1). It has also been found on a Hebrew seal from
the seventh century, and on as ostracon from the eighth century.\textsuperscript{298} Pashur is the embodiment and representative of established religion that felt so threatened by words of Jeremiah.

B. Details of Arrest (20:2):

1. Violence of it (20:2a):
   a. Beating (20:2a): \textit{Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet...} Pashur \textit{smote Jeremiah}. This probably means that Jeremiah was scourged with forty stripes (Dt 25:3). The priest was seeking to intimidate the prophet, hopefully silence him.
   b. Torture (20:2b): \textit{and put him in the stocks}. The exact nature of this instrument of torture is not clear. The Hebrew word suggests a device that twists the body into a cramped posture. The \textit{stocks} are mentioned again in 29:26. The Book of Chronicles refers to a house of stocks (2 Chr 16:10). Apparently the punishment was not uncommon.

2. Location of it (20:2c): \textit{[These] were in the upper Benjamin Gate that was in the house of the Lord}. In the case of Jeremiah, the stocks were in public. Upper Benjamin Gate probably distinguishes this temple gate from the lower city gate of the same name (Jer 37:13; 38:7). The tribal area of Benjamin was north of Jerusalem. Thus this gate was probably on the north side of the temple. The phrase \textit{that was in the house of the Lord} makes clear the location. This is probably the same as the \textit{higher gate} (Ezek 9:2) that was built by King Jotham (2 Kgs 15:35). It probably was one of the main gates leading from the temple area to the city proper.

C. Release from Arrest (20:3a): \textit{And it came to pass the next morning that Pashur released Jeremiah from the stocks}. In the light of the conversation that follows it appears that Pashur personally came to release the prophet. Jeremiah was neither intimidated nor cowed by his experience. He offers no apologies; he seeks no forgiveness for his message. He pleads no misunderstanding. Jeremiah immediately went back on the attack.

\textbf{Message for Pashur}

20:3b-6

When Jeremiah was released from the stocks, he had a special message for Pashur. Apparently this message was delivered at the very time of the release. The unit is structured with two personal references to Pashur (vv 3, 6) forming an envelop around the more public announcement of judgment in vv 4-5.

A. Changed Name (20:3b): \textit{And Jeremiah said unto him, Yahweh has not called your name Pashur, but Magor-Missabib}. Pashur’s name means something like \textit{fruitful all around}. That optimistic name proclaimed a future that was not to be. So Jeremiah changes the man’s name to \textit{Magor-Missabib}, meaning \textit{terror round about}. This symbolic name signifies one who is surrounded by horror on all sides, and who becomes an object of horror and fear to himself and to others. The same two Hebrew words that are used to construct this symbolic name appear together elsewhere four times in the book.\textsuperscript{299}

B. Changed Circumstances (20:4-5):

\textsuperscript{298}For documentation see Holiday, \textit{Her}, 1:541.
\textsuperscript{299}Jer 6:25; 20:10; 46:5; 49:29. The combination also appears in Ps 31:13.
1. Judah slaughtered (20:4a): For thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies; and your eyes shall see it. Pashur would live to see his friends (lit., loved ones) slain by the sword. Perhaps in this context the word points to colleagues who appear to be distinguished from those who live under the same roof with Pashur who are mentioned in v 6.

2. Judah taken captive (20:4b): And all Judah I will give into the hand of the king of Babylon; and he shall take them captive into Babylon, or he shall smite them with the sword. Pashur will see the rest of the men of Judah either slain or taken captive to Babylon. The word all is used in this v and the following v. The punishment is complete. None will escape.

3. Judah plundered (20:5): And I will give away all the wealth of this city; and all the fruit of her labor, and all her precious things; and all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies. They shall plunder them, take them and bring them to Babylon. All the wealth of the nation will be given by the Lord to the enemies of Judah. The national treasures will be taken to Babylon along with the captives. The documentation of the removal of Jerusalem’s treasures is found in 52:17-23.


1. Exile (20:6a): And you, Pashur, and all the inhabitants of your house will go into captivity; and you will go to Babylon. The religious establishment insisted that Babylon was no threat, that Yahweh would deliver Jerusalem from any threat from that quarter. Jeremiah reveals that Pashur will be among those dignitaries deported to Babylon once Jerusalem had fallen.

2. Death in exile (20:6b): There you will die, and there you will be buried, both you and all your friends… For a misguided patriot like Pashur, the worst fate imaginable would be to die and be buried in a foreign land.

3. Explanation (20:6c): to whom you prophesied falsely. It is not the personal mistreatment of Jeremiah that brought about this extreme prophecy of personal doom to Pashur. Rather it is the fact that he had prophesied lies. What the nature of these lies was cannot be ascertained from the account (cf. 5:31).

Some have conjectured that Pashur was the leader of the pro-Egyptian party in Judah. Perhaps this would account for his fierce opposition to Jeremiah. His pro-Egyptian policy led to national and personal disaster. That policy was the cause of the terror that was about to come upon the land.

In 29:26 Pashur’s office is filled by a fellow named Zephaniah. This suggests that Jeremiah’s prophecy already had been fulfilled. No doubt Pashur was taken captive either in the deportation of 605 BC, or in the deportation of 597 BC. The latter is more likely.

Depression of the Prophet
20:7-18

In his public confrontation with Pashur, Jeremiah had remained as firm as a rock. In his private moments with God, however, he broke down completely. He looked upon his ministry, not as a high privilege, but as an intolerable burden. He was discouraged with his task; he was disgruntled with his God. This is the fourth personal crisis in the ministry of Jeremiah.

300Jeremiah may mean no more than Pashur’s name prophesied a hopeful future that was not to be.
A. Jeremiah’s Complaint (20:7-10): The complaint focuses on the ways Yahweh has let him down in his ministry.

1. Complaint about his call (20:7a):
   a. Enticement (20:7a): You have enticed me, O Yahweh, and I was enticed… In a bitter moment, Jeremiah accused God of deceiving him. The same Hebrew verb (r. pth) is used of seducing a maiden (Ex 22:16), or enticing a husband. In 1 Kgs 22:21 a spirit from God enticed Ahab to go up to Ramoth Gilead in order that he might meet his death. I was enticed (Niphal) could be translated, I let myself be enticed.

   Jeremiah’s accusation against God was absolutely false. God had not deceived his prophet in the least about his mission. He pointedly had warned his prospective prophet that his mission was fraught with danger and disappointment (cf. 1:18).

   b. Overpowering (20:7b): you took hold of me and you prevailed. The accusation continued: you took hold of me (r. chzq). The verb can also mean to be strong, hence the translation overpowered in NIV and NRSV. You prevailed (tûkhâl) is the same form of the word that was used to describe how Jacob prevailed over God and men (Gn 32:28). Jeremiah was complaining that he had been compelled against his own will to preach the word of God.

2. Complaint about his circumstances (20:7b): I have become an object of laughter all the day, everyone mocks me. Object of laughter or laughingstock (s’chôq) is from the same root as merrymakers in 15:17. Because of the nature of his ministry, Jeremiah had become the object of ridicule and mockery. All the day suggests that the mockery was unrelenting.

3. Complaint about his message (20:8):
   a. Content (20:8a): For as often as I speak, I cry out, Violence! and destruction I must proclaim! Jeremiah faced physical torture without flinching; but he cringed before the barbs of ridicule. He blamed his plight upon the nature of his message. He must be a prophet of doom. He must constantly cry Violence! Destruction! The violence/destruction pairing appeared already in 6:7. The reference is to Jeremiah’s preaching, not the violence and destruction perpetrated on him personally. Some think he is referring to the sin of the people; more likely he refers to the punishment that he announced to his nation.

   b. Result (20:8b): Surely the word of Yahweh has become to me shame and derision all the day! Jeremiah’s message had brought him nothing but reproach and derision. On shame (cherpâh) or reproach, see on 6:10. Again all the day underscores the unrelenting nature of Jeremiah’s misery.

4. Complaint about his compulsion (20:9): A tremendous battle rages in the heart and mind of this sensitive man of God.
   a. He wanted to quit (20:9a): But when I say, I will not remember him nor will I speak again in his name… On the one hand, he wanted to resign his ministry and retreat to the quiet life at Anathoth. He could not bear to face the prospect of continued ridicule and opposition. He wanted to forget all about his recent unpleasant experiences. He never wanted to preach another sermon again. Jeremiah wanted to forget about his special calling to serve God.

301 Judg 14:15; 16:5.
302 The Hebrew word (r. ykl) appears four times in this prayer: you prevailed (v 7); I do not prevail (v 9); we can prevail (v 10); and they will not prevail (v 11). In the power struggle with his enemies Jeremiah is confident that he will come out on top because Yahweh is on his side.
b. He could not quit (20:9b): Jeremiah was in a proverbial catch 22. When he spoke out for God, he suffered unbearable abuse; when he tried to remain silent he experienced an overwhelming urge to preach. Though he wanted to quit, Jeremiah's heart was burdened with a sense of prophetic obligation and divine mission.

(1) A burning fire (20:9b): then there is in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones. The fire of God’s wrath against sin burned fiercely within him. In my heart and in my bones are parallel expressions meaning within me.

(2) An overpowering force (20:9c): I weary myself trying to contain it, but I do not prevail. Jeremiah tried to hold back the compulsion to preach, but he could not. He became utterly exhausted from trying to fight it. In spite of himself, Jeremiah must follow the divine call, he must resume his ministry. In 6:11 it was the wrath of Yahweh that Jeremiah could not hold in; here it is the word of Yahweh. Prevail (r. ykl). This is the same root used in v 7 where Jeremiah complained that Yahweh had overpowered him. Here he admits that he cannot overpower Yahweh’s word.

5. Complaint about the plot (20:10): Jeremiah knew the dangers attendant upon his resumption of the prophetic ministry. He knew his enemies were plotting against him.

a. What he had heard (20:10a):

(1) Defamation (20:10a): For I have heard the defamation of many: Terror round about! Jeremiah seemed to hear them urging one another to bring false charges against him. Defamation (dibbāh) refers to deliberate talk calculated to hurt someone’s reputation whether true (Gn 37:2) or false (Prov 10:18). The many who were defaming him certainly included the false prophets; but Jeremiah has probably reached the conclusion that everyone is against him.

(2) Mockery (20:10b): Declare it! Let us declare it! The verb declare (r. ngd) appears throughout the book in the introduction to prophetic discourse. It appears that these words are spoken by the enemies. Were mockingly they are urging one another to mock the fervor of Jeremiah, as well as the content of his message? Were they challenging Jeremiah to repeat his message of destruction all about so they could report him to the authorities? The context suggests a third possibility: they were pretending to share his burden for the nation so as to deceive him. See the next v.

b. What he had concluded (20:10c):

(1) He was being watched (20:10c): All of my intimate friends are watching my step. Even his friends (lit., all the men of my peace)—those who greeted him with familiar greetings of friendship—were watching his every move. They hoped that he would take one false step so that they could take advantage of it.

(2) He was a victim of deception (20:10d): Perhaps he will be enticed, and we will prevail over him; we will take our revenge on him. In v 7 Jeremiah accused Yahweh of enticing or deceiving him; now the enemies plan further deception. Jeremiah is a victim twice over. The enemies hope to lure him into making some mistakes, or saying something on which a charge of treason could be based. These enemies would stop at nothing. They were out for revenge against the meddlesome prophet who had dared contradict their pro-Egypt policy. In 11:20 Jeremiah prayed that Yahweh would take vengeance on his enemies; now his enemies plan to take vengeance on Jeremiah. They hated the message of national doom; so they intended to rid themselves of the messenger.
B. Jeremiah’s Conviction (20:11-12a): The light seems suddenly to shine through Jeremiah’s personal gloom. The prophet burst forth in expressions of joyous trust in God. This assertion of trust is both a genuine statement of faith, and a motivation for Yahweh to intervene in Jeremiah’s situation.

1. Yahweh’s power (20:11a): But Yahweh is with me like a fearsome warrior. Jeremiah suddenly realized that God was on his side after all. In 14:9 Jeremiah compared Yahweh to a warrior (gibbôr) paralyzed by fear. Now he sees Yahweh as a fearsome warrior (gibbôr) who will fight the battles of his prophet. In 15:21 Jeremiah used the adjective fearsome (țârîts = ruthless) to describe his enemies. Now he sees that his Helper is the one to be feared. This is the only place in the OT where this adjective is applied to Yahweh.

2. Enemies’ demise (20:11b):
   a. They will fail (20:11b): Therefore, my persecutors will stumble; they will not prevail. The enemies, who are plotting against him, would not succeed. Stumble means they will fail in their plans regarding Jeremiah and the nation. They will be discredited (cf. 6:15). Prevail (r. ykl) is used for the fourth time in this passage (vv 7, 9, 10, 11). Clearly there is a tug of war going on, but with much higher stakes.
   b. They will be humiliated (20:11c): They will be utterly put to shame, because they shall not prevail… As in 17:18 Jeremiah is confident that his enemies will be put to shame. For shame following stumble, see 6:15. Perhaps Jeremiah recalled the words of promise given to him at the time of his call: They shall not prevail! For I am with you to deliver you! (1:19).
   c. They will be forgotten (20:11d): [they will experience] eternal shame that will not be forgotten. Jeremiah wanted to forget God’s word (v 9); but he wants Yahweh never to forget what the enemies have done to him. The enemies will experience eternal and unforgettable shame. In 11:19 the enemies did not want the name of Jeremiah to be remembered; but here Jeremiah wishes that the sins of his enemies not be forgotten.

3. Yahweh’s character (20:12a): But O Yahweh of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the kidneys and the heart… This v is essentially a duplicate of 11:20. Such variations as do exist do not change the overall meaning. Since Yahweh is righteous by nature, and he can see the unseen inner thoughts, he is in a position to give all men exactly what they deserve.

C. Jeremiah’s Petition (18:12b): let me see your vengeance on them, for unto you I have revealed my case. See on 11:20. Jeremiah prays for the very vengeance that his enemies sought in v 10. He understands that vengeance is not within the proper range of response by the downtrodden. He wants Yahweh to execute vengeance that is in harmony with his righteous character. Yahweh’s vengeance is not arbitrary and undisciplined, but is the embodiment of principles of his law. Because Jeremiah is a righteous petitioner and the Judge is righteous, the prophet can anticipate a positive response to his petition.

D. Jeremiah’s Praise (20:13): In view of the preceding vv, some regard v 13 as irony or sarcasm. It is best, however, to see it as a momentary breakthrough in Jeremiah’s soul, as a speck of light in the dark tunnel of his discouragement.

1. Call for praise (20:13a): Sing unto Yahweh! Praise Yahweh! The sing/praise pairing occurs elsewhere only in Ps 149:1. So confident was Jeremiah of deliverance from his foes that he burst forth in a song of praise to his divine deliverer.
2. **Explanation of praise (20:13b):** *For he has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers.* Deliverance is the occasion of the praise. The soul of the needy is Jeremiah’s self-designation. He has referred to the needy (‘ebhyôn) in three other passages (2:34; 5:28; 22:16); now he identifies with them. *From the hand of evildoers* appears elsewhere only in 23:14 and Job 8:20. In these passages *hand* is a symbol of power. *Deliver (r. našš) from the hand* is common in the OT, but in Jeremiah the expression appears only in 15:21.

**E. Jeremiah’s Curse (20:14-18).**

1. **Dimensions of the curse (20:14-16):**
   
   a. **Birthday cursed (20:14):** *Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day on which my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!* The curse is not addressed to anyone in particular; Jeremiah lashes out against the darkness of his own existence. It is the day of his birth that comes under curse. Like Job he refuses to transgress the boundaries of faith to curse God (Job 2:9). He refuses to transgress the Law of Moses by cursing his parents (Lv 20:9). In hindsight, given the living tragedy of his life, Jeremiah wishes he had never been born.

   b. **Birth announcer cursed (20:15-16):**
      
      (1) **Announcement of the curse (20:15):** *Cursed is the man who brought the good news to my father, saying, A son is born to you! and thereby made him exceedingly glad.* The man who brought the good news of his birth was cursed. When news came that a son had been born, Jeremiah’s father rejoiced exceedingly. How ironic. The father rejoiced over the birth of one who would live a life of tragedy.

      (2) **Reason for the announcement (20:16):** *That man shall be as the cities that God overthrew, and did not relent; he will hear a cry in the morning, and a battle cry at noontime…* This v is often translated as a wish (e.g., KJV; NIV; NRSV), but there is nothing in the Hebrew that requires such a rendering. This is not the expression of a wish, but a declaration of what in fact will happen. Jeremiah is expressing pity because that man who announced his birth is cursed, for that anonymous person was a citizen of a nation that was doomed.

      Two ominous predictions are made about the messenger. First, he will experience the judgment of the cities that God overthrew, i.e., Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gn 19:21, 25, 29). And did not relent means that the two cities received the full measure of God’s judgment. So the point of comparison is not the manner of judgment (fire and brimstone from heaven), but the thoroughness of it. Second, the messenger will hear the cry of the terrified inhabitants of the city when the enemy comes smashing through the walls in the morning hours. He will hear at noontime the bloodthirsty battle cry of the invaders as they plunder the city.

   2. **Reason for the curse (20:17-18):** *because he did not slay me from the womb, [It would be better] had my mother been my grave, or her womb have everlasting pregnancy. (18) Why did I come forth from the womb to see trouble and sorrow that my days end in shame?* Instead of announcing Jeremiah’s birth, the messenger should have slain the infant. The verb *slay* (r. mût in Polel) appears to refer to mercy killings (Judg 9:54; 1 Sam 17:51; 2 Sam 1:9, 10, 16). If infanticide be thought too gruesome, Jeremiah might

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303 References to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah appears at least six times in the prophetic literature prior to Jeremiah.
simply have been left in his mother’s womb. Jeremiah could not understand why God allowed him to be born only to suffer such heartache, pain, distress and disgrace.

Was it right for Jeremiah to curse the day of his birth? It is easy for one who has not experienced the persecutions of this prophet to condemn him. Those who have experienced similar trials can empathize with him.

The experience of Jeremiah might be compared to that of the prophet Elijah. After descending from the triumph of Mount Carmel, Elijah sat under his juniper tree of depression (1 Kgs 19:4). Both prophets had moments of being strong in the Lord; both had moments of being weak in the flesh. Both men were merely clay vessels that God was able to use for his glory.

How is it possible that such a curse could follow immediately after the joyous confidence of v 13? Some would argue that vv 14-18 have been dislocated; they do not belong here. This explanation is hardly necessary. Nor is it necessary to postulate an interval of time between v 13 and v 14. Any saint who takes his eye off the Lord for even a moment may be engulfed by self-pity and despair.

This passage is the brutally honest confession of a tortured soul. Such passages indicate that, of all the OT prophets, Jeremiah is probably the most human and also the most heroic. Men of God shall ever be indebted to Jeremiah for recording these autobiographical lines, for they set in bold relief the grace of God. Sinful, weak and frail as Jeremiah was God could forgive him and still use him. The Lord does not reject his servant because of this momentary outburst.

**PART THREE**

**MESSAGE AGAINST KINGS**

**Jeremiah 21:1-23:8**

Part Three consists of a series of dated messages about specific Judean kings, prophets and groups. The material is not in chronological order as the following chart illustrates.

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**SECTION ONE**

**RESPONSE TO INQUIRY**

**21:1-14**

Section One is structured as an royal inquiry to which four answers are given.

**Zedekiah’s Inquiry**

**21:1-2**

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In 588 BC a new Pharaoh took the throne. Pharaoh Hophra (588-569 BC), known in secular literature as Apries, hoped to reestablish Egypt as a world power. He at once challenged the Babylonian supremacy. By means of lavish promises, Hophra secured the support of a number of leaders in Jerusalem.

Zedekiah eventually gave in to the political pressure to rebel against Babylon. This act of indiscretion brought on the invasion of the great Nebuchadnezzar. City after city in Judah had fallen to the Chaldeans. Having no one to whom to turn except the man of God, Zedekiah sent a delegation to Jeremiah.

A. Delegation (21:1): The word that came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh, when King Zedekiah sent unto him Pashur son of Malchiah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying... The phraseology of the introduction repeats what was used in 7:1. Zedekiah selected two men for his delegation to the prophet. Representing the civil authority was Pashur the son of Malchiah. This is not the same Pashur who appeared in 20:1 as a high-ranking priest and false prophet. This Pashur is mentioned again in 38:1.

Representing the ecclesiastical authority was Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah. He was second in rank to the high priest (52:24). Since Jeremiah had been for so long public enemy number one to the leaders in Jerusalem, it must have been very embarrassing for them now to seek him out for counsel. This Zephaniah is mentioned again in 29:25 and 37:3.

Some speculate that the two officials were part of a pro-Egyptian faction in the government.

B. Request (21:2a): Please inquire of Yahweh on our behalf, for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon is fighting against us... The delegation was in no position to make demands. National policy had failed. Zedekiah had no place to turn except to the prophet. The delegation humbly petitioned the prophet to inquire of the Lord for them. For inquire (r. drš) see 10:21. The request includes a search for direction; but it also signals a fresh commitment to Yahweh. But these men do not come as penitent sinners casting themselves on the mercy of God. They say nothing in their conversation about forgiveness or repentance.

The spelling of the name of the Chaldean king predominates in Jeremiah and Daniel and is the only form in Ezekiel. Actually this form of the name is closer to the Babylonian original Nabu-kudurri-uzur. In the Bible the spelling Nebuchadnezzar is also found.

C. Goal (21:2b): perhaps Yahweh will deal with us according to his wondrous works and cause him to go up from us. Perhaps suggests uncertainty on the part of the delegation. They were hoping for an intervention corresponding to the wondrous works (niphlā’ōt) that had characterized Yahweh’s dealings with Israel in the distant past. The term is used frequently in Psalms of the marvelous acts of God on behalf of his people, especially events surrounding the Exodus. The officials were hoping for assurance that Yahweh would intervene on behalf of Jerusalem in the present crisis, even as he had done many years before when Sennacherib the Assyrian had besieged the city (2 Kgs 19:35). Zedekiah and his counselors could not believe that God had abandoned them. They had forgotten all that Jeremiah had been saying throughout his ministry. Go up from us in this context means to withdraw.

The four answers to the inquiry reflect a balanced structure:

a. No hope: Yahweh fights against them (vv 3-7).
   b. Hope for individuals: surrender (vv 8-10).

305 Jer 29:25; 37:3.
b. Hope for city: royal justice (vv 11-12).
   a. No hope: Yahweh kindles a fire (vv 13-14).

First Answer:
Total Destruction of Jerusalem
21:3-7

But Jeremiah said unto them, Thus shall you say to Zedekiah (21:3): Jeremiah was not impressed by the royal delegation. Jeremiah’s first answer to the royal inquiry is directed to the king personally. The answer is couched in a series of first person verbs. Yahweh takes the lead in the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem.

A. Weapons Turned Back (21:3-4a): Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: I am about to turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you are fighting the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls… Those soldiers who are attempting to defend the walls of Jerusalem will not be successful. God himself will turn back, i.e., the defensive weapons of the armies of Judah. God will render inoperative, or perhaps even reverse the direction of those weapons.

This is the first of forty-three references to the Chaldeans (NIV Babylonians) in the book. The term originally referred to tribes living in southern Mesopotamia south of Babylon. These tribes were a major source of irritation to the Assyrians when they were dominating the region. Eventually the Chaldeans succeeded in establishing a new dynasty headed by Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar. The army of Nebuchadnezzar included diverse ethnics groups, called Chaldeans the biblical writers because of the ethnic identity of their king.

B. Chaldeans Brought In (21:4b-5):
   1. Yahweh gathers them (21:4b): and I will gather them into the midst of this city. Jerusalem will fall to the Chaldeans. God will actually bring the Chaldean soldiers into the walls of Jerusalem.
   2. Yahweh reverses his role (21:5): And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and in fury and in great wrath. Far from intervening on behalf of Judah Yahweh will actually be fighting against them. God’s outstretched hand and strong arm, that had on so many occasions been directed against the enemies of Israel (e.g., Dt 26:8), were now turned against Judah. He who was the Captain of the host of Israel was now leading the charge of the Chaldean enemy. He was the God of might and miracle, but he was now using that power in his wrath against his apostate people. The triad anger, fury and great wrath also occurs in Dt 29:27 (cf. Jer 32:37).

C. Citizens Smitten Down (21:6): And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they will die of great pestilence. Not only was God directing the Chaldean attack against Jerusalem, he was about to unleash from his arsenal the weapons of plague and pestilence against his people. A city under siege in antiquity was especially vulnerable to the outbreak of death-dealing pestilence since the food, water and sanitary facilities of the city were cut off by the enemy. For both man and beast, see on 7:20.

D. Remnant Delivered Over (21:7):
1. Surrender (21:7): *And after this (oracle of Yahweh) I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people, even those who remain in this city from the plague, the sword, and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, even into the hand of those who seek their lives.* Many rural folks flocked to the city during the time of attack. The swelling population placed an extra strain upon the community resources. Those who survived the terrible siege with its bloody assaults, the plague and famine will be given into the ruthless hands of Nebuchadnezzar. *Given into the hand* is an idiom surrender. The triad *plague, sword and famine* appears fifteen times in the book.

2. Execution (21:7b): *He shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not have pity upon them, nor mercy, nor compassion.* King Zedekiah and the royal household are specifically included in this threat. Nebuchadnezzar will have no mercy or compassion upon those who fall into his hands. The triad *pity, mercy, compassion* is found also in 13:14. Zedekiah had hoped for divine intervention; the irony is that there will be divine intervention, but it will be against Judah, not for Judah’s deliverance.

Second Answer:
Chance for Individual Safety
21:8-10

*And unto this people you shall say* (21:8a): Jeremiah’s second answer to the inquiry is addressed to the people. It draws on the language of Dt to offer an invitation to individuals to escape the tragedies detailed in the preceding vv.

A. Alternatives Described (21:8b): *Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.* To the gloomy message for King Zedekiah, Jeremiah adds an oracle addressed to the people in general. Using the solemn language of Dt 30:15ff, God places before his people the alternatives of life and death.

B. Alternatives Defined (21:9):
1. Death (21:9a): *The one who remains in this city will die by the sword or by the famine or by the pestilence.* While it is clear that Jeremiah is referring to the Dt passage, he is using the word *life* in a more restricted sense. In Dt the word *life* meant *prosperous existence* whereas here it means *escape from death.* The way of death is to remain in the besieged city of Jerusalem.

2. Life (21:9b): *the one who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live, and his life shall be as spoils to him.* The verb *go out* (r. *yts’t*) implies surrender. How ironic that this same verb described the exodus from Egypt. Jeremiah gave this same advice on other occasions (e.g., 38:1, 17). Several Jews followed this advice.306 The one who surrenders (lit., *falls away*) to the enemy will be rewarded only by the preservation of their lives. *His life shall be as spoils* appears four times in the book. Those who surrender will be like the soldier who goes into battle expecting to be enriched from the spoils of the enemy, but who in the end is happy to return without the loss of his life. Submission to Yahweh required submission to Babylon.

C. An Explanation (21:10):

306 Jer 38:19; 39:9; 52:15.
1. In a figure (21:10a): **For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good (oracle of Yahweh).** *Set my face against* expresses hostility. Resistance is useless, for God is the enemy of the city of Jerusalem. *For evil* points to capture and destruction of the city. *For good* refers to the place. By continuing the struggle, the fanatical defenders of the city are in reality fighting against God.

2. In plain words (21:10b): **Into the hand of the king of Babylon it shall be given, and he shall burn it with fire.** Yahweh will deliver Jerusalem into the hand of the king of Babylon. The torch will be put to the holy city. While there may be hope for individuals if they surrender, the doom of the city as a whole is sealed.

### Third Answer:
**Chance to Save the City**  
21:11-12

*And to the house of the king of Judah: Hear the word of the Yahweh!* (12) *O house of David, thus says the Yahweh…* The third brief oracle that comes as a response to the inquiry of Zedekiah is a last-ditch appeal to the royal house. They can still save their city if they are willing to make a radical change in the national policy. *House of David* may be ironic, as if to suggest that the current monarch (Jehoiakim) was no David.

A. Imperative (21:12b): The third response is structured around a double imperative followed by a warning of the consequences of disobedience.

1. Justice (21:12b): **Judge with justice in the morning.** *In the morning* stresses either the urgency of the imperative or the necessity of daily implementation. Judah needed to begin practicing social justice. The king and his administration must *judge with justice,* i.e., execute justice or render just verdicts. In the Mosaic and prophetic traditions the purpose of rulers was to insure justice for the weak and helpless.

2. Deliverance (21:12c): **Deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor…** The royal house must deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor. The *oppressed* are those who have had their rights or properties taken away by force, i.e., by crooked justice. The OT prophets had much to say in the area of social ethics. They were ahead of their times.

B. Warning (21:12b): **lest my wrath go forth like fire unquenchable because of the evil of your deeds.** Using *lest* to introduce the threat is as old as Amos (chs 1-2). The wrath of God is likened to unquenchable fire. Justice prevents the outbreak of that judgment fire. But that fire is ignited by the misdeeds of God’s rebellious people.

### Fourth Answer:
**Coming Divine Punishment**  
21:13-14

A. Address (21:13):

1. Ominous declaration (21:13a): **Behold, I am against you…** if disaster is to be averted was to cease their insane and irrational confidence in the inviolability of Jerusalem. *Behold, I am against you* is the challenge formula by which one combatant declared his hostility toward another.

307 Another reading is *their deeds.*
2. **Titles for Jerusalem (21:13b, c):**

   a. **Jerusalem the queen (21:13b):** *who are enthroned over the valley...* Enthroned (lit., inhabitant) is sometimes used of a reigning monarch (Amos 1:5, 8). It is also used as a designation of Yahweh as one who sits enthroned on the cherubim. Jerusalem is depicted as a queen reigning over the valley. Perhaps the language hints that Jerusalem has begun to idolize herself. The word valley ('ēmeq) is applied elsewhere to the valleys around Mount Zion (cf. Isa 22:7; Jer 31:40).

   b. **Jerusalem the rock (21:13c):** *a rock of the plain (oracle of Yahweh)...* Again Jerusalem is being figuratively and sarcastically described. The city is like an impregnable rock that juts up from a plain. Rock (tsûr) indicates a large rock, even a cliff. Many times in the OT this term is used as a designation for Yahweh. Instead of trusting in the Rock, Jeremiah thought of herself as being a rock! Queen Jerusalem in its vaunted self-reliance imagines herself to have a God-like strength. Plain is parallel to valley, as in 48:8). The term does not necessarily mean a level place, but a plateau, either level or hilly. Sometimes a plain symbolizes comfort and security (cf. Ps 26:12).

B. **Arrogance (21:13d):** The quotation attributed to the Jerusalemites in v 13 explains why Jeremiah sarcastically referred to Jerusalem as he does in this v.

1. **Untouchable people (21:23c):** *who say, Who shall come down against us...* The question is one of defiance. Because of the superior defenses of the city, the Jewish defenders were confident of their ability to withstand the invader. Such boasts suggest that the Chaldean siege was in its early stages at the time Zedekiah sent the delegation to meet with Jeremiah. Given the height of Jerusalem the verb come down (r. ncht) is strange. Do the Jerusalemites think of the Chaldeans as a huge bird swooping down on them? Or are they actually thinking that Yahweh will not (cannot?) come down against them?

2. **Impenetrable city (21:23d):** *and who shall come into our habitations?* The term habitation (māʿôn) is used of Yahweh’s habitation on high (25:30) and in the temple (Ps 26:8). In fact, Yahweh himself is the habitation of Israel (Pss 90:1; 91:9). The plural habitations may simply refer multiplicity of palace and temple buildings; on the other hand, the Jerusalemites may be claiming to exceed the prerogatives of Yahweh himself who has only a singular habitation.

C. **Threat (21:14):** The confidence manifested by the Jerusalem leadership was ill-founded in view of the fact that God was punishing his people.

1. **A well-deserved punishment (21:14a):** *But I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds (oracle of Yahweh...* Though v 13 has some ambiguity, there is no misunderstanding about Yahweh’s answer to the inquiry of vv 1-2: I will punish. The forthcoming punishment will correspond to the sins committed against God and man.

2. **A devastating punishment (21:14b):** *I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it will consume all that is round about her.* The divine sentence for Jerusalem is fire. Fire is a symbol for judgment, but in the case of Jerusalem the symbol corresponded to the reality. Forest is a metaphor for the palace, but probably the term here refers to the temple as well (1 Kgs 6:9-36). The name is derived from the cedar with which these

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308 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chr 13:6; Pss 80:1; 99:1.  
309 A suggestion of Holiday, Her 1:579.  
310 The palace is called the house of the forest of Lebanon in 1 Kgs 7:2; 10:17, 21. In Isa 22:8 it is called the house of the forest.

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buildings were built (1 Kgs 7:2-12). That fire would consume everything. There is no hope.

Address to the Royal Family  
22:1-5

Ch 22 traces Jerusalem’s troubles to a failure in the monarchy.

A. Background (22:1-2):
1. Location for the message (22:1-2): Thus says Yahweh: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word... At some point during the reign of Jehoiakim, God sent Jeremiah to the house of the king with an oracle directed to the royal family.
2. Authorization for the message (22:2): and say: Hear the word of Yahweh, O king of Judah, who sits upon the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates. The king and princes who passed through the gates of the palace each day were the lineal descendants of David; but they certainly were not his spiritual descendants. They were not men after God’s own heart nor were they amenable to the rebuke of a prophet. With Nathan-like boldness, Jeremiah meets the king on his own ground to deliver to him the word of the Lord.

B. Obligations of the Royals (22:3):
1. Execute justice (22:3a): Thus says Yahweh: Execute justice and righteousness...The justice/righteousness combination speaks of social responsibility. Justice speaks of social power, and righteousness speaks of social practice. Under the old covenant theocracy, the laws of the state were the laws of God. The king was responsible for enforcing those laws and establishing social justice in the land.
2. Deliver the oppressed (22:3b): deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor. The king was to be the defender of the poor and the helpless. But under the tyrant Jehoiakim, the Solomon of the last days of Judah, the people were being ruthlessly oppressed. Through governmental taxation, the king undertook lavish building projects (see vv 13ff.).
3. Aid the helpless (22:3c): And do not oppress nor do violence to the stranger, orphan or widow... Jeremiah demanded that the king cease oppressing the helpless—the strangers, orphans and widows. Other nations looked with suspicion on strangers, but the Bible teaches tolerance for those of other nationalities.
4. Support life (22:3d): nor shed innocent blood in this place. Jeremiah also demanded in the name of his God that Jehoiakim cease his violence and the shedding of innocent blood. That innocent blood was shed during this period is evident from case of Uriah the prophet. He was executed because he spoke out against the king (26:20-23). Jeremiah was putting his life on the line when he preached this sermon at the gates of the royal palace!

C. Alternatives for the Royals (22:4-5): The “if...then” format of these vv makes the survival of the monarchy conditional. These vv make it clear that the monarchy in Israel was subordinate to God’s Law. These vv also suggest that the royals still had a choice.
1. If obedience, then preservation (22:4): For if you completely comply with this commandment, then kings sitting in David’s stead shall pass through the gates of this house riding in chariots and on horses, he and his servants and his people. To his list
of royal obligations, Jeremiah added a promise that he had made previously (see 17:25). If the monarch will only heed the message of the prophet, the Davidic line would continue to reign in Jerusalem. The king and his servants and attendants would continue to pass through the gate of the palace even as they were doing while Jeremiah spoke these words.

2. *If disobedience, then desolation (22:5): But if you do not hearken to these words, I swear by myself (oracle of Yahweh) that this house will become a desolation.* If the royal family refused to accept their obligations, then the direst punishments would befall Jerusalem. Because he could swear by no greater, God swore by himself\(^{311}\) that the royal dwelling of the king of Judah would become desolate.

**Threat to the King’s House**

22:6-9

*For thus says Yahweh concerning the house of the king of Judah… (22:6a):* The central utterance of the message against kings is the following short oracle. *The house of the king of Judah* is probably the royal palace rather than the royal family; but the destinies of the two “houses” were intertwined. These vv suggest that time for positive action has past. Judah and her rulers have reached a point of no return.

**A. Threat Figuratively Stated (22:6):**

1. *What the palace is (22:6b): A Gilead are you to me, the top of Lebanon!* Because of the height of the palace, and because it was constructed from cedar-wood, the prophet calls it figuratively Gilead . . . the top of Lebanon. Both Gilead, a region east of the Jordan, and Lebanon were noted in antiquity for their stately forests. He may also be thinking of the members of the royal family as tall cedars, a figure not uncommon in his day.

2. *What the palace will become (22:6c): Surely I will make you a wilderness, as cities uninhabited.* The verb make (šît) means to make something into something (cf. 2:15). Forests were often denuded in time of war to provide fuel and weapons for an attacking army. So God will chop down the forest (palace) of the royal family. *Cities uninhabited* defines wilderness as meaning an unpopulated area. The high and mighty are brought down.

**B. Threat Amplified (22:7):**

1. *Preparation for battle (22:7a): And I will consecrate against you destroyers, each man and his weapons…* Consecrate (r. qdš) is the same verb used in 6:4 for battle preparation. This is the language of the holy war. Normally the hosts of Israel were consecrated to fight the wars of Yahweh. But now Yahweh is consecrating foreigners to fight his war against Jerusalem. For destroyers, compare 4:7 and 5:26. *Weapons (kēlîm)* can refer to tools.

2. *Result of battle (22:7b): and they shall cut down your choice cedars and cast them upon the fire.* The divinely appointed destroyers will take their weapons/tools and cut down the *choice cedars* of the land. *Your choice cedars* may have a double meaning i.e., the princes and leaders who lived in the palace, and the physical timbers that supported the palace structure.

\(^{311}\)The same expression occurs in Jer 49:13; Gn 22:16; and Isa 45:23. A similar expression occurs in Amos 6:8 and Jer 51:14.
C. Explanation of the Disaster (22:8-9): Using a “why...because” structure Jeremiah explains the destruction envisioned in the previous vv.

1. Question of passers-by (22:8): And many nations shall pass by this city; and they will say one to another, Why did Yahweh deal with this great city in this manner? On the verb pass by, see 18:16. Foreigners who pass by the ruins of Jerusalem will ask one another why the Lord has dealt with the once proud city in this manner. The question asked by the nations is repeated from Dt 29:23 and 1 Kgs 9:8.

2. Conclusion of passers-by (22:9): Then they will say, Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh their God and they bowed down to other gods and served them. The passers-by will rightly conclude that the destruction had come upon Judah because the people of Yahweh forsook their covenant with him and worshiped other gods. Bowing down or worshipping others gods is a common theme in the book.

No Hope for Shallum
22:10-12

This unit mirrors 22:1-5 where hope was held out to the royal family if urgently needed reforms were implemented. This unit stresses that there is no hope for one member of that royal family.

After the untimely death of King Josiah, at the pass of Megiddo in 609 BC, the people of the land selected his son Shallum to occupy the throne of Judah. He took the throne name Jehoahaz.

A. Admonition about Weeping (22:10):

1. Inappropriate weeping (22:10a): Do not weep for the dead, nor grieve for him! The dead refers to the beloved King Josiah who had been killed at Megiddo three months earlier. The death of Josiah was bitterly lamented. Even Jeremiah himself joined in the lamentation for this righteous man (1 Chr 35:25). But mourning over Josiah would not bring him back. Furthermore, by his premature death, Josiah was delivered from the horrors of those final years of Judah’s history. Now there was a more pressing need for lamentation. For grieve (r. nûd) see on 15:5.

2. Appropriate weeping (22:10b): Weep bitterly for the one who goes away... The reference is to King Jehoahaz who was deported by Pharaoh Neco to Egypt. After Jehoahaz had reigned but three months Pharaoh Neco summoned him to Riblah. The Pharaoh put him in chains. Jehoahaz was deported to Egypt (2 Kgs 23:30ff). This oracle must have been delivered shortly after the deportation of Jehoahaz. But as far as Jeremiah was concerned, tears were more appropriate for Jehoahaz than for Josiah. The verb goes (r. hlk) is sometimes used to describe death (2 Sam 12:23). Is Jeremiah suggesting that Jehoahaz in exile was as good as dead?

3. Explanation (22:10c): for he shall never again see the land of his birth. Jehoahaz would live out his life as a captive in a foreign land. There he would die. Dying in a foreign land was a fate worse than the premature death of King Josiah.

B. Prediction about Shallum (22:11-12):

1. He will not return (22:11): For thus says Yahweh concerning Shallum son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went out from this place: He shall no more return! Some people apparently believed that Jehoahaz would shortly return from Egypt to reclaim his throne. Jeremiah knew that this would not be the case. For the second time the prophet stresses that Shallum will never again return to Judah.

312 That Shallum is identical with the Jehoahaz of 2 Kgs is made clear by 1 Chron 3:15.
2. He will die in captivity (22:12): For in the place where they took him captive, there shall he die and this land he shall not see again. These words amplify the preceding v. Jehoahaz will not return to Judah because he will die in Egypt.

Condemnation of Royal Oppression
22:13-19

The third message of Part Three exhorted the royal family to implement justice and deliver from oppression. This documents that the royal family did not heed that exhortation.

When Jehoahaz was deported to Egypt in 609 BC, Pharaoh Neco put Jehoiakim on the throne of Judah. The stupidity of this monarch was only equaled by his pride, cruelty and covetousness.

A. Condemnation (22:13-15a):
1. Unjust projects (22:13a): Woe to him that builds his house with unrighteousness, and his upper chambers with injustice… The woe formula announces that death is come. The monarchy in Judah has entered into death throes. Specifically, the woe is pronounced on King Jehoiakim. A series of verbs is used to describe this king. All point to exploitation of others for the sake of self-exaltation. Jehoiakim was not satisfied to occupy the palace that his father Josiah had occupied before him. He wanted a bigger and more luxurious home like the rulers of Egypt or Babylon. Builds (r. bnh) may refer to a rebuilding effort (1 Kgs 12:25). So it is not clear whether Jehoiakim was building a new palace, or doing a major refurbishing of Solomon’s palace. Thus Jehoiakim was building his house with unrighteousness and injustice. Upper chambers refers to rooftop sleeping rooms that were designed to catch the breezes at night.313
2. Ruthless exploitation (22:13b): who makes his neighbor serve for nothing, and does not give his wages to him… Contrary to the teaching of the law and the prophets Jehoiakim forced his countrymen to labor on his projects without remuneration. The Hebrew prophets denounced this practice that was common in the ancient Near East.314 Not even a king could demand unpaid services from his subjects!
3. Grandiose plans (22:14): who says, I will build for myself a roomy house, with spacious upper rooms, and cuts windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it red. Jehoiakim's new palace was a roomy house with upper chambers and windows. The interior was paneled with cedar like Solomon’s palace (1 Kgs 7:7) and painted red.
4. Misplaced priorities (22:15a): Will you continue to reign because you are striving earnestly to excel in cedar? Jeremiah drove home the point that there is more to being a king than surrounding oneself with luxury. Jehoiakim should not think that he is entitled to reign merely because he can rival others in the building of cedar houses.

B. Contrast with his Father (22:15b-17):
1. Josiah focused on justice (22:15b-16):
   a. General description (22:15b): Did not your father eat and drink, and establish justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. By way of contrast to the pompous plans of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah points to the way that good king Josiah had conducted the affairs of the kingdom. Josiah ate and drank, i.e., he enjoyed the comforts of his regal status. But at the same time he established justice and righteousness in the land. He understood the responsibilities of kingship and performed those duties. He recognized the rights of other men and respected them.

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313Judg 3:20, 23; 1 Sam 9:25-26; 1 Kgs 17:19, 23; 2 Kgs 4:10-11.
314This was a practice reminiscent of that of Solomon (1 Kgs 5:27-28; 11:28).
As a result Josiah prospered and was blessed of God because he put first things first. Justice and righteousness are the antithesis of the vainglorious values of Jehoiakim.

b. Specific description (22:16a): *He judged the cause of the poor and needy. Then it was well.* Josiah was cognizant of the rights and needs of the less fortunate. For the second time the oracle mentions that *it was well* during his reign, i.e., he enjoyed a tranquil reign.

c. Application (22:16b): *Is not this what it means to know me (oracle of Yahweh)?* A person who really knows the Lord will see and seek to alleviate human suffering. Justice and righteousness are so fundamentally part of Yahweh’s character that one who belittles these qualities does not really know the God of the Bible.

2. Jehoiakim focused on oppression (22:17): *But your eyes and your heart are fixed solely upon your ill-gotten gain, upon shedding innocent blood and upon practicing oppression and violence.* Jehoiakim was the exact opposite of his godly father. He was determined to restore the glory of the throne and the splendor of the court. Any “little people” who stood in his way were ruthlessly eliminated. His covetous *eye* and wicked *heart* were fixed on ill-gotten gain. He would stop at nothing, even murder, to enlarge his holdings. For *oppression*, see on 6:6. For *shedding innocent blood* see 2:34.

C. Prediction (22:18-19):

1. An unlamented death (22:18):
   a. Unlamented like Josiah (22:18a): *Therefore, thus says Yahweh to Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah…* The contrast between the father and son continues even after death. Because of his flagrant wickedness, Jehoiakim would meet with an exceedingly shameful end. It was customary in Judah as in all other countries of the ancient Near East for kings and nobles to be interred with regal pomp and to have special dirges recited over their graves. Because he was universally loved, the whole nation lamented the death of godly Josiah (2 Chr 35:25). Four possible statements of grief are suggested in the remainder of the v.
   b. Unlamented by relatives (22:18b): *They shall not lament for him: Ah my brother! or Ah sister!* No one would shed a tear when Jehoiakim passed from the scene. The word *Ah* is part of the vocabulary of lamentation. It signifies extreme distress and sorrow. *Ah my brother!* or *Ah sister!* was no doubt a lament commonly uttered by relatives and friends to one another (1 Kgs 13:30).
   c. Unlamented by subjects (22:18c): *They shall not lament for him: Ah lord! or Ah his glory!* No mourners will assemble at the tomb of Jehoiakim to express sympathy for one another upon the loss of a great king. Still less would any lamentation be heard at his death that mentioned the lordship of Jehoiakim or his glory. The cry *Ah lord!* or *Ah his majesty!* was presumably an expression of grief reserved for the death of a king (cf. Jer 34:5). In the world of that day all kings were honored in death regardless of how bad they had been. The absence of public mourning over the death of the king is the ultimate humiliation.

2. An unburied body (22:19):
   a. Figuratively stated (22:19a): *With the burial of a donkey will he be buried…* The dishonor of the king continues in this v. Jehoiakim, who loved to live in pomp and splendor, would be buried with the burial of a *donkey*, i.e., would have no burial. The carcass of a dead donkey simply was left to rot in the open field.
No specific passage states that this prophecy was fulfilled. But 2 Kgs 24:6 does state *Jehoiakim slept with his fathers* 315 without mentioning the place of his burial. In most cases the Book of Kings mentions where the kings of Judah were buried. The fact that in the case of Jehoiakim this detail was omitted suggests that he did not receive the customary burial.

b. Graphically described (22:19b): *dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.* If this last indignity was heaped upon Jehoiakim after his death (and there is no good reason to think otherwise), then it was perpetrated by the people of Judah, not by the Chaldeans. Jehoiakim died just before the armies of Nebuchadnezzar arrived at the walls of Jerusalem in 597 BC. Another, though less likely, possibility is that the Babylonians dug up the body of the recently buried Jehoiakim as a final act of vengeance against him for violating the terms of his vassal treaty with Nebuchadnezzar.

### Exile for the People
22:20-23

In the second message of this collection the people were given these alternatives: fight the Babylonians and die; surrender to Nebuchadnezzar and live (21:8-10). Here the fate of those who surrendered is further developed. Divine punishment awaits the nation as well as the king.

A. Lamentation (22:20):

1. **Call for lamentation (22:20a):** *Go up to Lebanon and cry out, and lift up your voice in Bashan. Cry out from Abarim!* Under the figure of a woman, Israel was called upon to ascend the heights and bewail the fate of the country. The places named—Lebanon, Bashan, Abarim—were locations through which the Chaldeans must pass on their sweep southward toward Judah. The Lebanon Mountains were the northern entrance to Palestine. The Chaldeans would then pass through the hills of Bashan in the northeast. The Abarim is the mountain range southeast of the Dead Sea in which Mount Nebo was one of the prominent peaks. The double use of *cry out* reflects an urgent and desperate cry for help by a desperate Jerusalem.

2. **Reason for lamentation (22:20b):** *for all of your lovers are destroyed!* Everywhere lamentation is taken up as the enemy moved toward Jerusalem. No help would arise from any quarter, for all the lovers had been destroyed. These lovers are nations that had foolishly banded together in some sort of political pact to withstand Nebuchadnezzar.

B. Justification (22:21): *I spoke unto you in your prosperity. But you said, I will not hearken. This has been your way from your youth that you have not hearkened to my voice.* God had spoken to Israel in times of prosperity, but the nation had stubbornly refused to *hearken* to his words. From the time when Israel became a nation Judah had refused to give heed to the word of God. Prosperity breeds complacency. The double use of *hearken* (r. šm’) underscores that the decisive failure of Judah was in failing to pay attention to the voice of Yahweh.

C. Prediction (22:22-23):

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315 The same terminology is used of Ahab who died a violent death at the hands of the Syrians (1 Kgs 22:40).
1. Shepherds swept away (22:22a): *The wind shall shepherd all of your shepherds...* Judah’s shepherds—her political and religious leaders—will be driven by the wind as they are swept away into exile. Normally shepherds drive the flock before them. In 18:17 the east wind scatters the people; here God will shepherd the shepherds of Israel by means of the wind of divine judgment.

2. Lovers taken captive (22:22b): *and your lovers will go into captivity; surely then you will be ashamed and perplexed because of all of your evil.* The political lovers—allied nations in whom Israel trusted—will also go into captivity. The men of Judah will be ashamed and perplexed (cf. 6:15) as they come to realize the terrible evil that they have committed against their God.

   a. Their present attitude (22:23a): *O inhabitant of Lebanon, you who make your nest among the cedars...* Hitherto Jerusalem had enjoyed security like a bird nestled among the cedars in the high mountains of the Lebanon range. For this reason Jeremiah addresses the residents of Jerusalem as inhabitant of Lebanon. On the royal implications of inhabitant, see on 21:13. The use of the figure Lebanon for Jerusalem is appropriate in view of the fact that so many of the palaces and official buildings of that city were built of cedar wood from the Lebanon Mountains. Nest among the cedars is a figure for security. Jerusalem fancied herself out of the reach of predators. This oracle addresses Jerusalem in the days of its strength.
   b. Their future agony (22:23b): *how you are to be pitied when pangs come on you, travail like a woman in childbirth.* Jeremiah has nothing but pity for the proud city as he contemplates the terrible agony that Jerusalem shortly must endure, an agony comparable only to that suffered by a woman in travail (cf. 6:24).

**Coniah Removed**

22:24-30

The first message in Part Three depicted Zedekiah removed from the throne and from the land (21:1-7). This message speaks of Coniah being permanently removed from any royal standing.

Coniah’s throne-name was Jehoiachin. He was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC and taken away to Babylon to live out the rest of his days. His uncle, under the throne name Zedekiah, was then installed on the throne. Many continued to regard Jehoiachin as the legitimate king even after he had been deported. Some put great hopes in his soon return from Babylon to resume his reign.

A. Certainty of his Fate (22:24): *As I live (oracle of Yahweh), even if Coniah son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet upon my right hand, I would pull you off...* This man was a carbon copy of his father Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 24:9). For this reason God declared that even if Coniah were a signet upon his finger, he would pull him off, and cast him away. Because of its importance, the signet ring in antiquity was highly valued. It was guarded against any possible loss. That ring impressed into a bit of warm wax on a document made the document legally binding. The signet was the equivalent of the modern day signature.

The king of Judah was the earthly representative of the invisible King of Judah, the Lord of hosts. He exercised authority in the name of the Almighty. For this reason the king can be

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316 Kgs 7:2; 10:17, 21.
317 Jer 52:31. This monarch is also designated (in Hebrew) as Jeconiah (27:20), Jechonyahu (24:1 in Heb.) and Joiachin (Ezek 1:2). The name in its various forms means *The Lord will establish.* Besides here the name Coniah appears v 28 and 37:1.
318 A signet could also take the form of a cylinder seal worn on a cord around the neck (Gn 38:18).
compared to a signet on the hand of the Lord. But God swore with an oath formula (as I live) that Jehoiachin would be removed from this royal dignity. Yahweh had totally rejected the kingship of Jehoiachin. Those who regarded this man as the only legitimate king are thereby corrected.

B. Details of his Fate (22:25-26):

1. Delivered to Nebuchadnezzar (22:25): and I would place you in the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. When Yahweh removes the signet Jehoiachin from his right hand, he will deliver him into the hand of the ruthless Nebuchadnezzar. This language is frequently used to describe Yahweh’s sending people into exile. For Chaldeans, see on 21:4.

2. Taken to a foreign land (22:26): And I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another land where you were not born; and there you shall die. For hurl see 16:13. The corpse of Jehoiakim was thrown out of Jerusalem; his son is also to be thrown out of Jerusalem. The mother who bore you is the queen-mother, the influential Nehushta.319 Jehoiachin, along with the queen-mother, will be taken into another land, i.e., Babylon. There mother and son will die.

To die in a foreign land was considered one of the worst fates that could befall a person. The prophecy was fulfilled in 597 BC when Jehoiachin and the royal family were deported in chains to Babylon. Jehoiachin remained a captive of Babylon throughout the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. He was released after thirty-seven years of captivity by the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-merodach (2 Kgs 25:27-30). On there you shall die, see 20:6.

Jehoiachin must have died in Babylon before the restoration of the Jews in 538 BC or else he surely would have been made the leader of the returnees at that time.

C. Harshness of his Fate (22:27-28):

1. Failure to return emphasized (22:27): But to the land where they long to return, they shall not return. Vv 24-26 speak of the exile of king Jehoiachin as something in the future. But vv 27-30 presuppose that the exile had begun already. Here, as so often in prophetic literature, the prophet has projected himself into the future beyond 597 BC when Jehoiachin would be taken into captivity. He describes what he knows the attitude of the captives will be. They will long to return to Palestine but will not be permitted to do so.

2. Exile to Babylon questioned (22:28): Jeremiah finds it hard to believe the words of his own prophecy. By means of a favorite literary device — a series of questions320 — he expresses his incredulity. Why must Jehoiachin and his seed suffer the terrible fate of deportation to a foreign land?

a. Despised vessel (22:28a): Is this man Coniah a despised and broken vessel? Is he a vessel in which there is no delight? Despised (nibhzeh) is the same word used twice to describe the messianic servant in Isa 53:3. Broken (nāpûts) means shattered, smashed. The vessel (k’lî) envisioned is probably one made of pottery. A vessel in which there is no delight is quoted from Hos 8:8 where it is used of the northern kingdom of Israel. The phrase appears again in 48:38. Jehoiachin will be destroyed like a piece of junk.

319See Jer 29:2; 2 Kgs 24:8. An oracle has already been delivered to this prominent woman in Jer 13:18.
320Jeremiah elsewhere employs the repeated question to state an unnatural, incomprehensible fact. See 8:4f.; 8:22; 14:19.
b. Discarded refuse (22:28b): For what reason were he and his seed hurled away, and cast into a land that they do not know? The verb hurl (r. tûl) is repeated from v 26. In 16:13 the entire population is hurled out of the land. This term is used of hurling a spear, and of hurling Jonah overboard. Cast (r. šlk) is the same verb used of the dumping of King Jehoiakim’s body outside the walls of Jerusalem in v 19. But a worse fate awaits Jehoiakim’s son; he and his seed will be cast into a land that they do not know, i.e., a distant land.

Jeremiah is reflecting a great deal of sympathy toward the young king who was destined to reign only three months on the throne of Judah (2 Kgs 24:8). Though Jehoiachin was but eighteen years old when taken captive, he had wives (2 Kgs 24:15) and apparently seed, i.e., children.

D. Consequences of his Fate (22:29-30):

1. Address (22:29-30a): O land, land, land! Hear the word of Yahweh! (30) Thus says Yahweh: As Jeremiah reached the climax of his pronouncement against Jehoiachin, he dramatically called the entire land to listen to the announcement of the tragic fate of this king. The three-fold repetition of land anticipates the solemnity of the message that follows.

2. Threat of childlessness (22:30b): Write this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days… The command is to enter Jehoiachin in the register of the citizens as one who has no heirs. Normally kings ordered the registering of the nation (2 Sam 24). But Jehoiachin is no long king. The word childless is not to be taken in the absolute sense since v 28 already has mentioned the seed or children of Jehoiachin. The meaning is that, as far as the throne was concerned, Jehoiachin would be childless. The rest of the v makes this perfectly clear. Prosper means to succeed in preserving the power of the dynasty.

3. Details of the threat (22:30c): for he shall not be successful in having one of his descendants sit on the throne of David or rule again over Judah. No son of Jehoiachin would ever rule over Judah. It is interesting to note that Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, did serve as governor of the restored community once the exile in Babylon had ended.

Jesus, a descendant of Jehoiachin (Mt 1:12), became king, but not over Judah. At his ascension he was crowned king of all kings. He sits enthroned on the throne of David in heavenly Jerusalem, for the throne of David was in reality God’s throne (1 Chr 29:23).

Those who teach that Jesus is to return to sit on David’s throne in earthly Jerusalem are dealt a blow by this prediction concerning Jehoiachin’s descendants. Should Jesus return to occupy David’s throne in Jerusalem on earth, Jeremiah would be proven to be a false prophet.

Failed Kings and Future King

The collection of messages concerning kings of Judah comes to climax with an undated oracle announcing the removal of Judah’s shepherds (leaders) and the coming of a glorious future king. A general indictment against the current leadership (vv 1-2b) is followed by three glorious promises, each introduced by behold.

A. Present Leaders Indicted (23:1-2):
1. They have scattered the flock (23:1): How sad it is that shepherds are destroying and scattering the flock of my pasture! (oracle of Yahweh). How sad it is (hôy) is part of the vocabulary of lament. It is a sad situation that the prophet was describing in v 1. The shepherds — the national leaders — are responsible for the impending destruction of the flock, i.e., Israel (cf. Ezek 34). The shepherds were more focused on their own interests than on the well-being of the flock.

The Israelites were the flock of my pasture, i.e., they belonged to Yahweh. Their spiritual and political leaders should have realized that Yahweh would hold them accountable for the mismanagement of the flock. Under the unscrupulous leaders, the people of the land had strayed from the paths of fidelity to God. Not only did these leaders set the wrong example for the people, they also condoned and encouraged the violence that was rampant in the land.

2. They are about to be punished (23:2):
   a. Address (23:2a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who are caring for my people...
The messenger formula is like those used in 22:11, 18. Caring is used in the sense of purporting to care for, or obligated to care for.
   b. Charge (23:2b): you have scattered my flock and driven them away, and you have not visited them...
The leaders had not visited the flock of God. Therefore God is about to visit these corrupt leaders (v 2). The Hebrew word translated visit has a wide variety of meanings. It may mean to attend to, to visit, muster, appoint, and pay attention to. The word can be used in a positive or a negative sense. One can visit for the purpose of aiding or helping, or one can visit for the purpose of judging or punishing. The shepherds had neglected the flock, and the sheep died as surely as if they had been slaughtered by their leaders.

B. Promise #1: Gathering (23:2c-4): After the destruction of national Judah, Yahweh will begin a new work among the remnant.
   1. Work of the Good Shepherd (23:2c-3):
      a. Punishing present leaders (23:2c): behold, I am about to visit upon you the evil of your deeds. The spiritual leaders of Judah did not visit the flock, i.e., they did not care for, or aid them, or pay attention to them. Therefore, God will visit on them their evil deeds, i.e., God will punish them for their wickedness. This type of word play is common in the prophetic books. For evil of your deeds, see 4:4.
         By pointing the finger of blame at the national leaders, Jeremiah does not mean to excuse the populace from any responsibility for the condition of the nation. The people are guilty for having tolerated their wicked leaders.
      b. Gathering the flock (23:3a): Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands where I have driven them...
The scattering of vv1-2 is reversed. Someday the Good Shepherd will again gather his flock. Only the remnant is gathered. The term points to both quantity and quality. A small group within Israel was the spiritual remnant that would return from captivity. Apparently, the majority will be lost during the period of exile. God will gather his people from the various lands—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon—where he had scattered them.
      c. Restoring the flock (23:3b): and I will cause them to return to their pasture... The rightful sheep will brought back to their pasture.

d. Multiplying the flock (23:3b): *and they will be fruitful and multiply.* Upon returning to their homeland the remnant of Judah will be made fruitful and they will multiply.\(^{322}\) *Be fruitful and multiply* reflects the command that originally was given to Adam, Noah, and Jacob; it is also a promise made to Israel (Lv 26:9).

2. Future shepherds (23:4): As part of their new beginning, Yahweh will provide his flock with new leadership.
   a. They will tend the flock (23:4a): *And I will raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them;* After the remnant returns, God will raise up for his people a new kind of ruler. The wicked shepherds took care of themselves, not the flock; but the new shepherds will have the interest of the people at heart.
   b. They will protect the flock (23:4b): *and they will not fear anymore nor will they be terrified, nor will they be lacking (oracle of Yahweh).* The old shepherds had left the flock of God exposed to wild beasts (cf. Ezek 34:8); under the new shepherds the flock will graze contentedly. Not one of them will be lacking or missing due to any neglect on the part of the new shepherds.

   Who are the new shepherds of whom Jeremiah speaks? Some contend that Jeremiah was referring to leaders like Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah whom God raised up to care for the remnant of Judah following the return from Babylon. Others think the prediction is messianic and points to those leaders who serve under the glorious Ruler who appears in the following verse. As is frequently the case in prophecy, prophecies of restoration blend with prophecies of the Messiah and his kingdom.

C. Promise #2: Messiah (23:5-6):

1. His coming (23:5a): *Behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will raise up…* *Behold* indicates that a noteworthy announcement is about to be made. Jeremiah uses the formula *behold days are coming* sixteen times to introduce messages of reassurance. After the days of humiliation at the hands of Babylon, God will raise up an ideal King to rule over the land. This ruler is of course none other than the long-awaited Messiah.

2. His ancestry (23:5b): *for David a righteous Shoot.* The promised Messiah was to be the descendant of David.\(^{323}\) Through the prophet Nathan, God had promised David that his progeny would sit forever on the throne of Israel (2 Sam 7).

   Messiah is called in most English versions a *branch.* However, the Hebrew word is never used of a twig or individual branch of a tree. Rather the idea is a *sprout or shoot* that grows directly out of the ground. The title *shoot* is here applied unmistakably to Messiah for the first time. In Zech 3:8 and 6:12 *shoot* becomes a proper name for the Messiah. It was necessary for the Davidic shoot to be raised up by Yahweh because the old stock of David was worn out, incapable of reproducing from itself a mighty tree.

   Messiah will be a *righteous* Shoot. All other descendants of David had to confess their sins and ask divine forgiveness. Messiah would be sinless (Isa 53:9). He did not *become* righteous; he *was* righteous (Isa 53:11).

3. His reign (23:5c):
   a. Legitimate (23:5c): *He will reign as king…* Messiah will reign as legitimately as king.\(^{324}\) Jeremiah looks forward to the rule of a second David. That the reign of Christ already has begun is the clear testimony of the NT.\(^{325}\)

\(^{322}\text{Compare Ezek 34:12-15.}\)
\(^{323}\text{Cf. Isa 9:7; 11:1; Mic 5:2.}\)
b. Wise (23:5d): **he will act wisely**… Messiah will act wisely. The same Hebrew verb could be translated **he will prosper**. But in the light of Isa 11:2, probably the former translation is preferable. Messiah will have the insight and the intelligence to bring God’s plan of salvation to a successful completion. He will rule his kingdom in such a way as to bring joy, happiness and prosperity to all his subjects.

c. Ideal (23:5e): **and execute justice and righteousness in the land**. Executing **justice and righteousness** sums up the function of the ideal ruler (cf. 2 Sam 8:15). Messiah is able to create a new norm — a new righteousness.326

4. His work (23:6a): **In his days**… The phrase recalls 22:30. The work of the future is described in terms of Judah and Israel. Jeremiah obviously anticipates a united people of God under the rule of Messiah. Hosea and Ezekiel held out a similar hope (Hos 1:11; Ezek 37:19).

   a. Salvation (23:6b): **Judah will be rescued**… At the outset of his ministry Jeremiah held out the hope that Jerusalem might be rescued (4:14). At some point he began to realize that the hoped for rescue would not materialize. Now the news comes that Yahweh himself will appoint a king to orchestrate the rescue. But the rescue that this future king will effect is far beyond what Jeremiah or any of his contemporaries could have imagined.

   b. Tranquility (23:6c): **and Israel will dwell securely**… The rescue envisioned for Judah is described in terms of dwelling **securely** for Israel. For the people of God to dwell quietly without being harassed by enemies was a dream that can be traced back to Mosaic days (Lv 26:5; Dt 33:28).327

      Thus reunited Judah/Israel—the people of God of messianic days—are those who have experienced salvation and the peace resulting from it. Jeremiah is not thinking in political terms. Reunited Judah and Israel never regained political independence, except for one brief period under the Hasmonean rulers in the second century before Christ.

5. His name (23:6d):

   a. Uniquely introduced (23:6d): **and this is his name that he will be called**… Laetsch has pointed out the unique manner in which this name is introduced here. The Lord does not merely say: His name **is** or **shall be** (as is said of Abraham — Gn 17:5b); nor does he say: **call his name** (as in the case of Ishmael — Gn 16:11, 13); nor yet does he say: **This shall he be called** (as is used of Jerusalem—Jer 33:16). The phraseology used here is unique in the entire OT: **And this is his name that one shall call him**. According to Laetsch, two facts are underscored by this construction: (1) the name given Messiah is not a mere label or tag. Rather it designates the very nature or essence of Messiah. He is righteousness! (2) God desires that mankind should refer to Messiah by the title here given.

   b. Theologically significant (23:6e): **Yahweh our Righteousness**. In 33:16 Jeremiah gives this same name to the city of Jerusalem. The current king, whose legitimacy Jeremiah questioned, had a throne name Zedekiah that means **Yahweh is my righteousness**. It appears that the name of Messiah is a play off the name Zedekiah. In Messiah’s name Yahweh stands first in the Hebrew, a reversal of its position in

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324The survival of Jehoiachin in exile and installation of Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar must have raised questions about which king was legitimate. In Jeremiah’s view, neither of them was legitimate. The next great king from the line of David would be installed by Yahweh himself.

325See Heb 1:3-13; 10:12-13; Rev 3:21; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Acts 2:19-34

326Seven times Jeremiah uses the Hebrew verb meaning **do** or **make** with the word for **justice**. Thus the Messiah creates or makes justice and righteousness.

327Being **saved/rescued** (Niphal of r. yš’) and **dwell** (r. škn) **securely** (betach) are linked already in Dt 33:28f.
Zedekiah’s name. Perhaps this hints that Messiah will be a king of a different kind. In any case, the name proclaims the fact that Messiah’s people have no righteousness of their own. God provides the righteousness that he imputes to his people through faith in the work of Messiah. The name promises a reign that brings tranquility through administration of justice.

D. Promise #3: Exodus (23:7-8):
1. Introduction (23:7a): *Therefore behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh)*… In vv 7-8 the prophet moves back from the distant messianic future to the more immediate future. The promise is introduced by the word *therefore*. This suggests that God lets his people return to their homeland as a preparation for the coming of the great messianic Savior of whom Jeremiah has been speaking in vv 5-6. *Behold* introduces an unexpected turn of events. *Days are coming* is repeated from v 5. The phrase serves as a pointer to messianic times. *Oracle of Yahweh* stresses the divine origin and solemn certainty of the promise that follows.

2. Past redemptive work of God (23:7b): *when they will no longer say, As Yahweh lives who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt*… Using essentially the language of 16:14f, Jeremiah speaks once again of the return from Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah never wavered on this proposition: God will bring a remnant of his people home from Babylon. This return from Babylon will overshadow the Exodus from Egypt. For *as Yahweh lives* see 4:2. Old Israel was broken beyond repair (19:11); a new beginning is necessary.

3. Future redemptive work of God (23:8):
   a. A new exodus (23:8a): *but, As Yahweh lives who brought up and led the seed of the house of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where I have driven them*. Since the Exodus from Egypt was foundational to the establishment of the old covenant, it is no small matter for Jeremiah to state that the new exodus from Babylon will supersede that earlier event in importance. Only when the exodus from Babylon is seen as foundational to the establishment of the New Covenant is such a comparison justified. *Land of the north* appears at least five times in the book. *Lands where I have driven them* is the usual way of referring to the exile.
   b. A new occupation (23:8b): *Then they shall dwell upon their (own) ground*. The threat of 12:14 is reversed. As the occupation of Canaan followed the Exodus from Egypt, so those who have been rescued from the bondage of sin will occupies the antitypical land of Canaan, i.e., the kingdom of Christ.

PART FOUR
MESSAGES CONCERNING PROPHETS
Jeremiah 23:9-29:32

The seven messages that constitute Part Four of the book all more or less directly pertain to prophets. In these chs the term prophet occurs twenty-six times in the singular and twenty-eight times in the plural. The messages are arranged in a chiastic structure that is illustrated in the following diagram.

a. Judah prophets condemned (23:9-32),
   b. Contrasting views of Judeans (24:1-10),
   c. Cup message: Babylon rule (25:1-38)
c. Yoke message: Babylon rule (27:1-22)
a. Babylon prophets condemned (29:1-32)

Against the prophets. The prophets against whom Jeremiah speaks out are men who were purporting to speak in the name of the Lord when they had received no revelation from him. They are akin to those self-serving court prophets that appear in 1 Kgs 22 as part of the court of Ahab. The pseudo-prophets enjoyed a large measure of popular support in the days of Jeremiah. They tickled the ears of the people with the kind of preaching that they craved. These men were a major hindrance to the effective proclamation of the word of God.

That there existed a mutual antagonism between the true messenger of God and these charlatans is evident in the passages where they are mentioned. Jeremiah lashed out against them throughout his ministry.

SECTION ONE
JUDAH PROPHETS CONDEMNED
Jeremiah 23:9-32

The terms prophets/prophet occur seventeen times in this unit. The unit has five components. There is little discernable theme development within these components. Each accuses the prophets of betraying their ministerial office by falsifying Yahweh’s word and/or encouraging ungodly behavior. The material seems to be developed loosely in a chiastic pattern.

a. Holiness of Yahweh’s words (23:9-12)
c. Warning: Don’t Listen (23:16-22)
b. Ministerial perversion (23:23-32)
a. Pilfering of Yahweh’s words (23:33-40)

Holiness of Yahweh’s Word
23:9-12

Section One begins with a more general indictment of religious leaders, priests as well as prophets and a pronouncement of judgment upon them.

A. Impact of Yahweh’s Word (23:9): Jeremiah did not fit the stereotype of the hell-fire and damnation preacher. As he contemplated the impending destruction of his people, Jeremiah experiences emotional collapse.

1. A confession (23:9a): My heart is broken within me, all my bones shake… The heart is the seat of thinking and planning (4:4). In this passage Jeremiah may be referring to his reason that is broken. He is disturbed in mind by the shocking revelation of what was in store for Jerusalem. Bones refer to the inner most being of the prophet.

2. A comparison (23:9b): I am like a drunk man, and like a strong man whom wine has overcome… Drunkenness is associated with sorrow and shock. An inebriated person is confused and uncoordinated. His powers of reason and perception are impaired. So Jeremiah is confused and sorrowful about what the Lord was about to do to Judah.

3. An explanation (23:9c): because of Yahweh, and because of his holy words. The knowledge that God was about to bring judgment upon the wicked people of Judah has caused the prophet much grief and much perplexity.

B. Indictment of Yahweh’s Word (23:10-11): One reason for Jeremiah’s emotional crisis is that the holy words of Yahweh within his heart make him keenly aware of the wickedness of the people of Judah and their leaders.

1. Wickedness of the people (23:10):
   a. Adultery (23:10a): For the land is full of adulterers... Jeremiah was grief-stricken because of the sinfulness of the masses. The land was full of literal and spiritual adultery (cf. 3:8; 9:2). Yahweh’s holy words were diametrically opposed to the accepted lifestyle of the day. For this reason Jeremiah’s message brought him much grief.
   b. Drought (23:10b): for the earth mourns because of a curse; the pastures of the wilderness have dried up. The condition of the land brought the prophet much distress. The earth is said to mourn when it is unable to bring forth its produce. The curse is that with which God punishes the wicked. The pastures have dried up. This passage may well date to the time of the drought mentioned in 14:1.
   c. Evil lifestyle (23:10c): Their course is evil, and their strength is not right... The land was under the curse of God because of the sin of its inhabitants. The course of the people—their way of life—is only evil. Strength (g'hûrâh) is used of warriors (9:23) and of Yahweh, the divine warrior, (10:6; 16:21). But the Judean leaders use their strength for what is not right, i.e., for crookedness.

2. Wickedness of leaders (23:11):
   a. Profane in private life (23:11a): for both the prophets and the priests are profane. The greatest burden to the heart of Jeremiah was the condition of the spiritual leaders of the land. Both the priests and the prophets were disobedient to the commands of God. Profane (r. chnp) means to commit sacrilege, i.e., deeds that are opposed to Yahweh.
   b. Profane in God’s house (23:11b): yea in my house I have found their wickedness (oracle of Yahweh). In the very temple of God evidence of priestly wickedness could be found. Found in this context suggests the meaning discover or detect. This is the only place in the OT where God is said to discover or detect a transgression. Perhaps the thought is that the wickedness may not be obvious to the casual observer, but God with his all-seeing eye has discovered the transgression. The verb may also hint at surprise, disappointment or shock in what has been discovered.

   Just exactly what wickedness Jeremiah is referring to here is uncertain. Ezekiel spoke of the totemistic worship of figures of animals in the inner chambers. He alludes to women weeping for the nature god Tammuz in the courts of the temple (Ezek 8:10-14). These pagan practices could not have been going on without the active cooperation of the priests.

   False prophets were probably preaching their perversions of the word of God in the temple precincts. Being both priest and prophet, Jeremiah was keenly aware of the guilt of the men who occupied both of these offices.

C. Sentence of Yahweh’s Word (23:12):

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329See Zech 5:3; Dan 9:11; Isa 24:6; Lv 26:14ff; Dt 28:16ff.
330For an example of the kind of conduct that is covered by this verb, see on 3:1.
1. Slippery places in darkness (23:12a): *Therefore, their way will become to them as slippery places in deep darkness. They will be pushed forward and fall on it…* Up to this point the false prophets had pursued their evil course with assurance; but now God will make their way slippery and dangerous as they plunge forward into the darkness of sin. The imagery here is comparable to that of 13:16 and Ps 35:6. By circumstances and by Satan these wicked men are driven forward to ever more treacherous ground until they finally fall to their destruction.

2. Year of their visitation (23:12b): *for I will bring against them calamity, the year of their visitation (oracle of Yahweh).* The year of their visitation is the time of their punishment.

### Moral Failure

23:13-15

The focus of these vv narrows to the prophets. They failed the morality test. Their ungodly lifestyle was actually encouraging wicked behavior.

#### A. Sin of Samaria’s Prophets (23:13):

1. What God saw in them (23:13a): **In the prophets of Samaria I saw unseemliness…** In the eyes of God the prophets of Judah were more wicked than the prophets of Samaria. The nature of the *unseemliness* (*tipḥlāh*) is hard to ascertain. The only other usage of the term is in Job 1:22 where Job did not accuse God of unseemliness. A related word is used of tasteless food (Job 24:12) and worthless prophecies (Lam 2:14). The Baal prophets of the north had been lit., unsalted, tasteless. Saltless food is tasteless, bland, without distinctive character.

2. What they did (23:13b): **they prophesied by Baal and caused my people Israel to err.** Proof of the unseemliness of the northern prophets is now offered. They had *prophesied by Baal* (cf. 2:8). There was nothing in their message to distinguish them from pagan prophets. Their message came from the Baal cult, not Yahweh. This kind of preaching caused God’s people in the north to *err* or go astray. The same idea appears in Mic 3:5 as an indictment against the Jerusalem prophets.

#### B. Sin of Judah’s Prophets (23:14):

1. Moral failure (23:14a): **But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen an astonishing thing…** The prophets of Judah were far worse than the prophets of Samaria. By professing themselves to be spokesmen for God, they were putting God’s stamp of approval upon the most terrible deeds. They themselves were immoral and unscrupulous. To describe their immoral lifestyle Jeremiah repeats the word *ša’arūrāh* (astonishing, horrible thing) from 5:30. Two examples of the horrible thing Yahweh had discovered in the Jerusalem prophets are cited.

   a. Sexual impurity (23:14b): **committing adultery…** They committed adultery… The term is probably a metaphor for Baal worship as in Hos 4:12-14. But personal immorality cannot be ruled out.

   b. Falsehood (23:14c): **walking in lies…** Lies could be a metaphor for deceitful idols, the message of the prophets, or general unscrupulous conduct.


   a. Encouraging evil (23:14d): **and they have strengthened the hands of the evil ones, with the result that no one turns from his evil.** To strengthen someone’s hands is to encourage them (Judg 9:24). By their own hypocrisy and their failure in preaching
these prophets supported, endorsed and encouraged evildoers. The false prophets did not preach repentance (cf. 18:11) or judgment like Jeremiah. Consequently, no man turned away from his evil deeds.

b. Failure to discern jeopardy (23:14e): They are all to me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. Preaching judgment would have been obvious to anyone with a modicum of spiritual discernment. Certainly the Judeans deserved total destruction. In this respect they were like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

C. Sentence Pronounced (23:15):
1. Introduction (23:15a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh of hosts concerning the prophets… This is the standard introduction for a judgment speech in the book.
2. Metaphor (23:15b): Behold, I am about to feed them wormwood, and cause them to drink poisoned water… Behold indicates a shocking, unexpected announcement. The prophets will experience the same fate as the people to whom they preached. The prophets, as well as the people, will consume wormwood and gall. See on 9:15. The language is ironic. Prophets made their living by what comes out of their mouths. Now they will meet their doom by what goes into their mouths. There is no exemption for the clergy when it comes to divine judgment!
3. Explanation (23:15c): for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out to all the land. From the prophets of Jerusalem, ungodliness had spread throughout the land. Good prophets may not have much of an impact upon society. But let reports circulate of evil conduct on the part of clergymen spread and every sinner will use it as an excuse to commit even greater evils.

Warning: Don’t Listen
23:16-22

A. A Message Repudiated (23:16-17):
1. Result of their message (23:16a, b):
   a. Exhortation (23:16a): Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Do not hearken to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. Jeremiah calls for the people to repudiate these deceivers.
   b. Explanation (23:16b): They are causing you to become vain! The prophets of Judah are bolstering the false hopes of the people with false prophecies. Become vain (r. hbl) recalls 2:5 where the previous generations had walked after vanity (hebhel) and become vain. In Jeremiah’s generation the message of the false prophets was reproducing this phenomenon. There was no substance to the message of the prophets. Giving heed to such empty prophecies can only cause the people to act in a vain and foolhardy way.
2. Source of their message (23:16c): They speak a vision of their heart and not one from the mouth of Yahweh. Their prophecies did not come from the mouth of the Lord, but from the vain imaginations of their own hearts/minds. Their message was not the result of daydreaming; it was systematically devised distortion guided by the tenets of a faulty theology. Jeremiah, not the false prophets, was the mouth of Yahweh (15:19). The word from the mouth of Yahweh was a word of death (9:20).
3. Essence of their message (23:17): The false prophets were continually grinding out their pious platitudes. The Hebrew uses a grammatical device to emphasize the ceaseless flow of words that were pouring forth from these pseudo prophets.
a. Stated positively (23:17a): They say continually to those who despise me, Yahweh has said: You will have peace... Despise (r. n'ts) is used of those who disregard or devalue Yahweh or his manifestations. Those who despise Yahweh are the hardened and rebellious sinners of Judah. The expression Yahweh has said nowhere else in the OT introduces a revelation from the Lord. If this was the formula by which these false prophets actually introduced their supposed oracles, then it differed from those formulas used by Jeremiah and the other prophets whose books have been preserved in Scripture. Peace embodies all that people long for in life, including prosperity and security (cf. 4:10; 14:13).

b. Stated negatively (23:17b): and to all who walk in the stubbornness of their heart they have said: Calamity will not come upon you. On walking in the stubbornness of one’s heart, see on 7:24 (cf. 3:17). Calamity is lit. evil. The term can refer to natural disasters or to military invasions.

B. Message of Yahweh (23:18-20):

1. It comes from the council of Yahweh (23:18): By means of two rhetorical questions, Jeremiah denied the authority of the false prophets. At the same time, implicitly he affirmed his own inspiration. The answer to the two questions is obvious. Corrupt men like the false prophets could never have stood in the presence of God.

a. First rhetorical question (23:18a): For who has stood in the secret council of Yahweh that he might see and hear his word?331 Amos asserted, Surely Yahweh will do nothing unless he reveals his secret counsel (same word used by Jeremiah) unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). David declared that God extends his secret counsel to the pious (Ps 25:14). Sometimes the prophets had visions in which they saw the Lord in consultation with his trusted servants (Isa 6:1; 1 Kgs 22:19). Eliphaz asked Job, Were you listening in the council of God? (Job 15:8).

The picture is of the heavenly council chambers. True prophets are privy to the decisions of God relating to the children of men. This is figurative way of saying that the prophet receives direct revelation from God.

b. Second rhetorical question (23:18b): Who has paid attention to his word and heard it? The second rhetorical question points to another way in which man can ascertain the will of God. When one gives heed to the word of God as revealed in Scripture, he too can learn the will of God. The false prophets had not been privileged to stand in the secret council of God, nor had they paid heed to his written word.

2. It focuses on the coming storm (23:19): Behold, the storm of Yahweh has gone forth in fury, a whirlwind; it will whirl upon the heads of the wicked. Behold is Jeremiah’s regular way of introducing the shocking and unexpected. The message that Jeremiah brought in the name of God was quite different from what the false prophets brought. God’s judgment is already approaching like a storm/whirlwind. These terms for strong wind seem to be synonymous. The judgment storm will whirl (lit. dance around) upon the head of the wicked.

3. It is rooted in the anger of Yahweh (23:20a): The anger of Yahweh will not be turned back until he has accomplished and performed the plans of his heart. The hurricane of divine wrath is upon them. Nothing will turn back God’s wrath. Attempting to thwart the plans of God by human means is as foolish as trying to tame a tornado at the height of its fury. Accomplished/performed are synonymous.

331His word may also be read my word. The ancient versions are divided on the translation. Actually it makes little difference which reading is adopted.
4. *It will not be appreciated (23:20b): In the end of the days you will fully understand it.* Though the people may not presently be able to understand the plans and purposes of God, someday they will understand it all. At that time they will realize that they have been justly punished for their sins against God and man.

*End of days* has been explained in three ways. (1) Some think that the *end of days* refers to the consummation of the world. The idea would then be that at the end of the age—possibly after the second coming of Christ—men will be able to understand clearly all of God’s dealing with men. It cannot be sustained from the usage of this term in the OT that it refers to the end of the world. (2) Others think that *end of days* refers to the messianic age. The idea would then be that God’s dealing with Israel would be placed in proper perspective when Messiah comes. (3) A third view is that the term *end of days* simply means *in future days*. Cheyne points to an Assyrian inscription in which precisely the same phrase is used in the general sense of future time. Probably the second view is the correct interpretation in this passage.

C. *Message Repudiated (23:21-22):*

1. *They were not sent by God (23:21): I have not sent the prophets, yet they ran! I have not spoken unto them, yet they prophesied!* In vv 17-20 Jeremiah emphasized the point that the message of the false prophets was diametrically opposed to true revelation. Yahweh had sent Jeremiah (1:7); but God had not sent these prophets. Yet they eagerly ran to assume their prophetic office. God had not spoken to them, yet they had the audacity to prophesy in his name.

2. *They did not turn men from sin (23:22): If they had stood in my council, then they would have caused my people to hear my words, and they would have caused them to turn from their wicked way, and from the evil of their deeds.* As further proof that these men were deceivers, Jeremiah points out that their preaching was not designed to effect any moral change. Their message had no rebuke for sin and no appeal for reformation. Therefore, these men could not be true prophets of the Lord! If they truly had stood in the secret council (cf. v 18) of God they would diligently be laboring to turn people from their evil ways.

**Ministerial Perversion**

23:23-32

A. *Stupidity of Deception (23:23-24):* In a series of three rhetorical questions, Jeremiah presents deep theological truth.

1. *God is near at hand (23:23): Am I a God near at hand (oracle of Yahweh), and not a God far off?* This question brings out the thought of God’s transcendence. Unlike the pagan gods, Yahweh is not restricted to one place at a time. He was not confined to a temple or shrine. He dwells far off, where no man can approach him, let alone manipulate him. He is not inseparably attached to any shrine. Jeremiah’s rivals embraced a theology of Yahweh’s abiding commitment to the Jerusalem temple and his presence within Jerusalem.

2. *God knows all (23:24a): Can a man hide himself in secret places that I am not able to see him (oracle of Yahweh)?* This question brings out the thought of God’s omniscience. Though God is far off and thus impossible to manipulate, his vision and

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332 As in Jer 48:47; 49:39; Isa 2:2; Hos 3:5.
knowledge embrace all things happening on the earth. The remote past and the distant future are equally known to him.

3. **God created the universe (23:24b): Do not I fill the heavens and the earth (oracle of Yahweh)?** This question points to the fact that God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at once.

   Three times in vv 23-24 the phrase *oracle of the Lord* occurs. This transcendent, omniscience, omnipresent God is the Lord, i.e., Yahweh, the great I Am, who is unlimited by space and time. The false prophets have not escaped the notice of God. He has heard the lies that they have been prophesying in his name.

**B. Exposure of Deception (23:25-27):**

1. **Their false claims (23:25): I have heard what the prophets who have been prophesying lies in my name have said: I have dreamed! I have dreamed!** The prophets boasted of their dreams as though the mere claim to having received revelation was sufficient to prove that they were prophets of God.

   In Dt 13:1 a false prophet is described as a *dreamer of dreams*. God did at times, however, reveal his will through dreams. In Nm 12:6 God is said to make himself known to prophets by visions and dreams. Joel 2:28 predicts that in the messianic age the old men will dream dreams. It is interesting, however, that between Nm 12:6 (the very early period of Israel’s history) and Joel 2:28 (the distant messianic age) scarcely anything is said of dreams as a medium of revelation to prophets. Often prophets received communications from God in the night, but these are called visions, not dreams (2 Sam 7:14, 17; Zech 4:1). While dreams were not an illegitimate method of receiving divine revelation, as a matter of fact those who were true prophets rarely received revelation in that particular manner. The present passage seems to discredit the false prophets on the grounds that they claimed to receive divine revelation through dreams. Furthermore, the fact that the prophets permitted what God had forbidden in His word stamped their dreams as products of their own heart (cf. Dt 13:1-3).

2. **Their ugly intentions (23:26-27):** Two questions are asked in vv 26-27.
   a. **Short question (23:26a): How long?** The first question is quite general: How long? i.e., how much longer will these men continue their deception and falsehood?
   b. **Long question (23:26b-27): Do the prophets who prophesy falsehood and are prophets of the deceit of their own heart think, (27) do they plan to make my people forget my name with their dreams that they relate each one to his neighbor as their fathers forgot my name because of Baal?** The second question is more penetrating, probing the possible motives of the false prophets. Is it their purpose to cause the people to forget the name of God and all that his name stands for? False teaching leads people away from the Lord. As these prophets peddled their pernicious platitudes from door to door (lit., *each man to his neighbor*), they were sabotaging true faith. False doctrine is as dangerous as idolatry. Jeremiah’s generation was in as much danger of being deceived by a false theology as their fathers who had been deceived by Baal worship.

**C. Inferiority of Deception (23:28-29):**

1. **Their word is pathetic (23:28):**
   a. **A dream vs. God’s word (23:28a): The prophet who has a dream, let him relate a dream; and the one who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully.** There is

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333 Gn 15:12; 20:3; 31:24; 37:5.
nothing wrong with the prophets relating their dreams. When they do so, however, they should make it very clear that they are relating only a dream and nothing more. They should not pretend that these dreams are divine revelations.

b. Straw vs. wheat (23:28b): What does straw have to do with wheat (oracle of Yahweh)? Chaff and wheat—the word of God and the dreams of men—must be kept separate. What is worthless should never be allowed to contaminate what is pure. A preacher who presents personal views from the pulpit as if they were the word of God is no better than the false prophets with whom Jeremiah struggled. Those who preach the word of God must speak it honestly and forthrightly.

2. God’s word is powerful (23:29): What a contrast between the feeble falsehoods of the pseudo prophets and the dramatic truth of the pure word of God!

a. Like fire (23:29a): Is not my word like fire (oracle of Yahweh)… The word of God has dynamic power to accomplish the purpose of God. It is like fire: it burns the conscience, purifies the life, illuminates the mind, energizes the will, warms the heart, fuses the fellowship of believers, and consumes the ungodly.

b. Like a hammer (23:29b): and like a sledgehammer that shatters rock? God’s message for Jeremiah’s day was a message of judgment, crushing like a sledgehammer (pattiš). This term is used also in 50:23 (cf. Isa 41:7).

D. Sentence Pronounced (23:30-32): Three times in vv 30-32 God declares that he is against the false prophets. His opposition to them is three-fold.

1. Against their stolen words (23:30): Therefore behold, I am against the prophets (oracle of Yahweh) that steal my words everyone from his neighbor. Twice in three successive vv God employs the challenge formula to express his opposition to the false prophets. Steal means to appropriate by stealth (2 Sam 15:6). The false prophets have stolen the words of God everyone from his neighbor. Some think that he means that the false prophets stole their words, style and technique from men like Jeremiah. Others think that they simply repeated what they heard others saying. The point is that the message of the false prophets did not originate with God.

2. Against their claims (23:31): Behold, I am against you, O prophets (oracle of Yahweh), who take their tongue and they oracle an oracle. The challenge formula is repeated from the previous v. In 9:5 Jeremiah said that the people teach their tongue to speak falsehood. Similarly, the false prophets take their tongue, they take charge of their own tongue instead of letting Yahweh put his word on their tongue (cf. 1:9; 5:14).

   The false prophets used the official prophetic formulas to give their utterances the aura of truth. They used the word oracle, a technical term used by a prophet whenever God put words in his mouth. The false prophets were palming off their own delusions by adopting the same forms as the true prophets used. The verb (r. n’m) in oracle an oracle appears only here. It may have been a creation of Jeremiah himself.

3. Against their lying words (23:32):
   a. Challenge formula repeated (23:32a): Behold, I am against the prophets of lying dreams (oracle of Yahweh)... In v 25 the false prophets are said to tell lies when they announced that they had a dream. Here the dreams themselves are designated as lying dreams.

   b. Results of their lies (23:32b): who relate them and cause my people to err with their lies and their recklessness. The false prophets relate their lying dreams as in v 27. As in v 13 the false prophets were causing the people to err or go astray. The major trouble with false teachers is that they always gain a following. The people of Judah believed the lying dreams related to them by the false prophets. Recklessness
(pach’ažūt) occurs only here, but is related to a word describing prophets in Zeph 3:4. Lies and other loose talk from those who purport to be men of God is reckless behavior.

c. Repudiation of the liars (23:32c): *I did not send them, nor did I command them. I did not send* them is repeated from v 21. This language first appeared in 14:14. How presumptuous of these men to claim to speak the word of God when in fact they had nothing more to share with their countrymen than their own wishful thinking.

d. Evaluation of the liars (23:32d): *They will not profit this people at all (oracle of Yahweh).* In 2:8 the Baal gods are called *those who do not profit.* Here the same language is used of the false prophets.

**Pilfering Yahweh’s Words**

23:33-40

A. Response to Mockery (23:33):

1. **Their mocking question (23:33a):** *And when this people or the prophet or the priest ask you, What is the burden of Yahweh?* The Hebrew term *massā’* often means burden (e.g., 17:21); it is also the technical word for a prophetic utterance. The apostates of Judah took advantage of this double meaning of the word to mock the message of Jeremiah. They regarded every message from God as a heavy and wearisome burden. Wherever they would meet Jeremiah, they would ask the man of God, What new burden do you have for us, you prophet of doom?

2. **His jarring retort (23:33b):** *Then you will say unto them, You are the burden, and I will cast you off (oracle of Yahweh).* The next time that question was put to him Jeremiah was to respond four short Hebrew words that turned their pun against them. This reading of the Hebrew is based on a slightly different division and vocalization of the consonants. It is supported by the Septuagint and the Vulgate. An alternative translation is proposed by Keil: *With reference to your question, What burden? I will unload you.*

B. Warning to Mockers (24:34): *And the prophet, the priest and the people who continually say, "The burden of Yahweh," I will punish that man and his house.* Whoever continues to mockingly use the term *burden* will be punished by God. *Punish* is lit., *visit or attend to.* This warning applied to the *prophet* who regularly used the term, the *priest* who on occasion might make use it, or laymen who had no business using it. For those unauthorized to use the term the word *burden* becomes virtually a curse affecting both them and the members of their family.

C. Instruction for the People (23:35-37):

1. **Proper terminology (23:35):** *So shall each one say unto his neighbor and unto his brother, What is the answer of Yahweh? and, What is the word of Yahweh?* If a person wished to inquire concerning the word of Yahweh, he should adopt new terminology. The change of terminology indicated that the inquirers were sincere, and were not engaging in mocking punning.

2. **Improper terminology (23:36):**

   a. **Prohibition (23:36a):** *The "burden of Yahweh" you shall not mention any more…* When a divine oracle was being discussed, Jeremiah prohibited the use of the
technical expression that he frequently used in his own utterances. Use of the phrase did not differentiate between the genuine word of God spoken by Jeremiah and the phony message spoken by his rivals. At the worst the use of this phrase had become a way of discounting and mocking the judgment oracles of Jeremiah.

b. Explanation (23:36b):

(1) Fate of those who use the phrase (23:36b): *for the burden to every man shall be his word*. Those who persisted in using the term burden would find their own words to be a burden that would crush them to the ground.

(2) Sin of those who use the phrase (23:36c): *for you have perverted the words of the living God, Yahweh of host our God*. By peddling their sugarcoated lies as being a burden from the Lord, the false prophets were not only guilty of mockery, they were also guilty of perverting the word of God.

c. Proper terminology (2:37): *Thus you shall say unto the prophet: What has Yahweh answered, and what has Yahweh said?* This v reiterates the instruction of v 35.

D. Sentence Pronounced (23:38-40): *and if you say, "Burden of Yahweh," then thus says Yahweh: Because you have said this word, "Burden of Yahweh," when I sent unto you saying, Do not say, "Burden of Yahweh"*… Jeremiah anticipates that some will ignore his prohibition on using the phrase burden of Yahweh. In their efforts to deceive the people they will continue to misappropriate this sacred formula. Concerning such Jeremiah makes ominous predictions.

1. Forgotten (23:39a): *therefore behold, I will completely forget you*… God will utterly forget the false prophets. The word rendered in English completely forget (r. ns’) sounds very much like the forbidden word massā’ (burden). No doubt the prophet intended this as a play on words.

2. Removed (23:39b): *and I will remove you, and the city that I gave to you and to your fathers, from before my face*. God will remove the false prophets from his presence, i.e., cause them to go into captivity. The words and the city expand on the judgment announced in v 33. This is the only place in Jeremiah where God is said to have given to his people the city, i.e., Jerusalem. Removal from before my face/presence describes what happened to Ephraim and what will happen to the Judeans (7:15; 15:1) and Jerusalem (32:21). The expression describes exile to a foreign land. The implication is that Yahweh’s face/presence was uniquely manifested in Canaan.

3. Disgraced (23:40): *I will make you an everlasting reproach and an everlasting shame that shall not be forgotten*. The scoffers who made a reproach out of the word of God would themselves become an object of reproach. It is not hard to imagine the contempt with which these professing prophets were treated after their predictions of peace and prosperity failed to materialize. The double use of everlasting (‘ôlām) underscores that the false prophets will never be able to salvage their reputation after the failure of their optimistic forecasts concerning Jerusalem.

SECTION TWO
TWO VIEWS OF JUDEANS
Jeremiah 24:1-10

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335Elsewhere God has given to Israel land (7:7; 30:3), place (7:14) ground (16:15; 24:20; 25:5; 35:15) or inheritance (17:4).
336Otherwise my face appears five times in the book: Jerusalem’s iniquity is not hidden from Yahweh’s face (16:17). His face is set against Jerusalem (21:10; 44:11). He has hidden his face from the city (33:5). Men should tremble before God’s face (5:22).
The false prophets had a very different assessment of the spiritual condition of the Judeans after the deportation of 597 BC from that of Jeremiah. Those different assessments are brought out in the vision of the two baskets.

Presentation of the Vision
24:1-3

*And Yahweh showed me...* The terminology introduces a prophetic vision. There are two types of prophetic visions in the OT, the subjective and the objective. In the subjective vision, only the prophet sees the object in question. In the objective vision, the object is visible to the physical eyesight. The revelation consists of the significance of the object, i.e., the revelation is not what the prophet sees, but what the prophet sees in an object. It is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether a vision is subjective or objective. The vision that follows probably falls into the category of objective vision.

A. Circumstances of the Vision (24:1):
1. **Objects in the vision (24:1a):** *and, behold, two baskets of figs placed before the temple of Yahweh...* Jeremiah seems to have been just outside the temple at the time of the vision. God directed his attention to two baskets of figs that had been left for some unexplained reason near the entrance of the temple.
2. **Time of the vision (24:1b):** *after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the craftsmen and the smiths, from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon.* The vision is dated after the deportation of 597 BC. In this deportation Jeconiah—better known as Jehoiachin (cf. 22:24)—was taken captive along with all the artisans of the land. *Craftsmen* is a collective singular suggesting that the reference is to a guild of artisans (cf. 10:3). *Smiths (masgēr)* is of uncertain meaning, but blacksmiths or goldsmiths is the probable meaning.

B. Content of the Vision (24:2):
1. **First basket (24:2a):** *The one basket contained very good figs, like figs that are first ripe...* Jeremiah noticed that the first basket contained good figs that were a delight to the eye. Small figs that appear along with the first leaves of spring after ripening are called *first-ripe figs (bakurōt).* The first-ripe figs were considered a delicacy. Comparing Israel to figs appears already in Hos 9:10.
2. **Second basket (24:2b):** *the other basket contained very bad figs that were so bad they could not be eaten.* The prophet noticed that the second basket contained bad figs, so bad that they could not possibly be eaten. Jeremiah does not say why the figs were bad. Most commentators speculate that they were rotten, and therefore fit only to be thrown away. Another suggestion is that the second basket contained figs that had been allowed to remain too long on the tree. Such fully mature figs taken from the tree late in the season are not tasty.

C. Dialogue about the Vision (24:3): *And Yahweh said unto me, What do you see Jeremiah? And I said, Figs! The good figs are very good, and the bad ones are so bad they cannot be eaten.* As is frequent in prophetic visions, the Lord asked Jeremiah to relate what he had

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337 This spelling of Jehoiachin’s name is unique in the OT.
338 Cf. Hos 9: 10; Mic 7:1.
observed and the prophet quickly does so, anticipating the interpretation of these symbols that follows.

**Explanation of the Vision**

24:4-10

A. **Introductory Word** (24:4-5a): *Then the word of Yahweh came unto me, saying, (5) Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel...* The use of the messenger formula in the context of a vision is unusual, but there is no reason to delete it as proposed by some.

B. **Good Figs Identified** (24:5b): *As these good figs, thus will I regard as good the captives of Judah, whom I sent out from this place to the land of the Chaldeans.* The good figs represent those who had been taken captive in 597 BC. God was smiling upon them. Probably most Jews thought that those who were allowed to remain in the homeland were God’s favorites, while those who were taken away were in his disfavor. God, however, saw in those captives who were in Babylon the nucleus of a new Israel. Perhaps the trip to far off Babylon had brought a change in the attitude of those Jews. So God regarded them with more favor than those who had been left behind.

C. **Good Figs Rewarded** (24:6-7):

1. **Physical restoration** (24:6):
   a. Yahweh’s positive disposition (24:6a): *I will set my eye on them for good.* The captives in Babylon were far from home and loved ones—from the Holy Land and the temple. Yet the captives were not beyond the tender and loving watch care of their God. As long as they were in captivity God’s *eye* would be upon them. *For good* expresses the long range good intentions of God for his people. Elsewhere in the book God’s *for the city* were for evil (calamity), not for good (21:10; 39:16; 44:27). The language here effectively reverses the threat of Amos 9:4.

   b. Return to the land (24:6b): *I will cause them to return unto this land...* In his own good time Yahweh will bring his people back to Canaan. Cf. 23:3.

   c. Building up of the nation (24:6c): *I will plant them, and not pluck them up.* They would rebuild their land with God’s blessing. The four verbs in this line reflect the language of the call narrative (1:10). This same quartet of verbs appears in 31:28, 42:10; 45:4.339

2. **Spiritual restoration** (24:7):
   a. New heart (24:7a): *And I will give to them a heart to know me, for I am Yahweh.* In 4:4 Jeremiah hoped for a change in the hearts of God’s people. Now Yahweh promises to give Israel a new heart. The heart is the center of intellect, emotion, and will. God is said to give a positive heart to some one when he creates circumstances that leads them to repentance. To know Yahweh is to know him experientially, to have a personal relationship with him. The idea is similar to 32:39 where Yahweh gives his people one heart that they may fear him.340 It is Yahweh the God of redemption who creates the circumstances that lead sinners to repent. The return to Canaan was possible because the Jews would get acquainted with God all over again.

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339 With the addition of a fifth verb they also appear in 18:7-9.

340 The idea of God giving his people one heart is appears in Ezekiel (11:19; 36:26) and 2 Chr 30:12. Solomon prayed that God would give him an understanding heart so he could judge God’s people (1 Kgs 3:9, 12), while Moses declared that God had not given to Israel an understanding heart (Dt 29:3).
b. Restored relationship (24:7b): They shall be my people, and I will be their God, for they shall return unto me with all their heart. The restoration formula with which this half of the v opens is found in slight variation seven times in the book.341

Restoration to their position as God’s people is possible because they return to the Lord with all their heart. Repentance is the outward manifestation of the new heart mentioned in the previous line. Only those who come to the Lord through faith, repentance and obedience are part of the people of God. The idea that the nation Israel—the biological descendants of Abraham—are still the people of God is an idea foreign to the prophets of the OT and the teachings of the NT as well. Salvation is by grace, not race.

The fulfillment of the promises of restoration made here concerning the captives is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

D. Bad Figs Identified (24:8a): But as for the bad figs that were so bad they could not be eaten, surely thus says Yahweh: The basket of bad figs is symbolic of those who had not been taken into captivity in 597 BC. Jeremiah continued to preach to this group for another decade. Those who remained behind in Jerusalem were not the true Israel of God.

E. Bad Figs Punished (24:8b-10):
1. Given up to an enemy (24:8b): Thus will I make Zedekiah king of Judah, his princes, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. God will make Zedekiah the king, his princes, and those who remained in Jerusalem like the basket of bad figs. In his permissive will God allowed these hardened sinners to continue in their course of rebellion until they finally were fit for nothing but destruction.

The phrase who dwell in the land of Egypt refers to those who were taken captive by Pharaoh Neco in 609 BC when king Jehoahaz was deported and sent to Egypt in chains. It may be that other Jews fled to Egypt during the Babylonian invasions of 604 BC and 597 BC.

2. Given over to trembling (24:9a): And I will give them over for trembling, for evil to all the kingdoms of the land… The future of the rotten figs (those who remained in Judah) was far from bright. God will give them over to all kingdoms of the earth, i.e., they will be scattered far and near. But wherever they flee, they will be in constant fear of being delivered into the hands of their enemies. These fugitives will be mistreated by foreigners.

3. Given over to disgrace (24:9b): for reproach, for a proverb, for a byword and for a curse in every place where I drive them. The fugitive Judeans will be so despicable that wherever they go men will refer to these Jews in their reproaches, proverbs, by-words and curses. For reproach (cherpāh) see on 6:10. Proverb (māšāl) refers to a pithy saying. Byword (š’nīnāh) is used four times in the OT alongside the word proverb. It refers to a sharp, sarcastic utterance. Curse (q’lālāh) in this context means an object of contempt. The quartet of terms probably points to the universality of the threat in this v. Whenever one might wish to pronounce a curse against another, he would say, May you become like the accused Jews.

4. Given over to destruction (24:10): And I will send against them the sword, the famine and the plague until they are utterly consumed from upon the ground that I gave to them and to their fathers. Those who were not able to flee the doomed land would die

341Beyond the present passage the formula appears in 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38.
by the sword of the enemy, or by the famine and plague that were the direct results of enemy invasion. Thus by one means or another Judah will utterly be consumed from upon the land that God had given to their fathers. The triad sword, famine, plague appears already in 14:11-12. The theme of the ground that I gave to them and their fathers appears in 7:7, 14. Cf. 17:4.

SECTION THREE
CUP MESSAGE:
BABYLON’S RULE
Jeremiah 25:1-38

Ch 25 is one of the most important chs in the entire book. A great deal can be learned about the message of Jeremiah from this single ch.

a. Yahweh’s anger provoked (25:3-7)
   b. Yahweh’s servant coming (25:8-11)
   c. Wrath on Babylon (25:12-14)
   d. Cup symbol (25:15-26)
   c. Sword on the nations (25:27-29)
   b. Yahweh’s sword coming (25:30-33)
   a. Yahweh’s anger unleashed (25:34-38)

Background
25:1-2

A. Chronology (25:1a, b): The precision in dating the events of this ch indicates that Jeremiah considered the year pivotal in his ministry.

1. Judean chronology (25:1a): The word that came unto Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, the king of Judah… Ch 25 precedes chs 21-24 chronologically. Jehoiakim had been placed on the throne by Pharaoh Neco. When Nebuchadnezzar smashed Neco’s army at Carchemish, Jehoiakim switched his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. But this was only after the Babylonian king had put him in chains with the intention of taking him to Babylon (2 Chr 36:6). Concerning can also be translated against.

2. Babylonian synchronism (25:1b): (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon)… This synchronism is extremely important in establishing OT chronology. Babylonian chronology is fairly well established for the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. He began to reign shortly after the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. His first full year of reign begin on New Years 604 BC. So the fourth year of Jehoiakim must have overlapped some part of the years 605-04 BC. This synchronism enables scholars to establish OT chronology for a number of years forward and backward from 605 BC based on the biblical statements regarding the length of the reigns of the Judean kings.

   The Battle of Carchemish was one of the most important battles in ancient history and perhaps in all history. Control of the world was at stake. Jeremiah had been speaking in somewhat vague terms about the approach of an enemy from the north. He now saw his prophecies fulfilled.

B. Audience (25:2): that Jeremiah the prophet spoke unto all the people of Judah and unto all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Just before the armies of Nebuchadnezzar arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was told to make one last appeal to his countrymen for
repentance. God knew that his call for repentance would be unheeded. God's love for Judah, however, constrained him to issue the appeal through the mouth of his prophet.

_Yahweh’s Anger Provoked_  
25:3-7

**A. Jeremiah’s Efforts in Judah (25:3):**

1. **Beginning of his ministry (25:3a):** *From the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah…* The thirteenth year of Josiah equates to 627 BC. Cf. 1:2. This date marks the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry. Since Josiah reigned a total of thirty-one years (2 Kgs 22:1), Jeremiah prophesied for eighteen or nineteen years in the reign of that good king.

2. **Duration of his ministry (25:3b):** *unto this day, these twenty-three years the word of Yahweh has come unto me…* The reign of good king Josiah was followed by the three-month reign of King Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 23:31), and the first three years of the reign of King Jehoiakim. For over two decades Jeremiah had been receiving and proclaiming divine revelations.

3. **Evaluation of his ministry (25:3c):** *and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened.* Jeremiah had been faithful in proclaiming God’s word throughout his long ministry. Jeremiah emphasizes the earnestness of his ministry by using a Hebrew idiom *rising early and speaking.* The idea is that when people are eager to undertake a project they get up early in the morning and get started. But in spite of the earnestness of Jeremiah, the people had not been receptive. He felt the constant frustration of having the people reject, dispute and ignore his message.

**C. God’s Efforts in Judah (25:4-6):**

1. **He sent earnest prophets (25:4):**
   a. **What Yahweh did (25:4a):** *And Yahweh sent unto you all of his servants the prophets, rising early and sending…,* God had sent other prophets besides Jeremiah to plead with the people of Judah. Since most of the prophets who were contemporary with Jeremiah were unfaithful, he probably is referring to his prophetic predecessors. Jeremiah repeats the idiom for earnestness from the previous v.
   b. **How people responded (25:4b):** *but you did not hearken, nor did you incline your ear to listen.* The people of Judah had more than one opportunity to hear the message of the Lord. It was not merely a dislike for the personality of Jeremiah that had caused the people to reject his message, for they had rejected others before him.

2. **He urged repentance as a means of preserving the land (25:5):**
   a. **Exhortation (25:5a):** *They said, Turn now each man from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds…* The language here is similar to 18:11.
   b. **Promise (25:5b):** *and you shall live in this land that Yahweh has given to you and to your fathers forever and ever…* One by one those prophets had come before the nation to urge the people to abandon their evil practices in order that they might continue to dwell in the land that God had given to their fathers. Cf. 7:7.

3. **He warned them not to provoke him with idols (25:6):** *and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke me with the work of your hands, and I will not harm you.* God’s gift of the Promised Land to the descendants of

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342 Others take this to be the date of Jeremiah’s birth.
Abraham was conditional. The prophets of God repeatedly set forth the conditions upon which the Promised Land could be retained. One of the foremost conditions was that the people cease to worship and serve other gods, idols, the work of their hands. If they would but cease this deliberate provocation of God, he would not harm them. Cf. 7:6, 18; 13:10.

D. Result of God’s Efforts (25:7): *But you did not hearken unto me (oracle of Yahweh) in order to provoke me with the work of your hands to your own hurt.* The people of Judah did not hearken to the earnest appeals of God’s messengers. They continued to provoke God with their idolatry to their own hurt. When one disobeys God, he courts disaster! All of God’s commandments are for the benefit and well being of man. Judah’s history was characterized by disobedience and resistance.

Yahweh’s Servant Coming

25:8-11

A. Reason for God’s Servant (25:8): *Therefore, thus says Yahweh of hosts: Because you have not listened to my words…* In view of the fact that the people of Judah had not obeyed the word of the Lord God will execute judgment upon them. See on 7:13.

B. Selection of God’s Servant (25:9a):

1. Yahweh’s action (25:9a): *behold, I am about to send and take all the families of the north (oracle of Yahweh)…* As he had done so many times before, Jeremiah made mention of the powerful enemy from the north that was about to descend upon Judah. In 1:15 *families of the north* also points to Babylon.

2. Yahweh’s servant (25:9b): *and also Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon my servant…* For the first time Jeremiah positively identified the ominous foe. The enemy from the north was Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. His forces even at that very moment were poised for the strike against Carchemish.

The Judeans had refused to listen to Yahweh’s servants (v 4); so Yahweh was about to send a different kind of servant against them. The Chaldean king is called the servant of God because he was the unconscious agent of Yahweh. It is interesting to note that in each case where the title *my servant* is applied to Nebuchadnezzar the Septuagint translation omits the title.

Nebuchadnezzar is called by God *my servant* (cf. 27:6). Cyrus the Persian is called in prophecy *my shepherd* and *my anointed*. But no foreigner is ever accorded the title *my servant* except Nebuchadnezzar. Generally to be a servant of a deity is to be a worshiper of that deity (cf. Dan 6:20). The chosen people are called *my servant* and Isaiah describes the suffering Messiah as God’s servant. But certainly Nebuchadnezzar was no worshiper of the Lord. He was a polytheist and an idolater.

C. Work of God’s Servant (25:9c-11a):

1. Destruction (25:9c):
   a. Scope of destruction (25:9c): *and I will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about…* Nebuchadnezzar will sweep down upon Judah and her neighbors. He will utterly destroy them all.
   b. Thoroughness of destruction (25:9d): *and I will utterly destroy them, and I will make them an astonishment, an object of hissing and perpetual desolations.* The

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341 Isa 44:28; 45:1.
344 Jer 30:10; 46:27, 28; Ezek 37:25.
tiny nations of Syria-Palestine will be so completely destroyed that travelers will hiss or whistle in astonishment at the desolate condition of the lands. These desolations are not of brief duration, but are perpetual, i.e., they will last for a very long time.

2. **Death and darkness (25:10):** The language of most of this v repeats the thoughts of 7:34 and 16:9.
   a. **Social life (25:10a):** *And I will destroy from them the sound of joy and the sound of rejoicing...* Silence will reign supreme in the lands conquered by Nebuchadnezzar.
   b. **Married life (25:10b):** *the voice of bridegroom and the voice of bride...* Weddings were the most joyous of occasions. Sounds associated with weddings will cease.
   c. **Commercial life (25:10c):** *the sound of millstones...* Even the sound of the millstones will cease because no one will be left to grind the grain. The routine business of everyday life will cease. There is dead silence during the day.
   d. **Home life (25:10d):** *and the light of the lamp.* No light from oil lamps will illuminate the darkness of the night. After the destruction by Babylon there will be absolutely no sign of life throughout the lands. There will be total darkness during the night. Silence and darkness picture complete desolation.

3. **Desolation (25:11a):** *And all this land will become a desolation and astonishment...*

**D. Dominion of God’s Servant (25:11b):** *and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.* The prophets pled with Judah not to serve other gods (v 6); now they must serve a foreign master. For seventy years Judah and the neighboring nations of Syria-Palestine will serve the king of Babylon. But Yahweh will not keep his anger forever. The figure of seventy years is a “first whisper of hope” in the midst of Jeremiah’s thundering threats of judgment by an enemy from the north. This service to Babylon began in 605 BC following the Battle of Carchemish. From that time until the fall of Babylon in 539 BC the nations of the Near East were dominated by Babylon.

Commentators are divided as to whether the seventy years are to be interpreted literally or figuratively. Cheyne, for example, believes the figure is to be taken as an indefinite or round number as in Isa 23:17. Some link the figure to the normal lifespan (Ps 90:10). In this case seventy years would simply mean a very long time. An Assyrian text has been discovered that gives seventy years as the time that the god Marduk was angry with the city of Babylon. Other commentators insist that the figures are to be taken literally, but they disagree as to when the seventy years commenced.

**Wrath on Babylon**

25:12-14

The Ruler of all nations will not allow Babylon to go unpunished for her crimes against humanity. Babylon is merely a tool used of God for a time and then discarded. Jeremiah was not pro-Babylonian.

**A. Occasion of Judgment (25:12a, b):**

1. **Time of it (25:12a):** *But it will come to pass when seventy years are completed...* The seventy years must be a round figure, as is frequently the case in biblical prophecy. Babylon was overthrown in October of 539 BC. Counting the beginning partial year and the concluding final year the actual time was sixty-eight years.
2. **Reason for it (25:12b):** *I will visit upon the king of Babylon, even upon that nation, their iniquity, even upon the Chaldeans...* Jeremiah made a specific prediction that after seventy years of world rule, Babylon too will be visited by the God of judgment. To *visit* someone’s sins upon them is to punish them for their wrong doings. That Yahweh turns against Babylon is due to *their iniquity*. Isaiah went into more detail about this iniquity. Babylon overstepped its mandate from Yahweh. They administered their hegemony over Judah and the Near East with unnecessary severity (Isa 47:6).

**B. Result of Judgment (25:12c-13):**

1. **Desolation (25:12c):** *and I will make it desolate forever.* After Babylon’s seventy years of dominion, the city would become an eternal desolation. Jeremiah did not say that this would happen immediately after the seventy years. Babylon survived the overthrow by Cyrus, but continued to decline through the centuries until sometime in the first century AD.

2. **God’s words fulfilled (25:13):** *And I will bring upon that land all my words that I have spoken concerning it, all that is written in this book that Jeremiah prophesied concerning all the nations.* Every word that God had spoken and that Jeremiah had written about Babylon would be fulfilled.

**C. Agents of Judgment (25:14a):** *For many nations and great kings shall make servants of them, even them;* God announces that he will recompense the Chaldeans for their wicked works. Many kings and great nations will again and again enslave the Chaldeans. Babylon fell first to the Medes and Persians, and then to the Greeks and Parthians.

**D. Purpose of Judgment (25:14b):** *and I will repay them according to their works, and according to the deeds of their hands.* The fall of Babylon to her enemies is a punishment appropriate to the transgressions of that superpower.

### Cup Symbol

25:15-27

An action parable forms the central piece in Section Three.

**A. Cup of God's Wrath (25:15-17):**

1. **A directive (25:15):** *For thus says Yahweh, God of Israel, unto me: Take this cup of wine—wrath—from my hand and cause all the nations to which I am about to send you to drink it.* The figure of drinking from the wine cup of God’s wrath is not one that is uncommon the OT. The origin of the figure of the cup of wrath is uncertain. Some relate it to the practice recorded in Nm 5:11-31 where a woman suspected of adultery was required to drink a loathsome potion with disastrous results to her if she were guilty. Bright suggests that the figure may go back to the practice of giving those who were marked for execution some brew to tranquilize them and render them incapable of struggle.

Whatever the origin of the figure, Jeremiah was commanded to take the cup of wrath from the hand of God and cause the nations of the world to drink of it. The nations to which I am about to send you recalls the language of the call (1:5, 7).

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347 Isa 51:17, 22; Ezek 23:31-34; Hab 2:16; Ps 60:3; Jer 49:12; 51:7, etc.
2. A prediction (25:16): *And they shall drink and retch and act crazy because of the sword that I am about to send among them.* The nations after drinking of that brew will become as intoxicated men. Their incoherence and utter confusion is brought about by news of the approach of the sword of Yahweh, i.e., the armies that he will use to execute his judgment. *Retch* (r. ג'ג) is used of the heaving of the Nile (46:8), and in a slightly different form, to surging waters (5:22; 46:7). Here the reference is to the heaving or surging of the stomach. *Act crazy* (r. הילל in Hithpoel) is used of David’s efforts to pretend to be insane (1 Sam 21:14).

3. Compliance (25:17): *And I took the cup from the hand of Yahweh and I caused all nations to whom Yahweh had sent me to drink it.* Jeremiah complied with the commandment of the Lord. He caused the nations of the world to drink of God’s deadly cup.

   It would not have been possible for Jeremiah literally to visit all the nations. For this reason some think that Jeremiah was in a visionary experience when he took a wine cup from the hand of God and passed it among the nations. In this case Jeremiah is here describing what he saw in a vision. Yet no positive indication of a vision is present in the passage.

   Others think that a symbolic act was performed by the prophet. He actually took a cup of wine, explained its significance, and passed it around among the ambassadors of the various lands who were present in Jerusalem. It is difficult, however, to imagine that ambassadors from distant Media and Elam would have been present in Jerusalem.

   Other commentators think that the cup that Jeremiah is told to pass among the nations is metaphorical. The prophet passes the cup by preaching his message of God’s wrath against the nations. The account, however, seems to bear all the earmarks of an actual experience.

   God told Jeremiah to pass a wine cup among the nations (v 15) and he carried out the command (v 17). The nations to whom he carried the cup apparently could reject it (v 28). Although none of the explanations of this episode are without their difficulties, probably a symbolic act was performed. Most likely this act involved the ambassadors of the various lands mentioned in vv 18-26.

B. List of Affected Nations (25:18-26a): In vv 18-26 Jeremiah enumerates the nations to whom he carried the cup of God’s wrath.

1. Judah (25:18): *Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, her kings and her princes, to make them a desolation, astonishment, a hissing, and a curse, as it is this day.* Jerusalem and the cities of Judah stand first on the hit list. Judgment begins with God’s people (1 Pet 4:17). The kings (Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah) and princes of Judah will drink of that cup of judgment. Their land will become a *desolation*—a horrible and shocking sight *as at this day.*

   The last phrase of v 18 implies that in the view of Jeremiah the desolation of Jerusalem already had begun in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. The wine cup episode must have occurred not long after the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 BC. In the view of Jeremiah the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem began with that invasion, not with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The foreign nations that were required to drink the cup of God’s judgment are fourteen in number.

2. Egypt (25:19): *Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and all of his servants, his princes, and all of his people; (20) and all the mingled people…* Egypt is the southernmost country named. The oracles against Egypt also stand first in the collection of foreign nation oracles at the end of the book. Jeremiah was particularly hostile toward Egypt because he regarded that nation as the chief opposition to Yahweh’s purpose in the region.

   The mixed multitudes or *mingled people* mentioned were probably foreigners who dwelled within the borders of Egypt. Some of these mingled people joined the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt many years earlier (Nm 11:4).
3. **Uz** (25:20b): *all the kings of the land of Uz...* The location of the land of Uz is uncertain. It seems to have been in close proximity to Edom (cf. Lam 4:21). Job was a citizen of this land (Job 1:1). No kingdom by this name is found in the historical records of antiquity.

4. **Philistia** (25:20c): *and all the kings of the land of the Philistine (even Ashkelon, and Gaza, and Ekron and the remnant of Ashdod)...* Philistia to the southwest of Judah tastes the cup next. Four of the major Philistine cities—Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod—are named specifically. Gath, the fifth city of the Philistine pentapolis, is omitted as in Amos 1:6-8. Of Ashdod only a remnant remained after the siege and capture by Pharaoh Psammetichus I (663-609 BC).

5. **Transjordan nations** (25:21): *Edom and Moab and the children of Ammon...* The Transjordan kingdoms of Edom, Moab and Ammon are next named. These kingdoms are named in order from south to north.

6. **Phoenician cities** (25:22): *and all the kings of Tyre, and all the kings of Sidon, and all the kings of the isles that are beyond the sea...* Phoenicia with her two major cities of Tyre and Sidon and her overseas colonies would also drink from the cup.

7. **Arabian tribes** (25:23-24): *Dedan, Tema, and Buz, and all who clip the corners of their hair; (24) and all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mingled people who dwell in the midst of the desert...* Three tribes of northern Arabia—Dedan, Tema, and Buz—are next named. The Dedanites were descended from Abraham and Keturah (Gn 25:3). They had a reputation for being traders. Tema was a tribe related to Abraham through his son Ishmael (Gn 25:15). Dedan and Tema are linked in Isa 21:13-14. Both places were oases and caravan crossroads. Buz was a tribe descended from Nahor, Abraham’s brother (Gn 22:21). The location of Buz is unknown.

   All of these tribes are identified as those who *clip the corners of the hair*. The custom of cutting away the hair from the temples is forbidden to the Israelites in Lv 19:27. No doubt the custom had some pagan religious significance.

   The kings of Arabia and the mingled people who are associated with them will also taste of the judgment of God. These tribes dwelled almost due east of the populated region of Transjordan.


8. **Distant lands** (25:25-26): *and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes; (26) and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after another; and to all the kingdoms of the world that are upon the face of the earth. Zimri as the name of a people is not found elsewhere. Some relate this people to the desert tribes just mentioned while others associate them with the two kingdoms named along with Zimri in v 25.

   Elam was east of Babylon. This nation already had begun to fade as an independent people. Shortly after Jeremiah spoke these words, Elam was absorbed by the Medes. Still later Elam was incorporated into Persia. Nebuchadnezzar may have made a campaign into Elam in 596-95 BC, but the Babylonian Chronicle at this point is badly damaged rendering the documentation uncertain.

   The Medes were one of the most powerful nations of Jeremiah’s day. They were located east of Assyria and north of Elam. They had been instrumental in the overthrow of Nineveh in 612 BC. Media eventually merged with Persia under the leadership of

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348 Others think Uz was a rather undefined area in the Syrian Desert southeast of Damascus.
Cyrus the Great. The Medo-Persian Empire fell before the armies of Alexander the Great.

In addition to the nations specifically named, the Lord indicates that many other nations must also drink of the cup of destruction. Kings of the north—some near and some distant—would drink the wine of God's wrath.

C. Last to Drink the Cup (25:26b): The king of Sheshach shall drink after them. Last of all the king of Sheshach would drink of that deadly cup. Sheshach is a cryptic way of writing the name Babylon. In this system of writing, the alphabet is written along a line and then on another line is written again in reverse order. The first letter corresponds to the last, the second letter corresponds to the last but one, etc. When this system is followed in Hebrew, Babylon comes out being spelled Sheshach.

The same device is used again in 51:41. It is not clear why Jeremiah chose to use this code name for Babylon. Certainly he was not afraid to speak out plainly concerning the fate of Babylon (cf. v 12). Perhaps Jeremiah changed the name Babylon to Sheshach in one of the later editions of his book after this cipher came into common use among the captives in Babylon. Then, too, the word Sheshach sounds in Hebrew very like a word that means humiliation. A play on words might be intended.

D. Results of Drinking the Cup (25:27): Then say unto them; Thus says Yahweh of hosts God of Israel: Drink, and be drunk, vomit, fall and do not arise because of the sword that I am about to send among you. As Jeremiah hands his symbolic cup to each nation, he is to instruct them to drink its contents. They will, he predicts, begin to act as intoxicated men, i.e., staggering, vomiting and falling. But that is one stupor from which they would never awake. Thus does Jeremiah picture in figurative language the irrational, incoherent, and helpless behavior as Nebuchadnezzar marched against these lands. At its beginning Section Three had the words because of the sword that I am about to send (v 16); the unit now concludes with the same expression.

Yahweh’s Sword on Nations

25:28-29

A. Yahweh’s Declaration (25:28): And it shall come to pass, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then say unto them; Thus says Yahweh of hosts: You shall surely drink! Representatives to whom Jeremiah offers the symbolic cup might refuse to receive it from his hand. In such a case, Jeremiah must assure them that they will indeed drink of the cup of divine destruction whether or not they cooperate in sipping from the symbolic cup.

B. Yahweh’s Reasoning (25:29):
1. A question (25:29a): For behold, if I am beginning to destroy the city that is called by my name, shall you go completely unpunished? The rationale for the impending destruction of the nations is very simple. God already had begun to bring judgmental calamity upon the beloved city of Jerusalem, the city where his temple stood, and the city where some of his faithful worshipers lived. Jerusalem is called by the name of God, i.e., it was his special city. If Jerusalem must taste of divine wrath, do the nations think that they shall escape scot-free?

2. An assertion (25:29b): You shall not go unpunished; for I am about to call a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth (oracle of Yahweh). The surrounding nations too will suffer at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the divinely appointed sword. The sword is a symbol for God’s agent of punishment, viz., Nebuchadnezzar.
Vv 30-38 contain a poetic description of the worldwide judgment of the Lord.

A. God of Judgment (25:30-31): The prophet presents four pictures of the Lord in the act of executing judgment upon the wicked.
1. Like a pouncing lion (25:30a): But as for you, prophesy unto them all these words, and say unto them, Yahweh from on high will roar, and from his holy habitation he will give forth his voice; he will mightily roar against his pasture. Like a lion about to pounce upon the prey, the God of holiness roars from his heavenly habitation against his pasture or sheepfold. The tender Shepherd of Israel has turned into a roaring lion because of the wickedness of his people. The picture of Yahweh as a pouncing lion is based on Amos 1:2. His holy habitation is heaven.350 His pasture (nāveh) or sheepfold appears earlier in 10:25. The term is poetic for abode or habitation; here it refers to Judah and/or Jerusalem. Against (‘al) could also be rendered over.
2. Like shouting grape pickers (25:30b): He will give forth a shout like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. As those who tread the grapes shout while they press the grapes, so the Lord will raise the victorious shout as the wicked of the earth fall beneath his feet. Give forth is lit., answer, suggesting that Yahweh’s action is a response to what he observers among earth dwellers.
3. Like a stern prosecutor (25:31a): A noise comes unto the ends of the earth, for Yahweh has a controversy with the nations. As a prosecutor reads his indictment against the accused, so the Lord enters into a controversy i.e., a court case, with the nations of the world. The noise refers to the tumult of warfare. Comes is a participle, suggesting that the battle noise reverberates like an echo. Yahweh has a controversy (ribh) or court case is based on Hos 4:1. In Hosea the controversy is localized, but here it is universalized.
4. Like a righteous judge (25:31b): He is about to judge all flesh; the wicked he shall give to the sword (oracle of Yahweh). The Lord not only prosecutes the nations, he also pronounces judgment against them. It is as righteous judge pronouncing sentence against the guilty that God decrees desolation and war for the whole earth. Judge is a participle that expresses imminent action. It is in the Niphal form, suggesting the meaning, argue the case against. All flesh appears in 12:12, but here it means all mankind. Sword identifies the nature of the punishment that is to be visited on the nations. i.e., warfare.

B. Sweeping Whirlwind (25:32-33):
1. Sweeps from nation to nation (25:32): Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Disaster goes out from nation to nation, and a tempest is being stirred up from the farthest bounds of the earth. Jeremiah envisions a whirlwind of divine wrath sweeping from one nation to another. This tempest arises in the farthest bounds of the earth. In 6:22 this phrase refers to the north-country and therefore it is obvious that the prophet has in mind Babylon.
2. Leaves carnage in its path (25:33):
   a. Extent of carnage (25:33a): Those slain by Yahweh in that day shall be from one end of the earth to the other. Those slain by the agent of God will fill the earth. One end of the earth to the other is a phrase used in 12:12 where it is limited to the land of Judah.

350 Dt 26:15; Zech 2:13; Pa 68:5; 2 Chr 30:27.
b. Result of carnage (25:33b): They shall not be lamented, gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the face of the ground. So many will die that customary funeral rites will have to be abandoned. Unburied and unlamented corpses will lie upon the face of the earth.

C. Distraught Shepherds (25:34-37):
1. Slaughter has come (25:34):
   a. Call for lamentation (25:34a): Howl, O shepherds! Cry out! Wallow, O lords of the flock! The verbs howl/cry out are characteristic of calls for lamentation. Neither shepherds (rulers) nor lords of the flock (rich and influential people) will escape. Wallow (r. plš) was used earlier in 6:26.
   b. Reason for lamentation (25:34b):
      (1) Stated bluntly (25:34b): For the days of your slaughter and dispersions have been filled up… The lamentation is justified because for this world leaders the days of slaughtering other nations, deporting and scattering captive peoples, have come to an end.
      (2) Stated metaphorically (25:34c): and you shall fall like a precious vessel. The nations of the world in all their glory will fall and be broken like a precious vessel that has fallen to the ground.
2. Flight has perished (25:35): Flight shall perish from the shepherds, and escape from the lords of the flock. Sometimes high-ranking officials escape the fate of the common people in times of warfare. But from the divine judgment coming upon the world there will be no escape for anyone. Lords of the flock is repeated from the previous v. This title is unique to Jeremiah.
3. Pasture destroyed (25:36-37):
   a. Noise of lamentation (25:36a): A sound! The cry of shepherds, the howl of the lords of the flock! The proud and pompous world leaders will howl in agony. They will cry out in distress. A sound is used in the exclamatory sense in 10:22 as well.
   b. Reason for lamentation (25:36b-37): For Yahweh is destroying their pasture. (37) The peaceful folds are silenced because of the fierce wrath of Yahweh. Shepherds (rulers) are lamenting because they see their pasture (their kingdoms) devastated. In 6:26 the enemy from the north destroyed the land; here the destruction is attributed to Yahweh himself. For pasture (mar’ît) see 10:21 where the term refers to the sheep that occupy the pasture. Peaceful folds is used in the singular in Isa 32:18. The reference is to a meadow that offers tranquility and abundant herbage. The plural here perhaps points to the world-wide scope of the judgment. Those folds will be reduced to silence because neither man nor flock will be there any more. Silenced appears earlier in 8:14. The fierce wrath of Yahweh is mentioned eight times in the book.

D. Fierce Lion (25:38): He has left his covert as the lion; for their land has become an astonishment because of the fierceness of the oppressor, and because of his fierce anger. The land has become an appalling waste because the lion—the Lord of hosts—has left his lair. The language is similar to 4:7; but there the lion is the enemy from the north and your land is Judah while here the whole world is in view. God has become a fierce destroyer to the peoples of the earth.

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351 For shepherds as a designation of the national leadership see 2:8; 3:15; 23:1-4.
352 An alternative interpretation: The Lord forsakes his desolate land just as a young lion forsakes his lair when it has been destroyed.
353 Also in 4:7 a different word for lion is used. Here the word is k’phîr while in 4:7 it is ‘aryēh.
SECTION FOUR
JEREMIAH IN JEOPARDY
Jeremiah 26:1-23

The material in ch 26 is biographical in character. It is written in the third person. The events take place in the early days of Jehoiakim. This account illustrates how Jeremiah’s message stirred the animosity of the priests and prophets. God’s prophet was nearly killed by mob action led by the priests and prophets.

Arrest of the Prophet
26:1-10

The faithful proclamation of the word of God is dangerous business. Amos, the prophet from Tekoa, was openly rebuked by Amaziah the high priest of Bethel. He was ordered to leave the country (Amos 7:10ff). Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was stoned to death by the order of the pompous King Joash because he had the audacity to rebuke the king for apostasy (2 Chr 24:20ff.). Legend has it that Isaiah was sawn asunder by wicked Manasseh. It was the faithful proclamation of the word that got Steven stoned, John beheaded and Peter imprisoned. The ministry is a hazardous vocation! It is no place for those with weak knees and faint hearts! Ch 26 records how Jeremiah was put on trial for his life because of his uncompromising and forthright presentation of the word of God.

A. Divine Directive (26:1-3): Five specific points relating to a divine directive that came to Jeremiah are brought out in vv 1-3.

1. Time (26:1): In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from Yahweh, saying… The beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim354 is a technical expression corresponding to the accession year in Babylonian chronology. The few months that a king reigned before his first new year on the throne were called the accession year. Jehoiakim’s accession year fell in the year 608 BC. Righteous Josiah had been slain a few months before in the battle of Megiddo; Jehoahaz his son had been able to hold the throne only three months before being deposed and deported by Pharaoh Neco. Now wicked Jehoiakim was sitting on the throne of David.

These were turbulent times. World supremacy was being contested on the banks of the Euphrates River. No doubt the inhabitants of Jerusalem were jittery. Would the combined force of the Assyrian and Egyptian armies be able to withstand the armies of the Chaldeans? There were ominous implications for Judah no matter what force emerged as world conqueror.

2. Place (26:2a): Thus says Yahweh: Stand in the court of the house of Yahweh… Jeremiah was a soldier on a holy crusade, carrying out the instructions of his heavenly Superior. He was told to go to the court of Solomon’s temple (cf. 19:14).

On a previous occasion, in the reign of Josiah, Jeremiah had stood in or near this same courtyard and preached the word (7:1-8:3). Many scholars—perhaps a majority—believe that ch 26 contains a summary of that earlier message. Supposedly this ch relates "the rest of the story," viz., the consequences of his sermon.

354 Aside from the call of Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of Josiah, this is the earliest dated event in Jeremiah’s ministry.
The grounds for equating the temple sermon of ch 7 and the temple sermon of ch 26 are weak.355 There is not one hint of hostility to Jeremiah’s first temple sermon. Probably the message received a sympathetic hearing in the days of good King Josiah. But in ch 26 the climate had changed. The religious and civil authorities were in no mood to tolerate criticism. Furthermore, the temple sermon in ch 7 was delivered at the gate of Yahweh’s house.

3. **Audience (26:2b): and speak unto all the cities of Judah, that are coming to worship at the house of Yahweh...** The earlier temple sermon was delivered to all Judah. Now Jeremiah was told to preach to the masses that came from all the cities of Judah. The temple in Jerusalem was the center of Yahweh worship for the entire nation. All males where required by the Law of Moses to go up to the central sanctuary three times each year for the festivals. Though there was much lacking in the faith and commitment level of the Judeans, apparently a significant number of them were still observing the sacred festivals.

4. **Obligation (26:2b): all the words that I command you to speak unto them. Do not omit a word!** The divine directive to Jeremiah contains a specific obligation. The Lord commanded Jeremiah not to diminish a single word from the message he had received from God. This commandment is reminiscent of the initial instruction given to Jeremiah at the time of his call when he was told, whatever I shall command you, you shall speak (1:7). The warning not to omit a word recalls Dt 4:2; 12:32. The Lord knew that Jeremiah needed to be reminded of this obligation at this point in his ministry. Even the most stalwart man of God might be tempted to omit or "water down" certain unpopular portions of his message when faced with the prospects of arrest, imprisonment and possibly death. No longer did Jeremiah enjoy the protection of the pious Josiah; he would experience for the first time the full impact of public hostility.

5. **Purpose (26:3):**
   a. **Desire for repentance (26:3a): Perhaps they will hear and turn each man from his evil way...** Jeremiah’s message was harsh. It was a message of judgment. But the object of all that he said was the salvation of the nation. Perhaps they would hearken! This v reveals the eagerness of God to turn away from his announced purpose to destroy the nations if they would only repent! (cf. 36:3). The verbs hear and turn are virtually synonymous here.
   b. **Potential of repentance (26:3b): that I might relent concerning the calamity that I am planning to bring upon them because of their evil deeds.** What fantastic possibilities can be set in motion through sincere repentance! If Judah would turn away from rebellion against God, then he could repent or relent with regard to his intentions to destroy the land (cf. 18:8). This message of Yahweh places the fate of Jerusalem squarely on the shoulders of those who are addressed.

B. **Stirring Message (26:4-6):** Jeremiah’s sermon in the courtyard of the temple must have been quite a bombshell! It stirred a hornet’s nest of opposition. Only a brief summary of the sermon preached on this occasion has been preserved. Had the entire message been recorded, it probably would have included a stinging indictment for injustice, hypocrisy and rebellion against God. No doubt it included threats of the enemy from the north that would devastate the land. The summary that has been preserved here contains two points of

355For a discussion of these arguments, see comments on ch 7.
emphasis. The message boils down to a sharp either/or. Either they listen to God’s word, or else.

1. An oblique call for repentance (26:4-5): Jeremiah threatened the people that if they did not do certain things they would be punished. This is tantamount to calling upon the people to act in certain ways. Basically Jeremiah is calling upon them to hearken to the Lord. Repentance involves two distinct responses on the part of the people.

   a. Obey God’s law (26:4): Say unto them, Thus says Yahweh: If you will not hearken unto me, to walk in my law that I have set before you… The Judeans must listen to the voice of God as it was recorded in the ancient law of Moses. While he frequently condemned formalism and ritualism, Jeremiah never minimized the importance of obedience to the written law of God.

   b. Listen to God’s prophets (26:5): to hearken unto the words of my servants the prophets whom with urgency and persistence I have been sending unto you (although you have not obeyed)… The Judeans must also listen to the contemporary spokesmen of God, i.e., the prophets. The people thus far had failed to give credence to the words of God’s servants even though he had persistently sent them unto the nation.

2. A shocking announcement of judgment (26:6): In no uncertain terms Jeremiah spelled out the consequences of impenitence in this temple sermon. Two distinct threats are contained here in the summary of his message.

   a. Threat against the temple (26:6a): then I will make this house like Shiloh. If Judah does not choose Yahweh’s Law, then God threatened to make this house; i.e., the temple, like Shiloh. The shrine at Shiloh had been destroyed centuries before, apparently by the Philistine invasion during the judgeship of Eli (1 Sam 4:10-11).

      A persistent delusion in the days of Jeremiah was that God would never allow his sanctuary to be destroyed by any foreign enemy. The prophet marshaled the facts of history to support his contention that no spot was too sacred to be decimated when God poured out his wrath upon a sinful people.

   b. Threat against the city (26:6b): This city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth. The second threat concerns the city. God will make it a curse among the nations of the earth. Jerusalem will become so decimated that when anyone wished to pronounce a curse on a city he would say, May such and such a city become like Jerusalem!

C. Angry Response (26:7-10):

1. Jeremiah was heard (26:7): And the priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of Yahweh. Those who were assembled in the court of the temple that day listened sullenly as the mighty man of God delivered the word. Priests and false prophets were among them. Their aim, no doubt, was to turn the crowd into a mob and to silence Jeremiah for good.

2. Jeremiah was seized (26:8): And it came to pass when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that Yahweh had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, You must die! Though Jeremiah saw the scowling faces, the clenched fists, and the threatening gestures, he continued boldly to rebuke, threaten and exhort his audience. At the conclusion of his sermon, the people, led by their priests and prophets, seized and threatened Jeremiah. You must die (môt tômūt) is the formula by which a death sentence was pronounced against an accused person (cf. 1 Sam 14:44; 1 Kgs 2:37, 42). Since the trial has not yet taken place, probably the sense is, “you should be executed.”
3. Jeremiah challenged (26:9):
   a. Offense of his prophecy (26:9a): Why have you prophesied in the name of Yahweh, saying, This house shall become like Shiloh and this city will become desolate without inhabitant? Jeremiah’s opponents paraphrase his message. They deliberately omit Jeremiah’s call for repentance and thereby distort to some extent his message. In their selective listening all they heard was announcement that their temple and city (Jeremiah) were going to be destroyed. The prediction that the temple faced the same fate as Shiloh angered the mob. Jerusalem was supposed to be immune to such criticism. To challenge the popular theology of the day was equated with blasphemy against God and treason against the state.
   b. Danger to the prophet (26:9b): And all the people crowded about Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh. The mob was ready to kill Jeremiah on the spot. Buffeted, battered and berated by the angry throng, Jeremiah probably remembered the words God had spoken to him at his call: they shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail (1:19).

4. Jeremiah was rescued (26:10):
   a. Princes restore order (26:10a): And hearing these things, the princes of Judah went up from the house of the king to the house of Yahweh. One wonders what the fate of the prophet might have been had not help arrived from an unexpected source. In the nick of time certain princes arrived from the royal palace. Apparently they had heard the commotion in the temple court. They hastened there to determine the cause of the tumult. Their arrival seems to have had a soothing effect upon the hostile crowd. Prior to the deportation of 597 BC there were a number of officials that had served in the court of good King Josiah. These princes were good men with a keen sense of justice. They were not going to permit Jeremiah to kill by mob action.
   b. Princes prepare for trial (26:10b): They sat down at the entrance of the New Gate of Yahweh. After order was restored, the princes sat down at the entrance of the New Gate to conduct a formal inquiry into the matter. The city gate had a plaza in front of it where judicial proceedings were conducted (cf. Amos 5:10, 12, 15). The New Gate was mentioned in the upper court (36:10), but its precise location is unknown. It may be the same as the Upper Gate built by Jotham (2 Kgs 15:35) and the Upper Benjamin Gate (20:2).

Trial of the Prophet
26:11-24

The proceedings at the New Gate were similar to those in any court of law.

A. Charges against Jeremiah (26:11):
   1. Accusers (26:11a): And the priests and the prophets said unto the princes and unto all the people… The false prophets and priests opened the formal proceedings with their accusation against Jeremiah. They directed their remarks to the princes and unto all the people. Apparently a public relations battle is taking place as well as a judicial proceeding. The people seem to have calmed down since the arrival of the princes.
   2. Demand (26:11b): saying, A sentence of death for this man! The priests and prophets demanded a judgment of death. In their view Jeremiah had prophesied falsely in the name of the Lord. Therefore, he was worthy of the death penalty (Dt 18:20).
   3. Evidence (26:11c): for he has prophesied against this city as you have heard with your own ears. The theologians could not conceive of such threatening prophecy coming
from the Lord. To declare that Yahweh would destroy the city subverted the national defense efforts. Since Yahweh had made his name to dwell in Jerusalem, the predictions of Jeremiah were also view as blasphemy, i.e., a capital crime. As far as the priests and prophets were concerned, this was an open and shut case. Everyone in the court (except the princes) had heard Jeremiah’s sermon.

B. Defense by Jeremiah (26:12-15): To the credit of the princely tribunal, Jeremiah was given an opportunity to defend himself. Laetsch calls Jeremiah’s defense “a masterpiece of brevity and convincing argumentation.” He does not retract any statement he has made. He does not make any apology. In his defense he makes five points.

1. Divine mission defense (26:12): Then Jeremiah said unto all the princes and unto all the people, saying, Yahweh sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the things that you heard. Jeremiah’s first point is that he had appeared in the temple at God’s appointment. He had carried out the instructions of the Lord (cf. 1:7). If they did not approve of his message, they should have taken the matter up with the Lord. It was grossly unfair to blame the messenger for the content of the message.

2. Positive intention defense (26:13):
   a. Exhortation (26:13a): And now amend your ways and your deeds. Obey the voice of Yahweh your God… The threats against Jerusalem and the temple were conditional. Jeremiah had attempted through his preaching to effect repentance. Cf. 7:3, 5.
   b. Promise (26:13b): and Yahweh will relent concerning the calamity he has spoken against you. If repentance had been achieved, the divine threat would have been cancelled. The fate of Jerusalem was in the hand of the audience, not the prophet.

3. Martyrdom defense (26:14): And as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do to me as it is good and right in your eyes. Jeremiah was saying that he was willing to die for what he had done, if the court deem that an appropriate punishment. A person generally will not surrender his life in a cause he knows to be false. Jeremiah is virtually repeating what the Gibeonites said to Joshua almost eight centuries earlier (Josh 9:25).

4. Innocent blood defense (26:15a): But you surely know that if you put me to death, you will surely be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves, upon this city and its inhabitants… Shedding innocent blood was a serious crime under the Law of Moses. It brought blood guiltiness upon the perpetrator, a condition that required his execution. Bloodguilt involves the whole community (Dt 19:10-13).

5. Truth defense (26:15b): for truly Yahweh did send me unto you to speak in your presence all these words. Jeremiah closed his defense as he had begun, by affirming in no uncertain terms the divine origin of his message. But the opponents did not did not argue that Jeremiah’s words were untrue, only that they were prohibited. Jeremiah’s message undermined the theological claims upon which the priests and prophets based their authority. The messenger must be silenced.
   This may have been Jeremiah’s finest hour. The court could not help but be impressed by the unshaken conviction of this man of God.

C. Legal Precedent (26:16-19):

1. Jeremiah had spoken in Yahweh’s name (26:16): Then the princes and all the people said unto the priests and the prophets, No judgment of death for this man! He has spoken to us in the name of Yahweh our God. The princes (civic leaders) did not take

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356Ex 22:27; Lv 24:10-16.
long to reach a decision in the case. A death penalty was not appropriate for a man who spoke in the name of Yahweh. The princes do not affirm that Jeremiah’s message is true, only that he had a right to speak. The people seem to have concurred with their judicial officers in the decision. They too had been swayed by Jeremiah’s defense.

2. Precedent of Micah (26:17-18):

   a. Witnesses (26:17): *Now certain men from the elders of the land had arisen and said unto all the assembly of the people, saying…* The quick judgment in favor of Jeremiah was probably influenced by the testimony of the elders of the land. These men were not part of the Jerusalem establishment. They were not committed to the proposition that Yahweh was bound to protect Jerusalem and the royal family no matter what. Whether they occupied some official position, or were merely respected because of their age cannot be ascertained. These men occupied a position of honor among the people. Their testimony carried considerable weight.

   A casual reading of the standard English translations might lead one to think that the testimony of the elders followed the verdict of acquittal. The Hebrew would certainly allow—and logic seems to demand—that this testimony preceded the verdict of the princes and people.

   b. Citation (26:17-18a): *Micah the Morashtite was prophesying in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah…* The elders cited the case of Micah who made pronouncements against Jerusalem very similar to those of Jeremiah. Because Micah was from Moresheth-gath (Mic 1:14), he was called the Morashtite. Micah, like Jeremiah, came from one of the Judean villages. Both men rejected the theology that held Jerusalem to be inviolable.

   c. Quotation (26:18b): *and he said unto all the people of Judah, saying, Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as high places of a forest.* The elders recalled the exact words of Mic 3:12. A direct citation of this kind occurs nowhere else in prophetic literature. Over one hundred years elapsed between the time of Micah and the present incident. Yet these elders were able to quote verbatim the same text of Micah that has come down to the present time. This is a rather remarkable testimony to the accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew text in that early time.

   The elders pointed out that Micah, a recognized man of God from an earlier period, had prophesied negatively against Judah in words very similar to those used by Jeremiah. Therefore, the way the crown treated Micah should serve as a legal precedent for what now should be done with Jeremiah.

   In one respect Jeremiah’s message to the Jerusalemites was more generous than that of Micah. The Morashtite offered no possibility of escaping judgment, and Jeremiah in this text at least did.

3. Jeremiah should not die (26:19-20):

   a. Micah was not executed (26:19a): *Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all of Judah make any attempt to put him to death?* The elders pointed out that King Hezekiah did not punish Micah for his negative prophecies against Jerusalem.

   b. Judeans repented (26:19b): *Did he not fear the Lord and make entreaty before Yahweh?* Far from executing Micah, Hezekiah heeded the warning of the prophet. The king actually led the people in a great revival.

   c. Yahweh relented (26:19c): *And Yahweh relented concerning the calamity that he had spoken concerning them.* As a result of the repentance of the Judeans, God had relented with regard to the pronouncement of doom against Jerusalem.
d. Warning (26:19d): But we are on the verge of doing great harm unto our souls! The elders concluded their testimony by declaring that the execution of Jeremiah would be a travesty of justice. The passage indicates that Jeremiah was not standing alone in his opposition to the misguided royal and temple theology. He was the point man at the moment for a longstanding debate between those who were committed to the city and crown, and those who stood foursquare for Yahweh’s Law.

D. Counter-precedent (26:20-23): It is impossible to determine precisely what the original relationship was between this paragraph and the trial of Jeremiah. Some hold that the account of the death of Uriah the prophet is a completely separate episode coming from later in the reign of Jehoiakim. The account may have been inserted here to emphasize the extremely precarious position that Jeremiah had just escaped.

More probable, however, is the old Jewish interpretation of the passage (found in the Siphre) that this episode was cited by Jeremiah’s accusers as a counter-precedent during the trial.

Whichever view is adopted—and there are good arguments for both—the incident of Uriah the prophet certainly demonstrates the grave danger that outspoken men of God faced during the reign of the ruthless Jehoiakim.

1. Uriah the prophet (26:20):
   a. Prophesied in God’s name (26:20a): But there was also a man who was prophesying in the name of Yahweh, Uriah the son of Shemaiah of Kiriath-jearim… Nothing is known of Uriah apart from what is recorded here. The text relates that he was the son of a certain Shemaiah; and that he was from the city of Kiriath-jearim seven miles northwest of Jerusalem.
   b. Prophesied against Judah (26:20b): and he prophesied against this city and against this land just as Jeremiah has done. Uriah was a true prophet of God because he prophesied against Judah and Jerusalem in the same manner as did Jeremiah.

2. Uriah the fugitive (26:21):
   a. Jehoiakim’s death warrant (26:21a): When King Jehoiakim, all his mighty men and all the princes heard his words, the king sought to kill him. The current government was united in the opinion that Uriah had to be silenced.
   b. Uriah’s flight (26:21b): When Uriah heard of it, he feared, fled and went to Egypt. When his life was threatened by the tyrant Jehoiakim, Uriah fled to Egypt. Was this sinful cowardice on his part?

      Elijah fled from the wrath of wicked Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1-8). Jeremiah and Baruch hid on another occasion from this same Jehoiakim (36:19, 26). Joseph and Mary took the infant Jesus and fled to Egypt to escape the slaughter ordered by Herod (Mt 2:13-23).

      Jesus hid himself from those who would have stoned him (Jn 8:59). Paul secretly escaped from the city of Damascus to avoid those who were waiting to slay him (Acts 9:23ff.). Jesus advised his disciples: When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another (Mt 10:23). From all of these references the principle emerges that a man of God should not knowingly place his life in jeopardy while he still has a mission to perform.

3. Uriah the martyr (26:22):
   a. Extradition (26:22a): But King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achor and certain men with him to Egypt. (23) And they brought Uriah out of Egypt… Uriah was extradited from Egypt through the instrumentality of an Elnathan. How was Jehoiakim so easily able to secure the extradition of Uriah from Egypt? Why did not the king of Egypt grant asylum for the Judean fugitive? The answer probably lies in the fact that Jehoiakim of Judah was the vassal of Pharaoh Neco for the first three years of his reign. A treaty must have existed between the two kings. Such treaties usually included a provision for reciprocity with regard to fugitives.

357 This Elnathan is again mentioned in Jer 36:12, 25. If identical with the Elnathan of 2 Kgs 24:8, he was Jehoiakim’s father-in-law.
b. Execution (26:23b): *and brought him unto King Jehoiakim who smote him with the sword.* Jehoiakim slew Uriah or had him slain with a sword.

c. Desecration (26:23c): *He threw his corpse unto the graves of the children of the people.* Uriah was not accorded an honorable burial. Jehoiakim had his corpse thrown into the graveyard of the common people.\(^{358}\) No doubt the king’s treatment of Uriah was intended to be a warning for Jeremiah.

E. Jeremiah’s Deliverance (26:24): *But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah in order to prevent his being given into the hand of the people to slay him.* Jeremiah had one very influential supporter during his trial. *Ahikam son of Shaphan* is credited with having influenced the court in favor of tolerance.

Shaphan, Ahikam’s father, had served as secretary of state under Josiah (2 Kgs 22:8). Ahikam himself was deputed by Josiah to consult with the prophetess Huldah concerning the law book that had been found in the temple (2 Kgs 22:14). The son of Ahikam, Gedaliah, befriended Jeremiah on several occasions.\(^{359}\) Gedaliah was later appointed governor of the land by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 40:5).

These facts indicate that Ahikam was a devoutly religious man as well as a man of political influence. Here he courageously defended Jeremiah. Ahikam’s prestige is such that the enemies of the prophet could not carry out their scheme to get rid of Jeremiah. What a wonderful thing it is when there are God-fearing men in high places!

SECTION FIVE
YOKE MESSAGE:
BABYLON’S RULE
Jeremiah 27:1-22

Chs 27-29 cover events about fifteen years after the incident in ch 26. In the fourth year of King Zedekiah there was general unrest throughout the Babylonian empire. False prophets in Judah and in Babylon were encouraging Jews to join in the rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar. In continuing to counsel submission to Babylon, Jeremiah aroused the hostility of the civil as well as the religious authorities of the nation.

In chs 27-28 Jeremiah uses an ox yoke\(^{360}\) as an object lesson to drive home his point that Judah should submit to Babylon. It was Jeremiah’s position that God had given all the nations of the Near East into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar for seventy years.

In spite of the bitter opposition of the political and religious leaders, Jeremiah continued forcefully to assert that his pronouncements were of God. National survival demanded submission to the yoke of Babylonian world rule.

Yoke Action
27:1-3

A. Time (27:1): *In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying…* V 1 explicitly places events in ch 27 in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim. The remaining portion of the ch, however, makes very clear that these messages are to be dated in the reign of Zedekiah (see vv 3, 12, 14).

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\(^{358}\)Some form of degradation is obviously intended by the expression *graves of the children of the people.* Perhaps the idea is a common graveyard as over against a family sepulcher.

\(^{359}\)Jer 36:10; 39:14; 40:5

\(^{360}\)Some argue that the Hebrew word *nîrîn* does not mean *yoke,* but refers to the yoke-bars that wrapped about the neck of the oxen. These yoke-bars and the accompanying thongs held the yoke on the animal. On this view, Jeremiah wore only this “collar,” not an actual yoke.
20). As a matter of fact, according to 28:1 the events of ch 27 can be dated precisely to the fourth year of Zedekiah.

How did the name Jehoiakim get into 27:1? It is conceded by practically all scholars that the name of Jehoiakim in this v is the error of a copyist. As he copied the manuscript of the Book of Jeremiah, some scribe was probably influenced subconsciously by the heading that appears over the preceding ch. He inadvertently wrote Jehoiakim for Zedekiah in 27:1.

B. A Symbol (27:2): Thus says Yahweh: Make for yourself thongs and yoke-bars and put them upon your neck… It is not infrequent in prophetic books to find the Lord instructing a prophet to do something dramatic to call attention to his messages. God commanded Jeremiah to make thongs and yoke-bars, i.e., an ox yoke consisting of wooden bars held together by leather bands. He was then to put this yoke upon his neck.

With his yoke-bar around his neck, Jeremiah proclaimed throughout Jerusalem his message of submission to Babylon. V 3 suggests that Jeremiah made at least six other yoke-bars — perhaps miniature replicas — to be sent to various kings of the region.

C. A Delivery (27:3): and send them unto the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the children of Ammon, the king of Tyre, and the king of Sidon by the hand of the messengers who are coming to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah. Ambassadors from several neighboring states had gathered in Jerusalem for a consultation with Zedekiah. Representatives from three Transjordan kingdoms (Edom, Moab, Ammon) and two Phoenician city states (Tyre, Sidon) were present. While the purpose of the meeting is not stated, it is evident from the warning of the prophet that these nations were contemplating revolt against Babylon. Perhaps the envoys were attempting to persuade Zedekiah to join the revolt. These states (minus Sidon) were condemned by Amos about a hundred and fifty years earlier.361

First Yoke Message
Message for Ambassadors
27:5-11

Jeremiah, the ambassador of the King of the universe, urges the ambassadors of the neighboring lands to carry a message back to their respective kings. The message stresses that the God of Judah is not a local deity who controls only the territory in which his worshipers dwell. He is not a god; he is God! He exercises his sovereign pleasure over all nations of the earth. Jeremiah reveals to the ambassadors three important facts.

A. A Charge (27:4): Command them to say to their lords: Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Thus say unto your lords: With his yoke upon his neck, Jeremiah appeared in some public place where the ambassadors were sure to pass. In this strange guise, he delivered an impressive exhortation to the foreign visitors. The Hebrew prophets had a great deal to say about foreign nations; but only on rare occasions were their messages given directly to those foreign peoples.362 Command in this context means to give a charge to.

Worthy of note is the fact that King Zedekiah made a trip to Babylon in this same fourth year of his reign. He either voluntarily chose to go and renew his oath of fidelity to Nebuchadnezzar, or else he was summoned by the great king who heard rumors of the revolt that was being plotted in this ch.

361No Philistine cities are listed here probably because Nebuchadnezzar had dominated their territory since 604 BC.
362For other possible examples of prophets addressing messages to foreign ambassadors, see Isa 14:28-32 and 18:1-3.
B. Foundational Argument (27:5):

1. **Lord of creation (27:5a):** *I have made the earth, and the men and beasts that are upon the face of the earth by my great strength and by my outstretched arm.* God’s right to direct the affairs of men is grounded in the fact that he created the world and all that is in it. All creation is accountable to him. God may do with his creation whatever seems good to him. *Great strength/outstretched arm* is Exodus terminology recalling the sovereign power over the greatest of nations.

2. **Lord of history (27:5b):** *I can give it to whoever is appropriate in my eyes.* Yahweh may dispose of any part of his creation as he sees fit. The God of creation is also the God of history. If he desires, he may appoint an overseer for his world. God need not seek the approval of men before he takes such action. He simply exercises his prerogative as Creator and appoints the one who seems right to him.

C. Announcement of God’s Will (27:6-7): Jeremiah *announces* God’s sovereign will with regard to the world of the early sixth century BC.

1. **Appointment of a ruler (27:6):**
   a. **Basis of his rule (27:6a):** *Therefore, I have given all of these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant…* All these lands refers to all the nations named in v 3. God had given these lands into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jeremiah dared to think the unthinkable, viz., that the will of Yahweh and the rise of world empire converge. Because of his role in Yahweh’s world plan Nebuchadnezzar is again called my servant (cf. 25:9).
   b. **Extent of his rule (27:6b):** *even the beasts of the field I have given to him to serve him.* The idea that the beasts of the field are to serve the king of Babylon is most likely an idiom expressing the all-embracing extent and unlimited power of Nebuchadnezzar’s dominion.\(^{363}\) If even the beasts of the wild cannot escape his rule how much less can the rulers of nations avoid his sovereignty.

2. **Submission to the ruler (27:7):**
   a. **His appointed time (27:7a):** *All the nations will serve him, his son and his grandson…* This is probably equivalent to the seventy years prophesied elsewhere of Babylonian world empire. It is unlikely that Jeremiah had in mind three specific kings.\(^{364}\) Rather he seems to be saying that the nations would serve Babylon for a long time, but not forever.\(^{365}\)
   b. **His judgment time (27:7b):** *until also the time of his land comes, when many nations and great kings will impose servitude upon him.* Until indicates that the arrangement announced in the preceding vv is not permanent. Yahweh has placed a time limit on Babylonian world empire. There is a statute of limitation on the jurisdiction of Nebuchadnezzar. This concept does not grow out of sage wisdom that recognizes that dictatorships implode in time. Rather Yahweh wills the demise of Babylon just as he willed its rise to power.

   The *time of his land* refers to the time of judgment. Babylon is nothing more than a tool in God’s hands that is discarded when he no longer has need of it. At the end of the appointed time *many nations and great kings shall enslave him.* After the

\(^{363}\) Cf. 28:14; Dan 2:38.
\(^{364}\) The successive sovereigns of Babylon with their years of rule were: Nebuchadnezzar (44); Evil-merodach (2); Neriglissar (4); and Nabonidus (17).
\(^{365}\) Dt 4:25 and 6:2 use an equivalent expression in the general sense of a longtime.
appointed time of world supremacy, Babylon will become subservient to other nations. This prophecy began to be fulfilled when Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

Second Yoke Message
Either/or Alternative
27:8-11

A. Consequences of Rebellion (27:8):
1. Rebellion anticipated (27:8a): And it shall come to pass that the nation or kingdom that will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and will not put its neck in the yoke of the king of Babylon… While the message is not addressed to any particular nation, Jeremiah surely had Judah and King Zedekiah uppermost in his mind. Powerful voices in government and religious were urging resistance to Babylon. The voice of Jeremiah did not remain neutral in the political debate of his day.

2. Punishment prescribed (27:8b): I will punish that nation with sword, famine and pestilence (oracle of Yahweh) until I have consumed them by his hand. The prophet warns those nations that refuse to submit to God’s sovereign decrees. God will use Nebuchadnezzar as the agent of his wrath to bring the sword (military invasion) against those nations that were in rebellion against his will. Famine and pestilence usually accompanied war in antiquity. The triad sword, famine, pestilence is used by Jeremiah in fourteen threats against the Judeans.

B. False Alternatives (27:9-10): Jeremiah has clearly stated what will become of nations that rebel against Babylon. Before stating the assurance of survival for nations that submit to Babylon, Jeremiah warns against false prophets. What is the purpose of this intrusion? Jeremiah wishes to warn against illusionary third alternatives. For this prophet the alternatives were either submit to Babylon and survive; or resist Babylon and be destroyed.

1. Nature of the lies (27:9):
   a. Perpetrators (27:9a): But as for you, do not hearken unto your prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers and sorcerers… The foreign ambassadors also are warned not to listen to those who were counseling revolt against Babylon. Five classes of pagan prognosticators are singled out. Prophets (also called seers) were known throughout the Near East. Diviners interpreted omens (cf. Ezek 21:16). Interpretation of dreams is associated with prophesying in 23:23-32 and Dt 13:1-4. The practice was wide spread in the Near East. Soothsayers (‘ōnîm) are found in lists of condemned practitioners of the occult (Lv 19:26; Dt 18:10, 14). Nothing, however, is said that would distinguish them from diviners. Sorcerers (kaššophîm) practice magic of some sort, although their specific actions are unknown.

   b. Perversion (27:9b): who repeatedly say unto you, Do not serve the king of Babylon. All the experts in prognostication kept on saying that Judah should not submit to Babylon. Their reassuring words were a direct contradiction of the message of Jeremiah.

2. Danger of the lies (27:10): For they are prophesying a lie to you that will only serve to remove you from your land; for I will drive you out, and you will perish. In 14:14 Jeremiah also accused the prophets of prophesying a lie. Those who prophesied that

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366 Jeremiah recognized the existence of prophet-like individuals among the foreign nations. The closest parallels to the biblical prophets that have been discovered were found at Mari. They date to the eighteenth century BC.
rebellion against Babylon would be successful were lying. They were engaging in religious fantasy.

The phrase to remove you far from your land does not indicate purpose but result. That is to say, it was not the purpose of these false prophets, diviners and soothsayers to cause their peoples to go into captivity. Far from it! They were ultra patriots who could not conceive of the deity appointing a foreign ruler over their land. But the consequence of their lying words would be the destruction of their lands and the exile of their adherents to distant Babylon.

C. Prospects for Submission (27:11): And the nation that causes its neck to come into the yoke of the king of Babylon and serves him, I will cause to remain upon its land (oracle of Yahweh); and they will till it and dwell in it. Those nations that humbly submitted their neck to the yoke of Babylon would be allowed by God to remain in their own lands. Thus it has always been that people who submit to the will of the Almighty have a peace that the world at large cannot know. Cause to remain has the connotation to leave untouched. Serves and tills are different nuances of the same Hebrew word (r. ’bd).

Third Yoke Message
Warning to Zedekiah
27:12-15

In vv 12-15 Jeremiah moved from the general warning that embraces all the small nations of Syria-Palestine to a specific warning for King Zedekiah of Judah. As a prophet to the nations (1:5), Jeremiah was concerned about the course that these small states might follow. But naturally his concern for his native Judah in those perilous days was paramount. So the prophet directly addressed Zedekiah and his advisers, perhaps on the very same occasion when he addressed the foreign ambassadors. The short resume of his message to the king contains four elements.

A. Exhortation (27:12): And unto Zedekiah king of Judah I spoke in a similar manner, saying, Put your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and people, and live. Jeremiah exhorted Zedekiah to submit to the yoke of Babylon. The use of the plural your necks suggests that princes or advisers were present with the king at the time Jeremiah delivered this message. The word live while in the imperative mood actually has the force of a promise. The sense is, if you submit to Babylon, you will live. The yoke of Nebuchadnezzar was in reality the yoke of Yahweh. Submission to the Babylonian was submission to the word of God.

B. Argumentation (27:13): Why will you die, you and your people, by sword, famine and pestilence, as Yahweh has spoken concerning the nation that does not serve the king of Babylon? Jeremiah backs up his exhortation with an argument couched in the form of a question. Why will you allow your people to suffer such calamity as the Lord has predicted for every nation that refuses to serve Babylon? It is utter futility and national suicide to attempt to throw off the yoke of Babylon. It is stupid to bring upon yourself the evil triad of sword, famine and pestilence when you might live in peace if you will only submit to Babylon.

C. Renunciation (27:14): Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, Do not serve the king of Babylon, for they are prophesying falsehood to you… Jeremiah moved hastily to deal with a possible objection that might be arising in the mind of the king.
Other prophetic voices were urging an independent course for Judah. They were claiming that faith in Yahweh demanded resistance. Political strategists suggested that Judah should make common cause with Egypt against the Babylonian juggernaut. They were prognosticating that the backing of Egypt would guarantee success in the rebellion against Babylon.

D. Threat (27:15): *For I have not sent them (oracle of Yahweh), but they keep on prophesying falsely in my name. The result of this is that I will drive you out. You will perish, both you and the prophets who are prophesying unto you.* Jeremiah did not hesitate to brand these prophets as liars. They were no better than the prophets of the heathen nations mentioned in the previous paragraph. God had not sent these prophets! To hearken to their voice will bring disaster on the land. This may not be the intention of these prophets, but it will be the inevitable result of their lies.

**Fourth Yoke Message**  
**Warning about Prophets**  
27:16-22

One cannot be absolutely positive that this message was delivered on the same day as the preceding messages. The point of transition from the previous paragraph to the present paragraph is the blast against the false prophets. Not only had these false prophets given disastrous advice to the king, they had raised false hopes among the priests and the people. Jeremiah now moves to shatter those delusions.

A. Their Message is False (27:16-17):

1. Audience (27:16): *And unto the, priests and all this people I spoke, saying...* Lies repeated often and forcefully enough begin to sound like the truth. The people and their priests were easily deceived by the lies of the false prophets because they really did not want to believe the truth. The fate of the temple vessels was a matter of great concern to the priests.
   a. Message of Jeremiah (27:17a): *Thus says Yahweh: Do not hearken unto the words of your prophets who keep on prophesying to you...* The false prophets were expert propagandists. They knew all the techniques of presenting their message in attractive ways. They preached with authority and they preached continuously. Your prophets distinguishes these charlatans from God’s prophets. The words suggests that these men were appointed by the people rather than called by God.
   b. Message of false prophets (27:17b): *saying, Behold, the vessels of the house of Yahweh shall be returned from Babylon in just a short time...* Lies are often more attractive than truth. Certain prophets in Jerusalem were optimistically predicting that the vessels of the house of God that had been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar on his two previous assaults against Jerusalem (in 604 BC and 597 BC) would shortly be brought back from Babylon. These vessels were made of gold (2 Kgs 24:13).

   The implication of such a prediction was that Babylon shortly would be destroyed. Since this was the kind of news most men of Judah wished to believe, the false prophets must have had quite a following. Such a prophecy regarding the return of the temple vessels caused the influential priests to support the proposed revolt against Babylon.
3. **Explanation (27:17c): for they are prophesying falsehood to you.** Again—for the third time in this ch alone—Jeremiah called Jerusalem’s prophets liars. He urged the priests and people not to hearken to the lies. Rebellion against Babylon would mean the desolation of the city. Jeremiah was saying that they should not be so concerned about getting those temple vessels back, but about preventing a policy that would destroy the entire city including the temple.

**B. Challenge to the Prophets (27:18):**

1. **Prophets should pray (27:18a): But if they are prophets, and if the word of Yahweh is with them, let them entreat Yahweh of hosts…** True prophets of God were always fervent intercessors on behalf of their people. Jeremiah challenged the false prophets to prove that they were men called by God. If they were true spokesmen for God as they claimed, let them be praying as well as preaching.

2. **Prophets should pray appropriately (27:18b): in order that the vessels which remain in the house of Yahweh, the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem, do not go to Babylon.** The prophets are challenged to pray that the vessels still remaining in Jerusalem be not carried away to Babylon. Jeremiah’s point was this: not only were the prophets creating a delusion by insisting that the subservience to Babylon would shortly end, they were in reality powerless to prevent further humiliation at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. They could neither create good fortune by their preaching, nor prevent disaster by their praying.

**C. Contradiction of the Prophets (27:19-22):** Before concluding his message to the priests and people, Jeremiah produces a double thus says Yahweh that directly contradicts all that the false prophets had been propagating. In effect Jeremiah is saying that it is useless for the prophets to pray over preservation of the temple vessels even if they were inclined to engage in such intercessory prayer. He shatters any notion that the will of Yahweh and the well-being of Jerusalem were inseparably connected.

1. **Focus of the utterance (27:19-20):**
   a. **Focus on temple pieces (27:19): For thus says Yahweh of hosts concerning the pillars, and the sea, and the bases, and concerning the rest of the vessels that remain in this city…** The vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had left behind in the temple when he took Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) into captivity in 597 BC will shortly be carried away by the Great King. The implication is that Nebuchadnezzar will successfully besiege Jerusalem.

   Among the items that had not yet been taken away are the pillars, the sea, and the bases. The pillars of brass were twenty-seven feet high and eighteen feet in circumference. One was called Jachin (he shall establish) and the other Boaz (in it is strength). These enormous pillars were one of the most distinctive aspects of the temple of Solomon. Jachin and Boaz were broken up by the Chaldeans and carried to Babylon in 586 BC (Jer 52:17).

   The large molten sea of Solomon’s temple is described in 1 Kgs 7:23-26. It was forty-five feet in circumference and rested upon a beautiful base consisting of twelve oxen. The priests had to wash themselves at this enormous bowl before entering the Holy Place.

   The ten bases supported portable lavers. An elaborate description of them is found in 1 Kgs 7:27-37.

   b. **Focus on deported people (27:20): that Nebuchadnezzar did not take when he took captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon,
along with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) ruled for three months (2 Kgs 24:8) while the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem. He was deported to Babylon in March 597 BC along with other members of the royal family and ten thousand of the leading citizens (2 Kgs 24:14).

2. Future of the vessels (27:21-22):
   a. Vessels specified (27:21): Surely thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that remain in the house of Yahweh, and in the house of the king of Judah, and Jerusalem… The false prophets spoke of the sacred temple vessels that had been confiscated by the Babylonians in 597 BC. Jeremiah had a genuine word from Yahweh concerning the vessels that still remained in Jerusalem, including items from the royal palace.
   b. Vessels deported (27:22a): They will be brought to Babylon. Jeremiah consistently preached that Jerusalem could not escape further humiliation from Babylon. The worst was not over. The sacred vessels already in Babylon would not be coming home any time soon. In fact all the rest of the valuable vessels remaining in the city would shortly be taken there as well. The second Babylonian seizure of valuables is documented in Jer 52:17-23. The documentation includes the items named in v 19.
   c. Vessels preserved (27:22b): There they will remain until the day I visit them (oracle of Yahweh). If there is a note of hope in this message it is here. By taking the vessels to Babylon the collection would remain in tact. They would survive while Jerusalem and the temple were totally destroyed. Furthermore, the vessels will not remain forever in Babylon. Until asserts for the second time that Babylonian power is not absolute (cf. v 7). In God’s own good time He will visit, i.e., punish, Babylon. At that time the vessels will be returned to Jerusalem.
   d. Vessels restored (27:22c): Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place. Though the temple vessels would remain a long time in Babylon, they would not forever be absent from Jerusalem. Jeremiah’s prediction was fulfilled when in 539 BC. Cyrus conquered Babylon. He issued a decree allowing the Jews to take their sacred vessels back to their homeland (Ezra 1). Therefore, Jeremiah agreed with the false prophets that the temple vessels would return; it was in the matter of the time element that he disagreed with them.

SECTION SIX
TWO VISIONS OF THE EXILES
Jeremiah 28:1-17

The appearance of false prophets had been anticipated in the Law of Moses. Provisions were made in Dt367 for ascertaining whether or not a man was a true prophet of the Lord. In ch 26 false prophets were named among the fanatic adversaries who sought the life of Jeremiah. Ch 27 relates the continued opposition of these men during the reign of Zedekiah. Ch 28 describes a dramatic confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah, one of the false prophets.

Hananiah’s Temple Prediction
28:1-4

A. Setting (28:1-2):

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1. **Time (28:1a):** *And it came to pass in that year,* in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, the fifth month… Later in the same year in which Jeremiah preached his famous yoke sermon, the clash between the true and false prophets occurred. This is specifically designated as the fourth year of king Zedekiah. As the present event occurred in the fifth month, the events of the preceding ch must have occurred sometime during the first four months of that same year.

2. **Adversary (28:1b):** _that Hananiah son of Azur, the prophet,* who was from Gibeon…_ The two prophets involved in the clash are Jeremiah and Hananiah. Jeremiah has alluded several times thus far in the book to the false prophets. Here for the first time he actually names one of them.

The name Hananiah means Yahweh has been gracious. Two others in this book have the same name (36:12; 37:13). Two others in the OT have the name Azur (Ezek 11:1; Neh 10:18). Nothing is known of Hananiah except what is here recorded. _The prophet* suggests that this Hananiah was well known. Gibeon was a priestly city about three miles northwest of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown, about eight miles northwest of Jerusalem. Some have suggested that Hananiah may have been a priest as well as a prophet.

3. **Location (28:1c):** _said unto me in the house of Yahweh in the presence of the priests* and all the people, saying…_ Hananiah chose well the place of his showdown with Jeremiah. The confrontation took place in the temple. Perhaps it was on some Sabbath or festival day when the courts of the temple were crowded with people. Jeremiah showed up with the yoke about his neck that symbolized submission to Babylon.

4. **Bluster (28:2):** _Thus says Yahweh of hosts the God of Israel: I have shattered the yoke of the king of Babylon._ Whether Hananiah’s action was preplanned, or whether he simply was roused to action by the appearance of Jeremiah cannot be determined. In either case, Hananiah boldly approached Jeremiah. In a loud voice, no doubt, he announced that he had an oracle from the Lord. It sounded authentic. Either this solemn introductory formula was usual with all who claimed the prophetic gift, or Hananiah appropriated it to claim an inspiration equal to Jeremiah.

Hananiah announced that God had broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Of course this is exactly opposite what Jeremiah had been preaching. Note that Hananiah used the so-called prophetic perfect—he described the breaking of the yoke of Babylon as an accomplished fact. This was a technique that was frequently used by true prophets in predicting the future.

**B. Prediction (28:3-4):**

1. **Vessels to return (28:3):** _Within two years I will bring back unto this place all the vessels of the house of Yahweh that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took from this place and carried to Babylon._ Mention of the vessels links this episode to 27:16-22 where the topic was discussed. Since Babylon was shortly to fall, nothing would prevent the return of the temple vessels to Jerusalem. The return of those sacred vessels seems to have been a prominent theme in the prognostications of the false prophets. Perhaps the capture of those vessels by a foreign king created real theological problems for the religious leaders.

Hananiah confidently predicted that within two full years the temple vessels would be returned to Jerusalem. Jeremiah had been saying just the opposite, i.e., that shortly the remaining sacred vessels would be carried away to Babylon. The basis for the figure two years is not stated. Possibly it was derived from the timetable of the nations that were plotting revolt against Babylon.
2. **Exiles to return** (28:4): *And Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon will I bring back to this place (oracle of Yahweh), for I shall shatter the yoke of the king of Babylon.* That Hananiah mentioned the vessels before the nobles suggests that Jeremiah thought more about the vessels than the exiled royal family. When the yoke of Babylon was broken, King Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) and all the other captives would be permitted to return. Jeremiah had been predicting an exile of long duration (e.g. 25:11). Furthermore, Jeremiah explicitly had predicted that Jehoiachin would never return to Judah, and he would never have descendants to follow him upon the throne (22:24-30). For the expression *exiles of Judah* see 24:5.

Because King Zedekiah is not mentioned in the prediction of Hananiah, some have concluded that Hananiah had personal hostility toward the present king. While it is true that many seemed to regard the exiled Jehoiachin as legitimate king, there is no reason to search for subtle undertones of political dissatisfaction in this forthright prediction.

**Jeremiah’s Response**

28:5-9

A. **Personal Response** (28:5-6):

1. **It was bold** (28:5): *Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of Yahweh…* Thunderous applause probably greeted the optimistic forecast of Hananiah. Eventually the audience hushed. Everyone strained forward to hear what Jeremiah would say in response to this direct attack from a fellow prophet. Jeremiah rises to the occasion. Like an iron pillar, he courageously and calmly replied to his antagonist.

2. **It was positive** (28:6): *and Jeremiah the prophet said, Amen! Thus may Yahweh do!* May Yahweh establish your words that you have prophesied, to return the vessels of the house of Yahweh and all the captives from Babylon unto this place. Jeremiah’s initial response must have shocked the audience and temporarily disarmed his opponent. Jeremiah used term *Amen (so be it)* in 11:5 to confirm Yahweh’s threat against Judah.

   Jeremiah was not being sarcastic when he voiced the wish that Hananiah’s prophecy would be fulfilled. He dearly loved his people. He had prayed on behalf of his nation on more than one occasion. Nothing would please Jeremiah more than to hear that the exiles were coming home. But while in his heart he wished Hananiah was right, in his mind he knew that Hananiah was dreaming the impossible dream.

B. **Official Response** (28:7-9):

1. **Request for attention** (28:7): *But hear please this word that I am about to speak in your presence, and in the presence of all the people.* But (‘ach) distinguishes between the personal and official response of the prophet. Jeremiah’s personal response was followed by his official response. He called upon his opponent to hear the true word of the Lord.

2. **Observation about the past** (28:8): *The prophets who were before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and great kingdoms of war, famine and pestilence.* Jeremiah alluded first to the precedent of past prophecy. True prophets of God in the past prophesied against many countries and against great kingdoms. The horizons of Israelite prophecy were not limited to Israel and Judah.

   In the preserved writings of all the prophets who preceded Jeremiah (except Hosea), oracles regarding foreign nations stand side by side with oracles regarding Israel and Judah. The present v gives early and authoritative testimony to the genuineness of these
so-called foreign nation oracles that have often been questioned by modern liberal scholars.

Earlier prophets predicted war, evil and pestilence for the nations of their day. In other words, the tenor of preceding prophecies had been judgmental. Jeremiah did not mean that the pre-exilic prophets were completely negative—that they had no positive word of hope. The earlier prophets did foresee a messianic age; but the people to whom they spoke were unfit to enter into that golden age without first experiencing a terrible judgment.

Jeremiah’s point was that his own condemnatory-type prophecy followed the precedent of earlier prophets. He implied that Hananiah’s unconditional peace prophecy had probabilities strongly against it.

3. A test for prophets of weal (28:9): *The prophet who prophesies of peace can be recognized as a prophet truly sent of Yahweh only when the word of that prophet comes to pass.* After establishing a presumptive case against the prediction of Hananiah, Jeremiah indicated the criteria by which such a prophecy can be judged true or false.

If contrary to the analogy of previous prophecy a prophet spoke unconditionally of peace, then that prophecy can only be authenticated by the actual fulfillment. In effect Jeremiah was suggesting that everybody simply wait and see if Hananiah’s prediction came to pass.

The word *peace* is not used here in the sense of salvation, but of *national* peace, and in particular deliverance from exile. God had made very clear in the law of Moses that return from exile was *conditional*. Only after return to Yahweh would God bring his people home from foreign exile (Dt 30:1-5).

**Response of Hananiah**

28:10-11

**A. His Actions** (28:10): *Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke-bar from upon the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and smashed it.* Instead of any rejoinder to Jeremiah, Hananiah resorted to an act of violence designed to impress the multitude. Apparently he could not answer the prophet’s quiet and convincing argument. Violence grows in inverse proportion to the number of reasonable arguments that can be offered to bolster one’s position.

The air was tense already. Those assembled in the temple listened eagerly as the two prophets exchanged their verbal blows. Probably no one there, including Jeremiah, was quite prepared for the dramatic action that followed. Without any warning Hananiah tore the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah—one wonders how much physical violence this would have involved—and shattered it before them all.

**B. His Words** (28:11): *And Hananiah said before all the people, Thus says Yahweh: Like this I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon within two years from upon the neck of all the nations.* As he smashed the yoke, Hananiah dogmatically and dramatically declared that the yoke of Babylon would be broken within two full years. This is just a repetition of what Hananiah previously had said except that this time he adds the climax, *from off the neck of all nations.*

**C. Jeremiah’s Response** (28:11b): *Then Jeremiah the prophet went on his way.* Jeremiah submitted to the indignity of the moment. He simply went his way. Perhaps it was obvious that Hananiah had swayed the audience with his dramatic action and words. To attempt to
answer Hananiah further at that time might have placed Jeremiah's life in danger. Perhaps under the circumstances he felt it useless to repeat the admonition that he had earlier made.

**Final word to Hananiah**

28:12-17

A. **Confrontation** (28:12): *And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had shattered the yoke from upon the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, saying...*

Hananiah did not have the final word in his confrontation with Jeremiah. Shortly after the incident in the temple, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah with instructions to seek out Hananiah and deliver the divine reply to him. While Scripture does not reveal whether the second meeting was public or private, the likelihood is that the two prophets were alone on this occasion.

B. **Accusation** (28:13): *Go and say unto Hananiah, Thus says Yahweh: You have shattered yoke-bars of wood, but you have made instead of them yoke-bars of iron.*

For Hananiah to break the symbolic yoke that Jeremiah had been wearing was easy enough; but by so doing he had created a yoke of iron for the people. The concept of a yoke of iron is derived from Dt 28:48.

The action of Hananiah served to excite the Jews to resist Babylon and thereby caused their servitude to be the more harsh. What irony! Instead of hastening the deliverance of his people by his dramatic act of smashing the yoke Hananiah actually had made the situation worse.

Perhaps Jeremiah was hinting that the action of Hananiah in breaking the wooden yoke was not altogether inappropriate. Cheyne comments: “Jeremiah’s wooden yoke was really an inadequate symbol; the prophet was too tender to his people. Thus God made the truth appear in still fuller brightness from the very perverseness of its enemy.”

C. **Prediction about Babylon** (28:14): *For thus says Yahweh of hosts the God of Israel: I have placed a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him. Also I have given to him the beasts of the field.*

God had now placed, not just a yoke bar, but a yoke of iron about the neck of the nations. They had to serve Nebuchadnezzar. On the idea of the beasts of the field serving Nebuchadnezzar, see comments on 27:6.

D. **Rebuke** (28:15): *And Jeremiah the prophet said unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear please, O Hananiah. Yahweh has not sent you, but you have caused this people to trust a falsehood!* In his rebuke of Hananiah, Jeremiah lodges two complaints. First, Hananiah was an impostor. God had not sent him. Therefore he was not entitled to call himself a prophet. He is called throughout the ch *Hananiah the prophet* because that was his official title. But he was not a prophet by the will and call of God.

Second, Hananiah had caused the people to trust in a lie. His optimistic prophecy of the imminent fall of Babylon had created false expectations in the hearts of the people. National policy—a policy of rebellion against Babylon—was being formulated on the basis of these false expectations. While Hananiah’s motives may have been sincere, even patriotic, his words were leading the people down the road to national suicide.

E. **Prediction about Hananiah** (28:16):
1. A blunt prediction (28:16a): Therefore, thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to send you from the face of the earth. Because of these crimes against God and the nation, Hananiah must be punished. The verdict of the Great Judge is introduced with behold, a word that signals the shocking and unexpected. God did not send Hananiah to the people of Judah (v 15), but he now will send him. The prophets were quite fond of using paronomasia or play on words.

2. A specific prediction (28:16b): This year you will die… It is rare, but not unprecedented, in OT prophecy that a specific timeframe for the fulfillment is stipulated. The announcement of the death of this false prophet accords with the instructions of Dt 18:20.

3. A justified prediction (28:16c): because you have spoken rebellion against Yahweh. The Law of Moses clearly states that if a prophet was guilty of speaking rebellion against the Lord he must be put to death (Dt 13:5). To advocate rebellion against God was a capital crime. To advocate revolt against God’s appointed ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, was tantamount to advocating rebellion against God himself. Others take these words to mean that Hananiah had perverted the word of the Lord. In either case it was a serious accusation to make.

One can only wonder how Hananiah received this word from the Lord. The crowds that had bolstered his courage in the temple are no longer present. Surely in his own heart he must have realized the emptiness of the prophecies he had been so bold to deliver. Now he must have trembled as the finger of Jeremiah pointed in his direction and those solemn words were uttered.

F. Report (28:17): And Hananiah the prophet died that year in the seventh month. About two months after the temple episode (cf. 28:1) Hananiah died. The text does not assert that Yahweh smote him, but the implication is that his death was a divine punishment. Not only did the death of Hananiah serve to discredit this teacher of lies, it also served to vindicate Jeremiah as a true prophet of God. The seventh month is September/ October, near the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

SECTION SEVEN
BABYLON PROPHETS CONDEMNED
Jeremiah 29:1-32

The Jews in Babylon were free to correspond with their relatives and friends in Palestine. Ch 29 contains two (possibly three) letters that Jeremiah sent to Babylon. It alludes to several letters that were sent from Jews in Babylon to Jerusalem.

Jeremiah, like other prophets, regarded the exile in Babylon as a punishment for the sins of the nation. Yet once that exile had begun in 604 BC, and still in greater measure in 597 BC, Jeremiah deemed it his duty to offer encouragement to the exiles.

Prophets had arisen in Babylon who were predicting a speedy end to the captivity. While Jeremiah wished to encourage the Jews in Babylon, he was a realist. He could not allow them to go on deluding themselves. As long as they thought the exile to Babylon was a passing episode, there was no real incentive to repentance. The letters in this ch are a blend of realism and idealism, of discouragement and hope.

First Letter to Babylon
29:1-28
A. Introduction to the Letter (29:1-4):

1. Addressees (29:1): These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto those who were left of the elders of the captives, and unto the priests, the prophets, and all the people that Nebuchadnezzar had carried captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. Jeremiah was addressed to the captives in Babylon. Jeremiah spoke of those who were left of the elders. Many of the older leaders had perished during what must have been an arduous journey to Babylonia.

The fact that Jeremiah mentions elders, priests and prophets would suggest that some sort of communal organization existed in Babylon similar to what existed in Judah. This particular letter is intended for all segments of the population. It is an open letter.

2. Time (29:2): (This was after king Jeconiah and the queen-mother, the officers, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and smiths had departed from Jerusalem). In 597 BC Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) had surrendered to the great Babylonian monarch. Ten thousand of the leading citizens of Judah, including members of the royal family, were deported to Babylon. The queen-mother is mentioned in 13:18. Officers (sārīsīm) could be translated eunuchs. It is difficult to know whether or not the word has its physical sense, or is used in the more general sense of officers. For craftsmen, see on 10:3; for smiths, 24:1.

3. Mailmen (29:3): The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah had sent to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in Babylon. The letter said: For some unexplained reason, King Zedekiah sent an embassy to Babylon. Perhaps the purpose was to carry the annual tribute to Nebuchadnezzar.

The embassy was led by two outstanding men. Elasah the son of Shaphan is named first. The sons of Shaphan were among the most loyal friends that Jeremiah had. It was the brother of Elasah who protected Jeremiah when he was on trial for his life (26:24). Since Elasah was from a God-fearing family he recognized the authority of Nebuchadnezzar whom God had appointed over all the earth (27:4-14). He was more than willing to carry the letter of Jeremiah along with him to Babylon.

The second member of the embassy was Gemariah the son of Hilkiah. Hilkiah may be the high priest who took such an active part in the reforms of King Josiah. Gemariah may have been a brother of Jeremiah (see 1:1). He certainly was also a loyal believer. Even though the Judean leadership was by and large corrupt, still there were those who bore witness for the Lord in the inner councils of the nation.

4. Salutation (29:4): Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the captives whom I caused to go captive from Jerusalem into Babylon: No information is available regarding when Jeremiah sent this letter to Babylon. The likelihood is that the letter dates to the time shortly after the deportation of 597 BC.

B. Advice for the Captives (29:5-7): A series of imperatives urges the captives to embrace life in captivity.

1. Settle down (29:5): Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens that you may eat their fruit. The exiles were finding it hard to adjust to their new surroundings in Babylonia. They were in the midst of a people who spoke a different language, had strange customs, and worshiped different gods.

False prophets arose who predicted a speedy return within two years. Many were expecting the momentary overthrow of Babylon. They were making no effort to

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368 2 Kgs 22:4; 2 Chr 34, 35.
accommodate themselves to the new situation. Jeremiah encouraged them to settle down for a long captivity. He urged them to build permanent houses and plant gardens so they could provide food for themselves.

2. Arrange marriages (29:6): Take wives and beget sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters in order that you may increase in number and not diminish there. Because many believed in a quick return to Judah, marriage plans had been put on hold. Jeremiah urged the men to take wives. Fathers were to arrange marriages for their sons and daughters. Even though they were in a foreign land, the population of God’s people should not be allowed to diminish. This advice recalls the phenomenal growth of the Israelite captives in Egyptian bondage (Ex 1).

3. Offer prayers (29:7): Seek the peace of the city where I have deported you, and pray on behalf of it unto Yahweh; for your welfare depends on its welfare. The captives are to make Babylon their homeland for the next seventy years. They are to be loyal subjects of the government. They are to live as nearly as possible normal lives. They should pay no heed to the dangerous agitators among them who viewed quiet submission as treasonous capitulation. The captives were to seek the peace (šālôm well-being) of the city. For the first time in Bible history God’s people were told to pray for their foreign masters.

C. Warning for the Captives (29:8-10):
1. Beware of false prophets (29:8-9):
   a. Exhortation (29:8): For thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Let not the prophets that are in your midst, and your diviners as well, deceive you, and do not hearken to your dreams that you cause to be dreamed. Jeremiah pointed to three agents likely to lead the captives astray. False prophets promising a speedy deliverance had arisen in Babylon as well as in Jerusalem. Their goal was to lead the people to dissatisfaction and revolt. On diviners and dreams or dreamers (cf. 27:9). It is impossible to determine what particular forms of the occult art had been appropriated by the Jewish diviners in Babylon. The unusual phrase dreams that you caused to be dreamed indicates that the supply was created by a demand for dreams of this nature.
   b. Explanation (29:9): For they are prophesying to you falsely in my name; I have not sent them (oracle of Yahweh). This v repeats the essence of 27:15.
2. Prepare for lengthy captivity (29:10): For thus says Yahweh: When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you. I will fulfill for you my good word to bring you back unto this place. Jeremiah agreed with the prophets and diviners that the Lord eventually would deliver the Jews from bondage. But in the view of Jeremiah, this deliverance would come only after the seventy years (cf. 25:11) that God had prescribed for the duration of the Babylonian world empire.

   For the exiles to continue to believe in the delusion of speedy return from Babylon would have defeated the disciplinary objective of the captivity. Therefore, Jeremiah insists that a full seventy years must run their course before God intervenes on behalf of his people.

369 Several forms of divination are documented in the OT, e.g., rhabdomancy (the use of sticks and arrows) and hepatascopy (examination of the liver of animals) are mentioned in Ezek 21:21. Astrology is also a form of divination.

370 Plumptre, OTCER, 5:98.
D. Hope for the Captives (29:11-14): The explicit declaration that the exile is to last seventy years would have caused discouragement in the hearts of the captives. For this reason Jeremiah quickly adds in vv 11-14 a note of hope.

1. God’s plans for their peace (29:11): For I know the plans that I am making for you (oracle of Yahweh — plans of peace and not calamity, to give to you a future and hope. 

God assures the captives that his thoughts toward them were for their peace (well-being), not their destruction. Whereas in v 7 peace for Babylon was the task of the exiles, here peace is a gift from Yahweh to the captives. The first-person pronoun in the Hebrew is emphatic. God knew his purpose even when men are unable to comprehend the circumstances of life.

The exiles needed to hear this. They needed to realize that their captivity was not an accident; it was part of God’s plan for them as a people. No matter how tragic their seventy-year sojourn in Babylon seemed, they must believe that the entire episode was for their ultimate good. God assured the people through his prophet that he will give to them a latter end and hope (ASV margin). They do have a future as a people. Though they were at present exiles in a foreign land, though their homeland was yet to be devastated by the hated Babylonians, God still had a wonderful purpose for his people. Wrapped up in the words latter end and hope are all the blessings of the messianic salvation.

2. God’s promise to listen to their prayers (29:12): When you call upon me and come and pray unto me, I will hearken unto you. 

The captivity must last seventy years in order to effect the change in the moral and spiritual disposition of the people depicted in these verses. The old rebellious generation will die, and a new generation will arise that will turn to God. While in Babylon they are told to pray for their captors; at the end of the captivity they pray for themselves. These positive references to prayer contrast with those vv where Jeremiah was told not to pray for the preservation of Jerusalem (7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

3. God’s presence assured (29:13-14a): When you seek me, you will find me. When you seek me with all your heart, (14) then I will be found by you (oracle of Yahweh). 

Return to the homeland will only be possible when the exiles truly seek Yahweh. God does not play hide and seek with his people. He is always available to those who seek his face. Just as predictions of disaster are conditional upon whether the people persist in their evil, so are the promises of God dependent upon repentance.

The dreary circumstances of the captivity gave the Jewish people an opportunity to learn trust and reliance upon God. God often brings his people into difficult places so that they might learn to cast themselves upon him.

4. God’s promise of restoration (29:14b):

a. Gathering (29:14b): I will reverse your fortunes, and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you (oracle of Yahweh). 

The first step in restoration is the gathering of Yahweh’s people in whatever places they may have been scattered. Those who are gathered are those who pray to the Lord, those who have truly repented. This gathering of penitent exiles is a type of the gospel call that gathers those in the bondage of sin into one body.

b. Restoring (29:14c): I will cause you to return unto the place from which I sent you into exile. 

God will bring them back to the land of their birth. In other words, when the people are restored to God, they will be restored to their homeland. Reverse your fortunes is lit. restore your captivity. The expression was first used in Hos 6:11. The phrase appears eleven times in Jeremiah. The land of Canaan is a type of the kingdom of Christ, the church of Christ.
E. Response to the Hardened (29:15-20):

1. **Reason for this word (29:15):** Because you have said, Yahweh has raised up for us prophets in Babylon... Jeremiah’s correspondence with the captives was not appreciated. Some felt that the prophet from Anathoth was meddling where he had no business. The captives much preferred the messages they were getting from their own prophets in Babylon. These deceivers continued to generate false hope by assuring the Jews that they would shortly be returning to their homeland. It was imperative that Jeremiah shatter this delusion. **Yahweh has raised up** is language borrowed from earlier history that affirms the legitimacy of the prophets.371

2. **Subject of this word (29:16):** Surely, thus says Yahweh unto the king who sits upon the throne of David, and unto all the people who dwell in this city, your brethren who did not go out with you into captivity... While the captives who resided in Babylon bemoaned their fate, their brethren back in Jerusalem were in a much worse situation. The king who was sitting on the throne of David was Zedekiah. From the king to the working man, all who were in the city were at the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar. These people were not left behind in the homeland because they were any better than the captives in Babylon. Those in Judah and those in Babylon are brethren, equally undeserving of God’s mercies.

3. **Judah’s future (29:17-18):**
   a. **Horrors of invasion (29:17a):** Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Behold, I am about to send against them the sword, famine and pestilence. If the captives could realize the agony that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were shortly to endure at the hands of the Babylonians, they would not want to return home immediately. **Sword, famine and pestilence** will come upon the land in the not-too-distant future. The reference is to another occupation of the land. This is the seventh time Jeremiah has used this triad of tragedies. Cf. 24:10.
   b. **Humiliation of expulsion (29:17b):** I will make them like rotten figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. Using a figure he used earlier (24:3, 8), Jeremiah likens the inhabitants of Jerusalem to rotten figs that are good for nothing but to cast out.
   c. **Terror of pursuit (29:18a):** And I will pursue them with sword, famine and pestilence. The picture here is one of persecution. Driven from their homeland the Judeans will continue to be hounded by the sword of enemies. On the run and hiding out wherever they could find refuge those who escape Jerusalem will continue to experience famine and pestilence. It is Yahweh himself who hurls these three weapons at the rebellious people.
   d. **Spectacle of nations (29:18b):** I will make them an object of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, a curse, a desolation, an object of derision and a reproach among all nations where I have driven them... The language here is similar to 24:9. Cf. 15:4. Seeing the terrible calamity that Judah endured, the nations of the world would shutter with fear and whistle in amazement. Thus instead of promising a speedy return of the Jews already in Babylon, Jeremiah declares that there will be further deportations from the homeland. In view of what will shortly befall Jerusalem, the exiles should be thankful that they had been spared the horrors of the last days of Jerusalem. The term curse was used of a drought in 23:10; desolation and object of derision (lit., hissing) appeared in 18:16; 19:8; reproach in 6:10.

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371 The verb *raise up* (r. *qûm*) is used of the messianic prophet (Dt 18:15, 18) and the future Davidic king (Jer 23:5. It is also used of the deliverers that Yahweh raised up in the period of the Judges (Judg 2:16; 3:9, 15).
4. Judah’s sin (29:19): because they did not hearken unto my words (oracle of Yahweh) when I earnestly and persistently sent my servants the prophets; but you did not obey (oracle of Yahweh). Jeremiah related to the captives in Babylon what he had been preaching in the streets of Jerusalem. The inhabitants of Judah must be punished because they had refused to hearken to the words of the Lord spoken by the prophets. In the sudden shift from third to second person in v 19, Jeremiah included in the charge of disobedience to God those who read the letter. The language here is similar to 7:25-26.

5. Warning for captives (29:20): But as for you, hear the word of Yahweh, all you captives, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. Jeremiah pled with the captives to hear the genuine word of the Lord. In essence he was saying: Those in Judah have refused to hear; then you in Babylon give heed to the word of God. For Yahweh’s sending the exiles to Babylon see 24:5.

F. Fate of Two Prophets (29:21-23):

1. Their names (29:21a): Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah. Two of the leading prophets in Babylon are singled out for special attention by Jeremiah. Nothing more is known of Ahab and Zedekiah than what is here recorded.

2. Their lies (19:21b): who are continuing to prophesy to you a falsehood in my name… Jeremiah accused them of prophesying lies in the name of the Yahweh.

3. Their fate (19:21c-22):
   a. Public execution (19:21c): Behold, I am about to give them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He will smite them before your eyes. For their sin Ahab and Zedekiah would fall into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. He would smite, i.e., execute them, before your eyes, i.e., publicly. The v clearly indicates that to be put into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar meant more than merely being placed under his dominion.
   b. Shameful memory (29:22): A curse will be derived from them by all the captives of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, May Yahweh make you like Zedekiah and Ahab whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire… Curse (q̄lālāh) was used in 24:9 for an object of cursing; but here the term is used for a formula for cursing. Ahab and Zedekiah would be remembered, but not as prophets raised up by God. Their names would become part of a gruesome formula of imprecation that angry men would hurl at one another.

   Jeremiah indicates that these two scoundrels would be roasted in a fiery furnace. The Babylonian king regarded their oracles as dangerous. This allusion to execution by fire brings to mind three brave Hebrew young men whom Nebuchadnezzar attempted to execute in this manner when they refused to bow to a golden image (Dan 3:6ff).\(^\text{372}\)

4. Their sin (29:23):
   a. It was serious (29:23a): because they have done folly in Israel. Folly may also be rendered commit an outrage. The term refers to extreme acts of disorder that undermine every principle upon which the covenant was based. It is used of sexual atrocities (Gn 34:7; Judg 19:23-24; 20:6, 10; 2 Sam 13:12), but also of non-sexual offenses (Josh 7:15).

\(^\text{372}\)Code of Hammurabi (laws 25, 110, 157) prescribed burning as the punishment for certain crimes. See ANET, 167, 170, 172.
b. It was sexual (29:23b): They have committed adultery with the wives of their neighbors… Jeremiah accuses the two false prophets of committing adultery. Loose theology often is accompanied by loose morality.

c. It was presumptuous (29:23c): and they have spoken a word in my name falsely, that I had not commanded them. The second act of folly committed by Ahab and Zedekiah was claiming to speak God’s word when they had received no revelation from the Lord.

d. It was observed (29:23d): But I know this, and am a witness to it (oracle of Yahweh). God himself had taken note of the sins of these two hypocrites. God will see to it that they receive their just due.

Letter from Babylon
29:24-29

The letter of Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon stirred up a great deal of hostility.

A. Occasion of the Letter (29:24-25):
1. Writer (29:24): And concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall say… Along with Ahab and Zedekiah, Shemaiah was one of the false prophets in Babylon. Nothing further is known about him.
2. Recipients (29:25): Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have sent in your name letters unto all the people that are in Jerusalem and unto Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, and unto all the priests, saying… Shemaiah sent letters to Jerusalem in an attempt to have Jeremiah silenced. Zephaniah was a leading priest in Jerusalem. He was previously mentioned in 21:1; he will appear again in a delegation sent to ask for intercession by Jeremiah during the last stage of the Jerusalem siege (37:3).

B. Contents of the Letter (29:26-28):
1. An observation (29:26):
   a. Zephaniah’s office (29:26a): Yahweh has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, to be chief overseer of the house of Yahweh… In one letter Shemaiah urged Zephaniah to imitate his illustrious predecessor Jehoiada who had taken bold action in executing the idolatrous prophets (2 Kgs 11:1-20). In 20:1 Pashur was designated as overseer (pāqīd), so Zephaniah must have replaced him.
   b. Zephaniah’s responsibility (29:26b): for every madman when he prophesies that you might place him in the stocks and the collar. Shemaiah thought that action should be taken against the frenzied, “mad” prophets who were roving around the temple area. The term madman (mōṣugā’) had been applied to prophets in earlier times (2 Kgs 9:11; Hos 9:7). Prophesies here has the connotation of acting like a prophet. On stocks see on 20:2. Whether the stocks and the collar are together one torture/restraint device or two is not known.
2. A rebuke (29:27): And now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah from Anathoth who is prophesying to you? Shemaiah made clear that he had Jeremiah particularly in mind. Rebuke (r. g’r) might be as mild as a reprimand (NEB), and could involve discipline (Thompson).
3. A charge (29:28): Inasmuch as he has sent unto us in Babylon, saying, It is long! Build houses, settle down and plant gardens that you may eat their fruit. Jeremiah was regarded as a madman simply because he held a minority opinion with regard to the
duration of the captivity. Shemaiah summarized Jeremiah’s letter. *It is long* indicates that the captivity will last for a long time. The remaining part of the v repeats v 5.

C. Results of the Letter (29:29): *And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the presence of Jeremiah the prophet.* To the credit of Zephaniah, he did not yield to the pressure that Shemaiah tried to bring against him. He must have been sympathetic toward Jeremiah. For this reason he actually showed Jeremiah the letter.

**Second Letter to Babylon**

29:30-32

A. Occasion of the Letter (29:30-31):

1. *Addressees* (29:30-31a): *And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah*, saying, *(31) Send unto all the captives, saying...* Jeremiah received an oracle from the Lord that he dispatched to Babylon by means of a letter.

2. *Subject* (29:31b): *Thus says Yahweh concerning Shemmaiah the Nehelamite:* The subject of the letter from Jeremiah focused on fate of the false prophet Shemaiah.

3. *Accusation* (29:31c): *Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, though I did not send him. He has caused you to trust a falsehood...* Shemaiah is condemned for perpetuating the delusion of a short captivity. That delusion encouraged the Jews to rebel against Babylon.

B. Prediction of the Letter (29:32): Jeremiah predicted that the Lord will punish Shemaiah. The prediction is two-fold.

1. *Shemaiah’s seed cut off* (29:32a): *therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to bring punishment upon Shemaiah the Nehelamite and upon his seed; he shall not have a male descendant dwelling among this people...* Shemaiah will be deprived of descendants to carry on his name. In that region of the world such a fate was considered most lamentable.

2. *Shemaiah will die in Babylon* (29:32b): *and he shall not look with pleasure on the good that I shall do for my people (oracle of Yahweh), for he has spoken rebellion against Yahweh.* The second aspect of the punishment was that Shemaiah will not live to see the good that Yahweh would do his people. The *good* is restoration of the Judeans to their own land at the end of the seventy years of captivity.

**PART FIVE**

**MESSAGES OF HOPE**

**Jeremiah 30:1-33:26**

Chs 30-33—the so-called Book of Consolation—constitute the only consistently hopeful section of the Book of Jeremiah. It is likely that these chs date to the tenth year of Zedekiah (588 BC). At least that is the date assigned to chs 32-33.\(^{373}\)

Those were dark days for Judah and for Jeremiah. The Chaldean army was at the gates of Jerusalem. The city was experiencing the famine, pestilence and misery connected with siege operations. Jeremiah himself had been imprisoned in the *court of the guard* as a suspected traitor.

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\(^{373}\)Chs 30-31 have been assigned to periods from the time of Josiah to the governorship of Gedaliah. While one cannot be absolutely certain about the dating of these two chapters, it is reasonable to assume that they were written at the same time as chs 32-33.
Even though events had proved him to be speaking truth with regard to the fate of Jerusalem, still the people refused to acknowledge Jeremiah as the man of God that he was. They even suspected that he was collaborating with the enemy.

Those dark days gave birth to one of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible. Here is the positive aspect of the prophet’s ministry. He is now beginning to build and to plant (1:10). At times during his ministry Jeremiah had been permitted to have a glimpse of the events that were beyond the judgment. But this section of the book is unique in that here the focus is upon hope and salvation. Here the prophet treats the great themes of the destruction of Babylon; the return of God’s people; the reunification of Israel and Judah; the coming of Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom.

Introduction
30:1-3

The first three vv of ch 30 serve to introduce the Book of Consolation. Jeremiah was commanded by Yahweh to record in a book the words that God had spoken to him concerning the future of the nation.

A. Command to Write a Book (30:1-2):
1. Introductory formula (30:1): The word that came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh saying… The language is similar to 7:1 and 11:1. The same Yahweh who decreed the destruction of Jerusalem authorizes a new collection of Yahweh’s words—a collection that will comfort God’s people through the dark days of exile. There is life on the other side of national death.

2. Commission (30:2): Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: Write for yourself all the words that I have spoken unto you in a book. Unlike the collection of prophecies referred to in 36:1-6, this book does not seem to be intended for public proclamation. It was recorded for the personal comfort of the prophet himself. This is suggested by the words write for your own sake. The Hebrew word sepher (book) can refer to any size document from a single page to an extensive treatise.

B. Contents of the Book (30:3): The Book of Consolation is all about what God will do for his people. The promises of these chs are rooted in Yahweh’s faithfulness and purposefulness.
1. A certain future (30:3a): For behold! the days are coming (oracle of Yahweh)… The expression points to a certain, but indefinite, time in the future when Yahweh’s ultimate plans unfold. The promises of these chs are written on Yahweh’s “to do” list; they are entered on his calendar of activities.

2. Concrete action (30:3b): Two verbs summarize what Yahweh intends for his people after the trauma of 586 BC.
   a. Restore (30:3a): when I will reverse the fortunes of my people Israel and Judah, says Yahweh… Restore (šûb) the fortunes is lit., turn again the captivity (cf. 29:14). The phrase is used in prophetic literature to signal a radical change in circumstances, rehabilitation so complete that it can be called a new beginning.

   The phrase my people embraces the entire covenant people, Israel as well as Judah. Israel had been scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire from as early as 745 BC. Like Israel, Judah was in the process of being deported to foreign lands on the installment plan. Some ten thousand were already living in Babylon.

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374While some scholars think that the book mentioned here comprises only chs 30.31, it is probably best to include chs 32-33 as well.
Reversal of fortunes involves first a reunification of the divided people of God. Similar passages can be found as early as Hosea. Reunification of Israel and Judah is understood in NT exegesis to portray the union of Jews (Judah) and Gentiles (Israel)\(^\text{375}\) in the church of Christ (Rom 9:25f; 1 Pet 2:10).

\begin{itemize}
  \item[b.] \textbf{Return to the land (30:3b): and I will cause them to return unto the land that I gave unto their fathers and they shall repossess it.} The second verb gives specificity to the general promise of hope expressed in the first verb. God’s people will return to the land that he had given to their fathers, i.e., Canaan (cf. 7:7). That land was a type of the real Canaan land, the kingdom of God. The prediction began to be fulfilled when the Jews and a few stragglers from Israel began to return to Canaan after the fall of Babylon in 539 BC. But that return was a typological prediction of the gathering of Jews and Gentiles into the messianic kingdom.
\end{itemize}

The four chs of Part Five reflect four messages or collections: 30:1-31:26; 32:27-40; ch 32; ch 33.

\section*{SECTION ONE}
\textbf{A NEW DAY}
\textbf{Jeremiah 30:1-31:26}

Section One has eight units arranged in such a way as to highlight Yahweh’s beautiful declaration of love for his people (31:2-6). The structure of the unit is simple:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[a.] Distress/liberation (30:4-11; 12-17)
  \item[b.] Restoration (30:18-22; 30:23-31:1)
  \item[c.] Declaration of favor (31:2-6)
  \item[b.] Weeping/joy (31:7-14; 15-17; 18-22)
  \item[a.] Contentment (31:23-26)
\end{itemize}

\section*{Distress/Liberation}
\textbf{30:4-17}

The Book of Consolation begins with two oracles intended to dramatize the reversal of fortunes that Yahweh envisions for his people. Both oracles (vv 4-11; 12-17) depict movement from national distress to liberation.

\textbf{A. First Distress/liberation Picture (30:4-11): And these are the words that Yahweh has spoken concerning Israel and Judah…} (30:4): \textit{Concerning (’el) could be translated unto.} In this context \textit{Israel and Judah} represent the entire covenant people. The deliverance of Israel from servitude to Babylon will be preceded by a period of great trouble for Israel. The day of distress must precede the day of deliverance.

1. \textbf{Current distress (30:5-7):}

   \begin{itemize}
     \item[a.] Terrifying rumors (30:5): \textit{For thus says Yahweh: We have heard a cry of terror, fear, and there is no peace!} Jeremiah described in graphic terms the distress that Jacob, the entire covenant nation, was to experience. He heard the people expressing their fear as the enemy approached. Contrary to the assurances of their prophets, war had broken out; there was no peace. Both Israel and Judah had experienced invasion, siege, deportation and finally desolation. Both kingdoms were brought to an end by a powerful Mesopotamian adversary.
   \end{itemize}

\footnote{\text{Israel in such passages refers to the Northern Kingdom that was declared by Yahweh to be not my people, i.e., Gentiles (Hos 1:10).}}
b. Birth pangs (30:6): Ask now and see! Can a male give birth? Why do I see every mighty man with his hands upon his loins like a woman in childbirth? and why have all faces turned pale? The picture is of a great host advancing. The people face the uncertainties of war and siege; they are petrified. Convulsive pain gripped the Judean men so that they clutched their loins like a woman in travail.

c. Jacob’s distress (30:7): How sad it is! For that day is great, and no other compares to it. It is a time of distress for Jacob, but he shall be saved from it. How sad it is comes from the vocabulary of lamentation. The day of trouble is great in suffering and distress. Although there are several periods of discipline, judgment, adversity and persecution of the people of God, this is the only use of the term the time of distress for Jacob in Scripture.

It is not easy to determine precisely what period of time is being described in vv 5-7. Three views can be found among the commentators. (1) Some regard the time of Jacob’s trouble to be the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC. According to this view Jeremiah is describing something that was presently taking place. (2) Others see a prediction of confusion and fear that would grip the Jews at the fall of the Babylonian empire in 539 BC. The exiles in Babylonia would share the consternation of their captors when the Persians armies started marching south toward Babylon. (3) A third interpretation regards the time of Jacob’s trouble as a period that is yet future. It is not uncommon to find commentators who regard the "prefulfillment" of the passage in the events of 539 BC while regarding the fulfillment to be yet future.

Probably the period of Jacob’s trouble began with the first deportation of Israelites to foreign soil in 733 BC. This deportation certainly launched a day of distress for the covenant people. First, they were oppressed by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians. The calamity predicted by all the prophets had begun. With the final crushing blow in 586 BC, the nation ceased to exist. Israel was a people without a land. The time of distress for Jacob extended to 539 BC when Babylon fell to the Persians and the exiles were allowed by the benevolent Cyrus to return to their homeland. This was the act that saved Israel in the day of distress.

2. Future deliverance (30:8-9): These vv amply the words he shall be saved from it of the previous v. In stark contrast to the time of Jacob’s trouble is the glorious day of his deliverance.

a. Foreign yoke broken (30:8a): And it shall come to pass in that day (oracle of Yahweh of hosts) that I will shatter his yoke from upon your neck, and I will snap his bonds… The yoke of the oppressor will be shattered and the bonds of captivity will be loosed. The first person verbs shatter and snap suggest the necessity for divine intervention, the completeness of the deliverance, and the ease with which Yahweh accomplishes it.

b. Independence promised (30:8b): and strangers shall no more enslave him. Strangers (foreigners) will no longer subject Israel to bondage.

Two facts might lead one to think that the reference reaches beyond deliverance from Babylon in 539 BC. First, the name of the oppressor is omitted. Second, the prophecy states that foreigners will no longer subject Israel to bondage. History records that Israel was subject to foreign powers after the fall of Babylon. Persia, Greece, the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires and finally the Romans each in turn oppressed Israel.

If v 8 refers exclusively to the release from Babylonian captivity, then the last clause must be taken to mean that never again will Israel experience bondage such as they experienced under the Babylonians. Never again will they be carried away en masse to a foreign land.
Another alternative is to regard v 8 as a general prediction that God will shatter the yoke of any nation that tries to oppress Israel down to the time that Messiah comes.

c. Davidic king restored (30:9): But they shall serve Yahweh their God, and David their King, whom I will raise up for him. Once the yoke of the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity was removed from the neck of Israel, they will be able to serve the Lord in their homeland. Freedom of religion is the highest form of liberty. They will also serve David their king whom the Lord will raise up for them.

In this v Jeremiah reiterated the prediction of Hos 3:5. The prediction is not that David will literally reappear to rule over Israel as some modern cults have alleged. Rather Messiah was the one about whom the prophet was speaking.

Elsewhere Messiah is spoken of under the name David as well.376 There is obviously a time gap between the two halves of v 9.377 Frequently in predictive prophecy events that are separated by centuries of time are woven together as if they follow one another in immediate chronological order.

3. Salvation explained (30:10-11): The deliverance of Israel begins with the return from Babylonian captivity and reaches its climax in messianic redemption.

a. Jacob’s hope (30:10):
1) Appeal for calm (30:10a): And as for you, O my servant Jacob, Do not fear (oracle of Yahweh), and do not be dismayed, O Israel. These words of reassurance recall similar words spoken to Jeremiah at his call (1:8, 17).

2) Hope for salvation (30:10b): For behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. From afar (mērāchôq) recalls the term used for the enemy from the north that comes from afar (minērēchāq) in 5:15 and the warning to the nations that they will be removed far from their own land (r. rchq in Hiphil) in 27:10. For captivity see on 15:2; 20:6. Your seed suggests that the passage is not exhausted by the return from Babylon in 537 BC. Similar passages reach out to the messianic age and the redemption from the captivity of sin.

3) Hope for restoration (30:10c): And Jacob shall return… Jacob is another name for Israel. The return is first unto Yahweh, and then unto the land of Canaan. In the messianic age unfaithful Israel returned to the Lord through the work of Messiah. To return points to conversion.

4) Hope for security (30:10d): and rest and be secure. No one shall disturb him. In NT theology the Israel that comes to God is the new Israel, the Israel that consists of redeemed Jews and Gentiles. The result of returning to the Lord is rest and security (cf. Isa 30:15). Rest frequently is used in the OT to speak of respite from war.378 Those who return will have peace with God, and inward peace that passes understanding. Secure (r. š’n) means to be at ease. They will have security based on faith in the promises of Christ. They will not be disturbed by persecutions and tribulations of life since by faith they know their destiny. No one shall disturb him is similar to the thought in 7:33.

b. Further explanation (30:11):
1) Assistance of Yahweh (30:11a): For I am with you (oracle of Yahweh) to save you… Future deliverance will be possible because of the intervention of Yahweh. The Lord will be with them to deliver them (cf. 15:20). This is now the third use of the verb save (r. yš’) in this first oracle (vv 7, 10, 11).

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377As an alternative Laetsch argues that long before Bethlehem the Messiah was worshiped.
(2) Judgment on oppressors (30:11b): for I will make a full end of all the nations where I scattered you… God will utterly destroy the nations that had taken Israel captive. There can be no true salvation without the smashing of the forces that make the free exercise of faith impossible. Full end suggests the total obliteration of Israel’s oppressors.

(3) Survival of a remnant (30:11c): but I will not make a full end of you. Yahweh exempts Israel from what he intends to do to Babylon. In 5:10 the enemy was directed not to make a full end of the people of God. This v repeats the promise made to Judah in 4:27. A remnant will survive the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile. Out of that remnant will emerge the new Israel of God.

(4) Appropriate discipline (30:11d-e):
   (a) Measured (30:11d): But I will correct you in measure… Jeremiah once had prayed for a measured discipline of his people (10:24). Now Yahweh assures him that the prayer will be answered. Throughout the bitter distress of captivity Israel should realize that God had not utterly rejected them. He was disciplining them in measure, lit., according to what is just. In bringing judgment upon Israel God was not acting capriciously; he was not merely satisfying a feeling of revenge.
   (b) Certain (30:11e): and I certainly will not regard you as innocent. Jeremiah reaffirms one of the primary aspects of Yahweh’s character as articulated originally in Ex 34:7 and Nm 14:18 (cf. Nah 1:3). Israel must be punished; but that punishment had a positive purpose. Through exile and suffering Israel experienced national regeneration. The nation was purged and purified from idolatry in preparation for the coming of Messiah.

B. Second Distress/liberation Picture (30:12-17): The distress/liberation theme is developed in this oracle under the metaphor of sickness and healing.

1. Current distress (30:12-15): In a few bold strokes of the pen, Jeremiah painted a picture of the present wretched condition of Israel. In all four of these vv he uses synonyms for wound and pain.
   a. Incurable wound (30:12): For thus says Yahweh: Your fracture is incurable, your wound is fatal. The nation had an incurable wound. This is a metaphor for the failed political policy and moral corruption of Judah. The theme of the incurable wound appears numerous times earlier in the book.379 The pronouns are feminine; Israel again is personified as a woman (cf. 8:21-22; 10:19-20). Fracture (šebher) is used of the collapse of a people (4:6; 6:14). Fatal (nachlāh) or unhealable (cf. 10:19) is parallel to incurable (‘ānûš).
   b. No remedy (30:13):
      (1) No person to heal (30:13a): There is no one to plead your case for [your] sore… Jeremiah has woven together two different figures of speech.380 The first is a legal picture. No one goes to court for them. The legal issue is the healing of their sore, i.e., the national wound. The point is that there is no advocate for the nation. Healing can only come from an external source. But no one pleads for the nation at the judgment bar of God where the iniquities of the Judeans condemn them.381

380 This is a characteristic of his writing. See Streane, CB, xxix.
381 Jeremiah has woven together two different figures of speech in vv 12-13. This is a characteristic of his writing. See Streane, CB, xxix.
(2) No medicine to heal (30:13b): you have no healing medicines. For the wounded and dying nation there are no healing medicines.

c. Abandoned by lovers (30:14a): All of your lovers have forgotten you, and they do not inquire about you… Judah had been forgotten by her lovers, i.e., her allies who had encouraged her to revolt against Babylon. For lovers see 22:20. Perhaps the lovers abandoned Judah because her national wound was so repulsive. While the lovers have forgotten (r. škch) Judah, Yahweh continues to remember his people (31:20).

d. Cruel chastisement (30:14b): for I have smitten you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, because your iniquity is so great, and your sins so numerous. The source of Judah’s wound is now set forth. Yahweh himself had smitten them. The wound of an enemy is a wound such as an enemy might inflict. Chastisement (mûsār) almost always refers to Yahweh’s correction of his people. Yahweh had smitten Judah so severely that it would appear he was their implacable foe.

e. Explanation (30:15): Why are you crying out concerning your fracture? Your pain is incurable! Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous, I have done these things unto you. Attacked! Devoured! Carried away! How did Israel come to be in such desperate straits? Twice (cf. v 14) the prophet indicated the reason for the present plight. The chastisement of Israel was well deserved because of the enormous guilt piled up by their innumerable sins. Pain (makh’ōbh) appears also in 45:3 and 51:8.

2. Future deliverance (30:16-17): From the human standpoint Israel’s disease is beyond healing, her guilt beyond redemption. But the thought in the paragraph takes a sharp turn at v 16.

a. Enemies destroyed (30:16): Therefore, all of those who devour you shall be devoured! And all of your foes shall all go captive! Those who spoil you shall become spoil, and all who plunder you I will make plunder. The word therefore in Jeremiah generally introduces a pronouncement of judgment. Here, however, it introduces divine intervention on Israel’s behalf. Because of Israel’s hopeless condition, Yahweh will intervene on her behalf to destroy her enemies. There is a fourfold description of the enemies of Judah. In three of the cases Jeremiah uses a play on words to announce the demise of the enemies. The end of the present plight comes when God brings punishment upon all the adversaries of Israel.

b. Wound healed (30:17a): For I will restore health to you, and with regard to your wounds I will heal you (oracle of Yahweh)… Humanly speaking, the case of Israel was hopeless. But the diagnosticians of vv 12-15 now becomes the powerful healer. The great and gracious Physician, turns his attention to the wounds of Israel. Zion’s health is restored despite all the ridicule of her enemies. In vv 12-15 it was Yahweh who caused Israel’s troubles; here the angry Yahweh has become the compassionate One (cf. Hos 6:1f).

c. Slander silenced (30:17b): for they have called you an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares. The reason for Yahweh’s turn from anger against his people to compassion is now stated. The sneering enemies had called Zion an outcast for whom no one was concerned. Yahweh will respond to that Gentile mockery by an act of pure grace. He will restore the nation.

382:30; 5:3; 7:28; 17:23.
383 Brueggemann, CJ, 278.
Restoration
30:18-31:1

Having alluded to the destruction of Israel’s enemies and the restoration to Canaan, the prophet now paints a picture of the regenerate commonwealth of Israel. It is the picture of a happy people enjoying freedom and security in their own land.

A. A Regenerate People (30:18-22):

1. Cities restored (30:18):
   a. General promise (30:18a): Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob, and have compassion on his dwellings. The Judeans who had been taken captive will dwell again in their land as aforetime. For restore the fortunes, see v 3 and 29:12-14. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile Yahweh said that he would show no compassion (e.g., 21:7). But after the punishment, he will have compassion. The term is related to the Hebrew term for womb, hence can be understood as mother love. This implies action of Yahweh’s part, not just warm emotion. Tents/dwellings may suggest restoration in rural areas.
   b. Specific promise (30:18b): A city will be built upon its mound, and the palace will stand in its appropriate place. The city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt upon its own hill or mound i.e., on its original site. The palace will be restored. It will be occupied in its usual fashion.

2. Joy restored (30:19a): Thanksgiving and the sound of laughter will go out from them. Elsewhere the absence of joy is one of the results of Yahweh’s judgment. Thanksgiving may refer specifically to joyous temple praise. Sound of laughter may refer specifically to times of birth and marriage. Happiness will characterize restored Jerusalem.

3. Population restored (30:19b): I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish; exalt them, and they will not be lowly. The population of the restored community will be greatly increased.

4. Children restored (30:20a): His children will be as in olden days, and his congregation will be established before me… As aforetime in the golden age of David and Solomon, God will protect them from their adversaries. His children refers to the sons of Jacob, i.e., Israel. Congregation pictures Jacob’s children as a worshiping community. Olden days suggests a restoration to a condition that existed in the period before Israel was corrupted by Canaanite idolatry. Established before me suggests a restoration to a position of active service to Yahweh.

5. Protection restored (30:20b): and I will punish all of their oppressors. While the true sons of Jacob are restored, Israel’s adversaries are punished by Yahweh. The former Destroyer of Jerusalem will become its Protector.

   a. An Israelite (30:21a): And their Prince will be of themselves, and their Ruler shall come out of the midst of them… A glorious Prince shall rule over them. That this v is messianic in character generally has been acknowledged even by Jewish rabbis.

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384The phrase I will turn again (or return to) the captivity of Jacob’s tents seems to mean that God will cause the tents (dwelling places) to be rebuilt and inhabited. Streane thinks literal tents are meant but this is unlikely.
385Laetsch contends that city in this v, which does not have the article in the Hebrew, is a collective singular referring to every city of Judah.
386This need not be pressed to mean that the restored community would have a king (Streane). The word palace may mean nothing more than governmental building. Freedman suggests that palace is an allusion to the temple in Jerusalem.
3877:34; 16:9; 25:10.
The KJV is somewhat misleading at this point in translating *their nobles*. The ASV is more accurate in reading the singular *their prince*.

A still more literal translation of the Hebrew is *his Glorious One and his Ruler*. The masculine possessive pronoun throughout this passage refers to the nation. The future ruler shall be a Jewish as opposed to a foreign Prince.\(^{388}\)

**b. Royal priest (30:21b):** The Prince will draw near to God without a go-between. This implies that he will be Priest as well as King.\(^{389}\)

1. *Divine permission (30:21b): and I will allow him to draw near...* Under the OT law only priests were permitted to enter the presence of the Lord. The Holy of Holies was open but once a year, and then to the high priest alone. One king—Uzziah—tried to usurp the priestly prerogatives and offer incense before the Lord. He was smitten with incurable leprosy. But the glorious coming Ruler will be Priest as well as King. Zechariah, a few years later, would make it crystal clear that the Messiah would be *priest upon his throne* (Zech 5:13).

2. *Bold action (30:21c): and he shall come near unto me...* The future king knows that he has the right to come near to Yahweh. He boldly goes where kings of the OT covenant dispensation had not dared to go. NT revelation speaks of Messiah entering heaven itself and taking a seat at the right hand of the Father.

3. *Radical development (30:21d): of Yahweh’s for who otherwise would put his life on the line by approaching me? (oracle of Yahweh).* The last clause of v 21 is extremely difficult. The KJV renders: *who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me?* The ASV translates: *who is he that hath boldness to approach unto me?* Perhaps a better translation would be: *who is he that will risk his life (lit., pledge his heart) to approach unto me?* Any unauthorized person assuming priestly prerogatives and barging into the presence of God in a worship-leader capacity would be risking his life.

5. **Relationship restored (30:22): And you will be my people, and I will be your God.** Those who have been saved from bondage and restored to their land will enter into a new relationship with God.

**B. Plan for Israel (30:23-31:1):** The three vv\(^{390}\) of this paragraph serve to point to the purpose of God in history. Vv 23-24 are almost identical with the threat made against the false prophets in 23:19f. Here the words apply to the Gentile enemies of Israel, and particularly wicked Babylon. Salvation for God’s people is not possible until the oppressors have been removed.

1. **Picture of judgment (30:23): Behold, the tempest of Yahweh! Wrath has gone forth, a sweeping tempest! It will whirl upon the heads of the wicked.** The language of judgment is harsh, but colorful. The wrath of God, like a whirlwind, will go forth to execute the intents of his heart. The *wicked* are those powers that stand in the way of restoration.

2. **Purpose of judgment (30:24):**
   a. **Short-range purpose (30:24a): The fierce anger of Yahweh shall not turn back until he has done it, until he has accomplished the thoughts of his heart.** The Lord

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\(^{388}\)Streane sees another possible meaning in the words *from him, from his midst*. The expression may mean that the new ruler will spring from a lowly family.

\(^{389}\)In Nm 16:5, 10 Yahweh causes the priests to draw near. The only place where the verb is used with the king as the subject is 2 Kgs 16:12 where the king draws near to a pagan altar.

\(^{390}\)The Hebrew ch division places 31:1 as the last v of ch 30.
will not relent until evil has been punished. Until signals that God’s wrath is not unending (cf. 27:7, 22). His wrath is measured and purposeful.

b. Long-range purpose (30:24b-31:1):
   (1) New understanding (30:24b): In the latter days you will understand it. Only in the latter days — after the judgment against Babylon has been accomplished — will the people of God fully comprehend the sovereign purposes of God. The latter days, as envisioned by the OT seers, commenced with the coming of Jesus Christ.

   (2) New Israel (31:1): In that time (oracle of Yahweh) I will be the God of all the tribes of Israel, and they shall be my people. After the pouring out his fierce anger upon the oppressors, the families or clans of Israel will acknowledge Yahweh’s lordship. It was the long-range plan of Yahweh to gather and unify scattered communities of his people into one people. As Yahweh fused the tribes of Israel into one people at Mount Sinai, so he will again bring together the elements to create a new Israel (Ex 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9f).

   Declaration of Favor
   31:2-6

Vv 2-6 of are an amplification of the first v of the ch. The prophet paints the picture of the harmony that will characterize the relationship between God and his people in that glorious day of restoration.

A. Focus on God’s Actions (31:2-3):
   1. Grace in the wilderness (31:2): Thus says Yahweh: The people who escaped the sword have found grace in the wilderness. Go, O Israel, to dwell peacefully. Those who had escaped the sword of the Babylonians found favor in the eyes of God in the wilderness of exile just like their ancestors experienced Yahweh’s grace in the wilderness during the days of Moses (Ex 16:12; Jer 2:2). The last part of v 2 is extremely difficult to translate. The Hebrew reads lit., going to cause him—Israel—to rest. Perhaps the meaning is that God will give the true Israel—those who repented in captivity —rest in the land of Canaan. Those Israelites in far off places who have found favor in the wilderness joyously will acknowledge the grace of the Lord.

   2. Drawn by God’s love (31:3):
      a. Realization (31:3a): From afar Yahweh appeared to me. These are the words of the nation speaking collectively. In captivity the people discover anew the everlasting love of God.
      b. Declaration (31:3b): With everlasting love I have loved you. Yahweh asserts his abiding fidelity to Israel. Prior statements of abandonment must be regarded as directed to national Israel and must be regarded as momentary. The destruction of the nation Judah and the exile episode in no way cancelled Yahweh’s everlasting love for people of faith, i.e., the true Israel.
      c. Explanation (31:3c): Therefore, in lovingkindness I have drawn you to me. By his grace Yahweh has once again will draw his people to himself. How wonderful,
incomprehensible and compelling is the love of God! (cf. Hos 11:4). It is that love that still draws men to him (Jn 6:44; 12:32).

B. Response of the Redeemed (31:4-6): All aspects of Israel’s community life will be restored and revitalized.

1. Joy of the maiden (31:4):
   a. Reason for joy (31:4a): *Again I will build you, and you will be built up, O Virgin of Israel!* Again (*ôd*) appears three times in this passage. Community life, interrupted for a time, one day would be restored. *Again* there will be building. The verb *build* (r. *bnh*) is used of increasing the size of an individual’s family (Gn 16:2; 30:3). Such announcements fulfill Jeremiah’s positive ministerial objectives as stated in 1:10.

   Restored Israel is personified as a woman. For Israel as a virgin see 18:13. The *virgin* who had committed such horrible sins against her divine Husband by idolatrous flirtation was still the precious object of God’s love. He treated her as a chaste virgin. She had been completely forgiven. God will build her up *again*, i.e., make her to prosper with numerous offspring.

   b. Manifestation of joy (31:4b): *Again you will adorn yourself with tambourines, and go out in the dance of those who rejoice.* Previously Jeremiah announced the cessation of all sounds of joy (7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). But the Virgin of Israel shall again go forth joyously dancing to the accompaniment of her tambourines as young maidens often did. The tambourine is primarily if not exclusively a woman’s instrument in OT times. A tambourine is thought of as an adornment for a woman. Perhaps the tambourines were actually decorated by the women. As the women of Israel danced to celebrate deliverance from Egypt (Ex 15:20), so Virgin of Israel (the population) is pictured celebrating God’s deliverance from a greater bondage.

2. Joy of the farmer (31:5):
   a. Planting (31:5a): *Again you will plant vineyards in the mountains of Samaria…* The Virgin of Israel (personified population) will *plant vineyards*. Planting vineyards portrays a stable future under the blessing of Yahweh (Dt 20:5f). The vineyards will be planted in the hills surrounding *Samaria*. Samaria occupied a hill, but it is surrounded by four larger hills. These mountains, mentioned elsewhere only by Amos, were ideal for growing vineyards. Announcements like this fulfill the positive aspects of Jeremiah ministerial commission (1:10).

   b. Harvesting (31:5b): *the planters who plant shall enjoy the fruit.* After waiting the prescribed length of time, these farmers will enjoy the fruit of their labors. The fruit produced by a tree for the first three years was not to be gathered. That of the fourth year was to be consecrated to God. Only in the fifth year could the owner eat of that fruit. Jeremiah used the technical Hebrew word (*chillel*) that is used in the Law of Moses to indicate the use of fruit by the owner after the waiting period was over.

3. Joy of worshippers (31:6): *For there will be a day when the watchmen upon the hills of Ephraim will cry, Arise and let us go up to Zion unto Yahweh our God.* On the hills men anxiously watched for the crescent of the moon that would be a signal for the celebration of the new moon. The schism between the north and south is over. The Ephraimites will be anxious to join in the worship of God in Jerusalem. What a beautiful

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395The translation of *chillel* in the KJV is unfortunate shall eat them as common things. This translation misses the sense of the original.
396Freedman has a slightly different interpretation. He thinks the watchmen are looking for the procession of pilgrims from the more distant cities. When they spotted the procession, they signaled their own pilgrims to make ready to join the band.
picture of the new relationship that will exist between God and his people. Worship is a vital part of community life in the new Israel.

Laetsch makes the point that to go to Zion in the OT prophecy is to join the church of Christ. See Heb 12:22ff. There are many examples in the NT of inhabitants of Ephraim or Samaria who were converted to the Lord Jesus Christ.397

Weeping becomes Joy
31:7-22

Two oracles depict the transformation of weeping into joy.

A. Consolation for Israel (31:7-14): The prophet foresees the day when salvation will be accomplished. A new joy will fill the hearts of God’s people. Jeremiah calls for shouts of joy and praise. It is not clear to whom this exhortation is addressed. The imperatives throughout the v are plural. Jeremiah was probably calling upon all who love the Lord, whether Jew or Gentile, to burst forth into joyous strains. Israel is here called the chief of the nations because God had chosen them from among all the nations for special privileges and obligations.398 In the vv of this section, Jeremiah offers divine consolation to four different groups.

1. The distressed (31:7-9): How careful were the prophets always to include the distressed of humanity in God’s program of salvation.
   a. Exhortations for joy (31:7): Five exhortations to express joy signal that wonderful promises are about to be made to the downtrodden people of God.
      (1) First exhortation (31:7a): For thus says Yahweh: Shout joyously for Jacob! Jacob is a name for the nation. The nation has a glorious future.
      (2) Second exhortation (31:7b): Rejoice over the head of nations! In the messianic age downtrodden Israel will become the leading nation of the world (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). The idea is the same as in Isa 2:2.
      (3) Third exhortation (31:7c): Proclaim! Presumably it is the news of the great future of the people of God that is to be proclaimed.
      (4) Fourth exhortation (31:7d): Praise! The praise is for what God has done, and what he has promised to do.
      (5) Fifth exhortation (31:7e): Say, Save, O Yahweh, your people, the remnant of Israel. During the period of captivity Israel would cry out to Yahweh for deliverance. That prayer is always appropriate. The prayers of the spiritual remnant of the nation were answered in a more glorious way that anyone living in Jeremiah’s day could imagine as the following vv indicate.
   b. Gathering of God’s people (31:8):
      (1) Worldwide (31:8a): Behold, I am about to bring them from the land of the north, and I will gather them from the ends of the earth. The reason for the exhortations for joy in v 7 now becomes clear. Yahweh announces what is about to happen by Behold I. The focus is on Yahweh’s action of bringing and gathering. The land of the north is the area where the Judeans were held captive. In 6:22 ends of the earth is also parallel with land of the north as a designation of the region from which Judah’s conqueror was coming. The gathering started when God brought the spiritual remnant home from Babylon. But the gathering

397Jn 4:1-42; Acts 1:8; 8:5-17; 10:1 ff.
398Amos 3:2; Dt 7:6; 4:7, 8.
extends to the ends of the earth as the gospel goes forth calling men to Christ (Acts 1:8).

(2) Inclusive (31:8b): Among them shall be the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor together. The journey home from exile would be particularly difficult for certain segments of the population. The blind, lame, pregnant, and those in labor represent those who must be given assistance and those who are defenseless. But such people will be among those who experience deliverance by God. The application of this verse reaches beyond the return from Babylon. In the great messianic gathering the physically disadvantaged will not be left out.

(3) Vast (31:8c): As a great congregation they shall return to this place. In 537 BC some fifty thousand Judeans made their way back to Judea. But this was only a token of the vast numbers who respond to the gospel call and join the march toward heavenly Mount Zion. Great congregation can refer to worshipers (1 Kgs 8:65); it can also refer to an army coming out to battle (Ezek 38:15). The components of this great congregation or throng make it clear that this army (if that is what it is) is no threat to anyone.

c. Leading of God’s people (31:9):

(1) Need for God’s leading (31:9a): With weeping they shall come, and with supplications I will lead them… The distressed of Israel will return with tears of contrition upon their cheeks, and with supplications upon their lips. Their prayers were prayers of repentance and remorse. They were prayers requesting forgiveness and acceptance. Weeping/supplication are found in parallel already in 3:21.

(2) Adequacy of God’s leading (31:9b): I will guide them alongside brooks of water, in a straight way in which they will not stumble… Yahweh is the Good Shepherd. He hears the prayers of his people. He leads them in a straight way where there will be no danger of stumbling. In Ps 107:7 Yahweh brings his people out of the wilderness in a straight way (dereck yāšār) toward a city in which they might dwell. He will lead them beside brooks of water where they can find refreshment. This phrase is used in Dt 8:7 to describe in ideal terms the Promised Land. Thus brooks of water (nachalē mayim) point to a lovely land of abundance. On stumble (r. kšl), see 6:21.

(3) Reason for God’s leading (31:9c): for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. The reason for God’s concern for the distressed is clearly stated. The metaphor changes from Shepherd/ sheep to Father/son. “The shepherd who protects is the father who values.” The disabled of v 8 take the honored position as the firstborn of God. Clearly Ephraim is the former northern kingdom. But it is not entirely clear whether Israel in this verse is the entire nation, Judah or the northern kingdom. The concept of Israel as the son of God is as old as the accounts of the Exodus (Ex 4:22). Hosea 11:1-3 stresses the same concept. The heavenly Father will not allow his son, the spiritual remnant of the nation, to remain in captivity.

2. The disheartened (31:10-14):

a. Scattered flock gathered (31:10):

(1) Addressees (31:10a): Hear the word of Yahweh, O nations, and declare it in the distant isles! The Gentiles—the nations—were called upon to hear the word of Yahweh.
the Lord, i.e., to accept his word with a believing heart. Then they in turn were to become proclaimers of the good news to Israel. Distant isles (‘îyyîm) were mentioned in 2:10. The term is often used in Isaiah for the nations far distant from Israel.

(2) Announcement (31:10b): Say, The one who scatters Israel shall gather him, and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock. The verb scatter (r. zrh) is borrowed from Lv 26:33; it is used frequently in the book of Ezekiel. Israel was the flock of God, but during the exile a scattered and miserable flock (cf. Jer 13:17). The day will shortly come when the Good Shepherd will seek his own. The promise to gather (r. qbts) his people is repeated from 23:3.

b. Enslaved people redeemed (31:11): For Yahweh redeemed Jacob, and bought him back from the grip of one who was stronger than he. The gathering can take place because Yahweh has redeemed his people. The verb is prophetic perfect. Future events are so certain that they can be described as completed actions. The Lord will redeem Jacob—the true Israel of God—from the hand of his captor. From the hand of one stronger than he is similar to the thought of Ps 35:10. The implication is that the hands of the oppressor are too strong for Israel to resist.

c. Abundant blessing (31:12):

(1) Joy of the return (31:12a): They will come and shout joyously in the height of Zion, and they will stream unto the goodness of Yahweh… The proclamation of the Gentiles will not be in vain. Together Jews and Gentiles will flow like a mighty stream to Zion. Zion will echo with glad songs of praise. God’s people will sorrow no more. Shout joyously (r. rnn) is repeated from v 7. Height (mārôm) is used of heaven in 17:12 and 25:30; but here it is used of Zion.

(2) Reason for the joy (31:12b): because of the grain, the new wine, the oil, the young of the flock and the cattle. In Zion the redeemed—Jews and Gentiles—enjoy the blessings of the Lord. Grain, wine, oil are the best crops; the young of the flock and herd are the best animals.

(3) Result of the blessing (31:12c): Their soul shall be as a well-watered garden, and they shall not languish again. The word soul (nephesh) shifts the picture of prosperity from the nation as a whole to individuals. God’s people will be like a well-watered garden in the midst of a barren waste in that day (cf. Isa 58:11). What an exquisite picture of the peace, contentment and prosperity of the people of God! Languish (r. d’b) means to become faint from hunger. There will be no more drought in the land. Zechariah carries this figure forward, announcing that nations that do not go up to worship Yahweh in Jerusalem will not receive rain (Zech 14:17-19).

d. Abundant joy (31:13):

(1) Joy permeates society (31:13a): Then shall a virgin rejoice in dance, young men and old men as well… The conclusion to this oracle is introduced by then. The entire oracle has been a contrast between then—what was—and now—what lies ahead. In v 4 it is the virgin of Israel that goes forth with dances. Here virgin refers to the young women of the nation. Rejoice (r. smch) is used in 20:15. Old and young, men and women rejoice together in the joyous deliverance that they have experienced. Pairing of young and old men is common (e.g., Lam 5:14).

(2) Explanation (31:13b): for I will turn their mourning to joy, and I will comfort them, and give them joy after their sorrow. The key verb is turn (r. hpk). God will turn the despondent and depressed world of the exiles upside down.
Mourning over the national plight shall be turned into joy. *Mourning* (‘ēbhel) is used in 6:26; *sorrow* (yāgôn) in 8:18.

e. **Abundant satisfaction (31:14):**

1. **Thirst satisfied (31:14a):** *I will drench the soul of the priests with fatness…*

   *Drench* (r. rvh in Piel) means *water abundantly*. The thirst of the priests is not satisfied by water but by *fatness* (dāšen). The term is used of olive oil (Judg 9:9) and of the ashes of sacrificial animals (Lv 4:12). So many sacrifices will be brought to the temple that the priests, to whom portions of the sacrificial animals belonged (Lv 7:31-34), will have more than enough to fill their own needs.

2. **Hunger satisfied (31:14b):** *and my people will be gorged with my goodness*(oracle of Yahweh).* Gorged* (r. sb’) means *to eat one’s fill*. The *goodness* (tūbh) of Yahweh will satisfy all the longings of those who are God’s people.

B. **Consolation for Rachel (31:15-17):**

1. **Weeping (31:15a):** *Thus says Yahweh: Listen! In Ramah lamentation is heard! bitter weeping!* Two places called *Ramah* are prominent in the OT. Both of them were some miles north of Jerusalem.⁴⁰⁰ Some think that the reference is to another Ramah in the vicinity of Bethlehem that is otherwise unknown in the OT. Still others think the term *Ramah* is not a proper name at all, but means simply *a mountain height*. On the whole, however, it is best to regard Ramah as a definite location though it is impossible to determine which of the two places of this name is intended.

   Some think that Ramah is mentioned because Rachel was buried near there. But nowhere is Ramah explicitly designated as the site of Rachel’s tomb. Others think that Ramah is mentioned because this was the spot where the exiles were assembled before being slain or deported. Jeremiah himself was taken in chains to Ramah.⁴⁰¹ He may have actually heard the women of Israel wailing as they watched the cruel fate of their sons.

   Still another view is that Ramah is mentioned only to indicate the distance at which the lamentation was heard. According to this view the weeping originated at Bethlehem, but was heard as far away as Ramah. On the whole the last view seems to be the most satisfactory.

2. **Weeper (31:15b):** *Rachel is weeping over her children.* With brilliant poetic imagination, Jeremiah represents Rachel (Rahel, KJV) in her grave near Bethlehem lifting up her voice in bitter lamentation over the recent fate of her children. Rachel, who had pined for children all her life (Gn 30:1), died with sorrow in giving birth to Benjamin (Gn 35:18-19). It is most appropriate that this one who loved children so much should here bemoan the loss of them. The meaning of the name *Rachel* (ewe) adds force to the prophet’s description.

   Jeremiah hears the cry of the ewe in Ramah (lit., *on the hill-top*) bleating for her lambs. Rachel was the mother of Benjamin and Joseph and, through the latter, of Ephraim and Manasseh. As Ephraim was the leading tribe of the north it is likely that Rachel was regarded as the “mother” of Israel, the ideal representative of the northern kingdom. In a bit broader sense, Rachel symbolizes all the mothers of the entire nation.

3. **Reason for weeping (31:15c):** *She refuses to be comforted concerning her children, because they are no more.* Rachel was disconsolate because her children are being slain. No one can comfort her in this moment of sorrow because her children are no more, i.e., they are dead.

   Matthew (2:17f.) furnishes the key to the interpretation of this obscure prophecy. Rachel lived on in her descendants. She would weep bitterly over her dead children. He

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⁴⁰⁰ One Ramah is five miles north of Jerusalem (Josh 18:25; the other Ramah—the hometown of Samuel (1 Sam 1:19; 25: 1)—was about four miles northwest of Jerusalem.
⁴⁰¹ Jer 40:1; 39:11-12.
saw here a reference to the lamentation of the mothers of Bethlehem over the slaughter of their infants by King Herod.\footnote{Most commentators see in 31:15 only an analogy. What happened to the mothers at the fall of Jerusalem would be repeated by the mothers at Bethlehem. For example, see C.F. Keil, "Jeremiah" in Keil and Delitzsch Old Testament Commentaries (Grand rapids: Associated Publishers, n.d.) 941ff; J.W. McGarvey and P.Y. Pendleton, The Fourfold Gospel (Cincinnati: Standard, n.d.) 52. Theo. Laetsch defends the view that Jeremiah was predicting the massacre of the Bethlehem infants. See Bible Commentary: Jeremiah (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) 248ff.}

4. Comfort for the mourner (36:16-17):
   a. Exhortation (36:16a): \textit{Thus says Yahweh: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from tears...} God wipes away the tears from the cheek of the disconsolate Rachel. He does so by giving disconsolate Rachel a wonderful promise.
   b. Return from enemy’s land (36:16b): \textit{for there is a reward for your labor (oracle of Yahweh) when they return from the land of the enemy.} Using the language of the prophet Azariah (2 Chr 15:7), Jeremiah assured the mother of Israel that there will be \textit{a reward} for her work, i.e., her labor in child-bearing. In the resurrection those children would return from the land of the enemy (i.e., death) to inherit their own territory.
   c. Return to Canaan (31:17): \textit{There is hope for your latter end (oracle of Yahweh) when sons return to their border.} The Bethlehem mothers were the first to suffer great loss for the sake of Christ. Their labor in bearing children, however, would not be in vain. They could have hope for the future. \textit{Border} implies territory. The inheritance here is the new heavens and new earth of which OT Canaan was a pledge (Heb 11:14-16). Though the present prospects are exceedingly dismal, there is hope for the future of Israel.

C. Comfort for Ephraim (31:18-20): \textit{I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself...} Not only does the prophet hear Rachel weeping for her children, he also hears despondent Ephraim, the lost child, lamenting his waywardness. Ephraim was the largest tribe in the northern kingdom, and here is visualized as the representative of that kingdom. As Jeremiah wrote, Ephraim (northern kingdom) was politically dead. The former citizens of that kingdom had been declared not to be God’s people (Hos 1:9). Thereafter Ephraim became a symbol for Gentiles—those who were not God’s people. \textit{Bemoaning himself} is lit., \textit{rocking with grief}.

1. Ephraim laments his condition (31:18a): \textit{You have chastened me, and I took the chastisement, like a calf that would not be taught...} Ephraim recognizes that her present condition was the result of divine chastisement. Like a calf that would not submit to the yoke, Ephraim went his own rebellious way. He thus incurred the chastisement of the Lord. Comparing Ephraim to a calf originated with Hosea (4:16; 10:11).

2. Ephraim pleads for restoration (31:18b-19): \textit{turn me that I might be turned...} Eventually the prodigal son Ephraim came to himself and cried out unto God to help him repent. It is not just a physical return to Canaan that is in view, but a restored relationship with Yahweh. Ephraim offers three bases for his appeal.
   a. First basis of appeal (31:18c): \textit{for you are Yahweh my God.} The first basis of appeal is Ephraim’s faith in Yahweh (cf. 3:22). To recognize Yahweh as \textit{my God} is to affirm one’s loyalty, love, and willingness to serve.
   b. Second basis of appeal (31:19a): \textit{For after I strayed, I repented; and after I learned my lesson, I slapped my thigh...} Through the discipline of exile, Ephraim was brought to repentance. \textit{Repented} (r. nchm in Niphal) means to feel remorse. In the\footnote{Understanding the \textit{Niphal} in the reflexive rather than the passive sense.}
world of exile Ephraim learned his lesson. He came to recognize his miserable condition. He smote his thigh in consternation and contrition. This was a gesture of expressing strong emotion throughout the ancient Near East (cf. Ezek 21:12).

c. Third basis for appeal (31:19b): *I am ashamed and embarrassed, for I bore the reproach of my youth.* Ephraim was confused, utterly ashamed. Embarrassed (r. klm Niphal) expresses a more profound state that being ashamed. The word can mean blush (cf. 3:3). Reproach of my youth are the sins committed in the earlier history of the nation (cf. Isa 54:4).

3. God’s response (31:20):
   a. Ephraim’s status (31:20a): *Is Ephraim my precious son? Is he my darling child?* Do the parallel questions anticipate positive or negative answers? Usually (but not always) questions like these require negative answers. Ephraim represents those who did not have family status. Darling child is lit., *a child of delights*, i.e., one in whom a parent takes intense pleasure. Ephraim certainly had been unworthy of the love of the heavenly Father. He had not been the kind of child in whom a parent could delight. It is as though God is expressing surprise at his own mercy for wayward man.

   b. Yahweh’s longing (31:20b): *For as often as I speak of him, I longingly think of him. Therefore, my heart yearns for him…* Through Ephraim is not a son who makes God proud, still the Father has positive thoughts about him. The Father’s heart yearns for him, lit., *my bowels sound, moan.* Bowels were the seat of emotion in Hebrew psychology. The love of the Father for the lost is powerful.

   c. Yahweh’s commitment (31:20c): *I surely will show compassion to him (oracle of Yahweh).* Because of his overwhelming love, God must exercise mercy on behalf of Ephraim!

D. New Creation (31:21-22):

1. Importance of coming home (31:21):
   a. Mark the way home (31:21a): *Erect for yourself road marks, set up guideposts! Set your heart toward the highway, the way you have walked!* Jeremiah urges those going into captivity to mark the road they travel into exile so that they might know the return route. They are to erect, as it were, way marks (stone pillars) and high heaps or signposts to mark the way home. They are to turn their attention to that highway in order that they might be able to retrace their steps.

   b. Exhortation to return (31:21b): *Return, O Virgin of Israel, return to these your cities!* Jeremiah calls upon the virgin of Israel (the nation) to come back home.

   c. Rebuke for hesitation (31:22): *How long will you dillydally, O backsliding daughter…* How long connotes impatience (cf. 4:14). The backsliding daughter is admonished to put away her rebellious reluctance to return to the homeland.

2. Miraculous sign (31:22):
   a. Stupendous miracle (31:22a): *for Yahweh has created a new thing in the earth…* Jeremiah holds out a wondrous sign as an incentive to the reluctant nation. The Lord has created a new thing in the earth (or land). These words introduce a miracle that completely reverses ordinary human experience. It is something entirely new, something that had never happened before. The language suggests a new beginning comparable to the original creation.

404 The verb created appears only here in Jeremiah.
b. Nature of the miracle (31:22b): A woman shall compass a man. Many interpretations of these words clearly do not satisfy the requirements of the context. In order to set forth the marvelous prophecy of this v, three questions need to be asked.

1. Who is the woman who is the subject of the prophecy? Most commentators assume that the woman is Israel. Support for this interpretation is gained from the allusion to the nation as the virgin of Israel in the previous v, and a backsliding daughter in the present v.

While this view cannot be ruled out, another interpretation is possible. Many years before the time of Jeremiah, Isaiah prophesied of a virgin who would miraculously give birth to a child who would be Immanuel (God with us). Is it possible that Jeremiah is referring to that same woman? Certainly a virgin giving birth to a child would fulfill the requirements of this passage that states that the Lord would create a new thing. This particular section of Jeremiah (chs 30-31) contains several messianic predictions. A reference to the virgin birth of Christ would not be out of place here contextually.

2. Who is the man who is the object of the sentence? The Hebrew word used here (gever) is not the ordinary word for a man as a frail being of clay. Rather it is the word for man par excellence—strong, virile, powerful. Commentators commonly reason that if Israel is the woman, then the man must be the divine husband, i.e., the Lord. Probably the man here is none other than Messiah. Certainly the use of the Hebrew word gever and related words for the Messiah is not without parallel (see Zech 13:7).

3. What is involved in the verb that is used here? The Hebrew verb translated compass lit., to surround. The verb could well describe the fact that a man-child is enfolded in the womb of a woman. It might be argued that this would not be anything new as the context demands. But if the woman mentioned here is the virgin, and if the man is that holy thing that was born of her who was to be called the Son of God (Lk 1:35), then certainly this could be a new thing created by the Lord himself.

Contentment
31:23-26

After the prophet has promised Ephraim (symbolizing those not his people) an abundant material and spiritual blessing from God, he does the same for Judah.

A. Pure Religion (31:23):

1. Judah’s fortunes reversed (31:23a): Thus says Yahweh of hosts the God of Israel: Again they shall speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities when I restore their fortunes... Again implies that there was a time when the words of the song that follow were not sung in the land. When the temple was desecrated the singing stopped. When God’s people return from exile, completely new conditions will exist throughout the land. The song of praise to Yahweh will be sung again. On restore their fortunes see 29:14.

2. Judah’s faith restored (31:23b): May Yahweh, the Habitation of Justice, bless you, O holy hill! Pure religion will be restored among those who return from exile. On the basis of 50:7 Habitation of Justice can be taken as a title for Yahweh. On the other hand,

All of the following interpretations have been offered: (1) the woman will become manly in spirit; (2) the woman will keep close to the man; (3) the woman will seek protection from the man.
it may be Jerusalem that is called *habitation of justice/holy hill*. The people will again pronounce blessings upon the sacred sanctuary and the holy city. In both the title for God and the designation of the holy city the people who return from exile realize the important place of *justice* and *holiness* for the first time. *Holy hill* is used some twenty-three times in the prophets and psalms.

**B. Harmony (31:24):** *And Judah and all of its cities will dwell there together, farmers and nomadic shepherds.* Not only will idyllic conditions exist in the realm of religion, it will also exist among the various elements of society. Peace and harmony shall exist between farmers and nomads. *Nomadic shepherds* is lit., *those who journey with flocks*.

**C. Rest (31:25):** *For I satiate the weary soul, and every languishing soul I fill up.* The weary world shall find rest and the sorrowful will find abundant comfort.

**D. Jeremiah’s Reaction (31:26):** *At this moment I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.* At this point Jeremiah declared that he awoke from a deep sleep. The question is whether real physical sleep is meant, or some ecstatic condition resembling sleep. On the whole it is best to think in terms of real sleep, for dreams were frequently the channels of communication for divine revelation to prophets. Since the prophecies just enunciated were comforting, it is quite understandable why the prophet describes his sleep as *sweet*.

**SECTION TWO**

**NEW BLESSINGS**

**Jeremiah 31:28-40**

It is impossible to tell whether or not an interval of time elapsed between v 26 and v 27. Perhaps Jeremiah at once fell asleep again, much as a dreamer might go back to sleep after being awakened in order to continue a pleasant dream.

The six short oracles in this Section seem to be arranged in the following pattern:

- a. House of Israel rebuilt (28-30)
  - b. Old Israel rejected (31-32)
    - c. Description of new Israel (33-34)
    - c. Permanence of new Israel (35-36)
  - b. New Israel never rejected (37)
  - a. City of Jerusalem rebuilt (38-40)

**House of Israel Rebuilt**

31:27-30

**A. Promise of Fruitfulness (31:27):** *Behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of men and the seed of cattle.* Yahweh will bless his people with fruitfulness. God will make the people and their

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406 The expression *mountain of holiness* or *holy mountain* is used both for the temple mountain and for Jerusalem itself. See Ps 2:6; Isa 11:9; 27:13; 66:20; Dan 9:16; Zech 8:3.

407 In Hebrew the verbs are in the perfect or completed state. It is another example of the so-called prophetic perfect that represents future facts as already accomplished.

408 There can be little doubt that it is Jeremiah who is speaking in v 26. The language would not be appropriate to God or to the exiles.

cattle multiply so rapidly that it will seem as though they spring up like seed sown in fertile soil. It is both Israel and Judah reunited into one people who are the recipients of this promise.

B. Promise of Faithfulness (31:28): This v recalls the six verbs that formed the agenda for Jeremiah’s preaching career (1:10).

1. Past (31:28a): And it will come to pass as I have looked upon them to uproot, tear down, raze, destroy and do evil… Just as God has been “watchful” over the fulfillment of the prophecies of judgment, so will he now be equally zealous in fulfilling his promises of restoration. The four negative verbs from 1:10 are intensified by the addition of a fifth, to do evil, i.e., hurt, calamity.

2. Future (31:28b): so will I look upon them to build and to plant (oracle of Yahweh). In this ch Jeremiah was beginning to develop that more positive side of his message of which mention was made in his call (1:10). Build and plant encompass a full restoration and revitalization of community life. All that is about to happen will take place under the watchful eye of Yahweh. He will not relent until every last promise has been realized.

C. Promise of Fairness (31:29-30):

1. An old proverb (31:29): In those days they shall not say any more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, but the teeth of the children have been set on edge. Apparently the people of Jerusalem and the exiles already in Babylon had complained that it was unfair for them to have to suffer for the sins of their fathers. A popular proverb expressed the mood of the people. Such a proverb could only be uttered by a generation blind to their own sin, and utterly deluded in thinking that they were innocent of all wrongdoing.

2. A new reality (31:30): But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats sour grapes, his own teeth shall be set on edge. Ezekiel (ch 18) attacked this proverb as a blasphemy of God’s justice. But Jeremiah was not so much concerned to refute this notion as to merely assert that in the messianic age, people will have no occasion to make such a complaint. There are certain implications in Jeremiah’s prediction that the sour grapes proverb will no longer be used in the messianic age.

   1. The prophet may be suggesting that individuals in Messiah’s kingdom will be more sensitive to the sin in their own lives. Unlike the people of Jeremiah’s day, they will recognize that divine judgment is their just desert. Thus the prediction would involve a change of attitude on the part of the people.

   2. Similarly, the thought may be that in the messianic age the absolute justice of God will come to be fully recognized by all members of the covenant people.

   3. A further implication of the prediction might be that in the messianic age, the emphasis will be more upon the individual than upon the community. Heretofore the basic unit of responsibility before God was the nation; in the future it would be the individual.

   4. Another possible implication of Jeremiah’s prediction would be the holiness of messianic Israel. The prophet may be saying that the moral level in the messianic age will be so high that collective guilt will no longer be possible. Only individual transgression will occur as isolated exceptions from the rule. God will not allow the sins of individuals to permeate the whole. Each individual sinner will suffer the consequences of his own sin.

Old Covenant Israel Rejected
31:31-32

Jeremiah envisioned a time when the covenant between God and Israel instituted at Mount Sinai would be replaced by a new and better covenant.
A. Promise of a Covenant (31:31): Behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Hosea was the first to introduce the idea of a new covenant (Hos 2:20). It is Hosea’s understanding that Israel, the northern kingdom, were not God’s people (Hos 1:9) that furnishes the key to the understanding of the present prophecy.

The new covenant will be made with reunited Judah and Israel. In OT prophecy the unification of Judah and Israel points to that day when there would be neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female. All the redeemed would be one in Christ Jesus. Both Peter (1 Pet 2:10) and Paul (Rom 9:25f.) so interpreted the earlier prophecies of Hosea (1:10-11) regarding the unification of the two kingdoms.

Those interpreters who regard the covenant promised by Jeremiah to be something yet future—a covenant between God and national Israel—are proved to be dead by such passages as Heb 8:8-12 that quotes at length from Jer 31 and applies it to the Christian dispensation. Paul again and again takes up the matter of the new covenant. He emphasizes the distinction between it and the old Sinai covenant. Jesus alluded to this new covenant when he instituted the Lord’s Supper by saying: This is my blood of the new testament (covenant) that is shed for many.

In the prophetic view of the future, the restoration of Israel reaches its climax with the institution of the new covenant.

B. Newness of the Covenant (31:32a): It will not be like the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt. V 32 compares the old covenant to a marriage. God is the lord or husband and Israel is the bride. Being the perfect Husband, God never gave his bride any cause for desiring the dissolution of the marriage. The thought to bring them out of the land of Egypt appears in 7:22 and numerous times elsewhere; but took them by the hand is Jeremiah’s unique touch on the episode.

C. Need for the Covenant (31:32b): That covenant of mine they broke, though I was lord over them (oracle of Yahweh). Israel again and again had been unfaithful to the marriage vows, i.e. she had been disobedient to the covenant. A new agreement between God and his people was therefore necessary.

Description of New Israel
31:33-34

It was not given Jeremiah to see all that the new covenant would involve. All that the Holy Spirit was concerned to do at this point was to reveal in broad outline the basic character of that future covenant. Four statements are made with regard to the promised covenant.

A. Spiritual Dimension (31:33a):
1. Recipient of the new covenant (31:33a): But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel… In the light of the reunification of house of Israel and house of Judah in v 31, house of Israel here must refer to a new entity, the new Israel of God.
2. Time of the new covenant (31:33b): after those days (oracle of Yahweh)... After the days of the exile, and the return from exile, Yahweh will initiate a new covenant.
3. Superiority of the new covenant (31:33c): I will place my law within them. I will write it upon their heart. Heretofore the laws of God had been written on tablets of stone; in the

\[\text{E.g., 2 Cor 3:6, 14-16.}\]
\[\text{Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24.}\]
\[\text{Ex 32; Nm 14:16; Ps 95:8-11; Acts 7:51-63.}\]
new covenant they were to be written on the heart. Under the new covenant men will respond to the divine will from inward motivation rather than outward compulsion. An individual born in Israel was automatically under the law of God; he had no choice in the matter. But one can enter into the new covenant Israel, the church of Christ, only by willingly submitting himself to the commandments of God.

B. New Relationship (31:33d): *I will be their God and they shall be my people.* The formula used here appears already in 7:23. Those who enter into new covenant Israel through faith and obedience will come into a special relationship with God. Peter describes the Christian Church as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a people of God’s own possession (1 Pet 2:9). Only such as have today the Law of God written upon their hearts have this unique relationship to God.

C. Standard of Membership (31:34):

1. Based on faith (31:34a): *No more will they teach each man his neighbor and his brother saying, Know Yahweh, for all of them shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest (oracle of Yahweh).* Infants and small children were members of the old covenant Israel. They had to be taught their covenant obligations by their parents (Dt 11:19). This will no longer be true under the new covenant. Every member of the new covenant Israel will know God. The word know in Hebrew has the connotation of knowledge derived from personal experience. It is not knowledge about, it is knowledge of. It is the kind of knowledge of that Jesus spoke when he said: *And this is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent* (Jn 17:3). For know Yahweh, see on 2:8. *From the least to the greatest* could be interpreted socially, or chronologically. Probably the latter is intended, but both nuances are appropriate. That knowing Yahweh involves obedience to his commands is made clear in 22:15-17.

    To know the Lord is saving faith, that indispensable prerequisite to membership in the new covenant Israel. A Christian will not need to go around to fellow Christians and exhort them to know the Lord. If they are Christians they already have come to a saving knowledge of the Lord. Thus the point of this statement is not that there will be no longer any need of instruction in religion, but that there will be a directness of access to God for both Jew and Gentile that did not exist under the old covenant.

2. Based on forgiveness (31:34b): *I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* Earlier it is said that Yahweh will remember their iniquity and punish it (14:10). In the messianic age that threat is reversed. All of the newness promised under the new covenant is possible because sins have been forgiven.

    It is not by self-acquired holiness or meritorious works that a man enters the new covenant Israel. It is through the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb without spot and blemish. The basic inadequacy of the old covenant was its failure to provide a perfect sacrifice for sin. The ever-repeated sacrifices of the OT foreshadowed and typified that once-for-all perfect sacrifice that took place on the hill called Calvary. The Hebrew verbs in the imperfect state denote that the forgiveness predicted will take place again and again as men and women appropriate to themselves the benefits of the Savior’s sacrifice.

### Permanence of New Israel
31:35-36

In view of the establishment of the new covenant with the spiritual Israel of God (the church of Christ), God makes an astonishing commitment. The old covenant was broken by Israel; therefore the nation was rejected by the Lord. This will no more take place under the new covenant.
A. Permanence in Nature (31:35): *Thus says Yahweh who gave the sun for light by day, and the statutes of moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so its waves roar; Yahweh of hosts is his name:* God’s faithfulness in keeping his ordinances in the realm of nature are offered as a pledge that he will similarly keep his covenant commitments. The *sun, moon, and stars* daily perform their assigned tasks of governing the day and the night. Yahweh creates order. Yahweh *stirs up the sea so that its waves roar.* He is Lord over what seems to be random and unordered.

B. Permanence of Israel (31:36): *If these statutes shall be removed from before me (oracle of Yahweh), then the seed of Israel shall cease being a nation before me forever.* As certainly as the laws of nature are inviolable, so certainly will the *seed of Israel* everlastingly continue as a *nation* before Yahweh.

To the end of this world, God always will have a special people, and that people is Israel. The outward form of Israel has changed through the years—a patriarchal family, confederation of tribes, monarchy, hierocracy. Israel as a nation ceased to exist in 586 BC, but Israel as a people survived the destruction of their homeland and exile in Babylon. Jeremiah is looking to a time when the outward form of Israel will change once again. The Israel he envisions will be a pure theocracy ruled from heaven itself. It will be an invisible kingdom, a kingdom not of this world, a kingdom unlike anything this world has ever known.

**New Israel Never Rejected**

*31:37*

*Thus says Yahweh: If heaven above can be measured, or the foundations of the earth below searched out, then I will reject all the seed of Israel because of all that they have done (oracle of Yahweh).* Jeremiah underscored the same thought as the previous two vv. The heavens above are cannot be measured, and the foundations of the earth beneath cannot be searched out. On the day that man is able to measure the heavens and search out the foundations of the earth—on that day and not before—God will cast off the new covenant Israel as he cast off the Israel of old. This is equivalent to saying that God will never cast off his people.

**City of Jerusalem Rebuilt**

*31:38-40*

In the closing paragraph of the ch Jeremiah looks forward to the building of a new city, the city of the Lord. The geographical details of this passage are not particularly important. They may be dealt with summarily.

A. Enlarged City (31:38-39): *Behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when the city of Yahweh will be built from the tower of Hananel unto the Corner Gate. (39) And the measuring line shall go out farther right on to the hill Gareb, and then around to Goah.* The *tower of Hananel* is at the northeast corner of the city of Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate. The *Corner Gate* is at the northwest corner of Jerusalem. The *hill Gareb* is unknown. If the etymology of the word has any significance (*Gareb*—itch or leprosy) this hill would be the place outside the limits of Jerusalem proper where the unclean lepers lived. The location of *Goah* is unknown; it is mentioned only here.

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4142 Kgs 14:13; 2 Chron 26:9; Zech 14:10.
For what purpose are these geographical details enumerated? Is it to show that Jerusalem when rebuilt will be somewhat enlarged? This is certainly a prominent theme in prophetic Scripture. That the passage indicates some increase in the size of old Jerusalem seems fairly obvious. But lack of information as to the precise position of some of the places named makes it impossible to determine how much gain in space is anticipated.

B. Inclusive City (31:40): And the entire valley of corpses and ashes, and all the fields unto the brook Kidron, unto the corner of the Horse Gate to the east, shall be holy to Yahweh; it shall never again be uprooted or thrown down. The valley of the corpses is probably the Valley of Hinnom. The brook Kidron is a torrent-bed that begins north of Jerusalem, passes the temple mount and Mount of Olives en route to the Dead Sea. The Horse Gate is on the east side of Jerusalem near the temple.

It would seem that the circumference of the city is extended only so far as to include certain spots that were in Jeremiah's day regarded as unclean. This is the real point of the passage. Those unclean areas—places once reserved for outcasts, burial grounds, garbage dumps—will be brought within the city limits of the new Jerusalem. Those unclean areas will be transformed, sanctified, and cleansed. The entire city will be holy to the Lord.

Of what Jerusalem is the prophet speaking in this passage? Those commentators who think he speaks of the spiritual Jerusalem—the church of Christ—are certainly correct. Some rather cogent arguments can be raised in favor of this view.

1. Jeremiah already has alluded to the church as spiritual Jerusalem in 3:17.
2. Nothing is said in this passage about the rebuilding of the temple although Jeremiah had foretold its destruction as well as that of the city. This omission would be most strange if Jeremiah had in mind the literal city of Jerusalem.
3. The church of Christ is called in the New Testament Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22).
4. The context of ch 31 is that of the messianic age.
5. On the assumption that only literal Jerusalem is in view, it would be most difficult to find an appropriate fulfillment for the concept of city-wide sanctification embraced in this passage. The city of which Jeremiah speaks has no need of refuse dumps. It is in itself so thoroughly holy to the Lord that it will have nothing unholy to cast out. On the other hand if Jeremiah is speaking of messianic Jerusalem, he could be alluding to the incorporation of Gentiles—peoples formerly thought to be unclean and profane—into the church of Christ.
6. The idea that once this city has been built it will not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever (v 40) was certainly not fulfilled in the history of literal Jerusalem. The city of which Jeremiah speaks will be safe from destruction for all eternity. This could only be fulfilled by that kingdom that cannot be moved (Heb 12:28).
7. Other prophets speak of the messianic kingdom under the figure of Jerusalem.

SECTION THREE
POWER FOR RESTORATION
Jeremiah 32:1-44

In ch 32 God directed Jeremiah to demonstrate to his contemporaries in a most tangible way that the nation did have a future. Even though the Babylonian enemy was at the gates of Jerusalem, God

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417 Streane, CB, 218.
418 E.g., Zech 2:1-5; 8:3-6.
commanded Jeremiah to purchase a field. Quite perplexed, Jeremiah inquired as to the significance of this act. Why would God have him purchase a field when for years the word of the Lord had been that Judah would be overthrown? God explained to his prophet that there would be a national restoration to the land. Then, as if to settle the matter once and for all, God gave to Jeremiah a lengthy promise concerning the glorious future of Israel.

**Introduction**

32:1-5

To set the stage for the dramatic action recorded in ch 32, the author first spells out in detail the plight of the nation and the plight of Jeremiah. The time and circumstances of this particular narrative are particularly important and should be noted carefully.

**A. Judah under Attack (32:1-2a):**

1. **Date (32:1):** *The word that came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah. That was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar.* Late in the ninth year of the reign of King Zedekiah (Dec 588 BC), the Babylonian army began the siege of Jerusalem (52:4; 2 Kgs 25:1f). According to the Jewish system of counting, the tenth year of Zedekiah would have begun in March/April of 587 BC.

2. **Circumstances (32:2):** *At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem...* In the summer of 587 the Babylonians were forced temporarily to lift the siege of Jerusalem. An Egyptian army was attacking from the south. Nebuchadnezzar felt that he must deal with that threat before completing the capture of Jerusalem (37:3-5). Shortly the Babylonian army returned just as Jeremiah had said it would (37:8).

A chronological problem arises as to whether the events in ch 32 should be assigned to phase one of the siege (before the lull in the summer of 587 BC) or to phase two (after the lull). Most commentators opt for the latter placement. For a discussion of the problem and presentation of an alternative view, see the special note at the end of the present chapter.

Though the precise placement of this material within the period of the siege operations must be left an open question, this much is certain: At the time Jeremiah performed his symbolic act of purchasing a field, the situation in Jerusalem was desperate. Finally, many Judeans were able to interpret the handwriting on the wall. Jerusalem’s doom was sealed.

**B. Plight of Jeremiah (32:2b):** *and Jeremiah the prophet was imprisoned in the court of the guard, that was in the house of the king of Judah...* At the time Jeremiah was commanded to purchase the field of his cousin, he was confined in the court of the guard at the royal palace.

Ch 37 tells how Jeremiah was arrested and eventually put in the court of the guard for trying to leave Jerusalem during the lull in the siege. Most commentators view this as proof conclusive that ch 32 chronologically follows ch 37. It should be noted, however, that in ch 32 Jeremiah was arrested because of his preaching, not because of alleged treason as in ch 37. This suggests that Jeremiah was imprisoned more than once in the court of the guard during the siege of Jerusalem.

Regardless of the chronological reconstruction of these events, the present chapter records one of the most remarkable examples of personal faith found in the Bible.

**C. Offensive Message (32:3-5):**

1. **Capture of the city. (32:3):** *Where Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him saying, Why do you prophesy the following things. Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it...* King Zedekiah had imprisoned Jeremiah because his preaching offended him. While most of the spiritual leaders in Jerusalem believed that God could never deliver Jerusalem over to an enemy. Jeremiah predicted that the Lord was about to give Jerusalem into the hand
of Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah asked a question, but the substance of the question is a quote from the prophet. Had the king listened more carefully to the message of Jeremiah he would have heard the answer to his question. In this particular text the king’s question is not answered.

2. Capture of Zedekiah (32:4): _and Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape from the hand of the Chaldeans, for he has surely been given into the hand of the king of Babylon to whom he will speak face to face and eye to eye._ Jeremiah further angered the king by announcing that Zedekiah would personally be given over to the hand of the king of Babylon. Jerusalem’s king would come face to face with his adversary the king of Babylon. _Face to face is lit., his mouth with his mouth. Eye to Eye is lit., his eye to his eye._

3. Exile of Zedekiah (32:5): _Zedekiah will be brought to Babylon. There will he be until I visit him (oracle of Yahweh); for you will fight against the Chaldeans, but you will not be successful._ Zedekiah’s efforts to withstand the Babylonian onslaught would fail. King Zedekiah would be deported to Babylon. There Zedekiah would remain until God visited him with death.

**Purchase of a Field**

32:6-15

A. Instruction from God (32:6-7):

1. A visit from a cousin (32:6-7a): _And Jeremiah said: The word of Yahweh came unto me, saying, (7) Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle shall come unto you…_ In those dark days when the national catastrophe was taking shape, the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah. God revealed to him that a relative, Hanamel, would come to visit him in the court. That Hanamel was a cousin to Jeremiah is made clear in vv 8-9.419 This is the only occurrence of the name Hanamel in the OT. Some identify Jeremiah’s uncle Shallum with the husband of Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs 22:14).

2. A request from his uncle (32:7b): _saying, Purchase for yourself my field that is in Anathoth…_ Anathoth was Jeremiah’s hometown. The law of land-tenure in ancient Israel provided that an estate remain within a family (Lv 25:25). The tribe of Levi did not receive a tribal inheritance following the conquest. The priests were allotted thirteen cities (Josh 21:19) and the Levites forty-eight cities.420 Hence, the priests would have owned property that could be sold only to fellow members of the tribe of Levi (Lv 25:32-34). Hanamel must have been a refugee from Anathoth. At the time of this visit Anathoth was probably behind the Babylonian lines.

3. Explanation by the uncle (32:7c): _for you possess the right of redemption to purchase it._ The right of redemption was more like an obligation. If a piece of property had to be sold, the nearest of kin had the right to purchase it. The procedure that was followed in such cases is clearly outlined in Ruth 4.

B. Proposal of Hanamel (32:8):

1. Arrival of the cousin (32:8a): _And Hanamel my cousin came unto the Court of the Guard just as Yahweh had spoken…_ Hanamel made his appearance at the court of the guard just as God had revealed.

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419 The words _your uncle_ refer to Shallum in v 7. In v 12 the word _son of_ seems to have dropped out of the text, no doubt accidentally omitted by a copyist. The Septuagint, Peshitta and several Hebrew manuscripts support the reading _son of_ in v 12. The hypothesis that the Hanamel in v 12 is a different individual from the one mentioned in the earlier vv is most unlikely.

420 Josh 21:41; Nm 35:2-9.
2. Request of the cousin (32:8b): and said unto me, Purchase my field, please, that is in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin; for you have the right of possession and redemption. Purchase it for yourself! One can only conjecture as to why Hanamel wished to dispose of his property. He may have needed to convert his real estate into silver to pay off debts. On the other hand, he may have desired to leave the area because of the Chaldean threat. Jeremiah being the nearest kinsman had first opportunity to purchase the property. 421

3. Realization of Jeremiah (32:8c): And I knew that it was the word of Yahweh. The unusual and unexpected request did not cause Jeremiah a moment of hesitation. The previous revelation made him realize that he should comply with the cousin’s request.

C. Compliance by the Prophet (32:9-14):

1. Silver weighed out (32:9): And I purchased the field that was in Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin and I weighted out to him the silver, seventeen silver shekels. A business transaction was conducted there in the court of the guard. The purchase price was mutually agreed upon and the pieces of silver—seventeen shekels—were carefully weighed. Seventeen shekels comes to a little less than a half pound of silver. By purchasing the property Jeremiah was backing up his prophecies with his pocketbook.

   The price appears to be very low. Perhaps the field was small to start with. Probably a real estate panic had been created by the recent Babylonian incursions. Furthermore, in ancient Israel the price of any property diminished as the year of Jubilee—every fiftieth year—drew near. In that year all real estate reverted back to the original owners.

2. Deed prepared (32:10): Then I wrote a deed and sealed it and had men witness it and weighed out the silver on the scales. The business transaction conducted by Hanamel and Jeremiah has been illuminated by numerous finds in the ancient Near East. Jeremiah wrote a document (sepher) that is either the bill of sale or the deed or both. Jeremiah set forth in this business document all the particulars of the transaction. Witnesses were summoned. They apparently read and then signed the contract. The silver of the purchase price was weighed out in the balance.

3. Duplicate prepared (32:11): And I took the deed of purchase, the sealed copy as is customary and lawful, and the opened copy... In accordance with ancient legal procedure, a duplicate copy of the contract was made. The Babylonians would encase their legal contracts in a clay envelope upon which a copy of the document was recorded. The outer clay envelope was open for examination at any time; the inner clay tablet was consulted if any disagreement arose and it was suspected that the contract had been altered. In such a case the clay envelope was broken in the presence of witnesses to see if the sealed or hidden text agreed with that recorded on the envelope. The reference to the sealed and the open purchase agreement in vv 11 and 14 is to the inner tablet and the outer envelope.

4. Deeds filed (32:12-14):

   a. Introduction of Baruch (32:12): and I gave the purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my cousin and in the presence of all the men of Judah who were sitting in the court of the guard. This is the first reference to Baruch in the Book of Jeremiah, although chronologically his first appearance is recorded in ch 36. Baruch came from a family that was prominent in the royal court. 422 Baruch is called the scribe in 36:26, 32. A bulla (stamp-seal impression) from the seventh century has been found with his name upon it. A

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421 Hanamel either had no children, or else they were too young to assume ownership of the property.

422 This is indicated by the fact that his brother Seraiah was part of a delegation from Zedekiah to Babylon (51:59).
photograph of it is found in the endpapers of Holiday, vol. 2. The bulla makes it clear that Baruch (blessed) is a shortened form of Berechiah (blessed of Yah).

b. Instructions for Baruch (32:13-14): And I commanded Baruch in their presence, saying, (14) Thus says Yahweh of hosts the God of Israel: Take these deeds, this sealed deed of purchase, and this open deed, and put them in a clay vessel in order that they might last for many days. The command to Baruch was a divine command. The two copies of the deed were given to Baruch to be put into an earthen jar that served as sort of a filing cabinet. Such jars have been excavated, e.g., at Qumran.

D. Prediction (32:15): For thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Once again houses and fields and vineyards shall be purchased in this land. The purpose of the whole elaborate transaction is indicated in this brief oracle. By his purchase of the field in Anathoth, the prophet was dramatically demonstrating his faith in God's word. Houses, fields and vineyards were the fundamental elements of economic life. Once again points to the disruption in economic life caused by the Babylonian invasion. Shall be purchased points to a restoration of the economy after the exile. Considering the fact that Anathoth at that very moment was probably under Chaldean control, this was a most amazing action on the part of Jeremiah. One is only left to guess what kind of impact this dramatic act had on those Jews who were present in the court of the guard.

Prayer for Explanation
32:16-25

A. Introduction (32:16): Then I prayed unto Yahweh after I had given the deed of purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, saying… The verb pray is found elsewhere in 42:4 where Jeremiah prays for guidance for the Jewish remnant. Even though Jeremiah had faithfully executed the command of God to purchase the field in Anathoth, even though he publicly indicated the symbolic import of the transaction, he still was unable to comprehend the implications of what he had done. In times past Jeremiah had agonized in prayer over the incomprehensible judgments of God; now it is the gracious promise of God that he cannot fathom. A prediction that property would again be bought and sold in the land seemed to him utterly incongruous with the present circumstances and completely opposed to the messages he has so often repeated.

The prayer of Jeremiah for enlightenment surely must take its place alongside the outstanding prayers of Scripture.

B. Praise for the Lord (32:17-22):
1. His great power (32:17):
   a. An expression of exasperation (32:17a): Ah Adonay Yahweh! That Jeremiah is here pouring out his heart before God is indicated by the opening words of the prayer. Ah Adonay Yahweh appears in three previous passages (1:6; 4:10; 14:13). The Hebrew particle ah expresses the most intense emotions; it is usually a cry of anguish.
   b. An expression of praise (32:17a): Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and your outstretched arm. The prophet passes immediately to the praise of his God. In this part of his prayer Jeremiah depicts Yahweh as the God of creation.
   c. An expression of faith (32:17b): Nothing is too marvelous for you! Creation proves that Yahweh is omnipotent. Therefore, nothing is too difficult for him.
2. His absolute justice (32:18):
a. His loving kindness (32:18a): You are the one who shows loving kindness to thousands... Yahweh dispenses grace to thousands who turn to him. This is a quote from Ex 20:6 and Dt 5:10. The emphasis here is on Yahweh’s eternal and unconditional love.

b. His extricable punishment (32:18b): and repays the iniquity of fathers upon the bosom of their sons who follow them. The thought is similar to Ex 34:7 (cf. Isa 65:6-7).

c. His magnificence (32:18c): You are the great, the mighty God, whose name is Yahweh of hosts... Yahweh is the God of justice. He administers punishment to those who follow after iniquity. Yahweh is called great and mighty in Dt 10:17 and Neh 9:32.

3. His supreme wisdom (32:19):
   a. His attributes (32:19a): great in counsel and mighty in deed... Yahweh is the God of absolute wisdom. Unlike human counselors, Yahweh has the power to execute the plans of his counsel.
   b. His eyes (32:19b): whose eyes are opened upon all the ways of the sons of men... Yahweh is omniscient. Cf. Prov 5:21; Job 34:21.
   c. His equity (32:19c): giving to each man according to his way, and according to the fruit of his deeds. These words are repeated from 17:10.

4. His mighty works (32:20): You set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt unto this day both in Israel and among mankind in general and have made for yourself a name as at this day. The phrase set (šīm) signs and wonders appears in Pss 78:43; 105:27. But for Jeremiah Yahweh is the God of all the earth. His wonders had been performed in Egypt, Israel and among mankind in general. Yahweh’s fame is universal.

5. His wonderful faithfulness (32:21-22):
   a. Deliverance from Egypt (32:21): You brought out your people Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, a strong hand, an outstretched arm and with great terror. The deliverance from Egypt is frequently linked to signs and wonders in the Pentateuch. The language here is based on Dt 26:8. Yahweh is the God of history who brought forth His people from the bondage of Egypt.
   b. Inheritance of Canaan (32:12): You have given to them this land that you had sworn to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. Yahweh’s faithfulness was also revealed in granting an inheritance for Israel in Canaan. He kept his word to the Patriarchs by giving their descendants the Land of Promise. A land flowing with milk and honey is the standard phrase describing the Promised Land (cf. 11:5). This phrase is used twenty-three times in the OT. Compared to the surrounding desert areas Canaan must have appeared as an agricultural utopia.

   This ascription of praise to God is instructive for the prayer life of the Christian. One should remember in prayer to praise God for his work in creation and salvation, for his grace, his counsel, his signs and wonders, and his great acts of deliverance.

C. Confession to the Lord (32:23):

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423 The same thought in slightly different words appears in Ex 34:7 and Dt 7:9.
424 According to Rashi, God “recompenses the iniquity of the fathers unto the bosom of their children” when the children follow the footsteps of their fathers.
425 The phrase “even unto this day” in reference to the miracles in Egypt probably means “which are remembered unto this day” and not “which continue to this day.”
1. They enter the land (32:23a): *And they came and possessed it.* Came in and possessed it (the land) is based on Dt 1:8; 4:1, 5.

2. They disobeyed the Lord (32:23b): *But they did not obey your voice and they did not walk in your law; all that you commanded them to do they did not do...* Jeremiah’s prayer moved from praise to confession. The prophet admitted the gross ingratitude of the fathers who, having been blessed with possession of Canaan, refused to hearken to the law of God.

3. They experienced calamity (32:23c): *and you have brought all this calamity against them.* Jeremiah acknowledged the justice of the present situation in which Jerusalem finds itself.

D. Narrative Prayer (32:24):

1. Siege equipment in place (32:24a): *Behold, the siege instruments have come to the city to capture it...* Jeremiah described the situation of Jerusalem. Siege mounds had been erected. The personified siege mounds have come to capture Jerusalem.

2. City captured (32:24b): *and the city has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it by sword, famine, and pestilence.* The siege mounds would shortly enable the enemy to ascend the walls and enter the city. *Has been given* is a prophetic perfect describing what must inevitably come to pass. The triad *Sword/famine/pestilence* is used fifteen times by Jeremiah. *Chaldeans* were first mentioned in 21:4; they are mentioned forty-three times in the book.

3. Threats fulfilled (32:24c): *That which you have spoken has come to pass...* All that God had threatened concerning Jerusalem had materialized. Jeremiah would be vindicated as a true prophet; false prophets would be discredited.

4. Awareness of Yahweh (32:24d): *behold, you see it!* Jeremiah was not telling God something that he did not already know. Why then the narration? It is as though Jeremiah is presenting his case before a judge. All pertinent facts in the case must “go into the record.” Furthermore, the narrative element in prayer often helps one to think through a situation more carefully—to analyze it and crystallize his thinking about it. Prayer-narration may help one sharpen his focus and present a petition that is more apropos for the circumstances and more in harmony with the will of God.

E. Implied Petition (32:25): In this prayer there is no direct petition. Jeremiah did not ask for anything. But the manner in which he composed the narrative portion of the prayer raised a problem and offered an implied petition.

1. Address (32:25a): *But you, O Adonay Yahweh...* For Jeremiah Yahweh was Adonay, i.e., absolute sovereign. Though Jeremiah was sometimes puzzled by Yahweh’s commands, he always submitted obediently to those commands.

2. Strange command (32:25b): *have said unto me, Purchase for yourself the field with silver, and secure witnesses...* The problem for Jeremiah was the apparent inconsistency between the impending fall of the city and the command to purchase a field.

3. Puzzling circumstances (32:25c): *while the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans.* The implied petition is *Lord, how do I reconcile these two seemingly discordant facts? Will you enlighten my mind; will you solve the problem?*

Perspective for Perplexity

32:26-27
Jeremiah not only prayed; he also listened. Prayer is dialogue. And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah, saying… Yahweh answered the prayer of Jeremiah verbally by making a declaration and by asking a question.

A. A Basic Proposition (32:27a): Behold, I am Yahweh, the God of all flesh. The reply to the prayer of Jeremiah fittingly begins with a declaration. The Lord declares himself to be Elohim, the strong, the mighty, the God of creation. The Lord is the Ruler over all flesh. The contrast here between God and flesh is obvious—the exalted and powerful over against the lowly and weak. He is God of all flesh. What to mankind are baffling and perplexing problems find their solutions in him. The purpose of God can be thwarted neither by the most bitter attacks of his enemies, nor the misunderstandings of his friends. He will not allow his actions to be circumscribed by the limits of human comprehension. He is God. Perplexed people need to be reminded of this fact.

B. A Penetrating Question (32:27b): Is anything too hard for me? The declaration that the Lord is God is followed by a question that God asked a doubting woman many years earlier (Gn 18:14). At the beginning of his prayer the prophet had affirmed that nothing was too hard for God (v 17). But Jeremiah did not fully understand the implications of his own convictions. Had he fully comprehended the omnipotence of God he would not have seen any difficulty in the promise that God would resurrect Judah and Jerusalem from the grave of captivity.

How easy it is to utter great truths without fully understanding their import. So God asked Jeremiah a question in order to make him think.

In vv 28-41 God made two announcements regarding the immediate and ultimate fate of Jerusalem. Both announcements were introduced by therefore (vv 28, 36) that connects them logically with the basic proposition of v 27. Since nothing is impossible for the Lord, therefore he will destroy Jerusalem (vv 28-35) and restore it (vv 36-41). Because he is God—Almighty and Sovereign—both destruction and restoration are within his power.

Yahweh’s Short-run Plan
32:28-35

A. A Blunt Prediction (32:28-29):
1. Jerusalem captured (32:28): Therefore, thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall capture it. Throughout his ministry Jeremiah had been preaching that the enemy from the north—the Chaldeans—would destroy Jerusalem. God now assured Jeremiah that these threats had not been negated by the promise of a new day for Judah. God would indeed give Jerusalem into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar as he had done previously in 604 (Dan 1:1-2) and 597 (2 K 24:10-12).
2. Jerusalem destroyed (32:29): And the Chaldeans who are fighting against this city will come. They will burn this city, and put it to the torch, even the houses upon roofs of which they have offered incense to Baal, and poured out libations to other gods in order to provoke me. The Chaldeans would put the torch to the city. The blinded Jews thought it impossible that the chosen place of the sanctuary could be destroyed.426 They did not stop to think that with the Lord nothing was impossible. But it was not the might of the enemy that would gain the victory; God would deliver the city into the hands of

Nebuchadnezzar. Thus even though the people could not comprehend or accept what God was about to do, nonetheless God would still fulfill his word.

**B. A Brief Explanation (32:30-35):**

1. **They had provoked the Lord (32:30-32):**
   a. Both nations has a record of provocation (32:30): *For the children of Israel and the children of Judah from the time of their youth have been doing nothing other than evil in my sight; for the children of Israel have only been provoking me with the works of their hands (oracle of Yahweh).* Following the reaffirmation of his intent to destroy Jerusalem, God discusses the reasons for his decision. The basic cause of the calamity was idolatry. From the very beginning of the nation, the people had provoked God with their idolatry.
   b. Jerusalem had a record of provocation (32:31): *Surely this city has aroused my wrath and anger from the day when they built it, even unto this day; so that now it must be removed from my presence...* What was true of the nation as a whole was also true of Jerusalem—one continuous record of idolatrous practice from the day the city was built. Because of its sin, Jerusalem must be removed out of the sight of God.
   c. All strata of society were guilty of provocation (32:32): *because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah that they have done to provoke me—they, their king, their princes, their priests and their prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* Idolatry permeated every strata of society including the professional priests and prophets.

2. **They refused correction (32:33):** *And they turned the back to me and not the face; though I was teaching them earnestly and persistently, none of them would listen to receive correction.* Time and again God tried to teach them and discipline them, but to no avail. For *turned the back and not the face* see on 7:24.

3. **They put abominations in God’s house (32:34):** *They put abominations in the house that bears my name with the result that it was defiled.* The last vestige of allegiance to God disappeared when Israel erected abominable images in the temple. Vv 34-35 reflect, with slight alternations, 7:30-31.

4. **They offer children to Molech (32:35):** *They built high places of Baal that are in the valley of the son of Hinnom in order to offer their sons and their daughters to Molech (which I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind to do this abomination) in order to make Judah sin.* Yahweh became just another god to Israel. his temple became just one among many shrines. The climax of the apostasy came with the erection of high places in the valley of Hinnom and the institution of the rites of child sacrifice. Could such sin be ignored? Surely Jerusalem must fall!

**Yahweh’s Long-range Plan**

36:36-41

While the present prospects of Jerusalem and Judah were quite dark, the future was filled with bright hope.

**A. Jerusalem will Fall (32:36):** *And now therefore, thus says Yahweh the God of Israel concerning this city about which your people are saying that it has been given into the

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427The Israelites did not build Jerusalem; but when David captured the city from the Jebusites alterations and additions were made. The Hebrew verb used here (banah) is frequently used in the sense of “enlarging and repairing.”
hand of the king of Babylon by sword, famine, and pestilence: Therefore in v 36 corresponds to therefore in v 28. It introduces the second deduction from the proposition that nothing is too hard for God (v 26).

Destruction that was thought to be utterly impossible was about to take place; restoration that appeared to be equally impossible would take place. Moses, the great forerunner and archetype of the classical prophets in Israel, had held out to the nation centuries before both the threat of captivity and the potentiality of restoration (Dt 30:1-5). According to Moses repentance was a prerequisite for restoration (Dt 30:3). In the present passage the emphasis is upon the changed spiritual conditions that will characterize the remnant after and presumably before the restoration. V 36 serves to stress that the city that Yahweh is about to revive is the same city that he previously had destroyed.

B. Israel's Restoration (32:37):

1. Gathering (32:37a): Behold, I will gather them from all the lands where I have driven them in my wrath, anger, and great fury… Behold introduces Yahweh’s second great unexpected work just as it did the first in v 27. Gather is the verb that signals the beginning of restoration. The implications of this gathering are spelled out in the vv that follow.

2. Return (32:37b): and I will bring them back unto this place and cause them to dwell in safety. The second and third steps in Yahweh’s restoration program are indicated by the verbs bring them back and cause them to dwell. Resettlement of the remnant in Canaan is the clear intention.

   a. New relationship (32:38): They shall be my people, and I will be their God… The new Israel of God will be markedly superior to the old Israel. The spiritual changes that would take place among the people of God can perhaps best be described by the word reconciliation. A new relationship will exist between God and his people.
   b. New heart (32:39): and I will give them one heart and one way to fear me forever, for their own good, and that of their sons after them. The people will manifest a new commitment to the Lord. They will have one heart (inward disposition) and one way (outward manifestation). No longer would their heart be divided between the Lord and idols. There will be a unity of purpose and a unity of practice. Since the nation is united in its commitment to God, enmity and discord will disappear among the members of the people.
   c. New covenant (32:40a): And I will make for them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good for them… Of this covenant Jeremiah has previously spoken (31:31ff); but here he adds the emphasis that the covenant will be an everlasting covenant. God will never desist from showering blessings upon his people; the people shall never turn aside from God. Everlasting covenant appears eighteen times in the OT. The new covenant will not be disrupted as the Babylonian exile disrupted the old covenant.
   d. New reverence (32:40b): and I will put my fear into their heart so that they will not turn aside from following me. By his marvelous deeds and by the workings of his Holy Spirit, God will continue to generate in the hearts of his people that fear, that loving, trusting awe that is essential if those people are to remain faithful to the terms of the covenant. Thus there will be under the new covenant an uninterrupted bestowal of gracious benefits on the part of God and a faithfulness to the Lord on the part of the people.
e. New joy (32:41a): *I will rejoice in doing good for them…* God will evidence his new joy by gladly doing good for his people. Rebellious Israel had been such a burden to his heart, such a source of grief and anger. But once the nation has been reconciled to him; God will rejoice over the faith, devotion and loyalty of Israel.

f. New security (32:41b): *and I will truly plant them in this land with all my heart and with all my Soul.* The people will enjoy new security in the land. They will be planted securely in their land by the Lord. While God is reluctant to execute his wrath against the godless, he rejoices to bless the godly. Thus he will enter enthusiastically into the work of planting the new Israel securely in the land.

Assurance of God’s Plan
32:42-44

A. God Keeps his Word (32:42): *For thus says Yahweh: As I have brought against this people all this great trouble, so I will bring upon them all the good that I have been speaking concerning them.* Up to this point two deductions have been made from the basic proposition that with God nothing is too hard. The argument takes a new direction in v 42. Here God argues that the same degree of certainty that attends the threats of divine judgment also attends the promises of divine favor. The thought is the same as that in 31:28. The good (fortune) of which Yahweh had been speaking is restoration to life in the land of their inheritance.

B. Property Exchanged (32:43-44a): *Fields will be purchased in this land of which you are saying, It is a waste without man or beast, it is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.* (44) *They will purchase fields for silver and write the deed, seal it, have it witnessed in the land of Benjamin, and the environs of Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, and the cities of the Negev…* In view of the certainty of God’s promises of restoration, the action of Jeremiah in purchasing the field in Anathoth was altogether fitting. Normal business transactions would indeed again take place in the land. The enumeration of the several regions of the kingdom is, according to Keil, “rhetorical individualization for strengthening the thought.” The promises of God are not merely theoretical or spiritual; they deal with real life, concrete daily economic concerns.

C. Fortunes Reversed (32:44b): *for I will reverse their fortunes (oracle of Yahweh).* The renewal of property exchange will be possible because God will reverse the fortunes of his people. He will bring them out of the shame of captivity and lead them home. This was the oracle of God!

SECTION FOUR
CERTAINTY OF RESTORATION
Jeremiah 33:1-26

Section Four consists of seven oracles of promise. Each of them announces God’s intention to restore the fortunes of his people. The ch displays a chiastic structure.

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428 The assurance of God’s plan (32:42-44).
429 The Hebrew reads lit., *I will plant them in this land in truth.* Some commentators see this as a reference to the faithfulness of the Promiser rather than a reference to the stability of possession.
430 Keil, *BCOT,* 2:60. This same rhetorical device is used in 17:26.
The general promises contained in these vv are in reality but an expansion of concepts in the preceding prophecy.

A. **Introduction** (33:1-3): The first three vv of ch 33 are in the nature of a bridge between the preceding and the present ch. The vv contain a declaration, an invitation and a promise.

1. **Circumstances** (33:1): *And the word of God came unto Jeremiah a second time while he was yet imprisoned in the court of the guard, saying…* Shortly after he had received the comforting revelation of the preceding ch, Jeremiah received yet another word from the Lord. Jeremiah was still imprisoned in the court of the guard (cf. 32:2).

2. **Speaker** (33:2):
   a. **God of the future** (33:2a): *Thus says Yahweh who is the Creator of it, the Former of it so that he has established it…* The oracle begins with God’s self-assertion and self-identity. God not only observes the future, he creates it. Thus God declares himself to be the Creator of it and the Former of it so that he has established (or accomplished) it. Whether it refers to the universe or to the plan about to be revealed, the basic idea is the same: God has the power to fulfill his promises. Whatever God determines to do, he is able to bring to a successful conclusion. *Creator* and *Former* are derived from roots that occur frequently in the Gn creation account.
   b. **God of covenant** (33:2b): *Yahweh is his name:* The God who speaks to Jeremiah in the court of the guard declares himself to be Yahweh. The name seems to have the meaning *He who is.* It denotes God as the Eternal, Self-existent One. The name Yahweh is the covenant name of God. It denotes God as the keeper of covenant promises, as the merciful benefactor of his people. Being eternal, God can look beyond the present darkness to the hopeful future when he in his mercy will restore Israel to Canaan. God’s very name—*Yahweh*—is a pledge that he will keep his word to his people.431

3. **Invitation** (33:3):
   a. **Prayer answered** (33:3a): *Call unto me, and I will answer you…* The all powerful God is attentive to the needs of the powerless. The God who seems to be absent is available to those who call unto him. God invited his prophet (or perhaps the nation as a whole) to *call unto me.* What a wonderful invitation! Jeremiah had inquired as to the meaning of an act that God had required him to perform (32:16-25). God placed his stamp of approval on that prayer. He encouraged his prophet to approach him more frequently with such requests. The prayer that grows out of perplexity often is labeled as doubt. For that reason it is discouraged. But here the God of all wisdom encourages the searching out of the mysteries of life through prayer.

431 Jer 31:35; 32:18.
b. **Mysteries revealed (33:3b):** _and I will declare to you great and unsearchable things that you do not know._ God undergirded his invitation with a gracious promise: _I will answer you!_ Prayer is more effective than anyone realizes. Prayer is the key that opens the door to a new understanding of the power and purpose of God. The earnest petitioner will find his mind enlightened regarding the great and hidden things of life.

**B. Present Circumstances (33:4-5):**

1. **Siege progressing (33:4):** _For thus says the Lord the God of Israel concerning the houses of this city, and the houses of the kings of Judah, that have been torn down so as to provide protection against the siege instruments and the sword—_ When Jeremiah received this message of hope from the Lord, the situation within Jerusalem was very grim. The houses of the city— including the royal palaces— had been torn down in order to strengthen Jerusalem against the mounds and weapons of the Chaldeans. Perhaps some houses near the city walls had to be removed in order to give the defenders more maneuverability. Part of the timber and stone taken from the houses would be used to strengthen the walls, and part would serve to plug the breaches made by the enemy battering rams. The pair _houses of the city and houses of the kings_ is found earlier in 19:13.

2. **Soldiers dying (33:5a):** _as men are coming to fight the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the corpses of men whom I have smitten in my wrath and anger…_ Another purpose for demolishing the houses was so that corpses could be buried within the city as the siege progressed. Cemeteries of Jerusalem beyond the walls could not be reached because of the battle lines. To be forced to bury within the city walls would have been abhorrent to the Judeans.

3. **City estranged (33:5b):** _and I have hidden my face from this city on account of all their evil…_ The present plight of Jerusalem was due to Jerusalem’s estrangement from God. Because of the evil in the city Yahweh had hidden his face from the city. They must face this crisis without divine aid.

As one reads vv 4-5, he can feel the sense of desperation that prevailed within Jerusalem as the city prepared to make its final stand.

**C. Future Unveiled (33:6-9):** After painting this rather gloomy picture of the present conditions of Jerusalem, the Lord outlined the glorious future he had planned for his people. Destruction is the gateway to restoration; death the gateway to life. Old Israel dies; a new Israel arises.

1. **God promises peace (33:6):**

   a. **Metaphor (33:6a):** _Behold, I will bring to her healing and cure, and I will heal them…_ Though the Judeans had suffered a grievous wound at the hands of the Chaldeans, God would apply to the city a bandage that would result in healing.

   b. **Revelation (33:6b):** _and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth._ The divine Healer will reveal or make manifest to them a superabundance of peace and truth. The word _peace_ conveys the idea of physical and spiritual well-being; the word _truth_, the idea of God’s faithfulness to his promises.

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432 Ramps of debris and dirt that enabled the attackers to fight on more or less the same level as the defenders. Such ramps also enabled the battering rams to move close and batter the upper and weaker part of the city walls.

433 The word _sword_ in v 4 denotes the entire arsenal of weapons.
2. God will build them up (33:7): I will reverse the fortune of Judah and Israel, and I will build them as they were at the first. God will reverse the captivity of both Israel and Judah, i.e., he will reverse the fortunes of the whole covenant nation. The misery of the moment will give way to permanent happiness. God will build them up as a nation. They will again know the prosperity of the Golden Age of David and Solomon.

3. God promises forgiveness (33:8): I will cleanse them from all their iniquity that they have sinned against me, and I will forgive all of their iniquities by which they have sinned against me, and in which they have transgressed against me. That the healing is spiritual as well as physical and material is made clear by v 8. The restoration of Israel to Palestine is never depicted in the OT as a purely political event. A spiritual dimension is always present. The glorious vision of Jerusalem restored and flourishing is not allowed to overshadow the yet more glorious vision of a cleansed nation. The messianic cleansing here depicted already has been strongly emphasized in 31:34. It will again be discussed in 50:20.

The three standard words for sin are found in this v: sin (r. ch't’), iniquity or guilt ('avōn) and transgress or rebel (r. pš’). Yet these powerful words are overpowered by the words cleanse and forgive.

4. God promises a good reputation (33:9): And it shall be for a name of joy, praise, and glory before all nations of the earth, that shall hear all the good that I am doing for them, and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and the well-being that I will make for her. Among the surrounding nations, there will be two reactions to the external and internal renovation of Israel. The first reaction is one of joy. Jerusalem will develop into a city over which men will rejoice whenever her name is mentioned. The nations of the world will render praise to the God of Israel for so blessing his people. The triad name and praise and glory is based on Dt 26:19 (cf. Jer 13:11). The trembling of the nations theme is found earlier in Isa 64:1.

The second reaction among the nations is fear. They shall behold all the good that God does for Jerusalem. They will come to have that reverential awe that leads to conversion and salvation.⁴³⁴

Joyous Sounds Restored
33:10-11

In the second promissory oracle of ch 33 the prophet becomes more specific. He shows how joy and prosperity will affect the city (vv 10-11). Throughout this ch prosperity follows purification. Spiritual health is the key to material well-being.

A. Joy in the Streets (33:10-11a):

1. Current silence (33:10): Thus says Yahweh: Once again in this place that you say is desolate without man and without beast in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate without man or inhabitant or cattle... The cities of Judah are said to be desolate. A double without (mē’én) describes them—without man and without beast. Gone is the hustle and bustle of marketplace routine. A triple without describes the streets of Jerusalem—without man, without inhabitant, and without cattle. The description hints that the cities and streets have been forcibly emptied of all usable living things, human and animal as well.

⁴³⁴A popular but manifestly wrong interpretation of the fear in v 9 is as follows: The heathen infer that the God who so honors Israel will punish with equal emphasis those who disregard him. The first part of the v makes it clear that the fear mentioned here is a positive fear, a fear growing out of joy.
2. Future sounds (33:11a): shall be heard the sound of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and bride… In the silent empty places described in v 10 sounds of activity will again be heard. These vv are a reversal of the curse of God over Judah and Jerusalem found three times earlier (7:34; 16:9; 25:10-11). The streets of Jerusalem will once again echo with the sound of mirth and marriage. Marriage indicates an investment in the future. Resumption of wedding celebrations signals confidence that the future is secure. Social life has been restored.

B. Joy in the Temple (33:11b):
1. What they will say (33:11b): saying, Give thanks unto Yahweh of hosts, for Yahweh is good, and his mercy endures forever… Temple life resumes along with traditional social life. The voices that sing wedding songs will also lift up anthems to Yahweh. The joyous strains of the temple liturgy will also be heard again.
2. What they will do (33:11c): while they are bringing their thank offerings to the house of Yahweh. Worshipers will bring their offerings as expressions of their praise for the Lord (cf. 17:26).
3. Explanation (33:11d): For I will reverse the fortunes of the land and make it as in the beginning, says Yahweh.

Pastoral Life Restored
33:12-13

Passing from the joyous scenes within the cities, Yahweh turns to the prosperity that will characterize the rural areas in the day of restoration.

A. Promise of Pasture (33:12): Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Once again there shall be in this place that is desolate, without man or beast, in all its cities, pasture for shepherds who rest their flocks. The negative depiction of the cities echoes v 10. Once again indicates the bleak present. The land is desolate and empty as a result of the Babylonian invasion. In those areas of the land that are presently so desolate, sheep will once again find pasture.

B. Pastoral Enterprise Renewed (33:13):
1. Location (33:13a): In the cities of the hill country, the lowland, the Negev, the land of Benjamin, the environs of Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah… The six geographical reference were previously named in 32:44. In terms of ancient Judah, these six regions represent the entire land. Everywhere the land will return to normalcy.
2. Description (33:13b): flocks shall once again pass under the hand of the one who counts them, says Yahweh. Once again the populace would see the familiar sight of sheep passing under the hand each morning and evening as the shepherd numbered his flock.

Davidaic Dynasty Restored
33:14-15

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435 That the three clauses Praise the Lord of host: for the Lord is good; for his mercy endures forever are liturgical forms used in temple services seems to be indicated by 2 Chron 5:13; 7:3, 6; Ezra 3:11; Ps 106:1.


437 Some think that the shepherd/flock imagery depicts reordered political life.
The fourth promissory oracle virtually duplicates 23:5-6. In the grandiose promises of this paragraph the Book of Consolation reaches its climax. Since these vv are absent in the Septuagint, some critics have questioned the genuineness of the passage. They are also quick to point out that messianic concepts are introduced here that find no parallel in the rest of the Book of Jeremiah. But a prophet must be allowed freedom to express the messianic hope in a variety of ways.

The absence of the paragraph in the Septuagint version is difficult to explain no matter who is taken to be the author. Perhaps this paragraph was inserted into the book by Baruch after he immigrated to Babylon. If this was the case, then these vv would not be present in the Egyptian copy of the book from which the Septuagint translators made the Greek version. In any case this material certainly goes back to Jeremiah.

A. Fulfillment Guaranteed (33:14): **Behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will fulfill the good word that I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah.** The opening words **Behold, the days come** point to a certain but indefinite future. These words as used by Jeremiah become something of a messianic pointer.

God declares that he will certainly fulfill the good word that he has spoken to the covenant people. The **good word** probably refers back to the promise of a Righteous Sprout (23:5-6).

B. Coming Righteous Sprout (33:15-16):

1. **His ancestry (33:15a): In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous sprout to spring forth to David;** As if to remind Jeremiah of that promise, the Lord repeats it. A **righteousness sprout** will spring from the stock of David. There can be scarcely any doubt that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of David and Messiah of Israel who is depicted here.

2. **His work (33:15b-16a): and he will establish justice and righteousness in the land. (16) In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will be safely inhabited;** The righteous sprout will restore **justice and righteousness** in the land. In the days of Messiah the people of God, symbolized by Judah and Jerusalem, will be delivered from their oppressors. They will enjoy peace and security.

   Literal Israel and Judah never regained political independence following the restoration to Palestine. They were dominated successively by the Persians, the Greeks, the Idumean Herodians and the Romans. Thus Judah and Jerusalem must be understood here spiritually of the church of Christ. The deliverance here promised should be regarded as a spiritual blessing.

3. **His name (33:16b): and this is the name by which she will be called: Yahweh our Righteousness.** In those glorious days of which the prophet speaks, spiritual Jerusalem—the church of the Lord—will actually wear the name of her Master. She will be called **Yahweh our Righteousness** (cf. 23:6). It is appropriate that the bride of Christ should wear the name of her divine husband. The holy city has taken on the character of her King.

Proper Leaders Restored
33:17-18

The fifth promissory oracle makes a single statement that depicts a well-ordered kingdom of the future.

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438In the parallel passage it is Judah and Israel that will experience salvation and safety in the messianic age. The change from Israel to Jerusalem seems to be an intentional alteration in the promise in order to apply it more specifically to the dire straits in which Jerusalem found itself.
A. Promise Regarding David (33:17): For thus says Yahweh: David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel... The new Israel will have a throne. The one who will occupy that throne will be a descendant of David. This promise must be used to interpret previous passages where Jeremiah announced the termination of the monarchy (22:30).

The prophet reproduced almost verbatim the ancient promise made to David (1 Sam 7:16) and repeated by David in his parting words to Solomon (1 Kgs 2:4). When that promise was first given the line of David was in all the freshness of its strength. But in the present circumstances the line of David seemed to be on the verge of total extinction.

The prophet saw beyond the present tragedy. He is certain that the royal line will survive the destruction of Jerusalem and that the true king of Israel will always come from the house of David. During the intertestamental period, some of the Hasmoneans took the title king, but they were not universally recognized as such.

The Herodian dynasty, that still retained some measure of power in the days of Jesus, was never acknowledged as sitting on the throne of Israel. When the new Israel of God came into being on Pentecost, the sovereign Ruler was a son of David, a legitimate King.439

B. Promise Regarding Levi (33:18): and the Levitical priests will never lack a man before me to offer burnt offerings, to burn meal offerings, and to make sacrifice forever. The new Israel will have a temple where worship offerings regularly are offered up to God. A legitimate priesthood will officiate in that restored temple. The priestly office as well as the royal office will survive the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple. The terminology the priests the Levites (KJV) or the Levitical priests440 (NASB) points to the fact that under the old covenant the priestly functions were the exclusive right of the descendants of Levi.441

The NT categorically affirms that the Levitical priesthood has passed away (Heb 7:11). The OT priesthood was replaced by a new and better one inaugurated by Christ. He was made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Furthermore, the NT affirms that those who have been baptized into Christ have become part of a holy priesthood (Heb 10:19-22).

It is not necessary for Christians to offer before God burnt offerings and meal offerings. The perfect sacrifice for sins was made upon the cross. The Christian priesthood offers the sacrifices of praise (1 Pet 2:5) and the sacrifice of the body (Rom 12:1).

Jeremiah hinted at this dramatic change in the nature of the priesthood when he declared that the ark of the covenant will no longer be remembered in the messianic age (3:16). The removal of the ark of the covenant, which was so crucial in the rituals of OT worship, points to a complete change in the nature of the priesthood.

Continuity Assured

33:19-22

The sixth promissory oracle underscores the permanence of the new covenant by guaranteeing the permanence of the Davidic and Levitical houses.

A. Order in Nature (33:19-20): And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah, saying, (20) Thus says Yahweh: If my covenant of the day and night can be broken so that there will no longer be day and night in their proper times... The promise concerning David and the
Levites is reproduced with even greater solemnity. These promises are placed on the same level of permanence as the God-ordained succession of day and night. As long as day follows night, God will be faithful to his commitment to guarantee the survival of the royal and priestly lines.

**B. Order in Society (33:21-22):**

1. **Covenant with David (33:21a):** *then my covenant with David my servant will be broken so that he will have no son to reign upon his throne...* The covenant with the line of David is given in 2 Sam 7:12-16. Nathan promised David that a son from his line would occupy *his throne* forever. The throne of David was in fact God’s throne that David and his descendants were permitted to occupy (1 Chr 29:23). The “foreverness” of the Nathan oracle is echoed here. It finds fulfillment in the reign of Christ from the throne of God in heavenly Jerusalem.

2. **Covenant with Levi (33:21b):** *and for the Levitical priests, my ministers.* The covenant with the Levi, referred to again in Mal 2:4, 5, 8, is not so explicitly stated. Probably the reference is to the promise made to Phinehas in Nm 25:13. The argument of vv 19-21 is the same as in 31:35-37 except that the argument is applied specifically to the monarchy and priesthood while in the earlier passage it is applied to Israel as a nation.

3. **Permanence explained (33:22):** *As the hosts of the heaven cannot be numbered nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I increase the descendants of David my servant and the Levites, my ministers.* The main threat to any dynasty is the lack of heirs. The Davidic and Levitical dynasties are guaranteed a secure future because the descendants of David and Levi will be innumerable. The images of the stars and sand as symbols of numbers beyond counting come from promises made to Abraham (Gn 15:5; 22:17). According to the prophecy of Isaiah, all members of the messianic Israel would be priests and ministers of the Lord. No longer would the priesthood be restricted to descendants of Levi, but any member of the nation—even Gentile converts—would be able to serve in the priestly capacities (Isa 66:20-21).

   Just as Messiah is both priest and king, so also are his subjects. These OT prophecies find their fulfillment in the NT concept of the royal priesthood. Christians offer the sacrifice of praise before the throne of grace continually. Furthermore, Christians are said to reign with Christ. Just as Christians are spiritually the seed of Abraham, so also are they envisioned in this prophecy as descendants of David and of Levi.

   Whatever may have been the thoughts of the prophet, one is justified in looking for the seed of David and the Levites in those who, by virtue of their union with Christ, are made both kings and priests (Rev 1:6).

**Permanence of Israel Assured**

33:23-26

*And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah, saying...* (33:23): The seventh promissory oracle in ch 33 stresses Yahweh’s fidelity to Israel.

**A. Enemy Taunts Rebuked (33:24):** *Have you not considered what this people have said, saying, The two families that Yahweh chose, he has rejected? Thus they despise my people*
that they no longer regard them as a nation. V 23 is identical to v 19. Apparently some found it hard to accept at face value the glorious promises regarding the future of the royal and priestly orders. God called the attention of the prophet to the anguished cries of despair. God, it seemed, had altogether cast off his people.

Gentiles looking upon the pitiful condition of Israel could only despise the people of God.

B. Chosen Seed not Rejected (33:25-26): In response to the despondency of Israel and the disdain of Gentiles, the prophet renewed his assurance of the permanence of the kingly and priestly lines. He strengthened that assurance in three ways.

1. He repeated the analogy with the laws of nature (33:25): Thus says Yahweh: If my covenant with the day and night shall not stand, if I did not establish the statutes of the heaven and the earth... God is responsible for the orderly processes of nature; in a similar manner he ordained a glorious future for Jacob in general and David in particular.

2. He mentioned the names of the ancestors (33:26a): then shall I reject the seed of Jacob and David my servant, and no longer take from his seed rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The mention the names of the three great patriarchs of the race was a reminder that God already had demonstrated his faithfulness in covenant-keeping.

3. He connected the promises with a return from captivity (33:26b): For I will restore their fortunes and have mercy upon them. When the return from captivity came, it would be the pledge of the yet greater blessings that were involved in the new and everlasting covenant.

Many prophecies of the OT were never fulfilled in a narrow, literalistic sense. The principle of interpreting every prophecy literally unless forced to do otherwise is not really valid in the light of the inspired interpretation of prophecy found in the NT.

The prophets often used Mosaic terminology to describe the spiritual realities of the new covenant. So long as interpreters miss this point, the prophetic books will remain an enigma. In painting his picture of the future the prophet of God utilized the forms, the terminology and concepts of his own day.

That prophetic pictures of the Christian dispensation should be clothed in Jewish dress is not strange since this is the only form in which they would have any meaning to those to whom they were delivered. Those in the NT who were privileged to catch a glimpse of the heavenly Jerusalem exhausted the vocabulary of human language in describing the wonders they beheld. So the OT prophets found it necessary to utilize the language of the old covenant worship to describe that of the new covenant.

It is no doubt to such passages as Jeremiah 33 that Peter refers when he speaks of the prophets as inquiring and searching diligently... what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ that was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (1 Pet 1:10-11).

A NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL PLACEMENT OF CHS 32-33

Ch 32 contains the following chronological details that aid in integrating this ch into the chronological framework of the last days of Jerusalem: (1) It was the tenth year of Zedekiah. That year began on April 23, 587 BC. (2) The Babylonian armies were besieging Jerusalem. (3) Jeremiah was shut up in the court of the guard.

Since the arrest of Jeremiah, his imprisonment and subsequent confinement to the court of the guard are recorded in ch 37, commentators are all but unanimously agreed that ch 32 follows ch 37 chronologically. Of course the basic
assumption in this placement is that Jeremiah was only once confined to the court of the guard. This reconstruction may well be correct. An alternative reconstruction, however, is possible.

A close relationship exists between chs 32 and 34. Ch 34 relates how Nebuchadnezzar was fighting against Jerusalem (v 1). Outlying fortresses were still holding out against the Chaldeans, Lachish and Azekah being named in particular (v 7). This suggests that ch 34 must be assigned to an early part of the siege. The Chaldean strategy was to eliminate all military outposts before beginning the siege of Jerusalem in earnest.

These were the circumstances that existed when God told Jeremiah to deliver an oracle to King Zedekiah (34:2). The precise words of that oracle should be noted. (See the chart that follows). Ch 34 does not reveal what the reaction of the king was to this message of doom. In 34:8 the narrator jumps ahead to a later phase in the siege of Jerusalem. Perhaps 32:2-5 indicates what King Zedekiah did when he heard the word of the Lord. He ordered Jeremiah confined to the court of the guard that was in the house of the king of Judah.

In support of the above suggestion the following points can be made:
1. Ch 32 appears to be the initial confinement of Jeremiah in the reign of Zedekiah. There is not the slightest hint that he previously had been confined by the king.
2. In ch 32 Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard as a punishment for what he had preached. In ch 37 he was placed in the court of the guard as an act of mercy (see vv 19-21). Surely this indicates that the confinement in ch 32 and that in ch 37 must be two different occasions.
3. The message for which Jeremiah is confined in ch 32 is very similar to the message that he delivered to Zedekiah at the beginning of the siege in ch 34. (See following chart).

How then are the events concerning the confinement of Jeremiah to be arranged chronologically?
1. In the tenth year of Zedekiah, Jeremiah went to the king and delivered an oracle of doom (34:1-7). He was arrested by Zedekiah and confined in the court of the guard in the house of the king (32:1-5).
2. When the Babylonians temporarily raised the siege in the summer of 587 BC, the prophet was probably released. Since most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem thought the Chaldeans were gone for good, there was no further reason for detaining the political prisoners who might have proved dangerous in time of siege. During the lull in the siege, Jeremiah preached a blistering sermon against the Jerusalem nobles (34:8-32). No doubt he made some bitter enemies among the princes because of this sermon.
3. As Jeremiah attempted to leave the city to tend to some business in Anathoth, he was arrested by the guard. He was brought before the embittered princes who threw him into a dungeon as a traitor (37:11-15).
4. When the siege resumed Zedekiah was anxious to receive a further word from the Lord and so he sent secretly for Jeremiah. The prophet reiterated in one terse sentence the threat that he had been making for some time against the king (37:17). Since Jeremiah knew he was innocent of the charge of treason, he pleaded with Zedekiah that he might not have to return to the dungeon where he had been kept for some time (37:20; cf. v 16). Zedekiah acquiesced in the request of Jeremiah. He ordered Jeremiah confined henceforth in the court of the guard (37:21).
5. Jeremiah continued to preach even in the court of the guard. The princes demanded that he be put to death. Zedekiah gave in to the princes. Jeremiah was thrown into an abandoned well (38:1-6).
6. From a cistern Jeremiah was rescued by Ebed-melech (38:7-13). He was then confined in the court of the guard until Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans (38:28).

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<td>And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon (v 4)</td>
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mourn to mourn, and his eyes shall behold his eyes (v 4)

the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with you mouth to mouth (v 3)

and he shall bring Zedekiah to Babylon and there shall he be until I visit him (oracle of Yahweh). Though you fight against the Chaldeans you shall not prosper (v 5).

and you shall go to Babylon (v 3)

ACTIVITIES OF JEREMIAH DURING THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

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PART SIX
NARRATIVES
Jeremiah 34:1-45:5

Narrative predominates in Part Six. The various episodes have been arranged in such a way as to highlight the account of Jerusalem’s fall in ch 39. The structure of Part Six can be displayed as follows:

a. Events prior to final siege (34:1-36:32)
   b. Events during final siege (37:1-38:28)
   b. Post fall events (40:7-42:22)
   a. Fall in retrospect (43:1-45:5)
SECTION ONE
EVENTS PRIOR TO FINAL SIEGE
Jeremiah 34:1-36:32

In chs 34-36 Jeremiah relates three incidents that vividly illustrate the disobedience of the people of God in general, and their leaders in particular. The episodes as they stand in the book are in reverse chronological order. Ch 36 relates an event that transpired in the year 605-604 BC. Ch 35 can be assigned to almost any year between 602 and 598 BC. The event in ch 34 transpired during the final siege of Jerusalem (587-586 BC).

Ch 34 contains two messages delivered during the final siege of Jerusalem. The first of these messages is directed to King Zedekiah.

Section One has been arranged in the following structure:

- Zedekiah buried in exile (34:1-7)
  - Sacred covenant ignored (34:8-22)
  - Model of obedience (35:1-19)
- Sacred word ignored (36:1-26)
  - Jehoiakim unburied in Jerusalem (36:27-32)

**Zedekiah Buried in Exile**
34:1-7

A. **Setting** (34:1):

*The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth that were ruled by his hand and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem and against her cities, saying…*

During the last days of Jerusalem, Jeremiah had several conversations with the King Zedekiah. It is not easy to reconstruct the chronology of these interviews, but it is generally agreed that the present episode was one of the earliest. Kingdoms of the earth refers to the vassals of Nebuchadnezzar.

B. **Jerusalem’s Fate** (34:2):

1. **Jeremiah’s commission** (34:2a):
   *Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel: Go and say to Zedekiah king of Judah, and say unto him…* At this point Jeremiah was still free to travel about the city. Chronologically this ch comes before the previous three chs.

2. **Jeremiah’s message** (34:2b):
   *Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it.* The condemnatory word is first spoken concerning the city and then concerning the king. Again Jeremiah emphasizes that Jerusalem will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon; but then he adds a new element. For the first time the king is told that Jerusalem will be burned with fire.

C. **Zedekiah’s Fate** (34:3-5):

1. **Condemnation** (34:3):
   a. **Zedekiah captured** (34:3a):
      *And you will not escape from his hand, but will surely be taken and given into his hand…* Zedekiah himself would be captured by the

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enemy. The record indicates that Zedekiah did attempt to flee Jerusalem just before the city fell. He was captured in the plains of Jordan.

b. Zedekiah confronted (34:3b): and eyeball to eyeball and face to face you shall speak to the king of Babylon… The thought of 32:4 is repeated. The record indicates that after being captured, Zedekiah was taken to Riblah in Syria where he did come face to face with his overlord. There he had his eyes put out (2 Kgs 25:5-7).

c. Zedekiah deported (34:3c): and you will go to Babylon. Zedekiah would spend his last days as a captive in far away Babylon. Apparently Jeremiah now regarded the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of a portion of the population as inevitable.

2. Consolation (34:4-5): To his word of condemnation, Jeremiah appended a word of consolation to the hapless Zedekiah.

a. Death (34:4-5a): But hear the word of Yahweh, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says Yahweh concerning you: You will not die with the sword. (5) You will die in peace. The king would not die by the sword, but would die in peace in captivity.

b. Burnings (34:5b): As they made burnings for your fathers, the kings who preceded you, so will they make a burning for you. Zedekiah would receive a royal funeral, including the burning of spices.447

c. Lamentation (34:5c): They will lament you by saying, Ah lord! Because I have spoken a word (oracle of Yahweh). Appropriate laments would accompany the funeral of Zedekiah. Ah Lord is a phrase used in lamentation over a king who was respected. Earlier Jeremiah said that these words would not be used for King Jehoiakim (Jer 22:18).

Some commentators contend that this note of consolation to Zedekiah is conditional. Only if he surrenders immediately to Nebuchadnezzar will he be treated with due honor in life and death. This view may well be correct, but it is not necessary. Zedekiah did spend his last years peacefully in Babylon. There is no reason to assume that he did not receive a royal burial in that land.

D. Desperate Situation (34:6-7):

1. Obedience of Jeremiah (34:6): And Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem… In ch 21 Zedekiah had sent messengers to enquire of Jeremiah. But chronologically this appears to be the first face to face meeting between the prophet and the king.

2. Condition of the nation (34:7):

a. Invasion continuing (34:7a): while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left… The Babylonian strategy was to isolate Jerusalem by eliminating all the outlying fortresses.

b. Resistance waning (34:7b): against Lachish and Azekah, for they alone of the fortified cities of Judah were left. According to v 7 the message to Zedekiah was delivered after Nebuchadnezzar had conquered all the outlying cities of Judah except Lachish and Azekah. He was about ready to begin the assault against Jerusalem itself. The siege of Jerusalem began on Dec 29, 588 BC. The first message of Jeremiah then was delivered a short time before this date. The locations of the two cities mentioned here are not in doubt. Both were located in the Shephelah, a plateau that lies between the Philistine plain and the hill country of Judah. Important Judean military

447 That burnings of your fathers does not refer to cremation but to the burning of spices is made clear by 2 Chron 16:14; 21:19.

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correspondence was found at Lachish dating to this period. In these letters a prophet is mentioned, but not by name. This prophet may have been Jeremiah.

**Sacred Covenant Ignored**

34:8-22

The second message in this ch (vv 8-22) is directed to the people in general and the nobles in particular. In the summer of 587 BC the Egyptian army moved north to come to the aid of Zedekiah. The Chaldean army was forced to withdraw from Jerusalem to deal with the threat from the south. This second message of the prophet falls in the period just after the Chaldeans had been forced to lift their siege of Jerusalem.

**A. Zedekiah’s Proposal** (34:8-9): Israel, like other nations of the ancient Near East, had laws that permitted an impoverished man to sell himself into slavery. While this provision may seem harsh by western standards, it was certainly a boon for the poor.

Numerous invasions, enormous taxation and natural disasters (such as the drought mentioned in 14:1) would have reduced many Israelites—former landowners—to abject poverty. The wealth of the nation, such as it was, seems to have been concentrated in the hands of a relatively few members of the aristocracy. Under such conditions, no doubt many Israelites found slavery an attractive alternative to starvation.

1. *Proposed covenant (34:8):* The word that came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people that were in Jerusalem to proclaim liberty... Jerusalem came under siege in Dec 588 BC, King Zedekiah took the initiative in securing the release of these Hebrew bondsmen. First came the proclamation; each master proclaimed liberty, i.e., emancipated his slaves. Proclaim liberty is based on the law in Lv 25:10 (cf. Isa 61:1).

2. *Intended result (34:9):* so that each man would set free his Hebrew slave or handmaiden, that no one should hold his fellow Jew in bondage. The law of Moses had strict regulations governing the servitude of fellow Hebrews. Such bond-slaves were to be released after six years of service unless, of course, they preferred to remain in this state. The slave owners of Jerusalem had been guilty of violating these regulations, refusing to release their slaves at the end of the legally stipulated period. Set free appears in a similar context in Dt 15:12, 13, 18 (cf. Isa 58:6).

Then, in the temple in Jerusalem, the king and princes ratified the agreement by participating in ancient and solemn ceremonies. A calf was slaughtered and divided down the middle. One half was laid opposite the other with a passage between. The covenanters walked between the pieces. The significance of this act was probably that of an implied curse: May the party who breaks this covenant be cut in two even as the calf is divided. Perhaps an oath was actually repeated as the parties passed between the halves of the dead animal. By such a ceremony God’s covenant with Abraham had been ratified many years earlier (Gn 15:9f).

**B. Covenant of Release** (34:10): And all the princes and all the people entered into the covenant heard that everyone was to set free his Hebrew slave or maidservant, that they might not enslave them anymore. They hearkened and set them free. The verb hear/hearken (r. šm’) is used twice in the v. They obeyed the terms of the covenant. What motivated the slave owners suddenly to comply with the law and release their slaves? Their impulse was born while the Chaldeans were pounding on the gates of Jerusalem. Perhaps the thought was that by correcting this flagrant abuse of the law, they might influence God to
intervene on their behalf and to spare the city. Their action might be likened to “death-bed repentance” or “fox-hole religion”—a sort of last-ditch effort in the time of peril. In the present crisis these men were willing to try anything, even the religion of Jeremiah.

On the other hand, other motives may have influenced the nobles in their decision. With Jerusalem under siege, the slaves might have become economic liabilities rather than assets. They would no longer be able to work the farmlands that lay outside the city walls.

With food scarce within the city, the slave owners were hard pressed to feed their own families let alone their slaves. Furthermore, freeing the slaves would make more men available for the defense of Jerusalem. A free man has more incentive to fight against the invaders than a slave. Thus Zedekiah probably did not have a great deal of difficulty in persuading the nobles to release their slaves.

C. Repudiation of the Covenant (34:11):

1. Change of mind (34:11a): But after they had done this they changed their mind. When the Egyptian forces came to the relief of Jerusalem in the summer of 587 BC, the siege of Jerusalem was temporarily lifted. The foolish inhabitants of the city thought that the danger was over. The enemy would not return! God had delivered them!

2. Re-enslavement (34:11b): They caused the slaves and maidservants whom they had set free to return, and forced them once more to become slaves and handmaids. Thinking that normal conditions would soon be restored, the nobles issued a new proclamation: they revoked the freedom they had given. They brought the former slaves into servitude again. This shameful repudiation of a sacred covenant made with God and man incensed Jeremiah. He delivered the stinging rebuke that follows. Force (r. kbš) is a strong word suggesting that violence was used to subjugate the former slaves.

D. Stern Denunciation (34:12-22): God had something to say about the hypocritical actions of the Jerusalem nobles, and Jeremiah was the instrument by which his word was spoken. Jeremiah now speaks the word of Yahweh anticipated in v 8.

1. Commands ignored (34:12-14):
   a. Existence of a covenant (34:12-13): And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying, (13) Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, saying… The phrases out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage appears first in Ex 13:3, 14; 20:2 and five times in Dt. Jeremiah began his condemnation of the act of treachery by reminding his hearers of the stipulations of the Sinai covenant with regard to servitude. Just as Zedekiah had made a covenant (v 8), so Yahweh also had made a covenant.
   b. Contents of a covenant (34:14a): At the end of seven years you shall set free each man his Hebrew brother who has sold himself to you. When he has served you six years, you shall set him free from serving you. A Hebrew who served six years was to be released in the seventh year.
   c. Disobedience to a covenant (34:14b): But your fathers did not obey me, nor did they listen. Apparently this law had been ignored because Jeremiah said that the fathers of his hearers refused to hearken to this commandment of God.

   450 Blank (PFI, 47) sees a vague hint that this was the motivation in v 15 which he translates, you turned today and did what pleased me. Blank thinks this means, you did what you did in order to please me.

   451 The root kbš is elsewhere used of the rape of a woman (Esth 7:8).

   452 Dt 5:6; 6:12; 8:14; 13:5, 10.
a. Review of their actions (34:15): But as for you, you had turned and done what is right in my eyes, to proclaim liberty each man to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house that bears my name. God actually had been pleased that finally the nobles, whatever their ulterior motives, had compiled with his law and had released their slaves. In the house that bears my name underscores the solemnity of the covenant of emancipation.

b. Rebuke of their sin (34:16):
   (1) Profaned God’s name (34:16a): But then you turned and profaned my name… The wrath of God was kindled when these nobles went back on their word. Since the nobles had pledged in the name of God and in the house of God to release their slaves, Jeremiah charged that they had profaned the name of God. Whenever God’s name is falsely appealed to the holy name is thereby profaned. 453

   (2) Abused their fellowman (34:16b): and you caused each man his slave and handmaid, whom you had set free according to their desire, to return, forcing them to be your slaves and handmaids. Forcing free men and women to be slaves was a monstrous violation of human rights and God’s law. Such an act of betrayal and treachery as committed by the nobles of the land will have serious consequences. According to their desire points to the desire of all in slavery to be free. Obviously then it was against their desire to be forced back into a condition of servitude.

3. Ironic punishment (34:17-19):
   a. Liberty to them all (34:17):
      (1) They had not proclaimed liberty (34:17a): Therefore thus says Yahweh: You have not obeyed me to proclaim liberty one to another. The paragraph begins with a rather sarcastic word. Since the nobles had failed to proclaim liberty to their slaves in accordance with both the ancient and the recent covenant, God will proclaim liberty to them.

      (2) Yahweh will proclaim liberty (34:17b): Behold, I am about to proclaim to you liberty (oracle of Yahweh) unto the sword, pestilence and famine… They will be free from those obligations that they regard as unbearable; they will be free from the gracious protection of the Lord. God will deliver them over to that triple alliance of evils: sword, pestilence, famine. This triad of tragedies is mentioned frequently in the book (cf. 14:12), but this is the only place where the position of sword and pestilence is reversed.

      (3) Result (34:17c): and I will make you an object of terror to all kingdoms of the earth. Freedom from divine obligations is not true freedom at all. The cruel taskmaster of sin will take an awful toll in the life of that individual who declares his independence from God.

   b. Death to covenant breakers (34:18-19):
      (1) Transgression (34:18a): I will also make the men who transgressed my covenant, who did not perform the words of the covenant that they made before me... Throughout the Near East, and especially in Israel, covenants or treaties were taken seriously. Violation of a solemn covenant taken in the name of the

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453 The idea that God’s name suffers profanation because of his people has two different meanings in the OT. (1) God is defamed by the shameful conduct of his people (Lv 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32; Amos 2:7; Jer 34:16; Ezek 20:39; Mal 1:12). (2) God is also disgraced because of the shameful condition of his people (Isa 48:11; Ezek 36:16ff; 20:8.10, 14, 22; 39:7). Sheldon Blank has a helpful discussion of the whole concept, though written from an extremely liberal standpoint. See Prophetic Faith in Isaiah (New York: Harper, 1958), 117-126.
God of the parties called down the wrath of the deity. In this case the punishment of the hypocritical covenanters will be appropriate to the crime that was committed.

(2) Punishment (34:18b): *like the calf that they cut in two when they passed between the parts...* The parties to the covenant had piously passed between the halves of the calf they had cut in two. In so doing they had pronounced a self-malediction if they should be unfaithful to the terms of the covenant. The announcement here is that their self-malediction would be fulfilled.

(3) Identity (34:19): *the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the officers, the priests and all the people of the land who had passed between the parts of the calf—* The transgressors included members of the royal families, officers of state, priests and the *people of the land*, i.e., the landed gentry. Violation of the laws protecting the rights of those in debtors’ slavery was widespread in Jerusalem in the seventh century.

4. Given over to enemies (34:20-21):
   a. Covenant breakers (34:20):
      (1) Given to enemies (34:20a): *and I will give them into the hand of their enemies who seek their life.* Yahweh declares his intention to hand over the transgressors to their enemies. Jerusalem would be captured by the Chaldeans.
      (2) Left unburied (34:20b): *And their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth.* As they slew the calf for the covenant ceremony, so the Chaldeans would slay them. Like the carcasses of animals, their bodies would be left unburied, exposed to scavenger birds and beasts.
   b. Zedekiah and princes (34:21): *And I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies who seek their life, even into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon that has gone up from you.* This paragraph closes with a specific word for Zedekiah. The king would be handed over to the Chaldeans along with his princes.

5. Return of the Chaldeans (34:22):
   a. Chaldeans to return (34:22a): *Behold, I am about to issue a command (oracle of Yahweh), and I will bring them back unto this city...* Jeremiah also had a specific word about the Babylonian armies that had withdrawn from the siege of Jerusalem. The false prophets who hailed the departure of the Chaldeans as a vindication of their optimistic predictions would not have long to gloat. Yahweh will bring them back to Jerusalem.
   b. Jerusalem to be destroyed (34:22b): *and they shall fight against it, capture it and burn it...* When the Chaldeans returned they would renew the siege of the city in earnest. Eventually they would capture and burn the place. Even in the face of what appeared to be the failure of all of Jeremiah’s predictions about Jerusalem, he renews those threats.
   c. Judah made a desolation (34:22c): *and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.* The other cities of Judah would fall along with Jerusalem. The word of God spoken by his prophet some forty years earlier was about to be fulfilled.

**Model of Obedience**

35:1-19

At this point Jeremiah, or the final editor of the book, introduces an incident from an earlier period of the prophet’s ministry to illustrate the disobedience of the people. Ch 35 is unconnected
chronologically with the preceding and following chs.; but it does serve to serve as a counterbalance to the report of unfaithfulness of the Jerusalem leadership in ch 34.

The event here narrated dates back to the reign of Jehoiakim (vv 1, 11) who ruled from 609 to 598 BC. It is difficult to place the episode more precisely within the reign of that king. Perhaps the unfaithfulness indicated in the preceding episode triggered a recollection of the dramatic demonstration of faithfulness indicated in this Section.

Jehoiakim started his reign as an Egyptian vassal (2 Kgs 23:35). After the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC, he swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. He remained faithful to Babylon for three years, from 604 to 601 BC (2 Kgs 24:1). Encouraged by an Egyptian defeat of Nebuchadnezzar late in 601 BC, Jehoiakim rebelled against his overlord. Nebuchadnezzar, having returned to Babylon to lick the wounds of defeat, was unable to return to Jerusalem to deal with his rebellious vassal.

In the meantime Nebuchadnezzar sent local garrisons of Chaldean troops along with Syrian, Ammonite and Moabite mercenaries to raid Judah and harass Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 24:2). It was probably to this period of Jehoiakim’s reign (599 or 598 BC) that the present episode is to be assigned.

Jeremiah used many different methods to communicate God’s truth. In the present instance he uses a dramatic demonstration involving a whole clan to drive home the truth to the people of Judah.

A. Instruction to Jeremiah (35:1-2):

1. Dating (35:1): The word that came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying… The date signals that the ch is not chronological. The incident related in ch 35 is cited as an another illustration why Jerusalem must face judgment.

   a. Go to the Rechabites (35:2a): Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them… The narrative begins with Jeremiah receiving instruction to seek out the members of the Rechabite community. They were apparently of Kenite descent (1 Chr 2:55). They had joined the Israelites at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (Judg 1:16). It was Jehonadab (or Jonadab) the son of Rechab who gave to the name “Rechabite” its special connotation.
   b. Bring Rechabites to temple (35:2b): and bring them to the house of Yahweh unto one of the chambers… No reason is given for why the test of the Rechabites was to be conducted in the temple. Perhaps it was simply a matter of the temple being the location most like to have a large group to whom the prophet could preach the accompanying message.
   c. Offer Rechabites wine (35:2c): and offer them wine to drink. For reasons that will become clear, the offering of wine to the Rechabites was the most shocking thing Jeremiah was told to do.

B. Compliance by Jeremiah (35:3-4):

1. Rechabites contacted (35:3): And I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, his brethren, all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites. In obedience to this command Jeremiah contacted Jaazaniah, the present leader of the sect, and invited him and the members of his clan to come to the temple. Jaazaniah was the son of another Jeremiah. Both names were common in the period. The name of the grandfather—Habazziniah—is unattested elsewhere. House refers to household. The

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*Lit., Go to the house of the Rechabites. House here does not refer to a dwelling, but to members of a clan or, better still, a community.*

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passage gives the impression that what transpired there came as a surprise to the Rechabites.

2. Rechabites taken to temple (35:4a): And I brought them to the house of Yahweh… As commanded, Jeremiah took the Rechabites to the house of Yahweh, i.e., the temple. Clearly Jeremiah was free to go about in the temple area. In the following ch, dated to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, he for a time was prevented for some unexplained reason from entering the temple area.

3. Specific location (35:4b): For some reason Jeremiah felt compelled to become very specific about the location of the test of the Rechabites. Though the statements are not very helpful to modern readers, Jeremiah identifies the location in three ways.

a. A prophet’s chamber (35:4b): unto the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God… Jeremiah chose the chamber of the sons of Hanan as the spot for the demonstration. The phrase the man of God refers to a prophet.455 One cannot tell is Hanan was still making use of the chamber, or whether it merely had been named for him. Perhaps Hanan was a prophet who conducted a school in that chamber. If so, his sons may have been his disciples.456 The fact that Hanan (or his sons) lent the room to Jeremiah on this occasion indicates that some high-ranking officials of the nation were in sympathy with the prophet.

A number of chambers were arranged around the courts of the temple and served partly as storehouses and partly as residences for priests and other temple personnel.457 No doubt this particular chamber was able to accommodate several persons.

b. A prominent location (35:4c): which is beside the chamber of the princes… The chamber of the sons of Hanan was located in a prominent place next to the chamber of the princes. The area chosen would be a most advantageous spot for an object lesson to be seen by the leaders of Jerusalem.

c. An upper chamber (35:4d): above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold. Above may suggest that this was a second story chamber. The chamber of the sons of Hanan was just above the chamber of Maaseiah. He may have been the father of the powerful priest Zephaniah (21:1; 29:25; 37:3). Maaseiah was the keeper of the threshold or door. The keeper of the door was an important priestly function. There were three of these officials corresponding to the number of gates of the temple (Jer 52:24; 2 Kgs 25:18). They seem to have been honorary guardians of the temple precincts. They may have been in charge of money contributed for the temple (2 Kgs 12:9).

The point of all the detail about the location is to show that the Rechabites were surrounded by some of the most powerful men in the nation when Jeremiah put them to the test.

C. Invitation to the Rechabites (35:5): And I placed before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine, and cups; and I said unto them, Drink wine! After a crowd of witnesses, probably including temple officials, had assembled Jeremiah placed before the Rechabites large bowls of wine together with drinking cups and told them to drink. This is no example of placing a temptation before a weaker brother. It was not Jeremiah’s intention to entice these ascetics into sin. He knew that the Rechabites had committed themselves to a rigorous rule of life that included the abstinence from all fruit of the vine. It was their loyalty

455 The title man of God was an honorable title of the prophets. It was applied to Samuel (1 Sam 19:6-10), Elijah (2 Kgs 1:9-13), Elisha (2 Kgs 4-13) and others. The term occurs only here in Jeremiah.

456 See Streane, CB, 237.

457 See 1 Chr 9:27; Ezek 40:17; Neh 10:37-39.
and obedience to this way of life that Jeremiah wished to vividly portray before the national leaders. So he offered them wine.

D. Response of Rechabites (35: 6-11):
1. Polite refusal (35:6a): And they responded, We do not drink wine. As expected, the Rechabites vigorously declined the invitation to drink. The Hebrew imperfect in the Rechabite refusal implies customary action and can be translated: We never drink wine.
2. Explanation (35:6b-7):
   a. Obeying a specific command (35:6): Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Do not drink wine, you nor your sons, forever. Jehonadab (Jonadab) first appears in 2 Kgs 9:15-31 as a militant worshiper of Yahweh. He participated in the revolution of 841 BC when the zealot Jehu overthrew the dynasty of Omri in the northern kingdom of Israel. Apparently the excesses of Ahab and Jezebel, the importation of the worship of the Tyrian Baal, the disintegration of ancient social patterns and the wide-spread debauchery so completely upset certain conservative elements of the population that they were ready to take drastic steps to preserve the old values. Do not is the strong Hebrew negative indicating permanent, rather than temporary, prohibition.
   At this point the Rechabites have something in common with the Nazarites who also abstained from all fruit of the vine. There is no indication, however, that the Rechabites did not cut their hair or avoided contact with dead bodies as was the case with the Nazarites.
   b. Living a nomadic lifestyle (35:7a): Furthermore, do not build houses, sow seed, plant vineyards or own any such; but you shall dwell in tents all of your days… The litany of commands from their ancestor continues. Jehonadab had imposed a pentalogue of strict regulations upon his descendants. But even though some two hundred years had elapsed the Rechabites were still living by the rule of their father. Apparently Jehonadab did not want his descendants to accommodate to the lifestyle of urban society.
   c. Seeking an abundant life (35:7b): in order that your days may be many upon the face of the land in which you are sojourning. Jonadad held out to his sons a variation of the promise made by Moses to those who honor their father and mother (Ex 20:12). The Rechabites believed that by following the rules of their ancestor they would live longer and happier lives.
2. Obedience to Jonadab (35:8-10): Having reported the commands of Jonadab (vv 6-7), the narrative reiterates the commands in terms of their being obeyed. The key verb in these vv is listened (r. šm’). The Rechabites were a community that listened.
   a. In general (35:8a): And we have listened to the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, every word that he commanded us… The descendants of Jonadab had compiled with these commandments for over two hundred years. The passage does not argue the merits of the Rechabite lifestyle. The point is that Rechabites were a disciplined sect zealously conforming to the wishes of a distant ancestor. They are an example of radical obedience. Surely this is one of the most noted examples of the influence of a father in all the annals of history!
   b. In regard to wine (35:8b): not to drink wine all of our days, neither we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters… All of our days could refer to the entire time since the command had been given. On the other hand, the phrase may indicate that Rechabites practiced abstinence from the day of their births until their deaths. For Nazirites abstinence from wine was observed only for the duration of the vow. But the Rechabites the abstinence was life-long.
The abstinence principle was also clan-wide. The old and the young, the married and unmarried, males and females all practiced abstinence. In a culture where grape juice was the standard beverage and often safer to drink than the water, this teetotaling clan must have been considered weird.

c. In regard to nomadic life (35:9): nor to build houses in which to dwell; and we do not possess vineyards, fields or seed. Rechabites did not build permanent dwellings for themselves. They renounced ownership of real property. They had no need of seed since they owned no land upon which to plant it.

d. In summary (35:10): We dwell in tents, and we have listened, and done everything that Jonadab our father commanded us. The Rechabites were not ashamed of their lifestyle. They had great respect for their ancestor Jonadab. They showed that respect by observing the rules that long before he had established for his children. In the words of this v there is an element of clan pride. These people were not reluctant followers of what they regarded as outdated rules. They were enthusiastically committed to their way of life.

3. Explanation of their presence (35:11): But it came to pass, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up against the land, that we said, Come and let us go to Jerusalem because of the army of the Chaldeans and Arameans. So we dwell in Jerusalem. The Rechabites wish it to be clearly understood that their presence in Jerusalem does not indicate unfaithfulness to principle. Only for the sake of self-preservation had they sought refuge in the city. Bands of Chaldeans and Syrians pillaging the countryside had forced these gentle people to temporarily take up residence behind the protective walk of the capital.

The Rechabites were a people who desired the simple pastoral life. But there is more involved. By their practices they were protesting the corruption that they observed in the sedentary population about them. The excessive drinking and wild harvest-time orgies associated with Baal worship were repulsive to Jonadab. Since Baal was an agricultural deity, the god of the farmer, Jonadab refused to allow members of his clan to sow seed, to plant or to own vineyards. By their austerity the Rechabites were a constant rebuke to those Israelites who succumbed to the tantalizing temptation to join in the sensual “worship” of Baal.

Like the Nazirites, the Rechabites set an example of commitment to God. Even when forced to temporarily seek the safety of Jerusalem, even when confronted by the command of a prophet within the house of God, these noble nomads refused to compromise their convictions.

Along with their meager belongings, the Rechabites had brought their principles to the big city with them. Such convictions were as rare in the sixth century before Christ as they are today.

E. Application of Parable (35:12-15):

1. A question (35:12-13): And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah, saying, (13) Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Will you not accept correction to obey my words (oracle of Yahweh)? The presence of an eccentric group like the Rechabites in the temple area must have created quite a sensation in Jerusalem. No doubt a crowd quickly assembled in the courtyard outside the chamber of the sons of Hanan.

Apparently Jeremiah left the chamber where the demonstration had taken place and went out to address the people in the temple court. He minces no words as he drives home the spiritual lesson. The question is part exhortation, part accusation. The Judeans
needed to accept correction (mûsûr), or discipline. This means they needed to listen to what God said, take it seriously, and live by it. What Jeremiah wants is not obedience to a particular command; he wants the Judeans to be a community of people who live a lifestyle of submission to the will of Yahweh.

2.  A contrast (35:14-15):
   a.  Jonadab had spoken once to his sons (35:14a): The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab that he commanded his sons that they drink no wine, have been carried out. Unto this day they drink no wine, because they obeyed the commandment of their father. For over two hundred years the Rechabite clan had obeyed the command of a dead ancestor even though his commandment was merely a matter of human judgment.
   b.  God had spoken often to his sons (35:14b-15): But I have spoken unto you earnestly and persistently; yet you have not listened unto me! Time and again the living God had spoken to his people, yet they had ignored or disobeyed his commandments. While the Rechabites had listened to their ancestor (vv 8, 10), the Israelites did not listen to the heavenly Father (cf. v 17).
   c.  God spoke through prophets (35:15):
      (1)  An urgent message (35:15a): With urgency and persistency I sent unto you all my servants the prophets who said… Again and again God had sent unto them the prophets. The prophets are referred to as my servants five times in the books.
      (2)  An appeal for repentance (35:15b): Turn please each man from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them… The prophets pleaded with the rebellious Judeans to repent and turn from idolatry.
      (3)  A promise of survival (35:15c): then you shall continue to dwell in the land that I gave to you and to your fathers… The prophets promised the Israelites that they could continue to dwell in their land if they would only hearken to the voice of God.
      (4)  A message ignored (35:15d): but you would not pay any attention or obey me. The Judeans refused to hearken to the prophets. On occasion the people actually had reviled and ridiculed the servants of God.

F.  Announcement (35:16-19):
   1.  Obedience commended (35:16): Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the commandment of their ancestor, and this people have not obeyed me… Jeremiah commends the Rechabites for being faithful to their vow. This does not, of course, mean that Jeremiah shared their sentiments in every respect, or that he regarded their way of life as a model that all should follow. Jeremiah spent most of his life in Jerusalem, lived in a house, presumably drank wine (it was the common daily beverage), and owned land (32:1-15). The main point here is that the faithful obedience of the Rechabites was pleasing to God. They were a living rebuke to a faithless and disobedient nation.
   2.  Disobedience condemned (35:17):
      a.  Calamity coming (35:17a): therefore thus says Yahweh, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to bring against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the calamity that I have spoken against them… In view of the fact that Judah had ignored or spurned all efforts of God to turn them back from apostasy, God is compelled to execute judgment upon the nation.
      b.  Explanation (35:17b): because I have spoken unto them and they did not listen, I called out to them but they did not answer. Just before bringing the children of
Israel into Canaan God had warned his people through Moses that remaining in
possession of that land flowing with milk and honey was contingent upon their
faithfulness (Dt 28). Every prophet from Amos onwards had reminded the nation of
this fact. The fall of Samaria in 722 BC should have served as empirical proof of the
proposition. Yet Judah plunged even deeper into apostasy. There was no other
alternative. Judah must be punished, her population deported and her land made
desolate.

The contrast in vv 16-17 is great: a small obscure clan faithful to the word of
their forefather on the one hand; an entire nation unfaithful to the word of their
heavenly Father on the other. Surely the impending judgment was justified.

3. Obedience commended again (35:18): *And to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah
said, Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your ancestor, and you have kept all his commandments,
and have done everything that he commanded you...* By way of commendation the
obedience of the Rechabites to their ancestor Jonadab is reiterated. *Obedied* is lit.,
*listened*. The Rechabites *listened* to their ancestor; Zedekiah and the leaders of Judah
would not listen to God (34:4, 14, 17; 35:14, 17). Everything depends on *listening.*

4. Promise to Rechabites (35:19): *therefore thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel:
Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before me forever.* The
formula *shall not lack a man* is similar to the formula that insured the continuance of the
Davidic line (33:17). To *stand before* anyone in OT thought was to function as a servant
to that person. Thus the promise is that throughout the ages there would always be
obedient servants of the Lord among the descendants of Jonadab.

It is not easy to determine in what way the Lord fulfilled his promise to the Rechabites. Some
missionaries and travelers report having encountered Rechabites in Yemen and Mesopotamia.458 Perhaps it
is better, however, to think in terms of a spiritual fulfillment of the promise. Throughout history there have
been and will be spiritual descendants of the Rechabites who remained true to their convictions and
separate themselves from the sinfulness of the world.

Sacred Scroll Ignored
36:1-26

Ch 36 is instructive from several standpoints. First, it throws considerable light upon the history
of the Book of Jeremiah. The scroll produced at the dictation of Jeremiah was the first edition of the
book. That book was destined to undergo two, and possibly three, subsequent editions before it
finally reached the form in which it is found in the English Bible today.

Second, this ch provides a wealth of information about the mechanics of producing a biblical
book. Involved in the process were a roll-book, pen, ink, the selection of a scribe, and the actual
dictation. It is not unlikely that the procedures followed here were followed in the case of many
other books of the OT.

Third, ch 36 marks a turning point in the career of Jeremiah. While he was only a preacher,
Jeremiah’s influence was limited to his native land. But when he committed his sermons to writing,
Jeremiah was destined to influence the world for generations to come.

A. Word Written (36:1-4):
   1. Commandment received (36:1-3):
      a. Date (36:1): *And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah,
      king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying...* The

458Naegelsbach, CHS, 308.
fourth year of Jehoiakim was a turning point both in the political world and in the ministry of Jeremiah the prophet. This was the year in which the famous battle of Carchemish determined what power would rule the world for the next half-century or so. It was in this same year that Jeremiah was commissioned by the Lord to record permanently the messages that he had been preaching for the past twenty-three years.

It is difficult to determine which came first, the battle or the writing. V 29 has been submitted as proving that Nebuchadnezzar had not yet swept down through Syria-Palestine. But since Nebuchadnezzar invaded this area so many times, it is hardly possible to insist dogmatically that v 29 must refer to the first invasion.

On the other hand, while the battle of Carchemish seems to have occurred early in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the scroll was not read publicly until the ninth month of the fifth year of his reign (v 9). One must allow for a slow process of writing in those days. But even so it is difficult to see how the beginning of the writing could be pushed back prior to Carchemish in the early part of the preceding year.

b. Directive (36:2):
(1) Secure a scroll (36:2a): Take for yourself a book-scroll… Book-scroll is lit., scroll of a document. The meaning is a scroll suitable for a document. The writing substance was no doubt papyrus. Several pieces were stitched together and attached to a roller of wood at one or both ends. The writing was arranged in columns parallel to the rollers. As the scroll was gradually unrolled from one end to the other, the successive columns could be read.

(2) Record God’s words (36:2b): and write in it all the words that I have spoken unto you concerning Israel, Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke unto you in the days of Josiah even unto this day. Upon this scroll Jeremiah was commanded to record all the words that he has spoken. Some have suggested that Jeremiah had fragmentary written records that he used in compiling the first edition of his book. While this is not impossible it seems more likely that the prophet relied upon his memory, guided and aided, of course, by the Holy Spirit.

In any case, the book was to contain excerpts from his twenty-three year ministry.

c. Purpose (36:3): Perhaps the house of Judah will hear of all the calamity that I am planning to do to them, in order that they might turn each man from his evil way, that I might forgive their iniquity and their sin. The scroll is not designed to give information or make an argument. God’s purpose for issuing the directive was threefold. First, that the Jews will hear the word, not in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense, i.e., in the sense of observing, heeding, taking it to heart. Second, that by hearing the word they might thereby be converted. Third, that God, in view of their conversion, might be able to forgive their iniquity.

Perhaps the recent invasion of the area by Nebuchadnezzar would make the people more receptive to the threats of destruction by the enemy from the north. In any case, by ordering his prophet to produce a copy of the inspired word, God was endeavoring once again to lead his people to repentance. One has to ask with Isaiah, What could have been done more? (Isa 5:4).

2. Commandment executed (36:4):
   a. A scribe secured (36:4a): And Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah. Jeremiah complied with the commandment of the Lord by securing Baruch the son of Neriah to be his scribe. Why did not Jeremiah himself pen the words? It is not necessary to conclude that Jeremiah could not write. In deed there are hints within the book that the prophet did on occasion take the pen in hand (32:10; 51:60).

   It may be that Baruch was employed merely to relieve some of the burden of producing such a massive work. Anyone who has undertaken an extensive writing
project knows the inestimable value of a good secretary. Josephus relates that Baruch was “exceptionally well instructed in his native tongue.” Baruch seems to have been from a noble family. His brother Seraiah was in the royal service (51:59). According to Josephus Baruch's grandfather was Maaseiah (2 Chr 34:8), the governor of the city. While Baruch was first mentioned in 32:12, chronologically it is here that he makes his debut.

b. A scribe at work (36:4b): Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Yahweh, that he spoke unto him, upon the book-scroll. Just exactly how long it took to complete the writing of the scroll is not stated. It may have been a matter of days or weeks. The writing began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim; the scroll was publicly read in the fifth year and the ninth month. Assuming that the public reading of the scroll took place some time very soon after the writing, some scholars would posit as much as a year or more for the writing process. It is best, however, to leave the matter of the length of time involved an open question.

B. Word Read (36:5-19):
1. Request of Jeremiah (36:5-7): The word of God was never intended to be deposited in the public archives. God’s word is meant to be read, studied, heeded, and obeyed. It is both significant and appropriate that Jeremiah not only published the word, but saw to it that the word was proclaimed. If the word of God is to have an impact upon individual it must be transferred from the written page to the hearts of individuals. Jeremiah’s mandate to Baruch parallels Yahweh’s mandate to Jeremiah in vv 2-3.
   a. Reason (36:5): And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am restrained; I am not able to go to the house of Yahweh. Sometime after he had completed dictating the scroll to Baruch, Jeremiah requested that his secretary go to the house of God and read what he had written. For some unexplained reason, Jeremiah himself was not able to go to the temple to perform this task. He was not imprisoned, as the English versions might imply, for both he and Baruch were to hide themselves according to vv 19 and 26.

   Jeremiah was probably prohibited by royal edict or by temple authorities from appearing any longer in the temple to preach his message of doom. He was literally detained or restrained from entering the temple. Truth is more important than the speaker. What one hears is more important than whether he hears from the lips of an eloquent Jeremiah or a humble Baruch.

   b. Request (36:6): Now you go and read from the scroll that you have written from my mouth the words of Yahweh in the presence of the people at the house of Yahweh on a fast day. Also read them in the presence of all Judah who are coming from their cities. The word of God is intended to be heard in public places. Jeremiah instructed Baruch to read the scroll on a fast day. Just why this fast had been proclaimed in the ninth month of the year is not stated and it is useless to speculate about it. The main point is that Baruch was to read the scroll in the temple at a time when he would have the largest audience.

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459Antiquities 10:9.1.
460Less likely are the suggestions that Jeremiah was sick or ceremonially unclean at the moment.
461Only one fast day was prescribed in the law. It fell in the seventh month (Lv 16:29; 23:27). Streane (CB, 242) suggests that the fast here may have been called to commemorate the recent capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Laetsch (BCJ, 286) cites a passage from the Talmud that calls for a fast in the ninth month if the rains had not yet fallen.
c. Hope (36:7): Perhaps they will present their supplication before Yahweh, and will turn each man from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that Yahweh has spoken against this people. Jeremiah may have waited for quite some time for just the right opportunity to have his book read. He was prayerfully hopeful that in that hallowed spot the people would make genuine supplication to the Lord and thus avert the outpouring of divine wrath. Jeremiah’s intent echoes the intent of Yahweh in v 3.

2. Reading by Baruch (36:8-10):
   a. He read in the temple (36:8): And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading from the scroll the words of Yahweh at the house of Yahweh. As Jeremiah faithfully executed the commands of God, Baruch faithfully carried out the instructions of his master in every detail.
   b. He read on a fast day (36:9): And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people called a fast before Yahweh in Jerusalem; and all the people were coming from the cities of Judah into Jerusalem. In December—the ninth month according to the Jewish reckoning—the temple authorities proclaimed a fast. A large host of the inhabitants of Judah flocked to Jerusalem to the temple.
   c. He read in the chamber of Gemariah (36:10): And Baruch read in the scroll the words of Jeremiah in the presence of all the people in the house of Yahweh in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court at the entrance of the new gate of the house of Yahweh. Baruch selected the chamber of Gemariah the scribe as the spot from which to read the scroll. He probably stood at the door of this room so that he might be heard by the people milling about in the temple courts.

      This Gemariah was the brother of Ahikam who was friendly to Jeremiah (26:24). Thus Baruch was on friendly territory as he stood in the doorway of the office belonging to Gemariah. This office was located in the higher court at the entry of the new gate of the Lord’s house (v 10). The higher court would be the court of priests that was elevated slightly above the court of the people.

      The location of the new gate is uncertain. One of the doors of Gemariah’s office must have led into the court of the people. It was from this elevated spot—one that afforded a view over the larger court of the people—that Baruch read the scroll.

3. Report the princes (36:11-13):
   a. Source of the report (36:11): When Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of Yahweh as they were read from the book... One person who heard Baruch read the scroll that day was particularly touched. Micaiah was the son of Gemariah whose office Baruch was using to proclaim the word. He was anxious to report to his father what had transpired in the temple that day.
   b. Place of the report (36:12): he went down to the house of the king, to the chamber of the scribe. And, behold, all the princes were sitting there — Elishama the scribe, Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, Elnathan the son of Achbor, Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah and all the princes. It so happened that Gemariah was engaged at that moment in a council of the princes in the office of Elishama. Elishama may have been the grandfather of the assassin of Gedaliah

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462 Another Gemariah is mentioned in 29:3.
463 Laetsch suggests that the new gate is to be identified with the high, or upper, gate of Benjamin mentioned in 20:2 that was built comparatively late in the time of Jotham (2 Kgs 16:35).
(41:1). If so, he was of the royal family. *Elnathan* led the delegation that went to Egypt to bring back the prophet Uriah for execution (26:22). He may have been the king’s father-in-law (2 Kgs 24:8). The other individuals are mentioned on in this ch and nothing further is known about them.

Of the fathers named, *Achbor* and *Shaphan* were involved in the validation of the scroll discovered in the days of Josiah (2 Kgs 22:12, 14).

c. **Content of the report (36:13):** And *Micaiah declared to them the words that he had heard Baruch reading from the book in the presence of the people.* Micaiah declared to the princes the message that Baruch had been reading to the people in the temple court.

4. **Reaction of the princes (36:14-19):**

a. **They dispatched a messenger (36:14a):** Then all the princes sent unto Baruch Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi…

b. **They summoned Baruch (36:14b):** saying, The scroll from which you read in the presence of the people, take it in your hand and come. And Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hands and went unto them. The princes were so impressed that they dispatched Jehudi to summon Baruch to appear before them with the scroll. Baruch answered the summons of the officials, apparently willingly and unafraid.

c. **They listened to Baruch read (36:15):** And they said unto him, Sit please, and read in our presence. And Baruch read it in their presence. The scene shifts from a temple chamber to a government chamber. Since Baruch belonged to a family of distinction (see on v 4), the princes received him respectfully. In the light of vv 19 and 25 it would appear that these particular princes were favorably disposed towards Baruch and his master.

d. **They determined to tell the king (36:16):** And it came to pass when they heard all the words, they looked in fear one to another, and they said unto Baruch, We must surely declare all these things to the king. When the princes heard the words of the scroll, they looked at each other and trembled. Why were they afraid? Had the scroll made them aware of their own personal guilt? Did the bold, prophetic announcement of imminent destruction strike terror in their hearts? Were they afraid of the reaction of the king? Were they sympathetic to the argument of the scroll? Where they looking for a tool to use to get another royal hearing for their viewpoint? Perhaps all of these factors mingled to make these princes afraid. In any case, they were convinced that it was their responsibility as first officers of the realm to report the incident to the king. *They looked in fear one to another* is lit., *they trembled, each to the other.*

e. **They inquired about the origin of the scroll (36:17):** And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us please how you wrote all these things from his mouth. Before reporting to the king, the princes inquired more precisely about the scroll. They wanted to know exactly how the scroll came into being and who was responsible for it. Before informing the king about the scroll they needed to be confident about the origin, authenticity and credibility of the scroll.

f. **Response of Baruch (36:18):** And Baruch said unto them, He personally dictated unto me all these words while I wrote in the book with ink. Baruch honestly answered the question of the princes: *Jeremiah clearly and distinctly pronounced*
with his mouth while I was writing them with ink upon the scroll. Thus Baruch takes no credit (or blame as the case might be) for the scroll. He attributes all these words to his master. Baruch had neither added to the prophetic word, nor had he taken anything away from the words of Jeremiah (v 18).

g. They directed writers to hide (36:19): And the princes said unto Baruch, Go and hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and let no man know your whereabouts. The princes recognize that Baruch’s scroll was dangerously provocative. Anticipating the reaction of the king to the scroll, the friendly princes urged Baruch and Jeremiah to immediately hide. They should reveal to no one their whereabouts. The princes could honestly plead ignorant should the king demand to know the whereabouts of the scroll-makers.

C. Word Attacked (36:20-26):
1. Princes reported to king (36:20): Then they went unto the king in the court, having deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe. They reported all the words to the king. After depositing the scroll in the office of Elishama the scribe for safekeeping, the princes hastened immediately to royal court to report the matter to King Jehoiakim. Why did not the princes take the scroll with them into the presence of the king? Perhaps they feared what the king might do to the scroll. They wished to delay as long as possible that violent reaction. Perhaps they reasoned that if the king himself ordered the scroll brought into his presence, they would no longer be responsible for what he did with it. It may be too that they hoped the king would not wish to be bothered by the scroll.

2. King sent for the scroll (36:21): And the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll. He brought it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it in the presence of the king, while all the princes who were standing alongside the king. The king was very interested. He dispatched Jehudi, who is not further identified, to get the scroll. Then Jehoiakim ordered Jehudi to read the scroll in his presence. The princes mentioned in v 12 were also present, along with other princes of the realm.

3. Setting for the reading (36:22): Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, and a brazier was burning before him. Since the temperature was chilly, the king was holding court that day in the winter house. This was the inner portion of the palace that was shielded from the winter winds. In order to keep warm, the king was sitting beside a brazier filled with live coals.

4. King destroyed the scroll (36:23): And it came to pass, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, he ripped it with a scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was upon the brazier, until the whole scroll was consumed by the brazier fire. Jehudi began to read the scroll. But before he could read three or four columns (not leaves as in KJV), Jehoiakim jumped from his throne, tore the book from the hand of the reader, shredded it with his penknife, and threw the fragments into the fire. He had no intention of listening to that scroll.

   The document that Jehoiakim destroyed would not have been very long since it was read three times in one day. No doubt the scroll was made of papyrus; a document of animal skins would have been very difficult to cut with a knife and burn on a small brazier.

   A number of passages in the present Book of Jeremiah come from before the time when the scroll was written. Not all of these passages however, were part of that first edition of Jeremiah (see v 32).

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465 The Hebrew literally says three or four doors. The writing on ancient scrolls was done in the form of columns of prescribed width and height called doors because of their resemblance to small doors.
466 That it was Jehoiakim who actually burned the scroll and not Jehudi is made clear by vv 25, 27, 28, and 32.
Certainly chs 30-31 were not in it, for they form a sepher (book) in themselves. It seems likely that this scroll consisted only of minatory prophecies. It did contain prophecies concerning foreign nations (v 2), but probably not the lengthy oracles that appear toward the end of the present Book of Jeremiah. The scroll doubtlessly included ch 25 that contains threats against numerous neighboring nations. As for the oracles concerning Israel and Judah, it is impossible to identify specifically what chs were part of that early book.

This is the first recorded effort physically to destroy the word of God. Jehoiakim was the first of a long line of emperors and kings who thought that they would banish the word of God from their realm. Jehoiakim has rightly been called the first Higher Critic of the Bible. He did not like what he heard in the word; therefore he sought to destroy it.

An ever-increasing number of scholars within theological circles today have dedicated themselves to undermining the confidence of the people of God in their Scriptures. With the penknife of rationalism, they cut from the Scriptures those passages that describe the mighty acts of God in human history. Without one shred of manuscript evidence—one shred of objective proof—they will label one passage as unauthentic and another as uninspired. They do so without fear, in spite of the repeated warnings concerning those who would add to or take away from the word of God.

4. Reaction of those present (36:24-25):
   a. Some showed no fear (36:24): And they did not tremble nor rend their clothes, neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words. The king and his ministers were so calloused that they manifested neither sorrow nor fear that the word of God was being destroyed before their very eyes.
   b. Some pled for the scroll (36:25): Though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah had entreated the king not to burn the scroll, he did not listen to them. Mustering all their courage, the princes defended the scroll against the outrageous conduct of the king. In spite of the pleas of Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah the king persisted in burning the scroll until not a shred remained.

5. Warrant for the writers (36:26): And the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of the king, Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet, but Yahweh hid them. Having destroyed the written word Jehoiakim gave orders that Baruch and Jeremiah be arrested. The king planned to silence Jeremiah as he earlier had silenced Uriah the prophet (26:20-24). The Lord, however, hid his faithful servants. The counsel of the princes in v 19 was part of Yahweh’s providential involvement if the protection of his messengers. Thus he frustrated the plans of Jehoiakim. Jerahmeel appears to have been the son of King Jehoiakim. A bulla (seal impression) bearing his name has been found.

**Jehoiakim Left Unburied**

36:27-32

Three actions are taken in response to the king’s assault on the scroll.

A. Yahweh’s Directive (36:27-28): And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll and the words that Baruch had written from the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, (28) Get yourself another scroll and write upon it all the former words that were upon the first scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned. Every effort in human history to destroy the word of God was doomed to failure before it began. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God shall stand for ever (Isa 40:8). Kings may burn

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468 This probably does not include the princes who had earlier listened so attentively to the reading of the scroll. They were not of the same mind as the king.

469 If this is the same Elnathan as is mentioned in 26:22, he certainly seems to have had a change of heart regarding the prophet of God.

470 See Holiday, Her 2:261 for references.
Scripture, and they may burn those who read Scripture. Men may die because of the grand old book. But the word of God will stand forever! Destructive critics may undermine the faith of many individual Christians. They may cause those weak souls to return to the dismal swamp of the unregenerate life. But the word of God will stand forever! One can criticize Scripture, and pass judgment upon it. One can ignore it, disregard it, and show disrespect for it. But the books of Holy Scripture will be there in that final day as the standard for judgment (Rev 20:12).

Sometime later in his place of hiding, Jeremiah was commanded to rewrite the scroll that King Jehoiakim had destroyed. God is the scroll-maker; he will continue to make scrolls. The king cannot eliminate what Yahweh wills to be present.

B. Oracle against Jehoiakim (36:29-33): The oracle follows the lawsuit speech pattern of indictment followed by sentence.

1. Indictment (36:29): And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah say, Thus says Yahweh: You have burned this scroll, saying, Why have you written upon it that the king of Babylon will come and destroy this land causing both man and beast to cease from it? The new edition of the book was to contain a specific word concerning the king. Jehoiakim had been enraged about the threats at the hands of the Babylonians and had therefore destroyed the word of God. But the destruction of the scroll had not eliminated the divine threat against the king and his subjects.

2. Sentence (36:30-31): Destruction of the scroll was an attempt to eliminate the sovereign word and will of Yahweh. That affront will be punished appropriately. Four distinct threats against Jehoiakim are contained in the closing vv of ch 36.

a. No descendant (36:30a): Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will not have a descendant to sit upon the throne of David... The very God who stood behind the scroll, now speaks the final judgment upon the king. Jehoiakim will have no descendant to sit upon the throne of David. As a matter of fact Jehoiakim was briefly succeeded by his son Jehoiachin. But the Hebrew word translated sit implies some degree of permanence. Since Jehoiachin reigned but three months during all of which Jerusalem was surrounded by Chaldean troops, it could be said that he did not sit (successfully) on the throne of David.

b. No burial (36:30b): and his body will be cast forth to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. Jeremiah predicted a violent and dishonorable death for Jehoiakim. The last and worst indignity for an individual was to be left unburied.

c. No mercy (36:31a): I will punish him, his seed, and his servants for their iniquity... The family and servants of the king, as well as Jehoiakim himself, will be punished by God.

d. No deliverance (36:31b): and I will bring upon them—the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah—all the calamity that I have spoken against them, but that they refused to hear. The inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem will experience all the calamity that Yahweh’s prophets had been threatening for so many years.

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471Brueggemann, CJ, 353.
472The Hebrew preposition is best rendered concerning rather than to as in KJV. Direct communication between the prophet and the king was cut off by the incident that was just narrated.
473The expression the king of Babylon shall certainly come by no means proves that Nebuchadnezzar had not come already. Nebuchadnezzar visited Jerusalem in 605 BC shortly after the battle of Carchemish and took hostages. That visitation may well already have occurred at the time Jehoiakim destroyed the scroll. Perhaps the threats of destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar angered Jehoiakim all the more because of the recent humiliation that Jerusalem had suffered.
C. Scroll Reproduced (36:32): And Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the scribe, and he wrote upon it from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned; and many other words of a similar nature were added to them. The final v of the ch simply records that Jeremiah faithfully carried out the instructions of the Lord. The scroll was reproduced and there were added besides unto them many like words. The king’s reckless behavior can only result in a larger, more demanding document. God will not leave the king scroll-less even if the king wants no scroll.475 This is the second edition of the Book of Jeremiah. It is impossible to say with any degree of certainty what sermons or episodes were added in this second edition of the book.

SECTION TWO
EVENTS DURING THE
FINAL SIEGE
Jeremiah 37:1-38:28

A period of some eighteen years separates the events of chs 36 and 37. The focus in chs 37-39 is upon the events during the last days of Jerusalem. The total destruction of the city foretold by Jeremiah throughout his ministry was hastening toward fulfillment. During this period of time, Jeremiah suffered many indignities. His life was constantly in danger at the hands of his personal enemies. More than once he nearly died because of the deplorable prison conditions in which he found himself. But the physical agonies suffered by Jeremiah during those last few months before the fall of Jerusalem were as nothing compared to the mental and spiritual anguish of seeing his beloved land going down to destruction.

Introduction
37:1-2

The first two vv of ch 37 relate the background of this section of the book.

A. Change of Rulers (37:1): And Zedekiah son of Josiah whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had made to rule over the land of Judah reigned as king instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim. Zedekiah is introduced as though he had not appeared before. This is somewhat strange since Zedekiah has appeared in several previous passages. Perhaps these vv are a transitional device used by the editor of the book (Baruch) to notify the reader that he is jumping from the reign of Jehoiakim to the reign of Zedekiah.

Zedekiah had been installed as the vassal of king Nebuchadnezzar in March of 597 BC when Jehoiachin (Coniah) his nephew was carried away to Babylon. The fact that he reigned at the pleasure of Babylon must have rankled the ultra-nationalist patriots in the land.

B. No Change of Response (37:2): But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land listened to the words of that he spoke through the instrumentality of Jeremiah the prophet. While Zedekiah was not the ruthless tyrant that his brother Jehoiakim had been, he still did not submit to the word of God as spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.

Zedekiah was a weak-kneed monarch who was under pressure from two directions. On the one hand, he experienced the pressure of a troubled conscience. On the other hand, his authority was more symbolic than real.

475Brueggemann, CJ, 353.
In the view of Jeremiah, the security of the nation depended upon Zedekiah’s faithfulness to his vassal oath (27:11-15). Probably Zedekiah really would like to have followed the advice of Jeremiah. But tremendous political pressure was brought to bear against the king. He was not his own man.

The central problem in this section is that no one listened when Jeremiah spoke the word of Yahweh. The king did not listen, nor did his servants (government officials), nor did the city or its citizens. The failure to listen (i.e., obey) the divine word has sealed the doom of the nation.

The materials in Section Two revolve around consultations with King Zedekiah interspersed with episodes of varying degrees of incarceration for Jeremiah.

a. Jeremiah approaches Zedekiah (37:3-10)
   b. Jeremiah thrown in a dungeon (37:11-16)
a. Jeremiah consulted by Zedekiah (37:17-20)
   b. Jeremiah in court of the guard (37:21)
a. Jeremiah’s case brought to Zedekiah (38:1-5)
   b. Jeremiah thrown into a cistern (38:6)
a. Rescued by Zedekiah’s order (38:7-13a)
   b. Jeremiah in court of the guard (38:13b)
a. Zedekiah meets Jeremiah secretly (38:14-27)
   b. Jeremiah in court of the guard (38:28)

Jeremiah Approaches Zedekiah
37:3-10

In 588 BC Zedekiah foolishly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem had to pay the inevitable consequences. In Dec 588 BC the armies of Babylon besieged the city (32:1-2). Things looked very bleak for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. As for Jeremiah, he had been arrested and confined during that first part of the siege (32:1-5).

In the summer of 587 BC things took a turn for the better. Pharaoh Hophra came north with a relief expedition. The Chaldeans were forced temporarily to suspend siege operations to deal with this new development. This withdrawal of Chaldean troops afforded Jerusalem a breathing spell of a few weeks.

A. Zedekiah’s Request (37:3-5):
   1. A request for prayer (37:3):
      a. Delegation (37:3a): And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to Jeremiah the prophet… King Zedekiah sent a delegation to Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord. The two-man delegation consisted of Zephaniah the deputy high priest\(^ {476} \) and a prince by the name of Jehucal (or Jucal). The latter would shortly join other princes in demanding the death penalty for Jeremiah (38:4). But at the moment no animosity is apparent.

      Though the princes were violently resentful of the threats and warnings that Jeremiah had been uttering, yet the prophet was a powerful figure. They coveted his support for the national leadership. Let bygones be bygones. After all, the Chaldeans had withdrawn from the city. Surely Jeremiah would jump on the bandwagon with all the nationalistic prophets now that circumstances had proven his earlier predictions to be inaccurate.

\(^ {476} \)See 21:1; 29:25; 52:24, 26, 27; 2 Kgs 25:18, 20, 21.
b. Request (37:3b): saying, Pray please on our behalf unto Yahweh our God. As Hezekiah many years earlier had sent an embassy to Isaiah requesting prayer for besieged Jerusalem (Isa 37:6), so now they come and ask Jeremiah to pray for the city. The verb appeared earlier in 7:16. In the panic of the moment the king who will not listen to the prophetic word requested intercession by the prophet. Unfortunately, he wanted only divine deliverance, but not divine directives. Zedekiah hoped that God would miraculously intervene and overthrow the invading Chaldeans even as he had done many years earlier in the time of the invasion of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:35).

Jeremiah did not even acknowledge the request for prayer. It was too late. Yahweh will not listen to the prayers of those who do not listen to him.

2. Circumstances (37:4-5):
   a. Jeremiah still free (37:4): Now Jeremiah came and went among the people for they had not yet put him in prison. V 4 is a somewhat parenthetical note indicating the personal circumstances of Jeremiah at the time the deputation from Zedekiah arrived. The prophet was still free, i.e., he had not suffered arrest. This v is not to be interpreted in the absolute sense that Jeremiah had never yet been arrested. Most certainly he had been (see ch 26). Nor should this v be pressed to mean that Jeremiah had not yet been arrested during the reign of Zedekiah.

   On the basis of this v, most commentators place the episode in ch 32 after the events of ch 37. While this is not an impossible arrangement, it certainly is unnecessary. Jeremiah might have been in custody during the initial phase of the Chaldean siege, and then have been released once the attacking armies withdrew. In this case the present v would mean only that Jeremiah had not yet experienced the final arrest that was to keep him in custody until after the fall of the city. This arrest is recorded in 37:11ff.

   b. Aid coming (37:5a): Meanwhile the army of Pharaoh had gone out from Egypt. The Pharaoh was Hophra or Apries (cf. 44:30). It was the beginning of his reign. The Egyptians set out with the intention of forcing the Babylonians to end the siege of Jerusalem.

   c. Siege lifted (37:5b): When the Chaldeans who were besieging the city heard this report they lifted the siege of the city. When the Chaldeans shifted their forces to counter the invasion of Pharaoh Hophra, new hope was kindled in the hearts of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. For nine months they had been shut up in the city watching the stranglehold slowly doing its deadly work. But now the enemy was gone! Perhaps the Egyptian allies would be able to defeat the accursed Chaldeans! Seeking prophetic confirmation of the prevailing optimism, the king dispatched his messengers to the home of the prophet.

B. Jeremiah’s Response (37:6-10):
   1. Pharaoh’s help will fail (37:6-7):
      a. Directive to Jeremiah (37:6-7a): Then the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah the prophet, saying, (7) Thus says Yahweh God of Israel: Thus shall you say unto the king of Judah who sent you unto me to inquire of me… Instead of addressing a word to Yahweh on behalf of the king, Jeremiah addresses a word from Yahweh to the king. Jeremiah rightly sensed that the king’s request for prayer was in reality an inquiry as to the future course of events now that the Chaldeans had withdrawn. Jeremiah did not have to rely on guesswork, or political calculation. Yahweh gave him the word to pass on to the royal delegation. The king wanted assurance of divine help; he received instead unwelcome information.
b. Prediction for Zedekiah (37:7b): Behold, the army of Pharaoh that has come out to help you will return to its own land, to Egypt. Jeremiah’s response must have startled as well as angered the dignitaries who had approached him. When Zedekiah withheld his tribute from Babylon the royal administration was gambling on aid from Egypt. The prophet shattered all hope by emphasizing the failure of Egyptian aid. The Egyptians will be defeated and return to their land.

2. Chaldeans will return (37:8): The Chaldeans will return, fight against this city, capture and burn it. The Chaldean withdrawal was but a temporary lull in a siege that will lead to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Chaldeans will shortly return, fight against Jerusalem, capture it, and burn it. Jeremiah offers not even a sliver of hope for a more positive outcome.

3. Warning against deception (37:9): Thus says Yahweh: Do not deceive yourselves by thinking that the Chaldeans are permanently withdrawing, for they are not leaving. Jeremiah emphasized the futility of optimism. There was absolutely no ground whatsoever for hope that the enemy would abandon the siege of Jerusalem.

4. Chaldeans impossible to defeat (37:10): For if you smite the entire army of the Chaldeans who are fighting against you and there remained among them only wounded men, each of them lying in his tent, they would arise and burn this city. Even if the Jews could in some miraculous manner defeat the Chaldeans to the point that only a few, and those severely wounded (lit., pierced through) remained, yet they would overwhelm Jerusalem. So certain was God’s purpose that Jerusalem be destroyed that no amount of wishful thinking or active resistance could reverse it. The message of Jeremiah was unambiguous. Babylon will prevail. No verbal response to this oracle is recorded.

Thrown into a Dungeon

37:11-16

Jeremiah experienced a great deal of suffering at the hands of the national leaders during those last dark days before the fall of Jerusalem. He was arrested about the middle of the Chaldean siege. He spent the last nine months or so before the fall of the city being bounced around from one detention area to another as the king and his advisers tried to determine what to do with this troublesome prophet.

On more than one occasion, the prophet was given opportunity to change his message and thereby improve his miserable lot. If ever a man had reason to compromise his message, Jeremiah had it. The fact that through all his personal suffering he refused to alter his basic message authenticated him as a genuine prophet of God.

A. Circumstances (37:11-12):

1. Siege lifted (37:11): And it came to pass when the army of the Chaldeans had lifted the siege of Jerusalem because of the army of Pharaoh… The Chaldeans lifted the siege of Jerusalem in order to deal with the Egyptian threat to their flank.

2. Jeremiah leaving (37:12):

\[\text{Footnote:} \quad ^{477}\text{Five phases of Jeremiah’s prison experiences are recorded: (1) he was arrested in the gate and committed to a dungeon on the false charge of treason (37:11-15); (2) he was released from the dungeon, but restrained in the court of the prison; (3) he was imprisoned in the miry dungeon of Malchiah (38:1-6); (4) he was again released from the dungeon and kept in the prison court (38:13-28) until the capture of the city; (5) he was carried in chains from the city by Nebuzaradan, an officer of the Chaldean army, and was finally released at Ramah (40:1-4).\]
a. **Destination (37:12a):** *that Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem in the midst of the people...* Taking advantage of the departure of the Babylonians, Jeremiah decided to visit his home in Anathoth a few miles north of Jerusalem.

*In the midst of the people* that Jeremiah did not leave the city secretly, but publicly in company with many others. Among those leaving may have been the people who believed in Jeremiah's prophetic utterances.

Why was Jeremiah leaving the city? The question is not easy to answer. The Hebrew verb used to describe his action can be interpreted in more than one way. According to one view, Jeremiah was about to change his residence back to his hometown at Anathoth. This seems to have been the view of the KJV translators who render the verb *to separate himself thence in the midst of the people.* But why would Jeremiah want to move his residence to Anathoth? Was it that he was attempting to leave the doomed city for the sake of his personal safety? Such motivation would be incongruous with the circumstances and the character of Jeremiah. Less objectionable would be the view that Jeremiah now regarded his ministry in Jerusalem as completed.

b. **Motivation (37:12b):** *on his way to the land of Benjamin to divide a portion from that place.* Jeremiah had some personal business to take care of in Anathoth. A reasonable conjecture is that his business had to do with the purchase of the field mentioned in 32:6-12.

Two objectives have been raised against this interpretation: (1) the field in ch 32 was not to be apportioned or divided as this verb implies, but merely purchased; and (2) that purchase had not yet taken place. The former argument is not particularly weighty, and the latter argument is completely negated if in fact ch 32 chronologically precedes ch 37 as previously has been argued.

B. **Charges (37:13-14):**

1. **Place of arrest (37:13a):** *And when he was in the Benjamin Gate...* Jeremiah never reached his destination; he was arrested at the Benjamin Gate (north gate).

2. **Arresting officer (37:13b):** *the officer of the guard there whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah the son of Hananiah, seized Jeremiah the prophet...* The arresting officer must have been something more than a mere sentry. The listing of father and grandfather suggests that Irijah was a prominent officer. It is possible that Irijah was the grandson of the prophet Hananiah who confronted Jeremiah in ch 28. *Seized* has the connotation of *arrested or detained.*

3. **Reason for the arrest (37:13c):** *saying, You are deserting to the Chaldeans.* Jeremiah was charged with deserting to the Chaldeans. The language of the accusation, *you are falling away,* is perhaps an allusion to Jeremiah’s declaration (21:9) that *he that falls away to the Chaldeans... shall live.*

On the surface the accusation had some degree of plausibility. Jeremiah had openly preached since the beginning of the siege that desertion was the only road to self-preservation (21:9-10). On the other hand, if Jeremiah now was intending to desert to the Chaldeans, he could not have chosen a more inopportune time. The Chaldeans were gone! They were headed south; Jeremiah was headed north. Thus the charge against the prophet was not only false, it was somewhat foolish.

4. **Protest of the arrest (37:14):**

   a. **Forceful denial of the charge (37:14a):** *And Jeremiah replied, Not true! I am not deserting to the Chaldeans.* Jeremiah protested his arrest. He denied the accusation that he was deserting to the Chaldeans.

   b. **Forceful rejection of the denial (37:14b):** *But he would not listen to him. So Irijah seized Jeremiah and brought him unto the princes.* Since no one else in Jerusalem was listening to Jeremiah, it is not surprising that the chief officer of the guard likewise refused to listen. Irijah brought Jeremiah before the princes of the land for further action. These were not the same princes who had evidenced their respect for

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478 Streane, CB, 248.
Jeremiah on former occasions. Those princes had been hauled off to Babylon in the deportation of 597 BC along with King Jehoiachin. Zedekiah’s princes were of a lower origin and type. They were anxious to accept any charge against an unpopular person without proper examination. They remembered the blistering sermons Jeremiah had preached. They recalled how he had compared them to a basket of rotten figs (ch 24), how he had openly advocated surrender to the enemy. Now was their chance to rid themselves of this annoying pest.

C. Punishment (37:15-16):

1. Corporeal punishment (37:15a): And the princes were enraged at Jeremiah and smote him… It is impossible to tell from the Hebrew verb whether the princes had Jeremiah flogged or struck with the hand in the face. It is not even clear whether the princes caused others to smite Jeremiah or whether they administered the blows themselves. Most likely the princes ordered the prophet to be flogged, perhaps hoping to extract from him an admission of treason.

2. Imprisonment (37:15b-16):
   a. Place (37:15b): and put him in the prison house, the house of Jonathan the scribe that they had converted into a prison. Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon in the house of Jonathan, a royal secretary. Just why Jonathan's house was used as a prison is not revealed. Perhaps other places of detention were full; or perhaps the secretary’s house was a maximum security prison for those considered dangerous political offenders. In any case, there were parts of this house that were more than adequate for the purposes of detention.
   b. Description (37:16a): When Jeremiah had come into the dungeon and unto the cells… Dungeon (bor) suggests a subterranean cavity. The soft limestone beneath Jerusalem is honeycombed with vaults, caverns, cisterns, tunnels and the like. The word translated cells (chanuyot) is a word that occurs only here. Its meaning is uncertain.
   c. Duration (37:16b): and had remained there several days… For an unspecified number of days Jeremiah the prophet of God was confined in the dark, damp, unventilated cell beneath the house of Jonathan the scribe.

Jeremiah Consulted by Zedekiah
37:17-20

During the many days Jeremiah was in the dungeon the Babylonian troops returned to besiege Jerusalem anew. Zedekiah, hoping that there might be some positive word from the Lord, sent secretly for Jeremiah and had him brought to the royal palace. This is the fourth recorded interview between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah as the following chart indicates.

A. Interrogation (37:17):

1. Zedekiah’s question (37:17a): Zedekiah the king sent and had him brought. The king questioned him secretly in his house and said, Is there a word from Yahweh? Zedekiah hoped that God had changed his mind about the fate of Jerusalem. Maybe now that Jerusalem was so close to destruction, God would intervene as he had done on other occasions. Zedekiah had been reared in a godly home. Though he had strayed away from

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479 E.g., 26:16; 36:19.
480 Jer 24:1; 28:3; 29:2.
481 Laetsch, BCJ, 292.
the teachings of his father Josiah, yet now in this hour of desperation he fell back upon
the religion of his youth. Zedekiah consulted Jeremiah secretly out of fear for his
courtiers who seem to have manipulated the king like a puppet.

2. Jeremiah’s answer (37:17b): And Jeremiah responded: There is! Then he said further,
you have been given into the hands of the king of Babylon! Indeed there was a word
from the Lord. But it was a message of doom, not deliverance, as far as Zedekiah was
concerned. Many days in a dark dungeon had not softened the message of the prophet.
He was still standing as straight as an iron pillar.

B. Defense (37:18-19): Jeremiah’s defense to the king was cast in the form of two questions
both of which argue for his innocence of wrongdoing.

1. A personal question (37:18): Jeremiah also said unto the King Zedekiah, what sin
have I committed against you, your servants, or this people, that you have put me in
prison? Jeremiah took the opportunity while standing before the king to plead his own
case. Jeremiah’s first line of defense is that he was innocent of the charge of
undermining the war effort. Zedekiah was as guilty as the wicked princes who had cast
Jeremiah into the dungeon because he had failed to exercise his power to prevent this
injustice. Jeremiah was appealing to the king’s sense of justice.

2. A probing question (37:19): Where are your prophets who prophesied to you that the
king of Babylon would not come against you or this land? In his second line of defense
the prophet argues that events have proved his earlier predictions accurate. Jeremiah
faithfully had carried out his mission as a prophet of God. Had he not been vindicated by
the events of the past months? Where were the prophets who had so confidently asserted
that Nebuchadnezzar would never come against Jerusalem? Those prophets were the
ones who ought to be in jail for so completely deceiving the nation. No man should be
put in prison for telling the truth! Zedekiah made no verbal response to the new oracle,
any more than he responded after vv 7-10.

C. Petition (37:20):

1. It was respectful (37:20a): And now hear, O my lord the king; let my supplication be
presented before you. This prophet was no self-appointed martyr. Jeremiah raised the
subject of his personal well-being humbly and with proper respect for the man who
currently occupied David’s throne.

2. It was urgent (37:20b): Do not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe
lest I die there. Humbly Jeremiah pleaded with the king not to allow him to return to the
prison at the house of Jonathan. Evidently Jeremiah was near death at the time of the
interview. He knew that if he spent many more days in that wretched and foul hole he
would surely die. Jeremiah does not ask to be released from prison; he asks only for
humane treatment.

Jeremiah in Court of the Guard

37:21

A. Zedekiah’s Order (37:21a): And Zedekiah the king commanded that they commit
Jeremiah to the court of the guard. Zedekiah did not set Jeremiah free; but he sis
arrange for a more humane confinement. He had Jeremiah removed from the wretched
conditions of the dungeon. He ordered that Jeremiah be transferred to the court of the
guard. Perhaps Zedekiah was actually keeping Jeremiah in protective custody. Knowing
the hatred of the
princes for this man of God, he chose to keep him where the palace guard could watch out for his safety.

**B. Zedekiah’s Provision (37:21b):** *And he gave him a loaf of bread each day from the street of the bakers until all the bread of the city was gone.* As long as bread was to be found in the city, Jeremiah was to receive his daily ration. The *loaf* (lit. *disk*) was actually about the size of a pancake. It was similar to modern Near Eastern “pita” bread.

**C. Jeremiah’s Status (37:21c):** *And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.* Probably Jeremiah remained in this detention area until the city fell to the Babylonians.

| INTERVIEWS BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND KING ZEDEKIAH |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Passage | Date | Situation |
| 21:1-10 | Summer of 588 | Nebuchadnezzar advancing against Judah |
| 34:2-7 | Early in 587 | Most of the military outposts of Judah have been captured. |
| 37:3-10 | Early summer 587 | Siege of Jerusalem temporarily lifted |
| 37:16-21 | Fall of 587 | After Jeremiah's arrest |
| 38:14-28 | Early 586 | After Jeremiah's release from the dungeon. |

**Jeremiah’s Case Brought to Zedekiah**

38:1-5

The final stage of the siege of Jerusalem had come. It was only a matter of days until the city would fall to the Chaldeans. Still the enemies of Jeremiah were determined to silence his preaching. Ch 38 traces a three way struggle for power between the king, the prophet and the princes.

**A. Jeremiah’s Preaching (38:1-4):** Imprisonment in the court of the guard afforded Jeremiah the opportunity to communicate the message of God once again. He seems to have been able to converse with the soldiers who defended the city as well as with the general populace (cf. 32:9, 12).

1. *Names of enemies (38:1a):* Four pro-Egypt princes in particular seem to have been particularly bitter enemies of the prophets.
   a. *Shephatiah ben Mattan…* The first prince mentioned only here.
   b. *Gedaliah ben Pashur…* Gedaliah’s father *Pashur* is probably the one who had put Jeremiah in the stocks earlier in his ministry (20:1-2).
   c. *Jucal ben Shelemiah…* Jucal (or JehucaI) was one of the princes sent by the king only a few weeks before to request Jeremiah to pray for the city.

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482 Various tradesmen seem to have had special streets either chosen by them or assigned to them. See 1 Kgs 20:34. Hence the reference here to the *street of the baker.*
d. Pashur ben Malchiah... Pashur was one of the messengers of the king who had visited Jeremiah in an earlier interview (21:1).

2. Vigilance of enemies (38:1b): heard the words that Jeremiah was speaking unto all the people, saying... The princes, highly displeased with the leniency being shown the prophet, watched his every move. Jeremiah took every opportunity to influence the soldiers who were defending the walls of the city.

3. Objections of the enemies (38:2-3):
   a. He discouraged defenders (38:2a): Thus says Yahweh: The one who dwells in this city shall die by the sword, famine, or pestilence. In the court of the guard, Jeremiah openly proclaimed the message he had been preaching ever since the Chaldean armies first had appeared in the land. It was suicide to continuing defending Jerusalem against the Babylonians. The triad sword, famine, pestilence is used throughout the book to describe the horrors of siege.
   b. He encouraged surrender (38:2b): But the one who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live; his life will be his spoil and he will live. Those who defected to the Chaldeans would escape with their lives. Resistance to Babylon was poor politics; it was also disobedience to the word of Yahweh.
   c. He predicted Jerusalem’s capture (38:3): Thus says Yahweh: This city shall certainly be given into the hand of the king of Babylon and he will capture it. Surrender was the only alternative in view of the fact that Jerusalem was about to be handed over to the king of Babylon.

4. Request by the enemies (38:4a): Consequently the princes said to the king, it is our request that this man be put to death... The princes were both alarmed and angered by such public proclamation. They rushed to Zedekiah and demanded that Jeremiah be put to death for high treason. For what they regarded as treason, the princes demanded that Jeremiah be put to death. The struggle against the Chaldeans was literally a matter of life and death. In the view of these princes, Jeremiah's preaching was playing into the hand of the enemy. These princes would let the people perish rather than surrender! Now they were attempting to silence the only voice of reason and revelation in the entire city.

5. Argument of the enemies (38:4b):
   a. Morale of troops (38:4b): for in this manner he is weakening the hands of the fighting men that remain in this city and all the people as well, by speaking these words. The charge against Jeremiah was that he was weakening the hands of the men of war. The phrase refers to demoralizing the troops. No doubt this is an accurate assessment of the impact of the preaching of Jeremiah. The phrase fighting men that remain suggests that many had gone over to the Chaldeans (see also v 19).
   b. Intention of Jeremiah (38:4c): This man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm. The public statements of the prophet could well be classified as treason were it not for one fact. The words that Jeremiah spoke were not his own, but the divine message. The true sovereign of Israel was commanding his subjects to capitulate to the Chaldeans. The predictions of Jeremiah thus far had been shown to be accurate. Events had accredited him as a true spokesman of God. Only those who were spiritually blind failed to see that Jeremiah was truly speaking the word of God.

   How wrong the princes were when they declared that Jeremiah did not have the best interests of the people at heart. Jeremiah was the only true friend that the people had left.

483 The expression is found in the military correspondence from Lachish that was contemporary with Jeremiah.
B. Zedekiah’s Ruling (38:5):
1. Acquiescence (38:5a): And King Zedekiah said, Behold, he is in your hand… Weak-kneed Zedekiah capitulated to the demands of his princes. He does not even attempt to argue the point with them. What a shameful betrayal of duty!
2. Explanation (38:5b): for the king cannot oppose you in any way. What little influence Zedekiah might previously have had over his princes had eroded.

Jeremiah Thrown into a Cistern
38:6

Having gone through the formality of gaining the consent of the king, the murderers hurried Jeremiah off to his doom. They did not want his blood on their hands! Their plan was much crueler.

A. Location (38:6a): And they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king’s son, that was in the court of the guard… The princes cast Jeremiah into a cistern that served as a dungeon. The verb suggests violent action. Most domestic cisterns were shaped like a bottle, with a small opening in the top, usually covered with a stone.484 The cistern was located in the court of the guard. It was under the charge of Malchiah the king’s son. King’s son may refer to a particular office, or simply to a member of the royal family. If Malchiah was the son of Zedekiah, he could hard have been much older than fifteen.485

B. Condition (38:6b, c):
1. Lowering (38:6b): and they let Jeremiah down by ropes. So deep was the cistern that they had to let Jeremiah down into it with ropes.
2. Plight (38:6c): In the dungeon there was no water but mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud. Though there was no water in the cistern, the bottom of it was covered by a thick layer of mud. Slowly the prophet sunk into the mire. The pitiless princes wished this spokesman for God to die a slow, torturous, and frightful death. Unbelief makes men intolerant of God’s spokesmen; intolerance makes men cruel. There they left him. They were rid of him. They had effectively silenced God’s messenger.

The dungeon experience is without question the lowest point in the life of Jeremiah. He was now aged, and perhaps infirm. The siege and famine in Jerusalem had doubtlessly taken its toll. Yet it should be noted that no word of protest was lodged, no cry of revenge, or prayer of imprecation. Through the long bitter years of his ministry Jeremiah had learned the way of patient endurance. He had learned to cast himself upon the Lord and trust him for deliverance.

Rescued by Zedekiah’s Order
38:7-13

A. Appeal to the King (38:7-9):
1. Source of the appeal (38:7): And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs attached to the household of the king, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon. God had not forgotten his faithful prophet. Jeremiah still had a service to render to his King. That dungeon would not become a death chamber for him. God

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484 Holiday, Her 2:289.
485 Zedekiah was twenty-one when he became king (2 Kgs 24:18), and this present episode transpired in his eleventh year of reign.
stirred up the heart of a Negro eunuch who was attached to the court of Zedekiah to intercede on Jeremiah's behalf.

When Ebed-melech heard of the imprisonment of Jeremiah, he was filled with righteous indignation against the princes, and courageous compassion regarding the prophet. Ebed-melech, whose name means servant of the king, must have been a friend and follower of Jeremiah. Probably this Ethiopian eunuch was in charge of Zedekiah’s harem. Ebed-melech is crucial in this narrative because he alone stood between Jeremiah and death.

2. Place of the appeal (38:7b-8): Now the king was sitting in the Benjamin gate; (8) and Ebed-melech went out from the house of the king and spoke unto the king, saying… Ebed-melech was putting his position, if not his life, on the line when he rushed to the gate of Benjamin to plead for the life of Jeremiah. What amazing courage this humble man was able to muster in the face of a gross injustice to a friend.

3. Substance of the appeal (38:9):
   a. He reported what the princes had done (38:9a): O my lord the king, these men have done evil in regard to all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet in that they have cast him into the dungeon. As he stood before the judgment seat of the king, the Ethiopian slave humbly (my lord, the king), and yet forcefully, made his case. He accused the princes of absolute wickedness in their plot against the man of God. He pleaded that he might be permitted to rescue Jeremiah before he died of hunger and exposure.
   b. He underscored the jeopardy of Jeremiah (38:9b): He is as good as dead because there is no more bread any longer in the city. Knowing the age and infirmity of the prophet, Ebed-melech was confident that Jeremiah was already at death’s door in that dismal dungeon. There must have been a note of urgency in the appeal of this noble servant as he pleaded for the life of his friend.

Ebed-melech has been charged with exaggeration when he said there is no more bread in the city. He probably meant no more than that the public stores of grain were exhausted. As a royal servant he probably would have some knowledge of this. His point is that Jeremiah should be released. There would be small chance that any of the scanty provisions left in the city would reach Jeremiah in the place where he was confined.

B. Authorization by the King (38:10):
   1. Zedekiah’s action (38:10a): And the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian… Zedekiah may have been shocked to learn what the ruthless princes had done with Jeremiah. While he had turned the man of God over to his adversaries, the king had probably assumed that the princes would at least be humane in their treatment of Jeremiah. No doubt his own guilty conscience had been bothering him ever since he had told those princes Behold he is in your hand.
   2. Zedekiah’s precaution (38:10b): saying, Take with you from here thirty men… Lest the princes try forcibly to prevent the rescue operation, Ebed-melech is instructed to take thirty men to assist him. Zedekiah knew enough of his princes to realize that a show of force would be necessary under the circumstances.
   3. Zedekiah’s concern (38:10c): and bring up Jeremiah from the dungeon before he dies. Zedekiah attempted to right the wrong that he had committed against Jeremiah. He granted permission for Ebed-melech to rescue Jeremiah from his place of imprisonment. Perhaps Zedekiah felt that if the old prophet died in that pit, Jeremiah’s blood would be on him.
C. Action of the Servant (38:11-13):

1. His thoughtfulness (38:11-12): And Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, the part under the storeroom, and took from there some worn-out and tattered garments. He let them down to Jeremiah in the dungeon by ropes. (12) And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put please these worn-out and tattered garments beneath your armpits beneath the ropes. And Jeremiah did so. Armed with royal permission to rescue the prophet, Ebed-melech hastened to the task. On his way to the court of the guard, he stopped at the royal house (not necessarily the king’s residence) that was under the national treasure house. There he gathered some old rags. He then hastened on to the cistern where Jeremiah was confined.

2. His success (38:13): Then they pulled Jeremiah up by the ropes, and got him out of the dungeon. Thereafter, Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard. At the mouth of the cistern, Ebed-melech let these rags down to Jeremiah by ropes. He told the prophet to pad his armpits with the rags before securing the ropes around his chest. How thoughtful and gentle was this deliverer! The suction of the mud and the weight of Jeremiah’s body would serve to put tremendous strain under the arms. The rough ropes would have cut deeply into the flesh of the old man. But Ebed-melech had taken all this into consideration.

Slowly, ever so gently, Ebed-melech and his men hoisted the helpless prophet to light, fresh air, solid earth and a measure of freedom. Jeremiah remained a prisoner in the court of the guard until Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans (38:28).

Jeremiah Consulted by Zedekiah

38:14-26

This unit consists mostly of an extended dialogue between the king and the prophet. Zedekiah at this point is desperate. His advisors have misled him. Only the prophet can provide what the king needs at this point.

A. Zedekiah’s Summons (38:14):

1. The king’s instructions (38:14a): Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought unto him at the third entrance of the house of Yahweh. Shortly after Jeremiah’s rescue from the cistern, King Zedekiah summoned him for another interview.

The prophet was taken to the third entrance of the temple. Streane suggests that this was a chamber connected with a passage leading from the palace to the temple. It may be identical with what is elsewhere called the king’s entry (2 Kgs 16:18). It must have been a somewhat secluded spot.

2. The king’s inquiry (38:14b): And the king said unto Jeremiah, I am about to inquire about a matter... Since the two men had seen each other, the situation in Jerusalem had further deteriorated. Provisions in the city were exhausted. Chaldean battering rams continued relentlessly to pound the walls of Jerusalem in spite of all the defenders did to drive them off. It would only be a matter of weeks before a breach would be made in the walls. Then the enemy would come pouring through completely to overwhelm the sickly inhabitants. Surely now in this desperation there would be help from the Lord. Surely now that Zedekiah had permitted Jeremiah to be rescued from sure death, the prophet would have some kind word.

3. The king’s exhortation (38:14c): do not hide anything from me. In the seclusion of the third temple entrance — probably in the darkness of night — Zedekiah urged Jeremiah
to honestly answer his petition. The king was frantic; desperation was in his voice. He wanted to know the final issue of the siege.

How completely the king misunderstood this messenger from God. Those who unflinchingly preach the word of God will always be a source of perplexity to those who live by the rule of compromise and accommodation.

B. Jeremiah’s Skepticism (38:15): And Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen unto me! Jeremiah knew the king really did not want to hear what he had to say. Jeremiah must have been speaking sarcastically when he spoke the words of this v.

C. Zedekiah’s Oath (38:16): And King Zedekiah swore unto Jeremiah in secret, saying, As Yahweh lives who has made for us this soul, I will not put you to death, or give you into the hands of the men who are seeking your life. The desperate king then swore that he would not harm Jeremiah nor permit the princes to do so. The form of the oath is somewhat unique. As the Lord lives who made this soul. The Hebrew nephesh as usual in the OT means life. Since God was the creator of life, it was within his power to take it away, if the speaker should prove untrue to his word.

D. Jeremiah’s Word (38:17-18): These vv offer a double “if-then” construction that sets forth positive and negative possibilities to the Jerusalem leadership.

1. Surrender and live (38:17): And Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, Thus says Yahweh the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will only go forth unto the princes of the king of Babylon, then you will live, and this city will not be burned. You and your house will live. Convinced that Zedekiah was sincere in his oath, Jeremiah delivered the word of Yahweh to him. It is the same message that Jeremiah had presented to king and people on numerous occasions: liberty and life are yours if you surrender to the Chaldeans. There is no wiggle room in Judah’s position. If Judah did not surrender, the nation faced destruction.

2. Fight and die (38:18):
   a. Chaldeans will capture the city (38:18a): But if you do not go out unto the princes of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given into the hands of the Chaldeans… All wishful thinking and false theology to the contrary, Jerusalem was not exempt from enemy capture. The rescue in 701 BC from the Assyrians should not be used as a basis of false hope.
   b. Chaldeans will destroy the city (38:18b): and they will burn it… Once the Chaldeans battered through the walls they would not spare the city and merely replace the current royal administration. The city would be totally destroyed. Therefore, more was at stake than the king’s personal well-being.
   c. Zedekiah will not escape (38:18c): and you will not be able to escape out of their hand. If he thought that by resisting the siege he would avoid becoming a prison of war, Zedekiah was dead wrong. Perhaps it was on the basis of this prediction that Zedekiah began to formula plans to flee the city and make a break for lands beyond the Jordan.

E. Zedekiah’s Fear (38:19-20):

1. Zedekiah’s fear verbalized (38:19): And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews who have deserted unto the Chaldeans, lest they give me into their hand and they abuse me. Zedekiah had certainly pondered the alternative of surrender.
This tortured little weakling now confided in Jeremiah the reason why he had elected to hold out in Jerusalem until the bitter end. Zedekiah feared that those Jews who earlier had deserted to the enemy would be especially severe with him because he had caused the city to endure the miseries of a siege.

How contemptible! This is a man who feared the Jews in the camp of the enemy more than the God who time and again had demanded his allegiance. Zedekiah was a man who put personal welfare about the welfare of his people.

2. Zedekiah’s fear assuaged (38:20a): Jeremiah replied, They will not give you into their hand. Jeremiah immediately assured the king that his fears regarding the Jews on the outside would not be realized if he would but surrender.

3. Another appeal (38:20b): Obey, I beg you, the voice of Yahweh in what I am speaking unto you, that it may be well with you and you may live. To obey God’s voice in this instance meant to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar as his nephew had done in 597 BC. That was the only hope that things might go well for Zedekiah. But Jeremiah does not offer any guarantees.

F. Jeremiah’s Warning (38:21-23):

1. Capture of palace women (38:21-22a): But if you refuse to go out, this is the word that Yahweh has shown me: (22) Then behold, all the women who remain in the house of the king of Judah will be led forth unto the princes of the king of Babylon… Refusal of the king to surrender would lead to the captivity of all the palace women as well as the captivity of the king. "Led forth" depicts a line of captives, perhaps bound together, being taken under armed escort to the princes of commanders of Nebuchadnezzar’s troops. The language hints at abuse of those women by the Babylonians officers, abuse that was typically meted out to female prisoners of war.

2. Taunt of palace women (38:22b): and they will say, Your good friends have deceived you and prevailed over you; while your feet have sunk into the mud, they have turned back from you. If Zedekiah held out to the bitter end, the very members of his own household would turn upon him in unsympathetic mockery. Jeremiah pictures the women of the harem—the wives and concubines and their attendants—marching out of the city as captives of the Chaldeans chanting a proverbial taunt-song aimed at Zedekiah.

The taunt-song pictures one naively being led out into a swampy bog by those he trusted. When he has become mired in the muck, they have gone back instead of helping him. The "friends" are Zedekiah’s counselors who had urged him on in the hopeless struggle. Now they are unable to suggest any course of action that would extricate the king from his difficulties (v 22). Your good friends is lit., men of your peace.

3. Royal family led captive (38:22a): And all of your wives and your children they will lead out unto the Chaldeans… If Zedekiah continued to resist the Chaldeans he would shortly see those he held most dear—his wives and children—being led out as spoils of war to the enemy soldiers. The implication is that if the king surrendered he might be able to negotiate a better fate for his family.

4. Zedekiah captured (38:22b): and you yourself will not escape from their hand; but by the hand of the king of Babylon you will be seized… The general threat of v 18 is reiterated. But it is made more dreadful by the mention of the "hand of the king of Babylon". This is the first mention of the king of Babylon in this conversation.

486Essentially the same proverb appears in Obad 7.
Nebuchadnezzar’s harsh treatment for vassal kings who had reneged on treaties with him was well known.

5. *Jerusalem burned* (38:23b): *and this city you will burn.* The king through his obstinacy would have to bear the ultimate responsibility for the destruction of Jerusalem as though he himself had set the torch to the beloved city.

These are strong and daring words that Jeremiah spoke. He knew it was his last chance. Perhaps for the sake of his wives and children, for the sake of his own life, for the sake of the holy city and its thousands of inhabitants, Zedekiah would heed at last the word of the Lord.

G. Zedekiah’s Instructions (38:24-26):
1. *Keep the conversation secret* (38:24): *And Zedekiah said unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of this conversation in order that you might not die.* Zedekiah does not argue with Jeremiah or resist his analysis in any way. The interview closed, not with the king accepting the word of the prophet, but with a request that the princes not be told of the conversation.

2. *Withhold the whole truth* (38:25-26):
   a. *Anticipation of the princes’ actions* (38:25): *And if the princes hear that I have spoken with you, and they come unto you and say, Declare now to us what you spoke unto the king and the king spoke to you; do not hide anything from us, and we will not put you to death…* The king knew that the powerful princes had spies watching his every move. Thought his meeting with Jeremiah had been secret, he knew that there was a good chance that the princes would hear about it from some informant. He knew that these princes would demand to know the content of the conversation and that they would use death threats to extract the desired information.
   b. *Answer for the princes* (38:26): *then say unto them: I presented my petition before the king that he not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan to die there.* The king designed a cover story for Jeremiah. He carefully instructed Jeremiah as to what he should say if the princes interrogated him. Jeremiah should tell them that he had petitioned the king not to cause him to return to the dungeon in the house of Jonathan to die there. Such a petition may well have been part of the conversation between the prophet and the king that night.

Confronted by the Princes
38:27-28

A. Princes’ Questions (38:27a): *And all the princes came unto Jeremiah and questioned him…* The precautions of the king were well taken. Shortly the princes pounced upon Jeremiah. They probed him with questions about the interview with the king.

B. Jeremiah’s Response (38:27b): *and he told them according to all the words that the king commanded.* Jeremiah calmly answered the princes as he had promised the king. It was the truth as far as it went.

Jeremiah did not tell the inquisitive princes the whole truth, nor was he obligated to do so. Those princes did not have a right to know the full contents of the privileged conversation between the king and his spiritual counselor. To withhold information from those not entitled to it cannot be construed as falsehood. By speaking this half-truth, Jeremiah protected not only himself, but the monarch as well.
C. Conclusion (38:27c): Then they dropped the matter, for the conversation had not been overheard. Jeremiah’s answer seemed to satisfy the princes and they did not broach the subject to him any more no one had overheard what Jeremiah had said to the king.

 Jeremiah in Court of the Guard
 38:28

A. Duration of Confinement (38:28a): And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured… Without further harassment, Jeremiah was permitted to remain in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was captured by the Chaldeans. No doubt he was not put under friendly guard, else the pro-Egyptian princes would have gone after him again.

B. Difficulty of Confinement (38:28b): He was there when Jerusalem was captured. This clause probably should be the introductory clause of ch 39. At several places in the English versions, bad ch divisions have been made. In an case, the sentence underscores the difficulty that Jeremiah must have experienced as he endured the ordeal of Jerusalem’s siege and capture in a confinement area. Some of what he observed is recorded in the Book of Lamentations.

SECTION THREE
JEREMIAH VINDICATED
Jeremiah 39:1-40:6

For years Jeremiah had been preaching that Jerusalem would fall to the enemy from the north, i.e., the Chaldeans. Only through national submission to Nebuchadnezzar, the servant of Yahweh, was there any hope of deliverance. Because of this message, Jeremiah had suffered. He had been ridiculed, condemned as a false prophet, tortured, accused of treason, buffeted, harassed, and imprisoned. On more than one occasion he nearly lost his life. Yet he never ceased to preach. He never compromised his message.

Ch 39 relates the confirmation of Jeremiah as a prophet. All his warnings came to pass. No longer could there be any doubt in the mind of anyone. Jeremiah was a man of God speaking forth the revelations he had received from the one true God.

The fall of Jerusalem to the Chaldeans was one of the monumental events of OT history. The account here in ch 39 is one of four accounts of the events surrounding the fall of the city. Naturally all these accounts should be studied together for the complete picture.

It should, perhaps, be noted that the genuineness of the greater part of ch 39 has been called into question. Verses 4-13 are omitted in the Septuagint (Greek) version of Jeremiah. But the Septuagint of Jeremiah has all the appearance of being a translation of an abridged version of the book. Perhaps in that abridged version this section was omitted because the same material is repeated in more detail in ch 52. In this case the absence of this passage from the Septuagint is not a very weighty argument against its genuineness. The same can be said for the alleged contradictions found in this passage. These will be treated in the comments that follow.

This Section consists of narrative describing the consequences of rejecting Yahweh’s directive regarding surrendering to Babylon (vv 1-10). To this “payoff” narrative are added three personal episodes growing out of the collapse of Jerusalem.

487The intention of this v is merely to account for the whereabouts of Jeremiah up to the date of the capture of the city without making any assertion beyond that date. Actually it was some four weeks after the fall of the lower city of Jerusalem before Nebuzaradan arrived with instructions to free Jeremiah. Perhaps Nebuzaradan was present to direct the final assault on the upper city. This cannot be ascertained for certain.

488The other accounts of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians are found in Jer 52, 2 Kgs 25 and 2 Chr 36.
In this narrative there is no mention of Jeremiah or of Yahweh. There is nothing equivalent to “I told you so.” The facts speak for themselves. These vv are a cold, unsympathetic recitation of the fulfillment of the threats Jeremiah had been making to a king and people who would not listen.

A. Collapse of the City (39:1-3):
   1. Arrival of the Chaldean army (39:1): In the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all of his army against Jerusalem to besiege it. The siege of Jerusalem had begun in the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah, i.e., in Dec 588 BC. The siege was brought to a successful conclusion in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, i.e., July 3, 586 BC.
   2. Breach of the walls (39:2): On the ninth day of the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the city was breached. What a fateful day that was when the city was broken up, i.e., a breach was made in the walls. It was a day commemorated by fasting for nearly seventy years.

      After eighteen weary months, the people in Jerusalem were at the point of starvation. The city had fallen. All that was left for the Chaldeans to do was to storm the upper part of Jerusalem where the remnant of the Judean army was holding out.

      Nebuchadnezzar himself was not present when the city fell. After defeating Pharaoh Hophra a few months earlier, the great king had gone about two hundred miles north of Jerusalem to the Syrian town of Riblah. There he made his military headquarters. The final conquest of Jerusalem and the other military operations in the area were left in the hands of his subordinates.

   3. Military government (39:3): This v adds to information that is duplicated in ch 52 and in 2 Kgs 25.
      a. Administrative location (39:3a): All the princes of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate… As soon as the outer areas of Jerusalem had fallen, the Chaldeans established a military government for the city. The administrative headquarters was set up at the middle gate, probably located in the northern wall of the city. Remnants a gate complex of the original northern wall of Jerusalem has been found in the Jewish Quarter of the present-day city. The gate complex yielded evidence of a fierce battle, perhaps the final Babylonian assault against Jerusalem.
      b. Administrative personnel (39:3b): even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar, Nebosarsechim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer the Rab-mag, and all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon. Three or possibly four Chaldean officers of that provisional government are named.

         Nergal-sharezer means may Nergal protect the king. He may be identical with the man of the same name that ruled Babylon 560-556 BC. He was the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar.

         The next name that appears in the KJV is Samgar-nebo. Most modern scholars connect the nebo element with the next name. But what is to be done with Samgar?

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489Zech 7:3; 8:19.
490Nahman Avigad, Discovering Jerusalem (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 50-59. Some think that the middle gate was a gate in the wall that separated the upper and lower parts of the city. Others think the middle gate is the same as the Fish Gate (Zeph 1:10; 2 Chr 33:14; Neh 3:3).
491See Oppenheim, IDB, 3:537. This king is also known as Neriglissar.
It has been taken to be (1) the name of a second official, (2) the name of the town from which Nergal-sharezer hailed, or (3) the official title of Nergal-sharezer. At the present time it is best to be non-committal on the meaning of the word Samgar and await further information from the ancient Near East.

Nebo-sarsechim is the third officer named. He occupied the office of Rab-saris.

The final officer is another Nergal-sharezer 492 who occupied the office of Rab-mag. Rab-saris and Rab-mag were titles of high-ranking military or diplomatic officials, but their exact functions are unknown.493

These three or four officials administered martial law upon the city until the arrival of Nebuzaradan, the captain of the garrison force, who came about a month after the breach was made in the walls (v 12).

B. Capture of the King (39:4-10):

1. Zedekiah’s flight (39:4):
   a. Route of escape (39:4a): And it came to pass when Zedekiah, king of Judah, and all the men of war saw them, they fled by going out at night from the city by way of the king’s garden through the gate between the walls. When the lower city fell to the Chaldeans, Zedekiah knew that within a matter of hours he would fall into the hands of his enemies. Under cover of night, he and what was left of the army made a desperate dash for safety. Some might say that Zedekiah did not have the courage to endure to the end. He abandoned ship; he left his people leaderless.

   The king fled through the gate between the two walls, i.e., where the inner and outer walls came together. The king’s garden was on the southeastern slope of the city near the junction of the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys. With the northern part of the city under the control of the Babylonians, Zedekiah took the only escape route available to him.

   b. Destination of the escapees (39:4b): And they went out toward the way of the Arabah. The road followed by Zedekiah must have been what is elsewhere called the ascent of Adummim (Josh 15:7; 18:17).494 The Arabah is the rift valley through which the Jordan River flows to the Dead Sea. It must have been Zedekiah’s intention to cross the Jordan River to gain the protection of the king of Ammon.

2. Zedekiah’s capture (39:5):
   a. Pursuit (39:5a): And the Chaldean army pursued after them. How the Chaldeans ascertained the fact that Zedekiah had escaped, and which direction he had gone is not indicated. Capture of Zedekiah was a prime objective of the Chaldean invasion.

   b. Apprehension (39:5b): They caught up with Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, took him captive... Plains is the plural of the word Arabah. In the plains around Jericho, the Chaldean army overtook Zedekiah. These plains were a semi-desert area south of Jericho.

   c. Deportation (39:5c): and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the land of Hamath. The king and his staff were taken in chains to the headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah495 some two hundred miles to the north.

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492Bright, (HI, 243) contends that the two Nergal-sharezers mentioned here are the same person.
493The literal translation of the titles, chief of eunuchs and chief soothsayer does not do justice to the importance of these men.
494See Gold, IDB 1:51.
495This is probably the same Riblah mentioned in Nm 34:11 as being on the eastern boundary of the Promised Land. Some years earlier, Pharaoh Neco had made Riblah his military headquarters. There he had summoned Judean King Jehoahaz who was then deported to Egypt in chains (2 Kgs 23:33). Riblah was a strategic military point being at one of the major crossroads of western Asia.
d. Judgment (39:5d): There he passed sentence upon him. At Riblah Zedekiah was forced to stand in the judgment of the king against whom he had violated a sacred oath of allegiance. Passed sentence is lit., spoke judgments with him (cf. 1:16).

3. Zedekiah’s punishment (39:6-7): Many vassal oaths from the ancient Near East have come to light. In swearing fidelity to his overlord, the vassal would call upon the gods of both nations to punish him if he proved unfaithful to the terms of the agreement.

Generally such vassal treaties contained a section of maledictions that the vassal pronounced against himself, his family, and his nation should he violate any part of the treaty. Such treaties were regarded as the most solemn possible obligation. The overlord would punish in the most severe way the vassal who disregarded the treaty and rebelled.

Though the exact wording of the vassal treaty between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar is unknown, perhaps the words can be reconstructed in the light of what happened at Riblah. If this particular vassal treaty followed the terminology that was standard in such documents, Zedekiah may well have said something like the following: May my sons and my officials be slain before my eyes and may my eyes be blinded if I am unfaithful to any of the terms of this treaty. May I be carried to Babylon in fetters of bronze and languish in prison until my death if I violate this agreement.

a. His sons slain (39:6a): And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes at Riblah. The verb slew (r. šcht; lit., slaughtered) is usually used with animals as the object. Before his eyes recalls the prediction of 34:3 that the eyes of Zedekiah would see the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar.

b. His nobles slain (39:6b): The king of Babylon also slew all the nobles of Judah. The same vicious verb is used of the execution of the nobles as was used of the king’s sons.

c. He was blinded and deported (39:7): Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with chains to take him away to Babylon. The last sight that Zedekiah saw was the slaying of his own sons. Then his own eyes were blinded and he was carried away to Babylon. Chains is the dual form of shackles. The dual ending probably refers to shackles on both hands and feet.

The tragedy of Riblah is that all of this could have been avoided had Zedekiah only heeded the word of God spoken through the prophet Jeremiah. Again and again Jeremiah had warned Zedekiah that disobedience to his vassal oath would result in face to face confrontation with the king of Babylon and eventual deportation to Babylon.496

496 Jer 32:4-5; 34:3.

C. Captivity of the People (39:8-10):

1. Jerusalem destroyed (39:8): The Chaldeans burned the house of the king and the houses of the people and tore down the walls of Jerusalem. The capture of the upper city of Jerusalem and other pockets of resistance must have taken three or four weeks. According to 52:12, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the king’s bodyguard, did not arrive on the scene in Jerusalem until a month after the city fell. When he arrived he put the city to
the torch. He broke down the walls that had for so many months thwarted the Chaldean might.

2. Captives deported (39:9):
   a. Deportees (39:9a): The rest of the people who remained in the city, and those who had deserted to him, and the rest of the people who remained... The Judeans deported to Babylon consisted of three groups: (1) the Judeans who had defected to the Chaldeans during the course of the siege; (2) those who were captured when the city fell; and (3) the rest of the people who remained in the land. All of these were prepared for deportation to Babylon. The deportation followed the pattern of the earlier deportation in 597 BC in that it consisted mostly of artisans (52:15; cf. 2 Kgs 24:14).
   b. Officer in charge (39:9b): Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, took captive to Babylon. Nebuzaradan is the Hebrew version of a name that means [the god] Nabu has given offspring. Commander of the guard is lit., chief of the butchers. This man’s name and title has been found in a Babylonian text. 497

3. Poor were left (39:10): Only some of the poor people who had nothing did Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, leave in the land of Judah, giving to them vineyards and fields at that time. Only the very poor of the land were left in the land. The parallel accounts498 indicate that they were left as vinedressers and husbandmen. The text here indicates further that these poor were given the vineyards and fields. This land distribution to the peasants was probably designed to pacify those left behind as well as provide for their economic needs.

Status of Jeremiah
39:11-14

A. Orders Issued (39:11-12):
   1. Source of the order (39:11): Now Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had commanded Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard concerning Jeremiah, saying... Nebuzaradan had received special orders from the king himself regarding treatment of Jeremiah. No doubt Nebuchadnezzar had learned of the preaching of Jeremiah through some of those who had defected during the siege. He must have regarded Jeremiah as a friend and ally and so consequently ordered that he be given this special treatment.
   2. Content of the order (39:12): Take him and keep your eye on him. Do not do any harm to him, but do with him as he tells you. Nebuzaradan was to keep his eye on Jeremiah, i.e., watch out for his best interests. He was to prevent his soldiers from harming Jeremiah in any way. He was to respect the prophet’s wishes regarding where he wished to live.

B. Orders Implemented (39:13-14):
   1. Agents of implementation (39:13): And Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard, and Nebushazban the Rab-saris, and Nergal-sharezer the Rab-mag, and all the officials of the king of Babylon... Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nebuzaradan consulted with the Chaldean officials on the scene499 in order to prevent any possible harm to Jeremiah by conflicting orders or ignorance of the royal decree.

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497See ANET, 307b.
498Jer 52:16; 2 Kgs 25:12.
499Nebushazban seems to have replaced Sarsechim in the position of Rab-saris by the time that Nebuzaradan arrived (cf. v 3)
2. Jeremiah located (39:14a): *sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard.* Jeremiah was removed from the court of the guard where he was detained until Jerusalem fell (cf. 38:28).

3. Jeremiah given a protector (39:14b): *They committed him unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan...* Jeremiah was committed into the care of Gedaliah who had been appointed or would shortly be appointed as governor of the land (cf. 40:5). This is not the same Gedaliah mentioned in 38:1. This Gedaliah was the son of *Ahikam,* a man who earlier rescued Jeremiah from certain death in the temple (26:24). His grandfather Shaphan was one of the leaders in the reformation under King Josiah (2 Kgs 22:1-10). Gedaliah was one who listened to Jeremiah. He must have defected to the Babylonians early in the siege if not before. A bulla (clay stamp-seal impression) found at Lachish may have belonged to this Gedaliah. If so, then he held the position of major domo of the palace. 500

4. Jeremiah taken home (39:14c): *that he might escort him home...* Gedaliah was instructed to escort Jeremiah home. 501 The verb literally means, *cause him to go out.* This phrase suggests that Jeremiah was physically infirm at the time of his release from confinement. His age, coupled with the deprivation and hardship that he had suffered during those last few months, had left the venerable man of God frail.

5. Jeremiah’s status (39:14c): *and he dwelled in the midst of the people.* These words reveal the heart of Jeremiah. He did not desert his people nor betray them. Like Moses he chose to identify with his people rather than enjoy the rewards offered by the Empire.

**Message for Ebed-melech**

39:15-18

A. Date of this Message (39:15): *Now the word of Yahweh had come to Jeremiah while he was still confined in the court of the guard, saying...* Attached to the end of this present section of the book is a brief appendix containing a word of comfort for the slave Ebed-melech. Chronologically these four vv would stand after 38:13. They are postponed till now in order that there might be no break in the narrative of Jeremiah’s imprisonment and the capture of the city. The date of this message is important. With Jerusalem crashing down and panic on every side Jeremiah remembered the kind deed of the humble servant of the king.

In their present position these vv provide a bright conclusion to the dark story of the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. The passage suggests that God takes care of his own people. He rewards men of faith who have the courage to act decisively.

B. Jerusalem to Fall (39:16):

1. A commission (39:16a): *Go and say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel...* While still in the court of the guard, Jeremiah was given a message for Ebed-melech. Doubtlessly in the course of this servant’s daily work he would have had occasion to be in or near the court of the guard. Perhaps it was his task to feed the prisoners there. Jeremiah was instructed to go to this eunuch with a message of hope.

2. God’s word stands (39:16b): *Behold, I am about to bring my words concerning this city to pass for evil and not for good.* The word to Ebed-melech begins on a negative

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500 Holiday, *Her,* 2:293.
501 This has been taken to be (1) Gedaliah’s house; (2) the (chief) house, i.e., the king’s palace; and (3) Jeremiah’s own house. The last is probably the best interpretation.
All that Jeremiah had said about the fate of Jerusalem was about to be fulfilled. *Evil* means *calamity*.

3. **Ebed-melech a witness (39:16c): And they will be fulfilled before your eyes on that day.** Ebed-melech would see the city of Jerusalem captured and destroyed just as the Lord had spoken through His prophet. Perhaps this is an oblique way of saying that Ebed-melech need not fear reprisals at the hands of the wicked princes who hated him for rescuing Jeremiah.

### C. Ebed-melech Delivered (39:17-18):

1. **Saved from enemies (39:17): But I will deliver you in that day (oracle of Yahweh). You will not be given into the hands of the men of whom you are terrified.** Ebed-melech must have been harassed with fear regarding his personal future when Jerusalem was captured. As a royal servant he knew that he most likely would be killed by the Chaldeans. Jeremiah assures him that this will not be the case.

2. **Spared from death (39:18):**
   
   a. **Promise (39:18a): For I will certainly cause you to escape.** Though his life would be endangered in the day that Jerusalem fell, God would deliver Ebed-melech.
   
   b. **Illustration (39:18b): You will not fall by the sword; but you will have your life as spoils…** Ebed-melech’s life would be given to him as *spoils*, i.e., a prize of war.
   
   c. **Explanation (39:18c): because you trusted in me (oracle of Yahweh).** God will be gracious to this humble servant because he had put his trust in the Lord. What a contrast between this royal servant and the king he served. The servant trusted God and risked his life to take a stand for right. His master tried to save his life by refusing to heed the word of God. The Ethiopian found life in the midst of death; the king died a thousand deaths as he languished in blindness in a Chaldean dungeon.

   Early on Jeremiah had warned the community about trusting claims of the temple cult (7:4). Ebed-melech heeded Jeremiah’s admonition. His trust in God was not cerebral. He demonstrated his trust in a concrete way.

   Ebed-melech epitomized the remnant of believers who endured the agonies of siege warfare, but were spared death by the providential intervention of Yahweh. The promise to Ebed-melech serves as another invitation to Judeans in Jerusalem’s last hours to find personal salvation by putting their trust in Yahweh.

### Jeremiah’s Options

#### 40:1-6

A. **Jeremiah Arrested (40:1):**

1. **Introductory formula (40:1a): The word that came unto Jeremiah from Yahweh…** Following the interruption of the Ebed-melech oracle, chs 40-44 continue the narrative that began in ch 37. The introductory formula at the beginning of 40:1 would lead one to expect a prophetic utterance to follow. No oracle or prophecy, however, occurs until 42:9.

   Some suppose that a prophetic word or prophecy originally followed this introduction and that it has been lost or removed to some other part of the book. Others think that *the word* includes all the revelations given at various times during the

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critical period portrayed in chs 40-44. Probably, however, the expression the word should be taken in a wider sense, including history as well as prophecy.

2. **Jeremiah released (40:1b):** *after Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, had let him go from Ramah...* When Jerusalem was put to the torch, the Judean captives were removed to Ramah where they were processed for deportation to Babylon. Ramah is about six miles north of Jerusalem. However he came to be in Ramah, Jeremiah was released as soon as Nebuzaradan realized that he was there. Nebuzaradan was under orders to treat Jeremiah with great respect (39:11).

3. **Jeremiah taken captive (40:1c):** *when he had taken him bound with chains in the midst of all the captives from Jerusalem and Judah who were being deported to Babylon.* In ch 39 Jeremiah was freed from court of the guard in Jerusalem by the Babylonian officials. He was committed to the care of Gedaliah. He was taken to his home where he must have remained for some time. Evidently while mingling with the people, Jeremiah was arrested by Babylonian soldiers under orders to fetter the Jews for deportation.

Perhaps Gedaliah was away from Jerusalem on business for Nebuchadnezzar at the time. In the absence of his protector, Jeremiah did not receive any special favor from the soldiers who were in charge of the deportation.

**B. Jeremiah Recognized (40:2-3):**

1. **Source of his message (40:2):** *And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said unto him, Yahweh your God spoke all this evil against this place...* This seems to be the first face to face meeting between Jeremiah and this powerful general. How he recognized Jeremiah among the captives is not clear. Nebuzaradan must have been quite accurately informed about the preaching of Jeremiah. He certainly speaks the very language of the prophet in these vv.

2. **Truth of his message (40:3a):** *and Yahweh has brought about and accomplished all that he spoke.* Most commentators regard these two vv as a later insertion by some “pious” reader. A heathen could never have spoken in this manner! But is it not possible that this heathen might have heard of the predictions of Jeremiah? Perhaps he was impressed with the way in which these predictions had been so accurately fulfilled. It is, of course, possible that Jeremiah is merely paraphrasing the words of Nebuzaradan and putting his thoughts into language that would be meaningful to an Israelite. In any case, there are several other examples in scripture of amazingly perceptive language attributed to heathen leaders.

3. **Justice of Jerusalem’s fall (40:3b):** *Because you have sinned against Yahweh and you have not listened to his voice, this thing has happened to you.* Even pagan people understood the concept that a local deity that had been offended could bring calamity on his adherents. But here again the Babylonian may be paraphrasing the message of Jeremiah that has been reported to him by numerous Judean deserters.

**C. Jeremiah Rewarded (40:4-5):**

1. **Released from chains (40:4a):** *And now behold, I have set you free this day from the chains that are upon your hands.* Nebuzaradan, the commander of the occupational forces, quickly and apologetically removed the chains from the wrists of the prophet. How embarrassed he must have been to discover that Jeremiah had been subjected to the

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505 As for example the edicts of Cyrus (Ezra 1:3-4) and Darius (Ezra 6:1-12), of Huram of Tyre (2 Chr 2:11-12); Pharaoh Neco at the battle of Megiddo (2 Chr 35:21) and Rabshakeh’s boast outside the wall of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:25).
indignities of being a captive when Nebuchadnezzar had expressly given orders that he be treated with kindness.

2. **Given choices (40:4):**
   a. **He could go to Babylon (40:4b):** *If it is good in your eyes to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you...* Upon freeing Jeremiah, Nebuzaradan allowed the prophet to choose his own course of action. He could choose to go to Babylon with the other captives. Nebuzaradan promised to personally see to his welfare. The words hint of special privileges and protection.
   b. **He could remain in the land (40:4c):** *but if in your opinion it is not good for you to come to Babylon, then do not come.* Nebuzaradan realized that the old prophet might not wish to live out his years in a foreign land. So Jeremiah was given the option of remaining in his homeland. The choice was his.
   c. **He could anywhere he chose (40:4d):** *See, all the land is before you. Go wherever you think it good and proper to go.* No restrictions were placed on Jeremiah’s movements.
   d. **He could join Gedaliah (40:5a):** *When he did not turn away, he added, Or return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah and dwell with him in the midst of the people, or go wherever you think is proper to go.* Now while he was not yet gone back, i.e., while he was still in the process of making up his mind, Nebuzaradan suggested that if he should choose to remain in the homeland, he should join Gedaliah the newly appointed governor.

   Jeremiah chose to cast his lot with the humble people who remained in the land. Like Moses before him, he chose to suffer ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the prestige and pleasure of a royal court.

3. **He was given gifts (40:5b):** *So the commander of the guard gave him provisions, and a present, and released him.* So Jeremiah was given a supply of food and a present of some kind. Then he was sent on his way.

**D. Jeremiah Joins Gedaliah (40:6):** *And Jeremiah went unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah and dwelled with him in the midst of the people who remained in the land.* The prophet elected to follow the advice of Nebuzaradan. He joined Gedaliah who had set up his headquarters at Mizpah.

Mizpah is generally identified with Tell en-Nasbeh, seven miles north of Jerusalem on the main road to Shechem. This town had played an important role in the history of Israel. Here Samuel led the nation in a great revival (1 Sam 7:5); Saul was publicly named king of Israel (1 Sam 10:17). Excavations have revealed no signs of a destruction of Mizpah in the sixth century BC. It may be that Mizpah opened its gates to the Babylonians and as a result was made an administrative center by the conquerors.

**SECTION FOUR**
**POST-FALL EVENTS**
**Jeremiah 40:7-43:7**

Jerusalem died; but life went on in Judah. Events following the fall of Jerusalem center around the Babylonian appointed Gedaliah. This section contains biographical narrative and one prose sermon (42:7-22).

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506 Jer 40:1-42:6; 43:1-7. With the exception of 40:1-6, a brief account of the release of Jeremiah, the life of the prophet is not mentioned in chs 40 or 41. The term “biographical narrative” is still appropriate, however, in that these chs are the necessary transition to the last ch of the prophet’s life, viz., his forced immigration to Egypt.
Gedaliah’s Governorship
40:7-41:18

After the fall of Jerusalem, Judah became a province of the Babylonian empire. Jerusalem had been a thorn in the flesh of Nebuchadnezzar for so many years that he had unleashed his vengeance against her. The Holy City had been completely destroyed. But it was not the intention of Nebuchadnezzar to leave the whole land desolate.

Jeremiah is not mentioned in this long unit. No attempt is made here to interpret events theologically. The matter-of-fact narrative serves the purpose of underscoring that the rebellious spirit of the Judeans was not crushed by the fall of their capital.

In the three leading characters of this narrative the three policy options of the Judeans are illustrated. Gedaliah represents the policy of accommodation to Babylon. Ishmael stood for the policy of resistance to Babylonian hegemony. Johanan turns out to be sympathetic toward Egypt.507

A. Gedaliah’s Administration (40:7-12):

1. Gedaliah’s appointment (40:7):
   a. Appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (40:7a): When all the army officers and their men who were in the field heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam… Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, a member of a prominent Jewish family, as governor. He did not appoint a Babylonian as governor because he did not wish to arouse the hostility of those Jews who remained in the land. Nor would a descendant of the house of David do, lest ambitions of a restored monarchy be aroused. Gedaliah was an ideal choice. He came from a God-fearing and influential family.508 Through the years his family had supported the notion that Nebuchadnezzar had been appointed by God the ruler of the world.
   
   Some conjecture—and they are probably correct—that Gedaliah had followed the advice of Jeremiah and defected to the Chaldeans early in the siege of Jerusalem. Be that as it may, it would have been very difficult for Nebuchadnezzar to have found a man better qualified than Gedaliah to lead the Jews in reorganizing themselves.
   
   b. Appointed over the land (40:7b): over the land and had committed to him those men, women, and children of the poor of the land who had not been deported to Babylon… Under his leadership Nebuchadnezzar intended to create in Palestine a self-governing commonwealth submissive to Babylonian sovereignty. The great king hoped to maintain the loyalty of the new colony by granting to them as much freedom as possible, especially freedom of religion. Thus he hoped to create a state in western Asia upon which he could depend in any future showdown with Egypt.

2. Gedaliah’s associates (40:8): they came unto Gedaliah to Mizpah—Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Epha the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite. These came along with their men. The wisdom of Nebuchadnezzar’s choice of Gedaliah became evident at once. Gedaliah immediately launched into a program of reconstruction. His first goal was to unite the various factions of the remnant.
   Scattered throughout the land were small guerrilla bands that had somehow escaped capture and destruction by the Chaldean army. Once the main body of foreign troops

507Brueggemann, CJ, 385.
508Gedaliah’s father, Ahikam, had once protected Jeremiah when he was on trial for his life (26:24). His grandfather Shaphan had been secretary of state under the godly king Josiah (2 Kgs 22:8).
withdrew, these guerrilla units either came voluntarily or were summoned to Mizpah. Gedaliah wished to discuss with the leaders of these troops the future of the community in Palestine.

Among those named as participating in the discussions is Ishmael. He later turned traitor and murdered Gedaliah. Other leaders were Johanan and his brother Jonathan, who later would lead the remnant to Egypt; Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth; the sons of Ephai from the town of Netophah that was located near Bethlehem; and Jezeniai, the son of the Maachathite. With the cooperation of these men Gedaliah hoped to form a central government that would be adequate to the needs of the people during these dark days.

3. Gedaliah’s appeal (40:9-10): Gedaliah forthrightly presented his program to the captains. He urged them to use their influence to secure peace throughout the land.
   a. Calmed the fears of the soldiers (40:9a): And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan swear unto them and to their men, saying, Do not fear to serve the Chaldeans. First, Gedaliah assured the former soldiers that they had no reason to fear serving the Chaldeans. It may have been that Gedaliah had used his influence to secure from Nebuchadnezzar amnesty for all those who participated in the war against Babylon.
   b. Assured their well-being (40:9b): Remain in the land and serve the king of Babylon and it will be well with you. Second, Gedaliah called upon these leaders and their followers to dwell peacefully in the land and render service to the king of Babylon. If they continued to do this, he promised them a life of peace and tranquility.
   c. Promised to represent them (40:10a): And as for me, Behold, I shall dwell in Mizpah to represent you before the Chaldeans. Gedaliah assured the captains that he would stay at Mizpah and handle the affairs of government. He would act as liaison between Judeans and the Chaldean officials who might appear from time to time in the land.
   d. Urged return to normal activity (40:10b): As for you, gather wine, summer fruit, and oil. Put them in vessels. Live in the cities that you have taken. Finally, he urged the soldiers to demobilize to get busy gathering the harvest for the coming winter. Once the harvest was in, the military bands could live in whatever cities they had taken over during the aftermath of the war. Gedaliah was urging productivity in order to resurrect the Judean economy.

4. Gedaliah’s success (40:11-12):
   a. News spread (40:11): When also all the Jews who were in Moab, Ammon, Edom, and in all lands heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant to Judah, and that he had appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan… News of Gedaliah’s appointment and the progress he had made in reorganizing the remnant spread far and wide. Many homesick Jews had fled across the Jordan to Moab, Ammon, Edom and other lands. Travelers spread the word of Gedaliah’s wise administration in the homeland.
   b. Exiles returned (40:12a): all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been driven; and they came to the land of Judah to Gedaliah at Mizpah. Those who had fled during the hostilities with Babylon began to trickle back across the

509 The name Jaazaniah was found on a seal found in ancient Mizpah in 1932.
510 A Maacathite refers to someone from Maacah, an Aramean kingdom immediately southwest of Mount Hermon, west of Bashan.
511 The verb in v 10a translated serve is not the same verb that is used in v 9. The verb here literally means stand before. It refers to one who is the minister of another and looks after his interests.
They came to Gedaliah to recognize his authority and to receive instructions about what they were now to do.

c. Normalcy restored (40:12b): *And they gathered wine and very much summer fruit.* Catching the spirit of the reorganized community, the returnees joined in harvesting the land as Gedaliah had hoped (v 10). After reaping an abundant harvest the remnant settled down in their homeland. How thankful they must have been that God had so abundantly cared for their needs even during those difficult months of devastating warfare. How thankful they must have been to be living in the land of their forefathers. Apparently the Babylonians took a “hands off” policy regarding the remnant. Gedaliah and the Judeans were given the freedom to make the new arrangement work.

B. Threat to the Remnant (40:13-16): Gedaliah had the support of the Babylonians and Jeremiah; but there were those who opposed any government installed by the Babylonians.

1. A warning (40:13-14): The peace of the tiny remnant in Palestine was soon shattered. Ishmael, a member of the royal family, began plotting behind the scenes to assassinate Gedaliah.

a. Source of the warning (40:13): *Then Johanan the son of Kareah and all the officers of the army that was in the field came unto Gedaliah at Mizpah.* Somehow word of the treacherous plot reached the ears of Johanan. Perhaps Ishmael had even tried to enlist Johanan in the conspiracy. At once he warned the governor.

b. Substance of the warning (40:14): *And they said unto him, Are you at all aware that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to slay you? But Gedaliah did not believe them.* Just what motivated Ishmael in this ruthless plot is not clear. It may be that he resented the fact that Gedaliah had been appointed governor rather than a member of the royal family. On the other hand, Ishmael may have despised Gedaliah for collaborating with the Chaldeans. Ishmael was probably merely a political opportunist.

Whatever the explanation for the dastardly deed that he committed, it is clear that Ishmael is being used as political pawn of Baalis, the king of the Ammonites. Baalis must have coveted the territory of Judah for himself.\(^{512}\) He decided that Gedaliah was standing in the way. Envy, jealousy and greed must surely have been the factors that drove Baalis and Ishmael into their unholy alliance. In 1984 a bulla (stamp-seal impression) was discovered near Amman Jordan (ancient Ammonite territory) that contained the name of this king.\(^{513}\)

Gedaliah, being the righteous and godly man that he was, could not bring himself to believe that the report was true. Whether Gedaliah is here being naive or courageous is difficult to tell. Some have suggested that he brushed aside this threat to his life in order to inspire confidence on the part of the various leaders who had come to him at Mizpah. Perhaps he thought the report was only symptomatic of the divisions within the remnant. If that were the case, it would be best to disregard such malicious slander.

2. A request (40:15a): *So Johanan the son of Kareah privately said to Gedaliah in Mizpah, Let me go, I beg you, that I may smite Ishmael the son of Nethaniah. No man will know of it.* Johanan was convinced that the reports concerning Ishmael were true. He considered a preemptive strike against the conspirators to be in order. Privately he

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\(^{512}\) Others think that Baalis viewed a Babylonian satellite just across the river as a threat to Ammonite independence.

pressed the matter with the governor, offering to immediately slay Ishmael, if Gedaliah so desired. No one would know that the governor had authorized the assassination.

3. **A warning (40:15b): Why should he smite you and cause all of the Jews who have gathered unto you to be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish?** Johanan knew that the death of Gedaliah would mean disaster for the tiny remnant. He underscored the point that if Gedaliah were slain the Jewish remnant in Palestine would be scattered.

4. **Gedaliah’s response (40:16): But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah, Do not do this thing, for you are speaking a falsehood concerning Ishmael.** If Gedaliah had merely been putting up a brave front before, there was no reason to do so now. He ordered that no action be taken against Ishmael. He accused Johanan of making false accusations against a fellow officer. While Gedaliah was right in refusing to allow the assassination of Ishmael, it does seem that he should have taken more active steps to protect his own person. His lack of cautiousness led to his own assassination.

C. **Ishmael’s Plot (41:1-3):**

1. **Ishmael’s arrival (41:1):**
   a. **Date of the incident (41:1a): And it came to pass in the seventh month...** In the seventh month Ishmael began to set his plan in motion. Unfortunately the narrator has failed to mention the year in which the assassination took place. Does he mean that Gedaliah was assassinated in the same year in which Jerusalem was captured and burned? If so, then Gedaliah’s governorship lasted only about three months. It is perhaps better (though certainly not necessary) to think here in terms of a governorship that lasted a few years.

   The Chaldean armies that were to avenge the death of governor Gedaliah arrived in Judah in 582 BC (Jer 52:30). If Gedaliah died in the seventh month of 586 BC, the year of Jerusalem’s destruction, it would be difficult to explain why it took the Chaldean armies six years to respond to the new rebellion in Judah.

   b. **Identity of Ishmael (41:1b): that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, who was of royal descent, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam...** Although Gedaliah was of royal descent, the narrative presents him as a despicable thug.

   c. **Companions of Ishmael (41:1c): accompanied by ten men who were also royal princes.** How Ishmael and these ten princes had escaped the slaughter at Jerusalem is not known.

   d. **Reception of Ishmael (41:1d): And they ate bread there together in Mizpah.** When Ishmael and his crew of ten cutthroats arrived in Mizpah, Gedaliah still suspected nothing. He invited these men of the nobility to dine with him.

2. **Ishmael’s murders (41:2-3):**
   a. **Murder of Gedaliah (41:2): And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the ten men who were with him rose up and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword and killed him whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land.** During the course of the meal, in flagrant violation of the rules of oriental hospitality, the assassins suddenly rose up and slew Gedaliah. What a dastardly deed! In the ancient Near East when a man accepted an invitation to dine with another, the host was honor-bound to protect his guests from all harm. The guests were expected to reciprocate in good faith.\(^{514}\) Given these circumstances,
Gedaliah was actually defenseless. Josephus\textsuperscript{515} adds the tradition that Gedaliah was intoxicated at the time he was murdered. Throughout the period of the exile, the Jews observed the third day of the seventh month as a fast day to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah.\textsuperscript{516}

b. Other murders (41:3): *Ishmael also smote all the Jews who were with Gedaliah in Mizpah, the Chaldeans who were found there, and all the soldiers.* In the ensuing panic, these dedicated extremists were also successful in slaying all the Jews present in the banquet hall, even the Chaldean bodyguard.

D. Ishmael’s Massacre (41:4-10): The women, children and old men left in Mizpah were no match for the armed soldiers of Ishmael, though they were few in number.

1. Arrival of the pilgrims (41:4-5): Apparently Ishmael delayed his return to Ammon in order that he might increase his booty at the expense of some unsuspecting group of travelers who might be passing through Mizpah. This opportunity came on the second day after the murder of Gedaliah.

a. Time of their arrival (41:4): *And it came to pass on the day after the murder of Gedaliah, while no man yet knew of it...* For two days Ishmael and his brigands controlled the town of Mizpah. No one was allowed to leave the town; therefore no one outside Mizpah knew that the crime had been committed.

b. Identity of the pilgrims (41:5a): *eighty men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria who had shaved their beards, tore their garments, and cut themselves.* The eighty pilgrims were pious Israelites living in the former territory of the northern kingdom. The shaved beards, torn clothes and cut bodies are signs of the most intense mourning. No doubt the mourning was over the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Shaving the head and cutting the body were forbidden by the law (Lv 19:27; 21:5; Dt 14:1), but they must have been common anyway. The seventh month (v 1) was the time of the feast of tabernacles. This may be the explanation of the pilgrimage of these men.

c. Destination of the pilgrims (41:5b): *They came with offerings and incense in their hand to present at the house of Yahweh.* The pilgrims were on their way to present non-animal offerings (minchāh) and incense at the ruins of the temple in Jerusalem. Though the temple had been destroyed, these faithful few continued to observe the appointed festivals of the law of Moses. The festivals, however, were no longer occasions for joy.

2. Pilgrims lured into Mizpah (41:6): By word and deed Ishmael totally deceived the northern pilgrims.

a. Pretense (41:6a): *And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went.* Cunning Ishmael, shedding crocodile tears as though he too were sharing in the lamentation of the hour, went out to meet the pilgrims.

b. Invitation (41:6b): *And when he reached them he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.* Ishmael lured the pilgrims into the town of Mizpah with the appeal that they should salute Gedaliah the governor of the land while they were in the vicinity.

3. Pilgrims slain (41:7): *And when they came into the midst of the city, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them. He cast them into the cistern, he and the men who were with him.* As the unsuspecting pilgrims entered the town, Ishmael’s gang pounced upon them.

\textsuperscript{515}Antiquities 10:9.
\textsuperscript{516}Zech 7:5; 8:19.
They murdered seventy of these harmless people. The corpses of the unfortunate victims were thrown into an old cistern.

4. Some pilgrims spared (41:8): However, ten men among them said unto Ishmael, Do not kill us for we have provisions of wheat, barley, oil, and honey in the field. So he stopped and did not kill them along with their brethren. During the massacre ten of the eighty men were spared because they offered to show Ishmael the whereabouts of stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey. Probably these goods were stored away in underground cisterns on their fields. The bribe was sufficient. Ishmael spared the lives of these men. Perhaps this reveals Ishmael’s motive in the massacre. He is seeking booty for his band of robbers and for the king of Ammon, who had sponsored the enterprise.

5. Location identity (41:9): Now the cistern into which Ishmael threw all the bodies of the men he had slain in addition to Gedaliah is the one that King Asa made as a defense measure against Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with those who had been slain. This cistern had been constructed three hundred years earlier by King Asa when he fortified Mizpah against the possible attack of King Baasha of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Some fifty such cisterns have been found at the ancient site of Mizpah. It is impossible, of course, to identify the one that was made by Asa.

6. Ishmael’s hostages (41:10): After the slaughter of the Israelite pilgrims, Ishmael and his men took hostages. For good reason he fled toward his patrons, the Ammonites.

a. Identity of the hostages (41:10a): Then Ishmael took captive the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the daughters of the king and all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah whom Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. Three classes of hostages are identified. First, the rest of the people who were in Mizpah may refer to the native population of the town. Second, among the captives were princesses of the royal house, whom Nebuchadnezzar had permitted to remain in Judah. The sons of the king were killed at Riblah (39:6; 52:10; 2 Kgs 25:7). The wives of the king were taken to Babylon (38:22-23). It is therefore somewhat surprising to find the daughters of the king left in the land under the supervision of Gedaliah. Third, all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah.

b. Intentions of Ishmael (41:10b): Ishmael the son of Nethaniah took them captive, and he set out with the intention of crossing over unto the Ammonites. Ishmael’s motives here are not entirely clear. Did he intend to sell these captives on a foreign slave market? Did he intend to use these people as hostages to guarantee his safe return across the Jordan to Ammon? The detailed account of the escapades of Ishmael may indicate that Jeremiah and Baruch were among the Mizpah captives. This, of course, must remain a matter of speculation.

E. Ishmael’s Plot Thwarted (41:11-18):

1. Johanan’s intervention (41:11-12):

a. Discovery (41:11): And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the officers of the forces that were with him heard all the terrible things that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done. It was not long before the Mizpah massacre was discovered. The anonymous discoverer reported the tragedy immediately to Johanan.

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517Cf. 1 K 15:22; 2 C 16:6. Apparently Gedaliah’s body was also in this cistern. V 9 states that their bodies were by the side of Gedaliah (ASV). The KJV wrongly translates here because of Gedaliah. It creates the false impression that the pilgrims died because of some connection to Gedaliah.
b. Pursuit (41:12a): *And he took all the men, and set out with the intention of fighting with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah...* When Johanan and the other captives heard what had happened they took decisive action. They immediately gathered together their fighting men and set out in pursuit of the brigands.

c. Confrontation (41:12b): *and they caught up with him at the great pool that was in Gibeon.* The force of Johanan caught up with Ishmael at the great waters near Gibeon three miles southwest of Mizpah.

2. Hostages escape (41:13-14):
   a. Joy of the hostages (41:13): *And when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the officers of the forces that were with him, they rejoiced.* When the frightened captives saw the forces of Johanan approaching they took new heart.
   
b. Flight of the hostages (41:14): *And all the people that Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned and went back to Johanan the son of Kareah.* En masse the hostages broke ranks and ran in the direction of their deliverers. Johanan was recognized as the savior of the people. As a result of this rescue this captain rose to the surface as the leader of the remnant.

3. Ishmael’s escape (41:15): *But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan the son of Kareah with eight men and went to the Ammonites.* Ishmael and eight of his men were successful in escaping from Johanan, but two of the murderers apparently were caught and slain.

4. Plight of the remnant (41:16-18): Following the death of Gedaliah, the tiny remnant in Judah was thrown into confusion. Gedaliah was dead; Ishmael had escaped. It would only be a matter of time before Nebuchadnezzar would appear to avenge the death of his governor. The preceding narrative has skillfully portrayed the dire plight of the people who remained in the land following the destruction of Jerusalem. But they had one consolation. God was still with them and the prophet of God was still available to deliver his word to them.
   
a. Description of the remnant (41:16): *Then Johanan the son of Kareah and all the officers of the forces that were with him took all the remnant of the people whom he had rescued from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam—men, soldiers, women, children and eunuchs that he brought from Gibeon.* The group rescued by Johanan at Gibeon consisted of men—probably elderly men—soldiers, women, children and eunuchs who were probably servants.
   
b. Intention of the remnant (41:17): *And setting out they lodged at Geruth Kimham near Bethlehem with the purpose of going on to Egypt.* Without even pausing to return to Mizpah to gather their belongings, the Jews headed south in panic-stricken flight. They stopped for the night near Bethlehem at the habitation (or inn) of Kimham. The Hebrew word *Geruth* (habitation) occurs only here. Along major thoroughfares in antiquity benevolent souls would erect rude and simple shelters for the benefit of travelers. It was at one of these rest stops (called *khans*) that the tired remnant stopped for the night. Their intention was to seek safety in Egypt.

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518 The pool is mentioned in 2 Sam 2:13 as the place of the battle between Abner and Joab.
519 Kimham was a son of Barzillai (2 Sam 19:37), the kindly old gentleman who befriended David when he was in flight from his son Absalom. It may be that David had made a land grant to Kimham in gratitude for what his father had done.
520 Streane, CB, 269.
As long as Gedaliah was alive, the tiny community had prospered. The utter confusion and helplessness of the remnant after the governor’s death only serves to underscore the marvelous leadership of Gedaliah.

c. Fear of the remnant (41:18): They feared because of the Chaldeans since Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land. The remnant was completely dismayed and unnerved by the events of the past few days. They feared the wrath of King Nebuchadnezzar. After all, the governor whom he had appointed was dead. Several Chaldean officers had been slain. No doubt Nebuchadnezzar would construe this as an act of overt rebellion against his authority. Since the real assassins had escaped, surely the Chaldeans would pour out their wrath on the Jews who remained in the land. They must leave the land before the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar appeared on the scene.

By the end of ch 41 the brief experiment in government under the leadership of Gedaliah has collapsed. The de facto leader of the remnant is Johanan. With their options limited, and their backs to the wall, Jeremiah was invited back into the limelight.

Judeans Refuse to Listen
42:1-22

In 41:17 the intentions of Johanan and the remnant are made known. They intended to go to Egypt. For this group Egypt was their salvation.

A. Request by the Remnant (42:1-6):

1. Remnant’s approach (42:1-3):

   a. Petitioners (42:1): Then all the officers of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people both small and great, drew near… Having run out of options, and with nowhere else to turn, the remnant turned to Jeremiah. This abrupt and belated seeking of divine counsel was unanimously presented. The entire group of fugitives drew near to the prophet in order to receive an oracle from Yahweh. Johanan and Jezaniah acted as spokesmen for the group.

   b. Petitioner (42:2a): and said unto Jeremiah the prophet… It is while the people were encamped near Bethlehem that Jeremiah returns to the narrative. Nothing has been recorded about his activities since he chose to dwell with Gedaliah in Mizpah (40:7-41:18). Since Jeremiah is with the remnant at the inn of Kimham, it seems reasonable to assume that he had been among the captives led away by Ishmael. In any case, Jeremiah now comes to the fore again as the spiritual counselor of the people.

   c. Object of petition (42:2b):

      (1) Presented to Jeremiah (42:2b): May our petition, we beg you, be accepted before you. Very courteously the petitioners made their request. They ask the old prophet to pray for the remnant of the people.

      (2) Offered to Yahweh (42:2c): Pray on our behalf unto Yahweh your God… Jeremiah is asked to pray to Yahweh your (sing.) God. The language suggests

521 Another Jezaniah is mentioned in 40:8.
522 This seems preferable to the alternative view that Jeremiah and Baruch had been absent from Mizpah during the raid of Ishmael and joined the group later by their own choice.
that Jeremiah enjoyed a special relationship with Yahweh that the people did not feel.

(3) Offered on behalf of the remnant (42:2d): *on behalf of all this remnant—for we are only a few left from many, as you can observe with your own eyes*—The term *remnant* is enormously serious. The term was justified by the observable fact that only a few Judeans were still left in the land. Perhaps the emphasis on the remnant was meant to play on Jeremiah’s emotions and concern for the survival of his people. On the other hand, perhaps the term *remnant* was employed so as to recall Jeremiah’s earlier positive word regarding the remnant (23:3; 31:7).  

*We are only a few left from many* is the reverse of the *few to many* blessing celebrated in the Exodus (Dt 10:22). The language hints that Yahweh’s entire plan for Israel was in jeopardy.

d. Subject of petition (42:3): *that Yahweh your God may declare to us the way that we should go and the thing we should do.* The remnant desires that God might direct their path at this moment of uncertainty. Although they already knew what they were going to do (41:17), yet for some unexplained reason they wanted the prophet to endorse their intention.

2. Jeremiah’s response (42:4):
   a. He agrees to pray (42:4a): *And Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard. Behold, I will pray unto Yahweh your God according to your words.* Jeremiah was sympathetic to the well-worded plea of the leaders. He still loved his people dearly, and so he agrees to fulfill their request. *Yahweh your* (plural) *God* underscores that they are still God’s people in spite of all that has happened.
   
   b. He promises to communicate God’s response (42:4b): *And it shall come to pass that any word that Yahweh shall answer you, I will relate to you. I will not withhold from you a thing.* Jeremiah suspected that these people already had their minds made up as to what they were going to do. They had decided that it was necessary to flee into Egypt. They assumed that this decision would be quickly endorsed by Yahweh. After all, what other alternative was there?

Two premises undergird the exchange between Jeremiah and the remnant. First, prayer was the legitimate and, at the moment only, means by which the group could obtain divine guidance. Second, Jeremiah was the appropriate channel of intercession. Previous indications of the uselessness of prayer on behalf of the Judeans (7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12) seem to have been cancelled by the events of 586 BC.

Anticipating that God would not approve of their plan, Jeremiah warns the people that he will speak only what the Lord reveals. He will not alter the word of God to suit the present circumstances. He would not hold back the truth.

3. Remnant’s commitment (42:5-6):
   a. Commitment to obey (42:5): *And they said unto Jeremiah, May Yahweh be a true and faithful witness between us if we do not act in accordance with every word that Yahweh your God shall send you concerning us.* Somewhat over enthusiastically the people take a vow that they will act in accordance with the word of God. It is obvious from what follows that they were not sincere in this declaration. Like so many of God’s people, they were willing to follow his word only in so far as his word met with their approval.

\[523\]Isaiah also had many hopeful words to say concerning the remnant.
b. Commitment reiterated (42:6a):  *Whether it be good or bad, we will listen to the voice of Yahweh our God to whom we are sending you...* The remnant amplifies their commitment by pledging to act on the word of Yahweh regardless of whether that word is *good* (favorable) or *bad* (unfavorable). They recognize in the message of the prophet the *voice of Yahweh.*

The vow of unconditional obedience recalls earlier occasions when similar vows were made before Moses (Ex 24:3, 7), Joshua (Josh 24:21, 24), and Samuel (1 Sam 7:4, 6, 8; 12:19). By making such a vow the remnant is tacitly admitting that they had not listened to Yahweh in the past. They are committing to a new start. Now they will be obedient children.

c. Hope articulated (42:6b): *in order that it may be well with us, because we listen to Yahweh our God.* The remnant recognizes that without God’s blessing nothing will go right for them. Only by obeying the directives of Yahweh can they hope for a good outcome to their predicament.

B. First Response of Jeremiah (42:7-18):

1. Delay in response (42:7-8):
   a. Revelation received (42:7): *And it came to pass at the end of ten days that the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah.* For ten days God prepared the heart of his messenger both to receive and to communicate his word to the people. No doubt the people were perturbed by the delay. They knew what the divine directive had to be, so why delay?
   
   Each day the people manifested their impatience and disgust. Still Jeremiah refused to speak until he was certain that the message was from God. After ten days of prayerful wrestling with God, the answer came.

   b. Remnant summoned (42:8): *And he called Johanan the son of Kareah, the officers of the forces that were with him, and all the people small and great...* When Yahweh responded to Jeremiah’s intercession, the prophet immediately called for the entire encampment to hear God’s word. All the people small and great recalls the language used to describe the Josiah’s assembly that engaged in covenant renewal (2 Kgs 23:2).

2. Response introduced (42:9):
   a. A prophetic formula (42:9a): *and said unto them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel...* These words indicated that what Jeremiah was about to say was not a personal opinion or political judgment. He was about to tell them exactly what the Lord had communicated to him.

   b. A reminder (42:9b): *to whom you sent me to present your petition before him...* Jeremiah reminded them that the remnant had requested the prophet to make a petition for them before Yahweh. Jeremiah’s response consists of three “if-then” utterances.

3. Positive “if-then” utterance (42:10-12): Jeremiah’s first oracle to the remnant set forth the course they should follow if they wished to avoid further calamity.
   a. Condition (42:10a): *If you will continue to dwell in this land...* The word of the Lord came as a complete shock to the assembled remnant. It was God’s will that they remain in Judah!
   
   b. Promise (42:10b): *then I will build you up; and not tear you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up...* The quartet of key verbs that describe the prophet’s ministry
appears again.\textsuperscript{524} The two positive aspects of Yahweh’s program (build/plant) can be triggered if they chose to remain in the land. God would build them up and plant them, i.e., cause them to prosper. God was not angry with them. Human reason would indicate that they should flee to Egypt and place themselves under the protection of Pharaoh. To remain in the land would be an act of faith; therefore it would be blessed by Yahweh.

In the 586 BC destruction the Judeans had experienced Yahweh’s tearing down and plucking up. The implication here is that more destruction action awaits the remnant should they choose to disregard Yahweh’s instruction now.

c. Emotional explanation (42:10b): \textit{for I amgrieved concerning the calamity that I brought upon you.} Yahweh grieved over the calamity that had befallen Jerusalem. This is not a confession of mistake or of remorse for the disasters that he had brought upon them. Rather it means that his attitude toward his people now has changed. He was not hostile toward them any longer.

d. Double exhortation (42:11):

(1) Do not fear (42:11a): \textit{Do not fear the king of Babylon whom you fear. Do not fear him (oracle of Yahweh)…} After the general promises of peace and prosperity, the Lord addressed himself to the specific fears of the community. The double exhortation of this v suggests the motivation for the remnant wanting to get out of the land. These exhortations were not theoretical and general; the people really did fear the king. Jeremiah assures them that their anxiety concerning the reaction of Nebuchadnezzar to the death of his governor was groundless.

(2) Reason for courage (42:11b): \textit{for I am with you to deliver you and to save you from his hand.} God was with them. He would deliver them out of the hand of the Chaldean king.

e. Mercy extended (42:12): \textit{I will extend mercies to you so he will show mercy to you and cause you to return to your ground.} Yahweh promises to extend mercies to the remnant. The divine mercies would influence Nebuchadnezzar to show mercy to the remnant. He would permit them to return to their farms.\textsuperscript{525} Often in the life of a believer the worst fears prove to be unfounded.

4. Negative “if-then” utterance (42:13-15a):

a. Condition (42:13-14):

(1) Their option (42:13): \textit{But if you say, We will not dwell in this land, thereby disobeying Yahweh your God…} The people as free moral agents had a choice to make. If they chose to remain in the land, they would enjoy peace and prosperity. But if they chose to disobey God, they would experience his punishment. The choice was up to them. God lets man choose his destiny.

(2) Their plan (42:14): \textit{and say, No! Surely we will go to the land of Egypt where we will see no more war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor hunger for bread; and there we will dwell…} In Egypt the people imagined that they would enjoy peace and plenty. They would escape, so they thought, ravishes of war. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem Jeremiah’s message was \textit{submit to Babylon;} now it is \textit{remain in the land.} Since the land of Judah was now under Babylonian control, the two unpopular admonitions were equivalent.

\textsuperscript{524}Cf. 1:10; 18:7-10; 24:6; 31:28.

\textsuperscript{525}With the change of only one vowel in the Hebrew the phrase \textit{cause you to return} can be read \textit{cause you to dwell.} Some prefer this minor emendation.
b. Threat (42:15a): Now therefore listen to word of Yahweh, O remnant of Judah! Therefore introduces an announcement of judgment. The Judeans have been presented two options. Now in the most solemn manner Jeremiah sets for the consequences of the option to disobey Yahweh. He calls upon them to listen to (obey) this additional word from Yahweh. The announcement comes in the form of a second, more detailed, negative “if-then” utterance.

5. Negative “if-then” utterance (42:15b-17): Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel... Jeremiah underscores the source of these warnings by attributing them to Yahweh of hosts, i.e., the all-powerful, who is the God of Israel.
   a. Condition (42:15b): If you firmly set your faces to go to Egypt and you go to sojourn there... In these words Jeremiah is anticipating the reaction to the people to the commandment of God to remain in the land. In Israel’s national history Egypt was a place to flee, not a place to seek refuge. Only dire consequences can await those who turn the Exodus into an “Eisodus.”
   b. Threat (42:16-17):
      (1) Hardship and death to follow them (43:16a): then the sword that you fear shall catch up with you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine that you dread shall hang on to you in Egypt, and there you shall die! Jeremiah undercuts the major argument of the Egypt-bound remnant. Jeremiah assures the remnant that Egypt will provide no refuge. The sword and famine will follow them to Egypt. They will never again return to their native land, for they will die in Egypt.
      (2) No escape (42:17): And all the men who have set their faces to go to Egypt to sojourn there will die by the sword, famine and pestilence; and none of them will remain or escape from the calamity that I will bring against them. In Egypt the remnant will experience all the horrors of war. There they will die of the sword, famine, and pestilence. All who go into Egypt will die; none of them will escape.

C. Further Response (42:18-22): In Jeremiah’s second response to the remnant there is no positive invitation, but only stern warning.
   1. A reminder (42:18a): For thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: As my wrath and my anger was poured out against the inhabitants of Jerusalem... The remnant recently had experienced the outpouring of God’s wrath on Jerusalem. They had lived through the horrors of the siege of the city. They knew by experience that God’s threats were not to be ignored.
   2. A certainty (42:18b): thus shall my wrath be poured out against you when you go to Egypt. Just as in the past the nation had experienced the judgments of God, so would the wrath of God be poured out upon the remnant if they disobeyed this command.
   3. A warning (42:18c): You shall become an imprecation, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach; and you will never again see this place. The remnant would become an object of execration and horror; they would be accursed and derided. They would never again see their homeland if they left the land in violation of the direct command of the Lord.
   4. A revelation (42:19):
      a. Divine will summarized (42:19a): Yahweh has spoken concerning the remnant of Judah, Do not go to Egypt. As Jeremiah delivered the word of the Lord he could see in his audience the hardened look of rejection. Earnestly he exhorts his hearers to follow the divine directive and remain in the land. He wants them to be certain that this directive is not his personal opinion, but a direct word from Yahweh. Before 586
Jeremiah’s message was “Do not resist Babylon; now “Do not go to Egypt.” The second command, however, is really the same as the first. Remaining in the land was a manifestation of submission to Babylon.

b. Divine will underscored (42:19b): *Be certain of this: I have testified against you this day.* The remnant would never be able to say that Yahweh had not warned them, or that Jeremiah had withheld God’s word from them.

5. A rebuke (42:20): *You made a fatal mistake when you sent me unto Yahweh your God, saying, Pray on our behalf unto Yahweh our God and whatever Yahweh our God shall say, tell us that and we shall do it.* Jeremiah warned the people that their guilt was all the more serious in that they had sent him unto Yahweh to inquire concerning his will. They had pledged themselves to submit to that will. They were about to commit a double evil. Going to Egypt was wrong; vowing to listen to the prophet then reneging was even more evil.

6. An indictment (42:21-22):
   a. Anticipated response (42:21): *Now I have told you this day, but you will not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God in regard to anything for which he sent me unto you.* The look on their faces, the muffled complaints of the people told Jeremiah that the inspired directive would be ignored. By refusing to listen to the voice of Yahweh the remnant was placing itself in profound jeopardy.
   b. Certain result (42:22): *And now be certain of this: By the sword, famine, and pestilence you will die in the place where you wish to go to sojourn!* The disobedience of the remnant had sealed their doom. Unbelief does not alter the word of God. Jeremiah warned them one last time about what they would face if they migrated to Egypt. Sword, famine and pestilence is repeated from v 17.

SECTION FIVE
FALL OF JERUSALEM
IN RETROSPECT
Jeremiah 43:1-45:5

Section Five is arranged in a manner that highlights the continuing disobedience of the Judeans.

a. Attack on Baruch (43:1-7)
   b. Pharaoh’s palace captured (43:8-13)
   c. Remnant in jeopardy (44:1-14)
      d. Stubbornness manifested (44:15-19)
      d. Stubbornness punished (44:20-23)
   c. Remnant in jeopardy (44:24-28)
   b. Pharaoh Hophra captured (44:29-30)
   a. Consolation for Baruch (45:1-5).

**Attack on Baruch**

43:1-7

**A. Message Rejected (43:1-2):**

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526 The format of this command is similar to that used in the Decalogue, but the negative is ‘al (temporarily prohibition) not lo’ (permanent prohibition).
527 You dissembled in your hearts (KJV), i.e., you have deceived yourselves. On this translation Jeremiah is charging them with self-deception. Another translation of the phrase is possible: you have erred at the risk of your lives. On this translation Jeremiah is saying that these people have put their life in jeopardy by swearing to obey God and then rejecting His commandment.
1. **Timing of it (43:1):** And it came to pass after Jeremiah finished speaking unto all the people all the words of Yahweh their God that Yahweh their God sent him, even all these words… While the people heard the prophet, it was obvious that the word of God was not getting through to them. Scarcely had Jeremiah finished speaking when opposition arose.

2. **Source of it (43:2a):** that Azariah the son of Hoshalah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men began saying unto Jeremiah… A certain Azariah, most likely a brother of Jezaniah (cf. 42:1), seems to have assumed the role of chief spokesman. Joining with him were all the proud men. The Hebrew word used here is used of those arrogant, insolent loud mouths that had the audacity to speak out against God and question his word. They presumed to know better than Yahweh about the course of action that should be adopted.

3. **Substance of it (43:2b):**
   a. **General charge (43:2b):** You are speaking a lie! The general charge is that Jeremiah was lying when he claimed to have for them a revelation from God. They did not attempt to answer Jeremiah’s arguments; instead they challenged his integrity and veracity. In the book it is Jeremiah who frequently labels alternative policy opinions as false (šeqer); but here the remnant turns one of Jeremiah’s favorite words back on him.
   b. **Specific denial (43:2c):** Yahweh our God did not send you to say, Do not go to Egypt to sojourn there. So certain are they that flight to Egypt was the only viable course of action that they are convinced Yahweh did not forbid them to go there. When revelation clashes with reason, the latter will win out among the weak in faith. To a degree they misquote the word of Yahweh. The word not here is lō’, which indicates permanent prohibition whereas in 42:19 the negative was ’al, which indicates temporary prohibition.

**B. Baruch Accused (43:3):**

1. **They blamed Baruch (43:3a):** But Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us… Perhaps Jeremiah is too venerable to be attacked personally. So the remnant hurled a groundless but vicious charge at the faithful scribe. Just what the basis of this violent outburst against Baruch was is not made clear. Defiant disobedience must be rationalized. Baruch was made the scapegoat. Perhaps he was in the employment of the Chaldeans in some capacity. In any case, the attack made against him was patently absurd.

2. **They attribute sinister motives to Baruch (43:3b):** in order to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans that they might slay us or take us captive to Babylon. They actually think that Baruch has a hidden agenda to get rid of the remaining Judeans one way or the other. Why such an outlandish motive would be attributed to Baruch is not indicated.

**C. Abduction to Egypt (43:4-7):**

1. **Attitude of defiance (43:4):** And Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the officers of the forces, and all the people would not listen to the voice of Yahweh to dwell in the land of Judah. The defiance of the remnant is again emphasized (cf. v 2). They would not listen. Jeremiah does not even bother to try to dissuade the crowd that by this time had become a mob, from their course of action. Unbelief had hardened into apostasy. The die was cast. To Egypt they would go.

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528 Some scholars think that Jezaniah of 42:1 and the Azariah here are one and the same. Both are said to be the son of Hosaiah.
2. Action of defiance (43:5-7):
   a. Instigators (43:5a): And Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the officers of the forces… Having determined to disobey the commandment of God, Johanan instructed the people to hastily make preparation for the flight to Egypt. Too much time already had been wasted waiting on Jeremiah to deliver his oracle. They could feel, so they thought, Nebuchadnezzar breathing down their neck.
   b. Followers (43:5b-6a): took all the remnant of Judah who had returned from all the nations to which Yahweh had driven them in order to sojourn in the land of Judah—(6) the men, women, children, and daughters of the king, even every soul that Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan… The exact force of the verb took is hard to assess. The term might suggest no more than leadership; or it could imply coercion. Presumably those who had returned from nations willingly followed Johanan and the other officers to Egypt.
      The fugitives consisted of entire families. Special notice is given to the daughter of the king. The group that departed for Egypt was the same group that the Babylonians had placed under the supervision of Gedaliah.
   c. Victims (43:6b): and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah… Jeremiah and Baruch are both listed among those who went down to Egypt. It is impossible to imagine that this faithful man of God agreed to join the refugees of his own accord. He knew that the whole venture was contrary to the will of God. The angry leaders must have forced the old man and his faithful companion to go with them in order that they might share whatever fate awaited the group in Egypt.  
   d. Action (43:7a): and they went to the land of Egypt for they would not listen to the voice of Yahweh. This is one of the saddest vv in the whole book. How ironical. The Israelites, who nine hundred years earlier had been delivered from Egypt, have now returned. Those who were seeking peace and security were marching into the jaws of death. Those who were trying to avoid confrontation with Nebuchadnezzar would shortly face their dreaded foe on foreign soil.
   e. Result (43:7b): And they came to Tahpanhes. The remnant ended their flight at Tahpanhes (modern Daphne), a fortress city just inside the Egyptian border. They thought they were safe from any reprisals from the Babylonians. They ended up where the story of Israel began, i.e., in Egypt. “They were back in a bondage they misread as freedom.”

It is impossible to determine precisely what year the Jews immigrated to Egypt. The year 583 or 582 BC would probably not be far wrong. This conjecture is based on the fact that the armies of Nebuchadnezzar arrived in the land of Judah in 582 BC to punish the Jews for the death of Gedaliah. Therefore it is appropriate to assume that the flight to Egypt had occurred shortly before the coming of the Chaldeans.

Tahpanhes was situated at the eastern edge of the Egyptian Delta, some seven miles west of the Suez Canal. At one time, before it dried up, the Pelusior branch of the Nile flowed past the site. The city was one of the major fortresses guarding the eastern entrance into Egypt. It was also an important commercial center, since all the caravans going to and from Egypt passed through this city. The site was excavated by Sir Flinders Petrie, the famous British archaeologist, in 1886. He found the native name of the place to be Qasr Bent el Yehudi, palace of the Jew’s daughter. This name had for centuries preserved the memory of the visit of Zedekiah’s daughters following the collapse of the kingdom of Judah.

Pharaoh’s Palace Captured

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530 Brueggemann, CJ, 399.
Jeremiah did not cease from his prophetic activity in the land of Egypt. The final three oracles of his ministry were delivered on Egyptian soil. In the first of these Jeremiah elaborates upon the warning that he made to the remnant at their encampment near Bethlehem. He boldly predicts that Nebuchadnezzar will attempt to conquer Egypt. The Judean fugitives are not mentioned in this unit.

A. Parabolic Action (43:8-9):
1. Location (43:8): And the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying... Shortly after the Jews arrived in Tahpanhes, Jeremiah delivered an oracle to them. No doubt the exiles would be compelled to halt at this spot in order to secure permission from the Egyptian government to sojourn in their land.
2. Directions (43:9): Take in your hand large stones and hide them in the mortar in the brick pavement that is at the entrance of the house of Pharaoh in Tahpanhes in the presence of the men of Judah. As on so many occasions in his ministry, Jeremiah was directed to dramatize his message. Now God instructed him to hide some large stones in the brick pavement he formed the approach to Pharaoh’s house, i.e., some government building in Tahpanhes. The verb hide (r. tmn) was used in the earlier action parable of the linen waistband (13:4-7).

Jeremiah hid large stones which symbolize a foundation for the pavilion of the Great King. Unlike the linen in the earlierparable, the stones will not decay. This signals that some time may elapse before Nebuchadnezzar arrives to fulfill the prediction. The buried stones may also symbolize the undermining of Pharaoh’s palace, throne and authority.

Sir Flinders Petrie discovered a large brick platform at the main entrance of the fortress in Tahpanhes. This platform may have been the very place where the Lord instructed Jeremiah to bury the large stones.

Just how Jeremiah was able to perform this act is not stated. Some scholars think it was done at night. On the other hand, the native Egyptians may have regarded Jeremiah as insane. In that case they would have tolerated his actions under the theory that the insane were guided by higher powers. This much is certain: The men of Judah were present to observe the prophet performing this strange act.

B. Shocking Prediction (43:10-13):
1. Coming invasion (43:10):
   a. Invader (43:10a): Then say unto them, Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to send and take Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, my servant... When Jeremiah had finished burying the stones beneath the brickwork, he rose to make a startling announcement introduced by behold. The verbs send and take describe Yahweh’s actions (cf. 25:9). Yahweh of hosts was about to make use of Nebuchadnezzar once again. He is ominously described as king of Babylon and my servant (cf. 25:9; 27:6).
   b. Invasion (43:10b): that I may set up his throne over these stones that I have hidden; and he shall stretch out his canopy over them. Nebuchadnezzar will invade Egypt. The Chaldean had defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BC; but he was defeated on the Egyptian border in 601 BC. Heretofore he had not been able to

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531The last recorded oracle of Jeremiah was delivered before the death of Pharaoh Hophra in 569 BC. Therefore, 43:8-44:30 covers at the maximum a period of thirteen years, from 583 to 570 BC. The likelihood, however, is that the actual number of years covered in this section is less than half the maximum figure.

532Pharaoh’s house is not the royal palace—that was located at Sais—but a government building of some sort that Pharaoh used as his residence when in Tahpanhes.

533Brueggemann, CJ, 400.
penetrate into Egypt proper. Now, however, Yahweh will employ Nebuchadnezzar to punish the disobedient remnant.

Here on the very spot marked by the buried stones the Great King will set up his throne. This means that he will exercise authority over Egypt. He will also spread his royal canopy. This is probably not the tent where the king resided, but an awning or covering borne by attendants designed to protect the monarch from the rays of the sun.

2. General results of invasion (43:11): When he comes he will smite the land of Egypt; such as are appointed to death, to death, those appointed to exile, to exile, and those appointed to the sword, to the sword. The invasion of Nebuchadnezzar will have terrible consequences for the inhabitants of Egypt and for the Jews who were seeking refuge there. Smite the land suggests warfare with all its attendant horrors. This is the same verb used of the plagues against Egypt in the days of Moses. Some will be appointed to death, probably by famine, as cities were besieged. Others will be carried away to Babylonian exile. Still others will be given over to the sword of the executioner. The language of this v is similar to 15:2b.

3. Impact on Egyptian temples (43:12a): And I will kindle a fire in the house of the gods of Egypt; and he will burn them or carry them away captive. Nebuchadnezzar will have no respect for the gods of Egypt. He will put the torch to the temples of the land. He will carry their images to Babylon as trophies of war. Mesopotamian monuments frequent describe and sometimes depict the custom of transporting captured images back to Babylon.

4. Ineffectual resistance (43:12c): He will wrap himself in the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps his garment about him; and he will go out from that place unmolested. Wrap himself (t. ‘th) translates a verb root that has another meaning that also fits the context here. The root can also be translated delouse, i.e., Nebuchadnezzar will delouse the land of Egypt (NRSV), i.e., shake loose the treasure as one shakes vermin out of a robe. Whichever translation of the verb is accepted, the meaning is the same: with ease the Babylonian will ransack the land of Egypt. He will leave that land of his own accord unmolested, untouched by Egyptian military or magic.

5. Devastation (43:13):
   a. Images broken (43:13a): And he will break down the images of Beth-shemesh that is in the land of Egypt... Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the images of Beth-shemesh as well. The word translated here images is the same word rendered pillar in Isa 19:19. In both of these passages the word probably refers to the obelisk, the imperial symbol of power and authority.

   Beth-shemesh means house of the sun. The place was called Heliopolis by the Greeks and on by the Egyptians. It is located near the southern point of the Egyptian Delta region a few miles south of Taanah and about ten miles northeast of modern Cairo. A famous temple dedicated to the sun was located here that had in front of it a row of obelisks. It is to these obelisks that the present passage points. When the geographer Strabo visited the city twenty years before the time of Christ, it was already a heap of ruins. Nothing now remains of the city but some traces of the massive walls, fragments of sphinxes and an obelisk of red granite sixty-eight feet high.
   b. Temples burned (43:13b): and he will burn the houses of the gods of Egypt. Jeremiah reiterates that Nebuchadnezzar will burn the temples of Egypt.

Jeremiah’s prediction of a Chaldean invasion of Egypt was fulfilled in a marvelous way. The Jewish historian Josephus tells of an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar five years after the fall of

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534 The Hebrew word occurs only here. It is of uncertain meaning. Though canopy seems to be the best translation, some have rendered the word carpet.

Jerusalem. In this invasion the king of Egypt was killed. The Jews in Egypt were carried away captive to Babylon.\textsuperscript{536} Many scholars questioned the accuracy of the Josephus account until a fragmentary inscription\textsuperscript{537} from the archives of Nebuchadnezzar was discovered. This inscription told of a Chaldean invasion of Egypt. This invasion did not occur until the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, nineteen years after the fall of Jerusalem (i.e., 568 BC).

This fragment certainly establishes the fact that punitive campaigns to Egypt could be part of Nebuchadnezzar’s foreign policy. The fragment suggests that the purpose of the Great King was not permanent conquest. Rather Nebuchadnezzar was aiming to cripple Egypt so as to prevent Pharaoh from ever again meddling in Syria-Palestine.

Pharaoh Amasis (570-526 BC), who ruled Egypt at the time, was able to retain his throne. Subsequent to the invasion he seems to have maintained friendly relations with Babylon. Jeremiah’s prophecy does not demand a lengthy subjugation of Egypt. Therefore it may be regarded as fulfilled by one or both of the invasions mentioned above.

**Last Words to the Remnant**

44:1-30

The second oracle delivered by Jeremiah to the remnant in Egypt is lengthy. It reflects three statements by Jeremiah (vv 1-14, 20-23, 24-30) and one response to the prophet by the renegade remnant in Egypt (vv 15-19).

There is no indication about how much time has passed since the message of the previous ch.

A. Remnant in Jeopardy (44:1-14): Nothing is more inspiring than to see an old soldier of God faithful until death on the battlefield for the Lord. Ch 44 offers the reader the last glimpse of Jeremiah. He is still fighting for the God he serves; he is still appealing to the people he loves.

1. Revelation from Yahweh (44:1): **The word that came unto Jeremiah concerning the Jews who were living in the land of Egypt—in Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis, and in the country of Pathros—saying...** How grieved Jeremiah must have been to see the remnant in Egypt persisting in idolatry. For an entire lifetime he had tried to guide this people in the path of covenant faithfulness. Jeremiah, however, had failed to stem the tide of national apostasy. Jerusalem was made to drink of the bitter cup of God’s wrath in 586 BC. Now the remnant that had survived that disaster by God’s grace had turned from him to serve gods of their own making. It is with a heavy heart that the old prophet tries once again to warn the miserable remains of his people of the error of their ways.

   The Jews who had fled to Egypt had settled all over that land. Besides the colony at Taanach, where Jeremiah seems to have resided, Jews had settled at Migdol, Noph, and the country of Pathros.

   Migdol is located near the northeastern boundary of Egypt, about twelve miles south of Pelusium. Noph or Memphis was located about 125 miles south of the Mediterranean Sea. Pathros (land of the south) refers to the region still further south of Memphis called Upper Egypt. From these widely scattered places, the Jews had assembled for some kind of religious festival in honor of the heathen deity, the queen of heaven. Probably Taanach was the site of the gathering.\textsuperscript{538} This may have been the last opportunity that Jeremiah had to address the entire remnant that had fled to Egypt.

2. Past calamity (44:2):

   a. Observation (44:2a): **Thus says of hosts, the God of Israel: You have seen all the evil that I brought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah.** As was his usual custom, Jeremiah turned first to history. Those to whom he was preaching lived

537See *ANET*, 308. The tablet, now in the British Museum, has unfortunately been badly damaged.
538On the basis of v 15, some suggest that the festival was held in Pathros or Upper Egypt.
through the horrors of Jerusalem’s last days. Jeremiah jogs their memory. Evil in this v refers to calamity or disaster.

b. Description (44:2b): Behold, they are a desolation this day and there is no inhabitant in them… Jeremiah reminded his hearers that Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were uninhabited and in ruins at that very moment. To date archeologists have found no city in Judah that was continuously occupied during this period. For desolation (chorbāh) or ruin, see on 7:34. No inhabitant reflects the language of 2:6, 15.

3. Persistent sin (44:3-6):
   a. Persistent idolatry (44:3): because of their evil that they committed in order to provoke me by sacrificing to and serving other gods that neither they, nor you, nor your fathers knew. The people of God had provoked his wrath by their wickedness. They had committed the sin that God detested above all others—they had burned incense to strange deities and had rendered homage to gods of their own making. Evil plays off the use of the same word in the previous v. Yahweh’s punishment matches the transgression. For provoke (r. k’s) or offend see on 7:18. For sacrificing to other gods, see on 1:16.
   b. Persistent obstinacy (44:4-5):
      (1) Pleading by prophets (44:4): I earnestly and persistently sent unto you all of my servants the prophets, saying, Please do not this abominable thing that I hate. Even though they had violated the First Commandment, God had earnestly and persistently sent prophets to plead with his people to turn from their abominable idolatry. The prophets were God’s gift to Israel; through their preaching Israel could be brought to repentance and deliverance. For the sending of the prophets, see on 7:25. For doing this abominable thing, see on 7:10.
      (2) Ignoring by people (44:5): But they did not obey or listen to turn from their evil that they no longer offer sacrifice to other gods. In spite of all that Yahweh did to reach his people, still they persisted in this wickedness. The language in this v reflects 7:24.
   c. Resulting judgment (44:6):
      (1) Abundant (44:6a): And my wrath and my anger were poured out upon them. It burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem… Because of their stubborn refusal to turn from the path of idolatry, the anger of God had been poured out upon the cities of Judah. For pouring out wrath and anger, see on 7:20.
      (2) Consuming (44:6b): and they became a waste and a desolation as they are this day. The ruins of those once proud cities served for all time as a warning of the consequences of sin and apostasy—death, destruction, and desolation.

3. Present idolatry (44:7-10): Turning from the explanation of past calamity, the prophet begins to make an application of the lessons of history to the remnant in Egypt. Jeremiah found it hard to understand why the people continued to offer incense to pagan deities in view of the terrible consequences of that action in the past. The bewilderment of the prophet is reflected in the three questions he addressed to the remnant.
   a. Endangerment (44:7): And now thus says Yahweh God of hosts, the God of Israel: Why are you placing your lives in jeopardy by continuing to do this great evil that will only result in man, woman, child and suckling being cut off from the midst of Judah, so as to leave of yourselves no remnant? The first rhetorical question
underscored the ongoing involvement in idolatry. This sin only brought great evil upon themselves.540

b. Provocation (44:8a): Why do you provoke me by the works of your hands by offering sacrifice to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to sojourn... The second rhetorical question emphasized that idolatry only provoked the wrath of the living God.

c. Destructive (44:8b): in order to cut yourselves off that you might be a curse and a reproach among the nations of the earth. Persistence in this violation of the most elemental commandment of the word of God would result in national suicide. If it continued, every man, woman, child and infant of Judah would be cut off in the wrath of God. The nation would become an object of cursing and a reproach among all the nations of the earth.

d. Incomprehensible (44:9): Have you forgotten the evil of your fathers, and the evil of the kings of Judah, their wives, and your evil and the evil of your wives, that was done in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The third rhetorical question indicates the perplexity of Jeremiah over the short-term memory of the remnant. He then used the technique of emphasis by enumeration to set forth the wide-spread nature of the wickedness of the previous generation. Surely they had not so soon forgotten that the wages of sin is death!

e. Persistent (44:10): To this day they have not humbled themselves, nor feared, nor walked in my law and my statutes that I have set before you and before your fathers. In spite of all that had happened to their nation, its capital and temple, the remnant had not humbled themselves (lit., bruised themselves), i.e. made themselves contrite in repentance. They do not fear God, nor walk in his law and statutes.

4. Future judgment (44:11-14):
   a. God’s face against them (44:11): Therefore, thus says Yahweh of hosts the God of Israel: Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, even to cut off all of Judah. The maxim “they who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it” is vividly illustrated in vv 11-14. God declared that he will set his face against his people. Yahweh was resolved to bring evil (calamity) upon the remnant. All of Judah in this context refers to those Judeans who transgressed Yahweh’s directive to remain in the land.

   b. Remnant to perish in Egypt (44:12): And I will take the remnant of Judah that have set their faces to come to the land of Egypt to sojourn, and they will all perish. In the land of Egypt they will fall by the sword or perish in the famine; from the east even to the greatest they will die by sword and famine; and they will become an imprecation, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach. Throughout the paragraph the judgment of God upon the remnant in Egypt is represented as absolute. One must wait until the final clause to find any note of hope. An awesome trinity of verbs in v 12 spells out the disaster: they will fall, die, and perish. What irony! They fled to Egypt in order to escape bloodshed, privation, carnage, and exile. But these Jews who stubbornly had set their will against that of their God by immigrating to Egypt would meet with war and famine, destruction and death in that land.

Whatever imagined horrors drove the remnant from their homeland following the death of Gedaliah would overtake them in reality. From the least to the greatest indicates that none would escape the terrible onslaught.

539 A Hebrew participle implies continuous action.
540 Against your souls (KJV) is but another way of saying in Hebrew against yourselves.
Though the remnant in Egypt would die, their memory would live on in the minds of men for use in expressions of astonishment, execration, curses, and reproach.

c. Remnant to be punished like Jerusalem (44:13): And I will bring punishment upon all the inhabitants in the land of Egypt as I brought punishment upon Jerusalem by means of sword, famine, and pestilence. Just as God had punished Jerusalem by sword, famine, and pestilence, so God would now pour out his wrath upon those Jews who dwell in the land of Egypt. None would escape the judgment in order that they might return to Judah, even if they might have a desire so to do.

d. Only a few to return (44:14): Of the remnant of Judah that came to sojourn in the land of Egypt no one will escape or be left to return to the land of Judah to which they long to return to dwell there. But they will not return, except a few who might escape. In this dark picture of judgment there is but one, ever so tiny, ray of hope. Just as a minister who preaches on judgment might delay any mention of saving grace until the conclusion of his message, so Jeremiah waits until the very last clause of his judgment speech to temper the absolute tones of his message.

None shall return, except a few who might escape, i.e., be delivered by the grace of God. Only a handful of the present remnant will ever see their homeland again. Even the most optimistic Jew among them would not have been able to find much consolation in this exceptive clause. Jeremiah did not intend to offer consolation. It was his purpose here to shock, and hopefully thereby to lead these people to repentance. Only a remnant of the remnant will survive.

Stubborn Response

44:15-19

Jeremiah’s ministry ended on the same note with which it began. The people rejected the word of God that he brought to them. God had warned him at the outset, they will fight against you but they will not prevail against you; for I am with you to deliver you (1:19). From that day forward Jeremiah had forced his people into confrontation with the word of God that is sharper than any two-edged sword. That timid youth had indeed become the iron pillar, fenced city and brazen wall that God had predicted (1:18).

With unflinching courage he stood up in the midst of that pagan festival to manfully preach the word. Resentment in the faces of that apostate audience was quite obvious as Jeremiah administered the whiplash of divine rebuke. That resentment boiled over into violent anger when Jeremiah mentioned the guilt of the women of Judah.

A. Resoluteness in Idolatry (44:15-17a):

1. The women were backed by their husbands (44:15): And all the men who knew that their wives offered incense to other gods, and all the women who were standing around, a great congregation, even all the people who were dwelling in the land of Egypt in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying... Men who exhibit amazing restraint when being personally attacked often burst into uncontrollable rage when someone criticizes their wives. They might have ignored the old prophet and dismissed what he said as being the sentiments of a religious fanatic. But he had touched a sensitive nerve, and they felt compelled to reply to him. These hard-nosed rebels were not about to seek accommodation with the word of Jeremiah.

2. They refused to listen to the words of Jeremiah (44:16): As regards the word that you have spoken to us in the name of Yahweh, we will not hearken to you. The defiant
reply of the accused people is not clothed in diplomatic camouflage. They mince no words. They categorically refused to listen to anything Jeremiah had to say.

They do not accuse Jeremiah of speaking falsely in the name of the Lord as they had charged him at Bethlehem (cf. 43:2-3). Now they do not even bother to argue the point. They could not care less what the God of Jeremiah demanded of them. Even if the word of the prophet does come from the Lord, they will not receive it.

3. They vowed to continue idolatry (44:17): On the contrary we will continue to do everything that we have vowed to do—Everything that we have vowed is lit., whatsoever thing goes forth out of our own mouth. They are expressing their determination to perform the vows that they have made to the queen of heaven—to offer incense to her and pour out libations to her. The queen of heaven and the cakes offered to her were mentioned already in 7:18.

B. Rationalization of Idolatry (44:17b-19): In attempting to rationalize their idolatry the assembly offers three arguments.

1. They fared better when they worshiped idols (44:17b): to offer incense to the queen of heaven and pour out libations as we have previously done, we, our fathers, our kings, our princes in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem when we had plenty of bread, and were well-off, and had not experienced calamity. The remnant argued that the worship of the queen of heaven was nothing new. Their fathers had worshiped her throughout the land of Judah, and even in the streets of Jerusalem. Furthermore, the worship of this goddess was prestigious having attracted both kings and princes of the land. Could a religion practiced for so long and by so many be wrong? Finally, they argue pragmatically that worshipping the queen of heaven paid off. Rather than thanking the Lord for the blessings he had poured out upon them, they attributed their prosperity to their false gods.

2. They began to suffer when they ceased idolatry (44:18): But from the time we ceased to offer incense to the queen of heaven, and pour out libations to her, we have lacked all of these things and have perished by sword and famine. The assembly argued negatively that all of the misfortune that had befallen the nation from the death of Josiah to the present time they blamed upon those prophets and leaders who had made a valiant effort to suppress idolatry. The people were forced to cease the open worship of the queen of heaven during the reformations of King Josiah. But soon after the reform under Josiah commenced, one calamity after another struck the nation. These calamities culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus it was only when they attempted to worship the Lord exclusively and neglected the worship of other deities that trouble started. Obviously the people's interpretation of recent history was very different from that of Jeremiah.

Boiled down to its most simple terms, the argument of the assembly is simply this: We will worship the god who has done the most for us. The queen of heaven has done more for us than the God whom you represent. Therefore, we will serve the queen of heaven. These Jews were searching for a religion that would give them the maximum amount of blessing for the minimum amount of service.

3. They were determined to cling to their idols (44:19): Surely we are going to keep on offering incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her. Was it without our men that we made for her cakes that depicted her, and poured out

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541Further evidence of the existence of the Ishtar cult in Egypt is provided by an Aramaic papyrus dating from the fifth century BC found at Hermopolis in which the temple of the queen of heaven is explicitly mentioned. IWB, 3:102.
libations to her? The women added another argument. Whatever acts of worship were performed were done with the consent of the husbands. In other words, since they had the approval of their husbands for this worship Jeremiah had no right to interfere with it. Thus the whole community was involved in this final rejection of the Lord as the sole deity of Israel.

**Stubbornness Punished**

44:20-23

The last recorded words of Jeremiah came in response to the brazen remarks of the remnant in Egypt. Jeremiah did not wilt under pressure, nor did he run from controversy. He stood eloquently alone against what must have been a smirking, jeering, shouting crowd.

That the women were taking the lead in the whole affair can be seen in the fact that Jeremiah was careful to include them in his closing remarks (vv 20, 24-25).

Stooped by age and weakened by infirmity, the old warrior could still deliver a powerful oratorical blast. In fact, one detects very little difference between this last message of Jeremiah and the first one he delivered some forty years earlier.

A. **Explanation of Calamity** (44:20-23):

1. **Yahweh took note of the incense they offered** (44:20-21): Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, the women and all the people who had answered him, (21) Did not Yahweh remember and bring to mind the incense that you offered in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you, your fathers, your kings, your princes and the people of the land? Implicit in the preceding remarks of the assembly was the contention that Yahweh had forgotten them. God did not punish them for their idolatry back in the days of Manasseh. That did not mean, however, that he had failed to take note of their sin. God did remember their iniquity, Jeremiah affirms.

2. **Yahweh was no longer able to bear their evil deeds** (44:22): Yahweh was no longer able to bear your evil deeds and the abominations that you committed; and so your land became an astonishment, and a desolation, a curse without inhabitant as it is today. Because of his patience, Yahweh delayed the execution of the inevitable sentence until he could bear their sin no longer. Then, and only then, was the wrath of God poured out on Judah. That is why Judah was a desolation, an astonishment and a curse without inhabitant this very day.

3. **Yahweh brought the present calamity upon Judah because of their idolatry** (44:23): Because you offered incense, and sinned against Yahweh, and did not obey the voice of Yahweh, and did not walk in his law, statutes, and testimonies, therefore this present calamity has come upon you. Again Jeremiah stressed that it was because of their idolatry and flagrant disobedience to the word of God that they were in their present condition. The very religion that the Judean fugitives thought had brought them prosperity had brought them only trouble.

**Remnant in Jeopardy**

44:24-28

A. **Commitment to Idolatry** (44:24-25):

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542 Some think that the entire reply recorded here was framed by the women.
1. **Addressees (44:24):** *And Jeremiah said unto all the people and all the women, Hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah in the land of Egypt!* Those who had fled to Egypt constituted *all Judah*, i.e., all that was left of Judah. As in v 20 again *all the women* are specifically mentioned in the address. They apparently were taking the lead in the brand of idolatry being practiced in Egypt.

2. **Indictment (44:25):**
   a. **Explanation of their idolatry (44:25a):** *Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: You have spoken with your mouths and you have carried them out with your hands…* The verb *you have spoken* is feminine plural. *You have carried them out, your mouths and your hands* are masculine plural. The interplay of masculine and feminine forms suggests that the women were “calling the shots.” What the women were speaking were vows, as the following declaration shows. Under Mosaic Law a vow taken by a wife that was not rescinded before nightfall became binding (Nm 30:6-8). So husbands became doubly culpable in the actions of their wives. They failed to rescind their vows, and they assisted their wives in executing those vows.
   b. **Resolve of their idolatry (44:25b):** *saying, We will certainly perform our vows that we have made to offer incense to the queen of heaven and pour libations to her.* A general principle of ancient law is that a vow was binding unless the keeping of the vow involved a greater wrong that the breaking of the vow. The women were determined to carry out the vows they had taken upon themselves with their husbands’ approval. The plural *vows* suggests that each individual made her own commitment in concert with all the other women of the community. The Jews in Egypt served their idols with greater loyalty than they had ever shown for the service of Yahweh. On *the queen of heaven* see on v 17 and 7:18. The term *libations* is used nine times in Jeremiah, all in reference to idolatrous worship. The practice of pouring out drink offerings to pagan gods continued a practice that was widespread in pre-destruction Jerusalem (7:18; 19:13; 32:29).
   c. **Prophet’s response (44:25c):** *By all means carry out your vows! By all means perform your vows!* Jeremiah does not attempt to answer the remnant’s arguments. He simply acknowledges that they have kept their vows. Then with bitter sarcasm he urges them to fulfill their vows! A double statement, each reinforced by an infinitive absolute communicates the sarcastic imperative in the most forceful manner. The language and tone of this statement is similar to what Jeremiah used in his confrontation with the false prophet Hananiah (28:6). This is the exasperated and disgusted retort of a debater who has said everything he knows to say and yet has failed to convince the opposition. In effect Jeremiah abandons the Judean fugitives to the consequences of their own deathly choices.

B. **Oath Regarding Idolaters (44:26):** *Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah living in the land of Egypt: I have sworn by my great name, says Yahweh, that my name shall never again be pronounced by the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt who might be accustomed to saying, As the Adonay Yahweh lives!* Therefore introduces the sentence following an indictment. The Judeans may make their vows and carry them out; but so does Yahweh. *I have sworn by my great name* indicates that there is no greater name by which to take an oath. Abandoning his sarcastic tone, Jeremiah becomes deadly serious. *But if you perform those vows, you have made your choice of deities. You have committed the ultimate rebellion. Therefore, you will experience the ultimate punishment.* Jeremiah held out two threats.
First, God will withdraw his name from the lips of his people. Yahweh no longer regarded himself as their covenant God; therefore they had lost the right of calling upon his name.543

C. Sentence against Apostates (44:27): Behold, I am watching over you for evil, and not for good; and every man of Judah who is in the land of Egypt will perish by the sword and famine until they are annihilated. God assured the remnant in Egypt that he would watch over them for evil and not for good. What a dreadful thought! As God watches over his word to fulfill it (1:12) so now he was watching over his people to see that they were punished for their apostasy. This watching is the reverse of the positive watching of 31:27. For evil and not for good is the verbal reverse of the promise of 29:11.

None of their pagan deities or religious rites will be able to divert the disaster that will befall them. All the Jews who live in the land of Egypt will die by the famine and the sword.

D. Ray of Hope (44:28):
1. A few will return (44:28a): Those who escape the sword to return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah will be few in number… Just as in v 14 of this ch, the assertion that all the Jews in Egypt would perish is here immediately qualified. A tiny remnant shall escape the general slaughter in Egypt. At some point they will return to the land of Judah; but they will be few in number. In the days of Moses God took the few Israelites in Egypt and made them many (Dt 10:22; 26:5). Because of the failings of the Judeans, the many now had become but few again, and that in the land of Egypt. Yahweh will begin to form a new Israel with the few who come back out of Egypt.

Even in this judgment-speech, grace shines through. But why does Jeremiah in this stern sermon want to mention the few individuals who will be saved? Surely this must be construed as an oblique appeal directed to each individual present. Jeremiah was pleading with them to turn to the Lord. He can offer no hope to the Egyptian community of Jews as a whole. He can, however, hold out some hope to those who might turn in faith to the Lord. That is exactly what he seems to be doing in v 28.

2. All will know (44:28b): and all the remnant of Judah who have come to the land of Egypt to sojourn will know whose word will be fulfilled, theirs or mine. Two conflicting theological positions have been articulated, theirs (vv 17-18) and mine (vv 21-23). Future events will vindicate the one argument or the other in the experience of the remnant in Egypt. Jeremiah is placing his credibility as a prophet on the line.

Pharaoh Hophra Captured
44:29-30

A. Prophetic Sign (44:29): And this will be the sign to you (oracle of Yahweh) that I am about to bring punishment upon you in this place, in order that you might know that my words will surely be fulfilled against you for misfortune. Jeremiah did not want his hearers to think that the message he had delivered originated in his own imagination. Jeremiah offered the audience a sign that would confirm the prophetic character of his dire threats.

B. Prophetic Announcement (44:30): Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies who seek his life as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, his enemy, who was

543Others think that the Jews will not be able to mention the name of the Lord because no Jews would be left alive in Egypt. Another view is that God punished their apostasy by allowing them to sink into a state of secularism that did not even think of God.
seeking his life. The sign that should convince doubters that Jeremiah was speaking the truth was this: God will shortly deliver Pharaoh Hophra into the hands of his political enemies just as he had delivered Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Yahweh will be vindicated over the queen of heaven when pharaoh meets the fate stipulated in this v.

The Greek historian Herodotus relates that Hophra was captured by Amasis, the succeeding Pharaoh, who had him strangled to death after ten years of captivity (about 560 BC).

The captivity of Hophra took place about two or three years before the invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar to which reference has already been made. Jeremiah probably did not live to see either the sign or the prophecy of the Chaldean destruction fulfilled.

Consolation for Baruch
45:1-5

Chronologically ch 45 would have fitted much better after 36:8 or at least at the conclusion of that ch. Why has it been placed in its present location? It is impossible to say precisely. If Baruch was, as has been plausibly suggested, Jeremiah’s biographer and the editor of his master’s messages, it could well be that he has placed this ch here for a definite purpose. This short oracle also serves to balance the structure of Section Five, which began with an unwarranted attack upon Baruch.

Perhaps this ch serves as Baruch’s personal signature at the end of the biographical section of Jeremiah. It is only here that Baruch reveals himself as a person. Throughout the rest of the Book of Jeremiah he is content to remain in the background and simply record the message of his master.

Background
45:1-2

A. Recipient of the Note (45:1a): The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke unto Baruch the son of Neriah… Whatever the reason for the placement of ch 45 here, it is like a quiet meadow in the midst of a tumultuous battlefield. After the rumbling of chariot wheels, the carnage of battle, the fall of cities and nations the reader is ready for something more mild. Here the focus shifts from international conflict to the problems of a single individual. God is just as concerned about the troubled mind of one of his faithful as about the course of international politics.

B. Dictation of the Note (45:1b): when he wrote these words in a book from the mouth of Jeremiah… As in ch 36, Jeremiah dictated and Baruch wrote down what he said. Whether the book was the original book of Jeremiah, or in the second and expanded edition thereof cannot be ascertained.

C. Date of the Note (45:1c): in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: Ch 45 dates back to the fourth year of Jehoiakim. The dating formula is the same as in 36:1. That was a crucial year in the political history of Judah and in the ministry of Jeremiah. It was in that year that Nebuchadnezzar was able to defeat the Assyrian-Egyptian

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544 Herodotus, 2:161, 169.
545 Some see Baruch as a code name for all those who agreed with Jeremiah that Yahweh’s purpose was being worked out through the imperial aggression of Babylon.
546 This is the third time the fourth year of Jehoiakim has been mentioned (cf. 25:1, 36:1).
coalition and assume control of the Near East. That was also the year in which the words of Jeremiah were first put into written form.

**Baruch’s Problem**

45:2-3

A. **Nature of his Burden** (45:2-3a): *Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel concerning you Baruch: (3) You have said, Woe is me now!* Woe comes from the vocabulary of lamentation. The term points to Baruch’s desperate state of mind. There is no indication as to why Baruch felt this way. But since the incident is associated with the writing of the scroll in ch 36, there is probably some relationship between Baruch’s state of mind and what he had just written. For *woe is me* see on 4:13, 31.

B. **Source of his Burden** (45:3b): *for Yahweh has added grief to my hurt.* Perhaps Baruch had become depressed as he recorded from the lips of Jeremiah that long series of charges and threats against his people. For the first time he saw the deplorable spiritual condition of the nation. The thought of that impending catastrophic destruction brought anguish to his heart even as to the heart of his master. His city, the temple and all he held dear would be swept away. His own personal hopes and aspirations would be dashed to the ground. As he contemplated these bitter prospects, his depression grew into despondency. *Grief* (*yagôn*) or *torment* is used in 8:18. For *hurt* (*mach ‘ôbh*) or *pain* see 30:12-15.

In addition to the burden that future prospects laid upon him, Baruch faced a more immediate problem after he recorded Jeremiah's scroll. He was in hiding with Jeremiah under the threat of execution by the tyrant Jehoiakim. It seemed to him that ever since he had volunteered his scribal services to Jeremiah, one heartache, disappointment and sorrow had been added to another.

C. **Weight of his Burden** (45:3b): *I am weary with my sighing. I cannot find rest.* Baruch had been complaining. He was disturbed, weary and tired. The burden of Baruch had become too great. He was utterly weary because of his own sighing. He could find no rest for his soul. Somewhere along the difficult way he had lost that quiet trust and confidence in the Lord. Baruch had to learn, as Jeremiah before him had learned, that the immediate persecution was only the beginning of his personal suffering. Between 605 and 586 BC Baruch was to suffer much as the companion and scribe of the weeping prophet.

**God’s Answer**

45:4-5

Yahweh’s answer to Baruch goes through three phases that bring a revelation of divine grief, a rebuke of ambition, and a promise of personal deliverance.

A. **Revelation of Grief** (45:4): *Thus you shall say unto him, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, that which I have built I am about to tear down, and that which I planted I am about to pull up, even the whole land.* Behold directs attention to an unexpected response. The four strong verbs of 1:10 are used again. Here the building and planting refers to Yahweh’s past actions in establishing Israel in its land. For the immediate future these positive verbs are overpowered by the negative *tear down* and *pull up*. *The whole land* probably refers to Judah, but the language may embrace the entire earth, i.e., the international political scene as experienced by the Judeans.
Psychologically viewed, v 4 is profound. To the tired and weary Baruch, God sent his messenger with a word of comfort. It is not a word of sympathy, for this would merely have added fuel to the tormenting flames of self-pity within the soul of Baruch. God does not promise this secretary immunity from the difficulties of the time. Rather God deals with the despondency of Baruch by revealing to him the depths of the divine agony. The thought of the passage may be paraphrased as follows: You, O Baruch, are experiencing the very worst form of self-pity. Well, now, consider! What I myself built I am about to tear down. What I planted, I am about to uproot. In other words, God is saying to Baruch What is your hurt compared to mine? The amazing teaching of this little ch is that God too experiences pain.

Ch 45 is an antidote to the self-pity of those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord. Perhaps if more preachers and teachers and even church secretaries like Baruch would only stop to contemplate that God knows pain, perhaps they would be able then to view their own trials and troubles in the proper perspective.

When one begins to meditate on the Scripture God is not willing for any to perish, but that all should come to repentance surely the magnitude of the divine hurt must be obvious. When the modern Baruch comes mentally to grasp the depth of divine agony over lost mankind, he will realize how trivial are the circumstances that cause him to feel discouraged.

There are many Baruchs in the Bible. Elijah sat for a time under his Juniper tree (1 Kgs 19:4); Jonah became terribly despondent over the loss of a shade-giving plant. Some of the Psalmists are in this category. Above all there is Job. What they all needed to learn is the lesson of this chapter. Their grief was more than matched by that of God.

B. Rebuke of Ambition (45:5a): And are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them, for behold, I am about to bring calamity upon all flesh (oracle of Yahweh). Having pointed out to Baruch his own genuine grief, Yahweh seems to chide this scribe. The question is really a reprimand. Given the situation in Judah, Baruch should not be seeking great things for himself.

What were the great things to which Baruch aspired? One can only guess. Did he aspire to preach the word of the Lord in the masterful style of Jeremiah? Did he anticipate that the nation would heed the cry for repentance, recognize Jeremiah for the man of God he was, and give Baruch the recognition he deserved as the right hand man of this great prophet? Did he have his sights set on some position of political power? The truth will never be known. It is sufficient to note that the ambitions of the human heart often run counter to the purposes of God.

Baruch should have been praying, Not my will but yours be done! But like so many of his kind today, this secretary wanted to pour the purposes of God into the mold of his own ambition. All wishful dreams to the contrary, calamity (evil) upon all flesh was coming. All of the citizens of Judah—perhaps the entire world—will be affected by this calamity. God’s purpose would be carried out regardless of whom it affected.

C. Promise of Deliverance (45:5b): I will give you your life as spoil wherever you go. The message for Baruch ends on a note of consolation. In the day of destruction and death, Baruch’s life will be given to him as spoil, i.e., a prize of war. This expression that occurs several times in Jeremiah probably originated in the army. Victorious soldiers customarily brought home the booty they had seized. When asked where his share of the booty was, an empty-handed returning soldier might well have replied that his life was all the spoil that he could bring away.

Baruch’s faith in Jeremiah’s message and his loyal service will not be rewarded with great riches, power and prestige. Baruch, however, will escape from the forthcoming calamities with his life. That will be his reward. Instead of continuing to gaze upon the
wreckage of his own ambitions, Baruch should rejoice in the promise that through all those
days of trouble God will spare him for the task of being the secretary of a prophet.

The fourth year of Jehoiakim marked a turning point in the life of Baruch. It was indeed the moment of
truth for him. Baruch had been brought low by the circumstances of life. He had been melted down. Now he
was being poured into a new mold. He was able to triumph over despondency and alter his ambition to
conform to the divine will. Through thick and thin he stayed close to Jeremiah during all those long years of
ridicule and abuse. In the many passages that record the events subsequent to 604 BC here is never any hint that
Baruch ever faltered again.

The language your life as spoil is also used of Ebed-melech (39:18). Seitz calls Baruch
and Ebed-melech the Joshua and Caleb of the book of Jeremiah, the two exceptions to the
general threat of death. The promise made to Baruch in 604 BC was generalized during the
siege of Jerusalem. Anyone who submitted to Babylon was to receive his life as spoil (21:9;
38:2). Those who at enormous personal risk embraced Jeremiah’s vision were promised
personal deliverance when the kingdom of Judah was destroyed. A faithful remnant will
survive the international upheaval unfolding in the Near East. The promise of the faithful
remnant builds on the hint of 44:14 that only a few will survive in Egypt to return to the land
of promise.

In key ways ch 45 mirrors ch 1 as is indicated in the chart that follows. The two chs form
an envelope for Jeremiah’s utterances concerning Judah. The phrases the whole earth and all
flesh, taken in their broadest connotation, form a bridge to the collection of foreign nation
oracles that follows.

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PART SEVEN
ORACLES CONCERNING NATIONS
Jeremiah 46:1-51:64

Introduction (46:1): The word of Yahweh that came unto Jeremiah concerning the nations (46:1). The form of this introduction matches what is found in 1:2 and 14:1. In Jeremiah’s mind, the
future of the nations was intertwined with the purposes of Yahweh. The phrase concerning the nations harks back to the commission mandate of 1:10. From beginning to end this book is concerned about Yahweh’s reign over all the nations of the world.

With the exception of the Book of Hosea, every prophetic book of the OT contains at least one
oracle concerning a foreign nation. Rather large collections of such oracles can be found in the
books of Isaiah (chs 13-23) and Ezekiel (chs 25-32) as well as here in Jeremiah (chs 46-51). The
prophets of Israel could not avoid bringing heathen nations also within the sphere of their

predictions. The vital interests of the theocracy were at stake in the standing and falling of neighboring nations. Furthermore, the prophets emphasized the universal sovereignty of the Lord. This doctrine necessitated utterances concerning the destiny of the nations.

It is probable that of all parts of the OT, the oracles concerning the foreign nations are the least frequently read. Even among OT scholars very little attention has been paid to these passages. One has only to observe in the standard commentaries the disproportionately small amount of space devoted to these oracles to realize that they have not aroused a great deal of scholarly interest.

Whatever the reasons for this neglect may be, it is nevertheless a pity if for no other reason than that among these oracles is some of the finest poetry in the prophetic literature. Occasionally beautiful messianic prophecies are embedded within these messages of doom. Furthermore, sayings of the type found in this section represent a characteristic feature prophetic preaching. They must be taken into account if one is to have a true picture of the prophetic ministry.

That there would be an international dimension to the ministry of Jeremiah is clearly indicated in his call. God had made him a prophet to the nations (1:5); he was appointed over the nations to pull up and tear down, to destroy and to rend, to build and to plant (1:10). In ch 25 Jeremiah was told to take the cup of God’s wrath and pass it among the nations of his day. They would drink from that cup, stagger and fall to their destruction. Last of all, the king of Babylon would drink and perish. The foreign nations in chs 46-51 are treated roughly in the same order in which they are treated in ch 25. In ch 27 Jeremiah confronted the ambassadors of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon with the divine demand that they capitulate to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. These passages prepare the reader for the somewhat more comprehensive treatment of foreign nations in chs 46-51.

The foreign nation oracles in the Book of Jeremiah seem to be organized in a definite pattern. Jeremiah placed first in the collection the oracles against Egypt, the great and ancient archenemy of Israel to the south. Then he placed together a number of oracles addressed to smaller nations of his day that, along with Israel, were somewhat like pawns in the struggle between the great powers. The climax of this part of the book is reached in chs 50-51 when Jeremiah announces the judgment upon Babylon, the greatest power of that time.

The foreign nation oracles come from various periods of Jeremiah’s ministry. It is not possible to assign a precise date to each oracle. Scholars are not entirely agreed as to the general chronological sequence of the oracles. The following chart indicates the approximate chronological placement of the various oracles of this section of the book.

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<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Oracle</th>
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Ch 45 spoke of the world-wide calamity in the offing. Part Seven describes the upheaval and chaos that will envelop the Near East. In this book the oracles concerning foreign nations (1) document the role of Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations (1:10); and (2) assert the sovereignty of Yahweh over the nations of the world. For God’s people these oracles have a positive purpose. They emphasize nations that do not honor God’s people stand under divine condemnation. Part Seven consist of seven oracles against nations near and far sandwiched between oracles against the two world powers of the day.

a. Southern world power (46:1-28)
SECTION ONE
SOUTHERN WORLD POWER
Jeremiah 46:1-28

Standing first in the collection of oracles against the nations are three utterances against Egypt. The Egypt oracles stand first in the collection for three reasons. First, Egypt was the foremost power in resisting mighty Babylon, Yahweh’s agent of world judgment. Second, throughout Part Six Jeremiah spoke harsh words against Egypt. Thus, placing the Egypt oracles first makes a connection between Part Seven and Part Six. Third, from the beginning of Israel’s history Egypt became a symbol for a worldly power that opposed the will of Yahweh.

First Egyptian Oracle
46:2-12

The first Egypt oracle is dated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 BC). The theme of this oracle is the Egyptian defeat at Carchemish. The author develops his theme in two graphic pictures.

A. First Picture of Defeat (46:2-6):
   1. Background (46:2):
      a. An Egyptian army (46:2a): For Egypt: Concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt... The phrase for Egypt underscores the audacity of Yahweh’s spokesman. The God of Israel dared to speak a word against the glorious, powerful and ancient kingdom of Egypt. Many of Jeremiah’s contemporaries must have viewed such an assertion as the height of absurdity.
      
      The remainder of v 2 gives chronological placement to the oracle that follows. Neco ruled Egypt 610-594 BC. The supreme objective of his foreign policy was to maintain the balance of power in the region of Syria-Palestine. The Assyrian Empire was crumbling; a new menace was arising east of the Euphrates River. In 609 BC Neco took his army forward to assist what was left of the Assyrian army to make a final stand against the Chaldeans. En route to the battle zone Neco was briefly delayed by King Josiah of Judah who attempted to stop his march northward. Josiah was mortally wounded in the battle at Megiddo, and Judah passed briefly under the control of Neco.
      
      b. A Syrian river-crossing (46:2b): who was beside the river Euphrates at Carchemish... Neco chose Carchemish as the location for a fortress to defend against a Chaldean assault across the Euphrates River. The town is northeast of Aleppo, near the preset-day Syrian village of Jerablus on the Turkish frontier.550
      
      c. A Chaldean conqueror (46:2c): that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, smote... The fortification of Carchemish was viewed in Babylon as a threat. Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar to deal with Neco. King of Babylon is proleptic. Nebuchadnezzar was crown prince at the time, but became king shortly after the battle. At Carchemish the Chaldeans inflicted a crushing defeat upon Neco.
      
      d. A crucial date (46:2d): in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah. Jeremiah ties the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC to Judean chronology by

550 The ruins of Carchemish are on the Turkish side of the border.
identifying the fourth year of Jehoiakim as the year of the battle. It is important to note that v 2 dates the battle of Carchemish, not the oracle that follows. The poetic oracle in vv 3-12 may have been composed at any time during the early ministry of Jeremiah. It probably was not written until a few months before the decisive showdown at Carchemish. In any case, Carchemish demonstrated the vulnerabilities of Egypt and established her arrogant claims to splendor and greatness as fraudulent.

2. Egyptian preparations (46:3-4):
   a. Infantry preparation (46:3): Prepare the buckler and shield! Draw near for battle! The first poetic description of the Egyptian defeat at Carchemish begins with a graphic picture of the preparations in the Egyptian camp on the eve of the great battle.\(^{551}\) One can feel the excitement here as the Egyptian officers bark seven crisp commands to their men. The buckler (tsinnāh) covered the entire body and was carried by the heavy-armed infantry; the shield (māgēn) was the small round shield carried by the light infantry.\(^{552}\)
   b. Chariotry preparation (46:4a): Harness the horses! Mount, O horsemen! The deadly chariots that were such an important part of the ancient army of Egypt were to be made ready for action. The verb mount (r. 'lh) can also mean to go up into battle. Horsemen (pārāśim) can also mean horses. The term might refer to cavalry were it not for the fact that the Egyptian army did not utilize cavalry to any great extent.\(^{553}\)
   c. Final preparation (46:4b, c, d): Three more commands to the infantry are issued.
      (1) Stand forth in your helmets! (46:4b): First, they are told to stand forth (r. ytsb) or form up. They are to stand in their ranks to await the command to charge forward. They are to stand forth in their helmets. Since helmets were not worn except when actually in battle, this command is equivalent to an order to engage the enemy. A helmet consisted of a leather cap with long flaps to cover the cheek and ears.
      (2) Polish your spears! (46:4c): The verb normally means polish. Perhaps lances were polished to frighten the enemy. But it is hard to imagine soldiers polishing their weapons while formed in battle ranks ready to charge. So the verb in this context may have a technical military meaning. Perhaps metal part of spears was encased when the army was on the march. Before battle the spear was removed from its case to gleam in the sunlight. The spear (rōmach) was a lance with a long shaft designed for thrusting rather than hurling. Egyptian pictures and figurines represent the lance to be about the same height as the soldier or a bit longer.
      (3) Put on armor! (46:4d): The last command orders the troops to put on their armor. This armor (siryōn) or coat of mail (brigantines in KJV) consisted of a tunic that extended to the waist. It was covered with small pieces of metal joined together like fish scales.

Confident of victory, the mighty army of Egypt rushed forward. The battle that would decide the fate of the world and the destiny of nations had been launched.

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\(^{551}\) Others think that the Chaldeans are being urged to press the attack in view of the retreat of the Egyptians.

\(^{552}\) The relative size of the two pieces of equipment is established by 1 Kgs 10:16-17 and 2 Chr 9:15-16. It took twice as much gold for Solomon to make a ceremonial buckler as it did to make a shield.

\(^{553}\) For this reason Holiday (Her, 2:319) proposes that the orders are given to non-existent cavalry so as to expose the battle weakness of the Egyptians.
3. **Egyptian flight (46:5-6):**
   a. **Astonishment (46:5):** Why have I seen it? They are dismayed, turning backward and their mighty men are beaten down; they have fled headlong and not turned; terror is on every side… The picture suddenly changes. The prophet himself is astonished at what he sees and expresses his amazement. How can it be that such a well-trained and disciplined army could be thrown into confusion and flight? It is beyond comprehension that such a magnificent army could be thoroughly defeated. Jeremiah uses his favorite expression—fear was round about—to describe the terror that plunged those hardened soldiers into flight.
   b. **Explanation (46:5b):** (oracle of Yahweh). Why would the mighty Egyptian army fall at Carchemish? The answer is found in the words oracle of the Lord. Egypt will meet with the defeat at Carchemish because God had so decreed it. It is his judgment against Egypt.
   c. **Humiliation (46:6):** The swift cannot flee and the mighty one cannot escape. In the north by the river Euphrates they have stumbled, they have fallen. Even the most swift and mighty among them will not be able to reach their homeland. They will stumble in exhaustion, stumble over the slain, stumble over one another in their haste to flee the scene of battle. They will fall in a foreign land, in the north, by the river Euphrates.

B. **Second Picture of Defeat (46:7-12):**
   1. **Pride before the battle (46:7-9):**
      a. **Description (46:7-8a):** Who is this that goes up like the Nile, whose waters toss themselves like the rivers? (8) Egypt goes up like the Nile, and his waters toss themselves like the rivers. Names of the attackers and those in retreat have been withheld in this oracle. Here a question provides a hint, and the subsequent v a concrete identification.
         Jeremiah shows awareness of the natural history of Egypt. He knew of the annual inundation of the Nile, an inundation that also involved the retreat of the river to its banks. Jeremiah describes the armies of Pharaoh Neco rolling toward Carchemish like the mighty Nile in flood time. The rivers are the arms and canals of the Nile in the Delta region. In these vivid lines one can almost hear the roaring, moving and churning of the rampaging river.
      b. **Declaration (46:8b):** And he says, I will go up, I will cover the land, I will destroy a city and its inhabitants. The pride and confidence of Pharaoh is revealed in his boast. Cover the land is a boast about the number of his troops. The proud Egyptians thought themselves capable of world domination. Ezekiel uses this terminology to describe a troop covering the land like a cloud (Ezek 38:9, 16). A city—any fortified city—will not be able to resist.
      c. **Exhortation (46:9):**
         (1) **To chariotry (46:9a):** Go up, O horses! Rage O chariots! By means of a sarcastic imperative, Jeremiah urged the hosts of Egypt to hasten onward to their destination.$^{554}$ Go up (r. 'lh) is ambiguous. It can be to rear up, or to go up into battle. In v 4 the horses are to be bound or harnessed; here they are to go up. The same verb is used of the horses/horsemen in v 4. The reference is probably to chariot horses. Rage (r. hll) could mean to rage into battle, or run wild.

$^{554}$Actually it is impossible to determine whether the command to the troops is given by Pharaoh, or mockingly by the prophet. The KJV by translating the verbs come up suggests that it is the prophet who is summoning the troops of Egypt. The ASV translation go up is preferable.
(2) To infantry (46:9b): *Let the mighty men go out, Cush and Put who handle the shield, the Ludim who string the bow.* Go out (r. yts’) also is ambiguous. It could probably mean to go out into battle; but it could also mean escape the disaster. *Cush, Put and the Ludim*⁵⁵⁵ refer to Pharaoh’s mercenary troops. *Cush* is the area that today is called southern Sudan. *Put* cannot be located with precision. *The Ludim* were from Lud (Lydia) in Asia Minor. From the days of Pharaoh Psammetichus (663-610 BC), these mercenaries formed the major part of the Egyptian army. *Handle or seize the shield* refers to infantry. *String the bow* (lit., those who tread the bow) refers to archers.

Who could withstand such a vast and heavily armed host? No wonder Pharaoh made his boast. But God alone decrees what nation will rule his world, and God had chosen Nebuchadnezzar. Pharaoh will meet his doom at Carchemish!

2. Significance of the battle (46:10): With this v the oracle begins to describe the results of the battle. Instead of victory for Egypt or for Babylon, Carchemish will be a day of victory for Yahweh. Carchemish is not merely a showdown between the king of the south and the king of the north; it is vindication for Yahweh the God of Israel.

a. Yahweh’s day (46:10a): *For that day belongs to Adonay Yahweh of Hosts...* The phrase the day of Yahweh (and variations thereof) designates a day that God has reserved for the punishment of his adversaries and the deliverance of his people. Every day of Yahweh throughout history was a preview of that great and notable day of Yahweh that will be the final conclusive battle in the age-long struggle between righteousness and evil. The title Adonay stresses Yahweh’s absolute sovereignty. Yahweh of Hosts is a military title depicting Yahweh as the commander of powerful armies.

b. Vengeance day (46:10b): *a day of vengeance to take vengeance upon his adversaries...* At Carchemish God will take vengeance on his adversaries. The Egyptians are not God’s adversaries because of the unmerciful oppression to which they had subjected the Israelites centuries earlier. That debt had long since been settled when God brought the terrific plague-judgments upon the land of Egypt. But the Egyptians had continued to show their hostility toward the people of God in more recent days. Pharaoh had harbored the enemies of God’s anointed king of Israel (1 Kgs 11:14ff.); he had warred against Jerusalem (1 Kgs 14:25ff.); he had come to the aid of the tottering Assyrian Empire that had for so many years afflicted the people of God; he had slain righteous King Josiah at the pass of Megiddo and deported young Jehoahaz. Even after Carchemish Pharaoh would goad tiny Judah into those suicidal rebellions against Babylon that finally brought about the doom of that country. Thus there is good reason to call Egypt the adversary of God. It is Yahweh, not Nebuchadnezzar, who is the real enemy of Egypt.

c. Sacrifice day (46:10b): *and the sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of blood; for Yahweh of Hosts has a sacrifice in the land of the north at the river Euphrates.* The concept of the devouring sword appears already in 2:30. The verbs be sated (r. sb’) and drink its fill (r rvh) appear in tandem in 31:14 in a positive sense. The concept of the punishment of a nation being a sacrifice goes back to Zephaniah (Zeph 1:7). By describing the defeat at Carchemish as a bloody sacrifice, Jeremiah indicated the religious significance of the battle. In Jeremiah’s view,

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⁵⁵⁵Exact locations of Put and Lud are not known. It is thought that Put is on the east coast of Africa near Egypt and that Lud was west of Egypt. Cf. Bright, *HI*, 306.
Yahweh “stalks the map of the Near East.” Sooner or later all nations must come to terms with him.  

3. Result of the battle (46:11-12):
   a. An incurable wound (46:11): The Egyptian defeat at Carchemish is a national wound for which there is no known cure.
      (1) Sarcasm imperative (46:11a): *Go up to Gilead and take balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt.* Medical sciences advanced further in Egypt than in any other country of antiquity. But search as they may, they would not be able to find any medicine that would heal Egypt of the mortal wound received at Carchemish. Even the famed *balm of Gilead* would avail nothing (cf. 8:22; Gn 37:25). *Virgin daughter* depicts Egypt as previously unconquered. In view of the smashing defeat at Carchemish the title is used sarcastically. The once pampered and delicate daughter of Egypt has been battered and bruised.
      (2) Blunt diagnosis (46:11b): *For naught you have multiplied medicines. You shall not recover.* The balm of Gilead cannot cure Egypt’s wound, and neither can any combination of medicines that the nation can put together. The delicate virgin daughter of Egypt is doomed to death as a nation.
   b. Agonizing cry (46:12a): *Nations have heard of your shame; your cry fills the earth…* What a sad day that will be for Pharaoh. Defeat and confusion follow the battle. The cry of the retreating soldiers can be heard throughout the land.
   c. Humiliating defeat (46:12b): *for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty man; together the two of them shall fall.* In their haste to escape from the battlefield, the mighty men of the Egyptian army stumble over one another. The official Babylonian account of the battle reveals how accurately Jeremiah had foreseen what would transpire there. Concerning Nebuchadnezzar, the great prince of Babylon, the scribes wrote:
      He crossed the river (to go) against the Egyptian army that was situated in Carchemish and... they fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He defeated them in the district of Hamath, so that not a single man escaped to his own country.  

Second Egypt Oracle
46:13-24

A. Introduction (46:13): *The word that Yahweh spoke unto Jeremiah concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar and his smiting of the land of Egypt.* The second poem concerning Egypt points to an invasion of that land by Nebuchadnezzar. It is impossible to ascertain the date of this oracle. It could be assigned to almost any period subsequent to Carchemish and prior to the Babylonian invasion of Egypt in 568-567 BC. The general tone of the prophecy seems to point to a period somewhat later than the preceding oracle describes. This oracle seems to reflect a more intimate acquaintance with the land of Egypt (see vv 14, 25). Probably, therefore, this oracle should be assigned to the period of the prophet’s sojourn in Egypt.

B. Certainty of Invasion (46:14-17): Egypt’s invader is not named in the first movement of the poem, but clearly Babylon is in view.

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556 Brueggemann, CJ, 429.
557 Gilead lies east of the Jordan between the Arnon and Yarmuk rivers.
558 Isaiah referred to Sidon (23:12) and Babylon (47:1) as a *virgin daughter.* Jeremiah earlier used the expression for my people (14:17). See also Lam 1:15; 2:13.
559 DOTT, 78.
1. **Egypt needs to prepare (46:14):**
   a. **Areas alerted (46:14a): Declare in Egypt and publish in Migdol, Memphis and Tahpanhes.** The poem opens with Jeremiah urging that an alarm be sounded in the border towns of Egypt that they might prepare to meet the foe. To these cities the Jews had fled after the death of Gedaliah (cf. 44:1ff). Jeremiah previously had warned these Jews of the coming invasion. He had predicted that they would perish in the slaughter. **Memphis (Noph) and Tahpanhes** were mentioned together in 2:16 as symbols for the entire nation of Egypt. For Migdol see 44:1.
   b. **Content of the alert (46:14b): Say: Stand forth and prepare yourself; for a sword has devoured round about you.** The commands are sarcastic imperatives that say, in effect, that resistance is futile. *Stand forth* was used in v 4. *Prepare yourself* (r. *kun*) means something like *stand ready*, or *brace yourself*. The *sword* is military power of the Babylonians. That sword has consumed surrounding nations. From that sword Egypt is not exempt.

2. **Egypt’s gods cannot stand (46:15):**
   a. **A mocking question (46:15a): Why has your strong one been swept away, your bull not stand?** Strong one is a reference to Apis, the sacred bull, venerated in Memphis from the earliest times. The question format implies mockery and perhaps shock. Apis will be swept away or thrust down (ASV margin) before invading armies. The image of the mighty Apis is carried from the field of battle in shame. Egypt’s army has been hopelessly defeated.
   b. **A blunt explanation (46:15b): Because Yahweh did drive him out.** Jeremiah answers his own question. The mighty one of Egypt (Apis) cannot stand before the armies of the Mighty One of Israel! When the Lord brings Nebuchadnezzar against Egypt he will demonstrate his superiority to the gods of Egypt. The verb *drive out* (r. *hdp*) is used of cattle shoving one another (Ezek 34:11). In a head to head shoving match Yahweh is stronger than the bull Apis!

3. **Egypt’s troops flee (46:16):**
   a. **A battle scene (46:16a): He made many to stumble, yes, they fell upon each other.** Not only does Yahweh thrust down Apis, he causes many of the soldiers of Egypt to fall in battle. The Egyptian troops are thrown into confusion. They stumble over one another in their haste to flee the scene of battle. The word pair *stumble/fall* is used for the third time in the Egypt material (cf. vv 6, 12).
   b. **A desertion scene (46:16b): And they said, Come let us flee unto our people, unto the land of our birth because of the sword of the oppressor.** Jeremiah hears the mercenaries urging one another to return to their native lands. Being devoid of patriotic feeling, it is natural that these hired soldiers would flee from the doomed country. In their respective countries these mercenaries report the ruin of Egypt.

4. **Egypt’s king ridiculed (46:17):**
   a. **Pharaoh a harmless noise (46:17a): They cried there, Pharaoh king of Egypt is a noise.** In the safety of their own lands, the former mercenaries heap ridicule upon

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560Ezekiel also predicted conflict in Tahpanhes (Ezek 30:18). But Ezekiel seems to be speaking of the Egyptian campaign of the Persian king Cambyses II who conquered Egypt in 525 BC.
562The Hebrew noun is actually plural, but at least three other grammatical features of the v point to a singular reading. Sixty-five Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint and Vulgate translations also reflect a singular reading of the noun. Instead of *valiant men (KJV)* or *strong ones (ASV)* probably the translation should be singular.
563Just as the Lord is called the *Mighty One of Jacob* or the *Mighty One of Israel* (Gn 49:24; Isa 1:24; 49:26 etc.), so in Egypt Apis was called the mighty or strong one.
564Others think the Egyptians are urging as a strategy of last resort retreat to fortress Egypt.
Pharaoh is nothing but a noisy braggart who makes big boasts and promises but cannot make them good. Noise means something like loudmouth.

b. Pharaoh did not discern the times (46:17b): He has caused the appointed time to pass by. Some take this expression to mean that Pharaoh has let his hour of opportunity go by, i.e., he makes elaborate preparations, but never capitalizes upon the opportunity. The grace period was over.

A better view is that every nation has its appointed time for glory and power. That appointed time for Egypt was passed. With this interpretation Paul agrees when he says that God has appointed the times and seasons of the nations (Acts 17:26). Egypt’s appointed time had come to an end.

B. Pictures of Invasion (46:18-24): The second stanza of the poem emphasizes the plight of Egypt by means of several figures.

1. Tabor and Carmel (46:18-19):
   a. Coming of the invader is certain (46:18): As I live (oracle of the king, Yahweh of Hosts is his name) that like Tabor among the mountains and Carmel in the sea he shall come. The same oath form (as I live) was used in 22:24. Only here does Yahweh actually appear in this section of the poem. Yahweh swears that Nebuchadnezzar will come to Egypt. No one will be able to withstand him, for he is the appointed instrument of the Lord. As surely as Mount Tabor and Mount Carmel tower over the surrounding landscape in Palestine, so Nebuchadnezzar will tower over Egypt in splendor. Tabor is an isolated prominence at the eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel. Carmel is a range of hills that juts out into the Mediterranean Sea at the western end of the same valley.
   b. Desolation of Memphis certain (46:19):
      (1) Exhortation (46:19a): Prepare for yourself baggage of exile, O inhabitant, daughter of Egypt… In 10:17 Judah is personified as a young woman preparing for exile. Similar language is used here of Egypt. In view of the certainty of the coming invasion, Jeremiah urged the Egyptians to prepare themselves for captivity. The phrase baggage of exile, i.e., of one going into exile, is used three times in Ezekiel (12:3, 4, 7). The daughter of Egypt is addressed as inhabitant, a term that here means the enthroned queen (cf. 21:13).
      (2) Explanation (46:19b): for Memphis shall be a desolation, burned without inhabitant. Preparation for exile is necessary because the Egyptian capital Memphis (Noph) will be laid waste.
2. Heifer and the gad fly (46:20): A very beautiful heifer is Egypt. A gadfly from the north has come against her. The god of Egypt may be the bull Apis; but the nation itself is designed as a beautiful heifer. Egypt had hitherto enjoyed wealth and luxury. Like a choice heifer she is well-fed, sleek and beautiful. This beautiful animal suddenly finds herself pained and fleeing from the sting of a tiny gadfly from the north. The picture is intended to describe the weakness of Egypt in the face of her new enemy (Babylon) to the north.

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565Another view is that Pharaoh has passed the time appointed in which the Lord commanded him to surrender to Babylon (cf. 25:14-19). Still another view is that Pharaoh had let the time elapse within which he was called upon by God to reform.

566The masculine form of the same participle appears in Amos 1:5, 8 to refer to the king of certain cities.

567The word rendered in the KJV and ASV destruction occurs only here. It comes from a root which means to pinch or sting. Commentators are agreed in suggesting the translation gadfly. This translation is found in the margin of the ASV.
a. Picture (46:21a): Also her hirelings in the midst of her are like calves of the stall; but they also have turned and fled together not standing fast… The mercenaries of Egypt are likened to fatted bullocks (KJV) or more precisely calves of the stall (ASV). These hirelings have no taste for real war. They have gotten all they could out of Egypt. They have become fat and prosperous in the process. But now they read the handwriting on the wall. Hastily they flee to their native lands.
b. Explanation (46:21b): for the day of their destruction has come upon them, the time of their visitation. Egypt was facing the day of accountability, the time of calamity and divine visitation. The implication is that there is such a day for all nations.

a. Retreating serpent (46:22a): Her voice is like a serpent going away… The ancient power of Egypt that Ezekiel once compared to a crocodile has become nothing but a serpent hissing with impotent rage. As its habitat is destroyed the serpent Egypt can only emit a hiss of defiance as she slithers towards her hole.
b. Advancing woodsmen (46:22b): for they go with an army. With axes they come against her like those who hew wood. An army of ax men was coming against Egypt. This is a figure for the Chaldeans.
c. Deforestation (46:23a): They shall cut down her forest (oracle of Yahweh) since it is impenetrable… The woodsmen are the will unmercifully demolish what belongs to Egypt as the ax men clearing a forest. Her forest may refer to the pride of Egypt (cf. Isa 10:33f), public buildings that were paneled with wood (cf. Jer 21:14), or the soldiers of the Egyptian army

4. Swarming locusts (46:23b): for they are more than locust and are innumerable. The fourth picture is that of a great swarm of locust. Innumerable is lit., cannot be searched. In Joel 1:4 four stages of a locust’s existence are represented by four distinct Hebrew words. The word used here seems to represent the second stage in the development of the locust. The famous locust plague of Exodus may have been in the mind of Jeremiah as he penned this description of the forthcoming Chaldean invasion. Plagues of locust are not uncommon in this region of the world.

C. Plain Prediction of Invasion (46:24): In the closing v of the stanza, the prophet drops his figures of speech and becomes much more precise in his predictions.

1. Egypt humiliated (46:24a): The daughter of Egypt is put to shame… On the daughter of Egypt see v 11. Proud Egypt is put to shame, i.e., will be humbled.
2. Egypt conquered (46:24b): she is given into the hand of the people of the north. Egypt will be completely humiliated by being given into the hands of the people from the north, i.e., the Babylonians.

Third Egypt Oracle
46:25-26

A. Attack on Egyptian Religion (46:25): Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel has said: I am about to punish Amon of No, Pharaoh, Egypt, her gods, and her kings; even Pharaoh and those who trust in him. Amon (the sun god) for centuries was the chief god of Egypt; No is the biblical name for Thebes, one of the famous cities of the land. Thebes was located some 450 miles south of modern Cairo in what is called Upper Egypt. Beginning about 2100 BC

568Ezek 29:3; 32:2.
569Some think the reference is to the forest of the preceding figure.
the city served as the seat of the Pharaohs. Thebes reached the height of its power between 1500 and 1000 BC when it was the wealthiest and most famous city in the world. The Egyptians called the place No-Amon, *The Town of Amon*. The greatest collection of monuments and ruins in the world is to be found at ancient Thebes.

The ruins are grouped in three major areas. At the modern city of Luxor is the magnificent temple of Amenhotep III. A mile-and-a-half northeast of Luxor at Karnak, are the remains of the majestic temple of Amon and several smaller temples. Across the Nile from Luxor and Karnak lies the Necropolis, or royal cemetery where the temples and tombs of former rulers are located.

Among the greatest achievements of mankind are the temples of Egypt, and the greatest of all Egyptian temples is that of Amon at Karnak. It is the largest temple ever erected by man and, until recent times, the largest columned building ever constructed. Some of the columns in this temple rise to a height of sixty-nine feet and are thirty-four feet in circumference. It is said that 125 men can stand on the top of each capital of these huge columns.

The history of Thebes from the time of Jeremiah to the third Christian century is a succession of attacks by foreigners and insurrections by local inhabitants. First came Nebuchadnezzar (568-567 BC). He surely must have conquered Thebes, though the evidence falls short of conclusive proof. Then came Cambyses II (525 BC) who plundered Thebes, burned the famous temples, and ravaged the city. Thebes never recovered her former prominence.

An insurrection at Thebes was ruthlessly quelled by the Persians in 335 BC Alexander the Great next conquered Egypt (332 BC). In the first pre-Christian century Ptolemy IX completely destroyed Thebes in order to quell an uprising. The prophecy of Ezek 30:16, *Thebes shall be breached and its walls broken down* has been literally fulfilled. No city walls are to be seen at the ancient site. Only gateways and pylons mark the places where walls once stood.

Amon and the other gods of Egypt will be punished in the sense of being discredited when the Lord brings his instrument of judgment upon the land. Pharaoh and the kings or officials of royal blood will also taste of the wrath of the Lord along with all the foolish people who put their trust in Pharaoh. The Jews who fled to Egypt after the death of Gedaliah would be in the latter category.

**B. Attack by Nebuchadnezzar (46:26a): And I will deliver them into the power of those who seek their life, even into the power of Nebuchadnezzar and his servants.** That there will be no doubt as to the identity of Egypt’s conqueror, Jeremiah specifically names him in v 26. He will be none other than Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. Critics have tried to discredit the prophecy by arguing that Nebuchadnezzar never actually conquered Egypt. History, however, does record a successful Chaldean invasion of that land.

**C. Prediction of Restoration (46:26b): Afterwards it shall be inhabited as in olden days (oracle of Yahweh).** At the conclusion of the Egypt oracle Jeremiah holds out brighter prospects for the Egyptians. Ezekiel predicted that after forty years of desolation, Egyptians would be restored to their land; but Egypt would then be *the basest of kingdoms* (Ezek 29:12ff). Does Jeremiah have in mind here the future political prospects of Egypt as did Ezekiel? This interpretation is possible. But Laetsch has offered a more spiritual interpretation of this sentence.

Laetsch points out that *afterwards* in these oracles against the nations (e.g., 49:6) is equivalent to the phrase *the latter days*. In the latter days God will bring back the captivity (i.e., reverse the fortunes) of Moab and Elam. If the term *the latter days* refers to the messianic age as it most certainly does, then the term *afterward* should also have messianic implications.

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570 The forty years of Ezek 29:12 has also been taken to refer to the period of Persian occupation of Egypt (570-530 BC). Keil regards the forty years as symbolically “denoting a period appointed by God for punishment and penitence.”

This being the case, the reference to the restoration of Egypt may point to the conversion of Egypt to the Christian faith. Egypt will be inhabited as in days of old. During the patriarchal and unmilitary days of old, Egypt provided a peaceful and happy home for the teeming masses that settled in the fertile Nile valley. So when Egypt in the future, in the latter days, hears the gospel of Christ, the inhabitants will know a peace that will exceed even that of the days of old. Students of church history will recall that Egypt for centuries was a stronghold of the Christian faith.

Promise to Israel
46:27-28

Jeremiah cannot think of the defeat of Egypt without at the same time contemplating the salvation of Israel. The prophet here quotes two vv from an earlier passage (30:10-11).

A. Delivered from Captivity (46:27a):
   1. Exhortation (46:27a): But as for you, O my servant Jacob, do not fear! Do not be confounded, O Israel… Just as Egypt’s troubles are to be but temporary, so also would be the troubles of Israel. To those Israelites who are in captivity in foreign lands, Jeremiah directs this word of encouragement.
   2. Explanation (46:27b): for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity… God will save Israel from afar, i.e., he will bring them back to the Promised Land.

B. Secure in their Own Land (46:27b): and Jacob shall return and be undisturbed and at ease with none to make him tremble. Once restored to Palestine, Jacob will enjoy peace and tranquility. No foreign power would again make him afraid.

C. Punishment for Captors (46:28a):
   1. Exhortation (46:28a): As for you, do not fear, O my servant Jacob (oracle of Yahweh)… Fear not is repeated for emphasis.
   2. Explanation (46:28b): for I am with you! Surely I will make a full end of all the nations to which I have driven you… Those nations that were responsible for taking the people of God captive would be utterly destroyed.

D. Corrected but not Destroyed (46:28c): but I will not make a full end of you. I will correct you in measure; yet I will not leave you wholly unpunished. The destruction of Jerusalem and exile of the Judeans did bring to an end the monarchy phase of Israel’s history. But God still had plans for the remnant of his people, those who were true believers. While the captivity is for Jacob a divine punishment, it is a measured punishment designed for correction and not destruction. What a comfort it is to know that even in the darkest days God has his hand upon his children. In the most difficult circumstances, God’s people can manifest courage and faith because they are fortified by the promises of their God.

SECTION TWO
NEAR NEIGHBORS
47:1-49:22

Four neighboring nations are addressed in this section, one on the west of Judah, the other three on the east.
A. Introduction (47:1):
   1. Revelation (47:1a): *The word of Yahweh that came unto Jeremiah concerning the Philistines...* Again the prophet to the nations speaks forth Yahweh’s word concerning the nations. The Philistines lived in the lowlands and coastal plains west of Jerusalem. These people were enemies of Israel throughout OT history, but especially during the period of the Judges and early monarchy.
   2. Chronology (47:1b): *before Pharaoh smote Gaza.* Unfortunately for the modern student of the book, the prophet did not identify the particular Pharaoh who conquered Gaza. Since Pharaoh Hophra (588-569 BC) made an expedition as far north as Sidon during his reign, he has been nominated as the mysterious Pharaoh of Jer 47:1. But in view of the fact that Jeremiah is still talking about the enemy from the north rather than of the Chaldeans or Nebuchadnezzar it seems probable that the oracle comes from the earliest period of the prophet’s ministry.
      In the main, Jeremiah used the phrase *enemy from the north* in his messages prior to the battle of Carchemish. Probably then it was Pharaoh Neco who captured Gaza some time before the battle of Carchemish. Perhaps evidence for this conquest will be forthcoming from the new materials that are constantly coming to light concerning the relations between the Pharaohs and Palestine.
      The exact location of ancient Gaza is uncertain.

B. Overflowing Stream (47:2-4):
   1. Comes from the north (47:2):
      a. Metaphor (47:2):
         (1) Rise of the waters (47:2a): *Thus says Yahweh: Behold, waters are rising from the north and they will become an overflowing stream.* Borrowing a figure used earlier by Isaiah (Isa 8:7), Jeremiah describes the conqueror of the Philistines as an overflowing flood. The prophet sees the waters slowly rising in the north. Clearly the reference is to Babylon.
         (2) Devastation of the waters (47:2b): *They will overflow the land and all in it, the city and its inhabitants.* Jeremiah sees the waters gradually swelling, overflowing its banks, and then sweeping southward. Like a torrential stream that carries ruin and destruction along its course, this mighty river will overflow all the land of the Philistus. Fortified cities as well as open country will be covered by this flood. For the language referring to land and city see on 8:16.
         (3) Results of the rising waters (47:2c): *Mankind will cry out, and all inhabitants of the land wail.* Jeremiah can hear the shrieks, screams and howls of despair throughout the land of the Philistines as the waters of the metaphorical flood begin to rise. The verb pair *cry out* (e. z’q) and *wail* (r. yll) is used together in 25:34.
      b. A terrifying host (47:3):
         (1) Sound of war horses (47:3a): *At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his mighty ones...* The figure of the overflowing stream is now interpreted as the

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^372Some scholars feel there is a reference to the capture of Gaza by Pharaoh Neco in Herodotus 2:159. The evidence, however, is far from conclusive.
onslaught of a savage army. The mighty ones are the horses of cavalry or chariotry.

(2) Sound of chariots (47:3b): from the shaking of his chariots and the noise of his wheels… Mingled with the sounds of prancing steeds are the sounds of the rumbling chariots and grinding wheels of the Chaldean forces. Chariot wheels in this period were nearly the height of a man.

(3) Result of fear (47:3c): fathers will not turn back unto children because of feebleness of hands. Earlier Jeremiah depicted a doe abandoning her young in the time of drought (14:5). But here fathers are so terrified that they abandon their wives and children to the onrushing enemy. Feebleness of hands indicates a paralyzing fear that prevents a person from offering any resistance.

c. A devastating judgment (47:4):

(1) Day of destruction (47:4a): The day comes to destroy all Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every remaining helper… The day is an abbreviation for the day of Yahweh, the day when the interests of Yahweh are vindicated at the expense of those who have ignored or opposed him. For the first time in this poem the victims of the disaster are named. Ruin has come to Philistia. No Philistine will be able to go to the aid of Tyre and Sidon. Those cities as well will taste the wrath of the invincible conqueror.

(2) The destroyer (47:4b): for Yahweh is about to destroy the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Caphtor. Those who inhabited Philistia in the days of Jeremiah are only the remnant of the original invaders from Caphtor, the island of Crete. The Philistines already had suffered greatly in wars with Egypt and Assyria. Now the remnant of that once proud people will again suffer judgment at the hands of the God of Israel.

C. Devouring Sword (47:5-7): In the second stanza of the poem, the figure changes from an overflowing stream to a devouring sword.

1. Philistine mourning (47:5): Baldness is come upon Gaza. Ashkelon is made silent, the remnant of their valley. How long will you cut yourself? The sword of Yahweh creates havoc in Philistia. Gaza and Ashkelon—two of the principal cities of the land—suffer immeasurably. Baldness and the cutting of the flesh mentioned in v 5 are both signs of deep mourning (cf. 16:6). Ashkelon is made silent by having its population devastated. While some vent their sorrow vocally, others withdraw into a silent world of their own making. The question format appears to be mocking. For Gaza, see v 1. The site of Ashkelon on the Mediterranean coast has been identified.

2. Yahweh’s sword (47:6-7):

a. Question (47:6a): Alas! O sword of Yahweh, how long will you not be quiet? The questioner is not identified. The question is an oblique protest over the destruction of the Philistines announced in the previous vv. The sword of Yahweh was previously mentioned in 12:12.

b. Appeal (47:6b): Put yourself into your scabbard! Rest! Be silent! The question is followed by an appeal addressed to the sword. Does this question and appeal come from the prophet or from the Philistines? Some commentators feel that this is a cry for mercy on the part of the Philistines. Since no sign of sincere sorrow for their sin is manifested, the prophet, as God’s spokesman, must reject their plea in the following v.

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573 Ezek 26:1-21 and 27:1-36 describes at length the humiliation of the two proud commercial cities of Phoenicia.

574 Self-mutilation was also the means by which the heathen tried to arouse the pity of the gods.
This interpretation may well be correct; but it is certainly not necessary. It may have been Jeremiah himself who, seeing in his mind’s eye the devastation and destruction of Philistia, cried out for the sword of God’s wrath to be returned to its scabbard.

3. Response (47:7): How can you be quiet when Yahweh has commissioned you against Ashkelon and the seashore, there has he appointed it. After further reflection and possible divine revelation, Jeremiah realized that the sword of Yahweh cannot be sheathed until its work of judgment is finished. The righteous wrath of God must be poured out upon Ashkelon and the whole seashore, all of Philistia. When Almighty God brandishes his sword of wrath there is no stopping until the work is complete. For the fourth time in this oracle the emphasis is on the involvement of Yahweh in the destruction of Philistia.

This brief oracle does not reveal the reason for the divine wrath against Philistia. Certainly the Philistines had been bitter enemies of the people of God from the time of the judges. This alone would be reason enough for the awful destruction that is here depicted. But in addition to this, Jeremiah emphasized again and again that the nations that refused to submit to the yoke of Babylon would have to drink of the cup of God’s wrath.575

Oracle against Moab
48:1-47

The Moabites occupied the region east of the Dead Sea and, for the most part, south of the river Arnon. The Arnon flows through a steep, twisting gorge in the mountains of Moab. It was of great strategic importance in antiquity. In times of political decline the kingdom of Moab shrank to the area on the southern side of the river. In more vigorous periods, the Moab expanded northward beyond the river.

The Israelites first came into contact with the Moabites at the end of the period of wilderness wandering. At that time Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse Israel (Nm 22-24). This was the beginning of a long history of enmity between the two nations.576 The Moabite Stone, as well as the Bible, reflects the hostility between the Israelites and the Moabites.577

Concerning Moab: Thus says Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel (48:1a): Jeremiah’s oracle against Moab578 is unique in at least three respects. First, the Moab oracle is by far the longest oracle addressed to any of the smaller neighbors of Israel.

Second, the Moab oracle contains a multitude of place names. Certainly Jeremiah must have had an intimate acquaintance with the geography of Moab. It is this aspect of the oracle that makes it difficult to interpret.

Third, the Moab oracle is unique because of its similarities to other portions of Scripture. The Holy Spirit directed Jeremiah to gather, rearrange, and reaffirm the utterances made concerning

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575 Oracles threatening ruination of Philistia are found in Amos 1:6-8; Isa 14:29-31; Zeph 2:4-7; Ezek 25:15-17 and finally in Zech 9:5-7. The latter passage adds to the threat of destruction a note of hope that Philistines would share in the glory of the messianic kingdom. This promise was fulfilled when Philistia heard the gospel proclaimed and many of that region became Christians (Acts 8:40; 9:33-43).

576 See Judg 3:12-30; 1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:2; 2 Kgs 3:4-6; 3:6-27; 2 Chr 20:1ff; 2 Kgs 13:20. Only briefly was this hostility interrupted, as for example when Elemelech and later David took refuge in Moab (Ruth 1:1f; 1 Sam 22:3-4).

577 This inscription tells how Mesha, king of Moab, was able to recapture Israel territory north of the river Arnon.

578 Prior to the time of Jeremiah a number of prophets had uttered oracles against Moab. Balaam himself had been compelled by the Spirit of God to utter a prophecy against Moab (Nm 24:17). Amos (2:1-3) and Isaiah (15:1-7; 16:6-12; 25:10-12) had foretold the doom of Moab about a century before Jeremiah. Zephaniah, an earlier contemporary of Jeremiah, also alludes to the forthcoming total destruction of Moab (Zeph 2:8-10).
Moab by his predecessors. Jeremiah utilized the earlier prophecies and incorporated their phrases and ideas into his own picture of the future of Moab.

A. Advancing Devastation (48:1-9):

1. Tone of the oracle (48:1b): Woe… The poem opens with a resounding woe. This word is derived from the Hebrew vocabulary of lamentation. It expresses the idea how sad it is. Sometimes the word is used sarcastically; sometimes the prophets are sincere when they utter their woes. Here Jeremiah must feel genuine sympathy for the Moabites in the calamity they are about to experience at the hands of an unnamed northern army. In any case woe signals turmoil, judgment and death. The remainder of this long ch is an exposition of this single word.

The poet knows well the geography of Moab. The oracle begins by naming some of the cities of Moab, the economic centers and military fortresses, first in the north and then in the south. Accompanying the names of the cities are terms expressing suffering, death and devastation.

2. Northern Moab devastated (48:1c-2a):
   a. Devastated cities (48:1c): Woe unto Nebo! for it is laid waste; Kiriathaim is put to shame, is captured; Misgab is put to shame and confounded. The prophet saw in his mind’s eye the enemy devastating the northern cities of Moab, those cities north of the Arnon River. Nebo is not the mountain, but a nearby village named in honor of the Semitic deity Nabu. Misgab (the high fortress) and Kiriathaim (the double city) are in the vicinity of Nebo. The inhabitants of these cities are dismayed and stupefied in the face of the enemy onslaught.
   b. Enemy plans (48:2): The glory of Moab is no more; in Heshbon they have plotted calamity against her. Come, let us cut her off from being a nation. In Heshbon—the main city north of the river Arnon—the destroyers from the north assemble for the final push into Moab proper. The invaders exhort one another to get on with the work of destroying Moab. The goal is to cut off the political existence of Moab. The site of Heshbon is well known, and extensive excavations have taken place there.

2. Southern Moab devastated (48:2b-5):
   a. Devastated cities (48:2b-3): Also, O Madmen, You shall be silent; the sword shall pursue you. (3) Hark! A cry from Horonaim, desolation and great destruction. The villages of Madmen and Horonaim just south of the Arnon River are sacked and destroyed by the enemy. The exact location of the villages is disputed.
   b. Hysteria of fugitives (48:4-5): Moab is shattered; her little ones cause a cry to be heard. (5) For by the ascent of Luhith they will go up with continual weeping; for at the descent of Horonaim they have heard the distress of the cry of destruction. Jeremiah can hear the wails of panic-stricken men, terrified women and children as they flee southward up the road that leads to Luhith and down the valley that leads to Horonaim. The locations of these two villages are not known.
   c. Appeal (48:6): Flee! Run for your life! that you may be like the heath in the wilderness. The imperatives are plural. Knowing the destruction that awaits Moab, Jeremiah urged the inhabitants of that nation to flee for their lives. Be like the heath in the wilderness. The heath is a desert shrub. The thought is: Get out of the cities and take your chances in the uninhabited areas.

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579 Heshbon was a border town between Reuben and Gad. It served as one of the forty-eight Levitical cities (Josh 21:39). In Jeremiah’s day the city seems to have been occupied by Ammonites (Jer 49:3).
580 The RSV follows the Septuagint version and renders wild ass. Others suggest the translation destitute man.
3. **Reasons for coming judgment (48:7-8):** In these vv Jeremiah voices a prophetic indictment against Moab.

   a. **False trust (48:7):** Moab faces judgment from Yahweh for the same reason as Judah, viz., misplaced trust.

      (1) **Trust in material things (48:7a):** *Surely because you trusted in your works and in your treasures, you also will be captured.* The address shifts to the second feminine singular. Presumably Moab as a whole is being addressed. Flight is necessary because the judgment of Moab is inevitable. Moab will fall because she has put her trust in her works (some translate *strongholds*), and in her *treasures* instead of the living God. The term is not limited to gold and silver; it includes all kinds of supplies, including weapons. Judged by this criterion, many nations today would fall under the prophetic indictment.

      (2) **Trust in a false god (48:7b):** *Chemosh will go out into captivity, his priests and his princes together.* The Moabites should also flee because their national god *Chemosh* will not be able to save them. Indeed Chemosh will not even be able to prevent his own captivity, or that of his *priests*. The *princes* may be religious officials, or civil patrons of the deity.

   b. **Coming destroyer (48:8):** *And the destroyer will come upon every city. No city will escape.* The valley will perish, and the plateau will be destroyed just as Yahweh has said. The destroyer is not named, but the destruction he metes out spreads throughout the land. No city will escape. The Jordan valley, that formed part of the boundary of Moab on the west, will perish. The *plateau*—the Transjordanian highland that stretches from the Arnon north to Heshbon—also experiences the devastation.

4. **Personal response (48:9):** *Give wings to Moab, for she must fly; and her cities will become a salt-field without inhabitant.* In order to escape the destroyer, Moab will need wings. The prophet prays that she shall be provided with them. *Salt-field* (*tsîts*) references the custom of sprinkling salt over a ruin to symbolize that it is to be forever unproductive (cf. Judg 9:45). Thus the fate of Moab, like that of Judah, is twofold: exile and devastation.

**Prophetic Explanation**

48:10-13

A. **Unexpected Curse (48:10):** *Cursed be the one who does the work of Yahweh negligently; and cursed be the one who withholds his sword from blood.* While the prophet feels sympathy for Moab he realizes that the destruction of the Moabites is the work of the Lord that He has committed to human destroyers. A curse is pronounced upon the destroyer if he is negligent in performing the task that the Lord has given him.

B. **Pride of Moab (48:11-13):** It is pride that brings down Moab, a pride that was manifested in three ways.

   1. **Pride in location (48:11-12):**

      a. **A figure of complacency (48:11):** *From his youth Moab has been at ease, and settled on his lees; he was not emptied from vessel to vessel, nor had he gone into captivity; therefore, his taste remains in him and his aroma has not changed.* Why is Moab to suffer so terribly? In answering this question Jeremiah utilizes the figure

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581The Moabites are called people of Chemosh in Nm 21:29.
of wine and wine jars. Owing to its mountainous terrain and somewhat isolated geographical position (shielded by the Dead Sea on the west and the desert on the east), Moab had remained comparatively undisturbed throughout history. The country had been invaded from time to time. But unlike surrounding nations that had faced the fierce wrath of the Assyrian and Chaldean conquerors, Moab had never seen her cities totally destroyed and her people carried away into captivity.

Jeremiah compares the nation to wine that has settled on the lees (sediment). It was the custom to leave new wine for a time on its sediment in order to heighten its strength and flavor. In other words, due to its relatively undisturbed existence, Moab had become a strong and proud nation with a culture and character unchanged by foreign influences (cf. Zeph 1:12).  

**b. A figure of coming judgment (48:12):**

1. **Tilters (48:12a): Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will send to him tilters.** Moab’s status as an undisturbed nation was about to change. God would send to Moab tilters (RSV). The reference is to those whose job it was to pour the wine out of the aging vessels into vessels of skins or earthenware. The tilters are the Babylonians.

2. **Result (48:12b): They will tilt him, empty his vessels, and smash their bottles.** The tilters who come to Moab will not perform their task in the careful manner that men of that profession normally used. They will pour Moab on the ground and then smash his vessels. Moab is to experience a radical and abrupt change in fortunes. Her proud, ancient culture will be poured out like wine from the jar; her political existence smashed like an earthenware jar.

**C. Moab’s Shame (48:13): Then Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their trust.** Moab’s confidence in Chemosh will be shaken. They will discover that Chemosh was unable to save his people from calamity. Like the inhabitants of the fallen kingdom of Israel who had placed their trust in the false religious system established by Jeroboam at Bethel, the Moabites would come to realize the folly of misplaced trust (cf. v 7). They would come to realize that Chemosh was a nonentity.

### Regional Lamentation

48:14-20

In these vv the prophet repeats the language of vv 6-9.

**A. Gruesomeness of Judgment (48:14-15):**

1. **Fear of the warriors (48:14): How can you say, We are mighty men, valiant men of war?** What sinful vainglory! The Moabites boast of their skills in war. Moab’s pride in military power will prove unjustified.

2. **Plundered land (48:15a): Moab is plundered, and one assaults her cities.** Moab will be spoiled, the walls of her cities scaled by the enemy,

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582 Many commentators take the figure settled on his lees in a somewhat more negative sense: Moab is compared to an inferior wine that has been left too long on the lees. Therefore it had become sour and bitter.

583 KJV renders as wanderers. The ASV gives a better translation, them that pour off.

584 Jeroboam I established a counterfeit form of worship for the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. Golden calves were erected at Bethel, Dan and later at Samaria. Israel was carried away into captivity in 722 BC by the Assyrians.

585 The translation of the ASV they are gone up into his cities, is much to be preferred over the KJV which takes the phrase to be referring to the Moabites and translates gone up out of her cities.
3. **Dead soldiers (48:15b): The finest of her young men have gone down to the slaughter (oracle of the king whose name is Yahweh of Hosts).** Moab’s chosen young men slaughtered in battle. This is the oracle that the King of all nations and the God of history, Yahweh of Hosts, had spoken concerning Moab. The title *king* signals that Yahweh is about to dethrone and replace Chemosh.

**B. Nearness of Judgment (48:16): The calamity of Moab is close at hand, and his misfortune hastens quickly.** The ruin of Moab was prophesied by Balaam eight hundred years before (Nm 24: 17) and foretold by Amos (2:1-3) and Isaiah (chs 15-16) is now rapidly approaching. For *calamity* (*‘ēd*) see 18:17.

**C. Lament for Judgment (48:17):**

1. **Call for mourning (48:17a): Mourn for him all you who are round about and who know his name.** All who are friends of Moab are sincerely urged by the prophet to bemoan the fate of that nation.

2. **Words of mourning (48:17b): Say: How sad it is that the strong staff is broken, the glorious staff.** The scepter of Moabite sovereignty and the rod of Moabite splendor are broken.

**D. Admonitions to Cities (48:18-20):**

1. **Dibon (48:18):**
   a. **Admonition (48:18a): Go down from your glory! Sit in thirst, O enthroned daughter of Dibon...** Even Dibon, the highly honored royal city (cf. 2 Kgs 3:4-5), will be disgraced in the coming calamity. Dibon, personified as a delicate damsel, is bidden by the prophet to descend from her glory and sit in thirst, i.e., in the dust. Dibon was located about thirteen miles east of the Dead Sea and three miles north of the Arnon River. A modern village near the ancient site has preserved the name. It was at this site that the famous King Mesha Stone was found. For *enthroned* (lit., *inhabitant*) as a ruler to a ruler see 10:17.
   b. **Explanation (48:18b): for the destroyer of Moab has gone up against you; he will destroy your fortifications.** Why this ignominy and shame for the proud city built on two hills? The mighty strongholds of Moab are destroyed by the invader (Babylon).

2. **Aroer (48:19): Stand by the way and watch, O inhabitant of Aroer! Ask the fleeing man and the fugitive woman, What has happened?** Aroer was three miles southeast of Dibon and just to the north of the deep Arnon gorge. A modern village near the site has adopted the ancient name. The inhabitants of Aroer spot the fugitives from the north coming down the King’s Highway that passed through Dibon and Aroer. They ask them what has happened.

3. **Arnon (48:20): Moab is put to shame for it is dismayed! Howl and cry out! Declare in Arnon that Moab is laid waste.** In anguished cries the refugees reply: Moab is confounded; Moab is shattered! Jeremiah urged the inhabitants of Moab to howl and cry, i.e., take up a lamentation for their land. He urged the fugitives and inhabitants of Aroer to spread the word that Moab had been destroyed. *Laid waste* (r. *šdd*) repeats the ominous word from v 1.

**Complete Degradation**

48:21-28
A. Announcement to Cities (48:21-24): Judgment has come upon the land of the plateau, upon Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, (22) Dibon, Nebo, Beth-diblathaim (23) Kiriathaim, Beth-gamul, Beth-meon, (24) Kerioth, Bozrah and upon all the cities of the land of Moab both far and near. The judgment of God has come upon the land. City after city has fallen. Location of most of the eleven cities in these vv is uncertain. Several of them are named in the famous Moabite Stone that was found at Dibon in 1868.

The location of Holon is unknown. Jahzah is an alternative form of Jahaz in v 34 (cf. Nm 21:23). The location of Jahzah is disputed. Mephaath was probably located at a site about six miles south of modern Ammon. On plateau, see on v 8. For Dibon, see v 18; for Nebo and Kiriathaim, see v 1. Beth-gamul was about 7.5 miles east of Dibon. Beth-meon is probably the same as Baal-meon (Nm 32:38) and Beth-baal-meon (Josh 13:17). This place is mentioned in the Mesha Stone. Kerioth appears in Amos 2:2 and in the Mesha Stone. Bozrah may be the same as Bezer (Josh 20:8; 21:36).

B. Helplessness of Moab (48:25-27):
1. Pictures of helplessness (48:25-26a):
   a. Broken horn (48:25a): The horn of Moab is cut off… An animal that uses its horns to defend itself or to assert its authority is helpless to defend itself if it has lost its horns. A horn is a symbol of strength (Pss 18:2; 75:4f).
   b. Broken arm (48:25b): and his arm is broken (oracle of Yahweh). A man with a broken arm cannot defend himself against attack. The arm in biblical prophecy is a symbol of authority.
   c. Drunk (48:26a): Make him drunk, for he has become arrogant toward Yahweh. Moab will wallow in his own vomit and he also will be an object of derision. Drunkenness is yet another symbol of helplessness. The divine command had been issued: Moab, along with the other nations of the region, must drink the wine of God’s wrath (25:21). Like a drunken man, Moab reels and totters, vomits and then falls into his own filth. As people mock a drunken man, so men will deride Moab in its helpless condition. Cf. Lam 4:21-22. The reason Moab experiences this condition is that the nation had become arrogant toward Yahweh.

2. Explanation for the helplessness (48:27): Was not Israel an object of derision to you? Was he found among thieves so that as often as you spoke of him you wagged the head? Moab’s arrogance against Yahweh is manifest in their attitude toward Israel. In 20:7 it was Jeremiah himself who was the object of derision. Now it is Moab. Neighboring nations who observe Moab in its debased condition will make that nation the object of derision. But is this not exactly the attitude that Moab had toward Israel?

From the very beginning of their dealings with one another, the Moabites had treated the Israelites with the same contempt that one has for a thief caught in the act of stealing. As often as the name Israel was mentioned, the Moabites would wag their heads (ASV) in a gesture of contempt (cf. Mt 27:39). By so despising the people of God the Moabites had in effect magnified themselves against Yahweh. On Moab’s mockery of Israel see Zeph 2:8, 10. For found among thieves see 2:26. The image of wagging the head in a context of mockery appears in 18:16.

C. Final Admonition (48:28): Forsake the cities and dwell in the rock, O inhabitants of Moab, and be like the dove that makes her nest on the far sides of a gorge. As in v 9 Moab is advised to seek refuge where the dove or wild pigeon makes its nest in the inaccessible rocky crevices of the mountains. If Jeremiah is thinking of the gorge of the Arnon River,

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586 Location of most of the cities in these verses is uncertain. Several of them are named in the famous Moabite Stone that was found at Dibon in 1868.

587 The rendering of the KJV is: thou skippedst for joy. The ASV rendering is preferred by most commentators.
then he is calling upon them to do something that is not possible. Yet this is what it is going to take if they are to escape the judgment.

Abhorrent Exaltation
48:29-33

Jeremiah has adapted the comments in vv 29-30 from Isa 16:6.

A. Indictment (48:29-30):
   1. Proud heart (48:29): We have heard of the pride of Moab, so very proud; his loftiness and his pride, his arrogance and the haughtiness of his heart. Without question the major theme running through the oracles against the nations is that of national arrogance. Nearly every conceivable facet of this theme is treated in one or more of these oracles. National arrogance is an affront to the Lord. He must deal with it. The proud will be humbled. With vivid pictures Jeremiah portrays again and again the shame, degradation and disgrace into which the nations shall fall.

      The arrogance of the Moabites must have been well known in antiquity. Many years earlier Isaiah had emphasized this characteristic of the Moabites. Jeremiah borrows his terminology to make the same point. He forcibly makes his point by piling up synonyms for pride and haughtiness. Perhaps it was the geographical loftiness of the Moabite plateau that contributed to the attitude of the inhabitants.

   2. Empty boasts (48:30): I know (oracle of Yahweh) his insolence. His boasts are empty, he is not able to perform them. The Lord corroborates the assertion of the prophet in the previous verse. The term insolence probably refers to the arrogant, angry outbursts to which proud men are so prone. The last part of v 30 is extremely difficult to translate. There is no agreement among the English translations as to how it should be rendered. The KJV is extremely vague. The ASV renders: his boastings have wrought nothing. The RSV offers this interpretative translation: his boasts are false, his deeds are false. The basic idea is that both in his words and works, Moab was essentially untrue.

B. Judgment (48:31-33):
   1. Jeremiah weeps for Moab’s men (48:31): Therefore, I will wail over Moab, and I will cry out for all of Moab, and I will moan for the men of Kir-heres. This v is an adaptation of Isa 16:7. Because Moab is doomed to destruction, Jeremiah takes up a lamentation over that land. The lament expresses once more the prophet’s sincere sympathy with Moab. The weeping prophet was not only concerned with the destruction of his own people, he was deeply moved by the thought that others would suffer too. Kir-heres 588 is the chief fortress of southern Moab. In mourning the loss of that city, the prophet suggests that the conquest of Moab is complete.

   2. Jeremiah weeps for the vineyards (48:32):
      a. Lament for Moab’s vine (48:32a): With more than the weeping of Jazer I will weep for you, O vine of Sibmah. Jeremiah is adapting material from Isa 16:8-9. The prophet’s sorrow is deeper than that of the city of Jazer 589 located fifteen miles north of Heshbon. Jeremiah is distressed to think that the luxuriant vineyards of Sibmah (located near Heshbon) must come to ruin.

588 Kir-heres is called Kir-hareseth in Isa 16:7 and 2 Kgs 3:25.
589 Jazer was a Levitical city (Josh 21:39) within the tribal territory of Reuben.
b. Former glory of Moab’s vine (48:32b): *Your branches passed over the sea, they reached unto the sea of Jazer.* The vine of Sibmah is depicted stretching as far as the Dead Sea and the sea of Jazer (location unknown).

c. Destruction of Moab’s vine (48:32c): *Upon your summer fruit and your vintage the destroyer has fallen.* The famous and beautiful Moabite vineyards will be hopelessly ruined, ruthlessly trampled down by the enemy, together with the *summer fruit.* The agro economy of Moab is destroyed.

3. Jeremiah weeps for Moab’s gloom (48:33): *Gladness and joy have been removed from the fruitful land, the land of Moab. I have caused wine to cease from the vat; no one treads with shouting; shouting is not shouting.* Joy and gladness, normally characteristic of that plentiful land, shall disappear. Since the vineyards will be destroyed, the winepresses or wine vats will contain no wine. The shouting that will be heard in the land will not be the joyous shouting of the grape-treaders, but the battle shout of the invading soldiers. The arrogance of Moab brings great loss and profound grief.

**Lamentation for Moab**
48:34-39

A. Moab Weeps (48:34-35):

1. Universal lamentation (48:34): *From the cry of Heshbon unto Elealeh unto Jahaz they have uttered their voice; from Zoar unto Horonaim, Eglath-shelishiah; for even the waters of Nimrim will become desolations.* This v is an adaptation of Isa 15:4. For Heshbon, see on v 2. Elealeh, located about two miles north-northeast of Heshbon, survives today. For Jahaz, see Jahzah in v 21. Zoar is mentioned in v 4, and Horonaim in v 3. The location of *Eglath-shelishiah* is unknown. *Waters of Nimrim* probably to refer to one of the wadis that empty into the Jordan or the Dead Sea. The point of the v is that throughout the land of Moab a cry of woe is heard.

2. Worship ceases in Moab (48:35): *And I will cause to cease in Moab (oracle of Yahweh) the one who offers sacrifices on the high places and the one who offers incense to his gods.* Yahweh’s resolve to dismantle Moab is forcefully stated. Since the whole land of Moab is depopulated no longer will sacrifices be offered at the shrines, or incense burned before the idols.

B. Jeremiah Weeps (48:36): *Therefore, my heart murmurs like the flute, yea my heart murmurs like a flute for the men of Kir-heres because the riches he accumulated have perished.* In v 36 borrows thoughts from Isa 16:11 to express his personal sorrow over the destruction of Moab. He compares the agony of his heart to the pipes or flutes whose mournful sounds filled the air during funeral services. The prophet weeps because the riches, the abundance of Moab, have perished. *Flute* is taken by some to be a *clarinet.* For *Kir-heres* see v 21.

C. Moab Weeps (48:37-38):

1. Mourning signs (48:37): *For every head is bald, every beard is shorn; on all hands are gashes, and sackcloth on the loins.* Everywhere he looks the prophet sees signs of mourning: baldheads, clipped beards, cuttings upon the body, sackcloth about the loins.

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590KJV translates the expression *a heifer of three years old.* But ASV rightly regards this as a proper name. The Hebrew language has no capital letters. It is not always possible to distinguish between common and proper nouns.
The extreme expressions of lamentation indicate the depths the loss. These mourning signs have appeared previously in 4:8, 16:6, and 41:5.

2. **Places of mourning** (48:38a): *Upon all the roofs of Moab and in all her streets there is lamentation...* On *all the roofs* and in *all her streets*, i.e., everywhere, the lamentation can be heard. What intense agony in the land of Moab and in the heart of a Judean prophet!

3. **Explanation** (48:38b): *for I will shatter Moab as a vessel in which there is no delight (oracle of Yahweh)._ The God of Israel has broken Moab like a vessel that no longer pleases him. For this figure see 22:28.

**D. Derision** (48:39): *How sad the dismay! They howl! How sad that Moab has turned the back in shame! Moab shall become an object of derision and terror to those around about!* Surrounding nations will observe the fate of once proud Moab. They will themselves take up a mocking lamentation: *Moab has turned the back with shame,* i.e., fled before the enemy. Derision has been mentioned already in vv 26 and 27. Cf. 20:7.

Moab will not only be an object of derision to neighboring nations, she will also be an object of terror or dismay. If Moab falls to the enemy, what chances do the less powerful nations have for survival?

**Inescapable Destruction**

48:40-47

**A. Description of the Threat** (48:40-43):

1. **Bird of prey** (48:40): *For thus says Yahweh: Behold, he shall fly as an eagle and spread his wings ever Moab._ The reason for terror on the part of observers is completely justified. The conqueror of Moab will swoop down like an *eagle* or *vulture* (*nešer*). He will spread his wings over the whole land. No doubt Jeremiah is here referring to Nebuchadnezzar who is reported to have conquered Moab, Ammon and the neighboring peoples in 582-581 BC. The figure of an eagle is a favorite description of a victorious conqueror.

2. **Panic** (48:41):
   a. **Reason for panic** (48:41a): *The cities are captured and the strongholds are seized...* Victoriously the conqueror sweeps through the land capturing the centers of power. *The cities* (or *Kerioth*; cf. v 24) and *the strongholds* of the land fall before the conqueror.
   b. **Picture of panic** (48:41b): *and the heart of the mighty men of Moab will be in that day like the heart of a woman in travail._ The defenders of the land will be as terrified as a woman experiencing the pangs of childbirth. *A woman in travail* is a slight variation on the more common *a woman in labor* that occurs five times previously in the book.

3. **Destruction** (48:42-43):
   a. **Justified destruction** (48:42): *Moab will be destroyed from being a people because he has magnified himself against Yahweh._ When the conquest was complete, Moab will have been destroyed. Eventually Moab will cease to be a nation. All of this must happen because Moab has *magnified himself against Yahweh_, the God of Israel (v 42; cf. v 26). The phrase seems to mean that Moab and Ammon sought to dominate

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592See Jer 49:22; Isa 46:11; Ezek 17:3.
Israel. Moab sought to regain possession of land that the Lord had taken from them to give to Israel (cf. Zeph 2:8). By so harassing Israel, the Moabites were challenging Yahweh himself.

b. Complete destruction (48:43): **Terror, pit and trap are upon you, O inhabitant of Moab (oracle of Yahweh).** In that day of divine visitation, the Moabites will be confronted by **terror, pit and trap**, symbols of defeat and hopelessness. In the Hebrew this triad of nouns is alliterative, and thus “ear appealing.” Inhabitant of Moab may have connotations of enthronement (cf. 21:13; 10:17). Moab has arrogated to itself what can only belong to Yahweh; they sit enthroned where only Yahweh should be enthroned.

B. Hopelessness of Moab (48:44):

1. Inescapable destruction (48:44a): **The one who climbs out of the pit will be captured by the trap...** To make the point that the judgment will be inescapable Jeremiah again borrows from Isaiah (24:17-18; cf. Amos 5:18-20). The one who flees from the terror will fall into the pit; the one who climbs up out of the pit will be captured by the trap. These vv seem to reflect a popular proverb meaning that men will go from one danger into another until they are finally, inescapably trapped.

2. Appointed destruction (48:44b): **for I will bring upon her, upon Moab, the year of their punishment (oracle of Yahweh).** The language suggests that every nation has its appointed time on the stage of history. Then that nation must face punishment from Yahweh. Year of their punishment suggests that the punishment will be prolonged over time, and will not be administered quickly.

C. Desperate Flight (48:45-46):

1. **Picture (48:45a): In the shadow of Heshbon the fugitives stand without strength...** Some fugitives of Moab will attempt to seek safety in Heshbon (cf. v 2). But Heshbon can offer no refuge.

2. **Explanation (48:45b): for a fire has come forth from Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and it has devoured the corner of Moab, and the head of the tumultuous ones.** An ancient proverb cited in Nm 21:28 is here given application. Far from being a place of safety, Heshbon will be the spot from which the Chaldean foe will spread southward through Moab (cf. v 2). Centuries earlier the Amorite king Sihon launched his attack against Moab from the city of Heshbon (Nm 21:28-30). The Moabites are called tumultuous ones because of their noisy and boastful opposition to God and his people.

3. **Woe (48:46): Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh have perished; for they have taken your sons into captivity, and your daughters into exile.** The prophecy ends as it began with a woe against Moab. Those who worship the god Chemosh will go into exile. Their deity will not be able to save them from this fate. For Chemosh, see v 7.

**Ultimate Salvation**

48:47

But I will reverse the fortunes of Moab in the latter days (oracle of Yahweh). Thus far is the judgment of Moab. A note of hope is appended to the prophecy of doom against Moab. In the latter days — the NT age — God, because of his infinite grace, will turn the
captivity, i.e., reverse the fortunes of the Moabite people.\textsuperscript{593} This is not a prediction of the restoration of Moab’s national existence. It concerns the descendants of Moab who will hear the gospel and will become heirs to eternal life through Christ. Yahweh’s ultimate purpose for Moab is not judgment and destruction.

The same prediction is made concerning Ammon (49:6) and Elam (49:39) and the nations that have harassed the people of God (12:14-17). The prophecy finds fulfillment in the numerous Arab Christians of the countries of Syria and Jordan.

**Oracle against Ammon**

\begin{enumerate}
\item **Against the children of Ammon.** The territory of Ammon was just north of Moab. The Ammonites were centered around their capital Rabbah (modern Amman) on the Jabbok River. The Ammonites and Moabites were closely connected by descent. The two peoples frequently united in attacks against Israel.

Prior to the Israelite invasion of Transjordan under Moses, the Ammonites had been dislodged from their traditional home by the Amorite king Sihon. When the Israelites defeated Sihon, they assigned the former Ammonite territory to the tribe of Gad. With the Assyrian deportations of the northern tribes, the Ammonites were able gradually to filter back into their ancient territory. They began to occupy towns and villages that for centuries had belonged to Israel.

\item **A. Indictment and Judgment (49:1-2):**
\begin{enumerate}
\item **Indictment (49:1):** Thus says Yahweh: Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? Why does their king possess Gad, and his people dwell in his cities? The crime of Ammon was infringement upon Israelite territory. From the very earliest times, the Ammonites had laid claim to the territory occupied by the tribes of Transjordan.

Jephthah had attempted to settle the issue by diplomacy back in the period of the judges. To the charge that Israel had taken by force the territory of the Ammonites, Jephthah replied that as a matter of fact the Ammonites did not occupy that territory when Israel had entered the land. Since Israel had not taken the land from Ammon originally, and since Israel had already occupied the land for three hundred years, Jephthah argued that the Ammonites no longer had any claim to the territory (Judg 11:12-28). The king of Ammon refused to accept this reasoning. War broke out between the two peoples. Jephthah inflicted a crushing blow upon the Ammonites. Now, centuries after Jephthah, the territorial issue has been raised again.

Since the Assyrians had removed so many Israelites from the area in 734 and 722 BC, the Ammonites were able to occupy certain villages in the tribal territory of Gad. It is to this incursion that Jeremiah refers in v 1.

The indictment is couched in three questions, the first two of which require a negative answer. Has Israel no sons? Has he no heirs? It is not true that Israel has no sons or heirs. Israel indeed had been taken captive, but his descendants will return to claim the land Ammon had wrongfully seized. Had Israel been without sons or heirs then Ammon might have justified its land seizure.

The third question is the “punch line” of the indictment. It levels the accusation that even through Israel has sons and heirs, Ammon has made incursions upon their land. Their king is better read as a proper name Malcam as in the ASV. Malcam (Milcom/Molech) was the chief god of the Ammonites (1 Kgs 11:5, 7). Here Malcam represents his people just as Chemosh (48:7) represents the Moabites.

\item **Judgment (49:2):**
\begin{enumerate}
\item **Attack (49:2a):** Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will cause Rabbah Ammon to hear the shout of battle… Therefore introduces the

\textsuperscript{593} The same language is used in reference to the future of Israel: 29:14; 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:11, 26.
pronouncement. Behold introduces the unexpected. The seizure of Israelite territory is an affront to Yahweh for he is there (Ezek 35:10) because it is his land. Therefore, the Lord will bring about the conquest of Ammon. Rabbah (the capital) will hear the shout of battle.

b. Desolation (49:2b): and it will become a desolate heap, and her daughters will be burned. Rabbah and her daughters (minor cities depending on her) will be destroyed, burned and left desolate. For desolate heap (tēl), see 30:18.

c. Impact on Israel (49:2c): Then Israel will possess his possessors, says Yahweh. When Ammon has fallen, then Israel will be able to recover the territory unjustly seized.

The destroyer of Ammon is not specifically named, but there can scarcely be doubt that Jeremiah has in mind Nebuchadnezzar. The great Chaldean king devastated Ammon and Moab in 582-581 BC. At this time the Ammonite king was Baalis who had been instrumental in the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer 40:14).

**B. Ammon’s Great Loss (49:3-5):**

1. Their god cannot save them (49:3):
   a. Call for lamentation (49:3a): Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste! Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah! Gird on sackcloth, mourn, run to and fro among the hedges... In view of the forthcoming destruction of the land, Jeremiah called upon the Ammonites to cry and howl in lamentation over their fate. Though a city of Moab, Heshbon (cf. 48:2) seems at this period to have been under Ammonite control. The location of Ai of Ammon, mentioned only here, is unknown. The daughters of Rabbah could refer to the women of the city, or to satellite villages dependent on Rabbah. Jeremiah pictured the Ammonites running hither and yon in uncontrollable grief trying to find safety behind the hedges or stonewalls around fields and vineyards. For the signs of mourning mentioned here see 4:8.
   b. Reason for lamentation (49:3b): for Malcam will go into captivity, his priests and princes together. The reason for the grievous lamentation is that their god Malcam has been carried off into captivity along with his priests and his princes. What a disconcerting discovery to find that one’s god is really more helpless than the people who worship him.

2. Their location will not save them (49:4): Why do you boast in the valleys — your flowing valley — O backsliding daughter, who trusts in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me? For boast (r. hll) see 4:2. The Ammonites were proud of their fruitful valleys, particularly the valley of the Jabbok River. The apostate nation had turned from the living God. They placed their trust in their natural resources and treasures (48:7). Ammon boasted, Who shall come unto me? (cf. 21:13). Again misplaced trust is at the root of a Gentile nation’s demise (cf. 48:7).

3. They will be dispersed (49:5):
   a. Fear coming (49:5a): Behold, I am about to bring fear against you (oracle of Yahweh of Hosts) from all round about you. Yahweh shatters the illusion of security with a resounding Behold, I. Ammon’s false confidence will be shattered when God brought fear upon the land. It will be every man for himself. For fear (pachad) see 48:43.
   b. Flight coming (49:5b): You will be thrust out, each man before him. With only the thought of self-preservation in mind, the inhabitants of Ammon will flee in all

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594 Kgs 5:17; Hos 9:3; Joel 2:18; 3:2; Lv 25:23; Ps 85:1.
directions. *Each man before him* probably means that each man takes what he thinks is the shortest route to safety.

c. Result (49:5c): *There will be no one to gather the fugitive.* No one bothers to collect or rally the fugitives. What a sad future awaits those who regarded themselves as invincible.

C. Conversion of Ammon (49:6): *Afterward I will reverse the fortunes of the children of Ammon (oracle of Yahweh).* As in the case of Moab, a note is appended to the oracle against Ammon indicating that in the future the Ammonites will experience the grace of God. The language here is almost identical with that of 48:47 except that the phrase *afterward* replaces the more prophetically precise phrase *in the latter days.* See comments on 48:47.

**Oracle against Edom**

49:7-22

**Concerning Edom.** Edom was south of the brook Zered, the southern boundary of Moab. Edom was an exceedingly mountainous country. It was rich in copper and iron ore. Because of its mineral wealth, and because the King’s Highway passed through it, Edom was under constant threat of attack from surrounding nations.

From the time of David, the Israelites were able to dominate Edom, except for a few brief periods of independence. Esau’s bitter hatred of his brother Jacob was inherited by his descendants, the Edomites. While history records that Jacob and Esau were reconciled (Gn 33:1-16), the descendants of these two patriarchs remained implacable foes throughout most of their history.

A. Inescapable Calamity (49:7-11):

1. Wisdom cannot prevent it (49:7): *Thus said Yahweh of Hosts: Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent ones? Has their wisdom disappeared?* The oracle against Edom begins with a series of rhetorical questions designed to mock the wisdom for which that land was renowned (cf. Obad 8). For *counsel* see 18:18. The calamity comes with such suddenness upon Edom that the professional wise men, counselors, and statesmen are incapable of offering any helpful advice. It is uncertain whether *Teman* is a city or a region in Edom. Human wisdom is certainly inadequate in the face of the judgment of the living God.

2. Flight cannot avoid it (49:8):
   a. Exhortation (49:8a): *Flee! Turn! Go down deep to dwell, O inhabitant of Dedan…* Wisdom dictates that the Edomites flee from their land. Three imperatives call upon the Dedanites to take precautions lest they be caught up in the calamity that will befall their trading partners the Edomites. *Go down deep to dwell* probably means to withdraw deep into the desert regions where they would be safe from the approaching destruction. The Dedanites inhabited the region south of Edom. These merchant people apparently carried on extensive trade with Edom. The point is that if neighboring peoples must flee the area, there is no hope that Edomites can escape judgment by fleeing to those lands.

   b. Explanation (49:8b): *for I will bring the destruction of Esau upon him, the time of his punishment.* The Dedanites are urged to avoid all contact with Edom lest they be

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595 Others think of a colony of Dedanites living in Edom who are advised to flee, or Dedanite merchant caravans that are told to turn back because of the calamity.
caught up in the calamity that was about to befall that nation. It is the time of Edom's judgment; the Lord will bring calamity upon Edom.

3. Concealment will not avoid it (49:9-10):
   a. Complete devastation (49:9): If grape-gatherers come to you they will not leave grapes. If thieves in the night, they will destroy until they have sufficient. The complete devastation of Edom is indicated by two powerful figures of speech. Like grape gatherers, the enemy will leave no gleanings in the land (cf. 6:9). Like thieves, they will unsparingly plunder the land until they have their fill.\textsuperscript{596}
   
   b. No hiding places (49:10a): But I have stripped Esau, uncovered his hiding places and he will not be able to hide himself. For stripped see 13:26. For hiding places see 23:24. The Lord himself will lay Esau (Edom) bare. This will reveal to the enemy the secret retreats and hiding places. All the treasures of the land will be plundered. The inhabitants of Edom will be able to find no safe retreat.
   
   c. Destruction of Edom (49:10b): His seed and his brethren are destroyed; and he is no more. The descendants of Edom—those who shared his land and those who lived around about his land—will all suffer in the coming calamity. Most important, Edom himself is no more, i.e., ceases to exist as a nation.

4. Note of hope (49:11): Forsake your orphans! I will keep them alive! Let your widows trust in me! All the warriors of Edom will be cut off in the conflict. This will leave their wives and children defenseless. Yet the gracious God of Israel will care for these helpless ones, if they but trust in him for protection. What a beautiful promise in the midst of ominous threats and dreadful judgments.

B. A Just Calamity (49:12-13):

1. They must drink the cup (49:12): For thus says Yahweh: Behold, if those whose judgment was not to drink the cup surely drink, will you get off scot-free? You will not be exempt, but will certainly have to drink. Edom must drink of the cup of God’s wrath. For the image of drinking the cup see 25:15. The calamity is inescapable. If the chosen people of God will not escape his judgment, how could Edom?

2. They must experience desolation (49:13): For I have sworn by myself (oracle of Yahweh) that Bozrah will become a desolation, reproach, waste, and curse; and all her cities will be eternal desolations. Since Israel must suffer, Edom cannot be unpunished. Furthermore, God has taken an oath that Bozrah, the chief city of northern Edom (cf. Amos 1:12), and the other cities of the land, will become perpetual desolations.

C. Threat Repeated (49:14-16): The language here is very similar to Obad 1-4.

1. Summons of God (49:14): I have heard tidings from Yahweh, and an ambassador has been sent to the nations: Gather yourselves and come against her! Rise up to battle! Jeremiah begins the second section of the Edom oracle by announcing that he has heard a rumor or report directly from Yahweh. God has revealed to the prophet that he has sent a heavenly ambassador or messenger to the nations urging them to come to battle against Edom. Yahweh is mobilizing the nations to come against Edom.

2. Decree of God (49:15): For behold I have made you small among the nations, despised among men. God guides the counsels of nations. Often they carry out his plans and fulfill his purposes without even being aware that they are being used of God. The Lord had decreed that Edom would be small among the nations and

\textsuperscript{596}There is no reason why v 9 should be rendered in English as an interrogative as in KJV and ASV. The ASV marginal reading is superior.
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despised among men. To this end God granted success to the enemies who march
against Edom.
3. **Humbling by God (49:16):** *As for your terribleness, the pride of your heart has
deceived you, O dweller in the clefts of the rock, O holder of the heights of the
hills. Though you have made high your nest like an eagle, from thence I will bring
you down (oracle of Yahweh).* Again Jeremiah points to national arrogance as the
supreme cause of Edom’s doom. *Your terribleness* should probably be understood as
the terror you inspire. When they approached Edom, enemies were overcome with
fear. They beheld what seemed to be unconquerable fortresses nestled in the
inaccessible clefts of the mountains.

The reputation of invincibleness had misled Edom. It had given birth to
arrogance within the hearts of the inhabitants of that land. After all, even if the other
cities of the land fell, there was still that impregnable fortress Sela or Petra, *the Rock:*
Sela was accessible only by a narrow ravine that easily could be defended by a
handful of men.

Sela/Petra was the ultimate confidence of the Edomites. The huge cisterns there
could enable the defenders to withstand a siege of the longest possible duration. The
references to the *clefts of the rock* and the *height of the hill* likely refer to this desert
stronghold. The God of Israel will humble the arrogant pride of Edom. Even though
they might build their fortresses as high in those mountains as an eagle might build
her nest, God will bring them down to the ground.

**D. Judgment Pictured (49:17-22):**

1. **Picture #1: desolate cities (49:17-18):**
   a. **Reaction of travelers (49:17):** *And Edom will become an astonishment; every one
      who passes by will be astonished and will whistle over all of her wounds.* Suddenly
the picture changes. The battle is over. Edom has fallen. Centuries pass. Edom
remains uninhabited, i.e., a complete desolation. Those who pass by the area will
hiss or whistle in astonishment at the extent of the desolation. On *whistle* or *hiss* see
18:16.

   b. **Comparison to Sodom (49:18):** *As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and
      their neighbors (says Yahweh), a man will not dwell there, nor a son of man
      sojourn there.* The destruction of Edom will remind men of the earlier destruction
of the cities of the plain in that the whole region would henceforth be uninhabited. The
noun *overthrow* (*mahpēchāh*) and the related verb are used often for the destruction
of Sodom and Gomorrah.\(^597\) *Their neighbors* refers to the cities of Admah and
Zeboiim (Dt 29:22).

Of the Patriarchal accounts mentioned in the prophetic books, none is mentioned so frequently as
the Sodom account. The number of occurrences and the distribution of the references are truly
remarkable. From the eighth century on the cities of the plain, made famous by Gn 19, became
proverbial for divine judgment. Their destruction became the norm for punishment—the standard that
other judgments approximated or equaled. The emphasis here is not on the manner of Sodom’s
overthrow, but on the permanent effects of that destruction.\(^598\)

No promise of restoration appears in the Edom oracle as it did in the Moab and
Ammon oracles. Edom will be destroyed as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah;
there will be no restoration. This does not mean, however, that Edom had no hope of
restoration. The use of the Sodom comparison does not preclude hope of restoration.

\(^{597}\) Jer 50:40; Dt 29:22; Isa 13:19; Amos 4:11.
\(^{598}\) Cf. Isa 13:19, 20; Jer 50:40.
Zephaniah (2:9) uses the Sodom and Gomorrah simile in reference to Moab and Ammon. Furthermore, the prophet Amos (9:12) foretold that Edom would be included in the messianic kingdom (cf. Acts 15:15-18).

2. Picture #2: lion and sheep (49:19):
   a. Terrifying (49:19a): Behold, as a lion from the pride of Jordan goes up unto the strong habitation, so will I suddenly make him run from it... The enemy that is to come against Edom is compared to a lion that comes up from the pride [or thicket] of the Jordan (ASV) to pounce upon the prey (cf. 12:5). The lion is extinct in Palestine today. In biblical times, however, lions posed quite a threat to the inhabitants of the region. The lush vegetation that grows alongside the Jordan River — the so-called pride or swelling of the Jordan — was a favorite haunt for lions in those days. Shepherds especially had to be on guard against the attacks of these beasts.

   Edom is called the habitation of the strong, i.e., strong sheepfold or, as some prefer, permanent or perennial pasture (ASV margin). The phrase I will suddenly make him run away from it is difficult and has received various explanations. Probably the meaning is that God will cause the Edomites to flee in fear from their strong habitation in the face of the ravaging lion.

   b. Appointed (49:19b): and he who is chosen I will appoint over it; for who is like me? and who will appoint me a time? The one who comes to ravage Edom is the appointee of Yahweh. No mortal has the right to question the decision of Yahweh, for no one can appoint me a time. This terminology seems to be taken from the court of law. A plaintiff in a lawsuit had the right to appoint the time of the trial. But no one can take God to court, as it were, and there protest against his sovereign decisions.

   c. Irresistible (49:19c): Who is the shepherd who shall stand before me? No shepherd or ruler of Edom stands before Yahweh to resist him or his appointee. The prophet did not name the one appointed by the Lord to conquer Edom. V 19 places three “interrogatives of defiance” in the mouth of Yahweh.

   The Chaldeans dealt a crushing blow to Edom (Mal 1:3). During the intertestamental period the Maccabean rulers of Judea launched vicious attacks against the Edomites. The Romans continued the annihilation of that people about the time of the Jewish war against Rome. The conqueror of Edom as depicted in this passage is probably a composite of all of those agents who would be used by God through the centuries to bring divine judgment to the land of Edom.

3. Picture #3: the counselor (49:20):
   a. Call for attention (49:20a): Therefore, hear the counsel of Yahweh that he has counseled concerning Edom, and his purposes that he has purposed concerning the inhabitants of Teman... It was no accident of history that the Edomites were unable to withstand the invader who plundered their land. Nothing that they could do would have averted that destruction. Even the wisdom for which the Temanites were famous was worthless in this crisis. The God of the universe and the King of nations had decreed that Edom would be destroyed.

   b. Announced intention (49:20b): Surely they will drag them away, the small of the flock! Surely he will lay waste their pasture over them. The enemy will drag away the Edomites as sheep to the slaughter. Even the feeble among them will not be spared. The pasture upon which the flock of Edom had grazed will be turned to desolation.

4. Picture #4: great eagle (49:21-22):

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599 The terminology suggested by Brueggemann, CJ, 458.
a. **Loud cry (49:21): At the sound of their fall the earth will tremble; the sound of her cry is heard beside the Red Sea.** The sound of Edom’s fall will shake the earth. Edom’s wail will be heard at the Red Sea. In times of prosperity the southern border of Edom ex- tended to the Gulf of Akabah, one of two great arms of the Red Sea (cf. 1 Kgs 9:26). For the earth trembling, see 8:16.

b. **Paralyzing fear (49:22): Behold, like the eagle he will go up, fly and spread out his wings over Bozrah; and the heart of the mighty men of Edom in that day shall be like the heart of a woman in travail.** As the enemy is strong as a lion, so he is also as swift as an eagle. The towering heights of Edom will offer no difficulty to this conqueror. When he swoops down and spreads his wings over Bozrah, the hearts of the most fearless men will become as the heart of a woman in her pangs.

**SECTION THREE**

**MORE DISTANT NATIONS**

**Jeremiah 49:23-39**

**Damascus Oracle**

49:23-27

**Concerning Damascus.** Damascus was the capital of the kingdom of Aram (Syria), the northern neighbor of Israel. During the ninth century before Christ, the Syrians were the most formidable foe with whom the nations of Israel and Judah had to do battle. Damascus here represents all of Syria.

Damascus reached the height of its power under Hazael (841-801 BC) who oppressed Israel and Judah throughout his reign. Damascus suffered greatly in the campaign of the Assyrian Shalmaneser IV in 797 BC. The king of Israel was able to recover the territories that he had lost to Hazael (2 Kgs 13:25). Under king Rezin (750-732 BC), Syria again oppressed the people of God (2 Kgs 16:6). Many Judeans were taken captive to Damascus (2 Chr 28:5). In 732 BC the mighty Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser crushed Damascus. He thereby unwittingly fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah (17:1) and Amos (1:4-5). Thereafter Damascus lost its political influence.

Very little is known about Damascus in the days of Jeremiah. Perhaps some day, texts will be unearthed that will shed more light on the political background of the oracle concerning Damascus. Meanwhile, it is best to assign the Damascus oracle to the period just prior to the battle of Carchemish.

**A. Picture of Consternation (49:23-24):**

1. **Northern cities melt in fear (49:23): Hamath is ashamed and Arpad; for they have heard an evil report, they are melted away, at the sea there is sorrow; it cannot find rest.** The oracle against Damascus opens with a vivid picture of the consternation that sweeps over the land of Aram with the approach of a dreaded enemy. Hamath and Arpad, prominent cities of northern Aram, melt in fear at the reported approach of the foe. For ashamed (bôš) see 2:26.

   The exact meaning of the phrase there is sorrow on the sea is uncertain. Some take the expression to mean that the anxious concern over the invasion of the land extends to the seashore, i.e., throughout the country. Others suggest that the prophet is poetically describing the sea as participating in the sorrow of the land of Aram.

2. **Damascus paralyzed (49:24): Damascus is feeble; she has turned to flee. Trembling has seized her; sorrow and pangs have seized her as a woman in childbirth.** As the news of invasion sweeps southward even Damascus, the once proud and powerful city,

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600Hamath is located about 110 miles north of Damascus. Arpad was about ninety-six miles north of Hamath.
becomes paralyzed by fear. Using one of his favorite figures, Jeremiah compares the anguish of Damascus to that of a woman in travail.

B. Picture of Conflict (49:25-27):
1. City abandoned (49:25): How sad that the city of praise is not forsaken, the city of my joy? The fear of the foe has so paralyzed the inhabitants of Damascus that they cannot flee from their city. They realize that to remain there will mean disaster to them. Still they are immobilized. With the words How sad it is Jeremiah laments the sad situation. It is impossible to tell from this context whether the lament is sarcastic or sincere.

   Men have sung the praises of the city of Damascus throughout history. Because of its geographical location at the juncture of several important trade routes, the city was prosperous and flourishing. In appreciation for the beauty of this place the prophet refers to it as the city of my joy.

2. Defenders cut down (49:26): Therefore, her young men will fall in her streets, and all the men of battle will be silenced in that day (oracle of Yahweh of Hosts). Because the inhabitants of Damascus would not flee from before the enemy there would be a slaughter in the streets of Damascus. This brief oracle gives no indication of why Yahweh has decreed the destruction of Damascus. The point of the oracle is that no concentration of human mighty can survive when Yahweh determines otherwise.

3. Fire kindled (49:27): I will kindle a fire against the wall of Damascus, and it will consume the palaces of Benhadad. V 27 is based on Amos 1:4, 14. The phrase kindle a fire denotes the ravages of war. The conflagration will consume the palaces of Benhadad. At least two kings of Damascus named Benhadad appear in the books of Kings. Some think that Benhadad was something of a throne name for the kings of Damascus.

   Information concerning the city of Damascus subsequent to the fall of that city to the Assyrians in 732 BC is scanty. To date no reference to a destruction of Damascus following the days of Jeremiah has been found.

   The destroyer of Damascus was unnamed in the prophecy, for he was relatively unimportant. The important thing was that the destruction came from the God of Israel. Most likely the prediction was fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar after the battle of Carchemish (605 BC) when he victoriously marched throughout the Hatti land, i.e., Syria-Palestine.

Oracle against Arabians
49:28-33

Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor that Nebuchadnezzar smote. Kedar and Hazor represent the Arabian tribes that occupied the desert regions east of Palestine. The tribe of Kedar, descended from Ishmael, is mentioned by Isaiah (21:16-17), and Ezekiel (27:21), as well as Jeremiah (2:10).

   Several Hazors are mentioned in the OT. It is not certain whether this Hazor is a city, a region, or, as seems most likely, a tribe. The title of the oracle indicates the fulfillment of the prophecy in the words that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon smote (v 28). At the time this oracle was placed in its present position within the body of the oracles against the nations, it already had been fulfilled. The editor of the book, Jeremiah himself or Baruch, makes note of that fulfillment in the introductory verse.

A. Mobilization of Invaders (49:28-29):

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601 Cf. Nm 21:28; Dt 32:22.
602 The KJV wrongly makes the verb future. The ASV is preferable.
1. **Attackers (49:28):** *Rise up! Go up to Kedar! Destroy the sons of Kedar!* The oracle begins with an exhortation to the troops of Nebuchadnezzar to arise and plunder Kedar and the other Arab tribes of the eastern desert.

2. **Results of attack (49:29):** *Their tents and their flocks they will take; their curtains and their vessels and their camels they will bear away for themselves, and they will cry unto them: Terror on every side!* Tents and curtains are the dwellings of nomads. The Chaldeans will heed the exhortation and will confiscate the tents, flocks, beautifully ornamented tent hangings, vessels, and camels of the Arab tribes. The expression *terror on every side* is characteristic of Jeremiah. Some regard the expression as the battle cry of the invader; others regard it as descriptive of the effect that the enemy battle cry produces among the Arab tribes.

### B. Exhortation for Flight (49:30):

**Flee! Wander far off! Dwell deep, O inhabitant of Hazor (oracle of Yahweh); for Nebuchadnezzar has taken counsel against you, he has conceived a purpose against you.** Just as Jeremiah earlier urged the Dedanites (cf. v 8) to *dwell deep*, i.e., retreat into the impenetrable desert, so now he urges the inhabitants of Hazor to do the same. The desert dwellers of antiquity relied on the vast expanse of the desert to protect them from the scourge of war. Enemy armies would seldom dare attempt to penetrate those wide-open spaces where the lack of food and water and the blistering heat would make a military expedition most perilous. But Nebuchadnezzar, the daring young prince of Babylon, carefully had made his plans to attack these tribes. Therefore, Jeremiah urged the desert people to retreat even farther into the trackless waste. This is the first reference to Nebuchadnezzar within one of the foreign nation oracles.

### C. Commission by Yahweh (40:31):

**Rise up! Go up unto a nation at ease, dwelling securely (oracle of Yahweh) with no doors and no bars, that dwells alone.** Yahweh had a word for the attackers. He urged them to launch the attack against the Arab tribes.

Three facts about the Arab tribes are mentioned as incentives to the invaders. First, the Arabs are described as a nation *that is at ease, that dwells without care* (ASV). In other words, the Arab nations have hitherto felt secure from attack. Thus a Chaldean invasion would catch them off guard. Second, the Arabs had no walled cities that would necessitate prolonged siege. Third, the Arabs dwelled alone, i.e., they had no powerful neighbors or allies upon whom they could call for aid.

### D. Result of the Attack (49:32-33):

1. **Arab tribes spoiled (49:32a):** *And their camels will be spoil, and the multitudes of their cattle booty.* For the desert tribes camels were essential; they were the backbone of the economy of the desert region. The camels will become *spoil* for the invader along with the rest of their livestock.

2. **Arab tribes scattered (49:32b):** *I will scatter to every wind those who cut the corners of their beard.* Yahweh declares his intention to scatter the desert tribes, using the agent he commissioned in the previous v. Those who escape the initial onslaught will be scattered to the wind, i.e., in all directions. The Israelites were forbidden to shave or trim the beard (Lv 19:27). They regarded the custom of cutting off the hair from the edges of the beard and from the temples as something unusual.

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603 See Jer 20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:29.
3. Arab tribes overwhelmed (49:32c): *From every side I will bring their destruction (oracle of Yahweh)*… The calamity of invasion will surround these Arab tribes.

4. Arab territories a desolation (49:33): *And Hazor will become a habitation of jackals, an eternal desolation. A man will not dwell there, nor a son of man sojourn in it.* As a result of the attack, the area of Hazor will become a perpetual desolation, a habitation for jackals (not dragons as in KJV). No man will dwell in that area again.

Just when Nebuchadnezzar launched his campaign against the desert tribes cannot be determined. That he did attack and conquer Arabia is specifically attested by Berosus, the Babylonian historian, who is quoted at length in the writings of Josephus. The fact that Noontides, the last king of Babylon, occupied the oasis of Tema in the Arabian desert would also indicate that the prophecies of this section were fulfilled.

**Oracle against Elam**

49:34-39

*The word of Yahweh that came unto Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam…* Elam was located in the hill country east of Babylon and north of the Persian Gulf. Its capital Shushan (Susa) was located about two hundred miles due east of Babylon. Elam was mentioned earlier in 25:25.

Unlike the other nations mentioned in this section, Elam had very little contact with Israel throughout history. During the time of Abraham, the Elamite king Kedorlaomer and his allies quelled a revolt by certain city-states in the Valley of Siddim near the Dead Sea (Gn 14:1-11). Other than this episode, only brief allusions to Elam can be found in the Bible. Isaiah names the Elamites as allies of Assyria in the campaign against Judah (Isa 22:6). The same prophet predicts that it will be the Elamites, along with the Medes, who will ultimately conquer Babylon (Isa 21:2-6).

Why did Jeremiah deliver this oracle against far-distant Elam? The suggestion has been made that the oracle was intended mainly for the benefit of the Jewish captives who had only recently been deported to Babylon (597 BC). Some evidence exists that Elam was giving Nebuchadnezzar trouble about this time. The Jewish exiles may have been looking to that nation for deliverance. False prophets had stirred their expectations of immediate return to Palestine. At the moment Elam looked like the most likely prospect to make the prediction of these deceivers come true. This may explain why God directed Jeremiah to utter this brief oracle against Elam. The illusions and delusions of the Babylonian exiles needed to be crushed. It may be that a copy of this oracle was sent to exiles along with the letter recorded in ch 29.

**A. Background (49:34): in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah.** The oracle against Elam is dated shortly after King Jehoiachin had been deported to Babylon. The prophecy was uttered about eight years after the preceding oracles of this section. Babylonian operations against Elam seem to have been conducted in the winter of 596 BC that would fall in the early part of the reign of King Zedekiah.604 It may be that this campaign of Nebuchadnezzar was the beginning of the fulfillment of the present prophecy.

**B. Doom (49:35-38):** In spelling out the doom of Elam, the prophet makes four points. The oracle is dominated by first person verbs declaring Yahweh’s intentions regarding Elam.

1. Elam’s bow broken (49:35): *Thus says Yahweh of Hosts: I am about to break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might.* The military strength of Elam will be demolished. God declared that he will break the bow of Elam, the weapon on which that nation chiefly relied (cf. Isa 22:6). The military overthrow of Elam is predicted.

2. Elam scattered (49:36): *And I will bring against Elam four winds from the four corners of the heaven; and I will scatter them to all these winds, and there will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not come.* The inhabitants of Elam will be dispersed, scattered to the four winds, as they seek refuge in surrounding nations.

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604 See Wiseman, CCK, 36.
3. **Elam terrified (49:37):** And I will cause Elam to tremble before their enemies and before those who seek their life. I will bring against them misfortune, my fierce anger (oracle of Yahweh). I will send them the sword until I have consumed them. The Elamites will be dismayed when the fierce anger of the Lord is poured out on their nation. Even in captivity they will be hounded by the sword of the Lord until they are utterly consumed.

4. **Elam’s rulers destroyed (49:38):** I will place my throne in Elam and I will destroy from them king and princes (oracle of Yahweh). The rulers of Elam will be destroyed. The real Ruler of this world will set up his throne in Elam, remove the king and princes of the land, and appoint a ruler of his own choosing. When Cyrus, the anointed of the Lord, incorporated Elam as a province in his vast empire, the present prophecy was fulfilled.

C. **Hope (49:39):** And it shall be in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam (oracle of Yahweh). For Elam, as for Egypt (46:26), Moab (48:47) and Ammon (49:6), there is a future. The latter days are the days of Messiah. At that time the Lord will restore the fortunes, lit., bring again the captivity, of Elam. Elamites will experience the spiritual deliverance and blessing of the Messiah’s kingdom. Men from Elam were present in the Pentecost audience when Peter preached the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:9). Perhaps some of them accepted Jesus Christ as Savior that day, and were baptized into Christ. If so, they would be the first fruits of a great host of their countrymen who would embrace the gospel of Christ. For the idea of restoring the fortunes see 29:14.

### SECTION FOUR

**NORTHERN WORLD POWER**

**Jeremiah 50:1-51:64**

Eichorn was the first to deny the authenticity of chs 50-51. He has been followed by most modern critics. Cornill affirms in regard to these chs that “their non-genuineness has been so convincingly demonstrated that now hardly anyone can be found to defend their authenticity.” The critics generally consider the oracle against Babylon to be “a great conglomeration” that cannot possibly be traced back to Jeremiah. They think these chapters are the work of an anonymous prophet of the later period of the captivity who by “artistic copying and imitation” attempted to pass off his writing as the work of Jeremiah. Pfeiffer contends that the forger “concocted” this poem in order to supply the missing book that Jeremiah is said to have sent to the exiles in Babylon (51:59-64).

The critics use four arguments to impugn the genuineness of the Babylon oracle.

1. The critics contend that the historical situation of the Babylon oracle is not that of Zedekiah’s fourth year (cf. 51:59). The people are in exile (50:4-5; 51:54), the temple has been destroyed (50:23; 51-11), the author looks for a speedy overthrow of Babylon (50:8-10; 51:24). All of these considerations lead the critics to suggest a date of about 540 BC, long after the time of Jeremiah, as the date for the composition of this poem.

   This critical objection can be met by the simple hypothesis of E.J. Young. Young proposes that Jeremiah wrote a first draft of this oracle in the fourth year of Zedekiah. He sent it to Babylon by Seraiah precisely as recorded in 51:59-61. But during his days in Egypt, after the temple had been destroyed and the nation had gone completely into exile, Jeremiah expanded that original draft to form the oracle as it stands in the Hebrew Bible. Another possibility is that Jeremiah regarded the exile as already in progress in the fourth year of Zedekiah. He considered the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as so certain that he could speak of it having already occurred.

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605Isa 44:28; 45:1.
606Cornill, *ICBOT*, 308.
609Pfeiffer, *IOT*, 607.
610Young, *OTT*, 228.
2. The critics allege that the Babylon oracle is inconsistent with Jeremiah’s attitude concerning Babylon. Jeremiah considered Babylon to be the servant of the Lord, appointed by God to rule the world. The Babylon oracle could hardly have come from the pen of a Chaldean sympathizer like Jeremiah!

The critical view of Jeremiah’s attitude toward Babylon is mistaken. Jeremiah had not predicted the successes of the Chaldeans because of sympathy or admiration for them, but because that nation was to be used as God’s instrument of judgment upon the nations of his day. Jeremiah certainly did not regard the world rule of Babylon as interminable. He placed a limit of seventy years on Chaldean supremacy. After other nations had tasted of the wine of God’s wrath, then the king of Babylon must drink also. In the light of Jer 25:12, 26, it is appropriate that the section of foreign nation oracles should conclude with an oracle against Babylon. It would be puzzling if such an oracle were absent.

3. The critics contend that an oracle against Babylon would only serve to undercut the strong emphasis in chs 27-29 that the exile would be of long duration. The delusion of an imminent overthrow of Babylon was rampant among the Jewish captives. Jeremiah had done all that he could to dispel the delusion. If this oracle had been sent to Babylon shortly after the deportation of 597 BC, it would only serve to reinforce that very delusion. But the text specifically declares that the Babylon oracle was not circulated throughout the exilic community. It was sunk in a symbolic act in the river Euphrates.

4. The critics think that the length of the Babylon oracle argues against its genuineness. It is twice as long as the somewhat lengthy oracle against Moab. Furthermore, the Babylon oracle is marked by frequent repetitions: the approach of desolation is mentioned eleven times; the capture and destruction of Babylon nine times; Israel’s flight and return to Jerusalem seven times. Surely if this oracle as it stands is the product of the pen of Jeremiah it lacks originality.

In reply to this criticism it should be pointed out that repetition is characteristic of the Book of Jeremiah. Surely it is not critically sound to declare a passage spurious because it can be found elsewhere in the writings of the same author. As for the length of this oracle, it is not surprising that it should be the longest. Babylon exerted a tremendous influence on tiny Judah. For this reason Babylon would demand from the prophet more than a passing allusion. Furthermore, it was necessary for this oracle to be included in the Book of Jeremiah so that later generations might be able to properly evaluate Jeremiah's attitudes toward the Chaldean conquerors.

### Introduction

50:1

*The word that Yahweh spoke against Babylon, against the land of the Chaldeans by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet.* The question of the genuineness of the Babylon oracle should not require much debate since the text itself attributes these chs to Jeremiah. Even the most determined negative critics admit that many Jeremian utterances, turns of thought and ideas appear in these chs, Furthermore, the narrative epilogue (51:59-64), the genuineness of which is generally conceded, presupposes the existence of an extended anti-Babylon prophecy by Jeremiah. Finally, the appearance of the Medes as the conquerors (51:11, 28) may be taken as proof that the oracle was written a long time before the end of the exile when the participation of the Persians would of necessity have been mentioned. On the basis of these several lines of thought, the Jeremian authorship of the oracle against Babylon is fully vindicated.

The background of the Babylon oracle is related in 51:59-64. Seraiah, Zedekiah’s chief chamberlain, was about to accompany his king on a trip to Babylon. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that would come upon Babylon. Seraiah was commanded to read the prophetic message aloud in the face of the city. Then the book containing the message was to be sunk in the Euphrates River. By the first act Seraiah testified that the Lord had now declared to the city its fate; by the second, that the city will sink like the stone, never to rise again. It is clearly implied that the message read by Seraiah over the doomed city was the Babylon oracle of 50:1-51:58.

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611 Jer 50:1; 51:60.
612 While the Babylon oracle is attributed to Jeremiah in the Hebrew text, the Septuagint translation omits by the hand of Jeremiah in 50:1.
614 Orelli, *PJ*, 374-75.
Babylon dominated the political scene of Jeremiah’s day. All the nations of the Near East were required by Yahweh to submit to Babylon for seventy years (25:11). The power lust of Babylon and the sovereign will of Yahweh coincide in the book thus far. In chs 50-51, however, Yahweh announces the demise of Babylon. In all the previous chs the enemy from the north is Babylon; in these chs the enemy from the north is the adversary of Babylon. Here Babylon is no longer Yahweh’s agent of judgment, but the object of his wrath.

The material in the Babylon oracle is put together in an unusual fashion. The oracle consists of a series of poems with prose sections interspersed. The basic theme is the destruction of Babylon and the deliverance of Israel. Following almost every message of doom for Babylon is a message of hope for Israel. Logical progression in the theme is difficult to detect because the prophet chooses to drive home repeatedly his basic point. Any outline of the oracle is arbitrary.

In the first part of the Babylon oracle, the major theme of Babylon's defeat and the minor theme of Israel's return are skillfully blended.

**First Cycle**

50:2-10

A. Babylon's Destruction (50:2-3):

   a. Babylon has fallen (50:2a): Declare among the nations! Publish! Do not conceal it: Babylon is captured! The oracle began with an announcement of Babylon's destruction. The news spread like wild fire as signal standards are raised in the market places of lands under Babylonian hegemony. For most peoples, including the Judeans, the demise of Babylon was good news. The announcement is terse: Babylon is captured! Specifics are not given. They do not matter. What is important to the peoples of the Near East is that the mighty imperial power has fallen.
   b. Babylon's gods shamed (50:2b): Bel is put to shame! Merodach is dismayed! Her images are put to shame, her idols are dismayed! The fall of Babylon means the humiliation of Babylon's gods. Bel-Merodach (Marduk), the chief god of Babylon, had been shamed by what had happened to his city. The idols and images of man’s making are absolutely useless when God begins to intervene in human history. Images (‘atsabhîm) is a general term for idols meaning something like shaped things. Idols (gillûlîm), a favorite word of Ezekiel, means something like dung-pellets. Both words connote contempt for idols. The verb pair put to shame/dismayed is repeated in successive lines to underscore the depth of the humiliation of Babylon’s gods.

2. Land of Babylon desolate (50:3):
   a. Babylon’s enemy (50:3a): For a nation from the north has gone up against her. For seven decades Babylon had been the enemy from the north. In spite of all Babylon’s gods could do, however, a new enemy from the north—the Medo-Persian armies led by Cyrus the Great—defeated the old enemy from the north. The picture is so plain in the mind of the prophet that he can describe those events in 539 BC as though they already had taken place. Jerusalem’s enemy was described in similar terms earlier in the book (4:6; 5:15; 6:1).
   b. Babylon’s destiny (50:3b): He shall make her land a desolation with no inhabitant in it. Both man and beast flee, they go away. The defeat of Babylon by Cyrus was the first in a long series of disasters. The place eventually would become an

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615Bel (Lord) is the title; Marduk is the name of the state god of Babylon.
uninhabited desolation. V 3 is a generic prophecy, a prophetic snapshot of the fall of Babylon considered as a whole. Centuries would elapse between the events predicted in the first half of the v and the desolation pictured in the second half of the v.

B. Israel's Deliverance (50:4-10): The fall of Babylon has profound significance for Israel.

1. Announcement (50:4-5):
   a. Israel seeks Yahweh (50:4): In those days and in that time (oracle of Yahweh) the children of Israel and the children of Judah together will go on their way weeping, and Yahweh their God they will seek. The overthrow of Babylon is the signal for the deliverance and return of Israel and Judah. The passage is devastating to the Anglo-Israel theory that contends that Israel—the Northern Kingdom—migrated to Europe after the collapse of the Assyrian empire. Here both former kingdoms join together in returning in repentance to the Lord their God and to Zion the holy city. For they will go on their way weeping see 31:9. To seek Yahweh is an expression borrowed from earlier prophets (Hos 3:5; 5:6; Zeph 1:6; 2:3).
   b. Israel enters a new covenant (50:5): (1) They inquire about Zion (50:5a): They will ask the way to Zion, with their faces turned in that direction... Ask the way reflects 6:16. Those freed from bondage are interested in becoming part of Zion. Their faces are turned in the direction, i.e., they follow the way marked out for them. The language transcends the desire of Judeans to return to Jerusalem after the fall of Babylon. The v sets forth the general principal that when God liberates people, they desire to be part of the community of the redeemed. For return to Zion see 31:6. (2) They join themselves to Yahweh (50:5b): Come! Let us join ourselves unto Yahweh in an eternal covenant that will not be forgotten. Jeremiah hears the remnant of Israel exhorting one another to join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant. The verb join ourselves unto is associated with the meaning of the name Levi in Gn 29:34. This suggests that redemption brings the redeemed into a priestly community.

      The prophecy of Israel’s deliverance began to be fulfilled when Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon, issued a decree granting the captives the right to return home. From that remnant that returned, God raised up the promised Messiah who established with spiritual Israel the new covenant (31:31-34) for which the remnant yearns in this verse.

2. Reflection (50:6-7): Yahweh describes the circumstances of the exile that ends with the fall of Babylon.
   a. Abandoned by shepherds (50:6): My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray on the mountains; they have turned them to the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their fold. How did God’s people come to be captives in far off Babylon? Like lost sheep abandoned by their shepherds (their spiritual and political leaders) Israel had wandered away from the fold. Even worse, their shepherds had led them astray (cf. 23:13). For the malfeasance of the shepherds see 23:1-4. On the mountains of Palestine they worshiped their pagan gods with immoral acts. Their fold or resting place—the habitation of righteousness, the hope of their fathers—was completely forgotten.
   b. Devoured by enemies (50:7): (1) What the devourers said (50:7a): All who found them devoured them, and their adversaries said: We are not guilty... Those who devoured Israel were the
Babylonians. In 2:23 it was Judah that claimed they had not sinned; here it is Judah’s enemies.

(2) Explanation of the devouring (50:7b): because they have sinned against Yahweh, the habitation of righteousness, the hope of their fathers. These words of explanation are probably to be attributed to Yahweh, not the adversaries. The reason Israel has been devoured is that they have sinned against Yahweh. The Babylonians were being used as agents to punish the apostasy of his people. Yahweh is described as the habitation [or pasture] of righteousness. Those who have a relationship with Yahweh have a right relationship with God and with their fellowman. Yahweh is also the hope of their fathers, i.e., the one in whom the fathers of the Jewish nation put their trust.

3. Exhortation (50:8): Flee from the midst of Babylon, and from the land of the Chaldeans go forth! Be like the he-goats before the flock. Jeremiah foresees an end to that dreary period of Israel’s history. The hour of deliverance will come. At that time Israel must flee Babylon. They must be like he-goats, leading the flock of Babylon's captives out of that political prison.

4. Explanation (50:9-10):
   a. Babylon to be captured (50:9):
      (1) Attackers (50:9a): For I am about to stir up and bring up against Babylon a company of great nations from the land of the north. Flight from Babylon will be possible because the Lord will stir up a great army against Babylon. A company of great nations refers to the coalition of forces under the command of Cyrus. From the land of the north indicates the direction from which the attack on Babylon was to come.
      (2) Siege and capture (50:9b): They will set themselves in array against her; from there she will be taken. The army from the north will deploy about Babylon. The siege will result in the fall of the city.
      (3) Death (50:9c): Their arrows will be like a skillful warrior who does not return empty handed. During the course of the attack on Babylon the arrows of Cyrus’ troops will do their deadly work.
   b. Chaldeans to be spoiled (50:10): And the Chaldeans will be spoiled; all of her spoilers will be satisfied (oracle of Yahweh). The northern army will defeat and plunder Babylon. All of those who attack and ransack Babylon will satisfy their desire to confiscate valuables. The spoiling of Babylon includes the releasing of all captives held by Babylon. When Cyrus conquered Babylon he allowed all peoples held captive in Babylon to return to their native lands.

Second Cycle
50:11-20

A. Babylon's Desolation (50:11-16):
   1. Babylon addressed (50:11-13):
      a. Babylon rejoiced over the plunder of God’s people (50:11): Because you laugh, because you rejoice, O plunderer of my heritage, because you scamper about like a heifer in the grass, and you neigh like mighty horses… The inhabitants of Babylon are being addressed. Laugh and rejoice refers to the conquests of Babylon. The Chaldeans discharged their office as chastiser of Israel with malicious joy. The satisfaction that they received in plundering Jerusalem is compared to a heifer calf...
frolicking about the threshing floor eating her fill. Like strong stallions that neigh in triumph and challenge, the Chaldeans raise a loud and boastful cry after they subdued Jerusalem.

b. Babylon put to shame (50:12): your mother will utterly be put to shame, she that bore you will be embarrassed. Behold, the last of nations, a wilderness, a dry land, a desert. Your mother is Babylon personified (cf. Hos 2:4; Isa 50:1). God has taken note of the arrogant amusement of the Chaldean conquerors. He has decreed that the mother of Babylon (i.e., the land of Babylonia) will utterly be put to shame and confounded. Proud Babylon will become the very least of nations—a wilderness, a dry land, a barren desert.

c. Babylon to be desolate (50:13):
   (1) Uninhabited (50:13a): Because of the wrath of Yahweh she will not be inhabited. Babylon will experience the wrath of the God of Israel. She will be utterly uninhabited. For wrath or fury (qetseph) see 10:10.
   (2) Astonishment (50:13b): All of it will be a desolation; every one who passes by will be astonished, will whistle because of all her wounds. Visitors to the ruined city will be astonished by the desolation that marks the spot. For be a desolation, see 4:27. For the whistling or hissing of passers-by see 18:16.

2. Babylon’s attackers addressed (50:14-16): Yahweh authorizes military action against Babylon. The attacker is not identified, but he is given a mandate to unleash a powerful attack. Yahweh has declared all out war against Babylon.

a. Shoot (50:14):
   (1) Exhortation (50:14a): Set yourselves in array round about, all you bowmen! Shoot against her! Do not spare an arrow… The prophet next turned to the attacking armies. In direct address he urged them to execute the divine vengeance on Babylon. He urged the nations to put themselves in battle array round about Babylon. He exhorted them to unleash their deadly arrows.
   (2) Explanation (50:14b): for she has sinned against Yahweh. The Babylonians sinned against Yahweh by attitude and action when they conquered Jerusalem.

b. Shout (50:15):
   (1) Attack (50:15a): Shout against her round about! The shout is most likely the battle cry raised by troops when they launched an attack.
   (2) Surrender (50:15b): She has put forth her hand. Realizing the futility of further resistance, Babylon surrendered to the invader (cf. Lam 5:6).
   (3) Destruction (50:15c): Her bulwarks have fallen; her walls are broken down… Subsequent to the surrender of the city the walls of Babylon are razed.
   (4) Explanation (50:15d): for it is the vengeance of Yahweh. Take vengeance upon her! As she has done, do to her. Yahweh will not tolerate Babylon’s abuse of power. No defense of the city will be able to repel the attacking force, for this is the vengeance of the Lord. Babylon experiences the same humiliation that she has inflicted on others. For vengeance see 11:20.

c. Slash (50:16):
   (1) Sower cut off (50:16a): Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who holds the sickle in the time of harvest. The speakers are the captive peoples of Babylon. The agricultural regions of Babylonia—famous in antiquity for abundant productivity—will be destroyed by the invader.

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616 Others think the picture is that of a hungry cow that gorges itself to death.
617 Herodotus (1:193) declares that the yield in Babylonia was commonly two hundred-fold and sometimes even three hundred-fold.
(2) Sword unleashed (50:16b): From before the sword of the oppressor each man will turn to his people, yea, each man will flee to his land. When Babylon is laid waste, the exiles from all nations flee to their respective lands.

The picture of the destruction of Babylon in vv 14-16 is a composite that includes prophetic allusions to many different sieges of Babylon. These vv were not entirely fulfilled by the fall of Babylon in 539 BC; Cyrus did not raze the walk of the city, and he was very careful to spare the rural regions of Babylonia. At least these two elements must point to subsequent sieges of the city.

B. Israel's Restoration (50:17-20):

1. Israel twice devoured (50:17): A scattered sheep is Israel. Lions have driven him away. First, the king of Assyria devoured him; now at last Nebuchadnezzar has crushed his bones. In contrast to the devastation that awaits Babylon, the prophet points out the glory that Israel will experience. Hitherto Israel had been a poor, frightened sheep, devoured and crushed by two mighty lions, Assyria and Babylonia.

2. Babylon to be punished like Assyria (50:18): Therefore, thus says Yahweh of Hosts, God of Israel: I am about to visit the king of Babylon and his land as I have visited the king of Assyria. Now the tables will be turned. Assyria already has received its chastisement; that of Babylon will not be delayed.618 Good things happen for God’s people when Yahweh visits (punishes) oppressor nations.

3. Israel again to graze in Canaan (50:19): And I will cause Israel to return unto his habitation and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan, and on the mountains of Ephraim and Gilead he shall satisfy his soul. The fall of Babylon will enable Israel again to feed peaceably on its own pasture both west of Jordan (Carmel; Mount Ephraim) and east of Jordan (Bashan; Gilead). There God's people will enjoy the spiritual and material blessings of Yahweh. For Carmel see 46:18; for Bashan see 22:20; for Mount Ephraim see 4:15; for Gilead see 8:22. All of these areas were famous for lush vegetation.

4. Israel to be pardoned (50:20): In those days and in that time (oracle of Yahweh) the iniquity of Israel will be sought, but there shall be none; the sin of Judah, but it shall not be found; for I will pardon those that I leave as a remnant. In the postexilic times, God will provide for the remnant of his people—the spiritual Israel of God—absolute forgiveness. This v looks ahead to the cross of Calvary where the Son of God bore the sins of the world. The efficacy of that sacrifice was retroactive to sins committed under the old law, as well as sins of the present and future. Pardon makes it possible for Israel to make a new start.

The remnant of Israel (the spiritual Israel) in both Testaments consists of those who turn to the Lord in faith, repent of their iniquities and obey the commandments of God appropriate to that dispensation of time. Thus v 20 states the grounds of the promise of restoration in v 19. God can restore the remnant of Israel to spiritual blessing and prosperity because they have repented; God can pardon this remnant because of what he knew would transpire at Calvary.

Third Cycle
50:21-28

A. Babylon's Visitation (50:21-27):

1. Exhortations to the attacker (50:21):

618Note that it is Nebuchadnezzar who devours Israel but it is the king of Babylon who is punished. This king was Nabonidus, whose son Belshazzar was co-ruler in 539 BC when Cyrus conquered the city.
a. Attack (50:21a): **Against the land of Merathaim go up, against the inhabitants of Pekod!** The plural imperatives in vv 14-16a now become singular. The commander of the forces coming against Babylon is addressed. He is called upon to go up against the land of Merathaim (i.e., double rebellion) and the inhabitants of Pekod (i.e., punishment) and utterly destroy.\(^{619}\) The idea in these two enigmatic designations for Babylon is that God will punish that land because of her excessive rebellion.

b. Slay (50:21b): **Slay and devote her to destruction (oracle of Yahweh).** As in a holy war, the attackers are to devote Babylon to total destruction. Babylon as a superpower must die. **Slay** (r. chrb) is used here for the first time in the book. For the word **devote** (r. chrm) see 25:9.

c. Obey (50:21c): **Do according to all that I have commanded you.** Babylon’s attackers are Yahweh’s agents. They should carry out all of Yahweh’s commands against the oppressor of Israel.

2. **Results (50:22): The sound of battle is in the land and great destruction.** Following the summons to Babylon’s enemies, the prophet described the execution of the commission. He heard the terrible noise of war and destruction in the land. **Sound of battle** is what Joshua thought he heard in the camp of Israel when he and Moses descended from Mount Sinai (Ex 32:17).

3. **Sarcastic lament over Babylon (50:23):**
   a. Expressed metaphorically (50:23a): **How sad that the sledgehammer of all the earth is cut off and shattered!** The lament (how sad it is) is sarcastic. In 23:29 it was God’s word that was a sledgehammer; here the term is used of Babylon. Babylon was the instrument that had smashed the whole world into submission. That hammer had served its purpose; it was now shattered and discarded. For **sledgehammer**, see on 23:29.
   b. Expressed literally (50:23b): **How sad that Babylon has become a desolation among the nations.** In the plan of God the once proud land of Babylon had become a desolation among the nations.

4. **Pictures of the fall (50:24-25):**
   a. Captured like a beast (50:24a): **I laid snares for you, and you have been captured, O Babylon, and are not aware of it.** The prophet described the element of surprise that excluded all resistance at the capture of Babylon. Like an unsuspecting beast caught in the snare of the trapper, Babylon had been captured.
   b. Caught like a thief (50:24b): **You have been found and you have been caught...** The picture changes slightly from the captured animal, to a criminal that has been uncovered and apprehended. As the thief does not expect to be caught, so Babylon is unexpectedly seized.

5. **Explanation (50:24c-25):**
   a. Babylon strives with Yahweh (50:24c): **for against Yahweh you have striven.** The reason for the calamitous fall of the city is that Babylon had striven Yahweh. Babylon had exceeded the bounds of the divine commission to punish the nations. In so doing, Babylon had pitted herself against Yahweh. **Striven** (r. grh) means **to challenge** or **pick a fight**. The term refers to personal, political or military conflict of a physical kind.
   b. Yahweh goes to war with Babylon (50:25a): **Yahweh shall open his armory. He will bring out the weapons of his wrath...** The quick capture of the city will be possible

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\(^{619}\) Some think that **Merathaim** and **Pekod** refer to actual districts of Babylonia, but the geographical reference seems rather doubtful.
because the Lord of Hosts had opened his armory (`ôtsār). In 10:13 the term is used in the plural for Yahweh’s storehouses of rain, hail or snow. He had brought into use all the means of attack at his disposal.

c. Yahweh’s work (50:25b): for it is a work of Adonay Yahweh of Hosts in the land of the Chaldeans. Though God used secondary agents to accomplish his purposes against Babylon, that which they do there is God’s work.

5. Exhortation to attackers (50:26-27a): The commands in vv 26-27 are to the enemies of Babylon.
   a. General command (50:26a): Go up to her from every side! Babylon’s enemies are encouraged to go up against her (attack) from every side, thus cutting off all escape.
   b. Regarding granaries (50:26b): Open her granaries! Pile her up as heaps of grain, devote her to destruction! Leave her no remnant! In v 16 the enemy was encouraged to disrupt the agricultural processes in Babylon; here they are to destroy the food reserves. As in v 25 Yahweh had emptied his armory against Babylon, so also shall all the storehouses in Babylon be emptied and the contents destroyed. The phrase pile her up as heaps refers to the huge piles of rubble that were left after a city had been totally demolished. For devote to destruction see on v 21.
   c. Regarding bullocks (50:27a): Slay all her bullocks! Let them go down to the slaughter! The doomed warriors of Babylon, or perhaps only their leaders, are compared to sacrificial animals (bulls) to be slaughtered. In 48:15 it was the chosen young men of Moab who are said to go down to the slaughter.

6. Final woe (50:27b): Woe unto them, for their day has come, the time of their punishment. Woe unto those armies! The time of their punishment had come, the day of national accountability.

B. Israel's Vindication (50:28):
   1. Return of exiles (50:28a): Hark! Those who flee and escape from the land of Babylon come to Zion… At Babylon's fall, the Jewish captives will hasten to Zion.
   2. Report of the exiles (50:28b): to declare the vengeance of Yahweh our God, the vengeance of his temple. In Zion the exiles will proclaim the good news that Yahweh had executed vengeance upon the enemies of his people. The destruction of God’s temple had been avenged! Vengeance indicates that just retribution had been administered, and divine honor had been vindicated. Israel had been liberated by the divine visitation upon Babylon. Even superpowers must come to grips with divine recompense for their abuse of power. In 11:20 Jeremiah prayed for Yahweh’s vengeance on those who were trying to kill him.

Fourth Cycle
50:29-34

A. Babylon's Recompense (50:29-32):
   1. Exhortation to attackers (50:29a): Summon against Babylon archers, all who handle the bow! Encamp against her round about! Let no one escape! Repay her according to her work. Again the prophet called upon the unidentified archers to encamp round about Babylon. They must prevent the escape of any of the defenders of that doomed city.
   2. Explanation (50:29b): Do to her as she has done; for she has been arrogant toward Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Again Jeremiah called upon the invaders to recompense Babylon, to do to her as she has done to others. The reason for the divine
antagonism against Babylon is made perfectly clear: Babylon had manifested pride against Yahweh. Babylon cannot escape the reality that Yahweh has created a world of moral accountability.

3. Description (50:30): Therefore, her young men will fall in her streets, and all her men of battle will be silenced in that day (oracle of Yahweh). Those who attempt to defend the doomed city will fall in the streets. Similar language was used to describe the slaughter in Damascus in 49:26.

4. Declaration of hostility (50:31):
   a. Yahweh against Pride (50:31a): Behold, I am against you, O Pride (oracle of Adonay Yahweh of Hosts)… The exact background of the formula Behold! I am against you is unclear. The intriguing suggestion has been made that it originated in the formula of challenge with which a champion summoned his rival to combat.
   b. Explanation (50:31b): for your day has come, the time of your punishment. Yahweh of Hosts has appointed the day of her punishment. The implication is that Babylon’s destruction was marked on God’s calendar long before it began to unfold.

5. Fate of Pride (50:32):
   a. Stumbling (50:32a): Pride will stumble and fall, and no one will raise her up. The Lord will bring that proud city to totter and fall. No one will be able to lift her up again. Stumble and fall appear together also in 46:6, 12, 16. The picture is one of utter hopelessness and helplessness.
   b. Burning (50:32b): I will kindle a fire against his cities and it shall devour all round about him. In this sentence reflects Amos 1:14. God’s judgment, like a fire, will consume the cities of Babylonia. Thus will the pride of Babylon be humbled.

B. Israel's Redemption (50:33-34): Again the demise of the superpower leads to the liberation of Israel.

1. Israel’s situation (50:33):
   a. Oppressed (50:33a): Thus says Yahweh of Hosts: Oppressed are the people of Israel and the people of Judah too… In contrast to the recompense of Babylon is the redemption of Israel. The entire nation, consisting of both the remnants of the northern kingdom and the Judeans are in view. The northerners were dispersed throughout the old Assyrian Empire starting in 745 BC; the latter largely were deported to Babylon. Oppress/oppression (r. šq) is used earlier for the treatment of the poor by the rich (6:6; 7:6; 21:12; 22:17).
   b. Imprisoned (50:33b): and all who have taken them captive hold them fast; they refused to let them go. As in the days of the Egyptian bondage, the children of Israel and Judah are held fast in the iron grip of an oppressor. Refused to let them go is language out of the Exodus narrative (Ex 4:23; 7:14, 27; 9:2).

2. Israel’s Savior (50:34):
   a. His identity (50:34a): Their Redeemer is strong, Yahweh of Hosts is his name. To the disheartened and discouraged captives, Jeremiah strikes a note of hope. Their Redeemer (Liberator) is strong—strong enough to break the tight the oppressor’s tight grip mentioned in the previous v. Strong (r. Hzq) is the same Hebrew word

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620 The formula behold I am against you also occurs in Ezek 26:3; 28:22; 29:10 and with slight variation in Zeph 2:5.
621 Eaton, TBC, 71.
translated *hold fast* in the previous v. Babylon is strong, but Israel’s Redeemer is stronger still. Indeed, Yahweh is more than strong; he is *Yahweh of Hosts*, i.e., all powerful. He brings the oppression to an end. The word translated here *Redeemer* is the Hebrew *goel*, the title of the near kinsman.

**b. His intervention (50:34b): He will thoroughly plead their cause...** The Redeemer will take up the cause of his helpless people. He goes to court, as it were, to secure the rights of those who have been illegally restrained in Babylon. According to ancient law, to the *goel* belonged the duty of avenging murder and serving as an advocate and general protector. So now Yahweh is about to rescue his people and take vengeance upon their foe. This sentence is crafted alliteratively with three uses of the Hebrew word *rib*.

**c. Result (50:34c): in order to give rest to the earth, and to disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.** Actually all the nations had been troubled by the Babylonian oppressor. Therefore, when God acts on behalf of his people to disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon, the world at large will reap the benefits of peace.

It was the policy of Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon, to gain the good will of subject peoples by permitting all deported people to return to their native lands. This was not the first nor will it be the last time that the world has enjoyed blessing because of some action that God has performed on behalf of his people.

**Destruction of Babylon**

50:35-46

In this section (which extends through ch 51), the major theme of the fall of Babylon becomes more prominent. The minor theme of the deliverance of Israel occurs only in 51:5, 6, 10.

**A. Thorough Destruction (50:35-40):** The Lord will use the agents of sword and drought through the centuries to destroy all that supports Babylon’s glory.

1. **Coming sword (50:35-37):** A series of verbless clauses have a powerful rhetorical effect. The focus is upon a sword. The sword is not attached to any hand or linked with any historical event. This sword, wielded by the unseen hand of Yahweh, does great devastation.

a. **Against societal structure (50:35):** *A sword against the Chaldeans (oracle of Yahweh), against the inhabitants of Babylon, her princes and her wise men.* God will bring the sword of judgment to the inhabitants of the city as well as the civil and religious leaders. *Chaldeans* are mentioned forty-three times in the book.

b. **Against boasters (50:36a): A sword against the boasters, and they will become fools!* The sword effected radical reversal of circumstances. *Boasters (liars NIV) is probably a pejorative designation for *diviners (NRSV). The vaunted Babylonian wise men will become *fools in that they will not be able to forecast, explain or prevent the overthrow of Babylon.

c. **Against the army (50:36b): A sword against her mighty men, and they will be dismayed!** The heroes of the Chaldean army become immobilized by fear as they face the superior sword of Yahweh.

d. **Against military resources (50:37a): A sword against her horses, chariots, and all the mixed people that are in the midst of her, and they will become women!** Cavalry and chariotry are paralyzed by the unsheathing of Yahweh’s sword. The mixed people are probably mercenaries. In the face of Yahweh’s sword these mercenaries lose all manly courage and become like *women.*
e. Against stores and treasures (50:37b): A sword against her storehouses, and they will be plundered. The sword of Yahweh also comes against the treasuries of the city. All the hoarded wealth of the city and the surplus food stores are plundered by the attackers.

2. Coming drought (50:38):
   a. Devastation of the drought (50:38a): A drought against her waters and they will be dry... God will dry up the ancient and elaborate irrigation system of Babylon.622
   b. Explanation of the drought (50:38b): for it is a land of graven images, and they are mad over terrors. The tidal wave of destruction will sweep Babylonia because that land is a land of graven images and they are mad over terrors. Terrors refers to the cruel, bloodthirsty and immoral gods of Babylon. These gods were horrible creations of the depraved mind of man. What a pity that the highly cultured Babylonians had not used their knowledge to turn to the living God. Certainly through their contacts with the people of Israel they had numerous opportunities to come to know the Lord of glory. Surely it was of such people that the apostle Paul spoke when he wrote: Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things (Rom 1:22-23).

3. Inhabited by desert creatures (50:39): Therefore, desert creatures with wolves will dwell there, ostriches will dwell in it. She will not be inhabited any more forever, or populated for all generations. Therefore introduces the consequences of the sword visitation. In time Babylon will be fit only for the habitation of desert creatures—the wolves or jackals (lit., howling creatures) and the owls or ostriches. Such animals can live where human habitation is harsh or impossible. Babylon is devoid of meaningful life.

4. Uninhabited by humans (50:40): As God overturned Sodom and Gomorrah and neighboring cities (oracle of Yahweh), so a man will not dwell there, nor a son of man sojourn in her. The sword and the drought will eventually make Babylon as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. The point of comparison here is not the manner of Sodom’s destruction, but the results of that overthrow. Following its destruction, Babylon will never again be inhabited by human beings. In this description of the desolation of Babylon, Jeremiah was echoing the prophecy of Isaiah where many of the same thoughts occur (cf. Isa 13:19-22).

B. Ruthless Destruction (50:41-46):
   1. Confronted by a mighty foe (50:41-42): These vv reflect the language of 6:22-24, although the victim is the daughter of Babylon, not the daughter of Zion.
      a. Vast throng from the north (50:41): Behold, a people will come from the north, a nation and many kings will be stirred up from the distant parts of the earth. For the third time the prophet announced the approach of the conquerors of Babylon. No doubt the prophet is presenting a composite picture of the several conquerors that would attack the city of Babylon, beginning with the Medo-Persian armies of Cyrus and concluding with Parthian armies of Mithridates II.
         The enemy is described as a great nation because of the size of the host. Many kings all over the world are being stirred up to make the attack against Babylon.

622 One of the keys to the agricultural prosperity of Babylonia was the irrigation system that dates back to the time of Hammurabi in the eighteenth century before Christ. In fulfillment of the prophecy, the famous canals of Babylon have silted up and all but disappeared.
b. Various contingents (50:42): They grasp bow and spear; they are cruel and show
no mercy; the noise they make sounds like the roaring sea. They ride on horses
arrayed as a man for battle against you, O daughter of Babylon. Armed for war,
the vast host surges forward towards Babylon. The sound of their approach is likened
to the roar of the sea. They are ruthless warriors who show no pity to the daughter of
Babylon, i.e., the inhabitants of the city.

2. Distressed king (50:43): The king of Babylon has heard the news and his hands grow
feeble, distress takes hold of him, pangs as a woman in childbirth. The king of Babylon
is petrified at the news of the approaching host. His hands become limp; distress seizes
his heart like that of a woman beginning her travail.

One cannot read this description of the terror of the king of Babylon without thinking
of what is said of Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel when he hears the prophetic
interpretation of the handwriting of doom on the walls of his palace: Then the king’s
countenance was changed in him, and his thoughts troubled him; and the joints of his
knees smote one against another (Dan 5:6).

3. Overrun by a powerful foe (50:44-46): These vv are an adaptation of 49:19-21.
   a. Fearsome lion (50:44a): Behold, like a lion going up from the pride of Jordan unto
      the perennial pasture, so will I suddenly make them run from it. Babylon’s
      judgment will be that of Edom (cf. 49:19-21). It matters nothing to Yahweh whether
      the nation is small and insignificant like Edom, or a mighty empire like Babylon.
      Any nation that proudly lifts itself up against the Holy One of Israel will be
      punished.

      Babylon’s conqueror will burst upon the land, like a lion from the pride (jungle)
      of the Jordan leaping upon a helpless and unsuspecting flock.
   b. Irresistible commander (50:44b): The one who is chosen I will appoint over it. For
      who is like me? And who will challenge me? And who is the shepherd who can
      stand before me? According to Isaiah (44:28; 45:1) it is Cyrus who is chosen and
      appointed. In his witness to Nebuchadnezzar Daniel stressed the authority of
      Yahweh to enthrone and dethrone rulers (Dan 4:17, 25, 32). No shepherd or leader of
      Babylon will be able to withstand the impact of the divinely appointed conqueror.
      No human leader or nation can resist the appointments of Yahweh. Shepherd is a
      metaphor for ruler.

4. Pasture shocked (50:45):
   a. Appeal for attention (50:45a): Therefore, hear the counsel of Yahweh that he has
      made against Babylon, and the plans that he has formulated against the land of
      the Chaldeans… Babylon once played a pivotal role in Yahweh’s plans. Now,
      however, Yahweh no longer needed Babylon. He has taken counsel against Babylon.
      He has laid plans for the destruction of that land.
   b. Shocking reaction (50:45b): Surely their pasture will be shocked over what
      happens to them. The invader will make desolate the inhabitants of that land like
      helpless sheep.

5. Babylon’s cry heard among the nations (50:46): At the sound of the taking of Babylon
   the earth trembles, and the cry is heard among the nations. The earth trembles in
   astonishment at the news of Babylon’s fall. The final gasping cry of Babylon is heard
   throughout the nations of the earth.

JEREMIAH 51
DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON
The doom/hope pattern that was prominent in the previous ch is prominent in ch 51 as well. The ch concludes with an epilogue that relates the history of the lengthy Babylon oracle (vv 59-65).

**First Doom/Hope Cycle**

51:1-10

**A. Babylon Vanquished** (51:1-5): The description of the destroyers of Babylon continues from the previous ch.

1. **Announcement (51:1-2):**
   a. **Picture #1: wind (51:1):** Thus says Yahweh: Behold I am about to arouse against Babylon and against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai a destroying wind. Behold signals a new announcement and action on Yahweh’s part. For *arouse* see 50:9. *Leb-kamai* (ASV) means literally the heart of those who rise up against me. By this title Babylon is designated as the very heart of opposition to the Lord. But the term *Leb-kamai* has another meaning too, a meaning that the English reader completely misses. Leb-kamai is another example of the use of the cipher called Atbash (cf. 25:26) in which the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is replaced by the last letter, the second letter by the next to the last, the third by the third from the last, etc. When Leb-kamai is decoded it spells the word *Chaldeans* in Hebrew. As in 4:11 a *destroying wind* is associated with winnowing. The destroying wind has its counterpart in the desert wind of 13:24 and the east wind of 18:17.
   b. **Picture #2: winnowers (51:2a):** I will send strangers to Babylon. They will winnow her and empty her land... The *strangers* are Babylon’s enemies. Cyrus the Persian was the first of a succession of strangers who came against Babylon. The strangers will *winnow* or sift the inhabitants of Babylonia as a farmer winnows the chaff from the wheat. On winnowing as a symbol for judgment, see 15:7. The winnowers will be able to *empty* (r. *bqq*) Babylon’s land because the inhabitants of that land are the worthless chaff.
   c. **Picture #3: appointed day (51:2b):** for they shall be against her on all sides in the day of calamity. The citizens of Babylon cannot escape the calamity because their city is surrounded on all sides (cf. 4:17). For Babylon a *day of calamity*, i.e., judgment, is coming as surely as any special day on the calendar.

2. **Exhortation (51:3):** Let the archer bend his bow against the archer, and against the one who raises himself up in his armor. Do not spare her youths! Utterly destroy all of her hosts! The *archer* who is addressed represents Babylon’s attackers. The *archer* against whom he raises his *bow* represents the defenders of Babylon. The *one who raises himself up in his armor* mocks the feebleness of the defenders who scarcely have the strength to stand up even though their customary armor is of light weight. The attackers are further urged not to *spare* (r. *chml*) the youthful soldiers of Babylon (cf. 50:14). The attackers are urged utterly to devote to destruction the Chaldean hosts (cf. 50:21, 26).

3. **Description (51:4):** Slain will they fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and thrust through in her streets. No one was to be spared; every Chaldean soldier was to be slain in the streets of the city. Slain (r. *chll*) are lit., *those who have been pierced*. The word can refer to the wounded as well as the dead.

4. **Explanation (51:5):** The reason for the slaughter in Babylon is two-fold.
   a. **God’s people not widowed (51:5a):** For Israel and Judah have not been widowed of their God, Yahweh of Hosts... By means of the destruction of Babylon the Lord will prove that Israel and Judah—the entire covenant people—have not been forsaken (lit., *widowed*) by their God. Israel is not like some helpless woman left to
fend for herself by the untimely death of her husband. The implication is that Yahweh, the covenant husband of Israel, is not dead. The image of Yahweh as the husband of Israel recalls 2:2.

b. Babylon guilty (51:5b): because their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel. The guilt is best regarded as that of the Chaldeans and not the Israelites. In 50:7 the Babylonians denied any guilt in connection with their treatment of Israel. But Babylon is full of guilt with respect to the Holy One of Israel.

B. Vindication of Israel (51:6-10):
1. Exhortation to flee (51:6):
   a. Urgency of the exhortation (5:6a): Flee from the midst of Babylon! Let everyone save his life! Perish not because of her guilt! The description of the destruction of Babylon is briefly interrupted by words of exhortation directed to Israel. A similar exhortation was given to Moab in 48:6. As God begins the judgment of Babylon, the chosen remnant is exhorted to flee out of the midst of the city. The idea is that the people of God must not allow themselves to become embroiled in the defense of Babylon and possibly loose their lives in that futile effort. Her guilt or iniquity could refer to the punishment for her iniquity.
   b. Necessity for the exhortation (5:6b): For it is the time of the vengeance of Yahweh; he will render to her a recompense. Babylon’s destruction is an act of divine vengeance, i.e., righteous vindication. At that time Babylon will receive a just recompense for all the crimes against humanity and against covenant people (cf. 50:29).
2. Status of Babylon (51:7-9a):
   a. Previous status (51:7): Babylon was a golden cup in the hand of Yahweh, making all the earth drunken. The nations drank from its wine; therefore, nations went mad. Beautiful Babylon with her achievements, wealth and power, was like a golden vessel in the hand of the Lord. Many nations drank the wine of God’s wrath from that golden vessel and became as helpless and pitiable as an intoxicated man. For the image of the cup of wrath see 25:15f.
   b. Current status (51:8-9a):
      (1) Announcement (51:8a): Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken. Suddenly suggests how quickly the great empire falls. Babylon has served her purpose in the plan of the Almighty. She has acted out her role upon the stage of human history. Yahweh will now smash Babylon as a man smashes a vessel that is no longer useful and no longer pleases him.
      (2) Exhortation (51:8b): Wail concerning her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be cured. Jeremiah calls upon sympathetic bystanders for lamentation over the fall of Babylon. Those addressed are foreigners who, whether by choice or force, have been residents in Babylon. These people have an interest in the fate of that city. In 46:11 the sympathetic are to take balm (medicine; cf. 8:22) for the healing of Egypt. The sympathetic are now summoned to heal Babylon. They are now servants of the Great King and are thus obligated to render assistance to him. The words are sarcastic. They underscore the pathetic condition of Babylon.
      (3) Response (51:9a): We would have healed Babylon, but she would not be healed. Those who are addressed do not refuse to render the service, but their

623 Some think the Chaldeans are being urged to flee Babylon.
efforts are in vain. These captive nations affirm that they have honestly done what they could to prevent the destruction of Babylon and to restore her to her former glory.

4. Exhortation to abandon Babylon (51:9b): *Forsake her and let us go each to his own land. For her judgment reaches unto heaven, and is lifted up even unto the skies.* Since their attempts to heal Babylon have proved vain, the captives think now only of their own safety: *Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and save every man his life.* Perhaps there is an allusion to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah in the phrase *her judgment reaches unto heaven.*

5. Announcement of vindication (51:10): *Yahweh has brought forth our righteousness. Come! Let us recount in Zion the work of Yahweh our God.* Righteousness in this context is equivalent to *vindication* (cf. NIV; NRSV). To bring forth righteousness is to exhibit it for all to see. The Jewish captives in Babylon are anxious to rush home to Zion to declare there what God had done to Babylon. The avenging hand of God had vindicated his people. The idolatry of Israel had been sufficiently punished. God’s people were again to be accounted as righteous.

C. Theological Perspective (51:11-12):

1. First exhortation (51:11): *Sharpen the arrows! Fill the quivers!* Again Jeremiah addresses those who attack Babylon bidding them to prepare for battle. Yahweh is directing the attack against Babylon. The meaning of the word translated *quivers* (*šlātim*) is disputed; KJV and NIV render *shields*. Other versions (JB; NEB; NAB; NJV; NRSV) prefer the rendering *quivers*, which seems to fit the context better.

2. First Explanation (51:11b):
   a. Yahweh’s action (51:11b): *Yahweh has aroused the spirit of the king of the Medes...* Yahweh is behind the attack on Babylon. He *aroused*, as one would arouse a sleeping person, *the spirit* of the enemy. *Spirit* refers to the inner ambitions, in this case lust for conquest. The agents of the divine judgment upon Babylon are identified as the Medes, who were first mentioned in 25:25-26.

      The Medes inhabited the region south and southwest of the Caspian Sea in the Zagros Mountains. They were an Aryan people. The traditional capital of the region was Ecbatana.

      In Jeremiah’s day the Medes were at the heights of their power under Cyaxares (625-585 BC). After the fall of Nineveh (612 BC) Babylon and Media divided the Assyrian Empire with Media taking the land east and north of the Tigris River. Nebuchadnezzar II and Cyaxares' granddaughter wed to seal the pact. The Medes turned their attention to the north and toward Asia Minor. After a five-year war with Lydia, Cyaxares concluded a peace in 584 BC, again sealing it with a marriage.

      About the year 548 BC, Cyrus the Great was able to unite the Medes and Persians. Together they became the force that toppled the mighty Babylonian empire. The one who ruled Babylon immediately after its fall to Cyrus was known to the Hebrews as Darius the Mede (Dan 5:31).

   b. Yahweh’s purpose (51:11c): *for his purpose is against Babylon to destroy it.* The attack on Babylon is certain because it is part of Yahweh’s purpose.

   c. Yahweh’s vengeance (51:11d): *For it is the vengeance of Yahweh, the vengeance of his temple.* The Medo-Persian army was the instrument used by Yahweh to execute his *vengeance* (just retribution) upon Babylon for the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

3. Second exhortation (51:12a): A second set of military commands are addressed to the attacking forces. The Lord himself directs the attack against Babylon.

   a. *Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon!* (51:12a): The reference is to a military marker that indicated the particular area of the wall that was to be attacked (cf. 4:6).
b. **Make the watch strong!** (51:12b): The first order of business in any siege in antiquity was to blockade the city to prevent anyone from leaving or entering with supplies. The reference specifically may be to roadblocks.

c. **Set the guard!** (51:12c): A guard had to be posted about the camp of the besieging army lest the soldiers within the city launch a surprise attack.

d. **Prepare the ambushes!** (51:12d): These would be small groups of soldiers strategically hidden who would press into the city when the besieged made sorties against the attackers.

4. **Second explanation (51:12b):** *For Yahweh has purposed and done that which he spoke against the inhabitants of Babylon.* The explanation of these commands is profound: The Lord had planned the fall of Babylon. Now he will execute that plan. Yahweh’s threats are not idle words intended to encourage Israel.

**Second Doom/Hope Cycle**

51:13-19

**A. Babylon’s Powerless Gods (51:13-18):**

1. **Cannot prevent Babylon’s fall (51:13-14):**
   a. **Address to Babylon (51:13a):**
      (1) **Fertile (51:13a):** *O you who dwells beside many waters…* *Dwells* (r. škn) may connote temporary residence. *Beside many waters* is used of the Euphrates River (Isa 8:7) and probably the irrigation canals connected with it.
        The fruitfulness of the Babylonian territory, the produce of the fields, depended on the overflowing of the Euphrates. By an extensive system of dams and canals, the Babylonians had learned in very ancient times to direct the waters of the Euphrates to every area of the otherwise barren plain region of Mesopotamia. These watercourses also served to drain off marsh areas, to avert the violent inundations for which the Euphrates was notorious, and to provide a system of navigation from one end of the land to the other. The watercourses were also of the greatest importance for the defense of the country.
      (2) **Wealthy (51:13b):** *abundant in treasure…* The reference is to the great riches that Nebuchadnezzar accumulated through his conquests. One has only to think of the immense booty of Nineveh, the plunder of Jerusalem, the tributes of Syria and the Phoenician states that filled his coffers.
   b. **Announcement to Babylon (51:13c):**
      (1) **Politically (51:13c):** *your end has come…* The mighty walls, the great waters, the fertile lands, the enormous wealth, the multitude of inhabitants, all together are helpless before Yahweh. Babylon has played her role on the stage of human history and the curtain is about to fall upon the last act of her national existence. *End* implies extermination of Babylon as a world power (cf. Amos 8:2).
      (2) **Economically (51:13d):** *the measure of your gain.* The covetousness of Babylon has reached full measure. Her plundering, profiteering, and exorbitant taxation will soon come to an end. *Measure of your gain* is lit. *cubit of your cut.* Babylon had amassed great treasure by taking her *cut* (*betsa‘*). But Babylon has taken from the she will ever take. This is how the phrase is approached in KJV, JB and BDB.624
   b. **Action of Yahweh (51:14):** *Yahweh of Hosts has sworn by himself…* Yahweh bound himself by an oath to do two things at Babylon.

624Others take *betsa‘* to be a noun meaning *(your) breaking off*, or as an infinitive construct meaning *cutting you off*. Following this approach are NRSV, NAB, NIV, and NASB.
Surely I will fill you with men as with locusts... (51:14a): Babylon was a huge city with an immense population. It is said to have covered 2,500 acres.625 Yet Yahweh swears that he will fill that place with the enemy as numerous as locusts.626 The term locusts (yeleq) refers to the first stage of the insect’s development.

And they will lift up a shout over you (51:14b): Yahweh also swears that the shout (lit., vintage song) will be raised over the fallen city. To lighten their task and express their satisfaction with the yield of the crop, those who tread the grapes to produce the wine often sang a happy song. The fact that the conquerors of Babylon sing a vintage song over the fallen city indicates that their work of conquest is yielding abundant returns. In 25:30 Yahweh himself gives the shout against the inhabitants of the earth.

c. Powerless compared to Yahweh (51:15-16): He who made the earth in his strength, and established the world in his wisdom, and in his understanding spread out the heavens, (16) when he utters his voice there is a noise of waters in the heavens, and he causes vapors to arise from the end of the earth; he creates lightening for the rain, and brings forth the wind from his storehouse. Lest there be any doubt that the Lord who has sworn to destroy Babylon has the power to make good his oath, Jeremiah inserts at this point a passage that he had used earlier in his ministry. Vv 15-19 are all but identical with 10:12-16. The point of the passage is that mankind and man-made idols are helpless before the Almighty God. Israel’s God has created the earth and spread out the heavens (v 15); he it is who controls the rains and brings the storms (v 16).

d. Powerless because physical (51:17-19): Every man is stupid, without knowledge! Every refiner is put to shame because of his image, for his graven image is falsehood and there is no spirit in them. (18) They are vanity, a work of delusion! In the time of their punishment they will perish. In contrast to God, men are stupid and ignorant. The skillful craftsmen who fashion images and pass them off as gods are perpetrating a gigantic hoax. The idols are lifeless and vain. Those who fashioned them will be utterly ashamed of their creations in the day of God’s judgment (v 17). The idols will be unable to protect themselves in that day let alone their worshipers. In the day of their visitation, they shall perish (v 18).

B. Israel’s Powerful God (51:19): The Portion of Jacob is not like these! For he is the creator of everything including the tribe of his inheritance. Yahweh of Hosts is his name! The portion of Jacob, i.e., Israel’s God, is unlike any of the idols venerated in Babylon. He is Creator of everything, including the tribe of his special possession, Israel. It is the God of creation, the God of Israel, the Lord of hosts who has bound himself by oath to destroy Babylon.

Third Doom/Hope Cycle
51:20-24

A. Babylon’s Opponent (51:20-23):
1. Description of the enemy (51:20a): You are my battleaxe, my weapons of war! After establishing that Yahweh is superior to all the pagan gods, Jeremiah addresses the

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625 A. Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia, Portrait of a Dead Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), 140.
626 Others suggest the translation, even if I fill you with men like locust, they shall, etc. In this case the meaning would be that the teeming multitudes of Babylon will in no way be able to prevent the destruction of their city.
conqueror of Babylon. Just as God had used Assyria and Babylon as instruments to bring judgment upon nations and upon Israel, so now he will use the Medo-Persian armies to destroy Babylon. No nation or military force would be able to stand before God’s battleaxe.

2. Devastation of the enemy (51:20b-23): With a series of word pairings Jeremiah displays the awesome power of the coming conqueror.
   a. Politically (51:20b): With you I break nations in pieces, destroyed kingdoms. No individual nation or coalition of kingdoms will be able slow down the advance of the conqueror.
   b. Militarily (51:21): With you I shatter horses and their riders, chariots and their drivers. Neither cavalry nor chariotry will be able to stand before the coming conqueror.
   c. Demographically (51:22): With you I shatter man and woman, old man and youth, young man and maiden. Marital status, and considerations of age and sex will have no bearing on the actions of the conqueror. The strong as well as the weak, the old as well as the young will be shattered. No one is spared.
   d. Occupationally (51:23): With you I shatter shepherd and flock, farmer and team, governors and leaders. The exalted as well as the lowly will all be shattered by the conqueror. Team (tsemed) refers to any team of work animals, especially oxen. One cannot read vv 20-23 without recalling the earlier prophecies of Isaiah concerning Cyrus (Isa 45:1).

B. Israel’s Champion (51:24): And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil that they did in Zion before your eyes (oracle of Yahweh). Repay (šlm in Piel) or recompense has appeared already in 50:29 and 51:6. By means of this mighty and powerful army Yahweh will recompense Babylon for the maltreatment of the people of God. The Jews held captive in Babylon will have the satisfaction of seeing the requital of their enemy.

Fourth Doom/Hope Cycle
51:25-40

A. Babylon Terrorized (51:25-33):
1. Babylon a burning mountain (51:25):
   a. Challenge formula (51:25a): Behold, I am against you, O mountain of destruction (oracle of Yahweh) who destroyed all the earth! The challenge formula originally used against Jerusalem (21:13) now is hurled at Babylon. The Hebrew expression translated here destroying mountain occurs in 2 Kgs 23:13 where it is used of the Mount of Olives and is translated mount of corruption. The Mount of Olives evidently received this appellation because of the idolatrous rites that were performed there. In using this expression of Babylon, the prophet may have had in mind the corrupting spiritual and moral influence of that nation, as well as her physical destructiveness.
   b. Threat (51:25b): I will stretch out my hand against you and roll you down from the rocks, and will make you a burning mountain. To stretch out my hand is a metaphor for exert my power (cf. 6:12; 15:6). Yahweh once saved Israel with an outstretched hand (Dt 4:34; 26:8); now he will destroy Israel’s oppressor in the same

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627 Some commentators argue that Babylon itself is the hammer of these vv and some even argue that Israel is intended.
way. The expression *roll you down from the rocks* probably refers to a volcanic eruption during which rocks mixed with burning lava stream down the sides of the mountain. After the fiery outburst of divine retribution, Babylon will be nothing but a burned-out crater. Its power for evil will be completely exhausted.

2. Babylon a desolation (51:26):
   a. Extent of desolation (51:26a): *And they will not take from you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for a foundation...* So completely burned-out is that mountain that its stones are no longer fit for building material. Isaiah spoke of the foundation stone upon which Zion will be rebuilt (Isa 28:16). The implication of this v, however, is that Babylon will not be rebuilt. Only enormous force can crush stones so that they can never be reused.
   b. Duration of desolation (51:26b): *but you will be an everlasting desolation (oracle of Yahweh).* Babylon will never again serve as the seat of an empire; her position as first city of the world is completely shattered; her glory is gone forever. Babylon will be forever desolate.

3. Babylon an object of attack (51:27-28): Once again in this oracle Yahweh calls upon the nations to make preparations for the final onslaught against Babylon. The battle commands of these vv resemble those of 4:5-6 and 51:12. Seven imperatives in a row authorize Babylon’s enemies to proceed with the attack.
   a. First call for mobilization (51:27): *Lift up a standard in the land! Blow the trumpet among the nations: Sanctify nations against her!* The *standard* and the *trumpet* were means of gathering and directing the operations of great hosts of men in antiquity.628 *Sanctify* points to the custom in that time to begin every war with sacred rites in which the soldiers consecrated themselves to the deity. The campaign against Babylon is viewed throughout this oracle as a holy war because it has to do with a work of Yahweh (50:25) and the vengeance of his sanctuary (50:28).
   b. Second call for mobilization (51:27b): * Summon against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz! Appoint over her a captain! Bring up horses like hairy locusts!* Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz, located in present-day Armenia, were the northern allies of the Medes. The word translated *captain* is an Assyrian word denoting a high military officer, perhaps a mustering officer. The cavalry that would play such an important role in the conquest of Babylon is compared to a plague of locusts (*cankerworm*, ASV). The meaning of the word translated *hairy* is unknown.
   c. Third call for mobilization (51:28): *Sanctify nations against her, the kings of Media and her governors, and leaders and all the land of their dominion.* The third call for mobilization focuses on the Medes. See on v 11. For *sanctify* see on v 27.

4. Babylon a desolation (51:29): *Then the land will tremble and writhe, for the purposes of Yahweh against Babylon stand to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant.* Led by the rulers of the Medes, the vast army marched southward toward Babylon. The land trembles in pain at the news of its approach. God has determined to make the land of Babylon a desolation, without inhabitant. Divine purpose is about to be fulfilled. A quaking earth is used alongside the plan of Yahweh in 49:20-21.

5. Babylon powerless to resist (51:30): *The mighty men of Babylon have ceased to fight; they sit in the strongholds; their strength has failed; they act like women. Her dwelling places are ablaze, her bars are broken.* The prophet turns his gaze to what is happening among the defenders of Babylon. At the approach of the enemy host, the Babylonian soldiers become panic-stricken. On warriors becoming *like women* see 50:37 and 30:5-7.

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628Cf. Jer 50:2; 51:12.
Cowardice makes the warriors withdraw into the strong fortifications where they helplessly watch the bars (cf. 49:31) and gates battered down and the dwelling places burned.

   a. Messengers (51:31a): Runner shall run to meet runner, messenger to meet messenger, to declare to the king of Babylon… From every quarter of the city the messengers hasten to the royal palace with the news that the city has fallen to the enemy. Cf. 50:43.

   b. Message (51:31b-32): that his city is captured from one end to the other (32) and the passages have been seized, the reeds burned, and the men of war are terrified. The news is devastating. The enemy has seized the passages across the River Euphrates that ran through the city, thus cutting off all hope of escape. The reedy swamps around Babylon are put to the torch, both to cut off escape and to burn out fugitives who might have sought refuge there.

7. Nearness of the attack (51:33): For thus says Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time it is being trampled upon; yet a little while and the time of harvest will have come to her. But how can Jeremiah speak so confidently of the demise of Babylon that in his day was at the zenith of power? Jeremiah replies, Babylon is like a threshing floor. At the time it is being trampled upon means that the harvest is taking place. Grain was brought from the fields to be trampled by oxen pulling a threshing sledge over it. The Lord the God of Israel is already preparing for the harvest. It is yet a little while and the time of harvest and subsequent threshing will come to Babylon. The idea of harvest as a symbol of judgment goes back to Hos 6:11.

   B. Israel’s Reassurance (51:34-40):
      1. Complaint (51:34):
         a. Empty vessel (51:34a): Nebuchadnezzar has devoured us, has crushed us, has set us down like an empty vessel. Jeremiah heard as it were the bitter complaints of the Jewish captives against the Babylonians. These complaints are an indictment against Nebuchadnezzar. He had devoured and crushed Israel; he had emptied Israel's land. He had caused it to stand like an empty vessel.

         b. Monster (51:34b): Like a monster he has devoured us, filled his belly with my dainties, expelled us. Like some great monster of the sea or river, the king of Babylon had swallowed all in which Israel delighted (his dainties). The dish was empty; the monster was full. Just what monster Jeremiah had in mind as he penned these words is uncertain. It was probably a crocodile, or perhaps a large serpent. The KJV dragon is unfortunate and misleading. Nebuchadnezzar had expelled Israel, i.e., he had rejected and discarded Israel as though the people of God were something worthless or repulsive. Expelled (r. dûch) means to thrust away; fig. to cleanse; cast out, purge, wash. One wonders in this context if the word does not refer to vomiting. The monster Babylon devoured Israel, then vomiting the Israelites out into exile.

      2. A wish (51:35): May the violence done to me and my flesh be upon Babylon, will the inhabitant of Zion say. May my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, will...
**Jerusalem say.** For the *violence*, outrage and indignity done by Nebuchadnezzar, Israel wished to see the vengeance of Yahweh upon Babylon. It is as though Israel was a plaintiff standing before a judge and demanding that the guilty oppressor be punished. The reference to the *flesh* and *blood* refers back to the figure of Babylon devouring Israel in the previous v. *Blood be upon* is a legal expression demanding punishment for a murderer (Lv 20:9, 11-13). The Chaldean must answer for the blood he has shed.

3. **Yahweh’s commitment (51:36):** *Therefore, thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am about to plead your cause and execute your vengeance.* *Therefore* introduces a judicial verdict by Yahweh following the indictment of the preceding vv. In response to the appeal of oppressed Israel, Yahweh declared that he will take up their *cause* (cf. 50:34). He will go to court, as it were, on behalf of his people. *Execute your vengeance* is lit., *avenge your vengeance.* He will bring vengeance (just retribution) upon their enemies.

4. **Threats against Babylon (51:36b-40):**
   a. **Destruction of waterworks (51:36b):** *I will dry up her sea and cause her fountain to fail.* The *sea* of Babylon is equivalent to the *many waters* in v 13. The term includes the Euphrates, the irrigation canals, and artificial lakes that were part of the defenses of Babylon. Water in many ways was more precious than gold to the ancient Babylonians, since the prosperity of the land depended upon transporting the waters of the Euphrates to the inland agricultural regions. *Her fountain* could simply be parallel to *her sea.* On the other hand, *her fountain* may symbolize the source of Babylon’s vigor and power.
   
   b. **Babylon to become a desolation (51:37):** *And Babylon will be heaps, a habitation of jackals, an astonishment and a place over which one will whistle, without inhabitant.* With the destruction of this elaborate irrigation and water control system, Babylon rapidly became an uninhabited desert marked by shapeless and unsightly *heaps* (i.e., mounds of ruins) and occupied only by jackals. The lions will become *hot* or passionate in devouring their prey. In the midst of their greedy enjoyment, Yahweh will prepare for them a banquet of his own making. He will pour them out a full cup, not of wine, but of wrath. Not realizing the fatal contents of that cup, the Babylonians drink. They become intoxicated, and fall into the drunkard’s sleep—a sleep from which they never will awake. The vicious beasts are immobilized. The theme of the cup of wrath was introduced in 25:27-29.
   
   c. **Babylon’s perpetual sleep (51:38-40):**
      1. **Lion metaphor (51:38):** *They will roar together like young lions, growl like lion’s whelps.* Jeremiah depicts the Babylonians as starved lions, ready to devour everything within reach.
      2. **Feast metaphor (51:39):** *When they become hot, I will prepare a feast for them; I will make them drunken that they may rejoice. I will make them sleep a perpetual sleep from which they will not wake (oracle of Yahweh).* The lions become *hot* or passionate in devouring their prey. In the midst of their greedy enjoyment, Yahweh will prepare for them a banquet of his own making. He will pour them out a full cup, not of wine, but of wrath. Not realizing the fatal contents of that cup, the Babylonians drink. They become intoxicated, and fall into the drunkard’s sleep—a sleep from which they never will awake. The vicious beasts are immobilized. The theme of the cup of wrath was introduced in 25:27-29.
      3. **Slaughter metaphor (51:40):** *I will bring them down like sheep to slaughter, like rams with he-goats.* The tranquilized lion will be dispatched as easily a lamb led to the slaughter. The mention of *sheep, rams* and *he-goats* may be a way of saying that all classes of the population will go down to the slaughter.

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631 The KJV is again misleading in rendering the Hebrew word *dragons*. A different Hebrew word from that used in v 34 is used here. Commentators are in general agreement that the word used here refers to jackals.
A. Babylon's Demolition (51:41-44):

1. Lamentation (51:41):
   a. First lament (51:41a): How Sheshach is captured, the praise of all the earth is taken! Jeremiah begins this section of his oracle with a sarcastic lamentation over the fall of Babylon. The how of v 41 is not the how of amazement. The Hebrew word belongs to the vocabulary of lamentation. Perhaps it can best be rendered in English by how sad it is! No doubt the word is used sarcastically. Sheshach is a cryptic name for Babylon (see on 25:26). The praise of all the earth is Babylon itself. The city that received the accolades of people throughout the world has become a horror.
   
b. Second lament (51:41b): How sad that Babylon has become an astonishment among the nations! How sad it is that Babylon the mighty metropolis has become a desolation and an astonishment among the nations.

2. Description (51:42-44):
   a. Metaphorical inundation (51:42): The sea has gone up against Babylon; she is covered with the tumult of its waves. In v 36 Yahweh says he will dry up the sea of Babylon. Here a sea of foreign invaders sweep over the land of Babylonia.
   
b. Desolate land (51:43): Her cities have become an astonishment, a dry land, a wilderness, a land where no man dwells and no human being passes by. The waves of invaders will leave Babylon in their wake a desolation, a desert, a land where no man dwells.
   
c. Captives freed (51:44):
      (1) Bel disgorged (51:44a): I will punish Bel in Babylon and make him disgorge that which he has consumed. The fall of Babylon will be as much a judgment upon the gods of Babylon as upon the city itself. Bel, the chief god of Babylon (cf. 50:2), will be forced to disgorge all that he has devoured of the riches of subjugated nations. God’s people have been swallowed by the imperial monster, but not yet digested. Yahweh removes his people from those powerful jaws just as a shepherd snatches a lamb from the jaws of a lion (1 Sam 17:37; Amos 3:12). In the end Yahweh is stronger than the Babylonian monster.
         The gods of Babylon had had their moment of glory when they destroyed Jerusalem and brought the people of God into captivity. But with the fall of Babylon from a position of world power, the once famous gods of Babylon dwindled into insignificance and finally oblivion.
      (2) Reverse flow (51:44b): No more will nations flow unto him. The hustle and bustle of commerce that drew merchants from all over the world to Babylon will cease. No more will Babylonian conquests bring a stream of captives to the prison house of Babylon.
      (3) Wall dismantled (51:44c): Also the wall of Babylon will fall. In a context speaking of the release of captives this comment regarding the walls is probably to be interpreted metaphorically. But in time the massive walls, which served to imprison multitudes, did crumble. On the size of Babylon’s walls see on v 58.

B. Israel's Liberation (51:45-46):

1. Flee Babylon (51:45): Go out from her midst, O my people! Let every man flee for his life from the fierce anger of Yahweh. The abused exiles are addressed as my people.

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632 Some prefer to interpret the word sea as referring to the annual inundations of the Euphrates that even to this day render many parts of the ruins of Babylon inaccessible.
The fall of Babylon means liberation for them. Jeremiah repeats what he earlier has urged (50:8), viz., that when the captives see the fierce anger of Yahweh beginning to be poured out upon Babylon, they should flee from the city. God does not want his people to be caught up in the mayhem surrounding the fall of the empire.

2. Fear not (51:46): Let not your heart faint or fear because of the report in the land; for a report will come in one year, and after that in another year a report will come: Violence is in the land and ruler opposes ruler. The captives should not be disturbed by rumors of war and internal conflict. These but foreshadow that final day of doom for Babylon. Numerous upheavals and throne changes plagued Babylon after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BC. The prophet warned his brethren lest these commotions disturb them and aroused premature hopes of release. One is reminded of the similar admonition of Christ concerning the wars and rumors of war that prelude the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.633

Sixth Doom/Hope Cycle
51:47-53

Jeremiah used a formula that he previously used fourteen times, Behold, the days come. In this unit he developed anew the theme of the divine vengeance upon Babylon and the subsequent vindication of Israel.

A. Babylon's Retribution (51:47-49):

1. Images punished (51:47):
   a. General threat (51:47a): Therefore, behold days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon… The general threat against Babylon begins with the anticipatory formula, which is repeated in v 52. The threat against Bel in v 44 is expanded to include all the idols of Babylon (cf. 50:2). Yahweh will punish these empty, powerless symbols of Babylonian imperialism by destroying their patrons and ravishing their land.
   b. Specific threat (51:47b): and all her land shall be put to shame; her slain ones shall fall in her midst. Realizing that they have no higher power to which they can turn, the idolaters of Babylon are utterly confounded and ashamed. The defenders of Babylon are slain (cf. 8:23) in the very midst of the city. The term includes both the seriously wounded and the dead. The gods are unable to intervene on their behalf.

2. Joy over Babylon's fall (51:48):
   a. Extent of joy (51:48a): Heavens, earth and all in them shall sing over Babylon… The entire universe is depicted rejoicing over the fate of Babylon the great oppressor. The fall of the imperial power, everywhere feared and resented, is an occasion for celebration.
   b. Reason for joy (51:48b-49):
      (1) Coming spoilers (51:48b): for destroyers shall come to her (oracle of Yahweh). The destroyers (r. šdd) from the north—the Medo-Persian armies—capture Babylon. These destroyers are mentioned again in v 53 and in v 56 in a collective singular.
      (2) Slain to fall (51:49): As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the land. Heaven and earth rejoiced because once again Yahweh had demonstrated his wisdom, power and justice; once again

633 Mt 24:6; Lk 21:28.
it becomes evident that he and not Satan is the real Ruler of this universe. The sin of Babylon against Israel will be recompensed. Babylon had caused many of Israel to fall in battle. Now many from all over the land of Babylonia will be slain when Babylon falls. The idea that Babylon will suffer as she made others to suffer is found also in v 35.

B. Israel's Return (51:50-51):
1. Exhortation to captives (51:50):
   a. Leave Babylon (51:50a): *O you who have escaped the sword, Go! Do not stand around!* The prophet next turned to those who had escaped destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. Go conveys urgency. Do not stand around reinforces that urgency. For those who love Yahweh, Babylon is no place to linger.
   b. Remember Yahweh (51:50b): *Remember from afar Yahweh, and let Jerusalem come to your mind.* Though surrounded by images of deities, the awesome rituals of paganism, and people committed to a polytheistic worldview, Jeremiah exhorted the exiles to remember Yahweh. They should call to mind all that Yahweh had done for them. They should reflect on his faithfulness to them, and their unfaithfulness to him. They should also remember he holy city Jerusalem—the inspiring beauty of the place; the present shame and humiliation. The idea is to recapture the relationship that they once had with Yahweh. From afar suggests both geographical distance from Jerusalem and spiritual separation from Yahweh as well. Cut off as they were from the holy land and all they held sacred, the Judeans must hold on to the lifeline of memory.
2. Remorse of captives (51:51): *We are ashamed for we have heard reproach; shame has covered our faces for strangers have come unto the sanctuaries of the house of Yahweh.* The captives were so filled with remorse at what had happened to their temple that they seem not to acknowledge the joyful prophetic exhortation of the previous v. The Babylonian victory over Jerusalem was regarded by the heathen as a sign of triumph for their gods. Those Israelites who tried to remain faithful to the Lord were subjected to constant reproach by their neighbors.

C. Babylon's Retribution (51:52-53):
1. Idolatry punished (51:52): *Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of Yahweh) when I will punish her graven images, and in all her land the wounded shall groan.* The words are virtually a repeat of the threat in v 47. Yahweh will vindicate himself by executing judgment on the gods of Babylon. Wounded is the same word as slain ones in v 47, but groan here clearly excludes those who had been killed.
2. No escape (51:53): *If Babylon should go up to the heavens, and if she makes her lofty fortifications inaccessible, yet from me destroyers shall come to her (oracle of Yahweh).* Once before at Babel (Babylon) men had tried to build up to the heavens, but their efforts had been frustrated by Yahweh (Gn 11:1-9). Current efforts at towering fortifications at Babylon likewise will come to nothing. Though Babylon should build up her defensive walls and towers even to the heavens, yet the city will not be able to withstand the assault of the destroyers sent against her by Yahweh. The plural destroyers probably suggests that Yahweh will use more than one enemy to bring about the destruction of Babylon.

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634 The Hebrew word can also be translated *earth*. Keil thinks this v refers to the multitudes from all over the world that might be in Babylon at the time the city falls.
Final Pronouncement
51:54-58

A. Babylon’s Last Gasp (51:54-55):
1. Babylon’s cry (51:54): Hark! A cry from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans. Babylon’s day of accountability, pictured as “coming” in the previous two vv, is now depicted as happening. With prophetic ear Jeremiah could hear the cry at Babylon as the destruction of the city commenced.
2. Reason for the cry (51:55): For Yahweh is destroying Babylon, silencing her great noise. Her waves roar like many waters, the noise of their voice is given forth. The cry of v 54 is justified, for Yahweh is in the processing of destroying Babylon. Behind the destroyers of vv 48, 53 is the divine Destroyer. What happens to Babylon is a work of God. The foe sweeps into Babylon like a great sea, its roar drowning out the great noise (the tumult) of the city.

B. Yahweh’s Recompense (51:56-57):
1. A coming destroyer (51:56):
   a. Description of his coming (51:56 a): For a destroyer will come against her, against Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, their bows shattered… The destroyer is Yahweh’s agent, the Medo-Persian army. The mighty men are Babylon’s defenders. Bows represent military power. The military arm of Babylon will be crushed, the defensive weapons destroyed.
   b. Reason for his coming (51:56b): for a God of recompense is Yahweh; he will surely recompense. The abiding lesson in Babylon’s overthrow is succinctly stated. Yahweh is a God of recompense (judgment) however much moderns may wish it otherwise. Because of his nature, Yahweh will surely recompense, i.e., render the full payment, to any individual or nation that despises him and mocks his word. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap (Gal 6:7).
2. A perpetual sleep (51:57):
   a. Drinking the cup (51:57a): And I will cause her princes, wise men, governors, leaders and mighty men to drink. Five components of the Babylonian power structure are named. Yahweh forces all of them to drink, i.e., from the cup of God’s wrath as in 25:15-28. The royal family, the religious leaders, political appointees, civic leaders and military forces all must drink that brew.
   b. Result (51:57b): They will sleep a perpetual sleep and never awake (oracle of the King, Yahweh of Hosts is his name). Having imbibed from Yahweh’s cup, Babylon’s defenders fall into a helpless stupor. They cannot defend the city. Indeed they will be slain in their drunkenness and will sleep a perpetual sleep, the sleep of death (cf. v 39). Yahweh of Hosts, the King of creation--the real king, the only king--has spoken. It will come to pass.

C. Babylon’s Wall (51:58):
1. Fact announced (51:58a): Thus says Yahweh of Hosts: The wide wall of Babylon will be utterly razed, and her high gates will be put to the torch. The broad walls of Babylon, that must have appeared impregnable to the captives there, will be overthrown and the gates of the city will be burned.
Ancient testimony about the dimensions of the walls of Babylon is contradictory. Herodotus, the Greek historian, estimated these walls to have been more than 350 feet high. On the basis of excavation at the ancient site of Babylon, modern scholars estimate the walls to have been about sixty or seventy feet high and about forty feet wide.\(^{635}\) Herodotus further testifies that in the circuit of the wall of Babylon were a hundred gates, all of brass, with brazen lintels and side-posts.\(^{636}\) These gates will be burned, i.e., attacked, destroyed and melted down. It is estimated that the Ishtar gate was twenty-nine feet tall. It was flanked on each side by a massive square tower.

2. **Lesson delineated (51:58b): Thus peoples labor for nothing and nations get weary only for fire.** Countless thousands of workers from many nations of the world labored to make the citadel of Babylon impregnable. But when Yahweh begins to pour out his wrath upon that city, all of their weary labor will be proved to have been in vain; all the work of their hands will be set to the torch.

The wording of this final sentence (quoted from Hab 2:13) invites readers to make a wider application of the principles set forth in the preceding vv. *Nothing* (r. rîq) is lit., emptied. Those who labor for their own ends, who declare their independence from God, engage in empty efforts.

### History of the Prophecy

51:59-65

A. **Circumstances (51:59-61):**

1. **Address (51:59a):** *The word that Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah …* Seraiah was the brother of Jeremiah’s scribe Baruch (cf. 32:12). He is, therefore, a suitable candidate to carry out Jeremiah’s commission in Babylon. A bulla (stamp-seal impression) belonging to this Seraiah has turned up in excavations.\(^{637}\)

2. **Occasion (51:59b):** *when he went with Zedekiah, king of Judah, to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign.* In the fourth year of his reign king Zedekiah made a trip to Babylon to meet his overlord Nebuchadnezzar. The purpose of this trip is not stated. The commentators are left to speculate as to why it was undertaken.

In that same year a number of ambassadors from the neighboring countries had assembled in Jerusalem to map plans for a new rebellion against the Chaldeans hegemony (ch 27). Hearing of this conclave, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Zedekiah to Babylon that he might reaffirm his loyalty and renew his vassal oath.

3. **Explanation (51:59c):** *Seraiah was the chief quartermaster.* Accompanying Zedekiah on the trip was Seraiah the chief quartermaster (not quiet prince as in KJV) whose job it was to prepare in advance the royal chambers. No doubt Seraiah rode one day’s journey ahead of the royal party to make all necessary arrangements at the next halting place along the way.

4. **Jeremiah’s scroll (51:60):**

   a. **Its origin (51:60a):** *Now Jeremiah had written…* When Jeremiah learned of the trip to Babylon he seized the opportunity to secure the help of Seraiah in carrying out a very special mission. Whereas Jeremiah dictated the scroll in ch 36, he appears to have written this scroll with his own hand.

   b. **Its content (51:60b):** *all of the evil that will come upon Babylon on one scroll, all of these words that are written concerning Babylon.* The prophet gathered together into one book-roll all the oracles against Babylon that he had written or uttered up...

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\(^{635}\)Streane, *CB*, 342.

\(^{636}\)Herodotus 1:179.

\(^{637}\)Holiday, *Her*, 2:434.
until the fourth year of Zedekiah. Probably the reason Jeremiah was careful to use one roll (ASV mar) was because a single roll could be handled more easily and safely than two. The scroll is said to contain all the evil (misfortune) that will befall Babylon. The phrase even all these words that are written concerning Babylon points back to the content of chs 50-51.

5. Seraiah’s instructions (51:61): Jeremiah said to Seraiah: When you come to Babylon see that you read aloud all these words. Seraiah was given the scroll and commanded to read it aloud in Babylonia. See that you read is lit., see and read. The words could also mean, “Look at this first, then read it aloud.” Reading in these days was always done aloud. This action made the Babylon material a matter of public record. In carrying out these instructions Seraiah would be in as much danger as was his brother Baruch when he read the earlier scroll in the temple (ch 36).

B. Seraiah’s Prayer (51:62): Then you shall say: O Yahweh, You have spoken concerning this place that you will cut it off so that there will be no living thing in it, neither man nor beast, because it will be an everlasting desolation. Having read the scroll Seraiah was to pray. The prayer serves several purposes. First, it summarizes the Babylon oracle. Second, it acknowledges that what was written on the scroll was the very word of God. Third, the prayer Seraiah serves to affirm that God’s people were anxiously awaiting the fulfillment of the anti-Babylon prophecies in the scroll. So that there would be no living thing in it, neither man nor beast comes from 50:3. For everlasting desolation see 51:26.

C. Seraiah’s Action (51:63-64):
1. Scroll sunk (51:63): And it shall come to pass when you have finished reading aloud this scroll you shall bind a stone to it and cast it into the midst of Euphrates. When the reading was finished, Seraiah was instructed to bind a stone about the scroll and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates River, the lifeline of ancient Babylon. The command suggests that the document was of papyrus, because a leather document would sink on its own.

2. Action explained (51:64a): and say: Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not arise because of the calamity that I am about to bring against her, and they shall be weary. Earlier in his career Jeremiah had buried a waistband near the Euphrates signifying the doom of Judah (13:1-11). Now another ominous message is associated with that same river. As he sunk the scroll Seraiah was to proclaim that Babylon will disappear forever. The words, they shall be weary (in Hebrew, one word) are the last words of the Babylon prophecy (cf. v 58) of chs 50-51. The repetition of the word by Seraiah serves to join together the symbolic act and the prophecy that has just been read.

Some questions about this episode need to be answered. To whom was Seraiah to read the scroll? Probably not to the Babylonians, or even to a large assembly of Jews. Such a public reading would be fraught with great danger to Seraiah and possibly even to Zedekiah himself. Most likely this action was performed before certain trustworthy witnesses who would be able to testify in later days as to what they had heard and seen.

What was the purpose of this reading? With respect to the city of Babylon, it was an announcement of doom. In view of the circumstances of the journey to Babylon, the announcement of judgment is even more significant. While the king of Judah was publicly casting himself in homage before the Chaldean throne, Seraiah was to cast a roll in the Euphrates on which was prophesied the destruction of Babylon and the deliverance of Israel. With respect to God, the reading of the scroll was a pledge to his people that he would intervene on their behalf and bring them out of their bondage. Throughout the years of the exile the people of God could call upon him to make good the promises contained in this oracle. With respect to the Israelites the reading of the scroll would be a great comfort. No doubt those who heard the reading and witnessed the sinking were called upon to recite again and again the wonderful message.
Why was the Babylon scroll sunk in the Euphrates River? The sinking of the scroll was not an act of sympathetic magic such as was practiced among the heathen. By dramatically acting out an event, pagan religious leaders believed that they magically were setting the wheels of fate in motion that would actually bring the event to pass. But Jeremiah, the man of God, would certainly not authorize such a superstitious act. The sinking of the scroll in the Euphrates was simply a symbolic act such as was common to the prophetic ministries. The act was a visual aid to the message proclaimed in the scroll; it foretold the doom of Babylon.

What is the relationship between the scroll sunk in the Euphrates River and the Babylon prophecy of 50:2-51:58? As already noted, some feel that the situation reflected in the Babylon oracle is not that of the fourth year of Zedekiah. They have therefore proposed that when Jeremiah rewrote the scroll that he sent to Babylon, he added many similar threats against Babylon. For example, those words that suggested that the temple already had been destroyed under this theory could be assigned to a date subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem. While this theory has much to commend, it is not necessary. The impression left in v 60 and in Seraiah’s repetition of the last Hebrew word of v 58 (cf. v 64) is that the scroll that he read in Babylon was identical with the prophecy of 50:2-51:58.

D. Concluding Declaration (51:64b): Thus far are the words of Jeremiah. These words are an editorial note about the construction of the book. Whoever was responsible for appending ch 52 to the book must have added these words so as to carefully distinguish between his contribution and that of the great prophet. Nobody knows the identity of the author of Jer 52. Some have tried to argue that Jeremiah himself was the author, in spite of the note at the end of ch 51.

The argument for the Jeremian authorship of the ch is basically this: Jer 52 was taken from the Book of Kings and appended to Jeremiah's book. Since Jeremiah is said in Jewish tradition to have been the author of Kings, he must also be the author of Jer 52. This argument assumes that the Jewish tradition that attributes the Book of Kings to Jeremiah is reliable. It further assumes that Jer 52 was in fact borrowed from Kings. Finally, the argument for the Jeremian authorship of this ch ignores the plain implication of the editorial comment at the end of ch 51.

The most likely candidate for the authorship of Jer 52 is Baruch the faithful secretary of Jeremiah. He, no doubt, was the one responsible for putting the Book of Jeremiah together. He it was in all probability who added ch 52.

Why would Baruch add this historical appendix to the Book of Jeremiah? After all, the prophet himself is not mentioned a single time in the chapter. Furthermore, most of the material in this chapter can be found in the Book of Kings and, in an abridged form, in Jer 39. Baruch probably had a two-fold purpose in this appendix.

1. Ch 52 describes in detail the fall of Jerusalem, the event that vindicated the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. What a fitting conclusion, to allow the facts of history to bear witness to the truth of the prophetic word.

2. Baruch wished to call attention to the release of Jehoiachin (vv 31-34). Jehoiachin's release gave promise that after the midnight of judgment, a brighter day was beginning to dawn—a day that Jeremiah had foreseen and described in such grand style.

Jer 52, then, proclaims that God’s word of judgment has been fulfilled; his word of promise must surely follow.

**JEREMIAH 52**

**HISTORICAL APPENDIX**

The final ch of the book is derived from other historical sources. The contents (excepting vv 28-30) are parallel to 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30. Although he lived through the events that are narrated, Jeremiah is not mentioned. It is as though this ch is offered as independent testimony to the accuracy of the great prophet’s predictions concerning Jerusalem.

**Siege of Jerusalem**

52:1-11
A. Explanation of the Siege (52:1-3):

1. Introduction to Zedekiah (52:1): Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign and he ruled over Jerusalem for eleven years. The name of his mother was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. The ch begins with the standard royal introduction from the Book of Kings. Zedekiah was but twenty-one years old when he came to the throne of his country as the vassal of a foreign king. Libnah was an important city in the Shephelah west of Jerusalem. In large measure the policies of King Zedekiah led to the catastrophe described in the rest of the ch.

2. Sin of Zedekiah (52:2-3):
   a. General disposition (52:2): And he did evil in the eyes of Yahweh just as Jehoiakim had done. Religiously Zedekiah followed the same course that his brother Jehoiakim had followed. Abundant evidence exists within the Book of Jeremiah to substantiate this general charge against Zedekiah. A prophet of God with divine counsel was available to him, yet Zedekiah refused to submit to the program of God. Jeremiah advised submission to Babylon; Zedekiah plotted rebellion.
   b. Anger of Yahweh (52:3a): For because of the anger of Yahweh this condition continued to be in Jerusalem and Judah until he cast them out from his presence. Throughout his reign Zedekiah refused to give heed to the word of God. Because the political leaders and populace of Jerusalem repudiated the will of God, Yahweh was angry with his people and saw to it that they were cast out of his presence. The verb underscores the fact that the exile was Yahweh’s doing.
   c. Rebellion against Babylon (52:3b): And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. Yielding to the advice and pressure of his youthful advisers, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Jer 27 tells of his attempted conspiracy with neighboring nations. Zedekiah’s disastrous policy was apparently built on the false premise that the Lord would intervene and save Jerusalem as he had previously done in the reign of Hezekiah (cf. Jer 21:2). How presumptuous for men to expect God to work miracles when they are not willing to submit themselves to his will! Zedekiah provoked God to anger by his sin; he provoked Babylon to anger by his rebellion.


1. Beginning of the siege (52:4): And it came to pass in the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, he and all his army, came against Jerusalem. He encamped against her, and built siege works against her on every side. Nebuchadnezzar was not long in bringing his forces to punish the rebellious vassal. The tenth day of the tenth month became a date of infamy in the history of Judah. For almost seventy years the Jews took note of that sad occasion by fasting (cf. Zech 8:19).

2. Duration of the siege (52:5): And the city was under siege until the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. Jerusalem withstood the Chaldean siege for eighteen months.

3. Hardship of the siege (52:6): In the ninth day of the fourth month famine gripped the city. There was no bread for the people of the land. The sacred writer has shown amazing reserve as he described those last agonizing weeks of the siege. Eventually there was no further bread left in the city.

C. Fate of the King (52:7-11): Cf. 39:4-7.

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638 Cf. Jer 37:2; 3; 38:5, 24 etc.
639 The pathetic plight of the people is recorded in more detail in the Book of Lamentations (1:19, 20; 2:11, 12, 20; 4:9, 10).
1. Zedekiah’s attempted escape (52:7): The city was breached. The men of war fled, going out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the walls that lies beside the garden of the king (the Chaldeans were all around the city) and went off in the direction of the Arabah. In the fourth month of Zedekiah’s eleventh year (July 586 BC) the Chaldeans were successful in making a breach in the walls of the city. This day too for years was commemorated by a fast (see Zech 8:19). Zedekiah and the remnants of his army attempted to flee by night, thus unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezek 12:12). The king and his men fled in the direction of the Arabah, the lowland region through that the river Jordan flows. Perhaps they were attempting to escape across the Jordan to some friendly neighboring nation.

2. Zedekiah’s capture (52:8): But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king. They overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, all his army having been scattered from him. When the Chaldeans caught up with Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho the bodyguard of the king deserted him; it was every man for himself.

3. Zedekiah’s capture (52:9): And they took the king and brought him unto the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath. He then pronounced sentence over him. The Chaldeans dealt ruthlessly with Zedekiah. After his capture near Jericho, Zedekiah was taken some two hundred miles north to Riblah where he was brought face to face with the Great King to whom he had sworn allegiance eleven years earlier. There Nebuchadnezzar pronounced judgment upon his faithless vassal.

4. Zedekiah’s punishment (52:10-11): The king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. He also slew all the princes of Judah at Riblah. (11) He put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, took him to Babylon and put him in prison until the day of his death. At the time a vassal treaty between two kings was ratified, the vassal would pronounce horrible maledictions upon himself should he be unfaithful to his treaty obligations. It may be that Nebuchadnezzar now read those maledictions to Zedekiah. If that was the case, then Zedekiah pronounced judgment upon himself. Be that as it may, the judgment upon King Zedekiah is one of the saddest recorded in the Bible for two reasons.

First, Zedekiah witnessed the execution of his own sons and also some of the princes of the land (v 10). That turned out to be the last sight he saw, for Nebuchadnezzar had his eyes put out.

Second, Zedekiah lost his freedom; he was carried to Babylon where he remained in prison until the day of his death (v 11). Bitter are the consequences for that soul who neglects the will of the Almighty!

Fall of Jerusalem
52:12-16

A. Arrival of Nebuzaradan (52:12): In the tenth day of the fifth month of the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. Chronology is no longer reckoned by the regal years of Zedekiah, for he is no longer king. Jerusalem’s fate is now in the hands of the ruthless Chaldeans.

The account of the destruction of Jerusalem, already summarized in 39:8-10, is almost identical with 2 Kgs 25:8-17. After the city of Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans, the soldiers awaited further instructions concerning the fate of the city. A month after the successful
breaching of the walls, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard\textsuperscript{640} arrived from Riblah with the orders of Nebuchadnezzar.

The English text of Kings and Jeremiah seems to present a contradiction as to the date that Nebuzaradan arrived at Jerusalem. According to the former account he arrived on the seventh day of the month while in the present narrative it is the tenth day of the month (cf. 2 Kgs 25:8). The simplest solution is that Nebuzaradan arrived \textit{at} Jerusalem on the seventh day. For some unexplained reason he did not enter Jerusalem until the tenth day of the month.\textsuperscript{641}

\section*{B. Burning of the City (52:13):} \textit{And he burned the house of Yahweh and the house of the king; and all the houses of Jerusalem and every great house he burnt with fire.} Nebuzaradan’s orders were to destroy Jerusalem and prepare its inhabitants for deportation to Babylon. The entire city including the temple area was put to the torch. Cf. 39:8-9. The fourfold use of \textit{house} suggests massive destruction of all that gave Jerusalem meaning and made the city habitable.

\section*{C. Dismantling of the Walls (52:14):} \textit{And all the army of the Chaldeans that were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem round about.} Nebuzaradan ordered the Chaldean soldiers to dismantle Jerusalem’s walls. Those walls were to remain in ruins until the days of Nehemiah over a century later.

Both Psalms (74:6-7) and Lamentations (2:7-9) provide vivid poetic descriptions of this destruction.

\section*{D. Deportation of the Citizens (52:15-16):}

1. \textit{Those deported (52:15):} \textit{Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive some of the poor people, the rest of the people who were left in the city, and the deserters who had gone over to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude.} The extent of exile is indicated in the four categories of citizens that are named. In contrast to the deportations of 597 BC, the exiles this time were a cross section of the city’s population. Among them were \textit{some of the poor people}. The Babylonians also deported \textit{the rest of the people who were left in the city} at the time of its collapse. Those who had deserted to the Chaldeans during the siege, and the rest of the \textit{multitude} (i.e., the country people)\textsuperscript{642} were also prepared for the long trip to Babylon.

2. \textit{Those left (52:16):} \textit{But Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and laborers.} Only the very poorest people were left in the land to farm it. Some have suggested that these were workmen on highly organized state-managed estates producing export-quality produce such as wine and oil.\textsuperscript{643} Clearly it was in the interests of the Chaldeans to revitalize the agro-economy of the area.

\textbf{Temple Plunder}

52:17-23

Having sketched in broad outline the dimensions of the calamity of 586 BC, the narrative now becomes more specific. The seizure and/or destruction of temple vessels is narrated in detail for

\textsuperscript{640}On the title of Nebuzaradan, see note on 39:9.
\textsuperscript{641}In the Hebrew the word \textit{Jerusalem} has no preposition attached to it in 2 Kgs 25:8, but has the preposition \textit{beth} in Jer 52:12.
\textsuperscript{642}Some prefer to translate the Hebrew word as \textit{artisans}. In the light of the parallel passage 2 Kgs 25:11, \textit{multitude} is the best translation.
\textsuperscript{643}Holiday, \textit{Her}, 2:441.
several reasons. First, on purely a material level the temple vessels were a source of great wealth for the Chaldeans. More importantly, those vessels were the last signs of legitimacy for the old regime. To see them handled by unholy hands and hauled off unceremoniously severed any small threat of hope that yet remained that Yahweh would intervene on their behalf.

A. Items Smashed (52:17): *As for the bronze pillars that belonged to the house of Yahweh, the bases, the bronze sea that was in the house of Yahweh, the Chaldeans smashed them and carried away all the bronze to Babylon.* The description of the fate of the temple furniture is much fuller here than in the parallel passage in 2 Kgs 25:13-17. In order to facilitate transportation, the larger items of temple furniture—the brazen pillars, the bases and the sea—were broken up.

The two eighteen-cubit bronze pillars stood immediately in front of the temple proper. When they were set in place back in the days of Solomon, they were given names. One was called *Jachin (he shall establish)*; the other *Boaz (in it is strength).* See 1 Kgs 7:13-22. What purpose these pillars served is still debated.

The *bases* were the supports of the ten portable lavers at which animals about to be offered as burnt offerings were washed (1 Kgs 7:27-37). The *brazen sea* was a huge laver at which the priests washed their hands and feet before offering sacrifice (1 Kgs 7:23-26).

B. Smaller Vessels (52:18-19):

1. Bronze items (52:18): *They also took with them the pots, shovels, snuffers, sprinkling bowls, forks and all the bronze utensils used in the service.* The smaller temple vessels of brass, gold and silver were transported to Babylon where they became trophies of victory in the temples of the gods. In v 18 the objects of brass are enumerated. The *pots* and the *shovels* were used in the temple for carrying away the ashes after sacrifice. The *basins* were probably used in the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood. The *spoons* were incense-cups (cf. Nm 7:14). The word translated *snuffers* is of uncertain meaning.

2. Vessels of gold and silver (52:19): *The captain of the guard took away the small bowls, the fire pans, basins, the pots, lampstands, the incense bowls, the libation bowls—both the ones that were of gold and the ones of silver.* In v 19 the vessels of gold and silver are enumerated. The pots, basins and spoons (incense cups) are mentioned a second time in this v simply because such utensils were made of gold and silver as well as brass. Of the new items mentioned in v 19, the function of the *cup* is unknown. The *fire pan* was used for transporting hot coals.

Ten lampstands illuminated the interior of the temple (1 Kgs 7:49). The *bowls* of v 19 were connected with the table of showbread and were probably used for libations.

A problem arises with regard to the golden vessels. According to 2 Kgs 24:13 *all the vessels of gold* were carried off to Babylon in 597 BC How then can it be said that the golden vessels were carried away by Nebuzaradan some ten years later?

It is possible, of course, that the golden vessels were replaced after the deportation of 597 BC More likely, however, only the most valuable vessels were removed in 597 BC The golden vessels of less value were left in the temple along with the silver utensils to await the plunder of 586 BC

C. Amount of Bronze (52:20): *As for the two pillars, the one sea, the twelve oxen of bronze that were under the bases, that king Solomon had made for the house of Yahweh—the bronze of all these vessels could not be measured.* The total amount of the brass carried

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644Cf. Ex 27:3; 38:3; Nm 4:14.
away by the Chaldeans was so great that it seemed to merit special emphasis. The mention of the twelve brazen bulls that were under the bases presents a two-fold difficulty for the Bible student. In the Book of Kings the bases were under the lavers, while the bulls supported the molten sea (1 Kgs 7:25, 43). Furthermore, it is stated in 2 Kgs 16:17 that Ahaz had already taken away the twelve bulls and sent them as tribute to Assyria more than a century earlier (2 Kgs 16:17).

The second difficulty is easier to cope with than the first. It is entirely possible, and even likely, that the twelve bulls had been replaced since the days of wicked King Ahaz, perhaps during the reforms of King Hezekiah. As for the first difficulty, it is perhaps best to follow the reading of the Septuagint: the twelve bulls that were under the sea. In other words, one Hebrew word may have dropped out of the standard Hebrew text during the course of its transmission.

D. Pillars (52:21-23):

1. Size (52:21): As for the pillars, the height of one pillar was eighteen cubits, twelve cubits in circumference, and their thickness was four fingers (it was hollow). Vv 21-23 are in the nature of a supplement to the foregoing description of the loot taken by the Chaldean soldiers. The focus here is on the two pillars of brass already mentioned in v 17. Each pillar was eighteen cubits (twenty-seven feet) high; they had a circumference of twelve cubits (eighteen feet). The pillars were hollow with the metal being about four inches (fingers) thick.

2. Capitals (52:22): Upon it was a bronze capital five cubits high; and all around the capital was a latticework with pomegranates, all of bronze. The second pillar also had similar decorations and pomegranates. The pillars were crowned with capitals of brass that were an additional five cubits high. A decorative latticework surrounded the capital. Other translations of the word are network, meshwork, or filigree.

3. Pomegranates (52:23): And there were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides. In all there were a hundred pomegranates upon the latticework. Upon it were surmounted one hundred ornamental pomegranates, twenty-four on each side and one at each corner.

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Post-Fall of Jerusalem
52:24-31

A. Executions (52:24-27): V 10 alludes to the execution of the princes of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah; vv 24-27 expands upon that allusion by naming the princes who were slain. The passage is almost identical with 2 Kgs 25:18-21. Nebuzaradan selected those who were highest in authority. They were most responsible for the prolonged resistance of Jerusalem. Public executions of the leading citizens of Jerusalem must have made a lasting impression on all who witnessed these events.

1. Religious leaders (52:24):

   a. And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest (52:24a): At the head of these officials is Seraiah the chief of priests, who is not elsewhere mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah. Seraiah came from a noble line of priests. He was the grandson of the great priest Hilkiah who is famous for his participation in the reforms of King

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646 The account in 1 Kgs 7:20 states that each pillar had two hundred pomegranates arranged in two rows. Either the account here ignores one of the rows of the pomegranates, or else one row had been removed before this time.
Josiah; he was grandfather of Joshua who was high priest when the temple was rebuilt after the Exile.\(^\text{647}\) Ezra the scribe also descended from this Seraiah (Ezra 7:1).

b. *and Zephaniah the second priest...* (52:24b): After Seraiah, the priest Zephaniah is mentioned. He is probably the same Zephaniah who is mentioned several other times in the Book of Jeremiah.\(^\text{648}\) Zephaniah is called *the second priest* and it is not entirely clear whether this is an office or an order. According to 2 Kgs 23:4 there were several second priests.

c. *and the three keepers of the threshold* (52:24c). Three *keepers of the threshold* were also among those executed at Riblah. These must have been high-ranking clergy who supervised the four thousand Levites (1 Chr 23:5) whose duty it was to prevent any desecration of the temple.\(^\text{649}\)

2. **Military leader (52:25a):** He also took from the city an officer who had charge of the *men of war*... The first such official is not named but is designated as *the officer that was set over the men of war*. His name is not given. Some commentators have suggested that this man was the general who commanded the city garrison; others propose that he was a civilian official equivalent to minister of defense or the like.

3. **Political leaders (52:25b):** In the third category of those executed are eight officials of state.

a. **Royal advisers (52:25b):** *seven men who were personal advisers of the king who were found in the city*... Lit., *men who saw the king's face*, i.e., who were part of the king’s personal entourage. The account in the Book of Kings gives the figure here as *five* instead of *seven*. Perhaps two additional court officers were executed shortly after that day on which Zedekiah saw his princes slain and then had his own eyes put out. Kings would be counting only those slain in the initial execution while Jer 52 is giving totals.

b. **Defense minister (52:25c):** *the scribe of the captain of the host who mustered the people of the land*... This scribe’s job was to *muster the people of the land*. *Scribe* was a title given to the highest officers of state.\(^\text{650}\) This particular *scribe* was likely the head of the war department of Judah.\(^\text{651}\)

4. **People of the land (52:25d):** *and sixty men from the people of the land who were found in the midst of the city*. In addition to the priests and civilian officials, some sixty of the *people of the land* were also executed by Nebuchadnezzar. Frequently in the OT the phrase *people of the land* has the meaning of *landed gentry*. However, since earlier in this *v the people of the land* are the general populace who were mustered for military service, the expression likely has that same meaning here. In other words, sixty men were singled out from the ranks of the conscripted soldiers for execution as a warning to the rest of the troops.

In all seventy-four executions are documented. The text does not indicate any reasons these particular men were singled out. Were they known Babylonian resisters? Or were they simply “available” when the round up of prisoners started?

5. **Execution and deportation (52:26):** *And the king of Babylon smote them and had them killed at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So he deported Judah from upon his land.* The group that was destined for death was taken to Riblah to stand trial before

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\(^\text{648}\) See Jer 21:1; 29:25, 29; 37:3.


\(^\text{651}\) In 2 Chron 26:11 it is expressly stated that Uzziah’s army went out *by the hand of Jeiel the scribe*, i.e. Jeiel was the civilian official who organized and dispatched the host.
Nebuchadnezzar. The king of Babylon *smote* them (perhaps had them flogged) and put them to death.

**B. Deportation Details (52:28-30):** Vv 28-30 have no parallel in the Book of Kings. The statistics given here are found nowhere else in Scripture. These vv speak of three deportations of Jews to Babylon. Dating these deportations by the reign of Nebuchadnezzar subtextly makes that point that the Babylonians were in full control. The Babylonian dating also suggests that the figures were taken from official records. See special note at the conclusion of this ch.

1. **Seventh year (52:28):** *These are the people whom Nebuchadnezzar took captive: In the seventh year 3,023 Jews...* According to 2 Kgs more than ten thousand people were hauled off to Babylon in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:11-16); Jer 52 states that 3,023 persons were carried away captive in the seventh year of that king. If these two passages are referring to the same deportation, how can the difference in the number of captives be explained? Several proposals have been made.
   1. The lower figure of 3,023 may be the males; the higher figure in Kings the total of all people deported.
   2. The higher number represents the total taken captive in Jerusalem; the lower figure those who actually survived the long, rigorous journey.
   3. The figure in 52:28 is a partial or supplemental figure to that mentioned in 2 Kings.

   It is then possible in at least three different ways to reconcile Jer 52:28 and 2 Kgs 24:11-16. However the figures are harmonized, the believing scholar must press for the accuracy of both Kings and Jer 52 in regard to those taken captive in 597 BC. The Babylonians, like the Assyrians, kept a tally of their captives. Some such numerical record probably underlies the figures here in Jeremiah.

   The verb *take captive* (r. *glh*) jumps out of v 28; it appears again in v 30. So the book concludes on the note with which it began in 1:3. Captivity looms on the horizon throughout this book; now that threatened judgment has arrived.

2. **Eighteenth year (52:29):** *in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem 832...* As regards the number taken captive in 586 BC when Jerusalem was captured, a problem of a different kind exists. While no specific figures are given in Kings, one gets the impression that a rather sizeable portion of the population was carried away captive to Babylon in that year. Yet Jer 52:29 numbers the deportees as 832. Even if this number represents only males of fighting age, it still remains a pitifully small figure.

   Some explain the 832 as being persons outside the city of Jerusalem who were taken away to Babylon during the eighteen-month siege. According to this view, the 832 would be in addition to the vast throngs taken to Babylon after the city actually fell.

   John Bright explains the 832 as being only those from the urban population of Jerusalem. He suggests that the figure may have been taken from a Babylonian list giving the number of prisoners actually delivered, i.e., those who survived the march.footnote{652}

3. **Twenty-third year (52:30):** *in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took captive 745 Jews—in all 4,600 persons.* A final numerical problem remains: How is the rather small total figure of 4,600 in Jer 52:30 to be reconciled with the much larger number who returned with Zerubbabel in 537-36 BC? Three things must be kept in mind. (1) The figure in 52:30 does not include the deportation of 605-604 BC (2) It is not impossible that a constant emigration of Jews to

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652 Bright, *HI*, L, LIII, notes 14 and 18.
Babylon took place in the later reign of Nebuchadnezzar. (3) A lapse of about two generations exists between the deportations and return. This allowed for the multiplication of the captives while in Babylon.

**Release of Jehoiachin**

52:31-34

A. Jehoiachin Released (52:31): *And it came to pass in the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month of the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon, in his accession year showed favor to Jehoiachin, king of Judah, and released him from prison.* The account of the release of Jehoiachin occurs with only slight variations in 2 Kgs 25:27-30. King Jehoiachin, along with members of his family and court, had been carried away to Babylon in 597 BC. Although there had been no throne, kingdom or capital for twenty-six years, Jehoiachin is still recognized as *king of Judah*. He is not, however, fully king. He has no throne. He is not free to return to his land.

Until the end of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Judah was kept in prison. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded on the throne by his son Amel-Marduk (*man of Marduk*) who was called by the Jews Evil-Merodach (*stupid one of Marduk*). He was able to hold the throne of Babylon for only two years (561-559 BC) before being assassinated. Within the first year of his reign, Amel-Marduk *lifted up the head of Jehoiachin*, i.e., restored him to royal favor and ordered him released from prison.

B. Jehoiachin Elevated (52:32-34):

1. **Position (52:32):** *He spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon. (33) So he changed his prison garments and ate bread continually before him all the days of his life.* *He spoke kindly to him* means that Evil-merodach befriended Jehoiachin. Daniel and the other highly esteemed Jews at the Babylonian court may have used their influence to secure the release of the imprisoned king. This might also account for the favor bestowed upon Jehoiachin when his throne was placed above the thrones of the other captive kings in Babylon (v 32).

   The phrase *above the thrones* does not mean that Jehoiachin’s throne surpassed the others in height, but rather that he was privileged to sit nearer to the king of Babylon at the royal table. Thus after thirty-seven years Jehoiachin was permitted to put off his prison garments and eat at the royal table (v 33).

2. **Provision (52:33):** *As for his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him by the king of Babylon on a daily basis until the day of his death, all the days of his life.* As long as he lived, Jehoiachin received a daily allowance of all that he needed for himself and his family, besides the food that he enjoyed at the royal table (v 34). Nebuchadnezzar provided for the king of Judah and his family ten measures of oil daily. In comparison to the quantity of rations given to other captives, Jehoiachin and his sons fared very well indeed.

   The date given for the release of Jehoiachin is not the same of the date given the Book of Kings. Both accounts have the king released in the thirty-seventh year of his captivity during the twelfth month. The two accounts, however, differ as to the day of the release. Kings states that Jehoiachin gained his freedom on the twenty-seventh day of the month; Jer 52 indicates his release occurred on the twenty-fifth day. Perhaps the one

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653 Contemporary economic documents discovered in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace contain lists of the daily rations of food given to the royal prisoners and hostages from various lands. Jehoiachin and his five sons are mentioned in these texts.
account speaks of the day when the official decree was issued that laid the legal foundation for the release; the other account would then refer to the actual day that King Jehoiachin left the prison.

In the section of foreign nation oracles Jeremiah repeated made the point that sovereignty belongs to Yahweh. He gives control of the world to whomever he chooses. For a time he gave that position to Babylon (chs 46-49), then Yahweh threatened to take that power away (chs 50-51). In 52:1-30 Yahweh gives Nebuchadnezzar authority over Jerusalem. In 52:31-34 Babylon is still in control, but another king is emerging from obscurity. Jehoiachin, however, lives out his days and dies. With his death hope for the restoration of the Judean monarchy ended. God’s people can only fall back on the promises of Jeremiah (along with Isaiah and Ezekiel) that in days to come a glorious new king will arise from the line of David, a king who has universal dominion.

**Note on the Deportations**

When one attempts to integrate the information contained in these vv with the data from the Book of Kings, two problems arise one of which is chronological and the other, numerical. The two problems are really interrelated and difficult to treat separately.

How many times did Nebuchadnezzar deport Jewish captives to Babylon? Two facts are very clear. The first deportation took place in 605-604 BC, the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim (Dan 1:1). This deportation in which Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon is not mentioned either in Kings or in Jer 52.

The last deportation took place in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar (582 BC), five years after the fall of Jerusalem. In this deportation, that is mentioned only in Jer 52:30, 745 people were involved. Josephus states that in his twenty-third year Nebuchadnezzar deported Jews from Egypt, and the suggestion is made that in so doing he avenged the death of his governor Gedaliah.

Now while the first and last deportations are fixed, a problem exists as to the deportations between 605 and 582 BC. How many intervening deportations were there? When did they take place? No general agreement exists on these questions. The heart of the controversy is the interpretation of Jer 52:28-29.

Jer 52 speaks of deportations in the seventh and eighteenth years of Nebuchadnezzar (vv 28-29) while earlier in the same ch (v 12), in 2 Kgs 24:12 and 25:8 the eighth and nineteenth years are given as the dates for the deportations. The question over which scholars are in disagreement is whether these passages in Kgs and Jer speak of four, three or only two deportations.

The view that only two deportations are mentioned in these vv is based on what is known about dating methods in the ancient Near East. Two different systems were used in antiquity for dating the reign of kings. One system—the so-called accession year system—begins numbering the years of a king’s reign on New Years day. The months that elapse between the day of the new king actually begins to reign and New Years day is called the accession year. The other system of dating starts numbering the years of a king’s reign from the day he ascended the throne. Under this system, year one would be the time that elapsed (even if it were only a matter of months or weeks) between the day the king assumed control and New Years day. In other words, the accession year of the one system would be year one of the other system.

If one assumes that in Jer 52:28-29 the writer is using the accession year method of dating, and in 2 Kgs the writer is using the non-accession year method, then the seventh and eighteenth year of Jer 52 would be equivalent to the eighth and nineteenth years of 2 Kgs. According to this view the second deportation occurred in 597 BC and the third in 586 BC.

As appealing as this explanation may be, a serious problem exists for those who advocate it. If 2 Kgs and Jer 52:28-29 refer to the same deportations, how can one explain the divergent figures given in the two accounts of those who were taken captive?

A second approach to the chronological problem avoids the difficulty of the divergent numbers. Some have proposed that the deportations of 52:28-30 are included here because they have nowhere else been mentioned. According to this view, Nebuchadnezzar deported Jewish captives to Babylon in his seventh year (598 BC), his eighth year (597 BC), his eighteenth year (588 BC), and his nineteenth year (586 BC). This explanation has the difficulty of trying to fit a Chaldean campaign and deportation into the known events of 598 BC The Babylonian Chronicle that gives a year-by-year account of the activities of Nebuchadnezzar makes no mention of a campaign in Syria-Palestine in 598 BC. The Scriptures do not hint that Jehoiakim was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar in the last year of his reign. Finally, it would be most strange that Jeremiah in his sermons made no mention of a deportation involving 3,023 of his countrymen.
A third approach to the chronological problem must be mentioned because it has the support of some very able scholars. Keil and Streane suggest that originally v 28 read *seventeenth* instead of *seventh* year. This would mean that one Hebrew word—the word for ten—has dropped out of the text. The seventeenth year of Nebuchadnezzar would fall during the early part of the siege of Jerusalem. This deportation, so the theory goes, consisted of those from the rural regions. In the next year, the eighteenth year, Jerusalem fell and another deportation took place (v 29). According to this view, five deportations are recorded in Scripture: one in 605-604 BC, one in 597 BC, one in 587 BC, one in 586 and one in 582 BC. The possibility that the word *ten* has dropped out of the text cannot be denied. This is exactly what happened in 2 Chron 36:9 (cf. 2 Kgs 24:8) and it may have happened here. But it is always a dangerous practice to play around with the text of Scripture. No manuscript evidence exists for the reading *seventeenth* year in v 28.

Of the three approaches to 52:28-29, the first is superior. But this raises the second major problem, the numerical one.


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