

Jeremiah

In the introduction to Jeremiah the prophet is identified as a priest who lived at Anathoth, just north of Jerusalem. If you look north from a high spot in Jerusalem you can see Anathoth. Jeremiah sets the beginning of his prophetic mission in the 13th year of King Josiah, which was 627 BC. The great reforms of Josiah began in his 18th year (2 Kings 22:3), five years into Jeremiah's service. So Jeremiah was on the scene to see the renewal of the covenant and Josiah's attempts to eliminate idolatry and restore temple worship, and the great national Passover celebration. Jeremiah was also on the scene to see all of that unravel, to see that the reform was largely superficial and short lived, and to see the end of the kingdom of Judah in his 40 years of prophetic service.

Jeremiah 1:1-10 describes God commissioning him to speak God's word to nations and kingdoms (v5, 10). The LORD asserts his sovereign authority over every aspect of Jeremiah's life, beginning with his conception in his mother's womb. David wrote the same thing (Psalm 139:13) and so did Paul (Galatians 1:15). Perhaps we should all consider that God formed each of us from conception for his good purposes.

Jeremiah apparently was called to prophesy when he was quite young (1:6-7) which he saw as an impediment. The brief message of assurance in 1:7-8 is reminiscent of God's conversation with Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3-4) where Moses attempted to excuse himself from God's call with protestations of his shortcomings. God's call generally doesn't depend on the self-confidence or perceived abilities of the one he chooses.

The initial visions in 1:11-18 set the stage for God's communication with Jeremiah, that Jeremiah is getting God's message clearly, and that the message is relevant to what is really going on and is a message of divine judgment.

The message to Jerusalem in chapter echoes the preaching of the earlier prophets, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, likening Israel to an unfaithful wife who has been loved and generously provided for but who wantonly looks for "excitement" elsewhere. Those who pursue what is "worthless" become "worthless" themselves (2:5). Israel took the LORD's good gifts and squandered them, gaining nothing in return. Unlike the nations they displaced, and the nations around them, that served the same (useless) gods generation after generation, Israel borrowed gods with wanton abandon from various nations, in lieu of following the LORD who redeemed them. Thus, the 2 great evils of 2:13, abandoning the LORD as the spring of living waters in favor of cisterns of their own making, and cisterns that in fact leaked. They traded the Living God for useless pursuits that couldn't last. 2:17 is a frequent theme of the prophets, as disaster looms, "have you not brought this on yourself?"

Political maneuvering is mentioned many times in Jeremiah, as it was in Isaiah. Attempting to gain security and prosperity by political alliances (2:18, 36) is part of the same allegory as 2:13, that foreign rivers (powers) are no substitute or supplement for the Living Waters. Entanglements in the kingdoms and affairs of the earth (nations) are not the fortress of the godly.

The imagery of the yoke (2:20) is going to recur many times in Jeremiah. The people had

rejected the freedom God gave them, and defined a freedom of their own that was actually slavery to passions and sins. No human could cleanse the stain of guilt (2:22), only humble submission could make that possible.

Graphic imagery of the appetites associated with idolatry is evoked in 2:23-25. Sin is addictive, its allure once experienced is powerful (and demeaning).

2:27 has always reminded me of the materialistic theory of evolution.

Notice again a theme of most of the prophets, abandoning God and abusing other people made in God's image go hand in hand (2:34).

Chapter 3 opens with a reminder of a principle in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Israel/Judah had been defiled by her infidelity. Could she rightly be reunited with God? There had been consequences for their unfaithfulness (3:3) but, even though they'd uttered the religious formula words (3:4) they hadn't really changed, they were still bent on evil (3:5). Chapter 3 continues (6-10) with a sad assessment that the reforms led by King Josiah were superficial, not penetrating to the hearts of the people. Consequently, the people (Judah) who had seen the disaster that fell upon Israel/Ephraim for her unfaithfulness a century earlier, but hadn't learned the lesson of consequences for sin, were actually worse than their predecessors had been.

As so often in the prophets, the pronouncement of doom upon the current Jerusalem and Judah is accompanied by glimpses of a better future when a remnant is truly restored to God, 3:14b-18. The future involved shepherds after God's heart (remember David in this context, this is a Davidic kind of shepherding). That (then) future restoration didn't include an ark of the covenant, which was in the tabernacle and was in the first temple, but never seen again after the days of Jeremiah. Some modern interpreters think the ark will be found or rebuilt as part of God's purposes for physical Israel, but the LORD through Jeremiah said otherwise in 3:16, and that's because in Jesus Christians as priests of God can come freely into the Most Holy Place where God is (Hebrews 10:19ff) with his covenant written on our hearts, not on stone tablets (Hebrews 10:16). God wanted Israel/Judah to truly call him Father (3:19), and that's how Jesus taught his disciples to pray and to think of God.

God calls people to turn, to return to him, and offers healing (3:22). Denouncing the hedonism of the world's pursuits (3:23) allows God's salvation to cover the shame of sinners, our shame.

Chapters 4-6

"If you return, O Israel,..." The prophet has a message of doom, but an offer of reconciliation. God's hand is outstretched in mercy, if they (we) will repent and turn back to him. God would work through a just and upright Israel to make himself known to the nations (4:2). Since Israel did not, God worked that outcome through Jesus, in fulfillment of his covenant promises.

When Paul wrote of circumcised hearts among uncircumcised people in Romans 2:25-29 and Colossians 2:13-15, the inward circumcision of the heart being the mark of the true covenant relationship with God, he was certainly aware of Jeremiah 4:4.

While offering mercy for repentance, Jeremiah continually stressed the imminent and unfolding disaster for his people in their present unfaithfulness, as in 4:5-31. On top of other disasters, a mighty and irresistible army would come and sweep them all away. Notice 4:18, “Your ways and your deeds have brought this upon you.” And 4:22, “my people are foolish; they know me not... They are wise in doing evil!” Alas, many excel in the same “wisdom” still. Note the foolish pride of self-adornment in 4:30, a people with the self centered heart of Jezebel.

Jeremiah in chapter 5 was directed by the LORD to search out an honest person in Jerusalem. In the dialogue about Sodom the LORD had agreed with Abraham that he would spare the city for the sake of 50... 40... 30... 20... 10 righteous people in Sodom (Genesis 18:22-32). Finally though Sodom was destroyed and only 3 escaped the destruction. Jeremiah was challenged to find just 1, and he couldn't find even 1. Not among the poor and powerless, not among the rich and powerful. “They all alike had broken the yoke” (5:5) of basic integrity. So again, Judah, Jerusalem, Israel is indicted for dishonesty, injustice, hard hearts, sexual immorality, idolatry... etc.

Repeatedly Jeremiah is told “not a full end” (note 4:27, 5:10, 18 for example). God would sustain a remnant, a group to reset and reboot the covenant and keep the Davidic covenant alive until Jesus came.

It was and is a big mistake to think “the LORD... will do nothing” (5:12).

As Isaiah had seen and heard a hundred years earlier, and as Jesus said again 600 years later, Jeremiah was dealing with people who had eyes but did not see, and ears but did not hear” (5:21).

A major problem for Judah as for nations in our own time was prophets who told lies (5:31) and priests/religious leaders who followed the lead of the prophets. Prophets in our generation include media personalities and politicians of various sorts. Many of the messages of the prophets, both of the LORD and “false”, were directly related to the politics of the era. As Paul said about “itching ears” in 2 Timothy 4:3, people love having teachers that say what they want to hear. Nothing has changed in human nature in the 2600 years since Jeremiah 5:31. But if one listens to the prophets of this age, “what will you do when the end comes?”

Interesting that the people of Benjamin were told to flee in 6:1. Technically, though associated with Judah because of David, Jerusalem was in the tribal territory allotted to Benjamin. It didn't sound very patriotic, but Jeremiah by God's word told people to get out of there, not stand and fight. The coming conflict was because of the wickedness of the whole community, and those who would listen to God should not stand and fight a losing battle whose outcome was divinely determined, they should yield to God's will and leave the city before it was too late. Notice again the symptoms of denial in 6:13-14, dishonesty was rampant, including prophets and priests, and the message that everything would soon be fine was a lie, “saying ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.”

Jeremiah 6:15 is worth remembering. These were people who were so comfortable with sin that

they no longer knew how to blush. Multi-media entertainment has lowered many of us to the same level, no longer embarrassed by immorality or vulgarity of any kind. Far better to turn back to older values, less “liberated” perhaps, the “ancient paths, where the good way is...” (6:16).

As with many of the prophets Jeremiah chided the people for empty religious rituals, substituting sacrifice and offerings for the honesty and mercy God wanted in his people’s daily lives (6:20).

Watch out for people who are quick to slander others, including in our generation media personalities (6:28).

Jeremiah 7-9

Jeremiah 7:1 introduces a different prophetic vision with the words “the word that came to Jeremiah.” As Stephen would later emphasize again in Acts 7, the LORD here stressed that he was not tied to a location. God would not overlook or tolerate wickedness on account of having a “sacred” temple in Jerusalem (v4). The call for justice resonates once again, for the foreigner, the orphan, the widow (v6), the end of oppression and shedding innocent blood, ending idolatry which is bound up with such injustices. Jeremiah 7:9 runs through the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 1st commandments of the 10 delivered at Mt Sinai. You can’t systematically ignore God’s commandments for ethical and godly behavior, and then think visiting a “sacred” place with a sacrifice makes everything OK. Jesus linked these same denunciations of self-willed religiosity to his own generation, citing 7:11 in Mark 11:17. What happened to Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s generation was hanging over Jerusalem in Jesus’ generation, for all the same reasons, and hangs over nations and civilizations still who have a patina of sacred worship but ignore the basic moral principles of godliness.

The destruction of Shiloh in the days of Eli and Samuel (7:14, recall Joshua 18:1, 1 Samuel 1-5), leaving only a heap of ruins where the tabernacle had been for hundreds of years, was an enduring reminder that God isn’t bound to structures or locations, neither Shiloh and the tabernacle nor Jerusalem and the temple.

Several times, as in 7:16, 14:11 and 15:1 the LORD told Jeremiah not to pray/intercede for his people. The time for intercession had passed. If they would not respond to the prophetic message and the Law, they were doomed. The corruption spread to the practices of household worship (7:16-19), little comfortable rituals. They had made idolatry into a unifying family tradition, with father, mother, and children contributing to the household rituals of worshiping the feminine deity, the Queen of Heaven. God taught through the prophets that he’d chosen Israel/Judah as his wife, but she’d betrayed him by the very practices described here in worshiping other gods, including this feminine figure.

In 7:22-24 as in several other scriptures (ie, Psalm 50:8, 51:16-17, Micah 6:6-8 for example) the LORD emphasized that sacrifices as such were nothing to him, the aim was obedience to his commands, the least of which were sacrificial rituals. The 10 Commandments say nothing of sacrifice and offerings. Unfortunately, as Israel had not previously listened to God, or the former prophets, they would still not listen to Jeremiah (7:24-27).

Jeremiah 7:30-34 bear directly on Jesus' use of the word "gehenna" (the phrase "valley of Ben Hinnom," where Ben means "Son of," becomes "ge-henna," usually translated "hell") in Matthew 5:22, 29-30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 33, and the other gospels as well as James 3:6. This is the descriptive backdrop for the lake of fire, the 2nd death. No one is too high or too low to be included in the divine judgment (8:1-3, Revelation 20:12ff. What was literally going to happen to Jerusalem in Jeremiah's lifetime was emblematic of divine justice at the end of the ages, when people truly reap what they've sown, becoming like what they've served (8:2a).

One of the reasons finding the "book of the law" in the temple in the days of Josiah and Jeremiah was so important is that just as there were false prophets claiming divine authority, so also there were scribes who rewrote the law (Jeremiah 8:8) and the old copy from the temple verified the ancient unadulterated text. Ancient manuscripts are valuable for discerning what the authoritative text of the scriptures truly says.

In 8:11-12 we have the repeated messages about false assurances of "peace" without real change, and the moral decline into forgetting how to blush about inappropriate behavior.

Jeremiah has already said several times that the army God was bringing was coming from the north. Here in 8:16 the Babylonian army's presence in the far north of what had once been Israel's territory, Dan, signaled the imminent conquest by a rapacious horde.

Jeremiah has been called "the weeping prophet." 8:18-9:3 is one of those passages expressing great sorrow and tears for the plight of Judah and Jerusalem in their stubbornness. Sometimes the tears are Jeremiah's, sometimes the LORD's, and sometimes the suffering people. God himself grieved, still grieves, over human sin and humans' abuse of one another.

The "balm in Gilead" in 8:22 is a reference to popular medicinal plants harvested in that region of Israel, and we might be reminded of Jesus' references to himself as a physician (Luke 4:23, 5:31), the true balm of Gilead, who can and will restore the health of those who turn to him. But a physician is of no use to those who will accept his services.

The prophet very likely wept as in 9:1, but the reference really seems to be the tears of God (9:3). The treachery of the ordinary people was heartbreaking, and still is. Inflammatory words, lies, infidelity, selfishness out of control, and a refusal to know the LORD. The outcome was to lay waste to Jerusalem... or to any nation that persists in the same path.

Jeremiah's denunciation of the high and mighty of this world in 9:23-24 is echoed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:31ff. God's wisdom is grounded in the values of 24b, as echoed in James 3:13-18.

The issue of flesh circumcision vs. heart circumcision is revisited in 9:25-26. We have a grouping of Israel right along with her idolatrous neighbors who themselves practiced forms of circumcision, removal or trimming of the male foreskin. Having some variation of that mark in the flesh did not equate with being in God's family. Changed hearts then and now were the true mark of godliness.

Jeremiah 10-13

As the word of the LORD to Jeremiah continues to warn against idolatry in chapter 10 we have specific reference to the messages of astrologers and to the crafting of idols. As with Isaiah, the description of idols has a mocking and derisive tone, “like scarecrows in a cucumber field” (10:5). The LORD’s people should fear neither the prognostications of astrologers nor the foolishness of idols. There is no one like the LORD, King of the nations (10:6-7, see Revelation 15:2). He is the “living God” (10:10), an appellation used by Peter when he confessed Jesus’ divine identity (Matthew 16:16). Once again, in contrast to what the world worships, God’s identity as creator (10:12, 16) who manages all the systems of the world (10:13) for his purposes. Jeremiah again describes the LORD’s distress for the necessity of harshly punishing Israel/Judah with imagery of the Tabernacle and shepherding in 10:17-21.

Jeremiah 10:23 is a classic description of human imperfection and need of God.

While Josiah, a few years into Jeremiah’s prophesying, had led the people in a religious revival and renewal of the covenant (2 Kings 23:1-3), chapter 11 affirms that the renewal was superficial and short lived for the people of Judah and Jerusalem (11:9-10). Inevitably, the consequences of violating the covenant as enumerated in Deuteronomy 27-28 were hanging over their heads. The word of the LORD to Jeremiah was a repeat of what Moses had proclaimed centuries before.

Jeremiah learned first hand what the LORD had warned him about in 1:18-19, that his people, even his “friends” and family, would oppose his preaching, to the point of violence. The prophet’s experience of being like a lamb led to the slaughter by his own people (remember he was from Anathoth) is poetically set forth in 11:18-20. Reading of Jeremiah’s experience reminds us of language in Isaiah 52-53, the prophecy of the suffering servant, the Christ. Jeremiah was a living parable. Like Isaac or Joseph or David or many others we see a shadow of Christ in Jeremiah’s experiences, as well as his prophecies. Like Jeremiah, Jesus committed his cause to LORD of hosts (11:20), even as he rose above the human response and asked for divine forgiveness, even for the ones who crucified him. Nevertheless, the fate of those who persisted in rejecting Jesus was in fact just as described by Jeremiah in 11:20-23.

Jeremiah 12 is like an abbreviated account of Job. There will be a recurrence of complaint and response in chapters 15 and 20. As in Job’s experience of suffering that seemed inexplicable and unfair, Jeremiah wanted to see immediate resolution and divine justice. As with Job, the LORD chided Jeremiah (without condemnation) and offered divine perspective without personal justification. Jeremiah was a part of something much bigger than himself. Like Job, Jeremiah had people urging him to respond to his problems in the wrong way (12:6).

The LORD’s answer to Jeremiah’s complaint in chapter 12 stresses his own sadness over the plight of his unfaithful people (12:7-11). Humans can grieve the living God. Yet the LORD longs to show compassion, and that promise for the future is again set forth in 12:14-17, with portions of Judah and portions of the nations that have plagued her being brought into a divine inheritance belonging to those who learn to “swear by my name.” There is the divine future realized in the church of Jesus Christ of a people (of all nations) belonging to God that endure when those who reject him are utterly destroyed.

Jeremiah 13 includes the first of several stories of parables enacted by Jeremiah. A clean new linen loincloth soiled and ruined by being tucked away in a crevice by the Euphrates River for many days. Judah had been a garment for God's glory, intimately close, but like Jeremiah's loincloth they'd been ruined by their foreign entanglements and become useless to the LORD. Sin makes people useless to God.

Note again in 13:12-14 the demeaning impact of being filled with wine. Out of control, uncoordinated and uninhabited, and bound for disaster.

In 13:17, who is weeping? The prophet or the LORD? Both, I think. The impending consequences of divine judgment are likened several times to labor pangs (13:21) as also with the approaching final judgment (Romans 8:22).

"... because you have forgotten me, and trusted in lies" (13:25). There are plenty of liars still, saying things people want to hear, many of them not talking about religion at all, but still talking about how people should live and choices made daily. Many false prophets then and now speak far more about things of the world than spiritual matters, but the delusion is still devastating. Perhaps we ought to pray for ourselves and for one another, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." (2 Kings 6:17)

Jeremiah 14-17

One of the tools in God's toolbox of responses to national/regional sinful rebellion has always been weather calamities. In Jeremiah 14 drought was a device God used to stimulate the people to ponder their ways (see Deuteronomy 11:16-17, 1 Kings 17-18, 2 Chronicles 6:26-27, Amos 4:7), and perhaps humble themselves before the LORD. Yet they did not turn back, they continued to wander away from God. The LORD again instructed Jeremiah not to pray/intercede for the unrepentant people (14:11-12) and affirmed that he would pay not attention to their religious rituals as long as their hearts were turned away from him.

Sword, famine, and pestilence (14:12; pestilence=diseases, plague, pandemic) are a trio paraded before the rebellious people and nations over and over again by the prophets in warning, and by the LORD in history.

14:13 ff – Jeremiah was constantly at odds with others who professed to be prophets and prophesied/preached in the name of the LORD. While their lies were devastating for the people who listened to them, God assured Jeremiah (14:15) that they would get their just desserts, directly receiving the very consequences of sin they denied in their preaching, along with the people who preferred their message over God's truth.

Unhappily, the role of prophet or priest was for many a livelihood, a job, a means of making a living, then and now (13:18).

The LORD told Jeremiah not to pray for his people, and yet 14:19-22 sounds much like Moses in Exodus 32:11-14. While we sometimes have Jeremiah crying out for God's justice against his persecutors and adversaries, we also see the godly man imploring God to be merciful. And God himself told Jeremiah (15:1) that the pleading of Moses, or of Samuel (recall 1 Samuel 12:23)

would not prevent what was coming upon Judah for their accumulated sins and blood guilt. 15:2 again has sword, famine and pestilence, this time with the added component of captivity. In this case, captivity would be the best possible outcome.

The work of God in 15:7, winnowing Israel with a winnowing fork, is ascribed to Jesus by John in Matthew 3:12.

Jeremiah again sounds much like Job in his distress in 15:10. There was no pleasure in his lonely work against fierce opposition, but God reminded him it was needed, and Jeremiah's tormentors faced far worse consequences than the momentary troubles he'd experienced. When Jeremiah received God's words as his commission (in a passage that foreshadows Jesus, 15:16) he had experienced joy and delight, and had chosen the path of self denial, but Jeremiah found that way very difficult, and found himself wondering about God's purposes (15:18), again much like Job. In response, God did not promise Jeremiah an easier road, rather he challenged him to turn to the LORD and accept the role God had called him to, with the assurance that God would enable him to finish the task, but no promise of it being easy (15:19-21). Deliverance and redemption were not going to be easy.

Jeremiah in 16 was instructed by God to stay single and celibate. His life would be a sign of the deprivation that lay ahead for his people. Once again, sword, famine, and pestilence in 16:4 was the destiny of the unbowed inhabitants of the land. The idea of dead people like "dung on the ground" is cited several times in Jeremiah and alluded to also in Isaiah and Ezekiel. This is not only utter dishonor, it is complete collapse of the social systems. This is a paradigm for eternal judgement as well, the total breakdown of divine order, excluded from his presence and without purpose or value.

Considering Jesus' actions with bread and cup on the night of his betrayal, we should ponder the role of these elements in 16:7 in mourning for the dead. Note: the KJV has "tear themselves" in v7, but the word "tear" is the same word we have in Isaiah 58:7 for breaking bread to share it, and the word "themselves" was added by the translators, not in the text. There is no doubt the text refers to tearing/breaking bread to share, and sharing a cup as part of common mourning together. Jesus certainly was aware of this when he chose these elements from the Passover supper for his own remembrance.

The promise of restoration in 16:14ff sounds like the return from Babylon, except that as the LORD told Daniel that wasn't happening after 70 years (Daniel 9) but that there would still be 70 weeks, apparently 490 years to bring things to climax. Matthew likewise signaled that the Babylonian captivity wasn't really ended until the Messiah came in his genealogy language, Matthew 1:1-17. These things could not really be accomplished until the heir of Abraham and David came to receive the kingdom. So while there were limited restorations from captivity, the whole, with nations coming from the ends of the earth (16:19) was waiting for the coming of the LORD in person, Jesus Christ.

If a jewel pointed iron pen is required for engraving the tablet of the heart, 17:1, that's a hard heart. The sins of the people called by God were deep and persistent. 17:5 applies to every generation, every culture. We have in 5-7 a recap of Psalm 1. The two different world views and

their outcome.

17:9-10 is a classic description of the human problem and the only possible solution.

Where to turn? v12-13. Jeremiah struggled with the beautiful affirmation of 12-13, because he lived in midst of violent sinners who hated him, 14-18. Jeremiah faced the opposition, and struggled with being assured about God's presence. The fear of the LORD (17) is very real for those who truly encounter him. God's answer to Jeremiah's "complaint" was like his answer to Elijah at Sinai (1 Kings 19), go and speak my words (Jer 17:19ff).

Jeremiah had previously referenced (7:9) the 10 commandments, listing the 6th-9th and alluding to the 1st and 2nd. He has repeatedly referred to 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Here in 17:19-27 the focus bears down on the 4th commandment, to honor the day of rest in trust and obedience to God. If they would trust God enough to rest according to the commandment, their fortunes would turn and the royal dynasty of David would reign securely (17:25) forever. Unfortunately, they did not trust God and obey him, and so the fulfillment the unending reign of David's heirs fell to the work of Jesus, who made it possible for his followers to truly enter into God's rest (see Hebrews 4) forever. The other "forever" is the rebellious choice that leads to fire that "shall not be quenched" (17:17). What happened to disobedient Jerusalem again is a foreshadow of the form of divine judgment on the enemies of God.

Jeremiah 18-22

Jeremiah 18 opens with the metaphor of God as the potter, people as the clay molded into whatever the potter desires. A similar idea is revisited in chapter 19. The illustration was previously used by Isaiah (29:15) and later also used by Paul (Romans 9:21). The LORD, our maker, has a right to do what he will with the clay he has made and shaped. The principle applies, as Jeremiah notes in 18:7-11, to any and every nation, certainly including Jerusalem and Judah, but always true of every nation. God is sovereign, and will do as needs to be done to achieve his purposes. As sovereign, God offered the opportunity for a new beginning to the flawed work of Jerusalem (v11) but they refused, and many nations have refused, to submit to God, and so disaster followed.

Jeremiah 18:18 continues the recurring theme of hating the messenger when you don't like the message. To preserve the religious and political status quo people attacked Jeremiah, verbally and physically, somehow thinking they could silence God and overturn his will by defeating his messenger, but they could in fact do none of those things.

Jeremiah 19 goes again to the potter metaphor, but this time it isn't malleable clay that can be reworked, it is a finished pot that Jeremiah is to break as a sign of God's wrath against Jerusalem. This parable was acted out in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, the name that becomes Gehenna, the Hell of fire, in the New Testament. Where extreme religious perversity had been acted out, grotesque idolatry including sacrificing babies and children, God would vent his anger upon a rebellious people. As King Josiah had done to Topheth, the Valley of Ben Hinnom (19:6, see 2 Kings 23:10, so the LORD would do to Jerusalem.

When Jeremiah brought his preaching from Topheth to the temple courts (19:14) the messenger

was again the object of wrath from the religious establishment, as Passhur the priest (20:1ff) beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks for public humiliation. Curious that the house of God should have stocks as a feature in one of its gates. Not exactly the picture we have of the original Tabernacle and Temple, but what happens when the prophets, priests, and kings all get entangled in schemes to enjoy and preserve the perquisites of power and wealth. Jeremiah responded with imprecations of disaster for the priest and his community. The priest was denounced as a false prophet.

Once again in 20:7-18 Jeremiah bemoans his misery as the object of hatred for God's sake, at once calling for justice and vindication, acknowledging the sovereign majesty of God, who is worthy of praise, and bemoaning his own constant distress with a Job-like "wish I'd never been born" complaint. God didn't reject Jeremiah because of his struggle with discouragement and depression, rather he continued to be a fierce warrior in his behalf (20:11) as Jeremiah carried on despite his own frequent misery.

In chapter 21 the setting is about 588 BC when the destruction of Jerusalem was at hand. Despite Jeremiah's explicit repeated warnings publicly and privately not to rebel against the king of Babylon, King Zedekiah had his cronies had joined a conspiracy against Nebuchadnezzar. The outcome was exactly as predicted by Jeremiah (and also by Ezekiel who was in exile). The plea for Jeremiah to inquire of the LORD suggests they knew he was a true prophet, but the additional plea that perhaps God could be persuaded to rescue them as he'd done in the past shows they hadn't been paying attention. God frankly told Zedekiah through Jeremiah, as had been previously said, that He Himself was backing Nebuchadnezzar in that generation, and the "pestilence, famine and sword" were his devices to chasten stubbornly rebellious nations.

The polemic against the kings in David's lineage in 21:11-22:10 reflect on "the last words of David" (2 Samuel 23:1-7) where David affirmed that his house standing firm depended on ruling justly and obeying God.

Jeremiah 22:11-30 is a series of prophecies made to a succession of kings from 609 to 597 BC. First is Shallum (11-17), also called Jehoahaz, who reigned briefly when King Josiah died. Pharaoh Necho removed Shallum and set his brother Jehoiakim as vassal on the throne in his place (18-24). The removal of Shallum in 608 BC, with Jerusalem becoming subject to Egypt, is one of the starting points of the 70 years Jeremiah prophesied for the humiliation of Jerusalem and Judah.

The 2nd son of Josiah who reigned, Jehoiakim, was unjust, taking advantage, along with his cronies, of the poor and weak to accumulate wealth, just as Shallum had done in his brief tenure as king. Jeremiah prophesied an ignoble death for him, and the record indicates that when Nebuchadnezzar came to chasten him for rebellion he (or his dead body) was handed over to Babylonians and he received no honorable burial. The 3rd heir of Josiah here is Coniah, also called Jechoniah and Jehoiachin (24-30), who reigned briefly after Jehoiakim's death and then was removed as a captive to Babylon in 597 BC, the same time Ezekiel was taken into exile.

Jeremiah's excoriation of Jechoniah (22:24-30) included reference to "the signet ring" which recurs in a messianic prophecy given to Coniah's grandson Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:23),

foreshadowing the real temple builder, Jesus. But Coniah was told that “none of his offspring” would ever sit on the throne of David and rule in Judah (22:30). When we have the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, Jechoniah (Matt 1:11) is in the lineage of Joseph, establishing that he was a legal heir of the throne of David, but also establishing that Jesus was not in fact the biological descendant of Coniah, since Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. That’s one of the elements in Luke’s gospel, where we have a different lineage ((3:23ff), almost certainly the patrimony of Mary, not through Solomon and Coniah, of which Joseph was also the legal heir under the Law of Moses. Since the Babylonian captivity, no biological descendant of Coniah has reigned on David’s throne, and no heir of David has ruled in Judah, except for the overarching kingdom of Christ, the heir but not the son of Coniah.

Jeremiah 23-25

Jeremiah 23 addresses the shepherds who abuse the flock for their own ends. Isaiah used similar language, as did Ezekiel. Note v3-6, the Good Shepherd is Jesus (John 10) but the shepherds in v 4 include appropriate church leadership (see 1 Peter 5:1-4) over whom Jesus is Chief Shepherd.

Isaiah had also described the Son of David who was to come as the Branch (Jer 23:5, Isa 4:2, 11:1, etc), so this language was familiar, but at the same time there is a new twist. When Jeremiah predicts a “righteous Branch” for David, there’s a wordplay on King Zedekiah’s name, where the “zedek” means “righteous.” The LORD would raise up a “Zedek branch” because the king whose name meant “the LORD is righteous” was not himself righteous nor a faithful shepherd.

The salvation of God’s people is firmly put in the hands of the righteous Branch of David in 23:6. And again, the LORD’s people were to be drawn from all countries, 23:8.

Jeremiah (and the LORD) experienced distress from the observation of prophets who lied for their own ends (23:9-22), but those lying prophets who had not come into the divine council of the LORD would experience far worse distress because of their taking God’s name in vain and misleading the people into greater apostasy with their lies.

The repeated theme of God’s all knowing presence is highlighted in 23:23ff. God is constantly involved in everything in all of creation, including the words and deeds of every person. Note again the duration of God’s reproach in 23:40.

The illustration of good and bad figs in chapter 24 will come up again later in Jeremiah. This vision is set after the death of Jehoiakim, and the removal of Jeconiah to Babylon in 597 BC. God said that the best of the population of Jerusalem was already gone to Babylon. What was left in Jerusalem wasn’t any good at all. The same message was given to Ezekiel a few years later. Those left in Jerusalem tended to be proud and consider themselves the best, and regard the deportees as losers. God said it was just the opposite. Nebuchadnezzar had taken the best and left the dregs behind, and because of their stubborn pride things were only going to get worse in Jerusalem and Judah.

Jeremiah 25 chronologically precedes the message in 24, being set in the 4th year of Jehoiakim, 605 BC. That’s the year Jerusalem became a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar (instead of Egypt), and

when Daniel and his friends went to Babylon as hostages and servants of the King. In this prophecy Jeremiah rehearsed his own 23 years of experience as a prophet of the LORD, beginning in 627 BC in the reign of Josiah. Jeremiah had given a consistent message, but most had not listened. Again, Jeremiah urged his people to listen and repent. Jeremiah here predicted the coming of the Babylonians which was imminent, and the duration of the power of Babylon was set at 70 years (25:11-12). That clock began when the Babylonians in 609 BC defeated the last Assyrian king at Carchemish. That's the battle King Josiah intruded upon with Pharaoh Necho, and died. The 70 years were going to play out in several ways, but the ascendancy of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar's father was when the countdown initially began.

Exactly how Jeremiah made the nations drink the LORD's cup of wrath in 25:15-29 isn't clear (to me). Perhaps he traveled to each of these places, perhaps he sent messages, perhaps he sought out emissaries as happened later in chapter 27. However he did it, Jeremiah was a prophet to the nations (recall Jer 1:10) and he delivered God's message and warning to all the nations around Israel. Judgment was imminent (25:31) and we can see again a paradigm anticipating the end of the age when the nations are gathered for final judgment. The humiliation of being like "dung on the ground" is repeated again in 25:33. That's the reality of final and complete separation from God, with no possible resolution.

Jeremiah 26-29

The beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (26:1), about 608 BC. For the 2nd time we have Jeremiah reminding his people that God once had a dwelling place in Shiloh (7:12-15, and see Psalm 78:60) when the tabernacle was there and the house of Eli had the priesthood. That place and that line of priests fell under divine judgment because of sin, and the same outcome hung over the heads of 7th century BC Judeans, for the same reason. This same line of reasoning is employed by Stephen in Acts 7, that God is not tied to a geographical location or manmade structure, and ungodliness brings judgment.

When Jeremiah spoke the same truth as Samuel and Isaiah and others before him, the crowd was angry and wanted to kill him for his apparent lack of patriotism and criticism of the policies and practices of the rulers and people (26:8-10). Fortunately, when the mob was stirred to seize Jeremiah, just as later when Paul was seized by the mob in the temple courts (Acts 21:27ff), there were governing officials who stepped in to lawfully settle matters. On trial for his life, Jeremiah continued to say the same things, God's truth (26:12-15), again as Paul did later in Acts 22-23. Fortunately, this particular group of officials was familiar with the writings of previous prophets, and quoted Micah from 100 years earlier (26:18, Micah 3:12). They rightly inferred that God did not bring that disaster in Micah's and Hezekiah's generation when the Assyrians threatened Jerusalem. However, God relenting then did not mean that the judgment stated would never happen, only that it was deferred. Falling back into the same sins again meant the same prophesy could still be fulfilled. Nonetheless, familiarity with Micah saved Jeremiah from being murdered that day.

Unfortunately, the same escape was not allowed another prophet of God, Uriah, whose life the king sought, even pursuing him into Egypt (26:20-23). At the beginning of his reign Jehoiakim was a vassal of the Pharaoh, and so he could send soldiers there on a mission to arrest a fugitive

from Judah. The man who led the party that arrested Uriah and brought him to Jerusalem to die was Elnathan, who was also father-in-law to the king (2 Kings 24:8) and grandfather of his successor, King Jehoiachin. Elnathan also turns up later in Jeremiah chapter 36 when he shows some fear of burning Jeremiah's scroll, which he understood to be the word of God.

Chapters 27-29 shift from 608 BC in the reign of Jehoiakim to 593 BC in the reign of his brother Zedekiah. In the meantime, in 605 BC Jehoiakim had become a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar, and some people, including Daniel and his friends, had been removed to Babylon. Then Jehoiakim had joined a coalition with Egypt against Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar's army returned to Jerusalem in 598 BC, resulting in the death of Jehoiakim, and the exile of his son Jeconiah, along with the leading priests, wealthy people, craftsmen, and so forth, including young Ezekiel, in 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne, and Zedekiah pledged loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar. A few years later Zedekiah was again considering breaking his oath, his treaty, in alliance with other nations, and God sent Jeremiah to prophesy to the emissaries who gathered from those nations in Jerusalem, and to King Zedekiah himself. The message did not change. God alone has power over all the world he himself made (27:5), and his sovereign decision was to give Nebuchadnezzar power over all other rulers, and even over the animals at that time (27:6). Nebuchadnezzar was the LORD's servant, and his dynasty would continue for the period God ordained, about 3 generations (27:7). Rebellion against Babylon by any of those nations would bring the frequently mentioned trilogy of judgment, sword, famine, and pestilence (27:8, 12-13) upon them.

Later in the summer of the same year (28:1), Jeremiah acted out God's message by making and wearing a yoke, telling the king and people to pull their weight as required under Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and not rebel. On that occasion in 593 BC another prophet, named Hananiah, boldly opposed and contradicted Jeremiah. Where Jeremiah had said Babylonian domination would last 70 years, Hananiah said 2 years would bring deliverance from them. Jeremiah replied that such an outcome would be wonderful, if true (28:6), but it was not true, the prophesy was not consistent with the words of God's prophets. Hananiah reacted with physical aggression, pulling the wooden yoke from Jeremiah and breaking it (28:10), again denouncing Jeremiah's warnings. Notice that Jeremiah de-escalated the situation at that moment by walking away (28:11). Later, the LORD sent him back to Hananiah with a specific message, condemning him to death by divine judgment because he had "made this people trust in a lie" (v15). Consequently, he would die within the year, and 2 months later Hananiah was dead. The prophetic formula was fulfilled, Jeremiah predicted it, and it happened.

The letter in Jeremiah 29 may have been written before the events of chapter 28, since the context mentions the removal of Jeconiah and his mother (the daughter of Elnathan) in v2, 597 BC. The letter provides insights not only into God's will for his people in Babylon, but really for his people who live in the world but not of the world in any generation. Christians, like ancient Jews, live as strangers in a strange land, and like the ancient Jews generally want what is best for the land where they live because "in its welfare you will find your welfare" (29:7). This world is not my home, but we enjoy blessings along with others who live in this world. We desire peace for the sake of our loved ones and because it facilitates the sharing of our faith (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Once again, Jeremiah presented the prophecy of 70 years for Babylon's heyday (29:10) followed by a return to Jerusalem. The promises of 29:12-14 would not come to real fruition into

the Anointed came to lead his people personally. Meanwhile, those already removed to Babylon were making the same mistake they'd made while in Jerusalem, listening to lying prophets who said what they wanted to hear (29:15ff). This is where Jeremiah's vision of the bad figs recurs (24:1-8, 29:17). Those left behind in Jerusalem were the worst, not the best. The best had already been removed to a sanctuary in Babylon, but they needed to be wary lest they be misled by the lying prophets who spoke what they longed to hear. One indicator of the "bad fruit" of the false prophet was their immorality (29:23). Notice that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not the only Jews thrown into a fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, Jer 29:22, but they were the only ones to walk away afterward.

An enemy of Jeremiah in captivity attempted to destroy Jeremiah with letters to rulers in Jerusalem (29:24-28) because, again, he wasn't patriotic enough according to his critics, because he told the truth about sin and accountability. Jeremiah foretold the doom of that man and all that was his as he had Hananiah (v32), and no doubt that prophesy was fulfilled as well.

Jeremiah 30-31

The LORD instructed Jeremiah to write all the prophecies he had given (30:2). The same command is reported in 36:2, where the command is dated to 605 BC, and where we learn that Baruch was the scribe Jeremiah hired to write his dictation on a scroll (36:4). More on that later in Jeremiah, but here we have a glimpse of the process that took Jeremiah's preaching of God's word to him to written form as a book for the ages. And that long perspective is what the LORD stressed in 30:3, that the prophecies of Jeremiah (and other prophets) should be available to the next generation(s) and not just those who originally heard the word.

Lots of suffering lay ahead, 30:4-7, but eventually there would be salvation, and that great turning was to be accomplished by God raising up "David their king," which we see anticipates Jesus the Son of David ruling on his throne (Acts 13:33-34).

Despite Judah's sins being beyond cure (30:12, 15) God promised restoration and renewal (30:18-22) and Paul cites the prophetic phrase in 30:22 in 2 Corinthians 6:16b.

The promise in Jeremiah 31:1 that the LORD would be God of all the clans of Israel required, as previously noted, that the nations be invited to the feast, since most of the northern tribes of Israel had already been absorbed into the nations where the Assyrians took them 100 years before Jeremiah. With reference to Exodus 13-14-15 the LORD envisioned a new Exodus for his people, with his presence appearing to them, with journeying into the wilderness to encounter God, with the songs of victory like that of Moses and Miriam. The new life of the kingdom initiated by the heir of David again is pictured with agrarian prosperity in 31:6, when watchmen call on the scattered people of Ephraim to come to Zion, analogous to Hezekiah inviting the inhabitants of broken Ephraim to come to the Passover, but anticipating the going forth of the gospel.

As in a previous prophecy, the kingdom was to bring in the "blind and the lame" (31:8), alluding to David's conquest of Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 5:6 and anticipating the healing miracles of Jesus who took our infirmities upon himself. The Good Shepherd's work is pictured in 31:10-14, and

the pasturing of the flock is in an Edenic Garden, where sorrow is displaced by gladness and mourning is turned to joy. This is the fullness of the kingdom of Christ, in which all are priests of God.

Since Matthew cites Jeremiah 31:15 as pertinent to the coming of Jesus into the world (Matthew 2:18) we too should connect the costly process of redemption and return from exile to the work of Jesus. The tomb of Rachel was in Ramah, the area of Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19), and Jacob's camping place there was called "the tower of Eder" (Genesis 35:21) which means, "the tower of the flock." Micah 4:8 also connected "the tower of the flock" with a hill not far from Jerusalem, and said the great ruler would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and of course Luke 2 tells us of the angelic appearance to the shepherds keeping the flocks near Bethlehem. There is a thread of prophecy running through Genesis, and Ruth, and Samuel, and Micah, and Jeremiah, all connecting to Jesus coming to deal with the sorrow and grief of the LORD's bereaved people. The "hope for your future" in 31:16-17 is bound up in the Messiah's work of healing and reconciliation, and wouldn't be fully realized until he came.

Jeremiah 31:22 has a curious expression, that God would "create a new thing on earth: a woman encircles a man." Commentators for millennia have puzzle over the meaning. Perhaps as some have suggested, the virgin birth, a man who had a human mother but no human father? But then again, note that the first half of the verse refers to "virgin Israel" (v21) as a "faithless daughter." If the "virgin" and "daughter" refer to the LORD's people, then mightn't the "woman" also refer to the LORD's people, that is the new people, the new creation, the new covenant people (31:31ff), the church which is both the bride of Christ and the body of Christ, the church of which each of the children of God is both a part and a child?

Inasmuch as 31:21-34 is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and referenced several times as being fulfilled in Jesus and his church, it seems right to read the devotion of the LORD for his people in 31:35ff as referring to a genuine commitment to Israel, but not limited to Israel after the flesh (see Romans 9-11). God's presence would be among his people, all those who receive the New Covenant of 31:31-34. Jesus asserted on the night of his betrayal that he was enacting that new covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20).

Jeremiah 32-34

Jeremiah 32 is set in the 10th year of King Zedekiah, which was the 18th year of King Nebuchadnezzar, 587 BC. Jerusalem was under siege, because the king and people had ignored the LORD's command to keep their oath and submit to Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 27-28). Jeremiah was imprisoned in the palace, the court of the guard. Some details of how and why Jeremiah came to be imprisoned there are in chapter 37, particularly v21. At least he had meager rations as a prisoner there, until the food ran out.

At the time Jeremiah was imprisoned, Jerusalem was in desperate circumstances. Jeremiah had predicted several times that things would continue to get worse because the king and the people refused to submit to the LORD and to his servant Nebuchadnezzar, and the worst was in progress. In those terrible circumstances, Jeremiah's uncle came, according to God's word, and offered to sell a family field to Jeremiah. God directed Jeremiah to buy it. There is a great deal of irony in this episode, since Jeremiah himself had been attacked by his family in Anathoth, and he

had no wife or children to provide for, and the Babylonian army was camped at Anathoth and all around Jerusalem. It didn't appear to be an ideal time for buying land in that place. Nevertheless, in obedience to God, Jeremiah the prisoner in the city under siege bought the land from his uncle. This was a divine "sign" that despite the desperate current circumstances, local real estate would again in the future be occupied by the families of Judah.

The process in this transaction included a scribe named Baruch, 32:12-13, 16. This is the first mention of Baruch, but won't be the last. In fact, Baruch had already been assisting Jeremiah for at least 18 years by this time, going back to 605 BC, the days of Jehoiakim as reported in Jeremiah 36. ... The description of the sealed deed and how it was handled in v11-14 might stir recollections of Revelation 5:1ff, the sealed scroll in the hand of the Almighty, that only the Lion of Judah was worthy to open. The placement in a clay jar so "that they may last a long time" bears on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:7ff. Jerusalem would be ruined for a long time, but not forever.

Jeremiah's prayer in 32:16ff has beautiful poetic descriptions of the LORD, especially v17-19, and then reminders from antiquity of the great things God has done in human history, and the failures of the people to follow him. Once again in 32:24 the consequences of famine, sword and pestilence are linked to persistent community sins.

In response to Jeremiah's prayer, the LORD again cites the failures of Israel and Judah and the subsequent necessity to bring an end to the arrogant rebelliousness of the people who supposedly belonged to him. The extreme perversion of child sacrifice in ben-Hinnom is mentioned again in 32:35. Yet again, in 32:36-44 we have promises of a glorious future. The glory of unity under God in 37-41 (note the LORD's pleasure in v41), accomplished by the Messiah, depended on some initial restoration and occupation of Jerusalem and its vicinity as described in v42-44, what was pictured by Jeremiah's real estate transaction. Incidentally, men of Anathoth were numbered among the exiles who returned to Jerusalem after Babylon fell to Cyrus (Ezra 2:23).

The prophecy in Jeremiah 33:1-13, like that in 32 about the land, looks forward to a time of restoration and resettlement, a time of peace. God wanted everyone to know, including the generation born in captivity, that this was not the end of his plan for Israel, which was his plan to redeem the world. People of Judah/Israel would again inhabit the land and God's name would be known there. Terrible times were upon them, but God's good purposes would continue to be worked out. And again, the interlude of partial restoration and dwelling in the land was a prelude to the coming of the righteous Branch, Jesus (33:14-18), the heir of David, and renewal of the priesthood. God's promises of king and priest were irrevocable, as firm as the order of the created cosmos itself (v19-22). Those who despaired and presumed God had permanently abandoned Israel and the promises (23-25) were wrong. The covenants of Abraham and of David, the promises to the patriarchs, would be fulfilled (v26).

The message in Jeremiah 34 highlights the physical hopelessness of Jerusalem in the face of the onslaught of Nebuchadnezzar's forces. The city would certainly fall, as Jeremiah had prophesied again and again, and be burned. Yet in the midst of the crushing weight of calamity Jeremiah told Zedekiah he could survive, and be taken to Babylon for the remainder of his life. By this time in 588-587 BC Zedekiah was about 32 years old. However, the somewhat generous

opportunity for Zedekiah to die in peace in Babylon seems to have been based on an aborted action reported in 34:8-22. During the siege, the king and upper class in Jerusalem had agreed with a firm covenant oath to free their (Jewish) slaves. Circumstances were desperate, and there may have been an element of penitence under pressure, but there was also most likely the practical concern that there wasn't enough food to support household slaves. So they set them free. And God sent a message of approval through Jeremiah. But then the siege was interrupted by an Egyptian army moving toward Judah (see Jeremiah 37:5) and Nebuchadnezzar withdrew from Jerusalem to deal with Egypt. As soon as there was a break in the siege, the wealthy who had freed their slaves promptly broke their oaths and forced the recently freed (Jewish) slaves back into bondage (34:11). God was enraged by their greed and dishonesty, their abuse of their fellow man, and promised them a different sort of "freedom" (v17), freedom to die by sword, famine, and pestilence.

The description of oath taking, dividing an animal into halves and then walking between the parts with an oath like, "may this be done to me and more so if I do not keep my word," is pictured here in 34:18 and alluded to many times in the Bible, beginning in Genesis 15:17-18 when the LORD bound himself with such an oath to Abraham. Eventually Jesus fulfilled the oath by dying on the middle cross. Doing the right thing with the slaves, even for mixed motives, had brought a promise of mitigation of the divine judgment, but breaking their covenant oath about their slaves promptly annulled the mercy God offered. The army that briefly left (37:5) would certainly return and finish the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem (34:21-22).

Jeremiah 35-37

Chapter 35 recounts an assignment God gave to Jeremiah to meet with a group of people whose patriarch had bound his family with an oath to avoid alcohol live as nomads. From 1 Chronicles 2:55 it appears the Rechabites were a branch of the family of Kenites. The story seems to be set in the days of King Jehoiakim when he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, around 600 BC (compare v11, 2 Kings 24:1-2). God used the Rechabites, who faithfully followed their forefather's teaching, to illustrate that people can be faithful to guiding principles. If the Rechabites could faithfully keep the covenant of their merely human ancestor, Israel could have faithfully kept the covenant of God, but they refused to. For their consistent faithfulness, God promised an enduring blessing to the descendants of Jonadab the Rechabite.

Jeremiah 36 recounts a story from 606-605 BC, the time when Jehoiakim was made a vassal of Babylon instead of Egypt. This is the 2nd time we read of God instructing Jeremiah to write his prophecies in a book (recall 30:2). Here we have a glimpse of the process, Jeremiah recalling and dictating the prophecies to his scribe, Baruch. The first composition must have required several months, as we pass from the 4th year in 36:1 to the 9th month of the 5th year in 36:9 (December-January). The anticipated day of fasting (36:6, 9) may have been a national event prompted by the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar's forces at Jerusalem the first time. At this time, Jeremiah had been banned from the temple (recall 20:1-6, 26:1-24). Consequently Baruch had the assignment to go and read the prophecies openly in the temple, which he did from a room used by the Secretary Gemariah near one of the gates (36:10). Some officials who heard the words were very disturbed by the collected message of Jeremiah over 20 years of so of preaching God's word. They determined that the king should hear the words, but they also knew it might

go badly, so they urged Baruch and Jeremiah to go into hiding, which they did, with God's help (36:19, 26)).

As King Jehoiakim heard the words of the scroll, which had been months in preparation, he deliberately cut off the sections as they were read and burned them in the brazier that was warming his room (remember, it was December-January). Here, the king's father-in-law, Elnathan (36:25, recall 26:20-23, 2 Kings 24:8) and others urged the king not to burn the scroll, but with no fear he and his inner circle of advisors utterly rejected the word of the LORD. We have a stark contrast here between Jehoiakim and his father, Josiah. When the book of the Law was found in the temple, Josiah responded in righteous fear and carefully inquired whether this was truly God's word. Jehoiakim, who'd been 11 years old when the book of the Law was found, was utterly indifferent to the word of God and thought he could cavalierly ignore it and suppress it. However, Jeremiah and Baruch reproduced the book, and continued to add to it (36:28-32) for more than a decade after Jehoiakim had died in dishonor, and we still read the words God gave to Jeremiah today.

Like chapter 36, chapter 37 (and 38) tells of adversity the prophet experienced because of being God's prophet. The scene shifts from Jehoiakim's reign to his younger brother Zedekiah as king under Nebuchadnezzar's authority. This prophecy was in the time frame of the 3rd siege of Jerusalem, in 588-587 BC, the exact same time frame as the freeing of the slaves and subsequent reinforced servitude mentioned in chapter 34. Zedekiah and his cronies falsely supposed the Babylonian threat had been eliminated by a brief Egyptian incursion into Judah, but as Jeremiah foretold that was a brief relief. His message was highly unpopular with the king and others. Zedekiah was in the awkward position of thinking Jeremiah was a prophet, and at the same time being afraid to obey what God sent him to say.

Because Jeremiah's prophecies affirmed God's truth of judgment against Judah and of Nebuchadnezzar's divinely appointed role, many people saw him as a traitor to his people, and certainly unpatriotic. They had no grasp of his enormous concern for his people and their nation which compelled him to speak the truth of God to unwilling hearers. Consequently, when Jeremiah attempted to cross over the valley northward to his hometown of Anathoth in the interval when the siege was briefly broken, he was accused by a hostile sentry of defecting to the Babylonians (37:11ff). Knowing what lay ahead, Jeremiah had wanted to settle matters pertaining to family property. Ironically, after his imprisonment in the deplorable and deadly conditions of the dungeon, when he was moved into the court of the guard, that's where his uncle came to him to settle a matter of the family property (recall chapter 32). Zedekiah's mercy in 37:21 reflected the fact that he knew Jeremiah to be God's servant, he consulted him on multiple occasions, but because of his fear he never acted on the opportunities God offered him through the prophet. Though king, he feared the officials who surrounded him and their particular political agendas and would not do what was right in the weightier matters. Jeremiah's days in the court of the guard were during the final siege and the famine that resulted from it.

Jeremiah 38-40

Jeremiah 38 continues the narrative from chapter 37. Jeremiah was a prisoner in the court of the guard surviving on meager rations. Even there he continued to have some contact with people

and continued to proclaim the same message of death by sword, famine, and pestilence for those who stayed in Jerusalem. He urged people to flee the city and surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. Consequently, certain officials wanted to kill him. Jesus, of course, later instructed his own disciples similarly in Matthew 24-25 to flee Jerusalem when the Roman army came to crush the Jewish rebellion in 68-70 AD. The end result here for Jeremiah was to be put into a muddy cistern and left to die.

The statement of King Zedekiah in 38:5 shows his character. He knew Jeremiah didn't deserve to be attacked for telling the truth, but he feared his own officials and people more than he feared the LORD. Recall 37:17, and then 38:19, 24. Zedekiah knew Jeremiah was a true prophet whose words were fulfilled, yet he didn't have the courage to obey Jeremiah contrary to the will of his own subordinates. Fear brought Zedekiah, his family, and Jerusalem to a tragic and disastrous end, which he could have avoided by acting on the advice he requested from Jeremiah.

The hero of the story in 37-38 is an Ethiopian eunuch. Not a Jew, but a foreigner whose name is more like a descriptive title, Ebed-melech (servant of the king). He approached the king in public court session and asked for Jeremiah's life to be spared after the king had abandoned him to his enemies. The king authorized Ebed-melech's intervention, and Jeremiah was rescued from the cistern and restored to incarceration in the court of the guard. I have to think that the other Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39 is an echo, a reminder of this man's courage and convictions, and the blessing given through Jeremiah in 39:15-18.

Jeremiah 39 opens in January of 588 BC (see also Jeremiah 52:4, 2 Kings 25:1), when the final siege of Jerusalem had just begun. 2 ½ years later in v2 the city fell to the Babylonian forces on July 18, 586 BC. The events we've been reading about in 37-38 happened during that siege. When the Babylonians breached the walls and set up office in the gates of the city (remember the prophetic word in Jeremiah 1:15) King Zedekiah and his family and palace guard fled the city toward the Jordan River valley (the Arabah). Their flight was short lived, and they were captured by the Babylonians. The last thing Zedekiah saw was the slaughter of his sons, before he was blinded and taken in chains to Babylon. Moral weakness and fear had brought him to utter ruin, along with the city where he reigned and the people who followed him.

The character named in v3, Nebu-sar-sekem the Rab-saris, has also been identified by name and title on a clay tablet from Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon now housed in the British Museum in London.

Chapter 39 tells of Jeremiah's removal from his imprisonment and the instructions of Nebuchadnezzar for his freedom to choose his own future. Jeremiah chose to remain in Judah among his people, and so he was entrusted to the newly appointed governor, Gedaliah ben Ahikam. Chapter 40 then retells the story of how Jeremiah was initially rounded up with the other survivors in Jerusalem, and then rescued and freed as Nebuchadnezzar commanded, and handed over to Gedaliah by his own choice. It is noteworthy that the king and his officers knew of Jeremiah's prophecies and that according to his word the fall of Jerusalem had been by the LORD's design. Jeremiah was indeed a prophet to the nations. Daniel, who sometimes advised Nebuchadnezzar, knew Jeremiah's writings (Daniel 9:1-2). The Babylonian king and officers saw the truth of Jeremiah's prophecies when his own people were in denial.

With the destruction of Jerusalem and all the fortified cities of Judah a temporary administrative capitol was set up at Mizpah with Gedaliah as governor. Even then, political intrigue still boiled in the land, and some of the Judean soldiers were entangled with foreign rulers who wanted continued chaos to prevail in Judah. An officer named Johanan heard of a plot to kill the governor, and warned him, offering to quietly end the threat, but Gedaliah was naively skeptical of the report and forbade Johanan from acting. As we'll see in chapter 41, that decision to assume the best was another disaster.

Jeremiah 41-45

In some ways these final chapters of Jeremiah's personal story are one of the saddest commentaries on human nature you'll ever see.

The destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of most of the survivors had taken place in chapter 39, just as Jeremiah described. Jeremiah was freed by the Babylonians to remain among his people in the land of Judah if you chose to, and he did. The new governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar was beginning to organize the people who were left, when one of the surviving army captains warned him of a plot to murder him. Gedaliah the governor ignored the warning, deemed it a lie, and proceeded as normal. In the 7th month (41:1), just 3 months after Jerusalem had been completely defeated (39:2), a former army officer named Ishmael did indeed murder Gedaliah the governor, and several others as well at Mizpah and Gibeon. Ishmael compounded the his crimes by rounding up as many survivors as he could to transport them in bondage to Ammon, where no doubt they would have been sold into slavery.

Fortunately for the bedraggled group of survivors the same captain of Judah's former army that had warned Gedaliah gathered up some men and went in pursuit of Ishmael. The succeeded in rescuing the captives, but Ishmael and several of his men escaped. No matter how bad things are, there are always people who are willing to make things worse and prey on the weak.

Unfortunately, the remnant now gathered Bethlehem (41:17) were afraid of reprisals from the Babylonians, and wanted to go to Egypt for sanctuary.

Chapter 42 records the exchanges between the people who wanted to go to Egypt and Jeremiah. The request for divine guidance, the promise to do whatever Jeremiah relayed to them, and then as Jeremiah unhappily expected, their utter refusal to believe God's word and do what he said. No matter how bad things had gotten, they were still choosing to stubbornly go their own way and do what they wanted, even if it was the direct opposite of what God said. In 42 Jeremiah relayed God's message, stay in the land and settle down, and they would be blessed and protected, or disobey God and go to Egypt and continue to suffer sword, famine, and pestilence (42:19) there.

Chapter 43 records the immediate rejection of God's word, and insolent response of the very people who'd asked Jeremiah for guidance. Not only did they call Jeremiah a liar, they accused his helper the scribe Baruch of making up the things Jeremiah said and conspiring to destroy them. Conspiracy theories often abound in times of trouble, no matter how absurd. The net result

was that the refugees of Judah decided to flee to Egypt rather than stay where God wanted them, and also decided to take Jeremiah and Baruch with them, along with all the survivors. In Egypt sometime later Jeremiah delivered a prophecy that the very thing they'd feared in Jerusalem, the coming of Nebuchadnezzar with his army, would come upon them in the place they'd settle in Egypt.

Chapter 44 tells of Jeremiah's continuing role as God's prophet in Egypt, denouncing the idolatry the refugees persisted in, the idolatry that had led to their suffering in the first place. The simple reality is, despite all the words of the prophets that were fulfilled, they still refused to believe the worship of idols, particular the "queen of heaven," was a problem. They insisted they would continue their family rituals devoted to the queen of heaven (44:15-19). They had learned nothing, but like Gomer in Hosea persisted in attributing the LORD's blessings to the idols they whored after. Consequently, once again, sword, famine, and pestilence lay ahead for them (44:13).

The prophecy concerning Pharaoh Hophra was fulfilled in 570 BC when he was killed by rivals.

The epilogue to the historical accounts of Jeremiah in chapter 45 occurred in 605 BC, in the context of chapter 36, when Jeremiah hired Baruch to write down his dictated prophecies. It appears that Baruch, a skilled scribe whose services would have been in demand and profitable, was not thrilled to be attached to Jeremiah, but the LORD directed him to stay the course through the disasters that lay ahead, with the assurance he would be protected and have his life as a prize of war. This is very similar to the promise made to Ebed-melech in 587 BC after he rescued Jeremiah from the cistern (39:15-18). Baruch was being directed to assist Jeremiah at great personal risk and cost, except that if he believed God it was the best possible outcome he could hope for. Baruch did stay the course and assist Jeremiah through it all.

Jeremiah 46-48

This section of Jeremiah, 46-51, is a series of prophecies against the nations, beginning with Egypt and concluding with Babylonia. These were the two nations Judah was caught between from the death of Josiah in 609 BC to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

The prophecies against Egypt, 46:2-28, are chronologically placed in 605 BC, which was the same year God told Jeremiah to write down his prophecies and drafted Baruch to help (Jeremiah 36). That's when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco, who 4 years previously had slain Josiah and put Josiah's son Jehoiakim on the throne. Jeremiah's prophecy foretold the defeat of Egypt's army by Nebuchadnezzar, and the coming of Nebuchadnezzar into Egypt, defeating and raiding several of their leading cities. Notice that the judgment on Egypt in Jeremiah 46:25 echoes the earlier judgment in the days of Moses, Exodus 12:12, when God judged the pharaoh and the people and the gods of Egypt. Neither of those judgments was the end for Egypt, she would revive again. ... The prophecy against Egypt, when Jerusalem went from being a vassal of Pharaoh to being a vassal of Babylon, included reassurance of future blessings from God for Jacob (Israel) as God's servant.

Jeremiah 47 is aimed at the Philistines who'd been persistent enemies of Israel since the days of the Judges. Since Pharaoh Neco did attack Gaza in 609 BC this prophecy may have been made

before King Josiah died. In 605 BC when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco as mentioned in chapter 46 he decimated the cities of Philistia and marched on into Egypt. The sword of Nebuchadnezzar that struck Philistia was really the sword of the LORD (47:6-7).

Jeremiah 48 targeted Moab, the descendants of Lot who opposed the children of Israel at the end of the wilderness wanderings and repeatedly in the days of the Judges, until they were substantially subdued for many years by David. After a long interval of dwelling in security the King whose name is the LORD of hosts (v15) was sending in workers with swords (v10), namely the Babylonians. Moab's horrific idolatry that included human sacrifice is deplored in the judgment against them, and that they "magnified" themselves "against the LORD" (v26). God's judgment was not without remorse (v31-32, 36). He takes no joy in chastening the ungodly. As with Egypt (46:26) there is a promise of a latter day restoration for Moab (48:47), most likely in the good news of the New Covenant kingdom of God initiated by Jesus.

Jeremiah 49-50

The collected prophecies of Jeremiah against the nations began with Egypt in 46, continued with Philistia in 47 and Moab in 48. These are all close neighbors and frequent opponents of ancient Israel. The natural progression after Moab would be Ammon, the target of the prophecy in 49:1-6.

As the LORD pronounced judgment on the gods of Egypt (46:46) along with her rulers and people, so also Chemosh the god of Moab (48:7) and Milcom the god of Ammon (49:3). Likewise judgment fell against the gods of Babylon, Bel and Merodach (50:2).

The judgment of Ammon was not without relief. God promised a future restoration for Ammon (48:6) just as he had for Egypt (46:26) and for Moab (48:47) and as he did for Elam (49:39) and of course for Israel and Judah (50:4-5). The promised restoration should be seen especially in the work of Jesus when he was followed by "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan..." (Matt 4:25) and when he cast out demons in the Decapolis (Mark 5:1-20, Mark 7:31ff). Those who inhabited the old territories of Israel, and Moab, and Ammon were being introduced to the Redeemer, and of course people from Egypt and Elam were among those present at Pentecost when the reign of the risen Lord was proclaimed (Acts 2:8-10).

The prophecy about Elam is dated in 49:34 is dated to 597 BC or shortly thereafter when Zedekiah came to the throne. The prophecies against Babylon (50-51) are tied to an event in 593 BC (51:59) but might be a collection of two or more visions.

Ben Hadad of Damascus (49:27) was a regnal name/title shared by multiple rulers in the days of Elijah and Elisha when Israel and Syria were constantly fighting each other, or occasionally joining in common cause against another nation.

The imagery of divine judgment as growing birth pains, regarding Edom in 49:22, is repeated over and over again in these chapters, and used by other prophets, including Jesus in Matthew 24 and Paul in Romans 8. The agony of birth pains ultimately produced the Messiah, and then again

will end in the totality of the New Creation.

Pride is mentioned several times in these prophecies as a reason for divine judgment against the nations called to account.

Imagery from these prophecies recurs of course in the book of Revelation, as for example the 4 winds in 49:36 and Revelation 7:1ff.

The sovereignty of God over all gods, all kings, and all nations is stressed again and again in these prophecies. The creator has complete authority and power over his creation, the potter has every right to do with the clay what he will.

The prophecies against Babylon, chapters 50-51, include promises of redemption for Judah and Israel (50:4-5, 19-20). Some of these promises can be taken to apply to the immigrants who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, but overall they are much too expansive to be completely fulfilled in those days. The everlasting covenant in 50:5 and pardon for sin in 50:20 came only through the redemption accomplished by Jesus (50:34). The end of Babylon happened in one night, in regard to Babylon falling to Cyrus and the Persians, but the full end pictured in these prophecies stretched out over centuries. Babylon for millennia has been as described, deserted, ruined, a habitation for desert animals, but that prophecy was a long process, not a single event. Similarly, the opponent of the Heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation is Bablyon, and God's people are directed to come out of her (Jeremiah 50:28, Revelation 18:4), and her fall also is a prolonged process of decay and degradation, but the outcome in both prophecies is certain. Revelation 18-19 describe the fall of Babylon, the world city, in terms much like Jeremiah 50-51.

Jeremiah 51-52

Jeremiah's collected prophecies against the nations (46-51) conclude with a lengthy diatribe against Babylon (50-51). Several times these prophecies against Babylon describe her utter desolation and abandonment, which took place over a series of centuries, and at the same time there are references to God setting different shepherds over Babylon and Babylon being captured (50:44-46), which alluded to the conquest by Cyrus and the Persians, and again the conquest by Alexander and the Greeks. The outcome though was ordained, that Babylon was marked for destruction (50:1, 3). Babylon had been God's instrument for chastening the nations, his "golden cup" of wrath (50:7) but she herself was guilty of sin against "the Holy One of Israel" (50:5) and would receive her just desserts. Daniel's work with Nebuchadnezzar was no doubt part of the Lord's willingness to heal Babylon (50:8-9), but her guilt accumulated still.

When reading the language of scattering and "judgement has reached up to heaven" (50:9-10) remember the first Babylon, Genesis 11:1-9, where the people attempted to hold together and not be scattered, in defiance of God, building a tower that reached up to heaven. Babylon like its namesake Babel would be scattered and fall into ruin.

When Babylon is referred to as a "destroying mountain" in 51:25-26 we're reminded of other prophetic language picturing kingdoms as mountains, but that's especially ironic for Babylon, which was not on a mountain at all. The mountains of Babylon were man made structures,

pyramid temples (ziggurats) where idols were worshiped. Mountains made of baked bricks, not of stone, as again in Genesis 11 and in Nebuchadnezzar's great city.

The beginning of the end for Babylon was at work in the King of the Medes (50:11b), ironically appropriate because there were Israelites/Ephraimites among the Medes (recall the Assyrian captivity, 2 Kings 17:6, 18:11). First conquest, and ultimately destruction. The vengeance for the temple (again 50:11b) aligns with the futile arrogance of Belshazzar on the night Babylon fell to Cyrus, when he had a feast dedicated to idols using sacred vessels from the Jerusalem temple (Daniel 5). Conquered by Cyrus, the rule of Babylon was given to a man called Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:31).

Babylon's curse by the inhabitant of Zion, "let my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea" is unhappily echoed, twisted, by a mob instigated by corrupt priests in Matthew 27:25 when Jesus was condemned. Geographic Zion had aligned with spiritual Babylon.

Christians living in the world are called nevertheless to live apart from the world, with different loyalties, different values, different goals and behaviors. Come out of Babylon (51:45-46). The demeanor of 51:46 is appropriate for God's people in this world in any generation, to not fret about reports of troubles year by year or violence in the land or between nations.

Notice the markers of hope for God's faithful in 51:10, 46, 48. Not just justice against Babylon, but deliverance for God's people.

The prophecies against Babylon were written in a document in 593 BC (51:59-60). That was 4 years after Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin and the skilled workers of Jerusalem to Babylon, and 6 years before Babylon would destroy Jerusalem because King Zedekiah didn't keep his oaths to Nebuchadnezzar, disobeying the LORD.

Notice the acting out of Babylon's demise by throwing a stone with the message attached into the Euphrates (51:63-64). Jesus used that illustration to warn against discouraging "little ones" (Matthew 18:5-6) and John saw a reenactment in Revelation 18:21 with an angel delivering the same message about the Babylon that still persists in this world in opposition to God. Much of Jeremiah 50-51 is paralleled in the language and imagery of Revelation 17-19. At the same time, the pride and humbling of Babylon here in Jeremiah reminds of Isaiah's earlier prophecy in Isaiah 14.

The last verse of Jeremiah 51 indicates the end of Jeremiah's words. Chapter 52 is almost word for word the same as 2 Kings 24:18-25:30. Both describe the last days of Jerusalem, the sad end of King Zedekiah, the destruction of the city and removal of everything of value and almost all of the survivors. We most likely see the hand of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, in the final words about King Jehoiachin's freedom in 561-560 BC, concluding both Jeremiah and Kings with a note of change being in the works in Babylon.