

JEREMIAH
AND
LAMENTATIONS

The Bible Study Textbook Series

NEW TESTAMENT			
New Testament & History By W. Wartick & W. Fields Vol. 1 - The Intertestament Period and The Gospels		The Gospel of Matthew In Four Volumes By Harold Fowler	The Gospel of Mark By B. W. Johnson and Don DeWelt
The Gospel of Luke By T. R. Applebury		The Gospel of John By Paul T. Butler	Acts Made Actual By Don DeWelt
Romans Realized By Don DeWelt		Studies in Corinthians By T. R. Applebury	Guidance From Galatians By Don Earl Boatman
The Glorious Church (Ephesians) By Wilbur Fields		Philippians - Colossians Philemon By Wilbur Fields	Thinking Through Thessalonians By Wilbur Fields
Paul's Letters To Timothy & Titus By Don DeWelt		Helps From Hebrews By Don Earl Boatman	James & Jude By Don Fream
Letters From Peter By Bruce Oberst		Hereby We Know (I-II-III John) By Clinton Gill	The Seer, The Saviour and The Saved (Revelation) By James Strauss
OLD TESTAMENT			
O.T. & History By William Smith and Wilbur Fields	Genesis In Four Volumes By C. C. Crawford	Exploring Exodus By Wilbur Fields	Leviticus By Don DeWelt
Numbers By Brant Lee Doty	Deuteronomy By Bruce Oberst	Joshua - Judges Ruth By W. W. Winter	I & II Samuel By W. W. Winter
I & II Kings By James E. Smith		I & II Chronicles By Robert E. Black	Ezra - Nehemiah Esther By Ruben Ratzlaff
The Shattering of Silence (Job) By James Strauss		Psalms In Two Volumes By J. B. Rotherham	Proverbs By Donald Hunt
Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon—By R. J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt		Isaiah In Three Volumes By Paul T. Butler	Jeremiah and Lamentations By James E. Smith
Ezekiel By James E. Smith		Daniel By Paul T. Butler	Hosea - Joel - Amos Obadiah - Jonah By Paul T. Butler
Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi By Clinton Gill			
DOCTRINE			
Survey Course In Christian Doctrine Two Books of Four Volumes By C. C. Crawford		The Church In The Bible By Don DeWelt	The Eternal Spirit Two Volumes By C. C. Crawford

***JEREMIAH
AND
LAMENTATIONS***

By

James E. Smith

College Press, Joplin, Missouri

Copyright 1972
College Press

Reprint May 1974
Reprint January 1978

DEDICATION

To

Professor George Mark Elliott

Giant of the Faith,

Devoted Student of the Word,

Master Teacher

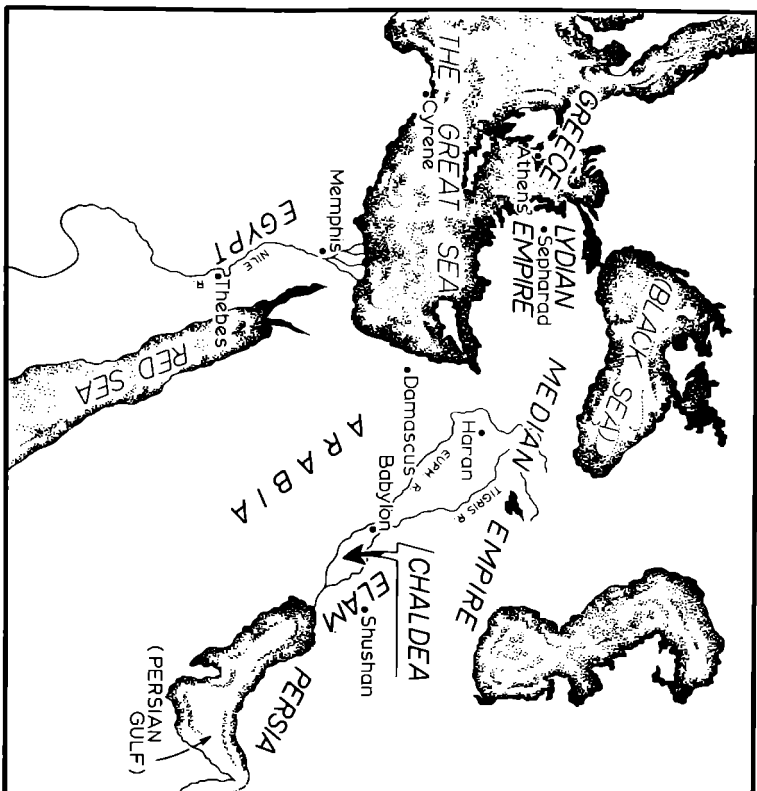
and

Christian Gentleman,

whose knowledge of and empathy with the prophets of Israel first kindled within the heart of the author an ever-increasing desire to know these men of God,

this volume is humbly dedicated

in full realization that it is but a feeble reflection of what he might have written.



JEREMIAH'S WORLD THE RIVAL KINGDOMS

0 500
MILES

CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	xi

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH

1. The World of Jeremiah	1
2. Jeremiah: The Man and the Prophet	39
3. Jeremiah: The Book	85

PART TWO

THE EARLY MINISTRY OF JEREMIAH

4. The Call of the Prophet (1:1-19)	115
5. Sermons from the Reign of Josiah (2:1—4:4)	145
6. Sermons from the Reign of Josiah (4:5—6:30) ..	185
7. Sermons on Worship (7:1—8:3)	222
8. Sermons from the Early Reign of Jehoiakim (8:4—10:25)	243
9. Conspiracies against God and His Prophet (11:1—13:27)	271

JEREMIAH

	Page
10. National Distress and Prophetic Discouragement (14:1—17:27)	310
11. The Potter and His Vessels (18:1—20:18)	356
12. Political Pronouncements of the Prophet (21:1—25:38)	383
SPECIAL STUDY: Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventy Years Prophecy	443

PART THREE

THE LATER MINISTRY OF JEREMIAH

13. Jeremiah Faces Opposition (26:1—29:32)	457
14. Jeremiah's Faith in the Future (30:1—33:26)	504
15. Obedience and Disobedience (34:1—36:32)	578
16. Events During the Last Days of Jerusalem (37:1—39:18)	612
17. Tragedy beyond Tragedy (40:1—45:5)	647
18. Nebuchadnezzar and the Nations (46:1—49:39)	697
19. God and Babylon (50:1—51:64)	753
SPECIAL STUDY: The Fall of Babylon: A Problem in Prophetic Interpretation	793

CONTENTS

	Page
20. An Historical Appendix (52:1-34)	818
SERMON: Jeremiah the Reluctant Preacher	838

PART FOUR

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

21. Introduction to Lamentations	846
22. A Widowed City (1:1-22)	858
23. A Broken People (2:1-22)	869
24. A Suffering Prophet (3:1-66)	879
25. A Ruined Kingdom (4:1-22)	893
26. A Penitent Nation (5:1-22)	902
Glossary	908

MAPS AND CHARTS

Map: Jeremiah's World p. vi.

Chart: The Last Kings of Judah p. 26.

Chart: Chronological Outline of Jeremiah's Life pp.
73-74.

Chart: Verse Repetitions in Jeremiah p. 93.

Chart: Order of the Foreign Nation Oracles p. 101.

Chart: Chronological Notices in Jeremiah p. 109.

Chart: Structure of the Book of Jeremiah p. 112.

Map: Palestine in the Days of Josiah p. 144a.

Plate: The Babylonian Chronicle p. 144b.

Chart: The Parable of the Ruined Waistcloth p. 298.

Illustration: Cuneiform Business Documents p. 546.

Chart: Activities of Jeremiah During the Siege of
Jerusalem p. 574.

Chart: Interviews Between Jeremiah and Zedekiah p.
622.

Map: Egypt p. 696a.

Plate: The Jaazaniah and Gedaliah Seals p. 696b.

Chart: Chronological Sequence of the Foreign Nation
Oracles p. 699.

Chart: The Two Seventy Year Periods p. 792a.

Plate: Jehoiachin Tablets p. 792a.

Chart: Structure of Lamentations p. 850.

Map: Moab p. 928

PREFACE

When the author was called upon in his twenty-eighth year to produce this volume his immediate reaction was that of Jeremiah to his prophetic call: "Alas, I am only a youth." This work is not the fruit of long years of teaching the Book of Jeremiah in the college classroom. Indeed, at the time the project was undertaken the author had yet to lead a single student through a study of this prophetic book. That deficiency has since been remedied with three courses, one an undergraduate survey, one a graduate seminar, and one a course in Hebrew exegesis. This limited teaching experience coupled with the somewhat detailed study of the book in the classroom of Dr. Sheldon H. Blank of the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institution of Religion constitute the only academic credentials which the author can produce to justify his participation in this project.

One's general opinion about the Word of God colors every comment that he might make upon it. Many modern authors seem to be unaware of their preconceived *a priori* assumptions or else they fail to admit to them. It is most perturbing to pick up a volume purporting to be an "objective" analysis of Biblical materials only to find it shot through with theological bias. The present author's view of the Old Testament is the view generally acknowledged to have been that of Christ and the apostles *viz.*, that the Scriptures are divinely authoritative, infallible and inerrant. No better summation of the Biblical doctrine of inspiration can be found than that to which every member of the Evangelical Theological Society must subscribe annually: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."

Numerous commentaries, treatises and articles on the Book of Jeremiah have been consulted in the preparation of this work. Among the older commentaries those of

Keil and Streane were most helpful. Without question the greatest of the more recent English commentaries on Jeremiah is that of the Luthern scholar Theodore Laetsch. The author found the brief comments of Bert Hall in the Wesleyan Bible Commentary particularly stimulating. John Bright's volume on Jeremiah in the Anchor Bible offered many insights particularly in the areas of archaeological research and linguistic analysis. Of the treatises on the man Jeremiah those of Skinner (*Prophecy and Religion*, 1922, 1963) and Blank (*Jeremiah: Man and Prophet*, 1961) have been extremely useful.

Since the literature on the Book of Jeremiah is so abundant the publication of another book on the subject might seem to be presumptuous. However a survey of the materials makes it clear that a Bible College textbook on Jeremiah is not currently available. Such study guides as have been produced, e.g., the volume in the Shield Bible Study Series, are too brief to be beneficial in a college classroom. The standard commentaries on the book are often too technical for the average reader and have the added disadvantage of not being arranged properly for classroom study. The present volume was prepared with the Bible College student and teacher in mind. It is intended to be something more than a study guide and something less than a technical and philological commentary.

The material in the Book of Jeremiah is not arranged according to strict chronological principles. The temptation was great to rearrange the units within the book in what would appear to be the correct sequence and to discuss the units in that order. This procedure, followed by several modern commentaries, is by no means without advantage. The chronological arrangement would have eliminated the frequent jumping ahead or backtracking which is so confusing to modern students of the book. The historical context of each oracle or sermon would be imme-

PREFACE

diately apparent. But on the other hand commentaries and study guides arranged according to the chronological principle are extremely difficult to utilize when one is interested in consulting the comments on a particular passage. Furthermore the Book of Jeremiah is certainly no hodge-podge and the arrangement of the materials within it is not accidental. Part of the challenge of studying the Book of Jeremiah is in trying to ascertain the motives of the author in placing certain chapters in their present location within the book. For these reasons, then, the author elected to discuss the contents of Jeremiah as they stand in the book.

In organizing the chapters of this volume the author has tried to follow the natural divisions of the Book of Jeremiah. At the same time the needs of those who teach have been kept in mind. The twenty-six chapters provide a convenient breakdown of the materials for two quarters of study in the local church. In the Bible college setting the book should provide more than enough discussion materials for a two semester hour course in Jeremiah. The review section found at the end of each chapter is designed to help the student recall the basic facts of the verses under discussion. Alongside the "facts to master" are the "questions to ponder" which are intended to provoke class discussion.

The translation of the text of Jeremiah is that of the author unless otherwise indicated. Naturally in producing this translation several English versions of the book were consulted. Where the author's translation differs significantly from the King James Version (KJV), the American Standard Version (ASV) or the Revised Standard Version (RSV) the author has attempted to explain in simple terms the reason for the difference. Every effort has been made to preserve in the English translation of Jeremiah the emphasis which is often clearly indicated in

JEREMIAH

the Hebrew except where doing so led to unwieldy English constructions.

The author would be remiss if he did not publicly express his appreciation to those who helped in the production of this volume. Misses Lyn Reed and Chris Bream and Mrs. Rachel Smith labored faithfully in typing the final manuscript. Miss Hope Wozniak, graduate student at The Cincinnati Bible Seminary, rendered invaluable aid in the production of the maps and charts.

James E. Smith

The Cincinnati Bible Seminary
February 4, 1972

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

THE WORLD OF JEREMIAH

One cannot understand the prophets of the Old Testament unless he thoroughly understands the history of the Old Testament. Those who find the prophetic books difficult and boring have probably never done their homework in the history of Israel. Trying to interpret a prophetic book without first mastering the historical background is like jumping into eight feet of water without first learning to swim. One may survive the experience, but only with tremendous effort and little enjoyment. If the student will study the chart on the inside cover with great care he will be able to place Jeremiah within the proper historical context. Each diamond represents a major epoch of Old Testament history. Major characters are listed in the upper half of the diamond, major events in the lower half. On the outside of the diamond the arrow serves to indicate the approximate duration of the epoch. Read the chart vertically. Note particularly the tenth and eleventh periods of the history for this is the era during which Jeremiah conducted his ministry.

I. JUDAH UNDER ASSYRIAN DOMINATION

In 745 B.C. a king came to the throne of Assyria who was destined to influence the course of history in the ancient Near East for decades to come. His name was Tiglath-pileser III. For centuries the Assyrian monarchs had from time to time harassed the small states of Syria-Palestine. But these invasions of the western territories had been more in the nature of tribute-gathering raids. No effort was made to annex territory or permanently enslave people. A radical change of policy took place under Tiglath-pileser. He was interested in building an empire.

A. The Fall of the Northern Kingdom

During the years 733-732 B.C. Tiglath-pileser struck a decisive blow against Israel. All the lands in Galilee and Transjordan were overrun and portions of the population were deported (II Kings 15:29). The Assyrian would undoubtedly have destroyed Israel entirely had not Hoshea, a pro-Assyrian, slain king Pekah (II Kings 15:30). Hoshea immediately rendered tribute to Tiglath-pileser and was thereafter recognized as king of Israel by the Assyrian monarch. By the end of 732 B.C. Tiglath-pileser could consider Syria- Palestine subject to his rule. Most of the conquered territory was organized into provinces administered by Assyrian governors. Such kings as did remain were tribute-paying vassals. Hoshea of Israel and Ahaz of Judah were in this category.

Ahaz of Judah seems to have been content with his status as vassal. He was summoned to Damascus to appear before Tiglath-pileser and to pay homage to the Assyrian gods at a bronze altar there. Ahaz was so impressed by this pagan altar that he ordered a duplicate of it to be placed in the Temple at Jerusalem. This was but the first step in an apostasy which was to sweep the land of Judah. Images to the Baalim were erected throughout the land; incense was offered in high places; child sacrifice seems to have become common practice (II Kings 16:3). The desperate religious situation was matched by equally desperate social and economic conditions. In order to meet his tribute obligations Ahaz had to empty his treasury and strip the Temple of its gold (II Kings 16:8, 17).

Not long after Tiglath-pileser had been succeeded by his son Shalmaneser V, Hoshea of Israel decided to rebel against Assyria. Hoshea began to negotiate with a certain king So, one of the rival kings of Egypt. When a mutual defense pact had been arranged Hoshea withheld his annual tribute from Shalmaneser thus proclaiming his independ-

ence. Assyrian retaliation was swift in coming. In 724 B.C. Shalmaneser attacked Israel. The anticipated aid from Egypt did not materialize. Realizing his mistake and hoping to make peace with his overlord, Hoshea went out from Samaria to meet Shalmaneser. Hoshea was arrested and deported. The Assyrians occupied the territory of the Northern Kingdom except for Samaria itself which continued to withstand siege for nearly three years. Finally in 722 B.C. Samaria fell¹ and many of its inhabitants—27,290 according to Assyrian records—were deported to distant territories of the empire. With the fall of Samaria the history of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, comes to an end.

B. The Struggle for Independence

The southern kingdom of Judah continued to exist for about 135 years after the fall of Samaria and the collapse of the Northern Kingdom. Ahaz the apostate was succeeded on the throne by good king Hezekiah. Hezekiah instituted one of the most thorough-going religious reforms in the history of Judah (II Chronicles 29-31). A reformation of these proportions had political implications. Hezekiah knew that his rejection of Assyrian paganism would be construed in Nineveh as rebellion against the Assyrian monarch. During these crucial years Hezekiah became desperately ill. The prophet of God, Isaiah, announced to him that he must set his house in order for he would shortly die. Hezekiah prayed that his life might be spared so that he might deal with the tremendous problems which his tiny nation was facing and help his people prepare for Assyrian retaliation. God heard that prayer and

1. Most scholars feel that Shalmaneser died during the siege and was succeeded by his commanding general Sargon. The latter would then be king at the time of the fall of Samaria. In several texts Sargon takes credit for the conquest of Samaria. However recently E. J. Young has put forward strong arguments in favor of the view that Shalmaneser was still ruling at the time Samaria capitulated. See his *Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), I, 18-19.

JEREMIAH

sent His prophet back to the king to announce that fifteen years had been added to his days. In confirmation of this divine response a miraculous sign was granted: the shadow on the royal sundial went backwards ten degrees! (Isaiah 38:1-8).

Visitors from far-off Babylon came to Jerusalem to congratulate king Hezekiah upon his recovery. This embassy came from Merodach-baladan, one of the most bitterly antagonistic anti-Assyrian kings of the day. Everyone except Hezekiah could see that Merodach-baladan was trying to flatter the Judean king in order to enlist him in one of his numerous rebellions against the Assyrian overlord. Overcome by the flattery Hezekiah made the foolish mistake of showing all his wealth and resources to the Chaldean emissaries. Because of this stupid act Isaiah the prophet revealed to Hezekiah that one day Judah would be destroyed by the Chaldeans (Isaiah 39:5-7).

In 705 B.C. a new Assyrian monarch, Sennacherib, came to the throne. The accession of a new king was usually the time for vassals to rebel and thus it is not surprising that in both the eastern and western parts of the empire Assyrian vassals withheld the annual tribute and declared themselves to be independent. Hezekiah was active in the rebellion and hastily made preparations to face the inevitable Assyrian invasion.

In 701 B.C. Sennacherib and a mighty host arrived in Syria-Palestine to punish the rebellious vassals. This campaign is especially interesting because, in addition to the Biblical account, the Assyrian records of the invasion have been discovered. In the Assyrian account Sennacherib claims to have captured forty-six fortified cities of Judah, deported 200,150 Judeans and shut up Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage."¹ Harmonizing the Biblical data with the information contained in the Assyrian annals is

1. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961) p. 67.

not an easy task. Various reconstructions of the events are possible. Some scholars hold to a single invasion theory and attempt to fit all the events of II Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-37 to the year 701 B.C. Others feel that the Biblical data demand a second invasion of Judah by Sennacherib about 688 B.C. In either case the Assyrian effort to conquer Jerusalem failed. God intervened on behalf of his people and smote the Assyrian army and 185,000 of the enemy troops died in one night. This glorious deliverance was long remembered and even became the historical foundation for a false theology against which Jeremiah would constantly do battle. Apparently it was on the basis of this deliverance that the false prophets of the sixth century based their conviction that Jerusalem was inviolable.

C. Renewed Assyrian Vassalage

The independence for which Hezekiah had struggled so valiantly was short-lived. Upon taking the throne of Judah in 687 B.C. Manasseh declared himself a loyal vassal of the Assyrian king who was now Esarhaddon. Actually Manasseh had little choice in the matter for under Esarhaddon the Assyrian empire reached the zenith of its power. Esarhaddon was able to do what none of his predecessors could do *viz.*, successfully invade Egypt. In the annals of this king Manasseh is listed among twenty-two kings required to send materials to Nineveh for his building projects. Asshurbanipal (669-672 B.C.), the next Assyrian king, also successfully invaded Egypt. He lists Manasseh as one of his vassals who assisted in the Egyptian campaign.¹

Without question Manasseh was the worst king to ever sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem. During his

1. James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (second edition; Princeton: University Press, 1955), pp. 291-94.

lengthy reign of fifty-five years all manner of heathen practices were tolerated and even encouraged. As an Assyrian vassal Manasseh was forced to render homage to the Assyrian deities and to erect altars to them in the Temple in Jerusalem. Local Yahweh shrines, suppressed by Hezekiah, were restored. Pagan cults and practices both native and foreign were allowed to flourish with all the apparatus of fertility religion. Sacred prostitution was tolerated even within the Temple precincts (II Kings 21:7; 23:4-7). Divination and magic, so popular in Assyria, were in vogue in Jerusalem (II Kings 21:6). The barbarous rite of human sacrifice again appeared (II Kings 21:6). It is said that Manasseh repented of his wicked ways (II Chronicles 33:15-17) but he must have been very old at the time. He was unable to stem the tide of apostasy and the abuses continued until the time of the reformation under king Josiah (II Kings 23). During the reign of Manasseh the nation of Judah committed sins which could not be forgiven and the Lord God decreed that Judah must be punished (II Kings 21:9-15; 24:3f.).

Amon succeeded Manasseh on the throne of Judah but reigned only two years. He continued the pro-Assyrian foreign policy of his father. The national plunge into degradation continued. Amon was murdered in 640 B.C. by anti-Assyrian assassins. The assassins themselves were in turn executed by "the people of the land," apparently an assembly of the landed gentry.

II. JUDAH AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE

Josiah was eight years old when he ascended the throne of his father Amon in 640 B.C. The sacred historian gives the highest commendation to this young man.

And like unto him was there no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his might, according to the law

of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him (II Kings 23:25).

Josiah was able to wrest his tiny nation from the grip of Assyrian imperialism and steer it once again along an independent course.

A. The Deterioration of the Assyrian Empire

During the reign of Josiah the mighty Assyrian empire was beginning to crumble. Egypt was able to regain independence under Psammetichus I (663-609 B.C.) and Asshurbanipal was powerless to stop the defection. In 652 B.C. rebellion broke out at the opposite end of the empire led by Asshurbanipal's own brother, Shamash-shum-ukin. Asshurbanipal dissipated his strength in putting down this rebellion. In his later years the great Assyrian monarch seemed to lose interest in administrative and military affairs and turned his attention to cultural matters. After the death of Asshurbanipal in 627 B.C. his two rival sons led the nation in a suicidal civil war. About this time the Medes and the Babylonians were joining forces against their common enemy Assyria. Asshur fell to the Medo-Babylonian alliance in 614 B.C. Nineveh fell two years later. The Assyrian empire was in shambles.

As the Assyrian grip on the west gradually relaxed the tiny states of Syria-Palestine were able to make a bid for independence. Scripture declares that in his eighth year (632 B.C.) Josiah began to seek after the God of David (II Chronicles 34:3). This would indicate that very early in his reign the decision had been made to make a bid for independence. By 628 B.C. it was clear that the Assyrians were in no position to interfere in the west. Josiah launched a campaign into the Assyrian provinces to the north in an effort to annex to his kingdom the old territory of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (II Chronicles 34:6).

B. The Reformation of Josiah

Josiah led his now independent nation in one of the most thorough-going reforms of its history. The reform which began as early as the eighth year of his reign gained momentum in his twelfth year (628 B.C.). Josiah began "to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and carved images and molten images" (II Chronicles 34:3b). The altars of the Baalim were ground into powder and thrown over the graves of those who worshiped them (II Chronicles 34:4). At Bethel he slew the idolatrous priests and burned their bones upon the pagan altars (II Kings 23:20).

In the eighteenth year of Josiah (621 B.C.) as the Levites were renovating the interior of the Temple, a law book was discovered. Hilkiyah the high priest took the book to the king who, when he heard the sacred words of the text, rent his clothes (II Kings 22:11). In order to authenticate the discovery, the book was sent to the prophetess Huldah. Huldah declared that every threat contained in the newly discovered book would come to pass. Judah would be punished by God because of past unfaithfulness but the punishment would be delayed until after the death of good king Josiah (II Kings 22:15-20). The king convoked an assembly of all the notables of the nation at the Temple in Jerusalem. A solemn covenant was made by all who were present that they would obey all the commandments which were contained in the book (II Kings 23:1-3). An elaborate Passover was kept that year. Scripture records that "there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet" (II Chronicles 35:18; cf. II Kings 23:22).

The discovery of the law book gave new impetus to the reformation effort. But since the Book of Kings lumps together the reforms of the twelfth and eighteenth years of Josiah it is impossible to determine precisely which

THE WORLD OF JEREMIAH

reforms preceded and which followed the discovery of the law book. Nonetheless it is important to realize the extent of this reformation. The following facts should be noted:

1. All the vessels in the Temple which were associated with pagan cultic practice were burned outside Jerusalem and the ashes were carried away to Bethel (II Kings 23:4).

2. Josiah removed the priests of the various pagan cults who had been appointed by his predecessors, Manasseh and Amon (II Kings 23:5).

3. He removed the "grove," the Asherah, from the Temple, burned it at the brook Kidron, beat it to dust and cast the dust on the graves of the people (II Kings 23:6).

4. The houses of the sodomites which were in (or by) the Temple were torn down (II Kings 23:7).

5. He defiled the high places where the Lord was worshiped illegitimately. He did permit the priests of these high places to come to Jerusalem to serve at the one legitimate altar. Most of these priests however elected to remain in the outlying area (II Kings 23:8, 9).

6. Josiah defiled the Topheth, the area within the valley of Hinnom where children were sacrificed to Molech (II Kings 23:10).

7. A certain monument consisting of horses and chariots dedicated to the sun god was dismantled and burned (II Kings 23:11).

8. Certain altars erected by his predecessors were broken down, ground up and the dust cast into the brook Kidron (II Kings 23:12).

9. He destroyed the pagan shrines erected by Solomon in honor of the gods of the Zidonians, Moabites and Ammonites and defiled the areas by placing bones there (II Kings 23:13, 14).

10. Josiah removed those that had familiar spirits, the wizards and even the teraphim, the household idols (II Kings 23:24).

JEREMIAH

Several factors made this extensive reformation possible. As the power of the mighty Assyrian empire began to wane the confidence of the people in the imported Mesopotamian deities was shaken. Furthermore the influence of the prophet Zephaniah cannot be ignored. This prophet of God was of royal ancestry, four generations removed from Hezekiah. He may have been the teacher of Josiah during his minority. Beginning with the thirteenth year of Josiah, Jeremiah was also on the scene with his threats of punishment and pleas for repentance. Hilkiah the high priest was in full sympathy with the reform movement and actively supported the king in this effort. The impact of the discovery of the lost law book upon the reformation effort cannot be measured but one must assume that its influence was considerable. It was the conjunction of these several factors that enabled Josiah to implement the great reformation of the seventh century.

III. JUDAH AS AN EGYPTIAN VASSAL STATE

A. The Death of Josiah

With the fall of Nineveh to the Medo-Babylonian coalition in 612 B.C. a refugee Assyrian government was established at Haran. In 610 B.C. Haran also fell to the Chaldean king Nabopolassar. Fearing that the international balance of power was about to be upset, Pharaoh Necho (609-593 B.C.) decided to intervene in the struggle on behalf of the tottering Assyrian kingdom. The King James and American Standard versions give the impression that Necho marched north to fight *against* the Assyrians. However a Babylonian text published by Wiseman in 1956 has made it clear that the purpose of Necho was to fight *on behalf of* the Assyrians.¹ The Hebrew preposition used

1. The relevant portions of this text have been translated in *Documents from Old Testament Times, op. cit.*, p. 17.

in II Kings 23:29 and II Chronicles 35:20 can be translated either "against" or "on behalf of." Here is a case where the texts from antiquity have actually aided modern scholars in producing a more accurate translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

On his way to Carchemish on the Euphrates River, Pharaoh Necho had to go through the narrow pass at Megiddo in northern Palestine. For some unexplained reason Josiah stationed his army in that pass to confront Necho and prevent him from marching to Carchemish. Necho tried to avoid any confrontation with Josiah. Ambassadors were sent to the Judean king with assurances that Necho had no quarrel with Judah. Necho insisted that God had directed him to undertake this mission and that should Josiah persist in resisting the Egyptian advance he would be fighting against God. The author of Chronicles seems to concur that the action of Josiah was contrary to the will of God for he declares that Josiah "hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God" (II Chronicles 35:22). The battle was joined and Josiah was mortally wounded. Josiah was taken by chariot to Jerusalem where he died (II Chronicles 35:23, 24). Jeremiah seems to have led the nation in lamenting the death of this good king (II Chronicles 35:25). For many years the anniversary of the death of Josiah was marked by weeping and lamentation.¹

The death of Josiah marked the end of Judah's independence. Shallum, the second son of Josiah, was selected by the "people of the land" to succeed his father. Shallum, who took the throne name Jehoahaz, was only able to maintain himself on the throne for some three months (II Kings 23:31). In September of 609 B.C. as Pharaoh

1. Zechariah (12:11) mentions the "mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo." I Esdras 1:32 alludes to the practice of a national lamentation each year.

JEREMIAH

Necho was returning from his wars in the north he summoned Jehoahaz to his military headquarters at Riblah. It is not clear why Jehoahaz answered the summons. Perhaps he hoped to enter into a vassal oath with the Pharaoh. But Necho had other plans. Jehoahaz was deposed and deported in chains to Egypt (II Kings 23:33). Many Judeans confidently expected that Jehoahaz would soon return to Jerusalem to reclaim his throne. Jeremiah dashed those hopes when he prophesied:

Weep sore for him that goes away; for he shall return no more nor see his native country. For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum the son of Josiah who reigned instead of Josiah his father and who went forth out of this place: He shall not return thither any more; but in the place to which they have led him captive he shall die, and he shall see this land no more (Jeremiah 22:10-12).

B. Jehoiakim as an Egyptian Vassal

Pharaoh selected his own man for the throne of Judah. He chose Eliakim the elder brother of the deposed Shallum (Jehoahaz). Eliakim took the throne name Jehoiakim. From the outset Jehoiakim was under an enormous financial obligation to Egypt. But near national poverty did not deter this petty little king from extravagantly spending huge sums upon himself. In one of Jeremiah's blistering sermons he condemns Jehoiakim for building for himself a fancy new palace (Jeremiah 22:13-14). Jehoiakim was the villain of the closing years of Judah's history. He was everything that is despicable in a national leader. He was a spend-thrift, a bigot, an arrogant and irreverent tyrant who brooked no criticism, not even when that criticism came from a man of God. A

THE WORLD OF JEREMIAH

prophet named Uriah was too bold in his denouncement of the king and paid for his boldness with his life (Jeremiah 26:21). Jeremiah himself was in danger on more than one occasion during the reign of this king.

Jehoiakim carefully watched the political developments on the Euphrates River to the north. From July 609 B.C. to June 605 B.C. the armies of the Babylonians and the Assyro-Egyptian coalition sparred. For the most part during these years the Babylonians were on the defensive. Finally the Babylonian army under the brilliant young crown prince Nebuchadnezzar was able to launch a mighty offensive which was to have world-wide significance. The focus of the attack was the fortress of Carchemish on the Euphrates. Nebuchadnezzar won a crushing victory. The Babylonian Chronicle¹ describes this historic confrontation as follows:

In the twenty-first year the king of Babylon stayed in his own country while the crown-prince Nebuchadnezzar, his eldest son, took personal command of his troops and marched to Carchemish which lay on the bank of the river Euphrates. He crossed the river (to go) against the Egyptian army which was situated in Carchemish and . . . they fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He defeated them (smashing) them out of existence. As for the remnant of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so (hastily) that no weapon had touched them, the Babylonian army overtook and defeated them in the district of Hamath, so that not a single man (escaped) to his own country. At that time Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole of the land of Hatti.

1. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, op. cit., pp. 78, 79.

IV. JUDAH UNDER CHALDEAN
DOMINATION

A. Jehoiakim as a Chaldean Vassal

The tattered Egyptian armies fled southward from Carchemish in disarray. Nebuchadnezzar was able to roam at will through Syria-Palestine, the Hatti-land as he calls it in his annals. A Chaldean assault against Jerusalem at this time is indicated in the opening verses of the Book of Daniel:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure-house of his god.

By the system of reckoning used in Daniel the third year of Jehoiakim would fall in the year 605 B.C.¹ It is not entirely clear from these verses whether or not Jehoiakim actually swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar at this time. It may be that Jehoiakim merely tried to bribe the Chaldean prince by sending to him some of the valuable temple vessels and some prize youth of the land *viz.*, Daniel Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.²

Nebuchadnezzar's campaign in the Hatti-land was cut short by the death of his father, king Nabopolassar, on August 16, 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar hastened immediately back to Babylon where he was crowned on September 6, 605 B.C. An important piece of evidence re-

1. By another system of reckoning, the so-called non-accession year method, Jeremiah dates the battle of Carchemish in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 46:2).

2. The Hebrew names of Daniels' three friends were Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Daniel 1:6).

garding the activities of Nebuchadnezzar at this time is furnished by Berossus, a Babylonian priest of the third century B.C.

Meanwhile his father Nabopolassar sickened and died. Nabuchodonosor settled the affairs of Egypt and other countries. The prisoners—Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians, and those of Egyptian nationality—were consigned to some of his friends with orders to conduct them to Babylonia, along with the heavy troops and the rest of the spoils; while he himself with a small escort pushed across the desert to Babylon.¹

Berossus, then, mentions Jews among the captives who were taken to Babylon shortly after the battle of Carchemish. This testimony confirms the picture of the Book of Daniel that Jewish captives were taken to Babylon in 605 B.C.

Upon assuming the throne Nebuchadnezzar returned to the Hatti-land to continue his conquests but the records do not indicate precisely what cities he conquered. A third campaign to the Hatti-land took place in the late spring and early summer of 604 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's official scribe declares that on this occasion "all the kings of the Hatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute."² The Babylonian annals specifically mention the conquest of certain Philistine cities. This may well be the fulfillment of the prophecies made by Jeremiah against the Philistines (Jeremiah 47). It was probably at this time that Nebuchadnezzar bound king Jehoiakim to take him to Babylon (II Chronicles 36:6). No evidence exists that Jehoiakim was actually taken to Babylon and so one must conclude that for some reason Nebu-

1. Berossus is quoted by Josephus, *Against Apion*, I, 19. The names Nebuchadnezzar and Nabopolassar are spelled somewhat differently in the Greek writing of Josephus.

2. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, op. cit., p. 79.

chadnezzar changed his mind about the matter. Perhaps Jehoiakim took a solemn and sacred oath of allegiance to the Great King and so Nebuchadnezzar decided to leave him on the throne in Jerusalem as his vassal.¹

B. Jehoiakim's Rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar

Jehoiakim had no intention of remaining permanently the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. According to II Kings 24:1 Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar for three years. If the sacred historian is counting the years of service from the time of the vassal oath and if the vassal oath was taken in the spring of 604 B.C. as set forth above then the three years of service would be from the spring of 604 to the spring of 601 B.C. It is no mere coincidence that Nebuchadnezzar suffered a stinging defeat on the borders of Egypt in the spring of 601 B.C. The Babylonian text relating to this setback has been published by Wiseman:

They smote the breast of each other and inflicted great havoc on each other. The king of Akkad and his troops turned back to Babylon.²

Reading between the lines of this somewhat cryptic text one can see what really happened. Nebuchadnezzar apparently attempted to invade Egypt but was repulsed and was forced to retreat. Jehoiakim seized this Babylonian setback as an opportunity to revolt. From that day forward he refused to pay his annual tribute and, no doubt, publicly disavowed his vassal oath.

That Nebuchadnezzar had received a rather severe blow in his battle with the Egyptians in 601 B.C. is indi-

1. Conservative scholars differ as to whether the episode of II Chronicles 36:6 should be assigned to the first, second or third Chaldean invasions of the Hatti-land.

2. D. J. Wiseman, ed., *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (1956), p. 71.

cated by the fact that for some eighteen months he was unable to personally attend to his rebellious vassal in Jerusalem. In the meanwhile he sent bands of Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites and local contingents of Chaldean soldiers to harass the Judeans (II Kings 24:2). Though these small units were probably unable to do much damage to the fortified cities of Judah, they did force the rural people to seek refuge in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 35:11).

Jehoiakim died on December 9, 598 B.C. The circumstances of his death are not entirely clear. The Book of Kings reports simply that Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers" (II Kings 24:6). However Jeremiah had a word to say about the death of this tyrant.

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or Ah sister! They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 22:18, 19).

These verses suggest that Jehoiakim was assassinated or at least that his body was dishonored after death. It is also possible that when the Chaldeans arrived in force at Jerusalem to punish the rebellious city they disinterred the corpse and exposed it to the indignities here described (cf. Jeremiah 8:1). Whether by violence or natural death Jehoiakim was dead when the Chaldeans arrived. His young son was left to face the wrath of the mighty Nebuchadnezzar.

C. The Deportation of 597 B.C.

On December 9, 598 B.C. Coniah or Jechonias succeeded his father as king of Judah under the throne name

JEREMIAH

of Jehoiachin. He was eighteen¹ when he began to rule and his reign lasted three months and ten days. During most of that short reign the armies of Nebuchadnezzar were encamped about the walls of his capital.² Jerusalem was well fortified and could have withstood several months of siege. But Jehoiachin realized that further resistance would only bring upon his people incalculable hardship. Perhaps he hoped that if he surrendered Nebuchadnezzar would allow him to retain his throne as a vassal king. Whatever his motives, Jehoiachin and the leading citizens of Jerusalem walked through the gates of Jerusalem and surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar on March 16, 597 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar did not allow Jehoiachin to become his vassal. Instead he deported the king, the royal family, the princes of the land and all the craftsmen and the smiths (II Kings 24:14, 15). In all, some ten thousand were carried away captive to Babylon, Ezekiel the prophet being among that number. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah son of Josiah and uncle of Jehoiachin as his vassal in Jerusalem. Mattaniah took the throne name of Zedekiah (II Kings 24:17).

D. The Jews in Babylon

Not a great deal is known about those Jews taken captive in 597 B.C. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. they seem to have been a very optimistic group. They firmly believed, as did their countrymen back in Palestine, that God would never allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. They believed that their stay in Babylon would

1. II Kings 24:8 gives the age of Jehoiachin as eighteen at the time of his accession but II Chronicles 36:9, 10 gives his age as eight. In Hebrew the number eighteen is written with two words, the word for eight and the word for ten. In the process of copying the manuscript of Chronicles some scribe must have accidentally omitted the word for ten.

2. The precise day on which the Chaldean forces arrived at Jerusalem cannot be determined. The annals of Nebuchadnezzar indicate that the siege began some time after December 18, 598 B.C.

be a short one for they were confident that Babylon would be overthrown within two years or so. False prophets appeared on the scene in Babylon boldly predicting such good fortune. On the other hand, Ezekiel labored through that decade before the fall of Jerusalem to smash this delusion and prepare the captives for the inevitable doom of Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote a letter to the captives in Babylon, urging them to settle down there and prepare for a lengthy sojourn (Jeremiah 29). Some of the Babylonian "prophets" retaliated by firing back a letter to the high priest in Jerusalem demanding that he silence Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:24-32).

One should not think of the Babylonian captivity in terms of the rigorous Egyptian bondage which the children of Israel suffered much earlier in their history. To be sure some of the captives like king Jehoiachin were confined for a while (II Kings 25:27-29).¹ But for the most part the captives in Babylon enjoyed a rather substantial amount of freedom. They built their own houses and cultivated their own lands (Jeremiah 29:5). They were allowed to correspond with Jews in Palestine (Jeremiah 29:24-29). They were free to give their sons and daughters in marriage (Jeremiah 29:6). Apart from one attempt to force the Jews to worship a Babylonian god, (Daniel 3) the Jews also seem to have enjoyed religious freedom. Ezekiel, for example, seems to have been free to preach the word of God among the captives. The elders began to resume their ancient significance and look after the welfare of the people. These elders frequently visited with Ezekiel to discuss religious matters (Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1). The priests who had been taken into exile doubtless spent much time instructing the people in the Torah, the written word of God. As a result the Jews

1. After 587 B.C. King Zedekiah was taken to Babylon in chains and apparently lived the rest of his days as a prisoner (II Kings 25:7; Jeremiah 52:11).

JEREMIAH

in Babylon were more faithful to God than those who remained behind in Palestine. Of course the Jews did not enjoy unlimited religious freedom as certain "prophets" in Babylon discovered. Jeremiah predicted that two such renegade "prophets" who had been stirring up the captives with promises of immediate return would be slain by Nebuchadnezzar by being roasted in a fire (Jeremiah 29: 21-23).

It would not be an overstatement to say that the Jews prospered in Babylon. The locations where they were placed by their captors (see Nehemiah 7) were among the most fertile regions in the land. Those Jews who were skilled craftsmen were used to help build and adorn the magnificent city of Babylon. To this Berossus¹ testifies:

. . . he (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar) received the entire dominions of his father, and appointed, that when the captives came, they should be placed as colonies, in the most proper places of Babylonia; but then he adorned the temple of Belus, and the rest of the temples, in a magnificent manner, with the spoils he had taken in the war.

As time went on many of the captives became involved in mercantile life. Business documents bearing distinctive Jewish names have been found at various locations in Mesopotamia. Some Jews attained positions of prominence in the Babylon court and later in the Persian court as well. Daniel and his three friends, Ezra, Nehemiah and Mordecai are examples of Jews in high places during the exile. So prosperous had many Jews become by 539 B.C. that they rejected the opportunity to return home which had been granted to them by Cyrus the Great.²

1. Quoted by Josephus, *Antiquities* X.xi.1

2. Josephus (*Antiquities* XI.i.3) states: "Yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions."

Nebuchadnezzar took special care of the young king Jehoiachin and his family. Cuneiform texts have been found which speak of the food stuffs distributed to the king and his five sons.¹ When Amel-Marduk, called in the Bible Evil-Merodach, succeeded his father on the throne, Jehoiachin was released. He was at that time fifty-five years old and had spent thirty-seven of his years as a captive of Nebuchadnezzar. Josephus affirms that Jehoiachin was honored at this time above all the kings who were captive in Babylon.

He set Jeconiah at liberty and esteemed him amongst his most intimate friends. He also gave him many presents, and made him honorable above the rest of the kings that were in Babylon: for his father had not kept his faith with Jeconiah, when he voluntarily delivered up himself to him, with his wives and children and his whole kindred, for the sake of his country that it might not be taken by siege and utterly destroyed.²

Jehoiachin probably died before the year 538 B.C. when the conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus the Great, issued an edict allowing captive peoples to return to their native lands. Had Jehoiachin been alive at this time he would undoubtedly have been restored to the throne of Judah.

E. The Last King of Judah

The reign of Zedekiah was in many respects one of the most tragic in the history of the people of God. The territory of Judah was diminished and many of the cities of the land were severely damaged. The population had been drastically reduced through deportation, the upper classes being completely depleted. Zedekiah himself seems to have been at the mercy of his princes. The royal court

1. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, op. cit., pp. 84-86.

2. Josephus, *Antiquities* X. xi. 2.

JEREMIAH

was bent on rebellion. Jeremiah thundered forth against the folly of resistance against Babylon but still the political leaders clung to their suicidal course. A brief insurrection in Babylon sparked renewed hope in the western part of the empire. When a new pharaoh, Psamtik II, came to power in 594 B.C. the little states of Syria-Palestine began to make plans for a concerted effort against Babylon. Ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon met in Jerusalem to plan the rebellion (Jeremiah 27:3ff.). The plan must have been uncovered for that very year Zedekiah was summoned to Babylon to reaffirm his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 51:59ff.). Zedekiah's first major effort to break with Babylon was nipped in the bud.

A still more boastful and aggressive Pharaoh took the throne of Egypt in 588 B.C. Pharaoh Apries, Hophra as he is called in the Bible, actively encouraged a western coalition against Babylon. But the revolt does not seem to have been widespread in Syria-Palestine. So far as is known, only Tyre and Ammon seemed to have committed themselves. Edom and Philistia remained loyal to Babylon.¹ Zedekiah sent ambassadors to Egypt (Ezekiel 17:15) and entered whole-heartedly into the rebellion.

F. The Siege of Jerusalem

On January 15, 588 B.C. the Babylonian army arrived at the gates of Jerusalem (II Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 52:4). They blockaded Jerusalem and began to systematically eliminate the outlying strong points. The fortified towns of Lachish and Azekah were among the last to fall to the Chaldeans (Jeremiah 34:7). In 1935 eighteen ostraca which date to this very time were discovered in the ruins of the ancient fortress city of Lachish. For the most part the ostraca are letters, military communiques between a

1. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), p. 308.

field commander by the name of Hoshayahu and his superior in Lachish whose name was Yaosh. It is not always easy to interpret the meaning of these ancient letters but they apparently reflect the desperate plight of the Judean armies in the face of the advancing armies of Nebuchadnezzar. One letter (Ostrakon IV) seems to refer to the capture of the city of Azekah:

We are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the signs which my lord hath given, for we cannot see Azekah.

The importance of the Lachish Letters in Old Testament studies is considerable. One must consult the standard works on Biblical archaeology for a thorough discussion of these texts. Briefly the contribution of these documents can be summarized as follows:

1. These ostraca enable scholars to know with certainty the kind of Hebrew language and script Judeans were using in the age of Jeremiah.

2. The Lachish Letters are important for the study of the Hebrew epistolary style of which there are but a few examples in the Old Testament.

3. The Letters provide important information to those engaged in the meticulous work of Old Testament textual criticism. The irregular use of a dot as a word divider and the splitting of words at the end of a line are clues as to how certain scribal errors may have arisen in the standard Hebrew text.

4. The Lachish Letters provide the first external Israelite witness for the full form of the Tetragrammaton, the name of God. The name YHWH (Yahweh) occurs at least ten times in these documents. In view of the later Jewish superstition about the use of this name for God this usage in ordinary military correspondence is noteworthy.

JEREMIAH

5. The ostraca supply important external evidence for the use of military fire signals in ancient Israel. The same Hebrew word translated "signal" in Jeremiah 6:1 is used also in Ostrakon IV of the Letters.

6. The names which are used in the Lachish Letters are similar to the names which are mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah. While the characters in the Letters are not to be identified with the characters in the book, nonetheless the similarity in names helps confirm the accuracy of Scripture in this respect.

7. These Letters furnish striking confirmation of the political situation that obtained during the last days of the Southern Kingdom, as portrayed by Jeremiah.

8. The Letters furnish the first occurrence in non-Biblical texts of the common Hebrew word for prophet.

The mention of "the prophet" in the Lachish Letters has fascinated students of Jeremiah. This unnamed prophet has been identified with Uriah whose flight to Egypt and subsequent execution by king Jehoiakin are recorded in Jeremiah 26:20-23. Others believe that "the prophet" in the Lachish Letters is none other than Jeremiah himself. As a matter of fact, however, the evidence is too ambiguous to allow any positive identification. All that can be deduced from the Lachish material is that this "prophet" acted as a messenger, carrying a letter (probably accompanied by a verbal message) from a court official in Jerusalem to one of the officers in the field. There were many prophets contemporary with Jeremiah whose names are known¹ and doubtless many others whose names were not recorded. It is best to regard "the prophet" of the Lachish Letters as one of these anonymous prophets. The important point to note is that in the Lachish Letters a prophet is actively participating in a military situation

1. E.g., Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:1ff.), Zedekiah (Jeremiah 29:21), and Shemaiah (Jeremiah 29:31).

even as on occasion prophets did in the Old Testament (II Kings 3:6ff.).

In the summer of 588 B.C. an Egyptian army marched northward toward Jerusalem. Pharaoh Hophra was trying to make good his commitment to the states of Syrian-Palestine to aid them if and when they were attacked by the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar was forced to temporarily lift the siege of Jerusalem in order to deal with the Egyptian threat although he apparently kept the pressure on the two remaining fortified cities of Judah (Jeremiah 34:7). As the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw the Babylonians break camp and withdraw from their city they must surely have thought that the siege was over. After the initial celebration the first official act was the revocation of the solemn covenant which they had made to release their Hebrew slaves (Jeremiah 34:8-11). Jeremiah, who had resolutely predicted a Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, must have suffered immeasurable ridicule. It looked as though Jeremiah had been wrong and the political tacticians who had master-minded the rebellion had been right. Still the prophet did not relent. Nebuchadnezzar will return, the prophet declared, and king Zedekiah, along with all his princes, will be given into his hand (Jeremiah 34:17-22).

G. The Destruction of Jerusalem

On July 29, 587 B.C. after a siege of eighteen months, the Babylonians were able to make a breach in the walls of Jerusalem. Zedekiah could see the handwriting on the wall and tried to escape. He and some of his troops fled by night toward the Jordan apparently trying to reach one of the friendly lands beyond the river. He was intercepted by the Babylonian soldiers and taken to Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's military headquarters for this campaign. There Zedekiah was forced to witness the execution of his

JEREMIAH

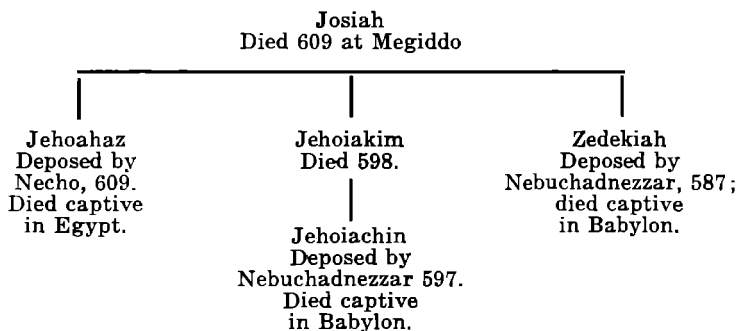
sons. This turned out to be the last sight Zedekiah had on earth for the Babylonians blinded him in retaliation for his unfaithfulness to the vassal oath (II Kings 25:3-7; Jeremiah 52:7-11). Zedekiah was then led away in chains to Babylon where he spent the remaining days of his life. Concerning the death of Zedekiah Jeremiah had predicted:

You shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings that were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you, saying, Ah lord! (Jeremiah 34:5).

According to Josephus, Zedekiah was kept in prison until he died, and then received a royal burial.¹

On August 25, 587 B.C. Nebuzaradan, a high-ranking Babylonian officer, arrived with orders to burn and level Jerusalem (II Kings 25:3-7; Jeremiah 52:7-11). The massive walls of the city were broken down. The once proud city was left a heap of smouldering ruins. The destruction of the city was followed by further executions at Riblah. The high-ranking priests, civil officers and military commanders were put to death (II Kings, 25:8-12; Jeremiah 52:12-16). At least 832, possibly more, were taken captive at this time (Jeremiah 52:29).

THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH



1. *Antiquities*, X.viii.7.

V. RELIGIOUS LIFE UNDER THE LAST FOUR KINGS OF JUDAH

The death of Josiah at Megiddo created a religious as well as political crisis in the land of Judah. In the ensuing years Judah suffered one setback after another and each tragedy suffered seemed worse than the one before. Such periods of national calamity and crisis always have a dramatic effect on the religious thinking of a people. Several very different reactions to the political circumstances of the day are evident in the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

1. Some were actually saying that the reforms of king Josiah were the cause of all the misfortune. "What we must do," said these people, "is return to the pagan practices of Manasseh's day. When Josiah destroyed the pagan shrines he offended the gods. If we ever hope to have peace and prosperity we must win the approval of these offended deities." This attitude is most clearly expressed by the remnant of Jews who fled to Egypt after the death of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 44:15-10); but the attitude must surely have been present before the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel makes mention of women weeping for Tammuz at the gates of Jerusalem (8:14) and of men worshiping the sun at the altar of the Lord (8:16-18) and elders in dark chambers of the temple offering incense before animal figures (8:7-13).

2. Others in Jerusalem were saying, "The Lord has sent our misfortune. We must invent better ways of securing His favor." Thus during these years the Temple was crowded with those anxious to offer sacrifices to the Lord (Jeremiah 6:20; 7:21; 14:12).

3. Another attitude that was prevalent was that the Lord had deserted the land. He does not know or care what is taking place (Ezekiel 9:9).

4. Some felt that the Lord was being unjust with the

JEREMIAH

nation. They felt that they were being punished for something their fathers did. This belief was expressed in a popular proverb of the day: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the children have been set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2). Some boldly were declaring that the ways of the Lord were not fair and just (Ezekiel 18:25).

5. In spite of the difficulties which the nation was experiencing, most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the captives in Babylon were optimistic. The Lord was on their side. He would not allow Jerusalem to be captured by the Babylonians and he certainly would not permit the Temple to be destroyed. Had not the Lord intervened to rescue Jerusalem from the armies of the Assyrian Sennacherib a century or so before? Surely, they thought, the present sufferings must be but a prelude to a glorious recovery. So in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:8, 9, 21-32) as well as in Jerusalem (28:1-4) false prophets were predicting that within two years the yoke of Babylon would be broken and the captives would be returning home. Even as late as 587 B.C., when the Babylonians were actually beginning the attack against Jerusalem, Zedekiah seems to have confidently expected some miraculous deliverance (Jeremiah 21:2).

6. Another attitude, that of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a small minority of the populace, needs to be noted. These people were saying, "We are getting just what we had coming. Things are not going to get better. Only a fundamental change of conduct and heart will prevent the fall of our nation" (Jeremiah 36:2, 3; 15:1-4).

VI. THE AFTERMATH OF 587 B.C.

A. The Administration of Gedaliah

Following the destruction of Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar appointed a certain Gedaliah to govern the pitiful

remnant of the nation. Gedaliah was the son of the powerful prince Ahikam who had once intervened in a public trial to save Jeremiah from death (Jeremiah 26:24). Judging from a seal found in the ruins of Lachish, Gedaliah himself had occupied the chief civil post in Judah during the reign of Zedekiah.¹ It is not unreasonable to assume that Gedaliah had been appointed to this high position by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. because of pro-Babylonian sympathies. If this hypothesis is correct then it becomes clear why Gedaliah was selected to govern the territory of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of Zedekiah.

Following the catastrophe of 587 B.C. Judah was a ravished country. Archaeological evidence has disproved the older critical contention that there was no drastic break in the continuity of life in Judah after 587 B.C. and that the exile only involved a few nobles. Albright has found no town in Palestine which was continually occupied during the exilic period.² Some towns like Beth-shemesh and Kiriath-sepher were never rebuilt after the destruction of 587 B.C. Since Jerusalem was in ruins, Gedaliah was forced to govern his province from the town of Mizpah. This town, located a few miles north of Jerusalem, had apparently been spared the destruction visited upon the capital.

Judah was a humiliated country. Those who were left in the land were forced to purchase the bare necessities of life from their Babylonian conquerors (Lamentations 5:4). They had to seek their harvest at the peril of their lives from marauding Bedouins (Lamentations 5:9). To add to the misery, a famine came upon the land (Lamentations 5:10). All segments of the population had been

1. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, *op cit.*, p. 223.

2. W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Baltimore. Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 141-42.

JEREMIAH

put to shame. The women had been ravished, the leaders dishonored, the young men humiliated and the children oppressed (Lamentations 5:11-13). Wild animals began to move in and haunt the ruins of the once proud cities of Judah (Lamentations 5:18).

The territory over which Gedaliah was appointed governor was greatly reduced in size. Judah was no longer a kingdom; it was a Babylonian *medinah* or province. Since the Jews were scarcely in a position to defend their borders, neighboring peoples began to make encroachments upon their territory. The Samaritans pressed in on Judah from the north, the Philistines from the west and the Ammonites and Moabites from the east. The *medinah* no longer included the Negev region to the south which was now occupied by the Edomites. Hebron too seems to have fallen into the hands of the descendants of Esau. Beth-zur and Tekoah, roughly seventeen miles south of Jerusalem, seems to mark the limits of Jewish possession in the south.¹

After the Babylonian destruction Judah was also a depopulated country. Few of the nobility were left in the land (Jeremiah 41:10; 43:6; Lamentations 1:4; 2:10). For the most part, only the poor farming class remained (Jeremiah 39:10; 40:10; 52:16; II Kings 25:12). Babylonian policy, unlike that of Assyria, did not provide for the repopulation of conquered areas. As the situation in Judah began to stabilize, many of the Jews who had taken refuge in surrounding lands began to filter back to Judah (Jeremiah 40:12). Most of these people seemed to have congregated around Mizpah, the provincial capital, where Gedaliah, with the aid of a small Babylonian garrison, was able to maintain some semblance of order.

1. Norman K. Gottwald, *All Kingdoms of the Earth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 287.

B. The Assassination of Gedaliah

Gedaliah did not have the support of all of the remnant. The old desire for independence from Babylon had not been squelched when Jerusalem was destroyed. Gedaliah was warned by some of his associates that an ultra right wing patriot named Ishmael was plotting to assassinate him. This plot was backed, if not instigated, by the king of Ammon who no doubt had a covetous eye on the territory of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 40:13-16). Ishmael himself was of the royal line and perhaps had ambitions of proclaiming himself king.

For whatever reasons, Gedaliah chose to ignore the warning concerning the assassination plot. As Ishmael and ten other princes were sitting at the banquet of Gedaliah they rose up and slew him, the Jews with him and the Babylonian garrison as well. Josephus explains the ease with which the plot was executed by noting that those in attendance at the feast were drunk.¹ While the assassination of Gedaliah was still undiscovered Ishmael stained his hands with other blood. A band of eighty pilgrims on their way to the site of the ruined Temple was lured into Mizpah. Seventy of them were murdered for no apparent reason. Ten of the pilgrims were spared when they bribed Ishmael with treasures they had hidden in the fields (Jeremiah 41:4-9). Ishmael's bloody deed accomplished nothing for himself. On the other hand, at one stroke it wiped out the program of Judean reconstruction so ably begun under Gedaliah.

Having completed his dastardly deeds, Ishmael gathered up the rest of the people in Mizpah including the royal princesses and probably Jeremiah and fled toward Ammon (Jeremiah 41:10). Once again Ishmael's motives are obscure. Perhaps he planned to use these people as hostages. At any rate, when news reached Johanan, one

1. *Antiquities*, X.ix.4.

JEREMIAH

of the loyal guerrilla captains in the field, he set out in hot pursuit of Ishmael and his band of cut-throats. Though not able to engage Ishmael in battle, Johanan was able to rescue the hostages (Jeremiah 41:11-18).

C. Emigration and Deportation

The Judean remnant was stunned and scared after the death of Gedaliah. They were fearful that the Babylonians would return to avenge the deaths of their governor and their garrison. Their first thought was to flee the land and they immediately started southward toward Egypt. At Bethlehem the remnant made camp. The leaders belatedly decided to consult with the prophet of God, Jeremiah, before continuing their journey. Jeremiah agreed to pray for a divine revelation concerning the fate of the group, and after ten anxious days he was prepared to speak unto them the word of the Lord. The remnant expected the Lord to rubber stamp their plans to emigrate to Egypt. Instead the prophet instructed them to remain in Judah in order that everything might be well with them. If they proceed to Egypt, there they will face the very violence at the hands of the Chaldeans from which they are fleeing. The scared remnant refused to listen. For some unexplained reason they accused Jeremiah of having been influenced by his scribe Baruch. Under the leadership of Johanan and the other guerilla captains a great portion of the people emigrated to Egypt and Jeremiah and Baruch were forced to accompany them.

In 582 B.C. the armies of Nebuchadnezzar did arrive in Judah. For the fourth time the great king deported Jews to Babylon, at least 745 persons on this particular occasion (Jeremiah 52:30). The province of Judah was then abolished and the territory was incorporated into the neighboring province of Samaria. At this time Nebuchadnezzar also terminated the monarchies of Ammon and

Moab¹ and, according to Josephus, made an attack against Egypt. Concerning this campaign Josephus relates the following:²

. . . and when he had brought all these nations under subjection, he fell upon Egypt, in order to overthrow it; and he slew the king that then reigned, and set up another; and he took those Jews that were there captives, and led them away to Babylon.

It is most difficult to reconcile this Egyptian campaign of 582 B.C. with the prophecies of Jeremiah and the known history of Egypt. If an Egyptian invasion was undertaken at this time it certainly must have been of a very minor nature. Josephus is most certainly wrong in asserting that Nebuchadnezzar slew the king of Egypt and put his own vassal on the throne in 582 B.C. Most scholars believe that Josephus is confused on his dates. That Nebuchadnezzar did invade Egypt in his thirty-seventh year (568 B.C.) is an established fact. Perhaps Josephus has this later campaign in mind. It is also possible that Nebuchadnezzar made two campaigns against Egypt, one in 582 and one in 568 B.C.

How long had Gedaliah governed the land prior to his assassination? The question is not easily answered. The Scripture simply relates that the murder took place in the seventh month (Jeremiah 41:1). Some scholars argue that this is the seventh month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah (587 B.C.). According to this interpretation Gedaliah's term of office was about two months in duration. However there are certain bits of evidence in the narrative which would lead one to believe that the governorship of Gedaliah may have been somewhat longer than a matter of months. (1) The account states that the

1. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, trans. A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), p. 354.

2. *Antiquities*, X.ix.7.

Jewish fugitives who returned to Palestine during the administration of Gedaliah settled down to agriculture and "gathered wine and summer fruits plentifully" (Jeremiah 40:12). This suggests a period at least from the fall of 587 B.C. to the summer harvest of 586 B.C. It would be hard to imagine an abundant harvest without the vines and fruit trees being tended through at least one season. (2) Gedaliah's confidence in the loyalty of his murderer may be more readily understood if some months and even years had passed during which Ishmael had faithfully served his governor. (3) It is difficult to resist connecting the murder of Gedaliah with the deportation of Judeans in 582 B.C. For these reasons it seems best to regard the governorship of Gedaliah as lasting some two or three years.

Information concerning the Jewish settlements in Egypt is not nearly so extensive as one might wish. The Scriptures do relate that the fugitives settled in Tahpanhes and Pathros in southern Egypt and in Migdol near the famous city of Memphis (Jeremiah 44:1). Jeremiah continued to preach to the remnant. He warned them that since they had failed to obey the word of the Lord, calamity would overtake them in Egypt. More specifically he threatened that Nebuchadnezzar would come to Egypt, conquer it and deport some of the Jews to Babylon. As a sign that these things would come to pass, Jeremiah predicted that Pharaoh Hophra, whose protection they had sought, would fall into the hands of his enemies. History records that Hophra was defeated in 570 B.C. by a Greek colony of Libya in North Africa. He then faced a mutiny in his army led by Amasis. In the short civil war which ensued Amasis was able to defeat Hophra and take him captive. At first Amasis treated his royal prisoner kindly, but later handed him over to the fury of the populace. Hophra was slain in 568 B.C.¹ That same year Nebu-

1. Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 361-2.

chadnezzar launched a military campaign against Egypt. The details of this invasion and its outcome cannot be reconstructed from the fragmentary inscription which alludes to it.¹

VII. THE FALL OF BABYLON

The glorious reign of Nebuchadnezzar came to an end in 562 B.C. His brilliant reign of forty-three years was followed by that of several inept successors. His son Amel-Marduk occupied the throne for two years before being assassinated. Neriglissar,² a son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar showed great promise as a ruler but died unexpectedly after a reign of four years. Labashi-Marduk, his minor son, lasted only a few months before being assassinated. Nabonidus, a harmless scholar-type individual, was placed on the throne by the princes of the realm. By his devotion to the ancient moon god Sin, Nabonidus enraged the powerful priesthood of Murduk, patron god of Babylon. In the seventh year of his reign for reasons unknown Nabonidus left Babylon for the oasis of Tema in the middle of the vast Arabian desert. He left affairs at home in the hands of Belshazzar who, in the absence of his father, was *de facto* king.

While Nabonidus was puttering about in Tema, neglecting the affairs of empire, a vigorous new force appeared on the scene in the ancient Near East. Cyrus the Persian, a vassal king of Astyages king of Media, rebelled against his overlord. By 550 B.C. Cyrus had seized Ecbatana, dethroned Astyages and had taken control of the vast Median empire. In a series of brilliant military campaigns Cyrus swept across Upper Mesopotamia and Syria to attack the major ally of Nabonidus, Croesus of Lydia. In a daring mid-winter raid Cyrus surprised and subdued

1. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

2. The Babylonian prince Nergal-sharezer mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3, 13 has been identified with this Neriglissar.

JEREMIAH

the Lydian capital of Sardis (546 B.C.). Babylon alone stood between Cyrus and world conquest. A showdown between the two powers was inevitable.

The activities of Cyrus during the next five years are not clear. Doubtless he was consolidating his territorial gains and perhaps expanding his domain to the east. But in October 539 B.C. Cyrus began to make his move against Nabonidus. All of the details of the fall of Babylon are not clear. The cuneiform sources refer to a bloody battle at Opis on the Tigris river north of Babylon. Two weeks later Ugbaru, general of Cyrus' army, entered Babylon "without battle."¹ The seventy years of Babylonian world dominion prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11, 12; 29:10) had come to an end.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER ONE

I. Names to Remember.

1. The name of the Assyrian king who invaded Judah in the days of Hezekiah.
2. The name of the prophet who reassured Hezekiah during the time of the Assyrian invasion.
3. The name of the Babylonian king who sent an embassy to Hezekiah.
4. The name of the most wicked of all kings of Judah.
5. The name of the king who burned the bones upon pagan altars.
6. The name of the high priest in the days of Josiah.
7. The name of the prophetess who confirmed the authenticity of the newly discovered law book.

1. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, op. cit., p. 82. Herodotus (I. 191) and Xenophon (Cyropaedia VII. 5), later Greek historians, relate a different version of the fall of Babylon. For a harmonization of these data see James E. Smith, "The Fall of Babylon in History and Prophecy," unpublished B.D. Thesis, The Cincinnati Bible Seminary, 1963.

THE WORLD OF JEREMIAH

8. The name of the great prophet of God who began his ministry shortly before the reformation of Josiah.
9. The name of the Egyptian pharaoh who slew Josiah at the pass of Megiddo.
10. Name the king deported to Egypt.
11. The name of the son of Josiah placed on the throne of Judah by Pharaoh Necho.
12. Name of the youthful king carried away to Babylon.
13. Name of the Chaldean king who on a number of occasions deported Jews to Babylon.
14. Name of the Chaldean officer who actually destroyed Jerusalem.
15. Name of the king who was blinded by the Chaldeans and carried away in chains.

II. Important Numbers.

1. Number of Assyrians slain in one night.
2. Number of extra years of life granted to Hezekiah.
3. Number of major deportations to Babylon.
4. Number of months which Jerusalem endured the Chaldean siege.
5. Number of the sons of Josiah who ruled Judah.
6. Number of Jews deported to Babylon in 597 B.C.

III. Important Dates.

1. The date of Sennacherib's invasion against Hezekiah.
2. The date when the lost book was discovered in the Temple.
3. The date when Nineveh was captured by the Medes and Babylonians.
4. The date of the battle of Carchemish.
5. The date of the first deportation to Babylon.
6. The date of the deportation of Jehoiachin and Ezekiel.

JEREMIAH

7. The date of the fall of Jerusalem.

IV. True and False. If the answer is false, correct it.

- 1. Gedaliah was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar after the capture of Jerusalem.
- 2. Gedaliah was assassinated by Ishmael, who was of royal descent.
- 3. Gedaliah's capital appears to have been at Mizpah.
- 4. Nebuchadnezzar's final invasion of Palestine occurred in 587 B.C. when he captured Jerusalem.
- 5. There were at least four deportations of Jews by Nebuchadnezzar.
- 6. When the Jews fled to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah, Jeremiah was left behind.
- 7. There is some evidence that Nebuchadnezzar invaded and partially conquered Egypt.
- 8. There is evidence that while the Babylonian invasions destroyed Jerusalem, the other cities of Judah went unmolested.
- 9. For the most part the Jews in Babylonia were treated with extreme cruelty.
- 10. Both Ezekiel and Daniel ministered to the captives in Babylonia.
- 11. King Jehoiachin was released by Nebuchadnezzar's son Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach).
- 12. As yet no record of Jehoiachin's captivity has been unearthed in Babylonia.
- 13. For several years of his reign Nabonidus was absent from his capital.
- 14. Cyrus began his rise to power by revolting against Astyages the Mede.
- 15. The cuneiform sources state that Babylon was entered "without battle."

CHAPTER TWO

JEREMIAH: THE MAN AND THE PROPHET

The year 627 was a crucial one in the history of redemption for that was the year that God ordained a timid young priest to the prophetic ministry. That young man was destined to become the dominant figure of redemptive history during that eventful half-century from 625-575 B.C. What kind of man did God choose to vocalize the final divine appeal to the condemned nation of Judah? How did God mold and shape the raw material which was Jeremiah of Anathoth?

I. JEREMIAH: THE MAN

In the opening verse of the Book of Jeremiah the author clearly identifies himself, his family, his lineage and his home town. This is about all that is known of Jeremiah prior to his call to the public office of a prophet. But these few notices can be amplified by deductions drawn from the totality of Jeremiah's writings. What then can be said about Jeremiah the man?

A. His Name

A great deal of importance was attached to names in the Old Testament period—much more importance than is generally the case today. Modern parents when naming the new born usually think in terms of the length of the name or euphonious sound; the ancients always considered the background and meaning of a name. The name was to reflect the personality, the accomplishments, the goals, the aspirations of a man. For this reason a man in antiquity might change his name at some critical juncture of his life.

JEREMIAH

On the meaning of the names of most of the important Bible characters scholars are in agreement. No such unanimity exists when it comes to the name of Jeremiah. The basic problem is in ascertaining the Hebrew root word from which the name Jeremiah has been constructed. Some scholars see as the basis of this name a Hebrew root (*rum*) which means to arise, elevate or exalt. According to this interpretation the name Jeremiah would mean "the Lord exalts" or "exalted of the Lord" or even "the Lord establishes." Others suggest that the name is derived from a Hebrew root (*ramah*) which means to cast or hurl. The name Jeremiah would then mean "the Lord throws down" or perhaps "the Lord hurls forth."¹

The famous prophet who is the subject of this study was not the only one to wear the name Jeremiah. Indeed the name seems to have been a common one and evidence of its use can be found in several periods of Old Testament history. At least seven other Jeremiahs are mentioned in Scripture. A Jeremiah was one of the leaders in the tribe of Manasseh (I Chronicles 5:24). Three of David's mighty men bore this name (I Chronicles 12:4, 10, 13). One of the fathers of the Rechabites was named Jeremiah (Jeremiah 35:3). A Jeremiah of Libnah was the maternal grandfather of Jehoahaz king of Judah (II Kings 23:31). One of the leaders of the restoration community who signed a covenant to walk according to the law of Moses was called Jeremiah (Nehemiah 10:2).

B. His Family

What kind of family did Jeremiah have? Was he surrounded in those early, formative years by piety and godliness? Caution is in order when one goes beyond the explicit testimony of Scripture and the Word of God does

1. Still another interpretation of the name Jeremiah traces it back to an Assyrian root *ramu* meaning "to loosen." The name would then mean "the Lord loosens (the womb)."

THE MAN AND PROPHET

not supply any specific information about Jeremiah's family life in Anathoth. Still it is best to think of Jeremiah as coming from a very devout family, one steeped in the religious traditions of Israel and committed unequivocally to the true God. In his sermons Jeremiah reflects the spirit of the great prophets who preceded him. The words of these men of God were part of the fabric of his personality. He surely had been instructed in the Scriptures in his most tender years.

His familiarity with the ideas of the older prophets, especially with those of Hosea, appears so soon after his call, and that call came to him so early in life, that we may safely assume that he had known the prophetic writings and assimilated the principles of their teaching before he had reached the age of manhood.¹

Since at the time of his call in the thirteenth year of Josiah (627 B.C.) he was still a very young man (1:6), Jeremiah must have been born about the year of 645 B.C. This would fall near the end of the long but notorious reign of king Manasseh. Perhaps the name of his father—Hilkiah—was more than a mere name; perhaps it was the family credo. The name Hilkiah means "the Lord is my portion." During the reign of Manasseh, when apostasy was the order of the day and Assyrian idolatry was rampant through the land, this family had taken its stand. Though others round about were chasing after the latest fad in deities this family had boldly declared "the Lord is my portion." Hilkiah, like Joshua before him had proclaimed to the world "as for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Is it mere coincidence that the high priest during the time of Josiah's reformation—the one who discovered the

1. John Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), p. 21.

JEREMIAH

lost law book—bore the same name as Jeremiah's father? Is the father of Jeremiah the famous high priest Hilkiyah? Scholars are practically unanimous in dismissing this identification. One cannot, of course, be dogmatic about the matter since the name Hilkiyah seems to have been fairly common in this period (cf. Jeremiah 29:3). But *if*—and it must necessarily remain just that—*if* Jeremiah was the son of the high priest his ministry is placed in new perspective. One true prophet of God, Urijah, was executed during the reign of Jehoiakim (26:23, 24). Though Jeremiah had some narrow escapes in the reign of this king, he survived. What made the difference? Could it be because Jeremiah belonged to one of the most prominent families in the land? Jeremiah had friends in high places;¹ he was treated with respect (for the most part) by the successive rulers of Judah and the princes of Babylon. While it is impossible to say with certainty that Hilkiyah the high priest was in fact the father of Jeremiah the thought is not impossible. As the son of a priest—possibly the high priest—Jeremiah no doubt frequently made the short trip to Jerusalem. There in the Temple he had opportunity to observe, to ponder, to meditate and to contemplate the day when he would enter the active priesthood. Perhaps it was a high view of the priesthood, formed during his boyhood days, that made Jeremiah so bitter against the worthless clergy of his adult years.

A number of questions concerning the family of Jeremiah might be asked but it would be useless to speculate about the answers. One point is at least probable: Jeremiah's family must have been financially well off. This conclusion is based on the fact that Jeremiah was able to purchase the forfeited estate of a bankrupt kinsman (Jere-

1. Another interesting coincidence is that the uncle of Jeremiah (32:7) and the husband of Huldah the prophetess (II Kings 22:14) both were named Shallum. If these two Shallums are in fact one and the same person, Jeremiah is again linked through relatives to the Josian reformation.

miah 32:1-15).¹ As it is hard to imagine Jeremiah receiving any wages for his prophetic ministry, his means must have come through inheritance.

C. His Home Town

Jeremiah grew up in the town of Anathoth located about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. This town dates to pre-Israelite times and was named by the original Canaanite inhabitants after their goddess Anath. Following the Conquest under Joshua, Anathoth, along with thirteen other cities in the territories of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin, was set aside for priests (Joshua 21:13-19; I Chronicles 6:57-60). After the Temple was built by Solomon the priests would go up to Jerusalem at regular intervals to officiate in the religious ceremonies. Anathoth survives in the modern 'Anata.

To Anathoth Solomon banished the high priest Abiathar (I Kings 2:26). Abiathar was the last high priest of the line of Eli who had served in that office during the last days of the Judges when the Tabernacle was located at Shiloh. Now since Abiathar retired to Anathoth and since Jeremiah is said to have come from Anathoth (1:1) some commentators have jumped to the conclusion that Jeremiah was a descendant of Abiathar. Since Abiathar came from the priestly family of Ithamar, and since Hilkiah, the high priest of the Josian reformation, was of the priestly family of Eleazer, Jeremiah's father could not have been the famous Hilkiah. This argument is based on the unproved assumption that only descendants of Ithamar lived in Anathoth. But is this assumption justified? Could not descendants of both Ithamar (Abiathar) and Eleazer (Hilkiah) have lived in this priestly town?

1. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1964), p. 348.

JEREMIAH

Like Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, Jeremiah the prophet to the nations (Gentiles) was a Benjaminite. It is repeatedly emphasized that Anathoth, though included in the kingdom of Judah and so close to its capital, was in the territory of Benjamin (1:1, 32:8; 37:12). Ethnologically Benjamin belonged to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Perhaps this helps to explain Jeremiah's undying affection for the Rachel-tribes of the north and his longing for the homecoming of their exiled children (3:12f; 31:4-6, 15-20).¹

In the rural setting of Anathoth Jeremiah was exposed to nature and profoundly influenced by it. His book reveals Jeremiah as a true outdoorsman. He observed and listened and learned from the animals and plants. He was familiar with the agricultural processes of his time and no doubt had spent many hard but happy days sowing, reaping and winnowing the grain as well as laboring in the vintage. Of course nature allusions can be found in other prophetic books; but Skinner is probably correct in his opinion that "we may find in Jeremiah's poetry traces of a closer sympathy with the life of nature than in any other prophet."² An investigation of the nature metaphors and illustrations in the Book of Jeremiah tends to substantiate this evaluation.

Numerous allusions to animals are found in the Book of Jeremiah. The enemies of Judah are compared to lions (2:15; 4:7; 5:6), wolves (5:6), leopards, (5:6) and serpents (8:17). Jeremiah sees a picture of backsliding Judah in the young camel running helter-skelter in a trackless waste (2:23) and in the wild ass in heat desperately searching for a mate (2:24). Adulterers are compared to well-fed, lusty stallions neighing after the wives of their neighbors (5:8). Riches accumulated by unjust means are as precarious as the eggs of the partridge which

1. Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

has so many natural enemies (17:11). It is as impossible for Judah to change her disposition towards God as for a leopard to change his spots (13:23). Judah, like a lion in the forest, has roared against God (12:8) and thus God must bring judgment upon the nation. Judah has become a strange speckled bird which is about to be attacked by other birds of prey (12:9). The beasts and birds will feed upon the carcasses of those who fall in battle (7:33; 15:3). The land will become desolate, forsaken by birds and beasts alike (4:25; 9:10). However the ruined cities of Judah will become a lair for jackals (9:11; 10:22). Perhaps the most striking animal figure employed in the book is that of the tender hind forsaking her young and the wild ass desperately sniffing the air for the scent of water during a terrible famine (14:5, 6). Even nature suffers when mankind sins against God!

Jeremiah's allusions to plants and trees are almost as numerous as his mention of various animals. In several passages he pictures the withering of vegetation during periods of famine (e.g., 7:20). He compares those who put their trust in God to a tree planted by a stream of water (17:6, 7). Once Israel had been as a green olive tree; but shortly all the branches of that fair tree would be broken off and burned (11:16). Jeremiah's favorite figure is that of the vine. Israel is God's vineyard (12:10) in which once flourished a choice vine. But that vine has now become degenerate and worthless (2:21). Hence the once-proud vine must be stripped of its branches (5:10). The remnant which will survive the destruction of Judah is compared to the few miserable grapes overlooked by grape gatherers (6:9; 8:13).

Jeremiah was also fond of metaphors and illustrations drawn from the area of agriculture. He pictures the consternation of farmers in the midst of a national drought (14:4). The positive aspect of his ministry is compared to planting (1:10). In several passages he emphasizes the

JEREMIAH

contrast between the barren wilderness through which God had earlier led the Israelites and the plentiful land into which the Lord had brought his people (e.g., 2:6, 7). Israel in the early days of her national history was looked upon by God with the same delight in which a farmer looks upon the first fruits of his increase (2:3). Judah is shortly to reap the disappointing harvest of sin (12:13). The tempest of divine judgment, unlike the gentle winnowing wind, will sweep down upon them (4:11); the sinful people will be scattered like worthless stubble (13:24). For this reason Jeremiah earnestly pleads with his people to break up their fallow ground—to prepare the soil of their heart—that the seed of the word of God might take root in their lives (4:3).

Still other striking nature figures are to be found in the Book of Jeremiah. In a figure reminiscent of Isaiah 53 the prophet compares himself to a gentle lamb being led to the slaughter (11:9). He places in juxtaposition the contrariness of sinful man and the unfailing obedience of the migratory birds to the law of their creator (8:7). Jeremiah makes a similar point when he refers to the perennial streams which flow down the sides of the snow-capped Lebanon mountains (18:14) and to the tumultuous oceans which do not pass beyond their appointed bounds (5:22). Even inanimate nature complied fully with the will of the Creator. Of all the creation only man had the audacity to violate the God-ordained principles of conduct. Jeremiah pictures the wicked men of Judah as fowlers who set their trap to catch men (5:26, 27). The enemies of Judah are compared to fishers and hunters who will not allow any of their victims to escape (16:16). In one of his most humorous figures Jeremiah compares the pagan idols to a harmless, lifeless scarecrow in the middle of a cucumber field (10:5). On the other hand the God of Israel is the One who makes the vapors ascend from the earth and creates the lightning, wind and rain (10:13).

D. His Times

In order to appreciate the ministry of Jeremiah one must thoroughly understand the times in which he lived. The public life of Jeremiah spans a period marked by political, social and religious changes of the utmost significance. This is particularly true of the years 627 to 587 B.C., years of black disaster which culminated in the greatest catastrophe which had as yet befallen the nation.

1. *Political conditions*

Jeremiah lived in a crucial period of ancient Near Eastern history. It was a period characterized by political instability. Judah in this period was but a petty state caught in the middle of the death struggle between the super-powers, Egypt to the south and Mesopotamia to the north. Jeremiah heard the news of the fall of Nineveh and watched as the great Assyrian colossus crumbled to the ground. He observed the rise of the Chaldean empire from its first defiance of Assyria until its smashing triumph at Carchemish in 605 B.C. He witnessed the desperate efforts of Pharaoh Necho to halt the inevitable Chaldean advance and saw the proud armies of Egypt flee in disarray before Nebuchadnezzar. He saw the armies of Chaldea smash through the feeble defenses of the land and force the surrender of the young monarch on the throne in Jerusalem. He saw thousands of his countrymen—the best citizens of the nation—deported to far-off Babylon. He saw the Chaldean battering rams systematically reduce the walls of Jerusalem to rubble. He saw the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar poured out on the faithless vassal king of Jerusalem as well as some of his officials. He saw a puppet government established in his land and then saw the government wiped out by ruthless extremists. The political turmoil and day to day uncertainty demanded the leader-

JEREMIAH

ship of a man with unwavering confidence in the God of history. Jeremiah was that man.

2. *Religious conditions*

Religiously, Judah was bankrupt during the times of Jeremiah. Under Manasseh (686-642 B.C.) the Assyrian religion had invaded Judah and had been accepted by the large masses of the people. Idolatry was rampant (2:10f; 8:2; 10:2 ff.; 44:15-19); pagan rites corrupted the worship of God at the altars of the Temple (7:30). The gallant effort of Josiah to bring about a reformation in the land did not have any effect on the hearts of the people. While the external signs of pagan worship were temporarily removed by royal decree, the king was unable to rekindle within his people a genuine and lasting love for the Lord. This is not to imply that the Jews ceased to perform the outward acts of worship to God. Throngs of people attended the great festivals at the Temple in Jerusalem. The altar there never lacked for sacrificial animals; the finest incense was utilized by the priests (6:20, 7:21). On occasion the people even fasted and prayed (14:12). But all of this was nothing more than mechanical ritual. To make matters worse, the people were living with the religious fiction—promoted by their professional theologians—that they as the people of God were exempt from judgment and destruction. They had been repeatedly assured by their learned prophets and priests that the Lord would never allow Jerusalem much less His Temple to be destroyed. With his threats of divine retribution Jeremiah was the voice of one crying in the wilderness of theological delusion.

3. *Moral conditions*

Jeremiah lived in corrupt times. In 7:9 the prophet summarizes the vices of his day: stealing, murder, adultery

and false swearing. The House of God had virtually become a den of robbers (7:11). Human life was cheap. Infants were offered up as sacrifices in the valley of Hinnom (7:31; 19:4-6). A faithful prophet of God was hunted down and executed by the tyrant Jehoiakim for no greater crime than preaching the word of the Lord (26:20-23). The Baal cult with its lewd and licentious "worship" had taken its toll. When Jeremiah refers several times to the harlotry being committed on the hills and under the green trees he is referring to the sexual orgies which passed for the worship of Baal (e.g., 2:20; 3:6, 13). The men of Judah brazenly chased after the wives of their neighbors (5:7-9; 9:2). Deceit and lying were so common that no one could be trusted, not even members of one's own family (9:2-6). The people had completely lost their sense of sin (2:27). Wickedness prevailed everywhere and the national leadership seemed unconcerned (10:21).

4. *Social conditions*

Socially, Judah was in turmoil throughout the days of Jeremiah. The reformation of Josiah brought the first major upheaval to the society in which he lived. For over fifty years Judah had been a docile vassal state of the Assyrian empire. With the assassination of Amon in 640 B.C. a wave of nationalistic fervor swept over the land. As the reform movement got into high gear tremendous changes took place in Judah in a relatively short period of time. Idolatrous priests were executed (II Kings 23:5). Other priests had their ministries restricted to the Temple in Jerusalem in compliance with the Mosaic law of the central sanctuary (II Kings 23:8, 9). Wizards and witches were driven from the land (II Kings 23:24). While Josiah's actions were necessary and commendatory they were nonetheless divisive. Those who lost power or prop-

JEREMIAH

erty or prestige during the reforms had their followers. No doubt the population was divided into camps of those who supported and those who opposed the royal reformation.

Another socio-economic upheaval took place when Pharaoh Necho placed a vassal king on the throne of Jerusalem in 609 B.C. As the appointee of the Pharaoh Jehoiakim was responsible for raising an enormous annual tribute (II Chronicles 36:3; II Kings 23:35). Though there is no direct evidence of it, there can be little doubt that the Egyptian levies put a severe strain on the economy of the tiny country. Jehoiakim himself added to the misery of his people by his irresponsible building projects. He squandered the meager resources of his kingdom in erecting a magnificent but unnecessary new palace. When his funds were exhausted citizens were pressed into the royal service to work on the project without remuneration. Jeremiah had nothing but contempt for this petty tyrant (Jeremiah 22:13).

The deportation of 597 B.C. created yet another social upheaval in the ministry of Jeremiah. When the king, the queen mother, the high officials, leading citizens, together with an enormous booty, were taken by Babylon, the nation again faced social and economic chaos. It must have been very difficult for society to function normally after all the craftsmen and skilled laborers had been carried away to Babylon. The deportation created a dearth of leadership in the land. Zedekiah the vassal king was a weak, though seemingly well-intentioned, character. But he could not or would not stand up to the princes who had become the real power in the kingdom. These royal advisers were men of small vision, low character and stubborn will.

The final great social upheaval came during and immediately after the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem in 588-587 B.C. Children were orphaned and wives made widows during the prolonged defense of the city (Lamentations

5:3). Faced with starvation and death mothers abandoned their children (Lamentations 2:11) or, even worse, ate them (Lamentations 2:20; 4:10). When the city finally fell the women were humiliated (Lamentations 5:11). All class distinctions were abolished; elders, priests, princes and common people were treated with equal disrespect and cruelty (Lamentations 4:16; 5:12). Young men were forced to push mill stones like animals; children staggered beneath loads of wood for the campfires of the enemy (Lamentations 5:13). The tattered survivors of Jerusalem's fall had to barter with the Chaldeans for water and wood for cooking fires (Lamentations 5:4). All the normal activities of Judaeon society had to be suspended during those terrible days (Lamentations 5:14, 15).

Throughout his ministry Jeremiah was concerned about the plight of the poor and helpless who were exploited by the powerful land owners as well as by the government. These men continued to enrich themselves by every unscrupulous means (5:26, 27). The poor were mistreated to the point of being physically abused. The agonizing cry of the suffering poor went up continually before the throne of God (6:7). Relief could not be obtained from the courts for they were completely corrupt (5:28). The poor, the fatherless, the widows and the foreign sojourners were completely at the mercy of these vicious men. Many were forced to sell themselves into slavery in order to pay their debts. The Mosaic law which clearly required a slave-holder to release his Hebrew slaves after seven years of service, was set aside (34:12-16). Jeremiah's impassioned appeals for social justice went unheard and unheeded (7:6; 22:3).

E. His Personality

In the opinion of A. B. Davidson "the book of Jeremiah does not so much teach religious truths as present a

JEREMIAH

religious personality.”¹ More biographical material is available for Jeremiah than for any other of the so-called writing prophets. Then, too, unlike other prophets Jeremiah reveals the inmost recesses of his mind. These considerations make a character evaluation of this prophet of God something more than exercise in imagination. Four outstanding personality traits are worthy of note:

1. *Sensitivity* was certainly one of Jeremiah's personality traits. He was a *gentle* man. Though he personally would have preferred the quiet rural life of Anathoth, he was thrust by circumstances into the limelight. In those turbulent times he became the center of controversy, the object of nefarious schemes, the butt of ridicule; he was subjected to a constant barrage of slander and presecution. While outwardly he stood in the face of this abuse like an iron pillar, inwardly he was a broken man. On occasion he sought to resign his prophetic ministry. Only the consciousness of having been predestined for his task, the sense of dedication, and the overpowering urge of God's Word within him, enabled him to rise to the heights of his call.²

2. A second quality, which in reality overlaps the first, is *sympathy*. How did a prophet of God feel when uttering threats of doom against his countrymen and against surrounding nations? Was he fierce, vindictive, even joyful as he contemplated the total destruction of "sinners"? Was he even self-righteously exulting? Some would have it so. But certainly this picture of the Hebrew prophets belies the facts. It was with a heavy heart that Jeremiah predicted the doom of his beloved land; tears stained the manuscript when he penned his oracle of doom against Moab. Jeremiah did not desire to be the harbinger

1. "Jeremiah the Prophet," *A Dictionary of the Bible* ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1909), II, 576.

2. H. Freedman, "Jeremiah," *Soncino Books of the Bible* (London: Soncino Press, 1949), p. xi.

of evil (17:15f.); he laments for the people (4:19f.); he repeatedly displays his tenderness by fervently praying for his people (8:21-22). He acknowledged the necessity of judgment, yet he prays that it might be tempered (10:24); he pleads with God (14:8). It was no moment of malicious jubilation for Jeremiah when he saw his dire predictions coming to pass. If it was with heavy heart that he uttered prophecies of doom it was with still heavier heart that he witnessed the fulfillment. He had sympathy with the condemned. It was because of his sensitivity to personal abuse and his sympathy with those doomed for divine judgment that Jeremiah has been called the weeping prophet. It is, however, important to remember that "Jeremiah was no weeping willow; he was a stalwart oak of divine planting."¹

3. *Courage* must be listed among the personality traits of this prophet. By nature he was shy and retiring; but when armed with divine courage he was a "fortified city, an iron pillar, and a brazen wall against the whole land" (1:18). He braved the fury of the people, the princes and the crown. He vigorously denounced the moral and spiritual corruption in the land as well as the suicidal foreign policy of the kings of Judah. He did not flinch when threatened; he sealed the truth of his testimony by being willing to offer his life. While others who called themselves prophets adjusted their message to harmonize with the popular theology of the day, Jeremiah could not and did not. On numerous occasions only a slight shift in emphasis, a single word of conciliation would have brought Jeremiah release from physical suffering if not honor among his contemporaries. But he chose to speak the truth at all cost and the cost to Jeremiah in terms of his physical well-being was great.

1. "The Book of Jeremiah," *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 180.

JEREMIAH

4. *Faith* or *conviction* was another admirable trait of the prophet from Anathoth. He had an overwhelming and unshakable conviction that he had been called of God and that he spoke the word of God. While he was, for the most part, a prophet of doom, he also had faith in the future of his people. When Jerusalem was besieged and all looked hopeless Jeremiah demonstrated his faith by purchasing a field (Chapter 32). He could see beyond the tragedy of exile, he was certain of the ultimate restoration of Israel (16:14f.; 32:37ff. etc.). When Jerusalem was in shambles and the faith of many faltered Jeremiah stood like a rock. Through his beautiful poetry, now incorporated into the Book of Lamentations, he gave expression to the agony of his suffering and theologically perplexed people while at the same time pointing out to them the direction of spiritual recovery.

As far as personality is concerned, Jeremiah was the heir of the great prophets that preceded him. Hertz describes the personality of Jeremiah by saying: "He combines the tenderness of Hosea, the fearlessness of Amos, and the stern majesty of Isaiah."¹ Freedman² describes him as "a realistic optimist." Jeremiah was realistic in the sense that he was not lulled into a false, and theologically unsound, sense of security; he was optimistic in that he could see beyond the darkness of the present hour the dawning of a new day. Naglesbach captured the paradox of this man of God when he wrote: "He was like a brazen wall, and at the same time like soft wax."³ He was like a brazen wall in that no power could shake him; he was soft like wax because of his gentle disposition and his broken heart.

1. Cited by Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

2. *Ibid.*

3. C. W. Edward Naglesbach, "Jeremiah," *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical*, ed. John Peter Lange (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), p. 8.

II. JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET

Jeremiah was a prophet. Such a statement though it might seem trite and unnecessary, is essential to the understanding of both this man and his book. Many superlatives could be used and have been used about Jeremiah. His eloquence and unusual poetic gifts have been praised; his profound insight, driving courage, unwavering commitment and fervent proclamation of the word of God make him one of the truly outstanding heroes of Bible history. He was an honest man—honest enough to reveal to all succeeding generations his inner doubts, fears and frustrations. He was a gentle man who was filled with compassion for his countrymen. He was a statesman, the most outstanding statesman in Judah in those desperate days of the nation's dying agony. But as true as all these superlatives may be they add little to the understanding of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was first and foremost a prophet of God. He believed to the very depths of his soul that he was a spokesman for the living God. If one fails to recognize this conviction in the life of the priest from Anathoth or refuses to take this conviction seriously he will never understand Jeremiah.

A. The Beginning of His Ministry

In the thirteenth year of king Josiah, 627 B.C., Jeremiah was called by God to the prophetic ministry. The circumstances of his call are not known. Whether he was in the Temple or at home or meditating on a green hillside cannot be determined. It was not his privilege to see a vision of divine majesty such as Isaiah saw; nor did he see visions of mysterious living creatures and wheels as did Ezekiel. But his call experience brought to Jeremiah the inescapable awareness that God had a claim on his life and

JEREMIAH

that he had been predestined to fill the prophetic office before he was born.

As in the case of other great men of God, Jeremiah did not receive his call with eagerness. In fact he sought to escape or at least postpone the divine summons by pleading that he was too young for such responsibility. The age of Jeremiah at the time of his call cannot be computed accurately. Estimates range from fourteen to twenty. Certainly, then, he was young; but was this the real reason he shrank back from the task? Perhaps Jeremiah was more a realist than most people are in their youth. Perhaps he could foresee what would befall him as God's messenger and he wanted no part of it. Jeremiah did not desire to be a prophet and through the early part of his ministry he had a most difficult time reconciling himself to his calling. But he did not quit; he could not quit. He knew that God had touched his lips, had given him a message. He had to preach!

B. The Dimensions of His Ministry

The ministry was multi-dimensional. He was a preacher, a writer, an intercessor, a statesman and a counselor.

1. *Jeremiah the preacher*

Jeremiah felt an uncontrollable urge to proclaim the message of God. When he tried to hold back the Word of God became a burning fire shut up in his bones (20:8-9); he could not forbear. God was speaking through his lips. For this reason he could preface his sermons with "thus says the Lord;" for this reason he could use the first person when presenting the divine demands.

The purpose of Jeremiah's preaching ministry is succinctly stated in 1:10: God sent him "to pluck up, break down, destroy and overthrow", but also "to build

and plant." The negative aspect of his ministry receives the greater emphasis in this verse. Jeremiah denounced sin and warned of judgment. But Jeremiah was not, as some critics have presented him, merely a prophet of doom. There was a genuine positive thrust to his preaching. He offered realistic encouragement to those of his countrymen who had been deported to Babylon (Chapter 29). His predictions regarding the coming Messiah-Prince (23:1-8) and New Covenant Age (Chapters 31-34) are among the grandest in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah seems to have begun his preaching ministry in his native home of Anathoth. His words so angered the men of that town that they ordered him not to prophesy again in the name of the Lord and threatened him with death if he did not cease preaching (11:21). During the early years of his ministry Jeremiah may have commuted from Anathoth to Jerusalem to deliver his thundering denunciations and threats of doom. In the capital the prophet did not restrict his preaching to the Temple area (7:2; 26:2); he preached in the city gates (17:19); in prison (32:2); in the king's house (22:1; 37:17); at the city dump (19:1). On one occasion he went into the streets throughout the land to proclaim his message (11:6).

God spoke through what Jeremiah did and did not do. God spoke through his life as well as through his lips. It was almost unheard of in his day for a young man to remain unmarried yet Jeremiah never took a wife. His abstinence from marriage was intended to demonstrate how perilous were the times (16:1-4). In view of the forthcoming national disaster Jeremiah could not think of marriage and children. He also refrained from attending parties and joyous festivities to dramatize the fact that shortly all the sounds of joy would cease from the land (16:8-9). Nor did he attend funerals (16:5-7). In the coming capture of Jerusalem so many would die that those

JEREMIAH

who remained would not find time for the customary funeral rites. What a sad life it must have been. At God's command he denied himself wifely companionship and normal social intercourse in order to preach a sermon through his life.

Jeremiah used dramatic symbolic acts and visual aids to capture the attention of an audience and underscore the point of his message. No doubt Jeremiah would be accused today of sensationalism and melodramatics. Many of his actions even by standards of that day were bizarre. The accredited clergy of the day cast aspersions upon him and hinted that he was deranged (29:26). It might be helpful and convenient to list Jeremiah's action parables, as they are sometimes called, in the order in which they occur in the book:

1. Jeremiah was instructed to get a linen girdle, wear it, bury it and then, after many days, to retrieve it. The marred and rotten garment was then used to symbolize the corruption and consequent worthlessness of Judah which had once been so very close to God (13:1-11).

2. He was told to take an earthen vessel, go out to the city dump, and smash the bottle in the sight of the elders of the people. Thus would God smash Jerusalem because of the idolatry practiced there (19:1-13).

3. Jeremiah was commanded to take a cup of wine representing the wrath of God and cause all the nations of Syria-Palestine to drink from it (25:15-28).

4. Jeremiah appeared for some time in public wearing a wooden yoke such as was commonly worn by oxen (27:2). It is possible that miniature yokes were given to the foreign ambassadors who had gathered in Jerusalem to be carried back to their respective lands (27:3). The yoke-bars and thongs, the prophet declared, represented Nebuchadnezzar's right to rule by divine decree (27:4-7). That yoke so enraged one of Jeremiah's adversaries that

he ripped it from the neck of the prophet and smashed it in the Temple (28:10).

5. When Jerusalem was under siege and Jeremiah was confined in the court of the prison the Lord instructed him to purchase a plot of ground from a relative (32:6ff). Jeremiah was careful to execute the purchase in the proper legal manner. This transaction was to demonstrate to the embattled populace of Jerusalem that Jeremiah had faith in the future of the land. After the destruction and deportation of the population, at some point in the future, houses and fields and vineyards would once again be bought and sold in the land of Judah.

6. The prophet took those teetotalers, the Rechabites, to the Temple and offered them wine to drink. In loyal obedience to the commandments of their ancestor the Rechabites refused to partake of the fruit of the vine. Their faithfulness to the instructions of their earthly father was used by the prophet to rebuke the unfaithfulness of Judah to the commands of their heavenly Father (35:1-19).

7. The prophet in Egypt continued to use symbolic acts. He hid great stones beneath the brick pavement in front of the house of Pharaoh in Tahpanhes to mark the spot where Nebuchadnezzar would one day erect his royal pavilion (43:8-11).

8. Jeremiah instructed a faithful follower to read a scroll in Babylon and then sink it in the Euphrates river (51:61-64). By this act the ultimate overthrow of Babylon was dramatically portrayed.

Thus by his non-actions and by his actions Jeremiah dramatized the message. His unusual behavior attracted attention and created opportunities for formal oral discourse. Those who are attempting to bring the message of God to communities where men are indifferent, unconcerned and out-right hostile might well learn a lesson

JEREMIAH

here: One must first capture the attention of an audience before he can effectively communicate the word of God.

Some of the acts listed above have been interpreted as being simply visions translated into ordinary narrative. Others have suggested that these acts are altogether imaginary, that is, a recognized rhetorical fiction. These problems of interpretation will be treated in the comments on the individual accounts.

2. Jeremiah the writer

Jeremiah was not only a preacher; he was also a writer. He felt duty-bound to attempt to deal with some of the delusions of the Jewish captives in Babylon; so he wrote a letter to them (29:1). This letter must have been widely circulated among the exiles for it created quite a stir. False prophets in Babylon fired a letter back to the high priest in Jerusalem demanding that Jeremiah be silenced (29:24-29).

When Jeremiah was forbidden by the authorities to publicly preach his message of doom he committed his sermons to writing. A scroll dictated by Jeremiah to his faithful scribe got the prophet in trouble with king Jehoiakim. This scroll, which was in reality the first edition of the Book of Jeremiah, contained excerpts from the sermons of Jeremiah during his first two decades of preaching. When the scroll was read in his presence Jehoiakim slashed it to pieces and burned it upon a brazier. Jeremiah then produced a second copy of the scroll adding to the original contents "many like words" (36:32). Eventually this scroll developed into what is today the canonical Book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah also composed certain lamentations. He is said to have lamented the death of king Josiah (II Chronicles 35:25) and this may imply that he composed a poetic lamentation over the death of that fine king. Tradition

is consistent in assigning the Book of Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah. In the oldest arrangements of the books of the Hebrew Bible the Book of Lamentations seems to have been part of the Book of Jeremiah. It is not possible to determine precisely just when Lamentations was separated from the Book of Jeremiah.

In addition to the Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations, Jeremiah may also have compiled the Book of Kings.¹ The Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Batra* 15a, states categorically that Jeremiah "wrote" the Book of Kings. In the light of the usage of the word "wrote" in this passage of *Baba Batra* the statement with regard to the Book of Kings is to be understood that the prophet was the editor thereof.²

Scholars have suggested that Jeremiah may have been the author of some of the Biblical psalms. Psalms 22, 31, 40, 55, 69, and 71 are so permeated with the "spirit of Jeremiah" that they have been ascribed to the pen of this prophet. These psalms do contain certain circumstantial parallels to the life of Jeremiah. But none of the psalms ascribed to Jeremiah allude to his prophetic office or his conflict with "false prophets." Figurative expressions like "sinking in the mire and in the deep water" (Psalms 69:2, 14) "require no groundwork of literal biographical fact."³ But most important of all is the fact that each of the psalms ascribed by modern critics to Jeremiah is attributed to David in the heading of the psalm. No good reason has yet been offered to deny that these psalms are in fact Davidic. The Ugaritic texts discovered in 1929 prove that poetic composition was a highly developed art centuries before David. In the light

1. The two books of Kings of the English and Greek Old Testament are counted as one book in the Hebrew Bible.

2. The same passage of *Baba Batra* asserts that Hezekiah and his associates wrote the books of Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes; the men of the Great Synagogue wrote the books of Ezekiel, the twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and the Scroll of Esther.

3. T. K. Cheyne, "Jeremiah," *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), p. xii.

JEREMIAH

of this evidence the testimony of the psalm headings becomes even more compelling. The internal circumstantial similarity between these psalms and the life of Jeremiah is thus offset by other evidence. Jeremiah probably did not author any of the Biblical psalms.

The apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature attributes at least three additional writings to Jeremiah. Two of these are worthy of note: (1) The so-called Epistle of Jeremiah is supposedly a letter written by the prophet to the Jews who were about to be led as captives to Babylon. In this letter the author warns his readers about the dangers of idolatry. This short book appears in the Roman Catholic Douay version of the Old Testament as the sixth chapter of the apocryphal Book of Baruch. This letter is a pseudepigraph (forged document) written many years after the death of Jeremiah (ca. 300-100 B.C.). (2) The Paralipomena of Jeremiah, also called the Rest of the Words of Baruch is chiefly concerned with Ebed-melech the Ethiopian who befriended Jeremiah in one of his darkest hours (Jeremiah 38:7-13). The writing appears to be even later than the former one with some passages obviously of Christian origin. Jeremiah could not have been responsible for either of these documents.

3. *Jeremiah the intercessor*

The Book of Jeremiah is rich with thought-provoking material on the subject of prayer. All of the great prophets were men of prayer. But Jeremiah is the only prophet whose prayers are on record in sufficient quantity to invite analysis. They are all but unique in prophetic literature.¹ Jeremiah's prayers on behalf of the nation fall into several categories: (1) In a prayer of complaint Jeremiah charges God with deceiving and misleading the

1. Sheldon H. Blank, *Jeremiah, Man and Prophet* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1961), p. 92.

people (4:10). (2) In a prayer of perception Jeremiah acknowledges that God's disciplinary dealings with Judah have been fair and just (5:3). (3) In the midst of a blistering attack against idolatry Jeremiah burst forth into a prayer of praise (10:6, 7). (4) In a prayer for clarification Jeremiah asks God to explain why he has been instructed to purchase a plot of ground in Judah when God had commissioned him to preach the total destruction of the nation (32:16-25). It is however, (5) the prayer of intercession which merits closer attention.

One of the great ministries of the prophets was to engage in intercessory prayer on behalf of their people. Jeremiah was no exception. When on one occasion Jeremiah wished to call attention to the falsity of certain prophets of weal he pointed to the fact that these men did not engage in intercessory prayer for the nation (27:18). Jeremiah apparently regarded the ministry of intercession as one of the hallmarks of a true prophet of God.

Many different Hebrew words for prayer are used in the Book of Jeremiah. Three of these are of particular importance in understanding the background of the Biblical concept of intercession. The verb *palal* means "to pray" but it has the overtones of argument, of presenting a logical case in defense of someone. The intercessor, then, is like a lawyer who pleads his case before the divine Judge. The expression "to stand before" is also used of prayer. This term comes from the vocabulary of the royal court. It means "to wait upon" in the sense of using one's influence with a king. Thus the intercessor is one who has access to the council chambers of God as it were, and uses his influence there for the well-being of the people he represents. The third Hebrew word, *paga'*, has the idea of an impassioned emotional appeal. The intercessor is one who pours out his heart as well as his mind on behalf of the people he loves.

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah prayed on behalf of his people. Several lines of evidence point in this direction: (1) On more than one occasion during his ministry individuals came to the prophet and requested that he pray on their behalf. Twice king Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah requesting prayer (21:2; 37:3). Following the assassination of Gedaliah the leaders of the remnant requested Jeremiah to pray on their behalf for divine guidance (42:2, 20). (2) Three times the Lord instructed Jeremiah not to pray for the people of Judah (7:16; 11:14; 14:11). A fourth passage has the force of a prohibition though it is not in the imperative mood (15:1). (3) In one of his personal prayers Jeremiah alludes to his ministry of intercession:

Remember how I stood before You to speak good on their behalf, to turn away Your wrath from them (18:20b).

(4) The strongest evidence that Jeremiah prayed for his people is furnished by the fragments of his intercessory prayers which have been preserved in the book. In one of these prayers Jeremiah so completely identifies with his suffering people that he employs the singular pronoun "me" for the nation. It is as though the nation personified is speaking through the mouth of the prophet to God (10:23-25). During a terrible drought Jeremiah, speaking as a member of the suffering nation, calls upon God to extend mercy to His people (14:7-9). Perhaps the most beautiful of the fragments of intercession is found in 14:19-22. Here Jeremiah skillfully mingles a series of rhetorical questions with confessions of sin and appeals for divine mercy.

4. *Jeremiah the statesman*

In ancient Israel the functions of church and state could not be separated into neat compartments. Israel

THE MAN AND PROPHET

was a theocracy, a nation under the direct government of God. All areas of national life were to be directed by the word of God as revealed through His accredited messengers. For this reason Jeremiah—and most of the other prophets for that matter—became involved in what today would be classified as political activity. Jeremiah's political position basically can be summed up in one principle: Submit to Babylon.

The patriotism of Jeremiah has been called into question by more than one modern writer. Did not Jeremiah advocate capitulation to the Chaldeans? Did he not, actively encourage the defenders of Jerusalem to desert to the enemy during those last desperate days before Jerusalem was captured? Such conduct would certainly be considered treason today! If a government fully commits itself to a definite and irrevocable policy, patriotism would demand at least silent acquiescence. Was Jeremiah then a traitor? In defense of Jeremiah it is important to make several observations:

1. Jeremiah was no coward. Though he advised others to desert to the enemy he did not follow his own advice. He was convinced that Jerusalem would fall to the Chaldeans and be destroyed yet he chose to remain within the city. Strange traitor, this man who refused to desert a sinking ship.

2. Jeremiah was not an hireling. When Jerusalem fell the Chaldeans wished to reward this prophet who for so many years had advocated capitulation to Babylon. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that Jeremiah was a fifth columnist on the Chaldean pay roll and that his job was to wage psychological warfare within the walls of Jerusalem. But if this prophet was an hireling it is most strange that he pointedly refused to accept a life of luxury and ease in Babylon. He chose rather to cast his lot with the tattered remnant who remained in the land

JEREMIAH

after the disaster of 587 B.C. Strange traitor, this man who refused to take reward for his treason.

3. Jeremiah was not malevolent. He took no delight in the message of doom he was compelled to preach to his countrymen. Earnestly he prayed on their behalf. He was not anti-Judah. He loved his nation and wanted it to survive as a nation. He could not comprehend why God must utterly destroy Judah and he did not hesitate to confess this lack of understanding to his Creator. Strange traitor, this man who so earnestly prayed for the survival of his nation.

4. Jeremiah was no prophet of doom, at least in the sense that this epithet is usually used. True, he did forecast the defeat of his nation at the hands of an enemy force. But Jeremiah believed firmly in the future of his people (31:31-34). He demonstrated that belief by purchasing a plot of ground at the very time when the Chaldean armies were sweeping through the land (32:6-15). Jeremiah persisted to the end in a "heaven-born assurance of the immortality and spiritual regeneration of his people." Strange traitor, this man who had such confidence in the future of his nation.

5. Jeremiah was no political theoretician. His counsel to yield to Babylon without a struggle was not politically motivated or dictated by mere prudence. In denouncing revolution against Babylon Jeremiah was running counter to the opinions of the best statesmen of most of the countries of Syria-Palestine including Judah. It was not the mere fact that resistance was suicidal that caused him to call for surrender and submission. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that Jeremiah had no admiration for the Babylonian imperial system. In fact he boldly predicted that after the divinely assigned period of world supremacy Babylon too would taste of the wrath of God. Strange

1. Cheyne, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

traitor, this man who was so outspoken against the enemy of his people.

6. Jeremiah was no pacifist. Though he opposed resistance to the Chaldeans he did not oppose war as such. As a matter of fact Jeremiah preached that the impending conflict was ordained by God. God was involved in the struggle (21:5) but He was fighting on the side of the Chaldeans. Those who would equate pacifism with treason certainly cannot question the patriotism of Jeremiah on these grounds.

In Jeremiah one can see what John Bright calls "patriotism on a deeper level."¹ The religious idea with which he was inspired was higher and broader than conventional ideas of patriotism. Israel had a divinely appropriated work to do; if Israel failed to perform that mission, it had no further right to exist. To state the matter another way, Judah was a theocracy in rebellion against its divine King. Jeremiah was the inspired spokesman for God to that rebellious people. The God who knows the future had revealed to Jeremiah what the future course of political events in the ancient Near East would be. This prophet did not formulate his advice to his countrymen on the basis of political or personal expediency. He *knew* whereof he spoke and history has vindicated his position.

5. *Jeremiah the counselor*

Jeremiah was not only concerned with crowds, oratory and national policy; he was concerned as well for individuals. Zedekiah the king had many agonizing decisions to make during the last days of the kingdom of Judah. On more than one occasion he sought out Jeremiah to ask his inspired counsel (37:17; 38:14ff.). Jeremiah was not a practitioner of the non-directive technique

1. Bright, *op. cit.*, p. cix.

JEREMIAH

in counseling. He clearly spelled out for Zedekiah the alternative courses of action and the consequences of each. If Zedekiah would surrender to Nebuchadnezzar the city would be saved; if he did not, the city was doomed. When Zedekiah expressed fear over his personal fate should he surrender, Jeremiah reassured him that his fears were unfounded. He tried to help the king see that selfish considerations must be secondary to that of the well-being of his people. Thousands would suffer if the king persisted in resisting Babylon. Jeremiah's private conversations with Zedekiah reveal the consistency and frank honesty of this man of God. He did not succumb to the temptation to tailor God's word to fit the individual but rather sought to bring the individual into harmony with the will of God.

The weeping prophet knew personal agony and despondency and thus could have empathy with those who suffered. To Baruch, a frustrated and discouraged disciple, Jeremiah spoke a tender word from the Lord. His message to Baruch in chapter 45 when properly understood is a masterpiece of counseling technique. By revealing to Baruch the genuine and unparalleled suffering of God Jeremiah helps that scribe to place his own predicament in proper perspective.

Equally tender and pertinent is Jeremiah's brief word for Ebed-melech (39:15-18). This Ethiopian servant was terrified at the prospect of falling into the hand of the Chaldean soldiers who were attacking Jerusalem. Doubtless he feared that all the servants of king Zedekiah would be slain when the enemy stormed into the city. The God who loved individuals as much as He loved nations sent His prophet to that noble Negro slave with a comforting word. Ebed-melech would not fall into the hands of those whom he feared.

Whether dealing with the paralyzing indecision of Zedekiah, the gloomy despondency of Baruch or the ter-

rifing fear of Ebed-melech Jeremiah was the master counselor. He did not always wait for the distressed to seek him out; he went to them. He was straight-forward and honest, yet tender and compassionate as he dealt with the needs of individuals.

C. The Chronology of His Ministry

The reconstruction of the life and career of Jeremiah is not an easy task. For the period following 609 B.C. an abundance of dated biographical material from the book can be utilized. When this material is placed in chronological order one has a fairly complete outline of the latter part of the prophet's career. But for information about the pre-609 B.C. career of the prophet one must depend upon undated oracles and sermons. For this reason the greatest caution needs to be exercised in reconstructing the early phases of the ministry of Jeremiah. Some modern scholars have even questioned whether or not Jeremiah had a ministry prior to 609 B.C. May and Hyatt,¹ for example, believe that Jeremiah did not begin to prophesy until after the reformation of Josiah—near the end of Josiah's reign or beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (ca. 609 B.C.). Not allowing for genuine predictive prophecy, these scholars insist that the "foe from the north" in chapters 1-6 must be explained against the background of the emerging Chaldean menace. But for those who accept the testimony of the book itself the matter of dating is at once settled by the clear statements of 1:2 and 25:3. The ministry of Jeremiah commenced in the thirteenth year of Josiah, 627 B.C.

The prophetic career of Jeremiah can be divided into five distinct periods: (1) The pre-reformation period,

1. H. G. May, "The Chronology of Jeremiah's Oracles," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 4 (1945) 217-27; J. P. Hyatt, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1942) 156-73; J. P. Hyatt, "The Foe From the North in Jeremiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 59 (1940) 499-513.

JEREMIAH

627-621 B.C.; (2) The post-reformation period, 621-605 B.C.; (3) The middle period, 605-597 B.C.; (4) The pre-destruction period, 597-587 B.C. and (5) The post-destruction period, 587 B.C. to his death.

1. *The pre-reformation period, 627-621 B.C.*

The early phase of his ministry extends from the divine call in 627 B.C. to the reformation under Josiah in 621 B.C. During this five-year period the energetic Jeremiah joined forces with Zephaniah in thundering forth denunciations of apostasy. But intermingled with these verbal assaults against the national sin are impassioned pleas for repentance (3:19—4:2). One can scarcely doubt that the powerful preaching of Zephaniah and Jeremiah helped pave the way for the reforms of king Josiah.

2. *The post-reformation period, 621-605 B.C.*

The second period of the ministry of Jeremiah extends from 621 B.C. to 605 B.C. The years following the reformation of Josiah and prior to the battle of Carchemish are practically a blank as far as the career of Jeremiah is concerned. Scholars are in disagreement about the attitude of Jeremiah towards the reforms of king Josiah. Some picture the prophet as bitterly opposed to the reform; others think he actively supported the efforts of the young king; still others argue that Jeremiah supported the *aims* of the reformation but took no active part in it. Most scholars believe that following the reformation of 621 B.C. Jeremiah entered into a period of silence.

It is most difficult to believe that Jeremiah could do anything other than applaud the efforts of king Josiah to reinforce the law of God. Two pieces of evidence seem to indicate Jeremiah's sympathy with the Josian reform: For one thing, Jeremiah publicly expressed almost un-

bounded admiration for Josiah (22:15f.). This would be most strange if Jeremiah felt that his reform efforts were inappropriate, inadequate or futile. Then, too, those who stood up for Jeremiah during his controversial ministry and who intervened to save his life were themselves leaders in the reform effort or came from families which were instrumental in the reform. Ahikam son of Shaphan (26:24) was among the delegation which took the lost book of the law to Huldah the prophetess for identification. Gemariah son of Shaphan (36:10 and 25) must have been a brother of Ahikam. Elnathan, another prince who defended the writing of Jeremiah (36:12, 25), was the son of Achbor who had been active in the Josiah reform (cf. II Kings 22:12). It is unlikely that Jeremiah would have received the support of these families if he had opposed the reforms of Josiah.

Scripture affirms that Josiah began to seek the Lord while he was yet young in the eighth year of his reign. He began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of all of idolatrous paraphernalia in the twelfth year of his reign (II Chronicles 34:3). Jeremiah was called to the prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah (1:2) one year after the reform got started and five years before the discovery of the lost law book. It is important to note that the discovery of the lost book was the result of the reformation and not the cause of it. The preaching of Jeremiah during the five years between the beginning of the reformation and the discovery of the law book must surely have helped pave the way for further reforms. Some have interpreted 11:6 to mean that Jeremiah got involved in the reformation efforts and went about the countryside as its chief advocate. But if Jeremiah was a supporter of the reforms of the king why did Josiah consult Huldah the prophetess concerning the newly discovered law book instead of Jeremiah? Does this not indicate that the king regarded Jeremiah as unsympathetic to the cause? Not

JEREMIAH

necessarily. Jeremiah was still young and relatively unknown. Perhaps he had not yet left the rural areas to begin his ministry in the capital.

3. *The middle period, 605-597 B.C.*

The year 605 B.C. was a milestone in the ministry of Jeremiah for with the battle of Carchemish the prophet commences a new phase of his ministry. That great clash between the Egyptians and Assyrians on the one hand and the Chaldeans on the other, marked a turning point in the life of Jeremiah as well as in world history. From that time Jeremiah explicitly named Babylon as the chosen agent of destruction of Judah. Babylon was to Jeremiah what Nineveh had been to Isaiah. The prophet foresaw and announced the prophetic program of God for the next seventy years. God had allocated to Babylonian world supremacy a period of seventy years. During that period any nation which refused to submit to the yoke of Babylon would be destroyed. The year 605 B.C. was important to Jeremiah from the standpoint of the form as well as the content of his message. It was in 605 B.C. that Jeremiah received instruction from the Lord to commit his prophecies to writing, apparently for the first time (chapter 36).

4. *The pre-destruction period, 597-587 B.C.*

The year 597 B.C. in which several thousand Jews including the royal household were taken to Babylon marked another milestone in the ministry of Jeremiah. A strong note of hope appears in the message of Jeremiah following the deportation of 597 B.C. Jeremiah believed that those captives in Babylon were the real hope of the nation. All hope for the deliverance of Jerusalem from destruction seems to have vanished. Jeremiah was looking beyond the tragedy of 587 B.C. to a new community which the Lord would establish. During this phase of his

THE MAN AND PROPHET

ministry Jeremiah appears in the role of counselor to the king. But since the counsel of Jeremiah ran counter to that of the powerful young princes who seemed to control king Zedekiah, Jeremiah suffered immeasurably during this decade.

5. The post-destruction period, 587 B.C. and after

The final phase of the ministry of Jeremiah begins in 587 B.C., the year in which Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah was broken in body but not in spirit. While the old man could have closed out his life in luxury and ease in Babylon, he chose to cast his lot with the tattered remnant which remained in Palestine. After the assassination of Gedaliah Jeremiah was forced to accompany the terrified remnant to Egypt. His last recorded sermons were delivered on foreign soil. Though well into his sixties Jeremiah had lost none of his fervor or fire. He still cried out against idolatry and predicted divine judgment upon those who refused to turn to the Lord with all their heart. In that foreign land Jeremiah ended his prophetic ministry; there in all probability he was buried.

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF JEREMIAH		
REFERENCE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT	DATE
ch 1	The Call	13 yr of Josiah
11:18-23	A plot against the Prophet by the men of Anathoth	Late Josiah (Payne) or Early Jehoiakim (White)
16:1-9	Three Prohibitions	Late Josiah (Payne) or Early Jehoiakim (White)
18:18	A plot Against Jeremiah by National leaders	Late Josiah (Payne) or Early Jehoiakim (White)
19:14—20:6	Jeremiah scouraged and put in stocks	Late Josiah (Payne) or Early Jehoiakim (White)

JEREMIAH

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF JEREMIAH		
26:1-24	Jeremiah on trial for his life	"Beginning" of Jehoiakim
ch 36	Publication of First Edition of Jeremiah	4th & 5th year of Jehoiakim
ch 35	Episode of the Rechabites	Late Jehoiakim (c. 598)
ch 29	A letter to Babylon	Beginning of Zedekiah
28:1-17	Confrontation with Hananiah	Beginning of Zedekiah
ch 27	Jeremiah sends yokes to foreign ambassadors	Beginning of Zedekiah
51:59-64	A scroll to Babylon	4th year of Zedekiah
ch 21	A delegation sent to Jeremiah from the king	Early part of the siege (588)
34:1-7	Jeremiah brings a message to Zedekiah	Early part of the siege (588)
32:1-15	Jeremiah in the court of the guard, Purchased land	Early part of the siege. (Note: most commentators place this after ch. 37 on the basis of 37:4.)
34:8-22	Jeremiah condemns the princes for breaking an oath	During lull in the siege (summer)
37:1-10	Second delegation sent from the king	During the lull v. 4, 5
37:11-15	Jeremiah arrested, put in Jonathan's pit	During the lull
37:16-21	Secret meeting with Zedekiah Placed in court of the guard	Last part of the siege
38:1-13	Jeremiah thrown in Dungeon Rescued by Ebed-Melech	Last part of the siege
38:14-28	Another secret meeting with Zedekiah	Last part of the siege
39:11-14	Jeremiah committed to Gedaliah	After the fall of Jerusalem
40:1-6	Jeremiah accidentally arrested by the Chaldeans	After the fall of Jerusalem
ch 42	Jeremiah consulted by the remnant	After death of Gedaliah
ch 43, 44	Jeremiah's ministry in Egypt	After death of Gedaliah

D. The Vicissitudes of His Ministry

The life and ministry of Jeremiah were filled with discouragement and danger. To preach to a people over a long period of time and realize no tangible results places a great burden on the heart of a minister. So it was with Jeremiah. He preached powerfully, eloquently and passionately but no one seemed to listen. This constant failure to "get through" to the people had a wearing effect on the man. He suffered intense personal pain as he watched the nation advancing step by step on the road to ruin. When he saw that the spirit of disobedience and rebellion in his countrymen was seemingly past remedy he still prayed that they might be spared. Finally when God forbade him to offer any more intercessory prayers on behalf of Judah, Jeremiah realized that the doom of his people was inevitable and irreversible. Only the complete overthrow of the nation could effect a cure for the malignancy of transgression which had permeated the land.

Jeremiah shed many tears over the impending doom of his people. He could see so clearly in his mind's eye the bloodshed and death and carnage which would accompany the assault by the enemy from the north. Frequently he burst forth in lamentation of the most bitter sort.¹ Once he cried out, "Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people" (9:1). In one of his sermons following a particularly eloquent appeal for repentance Jeremiah added: "But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride; and my eye shall weep sore and run down with tears, because the flock of the LORD is taken captive" (13:17). The burden of Jeremiah's suffering was somewhat increased by the restrictions placed upon his life and ministry by the Lord. He was forbidden to marry

1. See 4:19-21; 8:18—9:1; 9:10; 10:19; and 14:17-18.

JEREMIAH

(16:2) and hence had to bear his suffering without the solace afforded by wifely companionship. He was forbidden to attend social gatherings, even funerals (16:5, 8). While these prohibitions served a wise and useful purpose they nonetheless added to the personal agony of this broken-hearted man.

Add to the discouragement of this prophet the danger which he constantly faced in his ministry and the biography of Jeremiah becomes truly pathetic. Almost daily he suffered hostility and abuse from the people he was trying to help. Early in his ministry the men of his own home town plotted against him (11:9ff.). On one occasion he was arrested by the chief officer of the Temple, flogged, and forced to endure the pain and humiliation of exposure in the public stocks (20:1f.). Following one of his mighty sermons in the Temple he was seized by a mob and hastily put on trial for his life (26:11ff.). For a time Jeremiah was declared to be *persona non grata* and was restrained from entering the Temple area (36:5). His first literary production was ruthlessly destroyed by a tyrant king (36:23ff.). For a time he was forced to go into hiding to escape the wrath of this same king (36:26). Back in circulation again he was assaulted by a rival prophet (28:10f.). A letter from Babylon urged further violence against Jeremiah (29:24ff.). While attempting to leave Jerusalem on a private business matter the prophet was arrested and accused of treasonous desertion to the enemy (37:11ff.). Confinement in prison threatened the health of the prophet (37:20). He was lowered into an empty but damp cistern and left to die without food or water (38:6). Delivered from that danger he yet remained under arrest (38:13). Jeremiah was released from custody when the Chaldeans captured Jerusalem, but then through the blunder of some junior officer was again put in chains to be carried away to Babylon (40:1). Released by the Chaldean commanding general,

THE MAN AND PROPHET

Jeremiah chose to cast his lot with the tattered remnant of his people. His suffering was not yet at an end, however. Shortly the old man of God was abducted to Egypt where he spent his last years in forced exile from his beloved home land (43:5f.). "His whole life," says one writer, "is a series of dramatic rescues at the hand of unexpected people."¹

The biographical picture of Jeremiah is not entirely black. Here and there a friend can be found among the hostile crowd; once in a while a triumph of sorts is recorded. Though it might have seemed to Jeremiah that every hand was against him, he was not altogether friendless. The elders of the land defended Jeremiah at his trial and a certain prince named Ahikam used his influence to get the prophet acquitted. Baruch was a faithful friend. He joined Jeremiah in hiding, wrote his first book for him, read it in public and apparently remained with his master until the end in Egypt. Numbered among his friends are the court officials who saw to it that king Jehoiakim got a chance to hear the words written in Jeremiah's scroll and who protested when that scroll was destroyed by the king. A Temple official by the name of Zephaniah came under personal attack for allowing Jeremiah to preach in the Temple. Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian servant of king Zedekiah, risked his own life to rescue Jeremiah from a foul pit. Even king Zedekiah himself on certain occasions befriended the prophet. Finally there was Gedaliah with whom Jeremiah would have spent his last days had this governor not been struck down by the blow of an assassin. There were occasional triumphs in his ministry. Jeremiah's defense of his prophetic preaching was vindicated when he was on trial for his life. When Nebuchadnezzar lifted the siege of Jerusalem to deal with an attack by Egyptian forces, Jeremiah

1. Norman C. Habel, "Jeremiah," *Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), p. 13.

JEREMIAH

alone correctly assessed the situation. In a matter of weeks his confident assertion that the Chaldean would return to the siege of the city was vindicated. Twice the king sought him out to ask his counsel. The remnant came to him to seek his guidance following the death of Gedaliah. Nevertheless these friends and moments of triumph are not the dominant theme in the biography of Jeremiah.

It is on the background of this intense personal pain and persecution that the so-called confessions of Jeremiah must be interpreted. In these prayers, which all appear in the second ten chapters of the book, Jeremiah asks for justice. Standing before the Judge of all the earth Jeremiah presents the case *for* himself and *against* his adversaries. In defense of his own conduct the prophet points to his tireless efforts to persuade the people of Judah to repent. He has to the best of his ability carried out the divine commission which had been given to him (17:16). He has said and done only that which God had authorized. He had animosity for no one and had offended neither his people or his God (15:10). He had actually prayed for the salvation of his nation (18:20; 15:11). Why then is his life so turbulent? (15:15-17). Why does he suffer so? (18:20). In narrative prayer Jeremiah tells God the tragic story of his life and ministry. But he does something more. He seeks to disparage the activities of his adversaries. He vividly describes in these prayers the vicious behavior of those who had pitted themselves against him. They cursed (15:10), taunted (17:15) and ridiculed (20:8) God's duly appointed representative. They have openly blasphemed God as well (12:2, 4). They are hypocritical (12:6) and treacherous (20:10). They were actually plotting the death of the prophet from Anathoth (18:18; 11:21). By placing his innocence in juxtaposition with the guilt of his enemies Jeremiah was calling the attention of God to the injustice of the whole situation and setting the stage for his plea.

After Jeremiah presented his case before God he made his appeal. At times his plea was direct and unambiguous. He prays that God will vindicate His prophet and pour out vengeance upon his enemies (15:15; 17:17, 18). In some of his prayers he calls down in dreadful detail the wrath of God upon his adversaries (17:18; 18:21-23; 12:3). These imprecations are perhaps the most difficult passages in the book to comprehend. Are they to be interpreted as a sudden ebullition of natural anger? Jeremiah did not desire the destruction of his people and in fact prayed for their deliverance (17:16; 18:20; 15:11). Those upon whom Jeremiah calls down the wrath of the Almighty are the religious leaders who had so beguiled the people and persecuted the prophet. They had spurned the appointed representatives of the God of Israel; they had hindered the word of God. When Jeremiah calls upon God to destroy these wicked men he does not speak with vindictive enmity. He speaks rather as the official representative of God. God's cause was being hindered; God's honor was at stake. It was his zeal for God and desire for the triumph of righteousness that caused Jeremiah to pray for the destruction of these sinners. The so-called imprecations are in reality pronouncements of judgment. They are not unlike the "woes" which Jesus pronounced against the religious leaders of His generation (see Matthew 23).

Sometimes the plea in Jeremiah's personal prayers is less direct, taking the form of accusation or of a bold rhetorical question. Jeremiah accuses God of enticing him and forcing him into the ministry (20:7) and filling him with gloom (15:17). Perhaps his most bitter accusation is found in 15:18b: "You are indeed to me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail!" He is accusing God of being unfaithful and unreliable. These accusations against God amount to an appeal. The prophet is asking for release from a situation which he views as intolerable. The rhetorical questions in his prayers amount to the same

JEREMIAH

thing. "Shall evil be rewarded for good?" the troubled prophet asks God (18:20a). Again he asks, "Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable?" (15:18a). In 12:1b he asks the question suffering men have asked as far back as one can trace the literary records of the human race: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they at ease that deal very treacherously?" Each of these questions implies that something has gone wrong in the world. Righteous men suffer; wicked men prosper. Jeremiah knows that God is just and it is to His justice that Jeremiah appeals in both his accusations and his rhetorical questions.

E. The Importance of His Ministry

Only God knows to what degree the ministry of a man has been a success or a failure. As the world evaluates such things Jeremiah was a failure. No one, it seems, paid any attention to his dire predictions; no one gave heed to his appeals for repentance. He was powerless to stop the suicidal national policy. Yet in a very real way Jeremiah was the hero of the last days of Judah. More than any other single individual he enabled the people to survive the calamity of 587 B.C. Philip Schaff has referred to Jeremiah as "the most prominent personage in a period of deepest distress and humiliation of the Jewish theocracy."¹

The destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation to Babylon was a severe spiritual as well as political blow to the people of Judah. The religious establishment had said for years—since the days of king Hezekiah—that such a calamity could not befall the Holy City. God would never allow Jerusalem and the Temple to be destroyed. The notion of the inviolability of Zion seems to have

1. In the preface to the commentary on Jeremiah in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical*, ed. John Peter Lange (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), p. i.

hardened into an unquestioned assumption in the days of Jeremiah. It was heresy and blasphemy to challenge this dogma and those who attempted to refute it did so at the peril of their lives.

When the disaster of 587 B.C. became a reality the official religious leaders were at a loss to explain how it could have come about. The entire structure of faith in the Lord was dangerously close to toppling to ruins because one dogma—and it false to begin with—had proven to be unsound. Many were questioning the justice of God (Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2, 25; Lamentations 5:7). The temptation was strong to render homage to the gods of the conquering Chaldeans. Those who retained their faith were plunged into hopeless despair feeling that God had utterly and completely cast off his people (Ezekiel 33:10; 37:11). During and shortly after 587 B.C. the very survival of Israel's faith was hanging in the balance. Had there been no Jeremiah in Palestine and no Ezekiel in Babylon during these years to warn of tragedy and to interpret it when it struck, the Israelite people probably would have fared no better than the other peoples conquered by Babylon. That the faith of Israel survived 587 B.C. is due in no small measure to the preaching of Jeremiah. Herein lies the paradox of Jeremiah's ministry: By preaching judgment he was in fact providing the basis of salvation for his people. Again and again Jeremiah emphasized that the destruction of Jerusalem was of the Lord. He underscored the fact that the judgment was just because of the enormous transgression of the people. The desperately confused Jews in 587 B.C. clung to the words of Jeremiah as the only viable explanation of what happened. Thus Jeremiah was able to fit the tragedy of 587 B.C. into the framework of faith.

Jeremiah made another equally important contribution to the ongoing of his people. This prophet laid the foundations and prepared the way for the New Israel

JEREMIAH

which would one day rise out of the ruins of the old. Jeremiah believed in the indestructibility of Israel (30:11; 29:11). The nation must go into captivity; but the day for return would come at the conclusion of the seventy years of servitude to Babylon (16:18; 25:11, 12). That grand exodus from Babylon which would eclipse the memory of the exodus from Egypt (16:14ff.) would be a restoration for Israel as well as for Judah (30:10). Replacing the worthless kings who had disgraced the throne of David, God would raise up for them in that day an ideal king, a righteous Branch, the Messiah (23:5, 6; 30:9). Out of the ruins of the old city of Jerusalem a new city, a spiritual city would arise which would wear the same name as the King who rules over it (33:11, 16). Replacing the old covenant which had been written upon stone would be a new covenant written upon the tables of the heart, an inward, spiritual, everlasting covenant of pardon and grace (31:33f.; 32:39f.; 33:8). The old ark of the covenant, symbolic of God's presence, would no longer be needed or even desired in the new age for God Himself would dwell in the midst of the people (3:16f.). Through faith and obedience Gentiles would be incorporated into that New Israel (3:17; 16:19; 12:16). These and similar predictions of a glorious future on the other side of the valley of despair sustained the people of God through the agonizing spiritual ordeal of the exile. Because of his Messianic predictions Jeremiah stands forever as a strong cornerstone in that foundation of the prophets upon which is reared the majestic building of the Church of Christ, the New Israel of God.¹

Considerations of space will not permit a lengthy discussion of the importance of Jeremiah in Jewish tradition. Ginzberg in his monumental work, *The Legends*

1. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Doctrine of the Prophets* (third edition; London: Macmillan, 1923), p. 325.

of the Jews¹ records dozens of legends that grew up about this prophet. Legend would have it that Jeremiah was born circumcised; that he was weeping at his birth and that shortly thereafter he could speak; that the prophet concealed the Temple vessels and heavenly fire when Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans; that Jeremiah and Nebuchadnezzar were friends in their childhood; that one of the prayers of this prophet caused the crocodiles to disappear; that Jeremiah entered paradise alive; that he would be one of two witnesses to return to earth in the future. It was probably this last tradition which explains why some Jews thought Jesus was Jeremiah.²

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWO

I. Facts to Master

1. The meaning of the name Jeremiah
2. The name of Jeremiah's father
3. The name of Jeremiah's home town
4. The date Jeremiah received his call to the prophetic ministry
5. The major periods of Jeremiah's ministry

II. Questions to Ponder

1. In what ways did Jeremiah's early home life help to shape his ministry? To what degree is a man influenced for good or evil by his home environment?
2. To what extent does the preaching of Jeremiah reflect the influence of nature? What can a man learn about God from His creation?
3. What was there about Jeremiah that qualified him to deal with the political, religious, social and moral situation of his day?

1. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1938). See index vol., pp. 253-54 for references.

2. Matthew 16:14. "The prophet" in John 1:21, 6:14 and 7:40 is also a reference to Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH

4. Why did Jeremiah not receive the call of God with eagerness? What factors should a man consider before answering the divine call to specialized Christian service?
5. What lessons could a young preacher learn from Jeremiah?
6. To what extent did Jeremiah use action parables or symbolic acts in his ministry? Could Jeremiah be accused of sensationalism? Would such actions be appropriate today?
7. In what ways was Jeremiah's life a living sermon?
8. What role did prayer play in the life of this prophet? How could Jeremiah preach judgment and yet pray for the salvation of his people? Why did God instruct Jeremiah to desist from prayer on behalf of the nation? Should a Christian ever stop praying for a lost man?
9. Was Jeremiah a traitor to his country? What are the limits to which a Christian can go in supporting the government?
10. Why is Jeremiah called the weeping prophet? Did Jeremiah weep over his own misfortune or over the condition of his people? Was the weeping of Jeremiah a public or a private matter?
11. Why was the ministry of Jeremiah so important in the history of redemption?

CHAPTER THREE

JEREMIAH: THE BOOK

The Book of Jeremiah in the standard English editions contains fifty-two chapters, among the prophets second only to the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah. By actual word count Jeremiah is the longest prophetic book in the Bible. This book is not the easiest one to understand and appreciate. As a matter of fact Jeremiah makes extremely difficult reading even for those who might be somewhat more advanced in the area of Biblical studies. This book—like the other prophetic books—alludes to persons, situations and events which are unfamiliar to the modern reader. The figures of speech seem often to be crude and inappropriate or altogether obscure. Yet those who pick up this book should realize that they are studying a document which is more than twenty-five hundred years old. Such difficulties are to be expected when one reads any literature from antiquity. But if one succeeds in bridging the culture gap between the twentieth century A.D. and the sixth century B.C. he will be richly rewarded by what he discovers in the Book of Jeremiah.

I. THE WRITING OF THE BOOK

A. Authorship

The heading of the Book of Jeremiah (1:1) claims that the chapters which follow right up to (but not including) chapter 52 are the work of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah who lived in the late seventh and early sixth centuries before Christ. With this agrees the statement in 51:64, "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah." Internal evidence supports the contention of the superscription and subscription of the book. In 36:1-2 Jeremiah is told to record in a scroll his oral messages from the first half of his ministry. When the prophet complied with that

command the first edition of the Book of Jeremiah came into being. As regards the matter of authorship three questions need probing: What was the role of Baruch in the production of the Book of Jeremiah? Is there any extraneous material in the book? Who is responsible for the historical appendix which is contained in chapter 52?

1. *The role of Baruch*

Baruch the son of Neriah is mentioned several times in the Book of Jeremiah. Chronologically his first appearance is in chapter 36 where he wrote a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah and then publicly read the document. Jeremiah was commissioned to utter a special oracle pertaining to Baruch in that same year (chapter 45). Sixteen years later Baruch again appears in the capacity of an assistant to Jeremiah when the latter was performing one of the most dramatic action parables of his career (32:12f.). When last mentioned in the book Baruch was accused of influencing Jeremiah to denounce the plans of the remnant to emigrate to Egypt. Subsequently both the prophet and Baruch were forced to accompany the refugees in their flight from Judah (43:3, 6).

Opinions differ as to the extent of Baruch's influence in the publication of the Book of Jeremiah. On one extreme there are scholars who believe that Baruch was involved only in the writing of the scroll of 605-604 B.C. According to this view Baruch was nothing more than a public scribe employed for a very limited task. On the other extreme are those scholars who believe Baruch on his own initiative published a biography of Jeremiah. At a later date Baruch combined Jeremiah's work with his own, recasting some of Jeremiah's sermons in his own pedestrian style. Both of these positions with regard to the role of Baruch are unacceptable. The first position—that of Mowinckel—is *a priori* unlikely in view of the

close association between Baruch and Jeremiah subsequent to 604 B.C. As for the second position, Baruch appears to be too pious and serious a man to have tampered in any way with the speeches of his master.¹

What then was the role of Baruch in the publication of the Book of Jeremiah? His initial role as the scribe who recorded *verbatim* the sermons dictated to him by Jeremiah is clearly indicated in chapter 36. It is quite possible and even probable that in the latter half of his ministry Jeremiah used Baruch in a similar capacity. In the twilight years of the prophet's life Baruch probably gathered and edited all of Jeremiah's prophecies. But whatever he did in the way of editing was doubtless at Jeremiah's direction. Even the arrangement of the prophecies may be due to the suggestion of Jeremiah.² Thus Jeremiah is the author of the book which bears his name and Baruch's contribution was purely technical and mechanical.

2. *Alleged non-Jeremian material*

Negative critical scholars do not feel obligated to accept the claims of any Old Testament book with regard to its authorship. They believe that they have at their disposal modern "tools" by which they can confidently separate the actual words of Jeremiah from later intrusions. Robert Pfeiffer, for example, believes that the Book of Jeremiah consists of three groups of writings: (1) words dictated or written by Jeremiah himself; (2) biography of the prophet probably written by Baruch; and (3) "miscellaneous contributions from the hands of redactors and later authors."³ It is this third category

1. E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 244.

2. The view adopted here regarding the role of Baruch is that of E. J. Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-45.

3. Robert Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1948), p. 500.

JEREMIAH

of materials which is most disturbing. How is one to distinguish between the inspired and authentic words of Jeremiah the prophet and the words of redactors and later authors? The critical scholars begin by setting up categories of what they believe a prophet of that period could or would have said. Any verses in the book which do not fall into those categories are declared to be spurious. Since these critics, for the most part, do not believe in the possibility of long-range, pin-point predictive prophecy, all such passages can be taken away from the prophet and assigned to some anonymous person who actually lived *after* the event which is predicted. According to some of the more radical critics, Messianic prophecy prior to the return from captivity in 538 B.C. is impossible; therefore all passages predicting the coming of a personal Messiah in the books of Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and the other pre-exilic prophets must be assigned to some author living after 538 B.C. Now this methodology is so ridiculous that one is prone to dismiss it with a humorous chuckle. Yet this is the type of scholarship to which young people are exposed in most universities and theological training schools today!

It is not possible nor would it be profitable to deal here with all the disputed passages in Jeremiah. One recent and highly respected introduction to the Old Testament has taken the position that 533 verses, roughly thirty-nine per cent of the Book of Jeremiah, were written neither by Jeremiah nor by Baruch.¹ One cannot, of course, find unanimity among the critics as to which specific passages in the book are spurious. Since their methodology is so subjective, agreement among these critics is not to be expected. Where significant objections have been raised as to the genuineness of a verse, rebuttal will be offered in the comments on that verse. It will suffice

1. Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* trans. David E. Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), pp. 399-400.

here to note the various categories of passages which the negative critics tend to deny to the prophet Jeremiah. In general they question the following types of passages: (1) Passages which are verbally parallel with those in other Old Testament books; (2) verses which are repetitions from earlier within the Book of Jeremiah; (3) passages which predict doom for Babylon; and (4) Messianic prophecies.

3. *The authorship of Jeremiah 52*

The concluding words of chapter 51, "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah," seem to imply that what follows in chapter 52 was not written by the prophet. In spite of this explicit statement some insist that Jeremiah is still to be regarded as the author of the last chapter of the book. Their argument goes like this: Jeremiah 52 has been copied from II Kings and Jeremiah wrote II Kings; therefore Jeremiah wrote chapter 52. There are in this argument two basic assumptions: (1) that the Jewish tradition ascribing the authorship of Kings to Jeremiah is reliable; and (2) that Jeremiah 52 was copied from II Kings. The latter assumption would appear to be unjustified in view of the fact that Jeremiah 52 contains information not contained in II Kings (see 52:10, 19-23, 28-30). Furthermore certain words are spelled differently in the two sources. While most of these spelling differences are obvious only in the Hebrew at least one is clear in the English text. In II Kings 24:18 the name of the king of Babylon is spelled Nebuchadnezzar while in Jeremiah 52 the spelling Nebuchadrezzar is used.

The last seven verses of chapter 52 would seem to require authorship by someone other than Jeremiah. For one thing Jeremiah would have been close to ninety years of age when Jehoiachin was released from Babylonian im-

JEREMIAH

prisonment (52:31). While not rendering Jeremian authorship of these verses impossible this age factor would certainly render it improbable. Furthermore in these verses the next to the last king of Judah is called Jehoiachin while in the body of the Book of Jeremiah this king goes by the name Coniah (37:1; 22:24, 28) or Jeconiah (27:20; 28:4; 24:1). Finally these last seven verses use the Babylonian or accession year method of computing the regnal years of Nebuchadnezzar while in the body of the Book of Jeremiah, in 52:12 and in the Book of Kings the Palestinian system is employed. It would be most difficult to imagine one author using two different dating systems for the same king.

If Jeremiah did not write chapter 52, who did? Various suggestions have been made. Most likely Baruch added this chapter and clearly indicated that he was doing so by inserting the editorial note at the end of chapter 51. It is possible that chapter 52 (or at least most of it) was included at the suggestion of Jeremiah himself.¹

The position taken in this study of the Book of Jeremiah is that the entire work belongs to Jeremiah and his amanuensis, Baruch. The poetic oracles² and prose sermons no doubt were dictated by Jeremiah to Baruch or, in some cases, recorded by Baruch as they were preached. The biographical materials were likely written by Baruch and were based on his own observations or conversations with Jeremiah. The prophet himself was ultimately responsible for all the material in the book with the possible exception of chapter 52.

1. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 244. For further discussion of the value and purpose of this chapter see the introductory material preceding the comments on chapter 52.

2. An oracle is a Divine utterance which the prophet as the spokesman and messenger of God announces publicly in the name of God. Generally an oracle is introduced by the formula "Thus says the Lord" and concluded by "oracle of the Lord."

B. The Style of Writing

A careful study of the prophetic books of the Old Testament reveals that each of the inspired authors wrote in his own distinctive style. Much has been written on the style of Jeremiah, some of it complementary, much of it derogatory. The present writer finds it impossible to make pronouncements on whether Jeremiah's style is good or bad, or whether it is superior or inferior to that of other prophets. Jeremiah is Jeremiah. He has his own distinctive style of writing. His book has profoundly influenced the course of Jewish and Christian thought. Long after the subjective evaluations of literary critics are forgotten the Book of Jeremiah will continue to be studied and appreciated. Another point needs to be made as well: the fact that certain sections of Jeremiah strike modern scholars as stylistically inferior—e.g., the prose sections—does not mean that his contemporaries regarded it as bad Hebrew. Thus modern students of the book should be very cautious in passing value judgments on the style of this ancient document. Nevertheless as one reads the Book of Jeremiah he cannot help but notice certain rather prominent stylistic characteristics:

1. *Absence of ornament*

Cheyne describes the style of Jeremiah as one of "unpretending simplicity."¹ One does not find in Jeremiah the glowing language and vivacity which characterizes the Book of Isaiah; he is not the "artist in words" as was his predecessor. This is not to say that Jeremiah was inferior to Isaiah; such an evaluation would be grossly unfair. The men lived in different ages; they spoke to and wrote for different audiences and most important, they had different personalities. Jeremiah was preemi-

1. Cheyne, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

JEREMIAH

nently a man of sorrows; perhaps this accounts for his unadorned simplicity. In the desperate times in which he lived flowery oratory would have been entirely out of place. The times called for clear, lucid, direct, concise and easily understood discourse. When placed within the proper historical context the style of Jeremiah has a beauty of its own.

Perhaps one should not speak of a Jeremian style, for actually variations of style can be detected within the book. One's style of writing or speaking is determined in large measure by external factors. Those whose ministry extends over several decades may be shocked in later years to read what was written in their youth. In the case of Jeremiah the earlier oracles display a calmness and uniformity of tone; his later oracles show traces of his personal suffering.

2. Frequent repetition

Jeremiah's ministry was quite lengthy and his message throughout was basically the same. Given these circumstances repetition is to be expected. What modern preacher does not on occasion repeat himself? The repetitions in Jeremiah may be categorized under the following headings:

a) Certain figures of speech are repeated in the book. Among these are the figures of the brazen wall (1:18; 15:20), the turned back (2:27; 7:24; 32:33), fury that burns like fire (4:4; 21:12), the water of gall (7:14; 9:15; 23:15), the incurable wound (15:18; 30:12) and rotten figs (24:8; 29:17). The favorite figure employed by the prophet is that of the travailing woman (4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6). Another prominent figure is that of carcasses being given over to the fowl of the heavens (7:33; 19:7; 16:4; 34:20).

JEREMIAH: THE BOOK

b) The prophet uses stereotyped formulae throughout the book. He uses the expression "rising up early" at least a dozen times to express the idea of earnestness. Other favorite expressions are: "walking in the stubbornness of the heart" (7 times); "the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride (4 times); "sword, famine, pestilence" (18 times); and "fear on every side" (4 times).

c) Entire verses are repeated. At least fourteen¹ examples of such repetition can be observed in the book as the following chart illustrates.

VERSE REPETITIONS IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (1) 1:18, 19 and 15:20 | (9) 11:20 and 20:12 |
| (2) 2:28 and 11:13 | (10) 15:2 and 48:11 |
| (3) 5:9, 29 and 9:9 | (11) 16:14, 15 and 23:7, 8 |
| (4) 6:13-15 and 8:10-12 | (12) 17:25 and 22:4 |
| (5) 6:22-24 and 50:41-43 | (13) 23:19, 20 and 30:23, 24 |
| (6) 7:14 and 26:6 | (14) 30:11 and 46:28 |
| (7) 7:31-33 and 19:5-7; 32:35 | (15) 31:35, 36 and 33:25, 26 |
| (8) 10:12-16 and 51:15-19 | |
-

As far as literary form is concerned the repetitions in Jeremiah fall into no clear pattern. Poetic sayings are repeated in similar, or sometimes quite different, connections; the same is true of the prose sayings. The two parts of the doublet may differ in literary form. One may be prose and the other poetry; one may be part of a prose sermon, and the other part of the biographical narrative.

3. *Influences of earlier writers*

Jeremiah was influenced in no small measure by his predecessors. On account of quoting so frequently from other prophets Jeremiah has been charged with a lack of

1. Several other examples of virtual repetition could be cited, e.g., 15:13-14 and 17:3-4; 4:5 and 8:14; 8:15 and 14:19; and 49:19-21 and 50:44-46.

JEREMIAH

originality. But the truth of the matter is that this man was so saturated with the word of God that he unconsciously utilized the language of the great spiritual giants of Israel's past. It may even be at times that he deliberately quoted the earlier prophets in order to vindicate himself by showing a continuity between what he was preaching and what the prophets of God had always preached *viz.*, that idolatry and disobedience to the covenant would lead to national overthrow. However Jeremiah never allowed himself to become the slave of another man's style. The imprint of his own personality is upon all of his prophecies.¹

Jeremiah was especially fond of quoting the two great prophets of the eighth century, Isaiah and Hosea. The influence of Isaiah is clearly present in at least six passages of the Book of Jeremiah² and because of the similarities in language and thought Hosea has been called by one scholar "the Jeremiah of the Northern Kingdom." A parallel listing of some of the similar passages in the writings of these two men of God will clearly indicate the influence which Hosea exerted on Jeremiah.

Hosea 14:1, 4

O Israel, return unto the LORD your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. I will heal their backsliding . . .

Hosea 10:12

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness; break up your fallow ground . . .

Hosea 6:10

In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing: there whoredom is found in Ephraim, Israel is defiled.

Jeremiah 3:22

Return, you backsliding children, I will heal your backslidings.

Jeremiah 4:3

. . . Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

Jeremiah 5:30

an astonishing and horrible thing is come to pass in the land.

1. Clyde T. Francisco, *Introducing the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), p. 142.

2. Compare Isaiah 4:2; 11:1 and Jeremiah 23:5, 6; 33:15; Isaiah 13, 47 and Jeremiah 50-51; Isaiah 15 and Jeremiah 48; Isaiah 40:19, 20 and Jeremiah 10:3-5; Isaiah 42:16 and Jeremiah 31:9.

3. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

JEREMIAH: THE BOOK

18:13

. . . the virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.

23:14

In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies . . .

Hosea 4:2

There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery . . .

Hosea 14:9

Who is wise, that he may understand these things? prudent that he may know them?

Hosea 8:13

. . . but the LORD accepts them not: now will He remember their iniquity and visit their sins . . .

Hosea 9:9

. . . he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins.

Hosea 3:5

Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king . . .

Hosea 2:23

. . . and I will say to them that were not My people, You are My people; and they shall say, You are my God.

Jeremiah 7:9

Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal . . .

Jeremiah 9:12

Who is the wise man, that may understand this? and who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD has spoken, that he may declare it?

Jeremiah 14:10

. . . therefore the LORD does not accept them; now will he remember their iniquities, and visit their sins.

Jeremiah 30:9

But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.

Jeremiah 30:22

And you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

4. *The mixture of prose and poetry*

The Book of Jeremiah contains prose and poetry in nearly equal proportions. While the literary critics may be correct in evaluating the poetry of Jeremiah as artistically inferior to that of the eighth century prophets, Jeremiah's poetry is nonetheless outstanding. His poetry combines "pathos with picturesque imagery."¹ Jeremiah

1. Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

JEREMIAH

wrote some of the most sympathetic pages of the Old Testament.¹ But whatever his literary merits or demerits Jeremiah deserves the highest honor for his conscientiousness. Cheyne has correctly observed: "his greatest poem is his life."²

5. *Use of numerous figures of speech*

Jeremiah uses numerous images and figures of speech. He is particularly fond of similes drawn from the realm of nature (2:23; 8:7, etc.) and from the scenes of everyday life (6:29f.; 18:2ff). Frequently the figures are only partially developed as the prophet jumps back and forth from figurative to concrete description.³

6. *Preoccupation with mourning and funeral rites*

The Weeping Prophet has a great deal to say about mourning and lamentation. In several passages he calls upon others to lament the destruction of the nation (4:8; 9:17, 18, 20) or her "lovers" (22:20). In one passage Jeremiah discourages further weeping over the death of Josiah and instructs the people rather to mourn over the banishment of king Jehoahaz (22:10-11). He calls upon the "shepherds" of the nation to lament the impending slaughter of the flock (25:34). In his oracles concerning Moab and Ammon he rhetorically calls upon these Gentiles to mourn (48:20; 49:3). There are numerous descriptions of and allusions to lamentation in the book in addition to these direct exhortations. He vividly describes the lamentation and consternation caused by a terrible drought (14:2-3) and the wail of shepherds when

1. Cheyne, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

2. *Ibid.*

3. To this point the discussion of the style of Jeremiah has been developed along lines suggested by A. Streane, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Together with Lamentations* (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Cambridge: University Press, 1903), pp. xxviii-xxx.

their pasture has been destroyed (25:36). He places a lament on the lips of the captives in Babylon (8:19) and visualizes a day when rebellious Israel would return to God with bitter tears of shame and remorse (3:21; 31:9; 50:4). Jeremiah refers to the cry of lamentation which would arise over the destruction of foreign nations (46:12; 47:2; 48:4-5; 49:21; 50:46). When Jeremiah contemplated the disaster which was about to befall the peoples of Syria-Palestine he was overcome by grief. He mourned bitterly for his own people (4:19-21; 8:18-9:1; 9:10; 10:19; 13:17; 14:17-18); but he shed tears as well for the people of Moab (48:31-32, 36). This preoccupation with lamentation is one of the unique characteristics of the Book of Jeremiah. The mind of this prophet "was set on a minor key, and his temper was elegiac."¹

7. *The use of the rhetorical question*

The Book of Jeremiah is filled with rhetorical questions and the use of this device must be regarded as characteristic of the literary and oratorical style of this prophet. At times God uses rhetorical questions in speaking to Jeremiah (3:6; 7:17; 12:5). Jeremiah uses this device to rebuke and exhort the people of Judah. At least ten verses in chapter 2 alone contain rhetorical questions. Sometimes such questions are placed on the lips of the people.² Rhetorical questions are also used by Jeremiah in his prayers (e.g., 15:18; 18:20).

8. *Use of quotations*

Another favorite technique of Jeremiah is the use of quotations. In at least three verses God quotes Himself (7:23; 11:4, 7). Jeremiah frequently quotes the words of the people to whom he was preaching. Such

1. Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 576.

2. 8:19; 13:22; 16:20; 21:13; 22:8.

JEREMIAH

quotes reveal the rebellion (6:16, 17; 5:12), hypocrisy (5:2, 7:4, 10) and hostility (11:19, 21) of the people of his day. In at least one passage Jeremiah quotes the religious leaders of the nation (14:14). Finally there is what might be called the projected quotation where Jeremiah anticipated what the people will be saying once God's judgment has been poured out upon them (5:19; 8:14, 15, 19).

II. THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK

A. Early Editions of Jeremiah

Considering the turbulence of the times it is indeed remarkable that any records written during the early sixth century have survived.¹ It is nothing short of a miracle of God's providence that men can have access to the writings of this great prophet.² Perhaps more is known about the process of producing the Book of Jeremiah than any other book in the Old Testament. It seems clear from internal evidence that the book went through at least three distinct stages before reaching its present form.

1. *The original roll*

The first edition of the Book of Jeremiah appeared in 604 B.C. At the command of the Lord, Jeremiah dictated to his scribe Baruch portions of the sermons he had been preaching for some twenty-three years. Nearly everyone who has written a commentary or introduction to the Book of Jeremiah has attempted to reconstruct the contents of that original document. Such efforts are really futile, virtually amounting to nothing more than guesswork. The following cautious conclusions about

1. H. T. Kuist, "Jeremiah," *Layman's Bible Commentary* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960), pp. 12, 13.

2. C. Paul Gray, "The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah," *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966), p. 311.

the original roll are based upon what is said about it in chapter 36: (a) The scroll contained a selection from or a digest of the sermons of the prophet preached between 627 and 605 B.C. It is unlikely that it contained any narratives or reports of incidents in the prophet's life. (b) The sermons in the scroll must have been exclusively or at least primarily of a threatening character. (c) These messages were directed against foreign nations as well as against Judah and Jerusalem. (d) In comparison to the length of the present book the first edition must have been relatively brief for it was read three times in a single day (36:10, 15, 21) with significant intervals between each reading. The first edition of Jeremiah was utterly destroyed by the tyrant king Jehoiakim but was reproduced in an expanded form that very same year. In addition to the material contained in the roll which Jehoiakim destroyed this second roll contained "many like words" (36:32).

2. *Subsequent editions*

The history of the Book of Jeremiah after 604 B.C. is obscure. At least one (possibly more) edition of the book preceded the final form of the text as it has been preserved in the Hebrew Bible. Probably an edition of the book was published by Baruch in Egypt after the death of Jeremiah. This Egyptian edition of Jeremiah would have been considerably larger than the scroll which was destroyed and reproduced in 604 B.C. It would have contained in addition to the earlier material all the accounts of the life and ministry of Jeremiah subsequent to 604 B.C. These accounts cover the last twenty years of the prophet's ministry. If this edition of Jeremiah contained chapter 52—and this appears likely—then a clue is available as to the date of its publication. The Book of Jeremiah closes with an account of the release

of king Jehoiachin from imprisonment in Babylon in 560 B.C. The Egyptian edition of Jeremiah must have been published shortly after this.

When Baruch decided to leave Egypt the Jews there must have made a hasty copy of the Book of Jeremiah to retain in their own possession. Baruch seems to have emigrated to Babylon. There he issued the final, completed form of the Book of Jeremiah. Baruch may have rearranged the material in the Egyptian edition and may possibly have added some new Jeremian material (e.g., 33:14-26). It is this Babylonian edition of Jeremiah which appears in the Hebrew Bible and which has been translated in the standard English versions of the Old Testament. Thus at the time of Baruch's death two editions of the Book of Jeremiah were in circulation, a shorter and incomplete edition in Egypt and the comprehensive and final edition in Babylonia.

B. The Problem of the Septuagint

The Greek translation of Jeremiah is peculiar in several respects. It differs from the standard Hebrew Book of Jeremiah in both content and form. To be specific the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX) differs from the Hebrew in at least four ways:

1. The Septuagint is about one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew text. This means that about twenty-seven hundred words which are found in the Hebrew text are not represented in the Greek version.¹ These omissions range in length from a word or two up to an entire section (e.g., 33:14-26). Most of the omissions in the Greek text are trifling. Some, perhaps many, of them may be attributed to the caprice, ignorance or carelessness of those who translated Jeremiah into Greek.² But some

1. Giesebrecht cited by Bright, *op. cit.*, p. cxxiii. The Septuagint also adds about one hundred words that are not represented in the Hebrew text.

2. Naglesbach, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

JEREMIAH: THE BOOK

of the omissions appear to be systematic and deliberate.¹ This would suggest that the Septuagint translators had before them a *different* Hebrew copy of Jeremiah, one which was considerably shorter than the Hebrew copy that has survived. It is interesting that among the Dead Sea scrolls, texts of Jeremiah were found which support the shorter version of the book as well as the longer.²

2. The Greek version of Jeremiah has a different arrangement of sections within the book. The section of oracles against foreign nations which is placed at the end of the book in the standard Hebrew text (chapters 46-51) is placed in the middle of the book in the Septuagint (after 25:13).

3. Even *within* the various sections of the book the Greek version sometimes arranges the material in a different order. In the Septuagint the oracles against the foreign nations are not in the same order in which they appear in the Hebrew text. The following chart illustrates the differences between the Hebrew and Greek arrangements of these oracles.

THE ORDER OF THE ORACLES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS

Position	Hebrew Arrangement	Reference	Greek Arrangement	Reference
1	Egypt	Chap. 46	Elam	25:15-20
2	Philistia	Chap. 47	Egypt	Chap. 26
3	Moab	Chap. 48	Babylon	Chaps. 26-28
4	Ammon	49:1-6	Philistia	29:1-7
5	Edom	49:7-22	Edom	29:7-22
6	Damascus	49:23-27	Ammon	30:1-5
7	Kedar	49:28-33	Kedar	30:6-11
8	Elam	49:34-39	Damascus	30:12-16
9	Babylon	Chaps. 50-51	Moab	Chap. 31

1. For example, doublets are systematically eliminated in their second occurrence.

2. Fohrer, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

JEREMIAH

4. Some blocks of materials (e.g., Jeremiah 33:14-16) which are found in the Hebrew text are absent from the Greek version.

No entirely satisfactory explanation of the differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts of Jeremiah has yet been put forward. This much is clear: The Greek version must have been translated from a Hebrew manuscript which differed markedly from the standard Hebrew manuscripts of the book. Since the Septuagint was translated in Alexandria Egypt the translators must have used the text of Jeremiah which was most popular in that area. That text would be the hastily copied scroll of Jeremiah which was made when Baruch emigrated to Babylon. This abbreviated form of the Book of Jeremiah became the basis of the Septuagint translation. Some have held that the Septuagint actually represents a superior text of the book. On the whole, however, the Hebrew text is superior.¹

The arrangement of the materials within the Hebrew text is also superior to that of the Septuagint. The Alexandrian translators apparently took great liberty in re-arranging the materials in what they considered to be a more logical order.² Perhaps the oracles against foreign nations were inserted in the middle of chapter 25 in order to make the Book of Jeremiah conform in structure to the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel. In any case the placement of these oracles between 25:13 and 25:15 is quite unnatural, for the chapters should certainly have followed and not preceded the enumeration of nations in 25:15-26 to which they refer.³ The principle followed by the Septuagint translators in revising the order of the oracles against the nations can no longer be determined. Perhaps they were influenced by the political situation of their

1. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

2. *Ibid.*

3. A. B. Davidson, "Jeremiah the Prophet," *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1909), II, 574.

own day. In the mid-third century when the Book of Jeremiah was translated into Greek the Parthian empire had taken over the ancient territory of Elam and had given evidence that they were a power to be reckoned with. Babylonia was one of the major possessions of the Seleucid empire and Egypt was the center of the powerful Ptolemies. Because of their prestige and political importance Elam, Egypt and Babylon may have been placed first in the list by the Septuagint translators. What principle was followed in arranging the other six oracles is unclear. Be that as it may the order in the Hebrew text corresponds in the main to that of the nations enumerated in 25:15-26 and has all the marks of originality.¹

C. Canonicity of the Book

The term "canonicity" refers to the *recognition* of a writing as inspired and authoritative Scripture. In the case of the Book of Jeremiah such recognition must have come shortly after the publication of the book. History had vindicated the predictions of Jeremiah; no one could question any longer that he was a man of God. The earliest reference to the actual use of the Book of Jeremiah is recorded in Daniel 9:2. Just after the fall of Babylon, in the first year of Darius the Mede, Daniel was studying Jeremiah's famous seventy years prophecy. It was during his meditation upon this prophecy that Daniel himself received a revelation of the first magnitude, his famous seventy weeks revelation. The Book of Chronicles, probably compiled and written by Ezra the priest and scribe, furnishes evidence of the second use of Jeremiah. In the closing chapter of Chronicles a reference is made again to the seventy years prophecy (II Chronicles 36:21). Thus the Chronicler as well as Daniel recognized that Jeremiah

1. Davidson, *loc. cit.*

JEREMIAH

spoke the word of the Lord and he made use of the writing of that prophet.

The earliest testimony to the canonicity of the Book of Jeremiah outside the Old Testament is found in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (49:6-7). Here Ben Sira, the author of this important book, states that the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. was a fulfillment of the predictions of Jeremiah. Ben Sira, then, in ca. 280 B.C.¹ recognized Jeremiah as a prophet of God and consequently must have regarded the Book of Jeremiah as inspired Scripture. Since Ben Sira obviously speaks as a well-educated and pious man, one must conclude that his attitude toward Jeremiah was the attitude prevalent among the Jews of his day.

D. Placement of the Book

Probably every Sunday School child in memorizing the books of the Bible has learned that the five books of Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel. This arrangement of the books is based upon that of the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, the so-called Septuagint version. A Jewish child memorizing the books of the Hebrew Bible would learn that the Latter Prophets consists of four books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve. Under this system of counting the Minor Prophets are lumped together as one book. Daniel and Lamentations are not found among the prophets in the Hebrew Bible; they are counted among the so-called *Kethubim* or Writings.

In both ancient and modern Bibles, in the Hebrew, Greek and English arrangements of Old Testament books, Jeremiah stands alongside Isaiah and Ezekiel. But while these three books—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel—have

1. Ben Sira is usually dated at about 180 B.C. However, when all the evidence is sifted a date for the book at 280 B.C. is certainly possible if not probable.

always stood together, they have not always stood in that order. Certain evidence exists that the Book of Jeremiah once stood at the head of the Major Prophets. In the Talmud listing of Old Testament books Jeremiah is named immediately after Kings. Furthermore, a large number of Hebrew manuscripts place Jeremiah in the initial position.¹

E. Jeremiah in the New Testament

For the Christian, the attitude of Jesus Christ toward the Old Testament is of supreme importance. No one can question the fact that the Lord and His apostles regarded the Book of Jeremiah as inspired Scripture and an integral part of that group of sacred writings known collectively as the Old Testament. There are, according to one estimate, ninety-six allusions in the New Testament to the Book of Jeremiah.² Four passages from Jeremiah are directly quoted in the New Testament:

a) Commenting on the death of the innocents in Bethlehem Matthew quoted Jeremiah 31:15.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she would not be comforted, because they are not (Matthew 2:17).

b) When Jesus drove the money-changers from the Temple He quoted with an authoritative formula Jeremiah 7:11.

And He said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a den of robbers (Matthew 21:13).³

1. H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament* (second edition; London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 237.

2. United Bible Society Greek New Testament. The Nestle Greek New Testament lists fifty-five allusions. More than thirty of the allusions are in the Book of Revelation.

3. Also found in Mark 11:17 and Luke 19:46.

JEREMIAH

c) Using that same formula, "it is written" the Apostle Paul gives an interpretive quotation or paraphrase of Jeremiah 9:24: "He that glories, let him glory in the Lord" (I Corinthians 1:31).

d) The writer of Hebrews quotes at length from Jeremiah 31:31-34 in two passages (Hebrews 8:8-10; 10:16, 17) and attributes the words directly to God. Here is the inspired interpretation of the important New Covenant passage in Jeremiah.

In one passage Matthew quotes Zechariah 11:12, 13 and attributes the quotation to Jeremiah the prophet.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced whom certain of the children of Israel did price; and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me (Matthew 27:9, 10).

Many different solutions have been proposed for this difficulty. Some think that a scribe has inserted the name of Jeremiah into the Matthew passage. Others think that Jeremiah actually spoke the words here attributed to him and then they were subsequently written down by Zechariah. However the simplest solution is that Matthew is quoting a *section* of the Old Testament rather than a book. Jeremiah originally stood first among the prophetic books. What Matthew meant was that the relevant passage was found in that section of the Old Testament which had Jeremiah at its head.¹

1. During the course of his debate with the atheist Robert Owen, an anonymous questioner submitted in writing a number of questions to Alexander Campbell among which was one question pertaining to the quote here under discussion. Mr. Campbell's answer on that occasion was essentially the same as the answer here proposed. See *The Evidences of Christianity* (Cincinnati: Standard, n.d.), pp. 359-60.

III. THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

A. Types of Literature

Four basic types of material are to be found in the Book of Jeremiah: poetic sayings, the confessions, biographical prose, and prose discourses. The four types of literature are found comingled through the various parts of the book. Even though the recognition of these literary types is not a key to the arrangement of materials in Jeremiah it is nonetheless a useful tool in understanding the book.

The greater part of the poetry in Jeremiah belongs to the first literary type, the poetic saying or prophetic oracle. Most of the material found in the pre-exilic prophetic books falls into this category. In this type of utterance the prophet speaks as the mouthpiece of the Lord. He uses throughout the first person but the "I" is the Lord, not the prophet. Such an oracle is usually introduced by a formula such as "Thus says the Lord" or "Hear the word of the Lord." These oracles come from all periods of the prophet's public ministry with the heaviest incidence coming in the reign of king Jehoiakim.

The second type of literature in Jeremiah is virtually unique in prophetic books. It is called by some autobiography; by others, documents of self-revelation; by still others "the confessions." Here the prophet lays bare his most intimate feelings. In these passages Jeremiah uses the first person but the "I" is not the Lord; it is the prophet himself. It is most difficult to imagine that these lines of self-revelation were ever publicly spoken. At some state of the writing of Jeremiah—probably in the second edition of the book—these verses were skillfully interwoven with the oracles of judgment against Judah. Jeremiah records for subsequent generations his thundering

JEREMIAH

denunciations and threats of destruction. At the same time he reveals the personal agony which he experienced all the while he was publicly preaching doom. The material which falls into the second literary type may be further sub-divided into (1) the confessions or complaints (11:18—12:6; 15:10f., 15-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13, 14-18); and (2) the laments (e.g., 4:19-21; 5:3-5; 8:18—9:1).

The third type of literature in the Book of Jeremiah is the prose discourse. Most of the passages in this category begin with God addressing Jeremiah and giving him directions as to what he is to say and do (e.g., 7:2, 16, 27f.; 11:1-17; 16:1-13; 18:1-12; 19:1-13). Sometimes the introductory address has been omitted and only the prose sermon remains (e.g., 16:14-18; 31:27-34; 38:17; chapter 33). The prose discourse is found in all parts of the book and is often intermingled with the poetic material. As much as twenty-five percent of the content of the Book of Jeremiah falls into this category.

Biography constitutes the fourth category of literature in the Book of Jeremiah. While other prophetic books contain snatches of this type of material, large blocks of such material is found in this book. This narrative material refers to Jeremiah in the third person. The individual sections of this material are usually introduced by precise chronological data (e.g., 26:1; 38:1; 36:1) though sometimes such data are omitted (e.g., 14:14—20:6). Often times the biographical material serves to provide a framework for one of the prose sermons of Jeremiah. Some critics believe that the creator of this material, the "Biographer" as he is sometimes called, lived several generations after the time of Jeremiah.¹ However it is more likely that Baruch is responsible for recording

1. H. G. May, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 61 (1942), 139-55.

JEREMIAH: THE BOOK

and preserving this material probably at the direction and possibly the dictation of Jeremiah himself.¹

B. Arrangement of the Material

One of the most difficult problems facing the student of Jeremiah is that of the arrangement of the materials within the book. Francisco regards the arrangement of the book as the most confused in the Old Testament.² That the book is not chronologically arranged can be seen in the following chart which indicates the various time notices in the book. Eleven of these notices are explicit

CHRONOLOGICAL NOTICES IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

In the Reign of JOSIAH	In the Reign of JEHOIAKIM	In the Reign of ZEDEKIAH	After the Fall of Jerusalem
1:2 (25:3) 3:6			
	22:18	21:1, 2	
	25:1 26:1	24:1, 8	
		27:3, 12 28:1 29:3 32:1 34:2	
	35:1 36:1, 9		
		37:1, 3 38:5 39:1, 2	
			41:1 43:7, 8 44:1
	45:1		
		49:34 51:59	

1. John Bright (*op. cit.*, p. lxxvii) has pointed out that the biographical accounts cover the period from 609 (Chapter 26) to the end of Jeremiah's career. Baruch is known to have been the secretary of Jeremiah from at least 605 B.C. (Chapter 36, 45) until after 587 B.C. (43:3).

2. Francisco, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

JEREMIAH

as to the particular year of a king's reign; the remainder mention events which can be dated precisely by other means.

At times the Book of Jeremiah is chronological (Chapters 37-44) and at times it is topical (Chapters 46-51). Chapters 1-6 seem to be in sequence; but from chapter 7 on, no real systematic pattern can be observed. Even a superficial reading of the book reveals that materials from widely different periods of Jeremiah's life have been placed side by side. The undated material presents still another problem. Where do these chapters fit chronologically in the ministry of the prophet? Many conjectures have been put forward but to this day scholars are not in agreement as to how the Book of Jeremiah reached its present form.¹

Some of the most constructive work on the problem of the arrangement of the materials in the Book of Jeremiah has been done by J. Barton Payne.² This scholar believes that the book is arranged topically and that it grew with each of the three or four successive editions which preceded the final comprehensive scroll. As Jeremiah continued to preach he added to the writings that ultimately made up the book which bears his name. Payne takes each of the chronologically displaced units in the book and offers an explanation both as to the time and the reason that unit was placed in its present position. Payne believes that both the original scroll and the scroll reproduced in 604 B.C. were arranged chronologically. However, when the third edition of the book was produced in Egypt certain logical or topical supplements were inserted at various places in the document. Certainly the arrangement of the material as it stands was suitable for

1. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

2. "The Arrangement of Jeremiah's Prophecies," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, VII (Fall, 1964), 120-130.

the purpose of the book which was to lead God's people to repentance and to reconciliation with Him (36:3, 7).

Any attempt to outline the Book of Jeremiah in detail must result only in an approximate division of the text. While the broad divisions of the book are evident, wide disagreement exists as to how the material is arranged within those portions of the book. The main divisions of the Book of Jeremiah come at the end of chapters 1, 25, 45, and 51.

Chapter one is introductory to the entire Book of Jeremiah. It contains an account of the prophet's call and a summary of his prophet activity in prospect.

Chapters 2-25 are for the most part a collection of Jeremiah's oracles or prophecies down to 605 B.C. (25:1). This broad statement must, however, be qualified by noting that some biographical material is found in these chapters as well as some material (e.g., 21:1-10) which must be dated *after* 605 B.C. Chapters 2-25 are *mainly* poetical, *mainly* oracular, *mainly* national, and for this reason Robert Pfeiffer designates this division of the book as "the words of Jeremiah." Most of the material in this division of the book was dictated to Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, in 605 B.C. when the Lord commanded the prophet to commit his words to writing.

Chapters 26-45 contain primarily biographical material relating to the ministry of Jeremiah after 605 B.C. Again some qualification of this generalization is necessary. Excerpts from some of Jeremiah's sermons are found in this section as is some material dating prior to 605 B.C. (e.g., chapter 26). This section, which is mainly prose, has been called by Pfeiffer "the biography of Jeremiah." The materials here were likely compiled by Baruch.

Chapters 46-51 are prophecies against foreign nations which were written at various times during the ministry of Jeremiah. Perhaps at one time this section of Jeremiah

JEREMIAH

circulated separately. In the Septuagint version this whole section is placed after 25:13.

Chapter 52 is an appendix added to the Book of Jeremiah apparently to show how some of the prophecies of Jeremiah were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem and exile of many Jews. Others see the purpose of this chapter as a kind of introduction to the Book of Lamentations which seems at one time to have been a part of the Book of Jeremiah. Chapter 52 ends on a note of hope with the account of the release of Jehoiachin in 560 B.C.

Perhaps all that has been said in the previous paragraphs concerning the arrangement of the Book of Jeremiah can be summarized in the following chart.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH	
Introduction	
The Call and Commission	
Chapter 1	
Chapters 2-25	Chapters 26-45
Mainly prior to 605 B.C.	Mainly after 605 B.C.
Mainly National	Mainly Personal
Mainly Oracles	Mainly Narratives
Mainly Poetry	Mainly Prose
The Words of Jeremiah	The Biography of Jeremiah
Dictated by Jeremiah	Compiled by Baruch
The Oracles against Foreign Nations	
Chapters 46-51	
Historical Appendix	
Chapter 52	

REVIEW OF CHAPTER THREE

I. True and False

- 1. Jeremiah is the longest of the prophetic books.
- 2. Baruch is the real author of the Book of Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH: THE BOOK

- _____ 3. Baruch first appears as the associate of Jeremiah during the reign of king Jehoiakim.
- _____ 4. Both Baruch and Jeremiah were forced to emigrate to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah.
- _____ 5. Liberal and conservative scholars agree that Jeremiah and Baruch are responsible for all the material in the Book of Jeremiah.
- _____ 6. There is no internal evidence to justify regarding chapter 52 as non-Jeremian.
- _____ 7. Jeremiah 52 was borrowed directly from II Kings.
- _____ 8. Frequent repetition is one of the stylistic features of the book.
- _____ 9. Jeremiah was most influenced by Amos, the eighth-century prophet.
- _____ 10. Most of the Book of Jeremiah is written in prose.
- _____ 11. The earliest edition of the Book of Jeremiah was placed in the ark of the covenant for safe keeping.
- _____ 12. The original roll of Jeremiah was composed in 605-604 B.C.
- _____ 13. The last event recorded in the Book of Jeremiah is the release of king Jehoiachin from captivity.
- _____ 14. The shorter Greek version of Jeremiah offers a more original text than do the Hebrew manuscripts.
- _____ 15. Jeremiah always follows Isaiah in Hebrew manuscripts.

II. Fill in the Blanks

- 1. _____ stands first among the oracles against foreign nations in the Hebrew, while _____ occupies that position in the Greek.
- 2. The Septuagint is _____ shorter than the Hebrew Book of Jeremiah.
- 3. In the Greek version the oracles against foreign nations appear in the middle of chapter _____.

JEREMIAH

4. The first individual known to have read and studied the Book of Jeremiah was _____.
5. The first mention of Jeremiah outside the Old Testament is found in _____.
6. _____ passages from Jeremiah are quoted in the New Testament.
7. The most unique type of literature found in the Book of Jeremiah is _____.
8. The most natural divisions of the Book of Jeremiah occur at the end of chapters _____, _____, _____, and _____.

III. Points of Discussion.

1. Features of the style of Jeremiah.
2. Types of passages rejected by critics of Jeremiah.
3. Why Matthew quotes Zechariah and assigns the passage to Jeremiah.
4. Explanation of the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of the book.
5. The history of the writing of the Book of Jeremiah.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CALL OF THE PROPHET 1:1-19

The prophets of Israel were launched upon their prophetic career 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 and so he volunteered: "Here am I! Send me!" (Isaiah 6). Ezekiel saw the dazzling and mysterious throne-chariot of God and from this experience he came to realize that he was to preach the word of God (Ezekiel 2:8ff.). An essential mark of a true prophet and "a primary element in the prophetic consciousness"¹ was the assurance of a divine call. "Logically and chronologically the prophet's career begins with a call."² It is therefore most appropriate that the account of the call of Jeremiah stands first in the book.

I. PREFACE 1:1-3

TRANSLATION

The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests which were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, (2) to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. (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

1. R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944), p. 88.

2. Lindsay B. Longacre, *A Prophet of the Spirit* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1922), p. 92.

son of Josiah, king of Judah, until Jerusalem was carried away captive in the fifth month.

COMMENTS

A great deal of information is packed into the brief preface with which the Book of Jeremiah opens. Most of this information has been sifted and weighed in the preceding pages. It remains here to briefly take note of the literary, personal, geographical and chronological data contained in the first three verses.

The superscription opens with the formal title of the book: The Words of Jeremiah. Though the book contains a great deal of biographical narrative the emphasis throughout is on the preaching of Jeremiah. He was first and foremost a preacher of the word.

Concerning Jeremiah personally the superscription relates three facts: (1) That he was of the family of Hilkiah; (2) that he was a priest before he was a prophet; and (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 home town and serving periodically at the Temple in Jerusalem. But God 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.

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 the Lord 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?¹ Or did they receive their oracles while in complete possession of their rational consciousness?² It is interesting to notice that the New Testament is silent as to the manner in which God spoke to the prophets. Peter declared: "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21). To go beyond this simple statement is to become involved in useless speculation.

The superscription 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. The year of Jeremiah's call is pin-pointed as the thirteenth year of king Josiah. This was one year *after* Josiah began to purge Jerusalem and Judah and five years *before* the discovery of the lost law book.

The superscription 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 (Jeremiah 41-44). The solution to this problem probably lies in the fact that there was more than one edition of the Book of Jeremiah during and shortly after the lifetime of the prophet. See earlier discussion. It is of course possible that the superscription 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.

1. 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), II, 28-30.

2. Such was the position of Origen, the Christian Apologist. See "Origen against Celsus," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), IV, 611-13.

II. THE CALL EXTENDED 1:4-10

TRANSLATION

(4) Then the word of the LORD came unto me saying, (5) Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you were born I set you apart; a prophet to the nations I have appointed you. (6) Then I said, Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth. (7) But the LORD said to me, Do not say, I am only a youth; but unto whom-ever I send you, go! and all which I have commanded you, speak! (8) Do not be afraid of them; for I am with you to deliver you (oracle of the LORD). (9) Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have placed My words in your mouth. (10) See, I have made you an overseer this day over the nations and kingdoms to uproot, tear down, destroy, and raze; to build and to plant.

COMMENTS

The call of Jeremiah is disappointing to those who love the spectacular and melodramatic. 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 flashing and 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. First comes the divine summons (vv. 4, 5) and then, as is

usual in such call narratives, the hesitant human response (v. 6). This in turn is followed by divine assurance to the reluctant prophet (vv. 7-10).

A. The Divine Summons 1:4, 5

The change from the third person used in the preface to the first person in verse four is striking and indicates that the following verses are autobiographical. The preface was probably prefixed to the book by Baruch the faithful secretary of Jeremiah. But the account of the prophetic call was either written by or dictated by the prophet himself. Two matters are of interest in considering the divine summons: (1) the time and manner of it (v. 4) and (2) the content of it (v. 5).

1. *The time and manner of it* (v. 4)

Verse 4 indicates that, from the human standpoint, the call and appointment of Jeremiah occurred in 627 B.C., "then" referring back to verse 2, the thirteenth year of Josiah. Looking on the call of Jeremiah from the divine standpoint, verse 5 indicates that his appointment long antedated the birth of the prophet. Scholars differ as to whether or not Jeremiah is here describing a visionary experience. The prophet does not say that he *saw* the Lord; rather he simply says "the word of the Lord came unto me." Did he hear the word of God with his mind or with his ears? The question can never be answered.

It must be emphasized that this was a genuine experience on the part of Jeremiah and not an imaginary one as claimed by some critics. It is God and not Jeremiah who took the initiative in this passage. The tasks to which God calls men are often unpleasant and arduous. Men are not eager to assume the responsibilities. Jeremiah claimed that God had spoken to him and amid the tumult and clamor of four decades he never wavered in that

claim. One may open the book at random and find the same theme note repeated time and again with only slight variation: "The word of the Lord came unto me"; "Thus said the Lord to me";¹ "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord." 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.

2. *The content of it* (v. 5)

The divine summons contained two essential elements: (1) an affirmation concerning the past; and (2) an intimation concerning the future.

a) An affirmation concerning the past. In the first part of Jeremiah's call experience the divine purpose for his life was revealed to him. God informs the prophet that before he was born he had been selected for the task to which he is now called. 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: "The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he has mentioned my name" (Isaiah 49:1b). The Psalmist David declared much the same thing when he 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" (Psalms 139:16). Samson was to be a Nazarite from the womb (Judges 13:5); John the Baptist was to be "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15); Paul declared that God had "separated" him "from his mother's womb" (Galatians 1:15).

At first glance, verse five seems to involve an almost mechanical notion of predestination. But this cannot be

1. Of the 359 occurrences of this phrase in the Old Testament, 157 are in the Book of Jeremiah. See J. G. S. Thomson, *The Word of the Lord in Jeremiah* (London: Tyndale, 1959), p. 6.

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.¹ Jeremiah's ordination had taken place in the mind of God before the prophet was born.

The distinction must be drawn between personal predestination and professional predestination.² 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 and definite predictions were made as to what this lad would accomplish (Judges 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 also 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.

Jeremiah needed to know at the outset the identity of the One who was commissioning him. In the four verbs of verse 5—formed, knew, set-apart, appointed—God 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.³

(1) *Creation: "I formed you."* The birth of Jeremiah was no accident. God takes credit for forming him in the belly of his mother. This verb "formed" is used here as in Genesis 2:7 where God formed man from the

1. Walter Harrelson, *Jeremiah: Prophet to the Nations* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1959), p. 17.

2. The concept of professional predestination also appears in literature outside Israel. Assurbanipal 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.

3. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

dust of the earth. God's creative activity is like that of a potter whose handiwork reveals his design (see Jeremiah 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 which would qualify him for the office of a prophet.

(2) *Election*: "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. But the Hebrew word is not limited to mere intellectual knowledge; it embraces also intimate knowledge. This is the word which 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 fellowshiped with him for long years before he was ever born. But the Hebrew verb "to know" involves still more. It 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.¹ When the Lord said "I knew you" it was virtually equivalent to His having said "I selected you." Finally, the verb "to know" implies commendatory knowledge. In Nahum 1:7 God *knows* those that trust Him. In Psalms 1:6 God *knows* the way of the godly. In both passages the implication is that God knows and

1. Kenneth L. Barker, "Jeremiah's Ministry and Ours," *Bibliotheca Sacra* CXXVII (July 1970), 226.

approves of the godly ways of the righteous. Thus God knew Jeremiah intellectually, intimately and selectively and approved of his life before he was ever born.

(3) *Consecration*: "*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 Old Testament. While the word here primarily involves "vocational sanctification," the idea of "ethical sanctification" is not altogether absent. God alone is holy. When the Old Testament speaks of a man being "made holy" or "sanctified" it means that a person is to be exclusively devoted to God for His purposes and in His service. It is interesting that Jesus speaks of Himself as "sanctified and sent into the world" by the Father (John 10:36).

(4) *Installation*: "*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 impartation of spiritual gifts which would enable one to perform the tasks for which he was appointed.¹ 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 verse 5 which is not positively antecedent to the birth of Jeremiah. Nevertheless, in the light of the implications of the preceding three verbs it seems highly likely that the appointment also took place in the mind of God before the prophet's birth.

From the time of his call there is planted in the heart of this young man the conviction that a combination of things happened even before his birth that were to be determining factors in his becoming a prophet. The endowments, and all the influences of heredity and education have shaped, molded and prepared his life for his prophetic

1. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

career. Jeremiah came to realize that everything that he had received or that had happened to him worked together under the hand of God to prepare him for the work to which he was being called. The consciousness that he had been planned of 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."¹ 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 which is affirmed by Biblical revelation in general may be confidently affirmed *viz.*, prescience on the part of God does not demand compulsion on the part of man.

b) *An intimation concerning the future.* A great deal is said later in the chapter concerning the future ministry of the prophet. Yet even here in the divine summons there is an intimation of the role that Jeremiah is to play in the divine scheme of things. Jeremiah is called to be a prophet. The Hebrew word translated "prophet" occurs some three hundred times in the Old Testament. The precise etymology of the word is uncertain. As the term is used in the Old Testament it means one who is "qualified, called, and commissioned to speak God's truth to men."² 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.³ A prophet was a man who spoke to men on behalf of God and to God on behalf of men.

1. Harry Freedman, *Jeremiah* ("Soncino Books of the Bible"; London: Soncino Press, 1949), p. 2.

2. K. M. Yates, *Preaching from the Prophets* (Nashville: Broadman, 1942), p. 2.

3. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

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 as "a prophet to the nations." His ministry was to embrace in a special way 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 verse need not mean that Jeremiah is to go to the nations to proclaim his message. It may only mean that he is to include the nations within the scope of his prophecies.¹ He was to be the exponent of God's world plan in that age of convulsion and upheaval. It is completely unnecessary, then, to follow those critics who dismiss the phrase "prophet to the nations" as not being originally part of the text, or who emend the text in any way. Jeremiah was to become a prophet to the nations and this intimation of his future work is a genuine part of his call experience.

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 (I Samuel 15). Elijah was commissioned by God to anoint Hazael as king of Damascus (I Kings 19:15) and this task was discharged by his successor Elisha (II Kings 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" (Jeremiah 28:8).

1. W. Vischer, "The Vocation of the Prophet to the Nations," *Interpretation*, IX (1955), 310-17.

2. The issues with which Jeremiah was to deal would of necessity involve 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 would involve an international upheaval in which some powers would go down and others be built up.¹ 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 chapters 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 which 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 verse 10 to describe Jeremiah's ministry to the nations.

5. Jeremiah did on one occasion 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."² 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.

1. Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

2. Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

B. The Human Response 1:6

In verse 6 the hesitation of Jeremiah is placed over against the decisiveness of God in the previous verses. 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. *The emotional response*

Staggered by the responsibility of his call Jeremiah relates that he heaved a deep sigh to God, "Ah!". It is the same desperate sigh uttered by Joshua after the disaster at Ai (Joshua 7:7) and by king Jehoram when he saw his army fainting for lack of water in the wilderness (II Kings 3:10). "Ah!" is not an entreaty that God should change the circumstances but is a lament that circumstances are what they are. It is a cry of alarm and pain. It is hesitation, not rebellion. Jeremiah was fond of the word and used it in three other passages (4:10; 14:13; 32:17). The weeping prophet was acquainted with the vocabulary of lamentation.

2. *The logical response*

Jeremiah's response to the divine summons is not purely on the emotional level. In the latter part of verse 6 he disclaims any adequate preparedness for the task to which God is calling him. To Jeremiah the call seemed impractical for two reasons: (1) his age, and (2) his lack of natural gifts.

a) *His age.* In the Hebrew word order the emphasis is on the youth of the prophet. The Hebrew word translated "youth" or "child" has a wide range of usage in the Old Testament. It is used of an infant (e.g., Exodus 2:6), a small boy (e.g., Genesis 21:12) or a young man

of marriageable age (e.g., Gen. 34:19). The same word is used of Joshua at age forty-five (Exodus 33:11) and of Solomon when he succeeded his father as king (I Kings 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 17 to 25. Jeremiah is not rejecting the heavenly call in this verse 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."

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 the twenty-fifth to the fiftieth year (Numbers 8:23-25). Later this age restriction was changed by David from twenty to fifty (I Chronicles 23:24-32). One family of Levites, the Kohathites, could only serve from ages 30 to 50 (Numbers 4:3, 23, 30-35, 47). 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.

b) The lack of natural abilities. Because of his youth Jeremiah felt a keen sense of inadequacy. Literally he says, "I do not know to speak" (i.e., "I do not know *how* 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 which would win the attention of vast throngs. He did not have the persuasive abilities necessary to sway the

1. Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

conduct of hostile multitudes. 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?

C. The Divine Assurance 1:7-10

When called of God Moses brought forth excuse after excuse; but Jeremiah only needed encouragement and reassurance. The Lord took steps to give that timid and hesitant young prophet the encouragement he needed. The assurance in these verses is fourfold: assurance of (1) direction, (2) deliverance, (3) power, and (4) authority.

1. *Assurance of divine direction* (v. 7)

The divine assurance begins not with promises of assistance but with a gentle rebuke and a reaffirmation of His will. "Do not say, I am only a youth." God is telling Jeremiah that his focus is wrong. Jeremiah had been looking at himself, whereas he should have had his focus on obedience to God. The emphasis throughout these verses 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 altogether 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 doubting and mistrusting the power of God to provide for His own work.

Jeremiah's focus needed to be lifted from self to God (v. 7). He need not worry about where he will go or what he shall 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" in verse 7 are not imperatives but imperfects in Hebrew and for this reason most translators render them in English as futures. But the imperfect sometimes has imperative force and 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.¹ 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 commands. He is not called to propagate the philosophies of men or to concoct and say what is clever and 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 divine deliverance (v. 8)

The Lord saw within the heart of Jeremiah a fear of those to whom he was sent. 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 and condemnation, and there was strong possibility of reprisal. "Do not be afraid of them," the Lord says to his prophet, "for I am with you." The Hebrew reverses the order and has it

1. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

"with you am I." What words of comfort. God spoke these words to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:12), Joshua at Jordan (Joshua 1:15) and Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:15). They are reminiscent of the parting words of Jesus: "Lo I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). The major point of emphasis here is that God will be available to his prophet. But implicit in these words is a warning that the Lord will be near him 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. It is rather 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.

3. Assurance of divine power (v. 9)

Jeremiah declares that after the assurance of divine direction and deliverance "the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth." It is obvious that this is not purely metaphorical (as in Psalms 51:15); it represents a real experience on the part of the prophet. This experience however must have been a visionary one analogous to that which Isaiah experienced at the beginning of his ministry. But why did God touch the lips of the prophet? In Isaiah the touching of the lips was for purification; here, for communication. The hand is the symbol of making and doing. The act symbolized the fact that God was taking over his mouth, remaking it. Henceforth Jeremiah would speak with the tongue (authority) of God.

4. *Assurance of divine authority* (v. 10)

The divine summons closes with assurance that Jeremiah will have divine authority. God declares "I have made you an overseer over the nations and kingdoms," i.e., the officer who puts God's plan into operation. His ministry will have both a negative and a positive emphasis. Four verbs describe the negative work that the prophet must perform: (1) to uproot like a noxious weed; (2) to tear down; (3) to destroy; and (4) to raze or overthrow. Of course 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 fulfills this part of his commission by preaching divine judgment upon the nations of his day. Old sinful Judah must be destroyed. So too must the foreign nations which have proudly lifted up themselves against their Creator be uprooted.

But Jeremiah is not merely a prophet of destruction; he is also a prophet of construction. Two infinitives describe the positive aspect of his ministry: (1) to build, and (2) to plant. Beyond the tumult of war and destruction Jeremiah was permitted to see the dawn of a new day. In the assessment of the ministry of Jeremiah the emphasis is on 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. As one reads through the Book of Jeremiah it is true that 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 is to pave the way for that new day, that new beginning. 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.”¹

II. THE CALL CONFIRMED 1:11-19

TRANSLATION

(11) And the word of the LORD came unto me saying, What are you looking at, Jeremiah? And I replied, I am looking at a rod of almond. (12) Then the LORD said unto me, You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it. (13) And the word of the LORD came unto me a second time saying, What are you looking at? And I said, I am looking at a boiling pot and its face is from the north. (14) And the LORD said unto me, From the north calamity is unleashed upon all the inhabitants of the land. (15) For, behold, I am about to call for all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north (oracle of the LORD) 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. (16) Then I will pronounce against them My judgments because of all of their wickedness, viz., they have forsaken Me, made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their hands. (17) But as for you, gird up your loins! Stand up! Speak unto them all which I have commanded you! Do not be dismayed because of them lest I shatter your nerve before them. (18) And as for Me, behold, I have made you today a fortified city, and iron pillar, a wall of bronze against all the land, against the kings of Judah,

1. Irving Jensen, *Jeremiah, Prophet of Judgment* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), p. 20.

against her princes, against her priests and against the people of the land. (19) They shall fight against you but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you (oracle of the LORD) to deliver you.

COMMENTS

In the last half of chapter 1 the call of Jeremiah is confirmed and amplified through two visions and further words of exhortation and encouragement. The two visions are of particular interest. The first one expresses a general principle of prophecy; the second deals with a particular concrete application.¹ Before considering the visions themselves two preliminary matters need to be touched upon: (1) the time of the visions, and (2) the nature of them.

The time of the visions. Hyatt² 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. If these visions did not come immediately upon the call of Jeremiah they were given very early in his career for God seems to use them to assure Jeremiah of his prophetic call. They are confirmatory tokens. The visions also serve to create within Jeremiah an awareness that momentous events affecting the kingdom of Judah were imminent.

The nature of the visions. God made known His will and purpose through two kinds of visions in the Old Testament. In the first type of vision the prophet saw with his mind (or perhaps with his eyes, who can say) an

1. Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

2. Philip Hyatt, "Jeremiah (Exegesis)," *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1956), V, 798f.

object or scene which had no external reality. In this kind 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 one case God caused the prophet to see a significant object; in the other, God caused the prophet to see significance in an object. Into which one of these two vision categories do the visions in Jeremiah 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 Jeremiah 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" which are present in other similar passages (e.g., Jeremiah 24:3; Amos 7:8; 8:2) 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., Zachariah 4:2; 5:2). Exegetically, then, decisive evidence with regard to the nature of what Jeremiah saw in chapter 1 is lacking. The present writer is inclined to think that as Jeremiah meditated on these common, every day objects God caused him to see in them a mystic or prophetic significance.

A. The Vision of the Almond Rod 1:11, 12

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 which blossoms in January

was poetically named by the Hebrews the *wakeful* tree because it was the first to awake from winter sleep. 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*. Here then is paronomasia or word play.¹ God is using the rod of "wake-tree" wood to show Jeremiah that He is wakeful.

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 (Psalms 121:4). Amid the moral and spiritual deadness round about, God was awake. He was aware of and concerned about the corrupt condition of the nation. At times things seemed 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 (Numbers 17:8) so now the almond rod which Jeremiah observes presages the outpouring of God's judgment upon the apostate people of another time. It is not a branch with twigs and leaves which the prophet sees but rather a stick used for walking or striking. This would be a most appropriate symbol of an instrument of chastisement. The symbolic significance would not be lost upon a pro-

1. Paronomasia in the context of a vision also occurs in Amos 8:1, 2.

phet who knew the writings of Isaiah: "Ho Assyrian, the rod of My anger, the staff in whose hand is My indignation!" (Isaiah 10:5).

The third focus of the almond rod vision is that of 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 (Isaiah 55:11). Whether it be 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 would enable 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 among the trees hastens to put forth its leaves, so God is *hastening* (note the translation of the King James Version) to perform His word of judgment. Such was the interpretation of the great Jewish commentators Rashi and Kimchi. On God's calendar, judgment was imminent.

B. The Seething Caldron 1:13-16

At some undetermined time subsequent to the almond rod revelation Jeremiah experienced another vision. He observed a large cooking or wash pot¹ over an open fire. He describes the pot as seething or boiling. The Hebrew

1. The same kind of pot was used by a whole company of prophets to cook their meals (II Kings 4:38). It probably was made of metal (Ezekiel 24:11).

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.¹ So much is clear. But what did Jeremiah mean when he said "its face is from the north"?² "Its face" probably refers to the side of the pot facing Jeremiah.³ The face of the pot is "from" i.e., away from, "the north." If the pot is tilting *away from* the north it must be tilting *toward* the south.⁴ 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 and the southern side sank.

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 B.C. The Assyrian empire was tottering. The Neo-Babylonian kingdom was rising on the horizon. Shortly the calamitous contents of that political caldron would be unleashed against the inhabitants of Judah. The word translated "unleashed" (ASV, "shall break forth") means literally, "opened." 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.⁵ The "evil" (ASV) or calamity which is the subject of verse 14 is the invasion of Judah by hordes of Babylonian soldiers. The word translated "land" in this verse can also mean "earth." Here the former meaning is intended as verse 15 indicates.

1. Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

2. The King James translation "to the north" has been rightly corrected by more recent English versions.

3. Others think the face of the pot was what one would see as he looked into the pot, i.e., the contents.

4. Streane, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

5. Cheyne, *op. cit.*, p. 3. It is also possible that the evil or calamity in the north was "opened" in the sense of "revealed." See Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

The key word in verse 14 is the word "north." Previous to the battle of Carchemish the Babylonians are only mentioned vaguely by Jeremiah as a northern people.¹ Strictly speaking they were an eastern people from the point of view of Palestine. However, the caravan route which 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.

The significance of the boiling caldron pouring forth its contents toward Judah is explained in verse 15. God will summon against Judah all the families of the kingdoms of the north. The army of king Nebuchadnezzar was made up of mercenaries of the various kingdoms which he had conquered. This vast throng would attack Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. The "thrones" might refer to the formal judgment passed upon the inhabitants of the conquered city by the victorious Babylonian generals. On the other hand "thrones" might be metaphorical for the tents of the enemy generals or perhaps even for some of the large siege instruments. The formula "oracle of the Lord" (ASV "saith Jehovah") underscores the truth of the prediction made in this verse. This is the first of numerous occurrences of this expression in the Book of Jeremiah. The expression is one of the strongest possible claims of inspiration in the Old Testament.

Verse 16 makes it clear that the coming conquerors are but instruments of God who is sending His divine judgment upon an apostate people. The expression "speak or pronounce judgments" is peculiar to Jeremiah,² occur-

1. See Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1; 10:22.

2. See Jeremiah 4:12; 12:1; 39:5; 52:9.

ring elsewhere only in II Kings 25:6. The judgment falls upon Judah because of all of their wickedness. Three specific examples of this 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 many passages which sense is intended. Bright has proposed that the word be rendered "sending up offerings." The phrase "other gods" refers of course to false gods and does not imply that Jeremiah recognized the actual existence of other deities beside God.¹

C. Exhortation and Encouragement 1:17-19

After a brief preview of the fate of Jerusalem the divine eye again focuses on the key man for the hour. First comes the exhortation (verse 17) and then the encouragement (verse 18, 19).

1. *Words of exhortation*

The verbs in verse 17 are most instructive. Three positive commands are followed by one prohibition. The first command, "gird up your loins," implies preparation. Before beginning a journey, starting a race or engaging in conflict an Oriental would bind up his loose flowing robes so as not to be hindered in his movement.² "Gird up the loins" then implies (1) readiness for action and (2) energy in action. God is saying to the prophet "Prepare

1. Jeremiah's own strict monotheism is proved by such passages as 2:27; 8:19; 10:1-16 and 16:20.

2. Cf. Gehazi on an urgent mission (II Kings 4:29); Elijah racing from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel (I Kings 18:46). Jesus also advised his disciples in Luke 12:35: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps be burning."

yourself for a strenuous ministry." In modern idiom God might say to a preacher, "Roll up your sleeves!"

The second command, "Stand up," implies action! He is to begin his prophetic ministry immediately. The king's business is urgent and there is no time for loitering. The third command, "speak," points to the primary task of the prophet *viz.*, the communication of the word of God. As in verse 7, the prophet is directed to preach nothing more and nothing less than what the Lord has commanded.

The fourth command, a negative one, is accompanied by a word of warning. God knew that during his ministry Jeremiah would on numerous occasions face hostile crowds, angry shouts, mocking, taunting, jeering, 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 commands His prophet, "Do not be dismayed because of them." He must not permit himself to break down before his audience nor show any signs of fear nor let his fear cause him to alter the message. A stern warning accompanies this commandment, "lest I shatter your nerve before them." If Jeremiah shows the least bit of fear for 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.¹

2. *Words of encouragement*

The challenging "as for you" to Jeremiah (v. 17) is balanced by the assuring "as for Me" of the Lord (v. 18).²

1. Joseph Woods, *Jeremiah* (Epworth Preacher's Commentaries. London: Epworth, 1964), p. 13.

2. Elmer A. Leslie, *Jeremiah Chronologically Arranged, Translated, and Interpreted* (New York: Abingdon, 1954), p. 24.

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 would be fortified by divine strength. Three metaphors are used to portray the protection which Jeremiah would experience: (1) He would be as invincible as a fortified city which might withstand enemy bombardment for years. (2) He would be as indestructible as an iron gate which could withstand the heaviest attack. (3) He would be 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 brass.¹ Though all segments of the population—the kings, princes, priests and people of the land—might oppose him, yet God would give him the strength to endure.

Metaphorical language gives way to literal warning and promise in the last verse of chapter 1. Jeremiah would be famous but he would 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. Here then is the contrasting picture presented by this verse: Jeremiah hated and attacked by men but 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.

1. Theo. Laetsch, *Bible Commentary, Jeremiah* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), p. 32.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FOUR

I. Facts to Master.

1. The time when God selected Jeremiah for his mission (v. 5).
2. The reason Jeremiah was reluctant to accept the commission (v. 6).
3. The significance of God touching the mouth of Jeremiah (v. 9).
4. The way in which the ministry of Jeremiah is described negatively and positively.
5. The two visions which Jeremiah saw in connection with his call.
6. The significance of the almond tree.
7. The significance of the boiling caldron.
8. Meaning of "all the families of the kingdoms of the north" (v. 15).
9. Reason Jerusalem will be destroyed (v. 16).
10. Figures by which the spiritual strength of Jeremiah is described (v. 18).
11. Reason for the spiritual strength of Jeremiah (v. 19).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. Why is it appropriate to have the call of the prophet recorded in the first chapter of the book? Did the prophets require some authentication of their claim to be God's spokesmen? (cf. Jeremiah chapter 23).
2. How is the call of Jeremiah like and unlike the calls of Moses (Exodus 3-4), Elisha (I Kings 19), Amos (chapter 7), Isaiah (chapter 6), and Ezekiel (chapters 1-3)?
3. How should one imagine the conversation between God and the prophet to have taken place? Was the voice of God audible or did he speak to the mind of the prophet? Is there any evi-

JEREMIAH

dence that the prophet was in a trance at the time of his call?

4. In what sense did God predestinate Jeremiah?
5. What are some of the negative aspects of the ministry which the man of God must face up to today?
6. Why does God often choose the weak (or those cognizant of their weakness) for important tasks? See I Corinthians 1:26-31; II Corinthians 4:7.

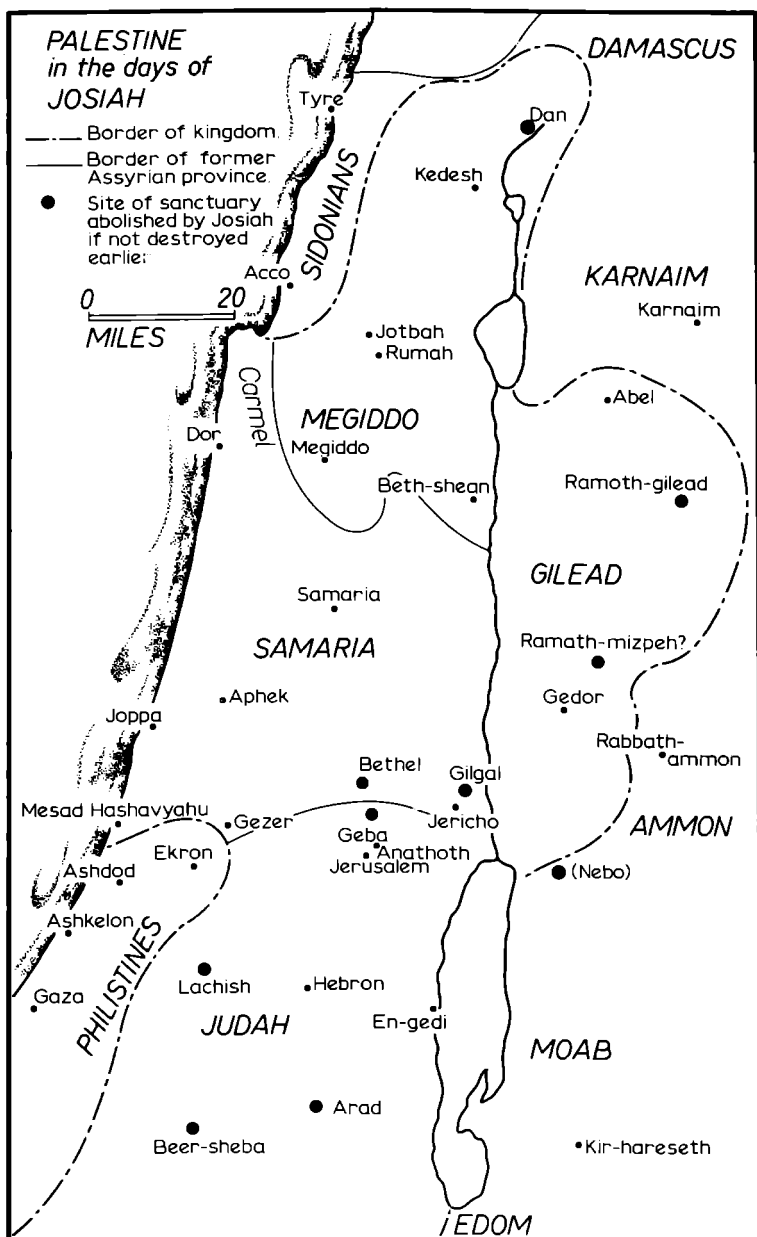
PALESTINE in the days of JOSIAH

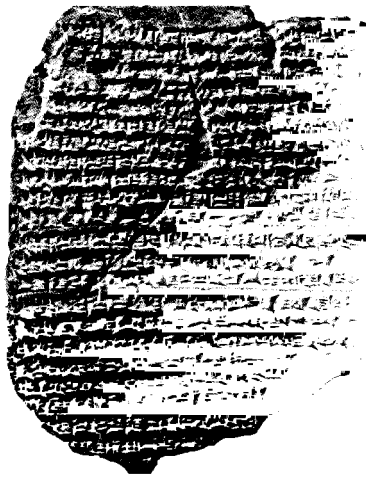
— Border of kingdom.

— Border of former Assyrian province.

• Site of sanctuary abolished by Josiah if not destroyed earlier:

0 20
MILES





"Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months . . . At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out . . . and the king of Babylon took him . . . And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house . . . And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon . . . And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah" (II Kings 24:8-17).

So far the only written evidence from Babylon dealing with these events described in the Bible is the cuneiform text above. It reads: "In the seventh year (i. e. of Nebuchadnezzar—599 B. C.) in the month Chislev (November/December) the King of Babylon assembled his army, and after he had invaded the land of Hatu (Syria-Palestine) he laid siege to the city of Judah. On the second day of the month Adara (16th March) he conquered the city and took the king (Jehoiachin) prisoner. He installed in his place a king (Zedekiah) of his own choice, and after he had received rich tribute, he sent (them) forth to Babylon".

CHAPTER FIVE

SERMONS FROM THE REIGN OF JOSIAH 2:1—6:30

Chapters 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 New American Standard Version. The theme which runs through these chapters 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. Needless to say, only a summary of the actual words of Jeremiah have been preserved here. 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 which 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 chapters 2-6 should be assigned to the reign of king Josiah. A reference to that king appears in 3:6. Certain verses seem to point to the period of Josiah's reformation which fell between the years 627 and 621 B.C.

I. THE INAUGURAL SERMON 2:1-37

Jeremiah's inaugural sermon might well be entitled "God's Indictment of His People." If chapter 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. The prophet begins by bringing to the attention of his hearers the past association which they as a nation had enjoyed with God (vv. 1-3). He then attacks the present apostasy (vv. 4-8) and offers a penetrating analysis of it (vv. 9-19). Jeremiah then drives home his accusations with a series of devastating analogies and figures of speech (vv. 20-28). The chapter closes with the prophet smashing whatever arguments the apostate people might use to justify their behavior (vv. 29-37).

A. Past Associations 2:1-3

TRANSLATION

Now the word of the LORD came unto me saying, (2) Go and cry in the presence of Jerusalem and say, This is what the LORD has said: I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth, your bridal love; how you went after me in the wilderness in a land that was not sown. (3) Israel was the LORD's holy portion, the first fruits of his increase; all who devour him shall be held guilty, calamity shall come against them (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

Apparently Jeremiah did not have to wait long to receive the first message from the Lord which he was to deliver to his people. While still at Anathoth instructions came to go and preach in Jerusalem the capital city. His message is to open with a nostalgic note which would certainly have gained Jeremiah an initially favorable hearing. The introduction to his sermon was psychologically sound. He proceeds to paint a beautiful picture of the tender relationship which had in past years existed between

God and His people. He points out Israel's loving care for God (v. 2) and God's loving care for Israel (v. 3).

1. *Israel's loving care for God* (2:2)

God still remembered the loving care which Israel had demonstrated toward Him in the days of national youth. It is in the period of the Exodus and wilderness wandering that the tribes of Israel became a nation. During those formative years Israel had shown tender and affectionate "kindness" to the Lord their God. This "bridal love," as Jeremiah calls it, had caused Israel to follow the Lord from Egypt, a land of comparative plenty (Numbers 11:5) into the wilderness ("a land not sown"). As a bride in loving trust follows her husband into a strange land so Israel had followed God into the barren wastes of Sinai.¹ But how can the period of wilderness wandering be regarded as a time of love and trust when the narratives of Exodus and Numbers are replete with examples of murmuring and lack of faith? Jeremiah was not ignorant of the wilderness failings of Israel but 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,² the wilderness wandering was the honeymoon period of Israel's history. In the wilderness Israel was completely dependent on God. He had no rivals for their affections. Israel was completely devoted to Him.

2. *God's loving care for Israel* (2:3)

God reciprocated the loving care of Israel. He regarded Israel as his holy portion. According to Isaiah, God was the holy one of Israel; according to Jeremiah,

1. The figure of a bride is also used in Hosea 2:19, 20, Isaiah 54:4, 5 and Ezekiel 16:8.

2. Cf. Isaiah 1:26; Hosea 11:1, 3, 4; Ezekiel 16:6-14.

Israel was the holy one of God. Israel belonged to God¹ just as did the first-fruits of the harvest.² This being the case, Israel was under the divine protection of the Lord. Foreigners were forbidden to eat of consecrated things; by breaking this law they became guilty of a "trespass" (Leviticus 22:10, 15, 16). 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 who attack God's people will be punished.

B. Present Apostasy 2:4-8

TRANSLATION

(4) Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. (5) This is what the LORD 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? (6) They did not say, Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who guided us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and deep darkness, a land which no man traverses and in which no human being dwells. (7) I brought you unto a Carmel-land to eat of her fruit and her goodness. But you came and polluted My land and My inheritance you made an abomination. (8) The priests did not say, Where is the LORD? They that handle the law do not know Me; the shepherds transgressed against Me;

1. Exodus 19:5, 6; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:19.

2. Exodus 23:19; Numbers 18:12, 13. 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.

the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after the useless ones.

COMMENTS

"Hear the word of the Lord" is a characteristic introduction to a prophetic oracle. This formula occurs at least twenty-three times in Jeremiah with slight variation. Note that Jeremiah calls upon all families of the house of Israel to hear his message (v. 4). 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. In pointing out the present apostasy of the people Jeremiah makes three points: the apostasy is (1) unjustified (v. 5); (2) ungrateful (vv. 6, 7) and (3) universal (v. 8).

1. *Unjustified apostasy* (2:5)

In verse five God asks a question and that question implies an emphatic negative answer: "What fault did your fathers find in Me?" There is no reason or fault on God's part which can account for the infidelity of the nation. Yet they have forsaken Him and gone after idols, "vain things" (lit., a breath, a vapor). With all of its pomp and pagentry idolatry in the eyes of Israel's prophets was mere nothingness, utterly futile, useless and vain. Following after these vain deities, the men of Israel became vain.¹ 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

1. II Kings 17:15 uses the same wording as the present verse. Bright sees a word play here: They think that they are following *habbaal*, The Baal, but in reality they are following *hahebel* the wind, emptiness.

that which they loved" (Hosea 9:10). A man is no better than the god that he worships.

2. *Ungrateful apostasy* (2:6-7)

Once the great apostasy set in, Israel seemed to forget about the God who had led them through the barren desert wastes. The word rendered "wilderness" in this verse may have the connotation "pastureland" or it may refer to a barren and inhospitable region. Several phrases are added to the word "wilderness" to paint a picture of the Sinaitic peninsula through which the Israelites had passed so many years before. It was a land of drought, deserts, and darkness. The word "darkness" in the Old Testament frequently connotes distress or extreme danger (cf. Psalms 23:4). A trackless desert can be every bit as bewildering as Stygian darkness. But God had brought Israel through that hostile land of pits, holes, rents and fissures in the soil to a beautiful land (v. 7). The Hebrew uses the word "Carmel" to describe this land. A Carmel-land is a land planted with vines and other choice plants.¹ Bright translates the phrase "a land like a garden" while Freedman renders it "a land of fruitful fields." Yet the Israelites were still unappreciative. They took that holy land that God had consecrated to His own purposes and defiled it by their idolatry. With their pagan rites they made the holy land an abomination to God.

3. *Universal apostasy* (2:8)

The apostasy extended even to the political and spiritual leaders of the nation. Even the priests and those who handle, i.e., were skillful in, the law were guilty. One can know the Book but not really know the Lord of the

1. Cf. Jeremiah 4:26; Isaiah 29:17; 37:24.

Book! The shepherds' or rulers of the nation did not restrain the apostasy but in fact they too transgressed against the Lord. Many prophets began to walk after idol gods and prophesy by Baal. The reference is not to the band of the prophets which appears in I Samuel 10 and 19 or to the sons of the prophets which appear in connection to Elijah and Elisha. The Scriptures nowhere link these early prophets to Baal worship. Rather the reference is to prophets like those in the court of Ahab who actually had gone over to the cult of Baal (I Kings 18:19). Since Jeremiah himself was both a priest and a prophet it must have particularly 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 and had begun to follow useless things, gods which had not done nor could do anything for them.

C. Penetrating Analysis 2:9-19

TRANSLATION

(9) So yet I present My case against you (oracle of the LORD), and with your children I must contend. (10) For pass over to the isles of Kittim and look! To Kedar send and make serious investigation! See if there was ever the like. (11) Has a nation changed gods (and they are non-gods)? But My people have exchanged their Glory for the useless one. (12) Be appalled, O heavens, at this! Bristle and be exceedingly amazed (oracle of the LORD). (13) For two evils My people have done: Me they have forsaken, a fountain of living water, to hew for themselves cisterns, cracked cisterns which cannot contain water. (14) Is Israel a bondman? Is

1. The term "shepherds" in the Old Testament generally refers to civil, not spiritual, leaders. See Jeremiah 3:15; 10:21; 22:22; 25:34; Zechariah 10:3; 11:5, 8, 16; Isaiah 44:28.

he a house-born slave? Why does he become a prey? (15) Against him the lions roar, they let their voice resound; they have made his land a desolation, his cities are laid waste without inhabitant. (16) Also the children of Noph and Tahpanhes have cracked your skull. (17) Did you not bring this upon yourself in that you forsook the LORD your God when He was leading you in the way? (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? (19) Your wickedness shall chastise you and your backslidings shall rebuke you. Know and see that bad and bitter is your forsaking the LORD your God, and My fear you do not possess (oracle of the Lord, GOD of host).

COMMENTS

In verses 9-19 the prophet analyzes the present apostasy pointing out (1) the deplorable condition of apostasy (vv. 9-13) and (2) the terrible consequences of their backsliding (vv. 14-19).

1. *The deplorable condition of apostasy (2:9-13)*

As a prosecutor arguing his case before a jury the Lord presents His case against Israel. A technical legal word is actually used in verse 9 which means to plead in a legal sense or present one's case. The "you" of verse 9 probably refers to the past generation of apostates about whom the prophet has been speaking in verses 4-8. The children's children would be the present generation to which Jeremiah was preaching. Repeated acts of rebellion through the years have called forth repeated reproach and punishment on the part of God.

The prophet argues that the apostasy of Judah is unprecedented in all the history of the world. He challenges his hearers to go westward to Kittim and eastward to Kedar to see if they could uncover another example of a nation which had changed deities (v. 10). Kittim refers to the isles of the Mediterranean (cf. Numbers 24:24; Daniel 11:30) and perhaps also the coastlands of Italy and Greece (cf. Genesis 10:4). Kedar was the name of one of the sons of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13) and is here used of Arabia in general. 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 (v. 11). Yet Israel has changed their Glory (God)¹ for the useless one (Baal). When a nation ceases to trust in God that nation has lost its true glory.

It is characteristic of the divine lawsuit that God or the prophet calls upon the heavens to bear testimony in the case (e.g., Micah 6:1f.; Isaiah 1:2). Thus in verse 12 the prophet calls upon the heavens to be appalled, 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 (Deuteronomy 32:1). Now they look down upon the willful and reckless transgression of the divine will. Nature which 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.

Two specific charges are leveled against the people of God in verse 13. They have forsaken the Lord, a fountain of living water,² in order to hew out for themselves

1. The use of Glory for God occurs in Psalms 106:20 and Psalms 3:3. A similar title for God is "the Pride of Israel" (Amos 8:7; Hosea 5:5).

2. Jeremiah uses the figure again in 17:13. Many years earlier David had said of the Lord: "With you is the fountain of life" (Psalms 36:9).

cisterns. A cistern in antiquity had three fundamental deficiencies: (1) The 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 has the color of weak soapsuds, tastes like the earth and is full of worms.¹ (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. Who in their right mind would prefer this 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 over-flowing, 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 (John 4:13).

2. *The terrible consequences of apostasy* (2:14-19)

In making the transition from considering the condition of apostasy to pointing out the consequences of apostasy, Jeremiah points to the example of the northern kingdom of Israel. 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 (Exodus 4:22). That Israel should be captive in another land is an unnatural state of affairs and demands a reasonable explanation. Why then has Israel become a prey to the nations, helpless to resist the advances of neighboring states? (v. 13). Israel's enemies

1. W. M. Thompson, *The Land and the Book* (London: Nelson, 1873), p. 287.

like lions have roared against God's people, have made the land a desolation and laid waste the cities (v. 14). Why?

From Israel in the north Jeremiah turns his attention to Judah in verse 16. The verse is best regarded as a prediction written as though it has already been fulfilled.¹ The translation "cracked your skull" is based on a slight alternation in the Hebrew vowel points which, in effect, the American Standard Version has also followed. Noph and Tahpanhes are important Egyptian cities, the latter being a fortress commanding the road to Palestine (44:1; 46:15). The prophecy then 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 and the consequent subjugation of Judah (II Kings 23:29).² Unable to learn from the fate of the northern kingdom, Judah was doomed to repeat that fate.

Now why had Israel suffered? Why was Judah yet to suffer? "You have brought it upon yourself," says the prophet. From the time of the wilderness wanderings to the present they had refused to follow the leading of the Lord (v. 17). 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 Euphrates³ in Assyria (v. 18). These broken cisterns could not provide the life-giving water the nation needed. In the view of Jeremiah there was no advantage whatsoever for Judah to become entangled in international politics.⁴ The his-

1. The 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.

2. Some would date these verses after 609 B.C. and since the passage is not dated, this possibility cannot be ruled out.

3. The Euphrates river was regarded as the boundary between Syria-Palestine and Assyria. Genesis 15:18 points to the fact that "the River" is the Euphrates.

4. Isaiah (30:2-5; 31:1) and Hosea (7:11, 16) had already inveighed against an Egyptian alliance.

torical books of the Old Testament bear witness to the fact that Israel's vacillation between Egypt and Assyria proved disastrous. Since they had forsaken the Lord and no longer feared Him they were doomed to chastisement and punishment at the hands of their enemies (v. 19). Through the depths of their suffering they would come to realize how heinous was their crime against God. They had sowed the wind and they were about to reap the whirlwind.

D. Pointed Accusation 2:20-28

TRANSLATION

(20) For from of old you have broken your yoke, you have burst your bands and you said, I will not serve. For upon every high hill and under every green tree you reclined, committing harlotry. (21) But as for Me, I planted you a choice vine of wholly reliable stock. How sad it is that you have become a degenerate, strange vine unto Me! (22) But if you scrub with lye and multiply to yourself soap your iniquity is a permanent stain before Me (oracle of the lord GOD). (23) How sad it is that you say, I have not defiled myself; after the Baalim I have not gone. Look at your conduct in the Valley! Understand what you have done! A swift camel running hither and yon! (24) A wild ass accustomed to the wilderness, in her desire, snuffs at the wind; in her occasion who can restrain her; all who seek her will not become weary; in her month they shall find her. (25) Withhold your foot from bareness and your throat from thirst. But you say, It is no use! No! for I love strangers and after them I will continue to go. (26) As the shame of a thief that is found thus the house of Israel shall be put to shame—they,

their kings, their princes, their priests and their prophets—(27) who say to a tree, You are my father, and to a stone, You brought me forth! For they turn unto Me the back and not the face; but in the time of their calamity they shall say, Rise up, Save us! (28) But where are your gods which you have made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in the time of your calamity; for according to the number of your cities are your gods O Judah.

COMMENTS

In a series of brilliant metaphors Jeremiah sharpens his accusation against Judah. The nation is compared to (1) an ox that breaks his yoke (v. 20); (2) a vine that bears strange fruit (v. 21); (3) a stain that will wash off (v. 22); (4) a roving dromedary (v. 23); (5) a wild ass in heat (v. 24); (6) a persistent paramour (v. 25); and (7) a thief caught in the act (vv. 26-28).

1. *An ox that breaks his yoke* (2:20)

Verse 20 presents some difficult textual problems and consequently the differences between English translations of the verse are considerable. The 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 American Standard Version. Like a stubborn ox Israel refused to submit to the yoke of divine restraint and the bands 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." Having demanded freedom from the Lord, Israel became the slave to the passion and lust of idolatrous worship. On the bare treeless heights Israel offered sacrifices to the Baalim. 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 and thus Jeremiah likens the national apostasy to harlotry and adultery.

2. *A vine that bears strange fruit* (2:21)

To produce choice grapes takes many years of patient and tender care of the vines. The divine Horticulturist had planted a choice¹ 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. But 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 and care expended by the One who had planted the vine. It was a degenerate plant worthy only of destruction. In this brief but 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 journeyings, the Egyptian bondage and the wilderness wandering God had patiently and lovingly watched over the tender young plant. When the people reached Canaan they refused to yield the fruit of service and obedience to the Lord but on the contrary rendered their allegiance to other gods. How sad it is,²—says the prophet, as he shakes his head in amazement at what has become of that noble vine.

1. 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 which this type of vine produced.

2. The Hebrew interjection used here is one of the distinctive words in the vocabulary of lamentation as can be seen in Ezekiel 26:17; Jeremiah 48:39; II Samuel 1:19, 25, 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.

3. *A stain that will not wash off* (2:22)

The iniquity of Israel is clearly visible to the Holy One of Israel. It is an indelible stain which cannot be removed through human effort. The best cleansing agents of the day are not sufficient to eliminate that blot. Lye (Hebrew, *neter*) is a mineral alkali deposited on the shores and on the bed of certain lakes in Egypt. This substance was collected for making lye for washing purposes (see Proverbs 25:20). Soap (Hebrew, *borit*) is the corresponding vegetable alkali (see Isaiah 1:25). Though the outward man may be scrubbed clean yet the ugly blot of iniquity remains upon the heart and the soul. Only God can wipe it away. What joy it is for the Christian to know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin (I John 1:7).

4. *A roving dromedary* (2:23)

The people who were secretly worshiping Baal apparently did not regard this 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. 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. The prophet compares their conduct to that of a swift young camel running hither and yon. Most commentators have interpreted this figure to be that of a female camel in heat, driven by lust, pacing to and fro. Kenneth Bailey, who spent seventeen years in the Middle East, argues that this is not the point of comparison in verse 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 verse is feminine, but all references since verse 16 have been feminine singular. It is not the *femaleness* that is being stressed in this verse, 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.¹

5. *A wild ass in heat* (2:24)

In verse 24 the prophet compares the apostasy of Israel to the dramatic and vulgar actions of a female ass in heat. In the month of mating, sires need not weary themselves in seeking out the female ass; on the contrary she will eagerly seek them out. So Israel eagerly turns to the lewd rites of Baalism. 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) snuffs at 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 and then straightens her neck and, with head high, closes her nostrils and "sniffs the wind." What she really is doing is *snuffing* the dust which is soaked with the urine of the male ass. With her neck stretched to the utmost she slowly draws in a long, deep breath, then lets out an earthshaking bray and doubles her pace, racing down the road in search of the male.²

1. Kenneth E. Bailey and William L. Holladay, "The 'Young Camel' and 'Wild Ass' in Jer. II. 23-25," *Vetus Testamentum* XVIII (April, 1968), 256-260.

2. *Ibid.*

6. *A persistent paramour (2:25)*

In verse 25 the divine Husband pleads with his adulterous wife, Israel, to cease from her wild pursuit of illicit lovers. The difficult first part of the verse might allude to the fatiguing practices of the Baal cult—the barefoot dances and endless repetition of the name Baal (see I Kings 18:26). 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." In any case 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."

7. *A thief caught in the act (2:26-28)*

A thief caught in the act is embarrassed and ashamed. Under the Mosaic law a thief if apprehended in the act had to restore what he had stolen and pay a stiff fine (Exodus 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 the shame of disappointment when the folly of their ways became manifest (v. 26). In times of peace and prosperity the Israelites turned their back upon God to experiment with idolatry. They bowed down before a tree, a sacred pole or idol made of wood and piously confessed, "You are my father," i.e., my guardian, my protector. Before the cold and lifeless stone pillar or idol made of stone they bowed and said, "You brought me forth," i.e., you are my mother, my creator. But in the hour of national or personal calamity when their idols of wood and stone proved utterly worthless they would cry out to the

living God in their desperation (v. 27). With Elijah-like sarcasm Jeremiah taunts the idolaters in verse 28: "Your gods are as numerous as the cities of your land!¹ Surely among the multiplicity of the gods you have made for yourselves there is one deity who can aid you in the day of your calamity!"

E. Pungent Argument 2:29-37

TRANSLATION

(29) Why do you continue to complain to Me? All of you have transgressed against Me (oracle of the LORD). (30) In vain I have smitten your sons; they have not received correction; your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravaging lion. (31) O generation, see the word of the LORD! Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness? Why do my people say, We are free; we will not come again unto you? (32) Does a virgin forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten Me days without number. (33) How skillfully you set your course to seek love! Therefore even the wicked women you have taught your ways. (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. (35) But you say, I am innocent; surely His wrath has turned from me! Behold, I am about to enter into judgment with you because you have said, I have not sinned. (36) Why is it such a very light thing for you to change your way? Also because of Egypt you shall be ashamed as you were ashamed because

1. The 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.

of Assyria. (37) **Indeed from this place you shall go out with your hands upon your head for the LORD has rejected the object of your trust and you shall not prosper because of them.**

COMMENTS

In the closing verses of the inaugural sermon Jeremiah drives home his final arguments against the apostasy of the people. He points out that their complaints against God are unjustified (vv. 29, 30). Their rebellion indicates ingratitude (vv. 31, 32), their protestations of innocence are useless (vv. 33-35) and their alliances with foreign powers are utterly unprofitable (vv. 36, 37).

1. *Unjustified complaints* (2:29, 30)

The brazen-faced apostates actually attempted to justify themselves before God. They contended with Him or complained against Him. The Hebrew word used here is the same technical legal term used in verse 9. It means to go to court with, to present a legal case against. 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! (v. 29). They cannot blame Him 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. God had raised up mighty men to preach his word and call His people to repentance. Instead of heeding the message of God the people destroyed the messengers (v. 30). Jeremiah probably has reference here to the reign of Manasseh when much innocent blood was shed (II

Kings 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.

2. *Ungrateful rebellion* (2:31-32)

Rather than the usual "Hear the word of the Lord" Jeremiah here 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. Has God been barren? Has He failed to provide for His people? God has not been a wilderness to His people nor a land of thick darkness. The latter expression is literally in the Hebrew "land of the darkness of the Lord." It probably refers to that deep kind of darkness such as the Lord sends in judgment upon the wicked (Exodus 10:21-23). This thick darkness is symbolic here of misery and uncertainty. God did not leave Israel to grope in such darkness without guidance. Yet the people of Israel have declared, "We are free!"¹ The word translated "free" means basically, to wander restlessly, to roam. As used here 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 is asking His people in verse 31, "How can you say such terrible things? How can I be deserving of such treatment?" A maiden will not forget the ornaments or jewels which are part of her dowry, nor will a bride forget the girdle or sash which is 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.

1. The King James Version has taken this word to be from an entirely different root and has translated it "we are lords."

3. *Useless protestations* (2:33-35)

The evidence in the case against Israel is clear. Israel is 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 (v. 33). Their very garments were stained as it were with the blood of poor innocent people. No doubt the reference here is to the persecutions which spring up during the wicked reign of Manasseh (II Kings 21:16). What a paradox! Those who were most skillful in pursuing "love" were at the same time belligerent towards, and intolerant of those who tried to remain faithful to the laws of God. The populace to a large degree must have supported their king in his attacks upon the faithful and the humble. Had these folks been caught red-handed attempting to break through (lit., dig through) the mud brick sides of a house then perhaps homicide might have been justified (Exodus 22:2). But this was not the case. Those who had been slain were innocent of wrong doing. They were executed "because of all those things," *viz.*, the apostasy and zeal for the false gods (v. 34).

In spite of the clear evidence against them Israel continued to raise strong protestations of innocence of any wrong doing. 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." The fatal flaw in this reasoning is that God sometimes delays the punishment for sin in order to give the sinners ample time to repent. "It will not be long now," says the prophet, "and God will enter into judg-

ment with you" (v. 35). In that hour Israel would come to realize how utterly corrupt and sinful she had been.

4. *Unprofitable alliances* (2:36, 37)

Israel will not be able to maintain the status quo and forestall the divine judgment by political alliances. The political history of both Israel and Judah since the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C. had been characterized by frequent and often disastrous shifts in foreign policy. One king would yield to Assyria; his successor would secretly negotiate 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 would not be in danger of attack from the north so long as Egypt was a friendly ally. Sadly Jeremiah warns these political optimists that Egypt would disappoint them just as Assyria had done many years before. The prophet probably has 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 but at the same time demanded that the king of Judah render tribute to him. Ahaz stripped the Temple and his own palace to bribe Tiglath-pileser (II Chronicles 28:20).

Political alliances with Egypt would not be able to deliver Jerusalem from destruction. The day would come when they would go out from Jerusalem with their hands upon their heads in a gesture of shame and surrender (cf. II Samuel 13:19). They will not prosper because of their political schemes for God had rejected that nation in whom Israel trusted, *viz.*, Egypt. Hosea had warned against alliance with Egypt (Hosea 7:11, 12:1) and

Isaiah had repeated the warning (Isaiah 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 and resumed the siege which he had temporarily suspended (Jeremiah 37).

II. GOD'S APPEAL TO HIS PEOPLE 3:1—4:4

After the blistering indictment of his inaugural sermon Jeremiah takes up the subject of repentance. He speaks here of (1) the possibility of repentance (3:1-5); (2) the need for repentance (3:6-10); (3) the call to repentance (3:11-15); (4) the blessings of repentance (3:16-22a); (5) The prayer of repentance (3:22b-25) and (6) the rewards of repentance (4:1-4).

A. The Possibility of Repentance 3:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) They say if a man divorce his wife and she shall go from him and shall become another man's, may he return unto her again? Would not that land become greatly polluted? But you have committed harlotry with many lovers; yet return unto Me (oracle of the LORD). (2) Lift up your eyes unto the high hills and look! Where have you not been lain with? Along the ways you have sat for them as an Arabian in the desert; you have polluted a land with your harlotry and with your iniquity. (3) So the showers were withheld and there was no latter rain; yet the forehead of a harlot you possessed, you refused to be ashamed. (4) Will you not

right now call to Me, "My Father! You are the Husband of my youth!" (5) Will He keep His anger forever? Will He keep it always? Behold, you have spoken but you have done evil things and you have succeeded.

COMMENTS

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 (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). In the light of this law is it *legally* possible for the Lord to take Judah back again? The answer is No! Judah's case is much worse than that envisaged 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 has cavorted around with many lovers, 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 repentance and reconciliation God calls upon Judah to return to Him (v. 1).

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 noll in all the land which had not been defiled by the licentious rites of Baal. Like a lonely Arab in the midst of the desert who eagerly joins himself to any caravans or passers-by, Israel has embraced every form of idolatry which has come along. This iniquitous spiritual harlotry has polluted the land (v. 2). Therefore God has punished them by withholding the showers and especially the latter rain of early spring which was so essential to an abundant harvest. Yet no amount of divine discipline could make Israel

feel the shame of her wantonness. 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 (v. 3).

The past can be forgotten and forgiven if Israel right now, at this very moment, will acknowledge the Lord as God. Instead of calling the idols of wood and stone "my father" will you not give that appellation to Me?, the Lord pleads. Will you not acknowledge Me as the husband of your youth? (v. 4). The translation "husband" here is justified on the basis of Proverbs 2:17 where the same word is used. The word can also mean intimate friend and even "guide" as in the American Standard and King James versions. As a matter of fact, according to verse 5 Judah had spoken the things which God had requested in the previous verse. At the same time, however, they had continued to do evil things thus indicating that their words were insincere and hypocritical. So far they had gotten by with this hypocrisy but God will not keep His anger for ever (v. 5). Shortly they will face the God of judgment.

B. The Need for Repentance 3:6-10

TRANSLATION

(6) And the LORD said unto me in the days of Josiah the king: Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She continuously goes upon every high mountain and under every green tree and you commit harlotry there. (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. (8) And I saw, when, because of the fact that Backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I put her away and gave a writing of divorcement unto her, yet the Treacherous One, Judah

her sister, did not fear but she went and committed harlotry. (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. (10) And even in all of this her treacherous sister Judah did not return unto Me with all her heart, but deceitfully (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The need for repentance in Judah was made manifest by what had happened in the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel was Backsliding personified. Throughout her history Israel had recklessly pursued the false gods upon every prominent noll where they would feel closer to the deities and under every green tree which would furnish welcome shade for the practice of their lustful desires. The last clause of verse six 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 which are presently in exile or else the prophet points to his hearers and declares "you too have engaged in such licentious acts."

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. But 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 (v. 7). Even when God divorced His adulterous wife Israel by sending her into Assyrian captivity Judah did not fear but continued in her own harlotry (v. 8). 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 (v. 9). 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. Some scholars think that in verse 10 Jeremiah is giving his assessment of the reformation of Josiah, that it was not sincere but hypocritical. It is not certain, of course, that this paragraph should be dated after the reform.

C. The Call to Repentance 3:11-14

TRANSLATION

(11) And the LORD said unto me, More righteous is Backsliding Israel than Treacherous Judah. (12) Go and call these words to the north and say, Return, O Backsliding Israel (oracle of the LORD). I will not frown on you for I am kind (oracle of the LORD): I will not keep anger for ever. (13) But realize your iniquity, that against the LORD your God you have transgressed and you scattered your ways to strangers under every green tree and you did not obey My voice (oracle of the LORD). (14) Return, O Backsliding sons (oracle of the LORD), for I am married to you and I will take you one of a city and two from a family and I will bring you to Zion.

COMMENTS

The present paragraph indicates that Jeremiah had a warm regard for the exiles of the northern kingdom. The sins of Israel though considerable were less than those of Judah (v. 11). Why does God regard Judah as more guilty? Because Judah had before her the example of Israel. More light brings greater responsibility in the sight of God. Furthermore, Judah was guilty of hypocrisy in her dealings with God (see v. 10). God still yearns for Israel's repentance and 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 (II Kings 17:6; 18:11). The word "return" in the Old Testament carries the idea of going back to the original point of departure.¹ If Israel repents they will find that God is kind and anxious to receive them. He will not frown upon them and continue to be angry with them if they will but repent (v. 12).

The return to God must be accompanied by sincere confession and acknowledgement of sin. Confession, which always precedes forgiveness, is telling God what He already knows about us. In the present case the confession was to involve acknowledgement of iniquity, transgression and disobedience. 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 (v. 13).

In verse 14 the Lord, first as a Father and then as an Husband, 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 "you" in this verse is plural in the Hebrew referring to individuals. Not many will

1. W. L. Holladay, *The Root Subh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1958).

accept the gracious invitation to 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 (v. 14). The verse clearly underlines the fact that God is concerned with individuals and that 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 B.C. But 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.

D. The Blessings of Repentance 3:15-22a

TRANSLATION

(15) And I will give you shepherds according to My heart who shall feed you with knowledge and wisdom. (16) And it shall come to pass when you have multiplied and grown numerous in the land in those days (oracle of the LORD) they will no longer say, The Ark of the Covenant of the LORD! It will not enter the mind; they will neither remember it nor miss it, nor shall one be made again. (17) In that time they shall call Jerusalem "The throne of the LORD" and all nations shall be gathered unto it, to the Name of the LORD and to Jerusalem; and they shall not go any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. (18) In those days the house of Judah shall walk

with the house of Israel and they shall come together from the land of the north unto the land which I caused your fathers to inherit. (19) But I said, How can I put you among the sons, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of the nations? Then I said, You must call me "my Father" and you must not turn back from after Me. (20) Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband thus you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel (oracle of the LORD). (21) A voice is heard upon the bare heights, weeping supplications of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their ways, they have forsaken the LORD their God. (22) Return, O backsliding sons, I will heal your backslidings.

COMMENTS

If individuals of the ten northern tribes truly repent and are brought by God into spiritual Zion they will experience many wonderful blessings. First, they will be blessed with a new leadership (v. 15). 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 (John 6:35-63), and the faithful men of God who have fed the flock through the centuries.

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.¹ The Book of Acts contains the record of the thrilling ful-

1. See Genesis 15:5-6; 17:2; 28:14; Jeremiah 23:3; Ezekiel 36:11; Hosea 1:10; 2:23.

fillment 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.

In the Messianic age a new covenant will replace the cherished Ark of the Covenant (v. 16). The Ark of the Covenant was vital to the religious life in Old Testament times. It must have come as a shock to even the most devout Jew to hear for the first time the announcement that the Ark would not play any role whatsoever in the New Israel. After all, the God-ordained worship of the Old Testament centered around the Sanctuary and around the Ark. The Ark is represented in the law of Moses as the throne of the Lord. It was the tangible, 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 when 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. "The Ark will disappear," says the prophet. So it did. 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.

In years to come a *new city* would replace earthly Jerusalem (v. 17). The throne of God will no longer be the Ark of the Covenant¹ but rather the holy city, the new Jerusalem. The New Covenant Jerusalem is none other than the New Testament Church. The Apostle Paul calls it the "Jerusalem which is above" i.e., spiritual

1. The Ark of the Covenant is never called in the Old Testament the throne of God, yet it was in fact no less than that.

Jerusalem of which all believers are citizens (Galatians 4:24-31). Jesus Christ sits on the throne of God and rules over His church and in the midst of His church (Ephesians 1:20-23). Ezekiel speaks of that same city when he says "the name of the city from that day shall be, 'the LORD is there'" (Ezekiel 48:35).

In the Messianic age Jerusalem will be blessed with a *new attractiveness*. Jerusalem shall become the spiritual center of the world and all nations shall gather there. The gathering of Gentiles into the Church of Christ is another frequent theme in Messianic prophecy (e.g., Isaiah 60; 62). Because they have experienced genuine conversion these Gentiles no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart. But what is it that attracts these Gentiles to the New Covenant Jerusalem, the Church? The verse seems to suggest that it is "the Name of the Lord" which attracts them. The name of God in the Old Testament was very significant. It revealed something of the character and nature of God. The Name of God in this verse is not an abstract idea or even a personification but a person.¹ 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 John 1.

A new fellowship shall characterize the Israel of the future. Israel and Judah shall be reunited for the first time since the great schism of 931 B.C. The reunion of these two estranged sister nations is also a major theme in the Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament.² The Israelites and Jews are depicted returning together from the land of the north, i.e., Assyria and Babylonia, to the land of Canaan which God had given to their fathers centuries earlier. The Apostle Paul quotes a similar "re-

1. Note the language of Isaiah 30:27; 26:8; 59:19 where the "name of God" is personalized.

2. Jeremiah 2:4; Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 37:16ff.; Hosea 2:2; 1:11.

union" passage from Hosea and applies it to the unity of believers that exists in the Church of Christ (Romans 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.

In verse 19a God asks,¹ in effect, "How shall I give you this wonderful heritage of which I have been speaking in view of the fact that you have rejected Me?" God then answers His own question, "I can thus bless you if you will call Me 'my Father' and not turn away from Me." The most wonderful inheritance that can befall a man is to be part of the kingdom of heaven. "That," says Jeremiah, "is the most beautiful inheritance of the nations." One is only entitled to that inheritance when he is able by virtue of the New Birth to call God "my Father." One can only claim that inheritance when he has been faithful unto death.

From an idealistic view of the distant future the prophet returns in verse 20 to a realistic view of the present. As God looks upon the nation all he presently sees in the whole house of Israel i.e., the whole nation, is unfaithfulness and apostasy. Just as a faithless wife departs from her husband so has the covenant nation departed from the divine Husband (v. 20). The sad description of the present state of affairs ends abruptly and 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 listens for some sign that the long apostasy has ended. Finally, He hears it. On the high places where once their boisterous idolatrous festivities were conducted now comes forth lamentation and mourning, and prayers pleading for forgiveness for having perverted their ways and having for-

1. The American Standard Version and a number of commentators prefer to render the first half of verse 19 as an exclamation instead of a question. Either rendering is possible.

saken the Lord (v. 21). Lest they feel that their sin is too grievous and their repentance futile the Lord immediately offers them words of encouragement. He addresses them as "sons" and calls upon them to return to Him. He, the Great Physician, will heal them of their spiritual maladies and restore them to spiritual health if they will but come unto Him (v. 22a).

E. The Prayer of Repentance 3:22b-25

TRANSLATION

(22b) Here we are, we have come to you because you are the LORD our God. (23) Truly the hills are a swindle, the tumult of the mountains; Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. (24) But shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. (25) Let us lie down in our shame and let our reproach cover us, for against the LORD our God we have sinned, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day; we have not hearkened to the voice of the LORD our God.

COMMENTS

The exact nature of the verses in this section has puzzled commentators. Does this forthright confession represent the longing of the Lord? Do these verses 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 and honest. The present writer feels that the prophet intended these verses 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."¹

The last part of verse 22 depicts the eager response of the people to the gracious invitation which the Lord has just offered in the first half of the verse. The people confess that the pagan worship conducted on the hills has proved to be vain. They admit that they had been spiritually swindled by the tumult of the mountains, i.e., the wild orgies² which accompanied idol-worship (v. 23). True spiritual power is not always proportionate to the boisterousness of the religious observance. The Hebrew word translated "shame" in verse 24 is the word *bosheth* which often serves in the Old Testament as a euphemism for Baal.³ For as long as these folks can remember Baal worship has devoured the resources of the nation. Their flocks and herds and even their sons and daughters had been offered as sacrifices to the pagan deities (v. 24). Then, too, because of their idolatry divine punishment came upon them which 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 which the Baal demanded and the subsequent punishment which the Lord exacted. The repentant sinners are so ashamed that they resolve to prostrate themselves, an expression of the deepest sorrow. Their guilt is so intense that it seems to enshroud them. In bitter tears of shame and remorse they cry out, "We have sinned against the Lord our God!" This is the godly sorrow that leads to

1. Laetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

2. For an example of tumultuous Baal worship see I Kings 18. Others take the tumult of the mountains to refer to the multitudes who gathered on the mountains to worship Baal. Still others feel the word refers to the idols themselves.

3. For examples where *bosheth* is substituted for Baal, see Jeremiah 11:13; Hosea 9:10; II Samuel 11:21; Judges 6:32; II Samuel 2:8 and I Chronicles 8:33.

repentance (II Corinthians 7:9-11). When one realizes the true nature of sin and the true nature of the God against who he has sinned, he cannot help but feel the agonizing shame depicted so vividly in verse 25.

F. The Rewards of Repentance 4:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) If you return, O Israel, (oracle of the LORD) unto Me return; and if you will remove your abominations from before Me, and never waver (2) and you swear, As the LORD lives, in truth, in justice and in righteousness then nations shall bless themselves in Him and in Him they shall glory. (3) For thus says the LORD, to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: Plow up your unplowed ground! Do not sow among the thorns! (4) Circumcise yourselves to the LORD. Remove the foreskins of your heart, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, 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.

COMMENTS

If she was to reap the rewards of repentance Israel must make sure that she turns unto the Lord. The pronoun "Me" is in an emphatic position in the Hebrew sentence structure of verse 1. 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." A genuine return to the Lord will involve three distinct actions on the part of the nation. (1) They must remove all their abominations, i.e., their idols and the rites conducted in their worship, from before the face of the Lord. (2) From that point on they must never waver, i.e., run to and from other gods, but rather

remain stedfastly faithful to the Lord. (3) They must swear by the life of the Lord. "As the Lord lives" was the common form of the Jewish oath. 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.¹ 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 (a) in truth, i.e., in sincerity; (b) in justice, i.e., in keeping with that which is right; and (c) in righteousness, i.e., in accordance with the commandments of the law of God (Deuteronomy 6:24, 25). Following this lengthy statement of the stipulations concerning repentance, the Lord adds a beautiful promise. If Israel truly repents then the Lord will make them a blessing to the whole world and the promise of 3:17 will be fulfilled. The heathen will come to bless and glorify the Lord when they see the way in which He will bless penitent Israel (v. 2).

From the explicit promise of reward in verse 2 the prophet develops two metaphors which contain implicit promises to penitent sinners. In the first metaphor, which Jeremiah has borrowed from Hosea (10:12), the heart of the men of Judah is like a field which has never been cleared of dense brush and plowed for planting. (v. 3). It is no easy task to clear that land of thorn and thistle and plow that virgin soil. Superficial plowing will 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 which 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 which harbors the roots of sin. But the more thorough the plowing, the richer the harvest.

1. Cf. Deuteronomy 26:17f.; II Kings 23:3; Nehemiah 9:1—10:39.

In verse 4 the metaphor changes as Jeremiah calls upon the men of Judah to circumcise themselves to the Lord. Here the prophet is taking a slap at the mere formal, ritualistic notions of 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 but also of their hearts (Deuteronomy 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. 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 will break forth against them and no one will be able to extinguish that fire (v. 4).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FIVE

I. Facts to Master.

1. The time of these sermons (3:6).
2. The great act in the past that demonstrated God's special favor (2:6, 7).
3. Places which Jeremiah challenges the people to look for similar examples of apostasy (2:10).
4. Something that foreign nations had never done (2:11).
5. What the people had substituted for the Fountain of Living Waters (2:13).
6. The two cities representative of Egypt (2:16).
7. The identity of the waters of Sihor and "the River" (2:18).

8. The significance of the term "harlotry" in Jeremiah's preaching.
9. A key word in Jeremiah: "Your children have received no _____ (2:30).
10. The law which Jeremiah cites in 3:1.
11. The two faithless sisters mentioned in 3:6-10.
12. That which would no longer be missed in the Messianic Age (3:16).
13. The name that Jerusalem would have in the Messianic Age (3:17).
14. The great reunion in the Messianic age.
15. The name by which God desired to be called (3:19).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. How would you compare and contrast Jeremiah's reference to "living" water with Jesus' use of the term in John 4:5-26?
2. What are some of the broken cisterns which men have hewed out for themselves today?
3. In what ways does Jeremiah indicate the worthlessness of idols in chapter 2?
4. Should 3:1-5 be regarded as an appeal to the people or as a rejection of Israel? Are these verses a *plea* or a *protest*?
5. Should the call for repentance in 3:6-10 be dated *before* or *after* the reformation of Josiah in 621 B.C.? See the hint in verse 10.
6. What lesson of history had Judah failed to learn? See 3:8. Why is it important for a citizen to know the history of his country?
7. What is repentance? What are the idols from which men need to turn in our days?
8. What principle was the prophet employing when he declared in 3:11 that Israel (Northern Kingdom) was more righteous than Judah?

JEREMIAH

9. What role does confession play in repentance? What should the sinner confess? Why should he confess if God already knows all the sin that he has committed? See 3:13, 23-25.
10. Who are the shepherds that God promises to give to his restored people? Why are they necessary? See 3:15. Do you think that enough emphasis is put on *conserving* those who are *converted* to Christ today?
11. Is it legitimate to regard Jerusalem in 3:17 as a prophetic reference to the church and the reunification of Judah and Israel as prophetic of the union of Jew and Gentile in the church?
12. What are the various conditions which the people were to meet if they were to enjoy the blessings of God? 4:1, 2.

CHAPTER SIX

SERMONS FROM THE REIGN OF JOSIAH (Continued)

III. GOD'S WARNING TO HIS PEOPLE

4:5—6:26

Following his treatment of repentance Jeremiah takes up at length the subject of divine judgment. Using bold figures of speech he first announces the coming judgment (4:5-18) and then adds a somewhat detailed description of that judgment (4:19-31). Chapter 5 in its entirety is devoted to discussion of the causes of the impending disaster. In chapter 6 the prophet sees the judgment approaching ever closer to his country.

A. Announcement of Coming Judgment 4:5-18

Jeremiah builds the announcement of divine judgment around three figures. He compares the armies which will destroy Judah to a lion who ravishes the countryside (vv. 5-10), to a tempest which swirls through the land (vv. 11-13) and to "watchers" who station themselves outside the fortifications of Jerusalem and guard against any escape on the part of the inhabitants of the city (vv. 14-18).

1. *The first figure: the lion* (4:5-10)

TRANSLATION

(5) Declare in Judah and publish in Jerusalem, and say: Blow the trumpet in the land; cry out boldly and say: Gather yourselves and let us go unto the fortified city. (6) Set up a standard toward Zion. Take refuge. Do not hesitate; for I am about to bring calamity from the north and great destruction. (7)

A lion has gone up from his thicket, yea, a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out of his place to make your land a desolation. Your cities shall fall to ruins, without inhabitant. (8) Because of this gird on sackcloth, mourn and howl for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned back from us. (9) And it shall come to pass in that day (oracle of the LORD) that the heart of the king shall perish and the heart of the princes as well. The priests shall be astonished and the prophets shall be dumb-founded. (10) And I said, Ah Lord GOD! Surely you have completely deceived this people and Jerusalem saying, you shall have peace, while the sword reaches to the soul.

COMMENTS

Verses 5-10 present a picture of impending disaster. 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. Jeremiah urges the people to sound the alarm throughout the land by means of trumpet and word of mouth. He urges them to cry out as loudly¹ as they possibly can in order that the scattered population might rush to safety in the fortified cities of the land (v. 5). Jeremiah urges them to set up a standard, a signal flag or signpost, to guide the fleeing refugees to Zion or Jerusalem. He pleads with fugitives not to hesitate (literally, stand around). They should not linger or tarry in order to have their possessions. It is an urgent hour. The Babylonian forces

1. The 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.

in the north are sweeping southward to bring calamity and destruction to Judah (v. 6).

Jeremiah compares Nebuchadnezzar to a lion which 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. Unlike the literal lions which might attack individuals, this mighty and ruthless lion attacks and destroys whole nations. 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" (lit., has broken up his camp). His purpose, declares the prophet, is to make the whole land of Judah a desolation (v. 7). In view of this impending disaster Jeremiah urges the people to gird on sackcloth as a sign of extreme distress. They should mourn and howl as in lamentation over the dead. The destruction of the land is inevitable because the fierce anger of the Lord has not turned away from Judah (v. 8) as the people naively believed (2:35). In that day of disaster the heart of the king and his princes shall perish. The heart in the Old Testament 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. The spiritual leaders who had so confidently been predicting that God could not and would not destroy Jerusalem will be utterly dumbfounded at the extent of the calamity (v. 9).

In verse 10 Jeremiah reacts to the vivid description of the future judgment which he has just faithfully related to the people. Shocking as it may seem, Jeremiah accuses God of deceiving or beguiling the nation, promising them peace while the sword of divine retribution was about to reach to the very soul or life of the nation. This is not the only passage where Jeremiah charges God with deceit (cf. 20:7). 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 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 (6:14; 14:13; 23:17). 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 is told that they are prophesying lies in the name of God.

2. *The second figure: the tempest* (4:11-13)

TRANSLATION

(11) In that time it shall be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A wind scorching hot of the bare heights in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow, not to cleanse; (12) a wind too strong for these things shall come for Me; now also I will speak judgments against them. (13) Behold, like clouds he comes up and like a whirlwind are his chariots. His horses are more swift than eagles. Woe to us! for we are devastated.

COMMENTS

When the judgment falls upon Judah people will use the figure of a blasting wind to describe what has befallen the land. The foe sweeping down upon Jerusalem will not be like the gentle wind which separates the grain

from the chaff but will be like the fierce sirocco which blasts in annually from the Arabian desert (v. 11). 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. God had spoken in times past through His prophets. Now God will speak to His people in the only language which they will understand, the language of judgment and punishment (v. 12). The hosts of God's warriors will come up like the clouds (Ezekiel 38:16) which accompany a violent whirlwind (Isaiah 5:28; 66:15). The horses of the enemy are more swift than eagles (Habakkuk 1:8; Deuteronomy 28:49). As the inhabitants of Judah see that vast horde descending upon them the wail of lamentation shall be taken up in the land (v. 13).

3. *The third figure: the keepers* (4:14-18)

TRANSLATION

(14) Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you might be saved. How long will you harbor in your midst wicked thoughts? (15) For hark! A messenger from Dan, one who announces bad tidings from the hills of Ephraim! (16) Report it to the nations: Behold! Publish concerning Jerusalem, Watchers are coming from a distant land and they shall give forth their voice against the cities of Judah. (17) Like watchmen of a field are they against her round about for she has rebelled against Me (oracle of the LORD). (18) Your way and your deeds have done these things to you; this is your evil. Surely it is bitter! Surely it has touched your very heart.

The third figure opens with an appeal to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse themselves from evil in order that they might be saved. Amid the crashing threats of divine judgment it is easy to overlook these quiet and sincere appeals. 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" (v. 11). Repentance is so urgent for Jeremiah can see in prophetic vision the rapid advance of the enemy. He dramatically depicts a messenger arriving from Dan, the northern border of Palestine. Almost as quickly as the first messenger reaches Jerusalem a second runner from the hills of Ephraim ten miles from Jerusalem arrives with equally bad tidings. The enemy is rapidly advancing toward Jerusalem (v. 15). Even the neighboring nations are called upon to take heed to what is taking place at Jerusalem for the divine visitation there has universal significance. Watchers, i.e., the besieging army, station themselves around the cities of Judah. They lift up their voices against the besieged cities in ridicule, in taunts and demands for total surrender (v. 16). The enemy erects pavilions, booths and tents about the besieged city like unto those erected by those who guard a field (cf. Isaiah 1:8). The enemy watches the city lest any within make good their escape. All this has come upon Judah because she has rebelled against the Lord (v. 17). The sin of Judah is bitter indeed. It has reached to the very heart of the nation dealing a death blow to her (v. 18).

B. Description of Coming Judgment 4:19-31

In the last half of chapter four Jeremiah describes the coming judgment. He emphasizes that this judgment

will be (1) terrifying (vv. 19-22); (2) devastating (vv. 23-26); and (3) inevitable (vv. 27-31).

1. *Terrifying judgment* (4:19-22)

TRANSLATION

(19) O my bowels, my bowels! I writhe! O walls of my heart! My heart roars within me! I cannot remain silent! for the sound of the trumpet you have heard, O my soul, the battle cry! (20) Destruction upon destruction is called for; the whole land is spoiled; suddenly they have spoiled my tents, in a moment my curtains. (21) How long shall I see a standard, hear the noise of a trumpet? (22) For My people are foolish, they know not Me; they are stupid sons! they are senseless ones. They are wise to do evil but they do not know how to do good.

COMMENTS

Let no one think that Jeremiah enjoyed preaching his message of judgment. He was no sadist who took delight in the suffering of others. As he contemplates the imminent destruction of his people he is emotionally shaken. His heart pounds; his bowels, considered by the ancients to be the seat of emotion, are in agony. He cannot remain silent. He must give vent to his intense feelings (v. 19). When he hears the war trumpet, the battle cry and sees in his mind's eye wave after wave of destruction sweeping across his land he is completely overwhelmed. Suddenly, in a moment it seems, the land and all its "tents" and "curtains" fall into the hands of the enemy (v. 20). Of course the people of Judah had long since given up the tents and curtains of their nomadic age for more permanent dwellings. Here Jeremiah is using

tents and curtains as a metaphor for the habitations of the citizens of Jerusalem.¹

In verse 21 the agony of the prophet reaches a climax as he cries out, "How long shall I see a standard, hear the noise of a trumpet?" The prophet seems to be rebelling against the visions of divine judgment which he has so frequently seen. The trumpet and standard here may be those of the enemy who attack Jerusalem or those of the Judeans who are defending their capital. Jeremiah seems to have hoped for some breakthrough in divine revelation, some note of hope. Yet all he has received thus far in his ministry are revelations of death and destruction. He asks the question, "How long?" He really means "Why?" God answers that question in verse 23 by giving a three-fold justification for the impending destruction of the nation. (1) The Judeans are foolish and no longer truly know God in their hearts. (2) When it comes to spiritual things, God's people are stupid and senseless sons. (3) These people are brilliant in planning further evil but do 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 verse 22 is that these revelations will continue so long as the people continue to be foolish and disobedient.

2. *Devastating judgment* (4:23-26)

TRANSLATION

(23) I looked at the land, and behold, it was waste and void; and unto the heavens, but there was no light. (24) I looked at the mountains, and behold, they were shaking; and all the hills shook themselves.

1. Jeremiah 30:18; II Samuel 20:1; I Kings 8:66; 12:16; Psalms 132:3.

(25) I looked, and behold, there was no man and all the birds of the heaven had fled. (26) I looked, and behold, Carmel was a wilderness and all his cities were pulled down because of the presence of the LORD and His fierce anger.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah regains his composure after the emotional outburst of verses 19-21. God's explanation of the forthcoming destruction in verse 22 seems to have satisfied the reluctant preacher. He takes up anew the description of the divine judgment by picturing the desolate condition of Judah during the years of the exile. Four times in verses 23-26 he declares that he "saw" what he describes to his hearers. What he saw was not a pretty picture. He saw "waste and void." The same two words are used in combination in the second verse of Genesis to describe the state of primeval matter before the spirit of God molded it into order and form. He sees darkness prevailing over the land as the heavens refuse to give forth light (v. 23). The mountains and hills, despite their massive weight, are "shaking" (lit., to be light or move lightly), swaying, tossing and heaving (v. 24). Not a man could he see! Not even a bird remained in the land (v. 25). When birds flee a land the desolation is complete. Carmel, the "fruitful field," had become a wilderness. All the cities of the land are in ruins. All had been laid waste and destroyed by the wrath of the God of judgment.

3. *Inevitable judgment* (4:27-31)

TRANSLATION

(27) For thus says the LORD: All the land shall become a desolation; but I will not make a full end of

it. (28) On account of this the land shall mourn, the heavens above shall be dark because I have spoken, I have purposed it and I have not repented nor turned back from it. (29) From the noise of the horsemen and bowmen all the city flees. They go into the thickets and go up into the rocks. Every city is forsaken and there is not a man dwelling in them. (30) And you who are about to be spoiled, what are you doing that you clothe yourself with scarlet, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with eye shadow. In vain you primp! Your lovers despise you, they seek your life. (31) For a sound as a woman in labor I have heard, anguish as one who brings forth her first-born, the sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, spreading forth her hands. Woe is me now for my soul faints before the murderers.

COMMENTS

However severe the punishment of Judah may be God "will not make a full end of it" (v. 27). A remnant will escape and become the seed for a holier nation.¹ Without such a conviction the work of the prophet would be meaningless. Yet God has proposed and decreed the destruction of the nation as a political entity. For this reason both earth and heaven are pictured as entering into mourning (v. 28). The figure of the earth mourning may mean that the soil will not produce its fruit. The lamentation on the part of nature is justified. Screaming, galloping horsemen and expert bowmen will sweep down upon "the city." The inhabitants of the city will flee for safety to the thickets and rocks, the limestone caverns which abound in Palestine. Every city is forsaken, deathly silent (v. 29).

1. See Amos 9:8; Isaiah 4:2; 6:13; 10:20; 11:11; Hosea 6:1, 2.

In view of the impending national disaster Jeremiah cannot comprehend the nonchalance of his countrymen. Like the wrinkled old Jezebel who painted her face in a desperate attempt to allure and seduce her antagonist Jehu (II Kings 9:30), Judah is using every device to gain the favor of the powers of the world. Judah puts on scarlet robes and beautiful ornaments of gold. She applies cosmetics to her eyelids in order to make her eyes seem larger. But all of this primping is in vain. Judah's political lovers actually despise her and are seeking to destroy her (v. 30). 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. Three times in verse 30 Jeremiah emphasizes Judah's efforts to please her political friends; three times he records the futility of her efforts. Too late the silly maiden will realize the folly of her ways. The dying daughter of Zion will experience agony akin to that experienced by a woman giving birth to her first child. She gasps for breath and spreads forth her hands in desperate appeal, crying out in anguish, "Woe is me!" At last she realizes that her lovers (*hoge bim*) are really her murderers (*bore gim*).

C. Causes of Coming Judgment 5:1-31

In chapter five Jeremiah discusses the various reasons why God must judge His people. The nation has been guilty of at least six terrible sins: (1) moral corruption (vv. 1-6); (2) sexual impurity (vv. 7-9); (3) treacherous unbelief (vv. 10-18); (4) religious apostasy (vv. 19-24); (5) social injustice (vv. 25-29); and (6) international deception (vv. 30, 31).

1. *Moral corruption* (5:1-6)

TRANSLATION

(1) Roam through the streets of Jerusalem, look and find out for yourself! Seek in her broad places if you can find a man or if there is one who does justly, seeking truth, that I may forgive her. (2) And though they swear, As the LORD lives, surely they swear falsely. (3) O LORD are not Your eyes on truth? You have smitten them but they felt no pain; You consumed them, they have refused to accept instruction. They have made their faces harder than a rock. They refuse to repent. (4) And as for me, I said, Surely these are poor! They are foolish for they do not know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God. (5) I will go up unto the great ones and speak to them for they know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God. But they altogether have broken the yoke, they have burst the straps. (6) Therefore a lion from the forest shall smite them, a wolf from the desert shall plunder them, a leopard watches over their cities. Anyone who goes out from thence shall be torn because their transgressions are many, their backslidings are without number.

COMMENTS

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 and make a personal observation of the moral condition of the city. Specifically he is to search in the broad places or marketplaces for a man, i.e., someone who was worthy to be called a man. Jeremiah was to search for a man who does what is just and right and who seeks truth

or faithfulness. The Hebrew word translated "truth" often times refers to the faithfulness of a man in performing his duties to God and his fellowmen.¹ The prophet is looking for a man who was true to God, true to man and true to himself. But sometimes in the Old Testament this Hebrew word has a more specialized meaning. It refers to faith in the promise of God to bring a Redeemer into the world.² Faith in the Gospel promise sustained the Old Testament heroes.³ It may well be that Jeremiah here is to search for a man who possessed Messianic faith.⁴ Abraham prayed that Sodom be spared if there were ten righteous men. But God here goes even further. If Jeremiah can find one just man in the city who seeks truth or faith He will forgive Jerusalem and withhold the execution of His wrath.

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 that which was untrue (v. 2). To use God's name in a solemn oath and then lie was tantamount to blasphemy against the holy name. God was looking for truth or faithfulness or faith in the hearts of men. Not finding it 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 almost completely destroyed them but they refused to accept the correction. With stoic determination they endured the discipline of God hardening their faces and refusing to repent (v. 3).

Jeremiah could not believe what he saw among the common people on the streets of Jerusalem and so he began to make excuses for them. These people are poor;

1. I Chronicles 9:22, 26, 31; II Chronicles 31:15, 18, etc.

2. Habakkuk 2:4. Cf. Romans 1:17.

3. Genesis 4:1; 5:29; 49:18; II Samuel 7:18-29; Hebrews 11.

4. Laetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

they are uneducated in the way of the Lord; they know nothing of the judgment, i.e., religious law of their God. It is their lack of education which causes them to foolishly sin, and the hardship of their poverty has caused them to harden their hearts in unbelief (v. 4). 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. They had all the advantages of education and instruction in the way of the Lord. They were literate and could read the law of God for themselves. But Jeremiah found that the up and out were worse than the down and out. Among the elite he found nothing but lawlessness and license. They had altogether broken the yoke of divine restraint (v. 5). The straps which they burst were the thongs by which the yoke was secured to the neck (cf. Isaiah 58:6). These men wanted to be free from the law of God and from any divine control. They wanted to do their own thing. Thus, in the entire nation Jeremiah could not find one man who by God's standards was a real man.

Because of the all-pervasive apostasy, God will bring judgment upon Judah: a lion from the forest, a wolf from the desert¹ and a leopard or panther watching over their cities (v. 6). Lions were common in the hills and valleys of Palestine. A few leopards are still to be found in the hills of Galilee. The singular words: lion, wolf, leopard, are probably to be regarded as collective singulars. These animals may be symbols of the calamity which would befall Judah. On the other hand, numerous prophecies make it clear that the land would be overrun by wild creatures after the Jews had been deported.²

1. Following the marginal reading in the American Standard Version.

2. Ezekiel 14:15, 21; Leviticus 26:22; Deuteronomy 32:24; II Kings 17:25ff.

2. *Sexual impurity* (5:7-9)

TRANSLATION

(7) Wherefore should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken Me and have sworn by no-gods; and when I fed them, then they committed adultery and they flocked to the house of a harlot. (8) They have become well-fed stallions roaming about; each man neighs unto the wife of his neighbor. (9) On account of these things shall I not punish (oracle of the LORD)? Shall not My soul take vengeance on a nation which is like this?

COMMENTS

Persistent unbelief makes divine forgiveness of Judah impossible. The children of Judah have forsaken God and have indicated their allegiance to idols by swearing in the name of these non-entities. God had fed them, granted to them prosperity. But instead of gratitude, here is depravity. They had committed the sin of adultery. The prophet may be referring to literal adultery here or he may be using adultery as a metaphor for apostasy. The men of Judah flocked (lit., assembled in troops) to the house of the harlot (v. 7). They were utterly unashamed of their actions and made no attempt to hide their immoral acts. The reference here might be to the obscene orgies which characterized certain of the Canaanite cults. In any case, the immoral acts of the Baal cult could not be confined to "religious" exercises. The men of Judah roam about like well-fed¹ stallions, each one neighing to the wife of his neighbor (v. 8). The morals of a nation have sunk to rock bottom when sexual desire becomes merely an animal appetite to be satisfied in any manner

1. The meaning of the Hebrew word is obscure. The best Hebrew authorities suggest that the word means "weighted or furnished with weights."

and with anyone. Can God do anything other than bring punishment and divine vengeance upon such a nation? (v. 9). Divine vengeance in Scripture is just retribution for sins which are an affront to God.

3. *Treacherous unbelief* (5:10-18)

TRANSLATION

(10) Go up against her rows and destroy, but do not make a full end; Remove her shoots for they do not belong to the LORD. (11) For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been thoroughly treacherous with me (oracle of the LORD). (12) They have lied against the LORD and have said, He is not and the calamity shall not come against us. We shall not see sword and famine. (13) And the prophets are windbags and the word is not in them. Thus let it be done to them. (14) Therefore thus says the LORD God of Hosts: because you have said this thing, behold, I am about to place My words in your mouth as fire and this people as wood and it shall consume them. (15) Behold, I am about to bring against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel (oracle of the LORD), a powerful nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose tongue you do not know nor can you understand what they say. (16) Their quiver is like a open grave; all of them are mighty men. (17) They shall eat your harvest and your bread, they shall eat up your sheep and your cattle, they shall eat your vines and your fig trees, they shall batter with the sword your fortified cities in which you are trusting. (18) But even in those days (oracle of the LORD) I will not make a full end of you.

COMMENTS

Frequently in prophetic literature the Lord through his prophet will exhort the enemy to get busy with the work of judgment against Israel. In verse ten Judah is compared to a vineyard or perhaps an olive orchard. The enemy is instructed to go up against the rows¹ of vines and begin a ruthless pruning operation. The degenerate and dead shoots,² the apostate people who no longer render allegiance to the Lord, are to be removed. But the enemy is not to completely destroy the vine. Through the process of their pruning the degenerate members of the nation will be removed and the believing kernel of the nation will be left (v. 10). Here again is the idea of the remnant which plays such an important role in the Old Testament (cf. 4:27).

But why must any judgment against Judah take place? The house of Israel and the house of Judah, both kingdoms, have been "treacherous" with the Lord (v. 11). The word "treacherous" in the Old Testament carries the idea of violating the most sacred relationships as, for example, marriage vows (Malachi 2:11). Furthermore, the people of Judah have lied against the Lord (v. 12). 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. In the view of the present writer the people were saying,

1. The American Standard and King James versions 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.

2. The rendering of the American Standard, "branches," is much to be preferred over the King James "battlements."

"God will not turn against us, He will not bring calamity upon us." The notion that God could not destroy Judah because of the covenant with them was deeply rooted in the popular theology of that time. Whatever it was that they were saying God regarded it as a lie concerning Himself.

Not only were the people lying against God, they were ridiculing the prophets of God. They regarded the prophets who claimed to be men of the Spirit as nothing but windbags.¹ 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 (v. 13). But God will not let the slanderous words of the people go unchallenged. He acknowledges Jeremiah as His spokesman and affirms that He, the Almighty, has placed those words upon the lips of the prophet. The judgment words spoken by Jeremiah will eventually consume the people as fire consumes dead timber (v. 14). The title "Lord God of Hosts" appears in verse 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.

The threat of divine judgment so repugnant to the people of Judah is repeated in verses 15-18. God is about to bring a powerful and ancient nation against the house of Israel. The "house of Israel" is here the kingdom of Judah, for after the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C. Judah became the sole representative of the people of Israel. The attacking nation is "powerful." The word used here is one used primarily of rivers which flow the year around. The enemies have inexhaustible resources and

1. The same Hebrew word can be rendered "spirit" or "wind."

therefore do not fail in the purpose which they undertake. The nation is ancient, dating back to the very dawn of history. They speak a language which the men of Judah cannot comprehend (v. 15). Here Jeremiah seems to borrow the terminology used earlier by Isaiah to describe the Assyrians (Isaiah 28:11; 33:19). Every man in the enemy army is a mighty of valor. The arrows of their archers are deadly (v. 16). The armies of the enemy sweep over the land and 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 which the children would normally eat. This would mean, of course, that the children would then die of starvation. 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 (v. 17). Yet as terrible as this judgment is, the nation will not be utterly destroyed. A remnant will survive (cf. 4:27; 5:10).

4. *Religious apostasy* (5:19-24)

TRANSLATION

(19) And it shall come to pass when you shall say, For what reason did the LORD our God do all these things to us? Then you shall say unto them, Just as you have forsaken Me and served strange gods in your land, thus you shall serve strangers in a land not your own. (20) Declare this in the house of Jacob and make it known in Judah, saying, (21) Hear now this: O foolish people who are without understanding, who have eyes and see not, who have ears and do not hear. (22) Do you not fear Me (oracle of the LORD)? Do you not tremble from before My face who placed the sand as a border to the sea, an eternal statute and it shall not cross over

it. (23) But this people has a revolting and rebellious heart; they have revolted and gone. (24) They did not say in their heart, Let us fear now the LORD our God who gives us the rain in season, even showers of autumn and spring, who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

COMMENTS

Once the divine calamity begins to fall upon Judah men will inquire of the prophet as to why their nation is suffering so. His answer is to be honest and uncompromising: "You willingly forsook God and served strange gods in your own land. As your punishment you must serve strange people in a foreign land" (v. 19). The divine punishment corresponds to the crime which the people have committed against God. On at least four occasions, possibly more, Nebuchadnezzar led away captives from Jerusalem, in 605, 597, 587 and 582 B.C.

In order to impress once again the seriousness of the national apostasy upon the people Jeremiah is commissioned to deliver another oracle to "the house of Jacob," i.e., Judah (v. 20). The people of Judah are foolish, without understanding. They have eyes and ears but they do not see and hear (v. 21). This same terminology is used in Psalms 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. Ezekiel 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. As but one example of His handiwork Jeremiah mentions how the Creator has placed the sand as an impassable barrier to the sea. This is an eternal statute or

perpetual decree, a law of nature (v. 22). But while inanimate nature is submissive to the divine will, Israel has a rebellious heart or will. They have actually defied and opposed their God and gone away from His will (v. 23). They were utterly blind to their dependence upon God for their sustenance. God had faithfully given to His people the autumn and spring rains upon which the agricultural prosperity of Palestine depends. Year in and year out God kept the weeks of the harvest for the benefit of His people. 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 restrained the rain when it would have been harmful to them. Yet in blind ingratitude they never thought of rendering to God the fear and reverence due to Him (v. 24).

5. *Social injustice* (5:25-29)

TRANSLATION

(25) Your iniquities have turned away these things and your sins have withheld good from you. (26) For wicked men are found among My people. They watch, with the crouching of fowlers; they set the traps; they catch men. (27) As a cage full of birds so their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they become great and they become rich. (28) They have become fat, they are sleek, they have surpassed the deeds of the wicked. 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. (29) On account of these things shall I not punish (oracle of the LORD)? Shall not My soul take vengeance on a nation which is like this?

JEREMIAH
COMMENTS

The iniquities of the people of Judah have deprived them of continued divine blessing (v. 25). 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). These judgments are necessary because there are wicked men among the people of God, men who will stop at nothing to enrich themselves. Like the fowler (cf. Micah 7:2) they crouch and wait until an innocent and helpless victim is ensnared in their trap. By wicked and diabolical schemes they are attempting to catch men (v. 26). As the home of the successful fowler is full of caged birds, so the homes of these wicked schemers give evidence of their prowess. Their homes are full of deceit, i.e., objects obtained through deceit, ill-gotten gain (v. 27). These wicked men grow fat and sleek as their riches increase. Their wickedness grows ever more bold and reprehensible. They exceed or go beyond the deeds of the most wicked men. No crime is out of the question if it serves to enhance their wealth and power. They were totally inconsiderate of the rights of helpless minorities, the poor and the fatherless. Never would one of these powerful men intervene to help the less fortunate get justice in the courts (v. 28). Repeating the rhetorical question of verse 9 the Lord asks, "Shall I not take vengeance on such a nation as this?" Acts of injustice are offences against God and He must avenge them. The intervention of God on behalf of the helpless and in judgment upon those who oppress them is one of the major themes of prophetic literature.

6. *Intentional deception* (5:30, 31)

TRANSLATION

(30) An astonishing and horrible thing has come to pass in the land. (31) The prophets have prophesied falsehoods and the priests rule at their side and My people love it so! And what shall you do at its end?

COMMENTS

That which 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 and horrible (v. 30). Not only the political rulers (v. 28) but the spiritual rulers as well were utterly corrupt. Jeremiah was both prophet and priest and he criticized those who held both offices. The prophets were prophesying falsehoods, promising the people that God was on their side and no ill would befall their nation. They peddled a false security based on empty forms and rituals. It was a superficial religion, a religion which did not get in the way of one's everyday life. The priests "rule at their side," i.e., at the beck and call of the prophets. But the people were as guilty as their religious leaders for they encouraged and supported them. Falsehood is generally far more pleasant to the ear than truth and the men of Judah were quite anxious to hear the assurances of peace and prosperity. But 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 as a nation stand face to face with God.

D. Approach of Judgment 6:1-30

Chapter 6 contains a dramatic description of the advance of the foe against Jerusalem (vv. 1-5) and the

subsequent siege of that city (vv. 6-8). The enemy will be completely successful in destroying the city (vv. 9-15). At this point in the chapter Jeremiah offers to the people a prescription of deliverance from impending judgment (vv. 16-21). Then he reverts to a description of the coming conqueror (vv. 22-26). The chapter concludes with an indication of the hopeless task of the prophet of God (vv. 27-30).

1. *The advance of the foe* (6:1-5)

TRANSLATION

(1) Seek refuge, O children of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem and in Tekoa blow a trumpet! At Beth-Hakkerem rise up a signpost! for calamity peers down from the north, great destruction. (2) The beautiful and dainty one, the daughter of Zion, I will cut off. (3) Unto her shall come shepherds with their flocks; they shall pitch against her tents round about; they shall graze each man what is at his hand. (4) Sanctify against her war. Rise up! Let us go up at noontime. Woe to us when the day turns for the shadows of evening are stretching out. (5) Rise up that we may go up by night, that we may destroy her palaces.

COMMENTS

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 appears to be safe and the prophet can see refugees streaming southward from her gates. Being himself a Benjaminite, Jeremiah calls for his fellow tribesmen to get out of the midst of Jerusalem. The city of Jeru-

salem was actually located on the border between Judah and Benjamin and hence many Benjaminites made that city their home. In Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, a trumpet is sounded to assemble the people in their flight to the wilderness of southwestern Judah. At Beth-Hakkerem, thought to be a hill east of Bethlehem, a sign post or fiery beacon is set up to give further guidance to fugitives. This flight is wise and necessary because the ugly monster of calamity is peering down (lit., bending forward) from the north (v. 1). By means of the ruthless armies of Nebuchadnezzar God will cut off or destroy the beautiful and dainty daughter of Zion, i.e., the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 2). Zion was the hill chosen by the Lord as His earthly abode and was part of the city of Jerusalem. No longer will the delicate lady, the bride of God and daughter of Jerusalem, receive the loving and tender treatment of the past. Instead, foreign commanders with their armies will come up against Jerusalem like shepherds with their flocks. Each "shepherd" will allow his flock to graze that part of Judah which is "at his hand" i.e., which has been assigned to his jurisdiction. As sheep graze a pasture land until nothing but bare soil remains so will these "shepherds" and their "flocks" utterly depasture and devastate the land of Judah (v. 3).

Verse 4 opens with an exhortation addressed to the invading force. "Sanctify against her war!" War in antiquity was a sacred undertaking. Sacrifices were frequently offered before battle (e.g., I Samuel 7:9; 13:9) and inspirational addresses were given (e.g., Judges 7:18). Following the exhortation which he addresses to the enemy, Jeremiah takes his audience into the very camp of the enemy. The enemy is planning a surprise attack at noon-time, a time when usually both sides in a conflict rested. As the shadows of evening lengthen the enemy forces lament the fact that they have not been able to complete their work of destruction (v. 4). Rather than retire to

the camp for rest and refreshment the enemy commanders urge their men forward in a daring and decisive night attack designed to bring them within the walls of Jerusalem. They will not wait till morning for the final assault (v. 5).

2. *The siege of Jerusalem* (6:6-8)

TRANSLATION

(6) For thus says the LORD of hosts: Cut her trees and pour out against Jerusalem a mound! This is the city to be punished; everywhere there is oppression in her midst. (7) As the well causes its water to bubble forth so she bubbles forth her wickedness; violence and oppression are heard in her; before Me continually are sickness and wounds. (8) Be corrected, O Jerusalem, lest My soul be removed from you; lest I make you an astonishment, a land not inhabited.

COMMENTS

The God of Israel is the Lord of the enemy hosts. He issues the commands; they are merely instruments in His hands. "Cut her trees! Pour out against Jerusalem a mound!" The 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. Baskets of earth were poured out to form high mounds from which missiles could the more easily be hurled against the walls or into the besieged city. Jerusalem is to be punished by God because oppression exists throughout that city (v. 6). Just as a well always yields a supply of cool, fresh water so Jerusalem seems to constantly cause her wickedness to bubble forth. Deeds of violence and oppression

against the less fortunate are commonplace. As a result of this mistreatment people suffer physical agony. Diseases produced by deprivation, want and wounds resulting from violent deeds cause the people to cry out to God about their plight (v. 7). Jeremiah earnestly appeals to Jerusalem to accept divine chastisement, to amend her ways, to repent. If they fail to heed this appeal God will 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 (v. 8).

3. *The success of the foe* (6:9-15)

TRANSLATION

(9) Thus says the LORD of hosts: They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel; turn again your hand like a grape gatherer over the basket. (10) To whom may I speak and give warning that they may hear. Behold, their ear is uncircumcised; they are not able to pay attention. Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them, they do not delight in it. (11) Therefore with the wrath of the LORD am I filled; I weary myself containing it! Pour it out upon the child in the street and upon the gathering of young men. For a husband along with his wife shall be taken captive, the old man with the one full of days. (12) And their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and their wives together. For I shall stretch out My hand over the inhabitants of the land (oracle of the LORD). (13) For from their least to their greatest everyone is greedy for gain, from the prophet even unto the priest everyone practices deception. (14) They have healed the wound of My people with

platitudes, saying, Peace! peace! when there is no peace. (15) They shall be put to shame because they have committed abomination; they neither are ashamed nor do they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who are falling. At the time that I punish them they shall be thrown to the ground said the LORD.

COMMENTS

Once again comparing Israel to a vineyard Jeremiah paints the picture of 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, is to undergo a severe sifting process. The enemy will 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 (v. 9). Here is a picture of the repeated calamities, deportations, and attacks which Judah experienced in the twenty years following the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. So was the remnant of Israel, Judah, itself made a remnant.

Jeremiah's prophetic discouragement comes out in verse 10. No one will listen to him as he sounds the warning of impending judgment. The word of the Lord is treated with derision. The ear of the people seems to be uncircumcised, covered as it were with a foreskin which prevents the prophetic word from penetrating their mind (cf. Acts 7:51). Discouraged though he is, Jeremiah cannot refrain from preaching the word of judgment. He is filled with the message of divine wrath; it burns within him. He tries very hard to hold it back but only succeeds in making himself weary. In the last part of verse 11 the problem arises as to who is speaking

and to whom. 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. Whether or not the people listen he 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 (v. 11). Their houses, and fields, and wives will be turned over to the invading soldiers; for the hand of the Lord, once stretched out against the enemies of Israel (Exodus 3:20; Deuteronomy 7:19) is now stretched out against them (v. 12).

The judgment described in verse 12 is appropriate to the root sin of the men of Judah, covetousness. Everyone in the nation, from the least to the greatest, was greedy for illicit gain. Even the prophets and priests practice deception and fraud to curry favor with the populace and thereby secure their good will and their gifts (v. 13). For the love of filthy lucre they would offer flattering pictures of the future prospects of the nation (cf. Micah 3:5). "All is well," they would say. "Peace! Peace!" 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. These leaders feel no shame at present, they have no conscience, they do not know how to blush. But the leaders will eventually share the fate of those they had misguided. They shall fall among those who are slain in battle; they shall disrespectfully be thrown to the ground by the ruthless conqueror (v. 15).

4. *Prescription for deliverance* (6:16-21)

TRANSLATION

(16) Thus said the LORD: Stand along side the ways and observe. Ask for the old ways where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your soul. But they said, We will not walk in it! (17) I have set over you watchmen. Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they have said, We will not hearken! (18) Therefore hear, O nations! Know, O congregation, what is in them. (19) Hear, O earth. Behold, I am about to bring calamity unto this people, the fruit of their thoughts; for they have not paid attention to My words and as for My law, they have rejected it. (20) Why should you bring incense from Sheba, and sweet cain from a distant land. Your burnt offerings are not pleasing and your sacrifices do not satisfy Me. (21) Therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to give unto this people stumbling and they shall stumble over them, fathers and sons together. The neighbor and his friend shall perish.

COMMENTS

In the view of Jeremiah the nation was at a cross-roads. He calls upon the people to stand, i.e., halt their headlong rush to destruction. Jeremiah urges them to select the old path of fidelity to God and adherence to His holy law and then to walk in that path. The old paths are those which previous generations have trodden to find salvation and divine blessing. There is but one way which has the blessing of the Lord and that is the way of obedient faith. True reformers are not those who are advocating new things but those who give due weight to old truths. 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. 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. Their defiant response to the appeal is, "We will not walk in it!" (v. 16). Again God appeals to them to hearken to the alarm sounded by the prophetic watchmen whom He has placed over the nation (cf. Ezekiel 3:17; 33:1). Like watchmen of a city who stood on a high tower scanning the horizon for the first appearance of danger, so God's watchmen would constantly be on the lookout for any danger to the continued existence of the nation of Judah. 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. God's second appeal is also rejected. The hardened people declare that they will not hearken to the alarm of the watchmen (v. 17).

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. Micah 1:2; Isaiah 18:3). The congregation of nations should note the sin and ingratitude which dwells in the heart of God's chosen people. 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 will be able to apply the lesson to themselves (v. 18). The whole earth hears the horrible sentence of judgment: "I am about to bring calamity unto this people." This punishment is the ripe fruit, the direct result, of their wicked and rebellious thoughts. They have not paid any attention to the word of God spoken through the prophets and furthermore they had rejected his written law (v. 19). Everywhere the Jews were scattered among the

nations they became witnesses to their own guilt and the righteousness of the divine retribution against them.

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 1500 miles south of Jerusalem in southwestern Arabia. This may well have been the nearest location from which the proper ingredients specified in the law (Exodus 30:34) could be obtained. Sweet cain or calamus (Exodus 30:23), an ingredient of the holy anointing oil, was imported from a "distant land," perhaps India. There was nothing wrong, of course, with the zeal of these people in obtaining these rare materials. 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 (17:26; 27:21, 22; 33:10, 11, 18). But Jeremiah, like all the prophets before him, regarded sacrifices without obedience as worthless.¹ 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. The men of Judah thought they were keeping God happy and on their side by going through the outward motions of worship. It was a tragic theological miscalculation, one which ultimately resulted in the destruction and ruin of the nation. They might be able to sidestep or rationalize the various disciplinary disasters which God had brought upon them. But in a very short

1. I Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11; Amos 5:21-24; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8.

period of time God would place before them a stumbling-block, Nebuchadnezzar, which they would not be able to sidestep. The whole nation would stumble over that obstacle and fall to their ruin (v. 21).

5. *Description of the foe* (6:22-26)

TRANSLATION

(22) Thus said the LORD: Behold, a people is about to come from a north land, a great nation shall be aroused from the uttermost parts of the earth. (23) Bow and spear they bear. They are ruthless and have no compassion. Their voices roar like the sea. Upon horses they ride equipped as men for war against you, O daughter of Zion. (24) We have heard the report of them. Our hands are feeble. Anguish has taken hold of us, pain as a woman in childbirth. (25) Do not go out into the field nor walk in the way for the enemy has a sword, terror round about. (26) O daughter of My people, Gird on sackcloth and wallow in the dust; make for yourselves the mourning of an only son, most bitter lamentation for suddenly the spoiler shall come upon us.

COMMENTS

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. In contrast to tiny Judah the northern foe is a great nation. They come "from the uttermost part of the earth" (v. 22). In 31:8 this phrase is used of Babylon (cf. 25:32; Isaiah 14:13). The enemy soldiers carry both bow and spear. They are ruthless and have compassion on no one. The cruelty of the Mesopotamian armies in

antiquity is well documented in the monuments. They were feared throughout the ancient Near East (cf. Nahum 3:1; Habakkuk 1:6, 7). The noise of their countless horsemen and chariotry resembled the roar of the sea. This vast and invincible army will shortly come to make war against the daughter of Zion, the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 23).

In verse 24 the prophet again projects himself into the future to describe the reaction of the populace of Jerusalem as this vast host approaches. He identifies himself with his people and expresses the general feeling of anxiety and pain which will prevail in the city at that time. The Jewish soldiers lose their courage; they are too scared to resist. Throughout Jerusalem there is panic and pain which can only be compared to that which a woman experiences in childbirth (v. 24). No one is safe; the enemy is everywhere. No one should venture outside the walls of Jerusalem. Terror surrounds the city (v. 25). In view of the spoiler's rapid descent on Jerusalem, Jeremiah calls his countrymen to bitter lamentation. The bereavement for the loss of an only son was the most severe a Hebrew could suffer (cf. Amos 8:10; Zechariah 12:10). Jeremiah loves his nation as a father loves his daughter and thus he addresses Judah as "the daughter of my people." They refused to shed the tears of repentance; they will now be forced to shed the tears of lamentation (v. 26).

6. *The hopeless task of the prophet* (6:27-30)

TRANSLATION

(27) A tower have I made you among My people, a fortified city that you may know, then test their way. (28) They are all rebellious revolvers, those who go after slander, brass and iron all of them, corrupters are they. (29) The bellows are scorched!

The lead is consumed by fire. In vain he continues to smelt but the wicked are not removed. (30) Refuse silver they shall call them, for the LORD has rejected them.

COMMENTS

In verse 27 God addresses Jeremiah. God has made His prophet as strong as a tower¹ a fortified city; the people will not be successful in attacking him. Jeremiah can then fearlessly test and try the way of the people by his preaching² (v. 27). In this and the following verses 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 corruption; all of them are rotten to the core (v. 28). Try as he may the assayer is not able to extract any precious metal from the worthless ore of the nation Judah. The fire is so hot that the bellows are scorched. The lead which served as a flux to carry away the impurities melts. But no silver remains. There were no righteous ones from whom the wicked could be separated (v. 29). Once Israel had been as precious to God as silver (Deuteronomy 5:27-29). Now that silver had become "refuse silver" i.e., worthless silver, good for nothing dross (v. 30).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SIX

I. Facts to Master.

1. The interpretation of "evil from the north" and "destroyer of nations" (4:6, 7).

1. Another possible rendering is "smelter, prover or trier." For lengthy discussion and defense of the translation "tower" see Laetsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

2. Elsewhere in Scripture men are tested in fire or furnace of trials and tribulations in order to refine and purify them from the dross of sin. See Proverbs 17:3; Zechariah 13:9; Jeremiah 6:29; 9:7.

JEREMIAH

2. The charge which Jeremiah makes against God (4:10).
3. That which was essential if Judah was to be saved in the coming invasion (4:14).
4. Jeremiah's personal feelings as he contemplated the impending disaster (4:19-22).
5. That which the nation tried to do to avert disaster (4:30).
6. A favorite comparison of Jeremiah (4:31).
7. The search which Jeremiah is bidden to undertake (5:1).
8. The words they used in taking an oath (5:2).
9. What the people had been saying about their prophets (5:13).
10. The fate of those who had served foreign gods (5:19).
11. The appalling thing which had happened in the land (5:30).
12. The figure with which Jeremiah describes the obstinacy of the people (6:10).
13. That which the false priests and prophets were proclaiming (6:14).
14. That for which the people should ask (6:16).
15. That which was no longer acceptable to God (6:20).
16. Two metaphors used to describe the prophet (6:27 ASV).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. How can the heart of the sinner be compared to fallow ground? How can the preacher of the Gospel precondition the soil of the heart for a favorable reception of the seed of the Word?
4:3
2. Why does Jeremiah call upon these Jews to circumcise themselves?

SERMONS — JOSIAH'S REIGN

3. What literary technique does the prophet employ in 4:5-18 and 6:1-6?
4. What was the prophet's personal reaction to the destruction of his people? 4:19-22.
5. What is meant by the expression "yet I will not make a full end"? 4:27; 5:10, 18.
6. Was the sin of Judah a matter of ignorance? Justify your answer. 5:1-6.
7. What were some of the pagan gods worshiped in Judah in the days of Jeremiah?
8. What was the root cause of the apostasy in Judah? 5:23.
9. What was the attitude of Jeremiah toward social injustice? 5:28. Should church leaders today become involved in social action projects?
10. What does the prophet mean in 6:8 when he urges the people of Jerusalem to "be instructed"?
11. What is the significance of the figure of the grape gatherer in 6:9?
12. Who is speaking in 6:11b? Is this a prayer on the part of the prophet or a command on the part of God?
13. What inadequate remedies for the hurt of God's people are the spiritual leaders of our nation offering? See 6:14.
14. Why do you think 6:16 was such a popular preaching text among the preachers of the Restoration Movement?
15. What kind of "rest" comes to those who walk the old paths? Is it the rest of inactivity? See 6:16. Also Matthew 11:28.
16. Why is ritual without righteousness worthless? Does Jeremiah here completely repudiate the Mosaic sacrificial system? 6:20.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERMONS ON WORSHIP

7:1—8:3

The dating of the materials in this section is a vexing problem. Laetsch assigns this section to the days of king Josiah early in the ministry of Jeremiah. However most commentators, on the basis of what they believe is a parallel passage in chapter 26, assign the section (or at least 7:1-15) to the early days of King Jehoiakim. Though one dare not be dogmatic on this point the present writer feels there is nothing in this material that demands a date later than the reign of king Josiah.

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. After a brief introductory note (vv. 1-2) the prophet speaks of (1) presumptuous worship (7:1-15); (2) pagan worship (7:16-20); (3) priorities in worship (7:21-28); and (4) polluted worship (7:29—8:3).

INTRODUCTION 7:1, 2

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jerusalem from the LORD, saying, (2) Stand in the gate of the house of the LORD and proclaim there this word. Say: Hear the word of the LORD all Judah who are entering these gates to worship the LORD.

COMMENTS

Acting upon the definite instructions from the Lord (v. 1) Jeremiah went to one of the eight gates of the Temple to deliver a blistering sermon on worship. He is to proclaim the word to "all Judah who are entering these

gates to worship the Lord" (v. 2). During the three annual festivals of Israel all the males were obligated to come to the Temple to worship (Leviticus 23:1-44; Deuteronomy 16:1-17).

Later in his ministry Jeremiah preached a sermon similar to the one recorded here in chapter 7. Some commentators have identified this "Temple Sermon" with the sermon preached in chapter 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 this that the sermon of chapter 7 is identical with that of chapter 26 and to therefore assign chapter 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.¹ It would be *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. It is the feeling, then, of the writer that chapter 26 represents a later sermon of Jeremiah preached during the days of Jehoiakim. Chapter 7 represents an earlier sermon from the reign of good king Josiah.

I. PRESUMPTUOUS WORSHIP 7:3-15

The men of Judah, like the majority of all ages, took worship for granted. They were content simply to show

1. Jeremiah 19:14; 35:2, 4; 36:5-10; 28:1, 5.

up at the Temple and participate in the prescribed ritual. They assumed that God was pleased with their conduct. In the opening paragraph of his Temple sermon Jeremiah attacks this presumptuous attitude toward worship by (1) indicating a fundamental requirement of true worship (vv. 3-7,); (2) challenging the fallacious assumption that worship had no bearing on conduct nor *vice versa* (vv. 8-11); and (3) threatening the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the populace (vv. 12-15).

A. A Fundamental Requirement 7:3-7

TRANSLATION

(3) Thus says the LORD of host, God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds that I may cause you to dwell in this place.¹ (4) For your own sake do not trust in the words of the lie: The Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD are these. (5) If you thoroughly amend your ways and your deeds; if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbor; (6) if you do not oppress stranger, orphan and widow; and if you do not shed innocent blood in this place; and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt; (7) then I will cause you to dwell in this place in the land which I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

COMMENTS

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 (v.

1. Another ancient reading is "then I might dwell with you."

3). Jeremiah begs his hearers for their own sake not to give any credence to the superstition that the presence of the Temple of the Lord was a guarantee for the safety of the city. 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 when Jeremiah thrice repeated the phrase for emphasis gesturing as he did so to the courts and building that were part of the Temple complex (v. 4).

Verses 5-7 contain a conditional sentence of which verses 5-6 are the protasis and verse 7 the apodosis. Five conditions for national survival are laid down: (1) Repeating the basic demand of verse 3, they must thoroughly amend their ways and their deeds. (2) They must make sure that justice is executed in the courts (v. 5). (3) They must not oppress the stranger, the orphan and the widow. The Old Testament enjoined Israel to show respect for peoples of other nationalities and races simply because they were fellow human beings. Many Christians have not yet caught up with this passage. There was to be a concern for the weak and for those who had lost their natural protector. No other code of laws from antiquity is marked by such humanity in respect to the unfortunate. (4) Innocent blood must no longer be shed in the land through violence and miscarriage of justice. (5) They must cease to follow after other gods "to their own hurt." Idolatry would lead deeper and deeper into sin and have dire repercussions both on the national and personal level. If they fulfilled these fundamental requirements God would cause them to continue to dwell in the land. God had given that land to their forefather "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 which God specifies here.

B. A Fallacious Assumption 7:8-11

TRANSLATION

(8) Behold, you are trusting in the words of the worthless lie. (9) Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, offer incense to Baal, walk after other gods which you do not know (10) and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My Name and say, We are safe; in order to do all these abominations? (11) Has this house which is called by My Name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen this (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

God cannot continue to allow His people to dwell in the Promised Land so long as they continue to trust in deceitful words (v. 8). In verse 4 the prophet has already given an example of the words of the worthless lie. The fact that the Lord has His Temple in Jerusalem will profit them nothing if they continue to live godless lives. The people were engaging in every conceivable sinful activity: stealing, murder, adultery, false swearing, worship of false gods (v. 9). Yet they would come and stand before God in His house and think that because they had expressed this outward concern for the Lord they were completely safe from all harm. 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! With

amazement the Lord asks, "Has this house which 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 into which they would flee after committing their criminal acts. But God has seen all. He knows their hearts. He is aware of their evil intentions and sinful attitudes. He is not deceived by the outward manifestations of religious zeal.

C. A Forceful Threat 7:12-15

TRANSLATION

(12) For go now to My place which 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. (13) And now because you have done all these things (oracle of the LORD) and I spoke earnestly and persistently unto you but you did not hear; and I called you but you did not respond; (14) therefore I will do to the house which is called by My Name, in which you are trusting, and to the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. (15) And I will cast you forth from My presence as I cast forth all your brethren, all the seed of Ephraim.

COMMENTS

If the people of Judah had been more aware of their history they would have been more correct in their theology. In verse 12 Jeremiah attacks the popular false confidence in the Temple by pointing to another sacred sanctuary which 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 which had been transported through the wilderness wanderings was eventually replaced by or perhaps encased in some type of permanent structure which is called a "house" (Judges 18:31; 19:18) or "temple" (I Samuel 1:9). The historical books of the Old Testament do not specifically mention the destruction of Shiloh. The place was probably captured and destroyed by the Philistines after the battle of Ebenezer (I Samuel 4:1ff.) in the days of the judgeship of Eli. On the basis of their excavations archaeologists have dated the destruction at about 1050 B.C. 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 is under some solemn obligation to preserve Jerusalem.

In spite of the fact that God had earnestly and persistently called the people to repentance, they had not responded to the appeal (v. 13). To emphasize the zeal of the Lord in speaking to His people Jeremiah uses the idiom "rising early and speaking." It is an expression peculiar to Jeremiah and means that the appeals were oft repeated and eager. In view of this rebuff and rejection God will destroy the Temple in Jerusalem just as he destroyed Shiloh (v. 15). 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. In more recent history Jeremiah finds another analogy. Just as God had cast forth into exile the seed of Ephraim, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom,¹ so now He will cast forth the inhabitants of Judah (v. 15). The land of Israel belonged to the Lord (Hosea 9:3; Leviticus 25:23)

1. See Isaiah 7:2; Hosea 4:17; 5:1-9; 12:1.

and here the divine Landlord is issuing an eviction notice to His tenants.

II. PAGAN WORSHIP 7:16-20

The worship in Jerusalem was so corrupt that God instructs Jeremiah to cease interceding for the apostates (v. 16). The depravity of the nation is further described (vv. 17-19) and again the prophet announces that judgment will be poured out on the nation (v. 20).

TRANSLATION

(16) 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 for I will not hear you. (17) Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? (18) The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire and the wives knead dough to make sacrificial cakes to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to provoke Me. (19) Is it Me they are provoking (oracle of the LORD)? Is it not themselves to the shame of their faces? (20) Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, My anger and My wrath are about to be poured out upon this place—upon man, cattle, the tree of the field, and the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn and shall not be quenched.

COMMENTS

A prophet not only represented God to the people, he also represented the people before God through intercessory prayer. Abraham prayed for Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32); Moses prayed for Israel (Exodus 32:11-14; 17:11; Numbers 14:13-20) as did Samuel (I Samuel 7:9,

10; 12:17, 18, 23). Jeremiah here is told that conditions in Judah were so bad that such prayer was useless. Still Jeremiah prayed and one of his great intercessory prayers is recorded in 14:19-22.

Four words for prayer are used in verse 16. The first Hebrew word, translated "pray," means to intercede on behalf of someone. God told Abimelech that Abraham would pray for him (Genesis 20:7). In Numbers 21:7 the people ask Moses to intercede on their behalf. Moses interceded on behalf of Aaron (Deuteronomy 9:20). Samuel assured the people that he would not cease to intercede on their behalf (I Samuel 12:23). The second Hebrew word carries the idea of entreaty or supplication. It is sometimes used of a ringing cry of praise to the Lord. In the present context the word would convey the idea of a loud, vehement prayer.¹ The third word, translated "supplication," is often used synonymously with the preceding word. The fourth word, translated "plead," literally 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 he might sell a cave (Genesis 23:8).

Verses 17-19 indicate the reason why intercessory prayer on the part of the prophet would be useless. In view of the open and flagrant practice of idolatry in the cities of Judah the prohibition of intercession is justified (v. 17). The entire population is engaged in the service of the false gods. The children gather the wood for the cooking fires; the men kindle the fire and the women bake some kind of sacrificial cakes. 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

1. Psalms 17:1; 88:2; Jeremiah 11:14; 14:12.

Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, the planet Venus. Statuettes of Astarte have been found all over Palestine indicating how wide spread her cult was. The exact nature of the cakes which were baked is unknown as the word used here is found elsewhere only in 44:19. Apparently they were made in the likeness of the goddess Astarte or in the shape of a star which was her symbol. With these pastries liquid refreshment was also served. An ivory carving dating to the eighth century B.C. suggests that the whole ceremony was performed to accompaniment of music played entirely by women.¹

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 Him² (v. 18). 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 (v. 19). God's burning wrath is about to be poured forth upon Judah and no one will be able to extinguish it. The cattle, trees and crops will be consumed as well as the wicked apostates of Jerusalem (v. 20). Scripture emphasizes over and over again that all creation suffers because of the sin of mankind (cf. Isaiah (24:4); Hosea 4:3).

III. PRIORITIES IN WORSHIP 7:21-28

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

1. Benjamin Mazar (ed.), *The Illustrated World of the Bible Library* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), III, pp. 102-103.

2. "Provoke," one of the characteristic words of Jeremiah, is used here for the first time.

(v. 21). He reminds his listeners that there are obligations which take priority over such outward acts (vv. 22, 23). He then points out that through the centuries the people of Israel had been obstinate in their disobedience (vv. 24-28).

A. Prior Obligations 7:21-23

TRANSLATION

(21) Thus says the LORD of hosts, God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices and eat the meat. (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. (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 way which I command you in order that it might be well with you.

COMMENTS

By means of a sarcastic imperative Jeremiah urges the men of Judah to increase their already numerous sacrificial offerings. Normally the burnt offerings were wholly consumed on the altar while in other sacrifices (e.g., the peace offering) parts of the animal were eaten by the priests and by those who made the offering. 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 and thereby derive some benefit from them. The offerings certainly had no religious value (v. 21). Contrary to the popular theology of the day the sacrificial ritual was not the heart and core of their covenant obligations to God.

Verse 22 has played an important role in the debate which has raged over the origin of the sacrificial system in ancient Israel. In the Pentateuch sacrifice is instituted by Moses in compliance with the instructions given by God to him in the mount. According to the modern critical view of the Old Testament the so-called priestly legislation of the Pentateuch is a product of the postexilic age, a thousand years after Moses. Jeremiah 7:22 seems on the surface to support the critical contention that Moses did not have anything to do with the sacrificial ritual. The verse seems to deny that the Lord gave any instructions concerning sacrifice at Mt. Sinai. In interpreting this verse 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 will continue to permit them to come to Jerusalem "bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meal offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the Lord." As he looks beyond the destruction of Judah to the Israel of the future he 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 verses say nothing of the origin of the sacrificial system; but they do seem to imply that the Lord and his prophet regard that system with favor. To these passages may be added 33:17-24 which speaks of the covenant with the priests, i.e., that portion of the covenant of Sinai which included the duties and regulations of the priesthood as regards sacrifices.

2. Jeremiah seems to have supported the reforms of king Josiah which included the observance of the Passover ritual (II Chronicles 35:1-9).

3. Jeremiah was never charged by his priestly and prophetic 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 (I Samuel 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 verse 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 verse then would not be denying that commandments concerning sacrifice were given at Mt. Sinai but rather would be denying 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. Leviticus 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 Old Testament.¹ 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, verse 22 is not denying the existence of Mosaic legislation concerning sacrifice. God is simply saying, "When your fathers came out of Egypt I did not give legislation in the interest of or for the sake of sacrifices." The verse would then by denying

1. Deuteronomy 4:21; II Samuel 18:5; II Kings 22:13; Psalms 7:1; Jeremiah 7:22; 14:21.

that sacrifice was the chief goal or purpose of God in the Mosaic system.¹

9. Another possibility is that the denial of verse 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 verse 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 Old Testament religion. The fundamental requirement of the Sinai covenant was that of obedience. The people of Israel had to hearken to the divine voice and walk in the divine way 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 (v. 23). The phrase "that it might be well with you" is characteristic of Jeremiah.² The obedience which God demands is for the ultimate benefit of man.

B. Persistent Obstinacy 7:24-28

TRANSLATION

(24) But they would not hearken and they did not stretch out the ear but walked in the counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart and they went backwards and not forwards. (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). (26) But they did not hearken unto Me nor did they incline their ears, but made hard the neck and committed evil more than their fathers. (27) When you

1. O. T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1949), pp. 168ff.

2. Cf. 42:6; 38:20; 40:9. The phrase is also frequent in the book of Deuteronomy.

Speak unto them all these words they will not hearken unto you; when you call unto them they will not answer you. (28) Therefore you shall say unto them: This is the nation which will not hearken to the voice of the LORD their God nor will they accept correction. Faith has perished, it is cut off from their mouth.

COMMENTS

The people of Israel had a record of obstinacy. They had no desire to listen to the commandments of God. They followed instead the inclinations of their own evil hearts. In relationship to God they had gone backward and not forward (v. 24). In other words they had turned their back to God and 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.

From the days of the Exodus from Egypt God had continually and earnestly communicated with His people through prophets (v. 25). But the people paid no heed to these servants of the Lord. Rather than inclining their ears in the direction of these messengers of God they made their necks hard. Each generation seemed to become more sinful than the preceding one (v. 26). The people will not listen to Jeremiah any more than they listened to his predecessors in the prophetic ministry (v. 27). All he can do is publicly accuse them of obstinacy: "This is the nation which will not hearken to the voice of the Lord their God nor accept correction." No other nation had been so blessed, so honored, so trained and guided. Yet *this* is the nation which refuses to heed the word of God. Faith or truth has vanished from their prayers and from their praise (v. 28).

IV. POLLUTED WORSHIP 7:29—8:3

Again Jeremiah takes up the subject of paganized worship. He speaks of the present defilement of the population of Jerusalem (v. 29), of the Temple (v. 30) and of the land of Judah (v. 31). Then Jeremiah describes the destruction which will come as a result of the polluted worship: defilement of the sanctuaries (vv. 32, 33), desolation of the land (v. 34) and desecration of the dead (8:1-3).

A. The Present Defilement 7:29-31

TRANSLATION

(29) Cut off your hair and cast it away and take up a lamentation upon the bare hills for the LORD has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath. (30) For the children of Judah have done evil in My eyes (oracle of the LORD); they have set their abominations in the House which is called by My Name to defile it. (31) They have built the high places of Topheth which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire which I did not command nor did it even enter My mind.

COMMENTS

In verse 29 Jeremiah resorts to one of his most devastating oratorical devices, the sarcastic imperative. He urges the daughter of Jerusalem¹ to shave off her long hair² as a sign of mourning and take up a lamentation. The present generation has been rejected and forsaken by God. In ancient times the divorce of a woman was a

1. The pronoun and the verb are feminine.

2. The Hebrew word usually refers to the long hair of a Nazarite. But here the word seems to have lost its primary meaning and refers to the long, unshorn hair of a woman.

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 which will experience the wrath of the living God (v. 29).

Denial of apostasy was impossible for it was open and flagrant. The abominations of heathendom, the cult objects used in pagan cults, 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 (II Kings 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 (v. 30). Furthermore they had built special high places in the valley of the son of Hinnom¹ where human sacrifice was openly practiced. The meaning and etymology of the word Topheth are uncertain. It seems to be akin to a word meaning fireplace. Most likely the Topheth was the pit in which human victims were burned.² Such human sacrifices were to the god Moloch who sometimes generically is called Baal (Jeremiah 19:5). God had never commanded the wretched practice of offering children as burnt offerings and never did He condone it (v. 31).

B. The Future Destruction 7:32—8:3

TRANSLATION

(32) Therefore behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) 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

1. Since the days of Joshua this valley near Jerusalem had been known as the valley of the son of Hinnom. See Joshua 15:8; 18:16

2. Cf. Jeremiah 19:5; 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20-21; II Kings 23:10.

for lack of place to bury. (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. (8:1) In that time (oracle of the LORD) they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of his princes and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. (2) And they shall spread them to the sun and to the moon and to all the host of the heavens which they loved and served and went after and which they sought and which they worshiped. They shall not be gathered nor buried; they shall become dung upon the face of the ground. (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 the LORD of hosts).

COMMENTS

The polluted worship of the people of Judah will be punished in a most decisive way. A disaster will befall Judah in which so many people will be slain or die 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 (v. 32). 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 room for burial places 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 (v. 33).¹ In antiquity the lack of proper burial

1. Verse 33 echoes the threat of Deuteronomy 28:26.

was the worst indignity which could befall a man. The thought of a corpse exposed to the elements of nature horrified the ancient Hebrews.

The cities of Judah met the same fate as Topheth. All the normal sounds of joy and mirth will be removed. The entire land becomes a desolation (v. 34). The word translated "desolation" is used only of places which, having once been inhabited, have fallen into ruin. It is a gloomy picture indeed which the prophet paints of the future destruction.

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. In search of valuables the Babylonians will ransack the sepulchres of the leading citizens of Jerusalem (v. 1) and scatter their bones across the face of the ground. All the hosts of the heavens which the men of Judah had worshiped in life will helplessly look down upon this act of desecration (v. 2). 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.

For those who escape the destruction of Jerusalem and go into exile life will be so miserable that they will wish they were dead (v. 3). 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 587 B.C. can be seen in Psalms 137. 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 mind and their heart in respect to God their lot improved. They ad-

justed to their surroundings and many of them actually prospered in exile. Verse 3 must be describing the initial reaction of those who were carried away captive.¹

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SEVEN

I. Facts to Master.

1. The place where the sermon on worship was delivered (7:2).
2. The lying words which were being repeated (7:4).
3. The conditions necessary if they were to continue to dwell in the land (7:5b-6).
4. Five of the Ten Commandments which had been broken (7:9).
5. Two lessons from history which should have served to warn the inhabitants of Judah (7:12-15).
6. The strange command issued to the prophet (7:16).
7. The name of one deity so zealously worshiped in Judah (7:18).
8. The metaphor frequently used in Jeremiah to describe the earnestness of God in calling His people to repentance (7:25).
9. The place where child sacrifice was conducted (7:31).
10. The new name which would be given to the valley of Hinnom after the destruction of 587 B.C. (7:32).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. Is the sermon recorded in 7:1—8:3 the same as that recorded in 26:1-19?

1. Laetsch views verse 3 as a conditional threat which was unfulfilled because of the repentance of the exiles.

JEREMIAH

2. Should a Christian champion the cause of justice for minorities? See 7:6.
3. What false attitude toward worship was prevalent in the days of Jeremiah? See 7:10, 11. Will merely attending worship services deliver us from the judgment of God?
4. What is the history of the sanctuary at Shiloh? Consult a good Bible dictionary.
5. Who was "the queen of heaven"? See 7:18.
6. What rhetorical technique is employed by the prophet in 7:21? Should this technique be used today?
7. What is the basic problem involved in 7:22? How is the verse used by critics?
8. What are the priorities in Old Testament worship? In New Testament worship? What acts of worship tend to be abused most today?
9. What is meant by the expression "generation of his wrath" (7:29)? Do you think it would be appropriate to use that designation for the present generation?
10. What is the meaning of the name Topheth? 7:31ff.
11. What might be the motivation for removing dead bodies from graves? See 8:1-2.
12. What was the attitude of the ancient Hebrews with regard to the burial of the dead? A good Bible dictionary will help you here.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SERMONS FROM THE EARLY REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM 8:4—10:25

The oracles in 8:4—10:25 are undated. They may well represent excerpts from the sermons of Jeremiah preached in the streets of Jerusalem between 608 B.C. and 597 B.C. 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 B.C.

For the most part this section contains excerpts from the sermons of Jeremiah. Those excerpts in 8:4—9:26 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). Chapter 10 contains a longer message on the subject of idolatry. The section ends with a prophetic prayer (10:23-25). If one were to attempt to provide the sermonettes of this section with captions the following might be suggested: (1) Stubborn Apostasy (8:4—9:1); (2) National Corruption (9:2-26); (3) True Glory (9:22, 23); (4) The Uncircumcised Heart (9:24, 25); (5) God vs. the Idols (10:1-25).

I. STUBBORN APOSTASY 8:4—9:1

Stubborn apostasy was ultimately responsible for the downfall of Judah. It is no wonder then that Jeremiah returns to this subject again and again. Here he dwells on the unreasonable persistence in rebellion (8:4-7); the unwise proclamations by the leaders (8:8-10) and the unavoidable punishment which would fall upon the people (8:13-17). All of this causes Jeremiah to give expression to the unbearable pain of his own soul (8:18—9:1).

A. Unreasonable Persistence in Apostasy 8:4-7

TRANSLATION

(4) And you shall say unto them, Thus says the LORD: Do men fall and not rise again? Does one turn away and not return? (5) Why has this people, Jerusalem, turned away with perpetual backsliding? They cling to deceit, they refuse to return. (6) I have been attentive and listened, but they continue to speak what is not right. There is not a man who repented of his evil, saying, what have I done? Everyone turns away in their course as a horse rushing into battle. (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 the LORD.

COMMENTS

In attempting to jar the people into a realization of their stupid and stubborn apostasy Jeremiah appeals to common sense. 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 (v. 4). Yet Jerusalem has turned away from God and refuses to turn back to Him. Tenaciously they cling to deceit, i.e., idols. As far as Jeremiah was concerned, idols were outright frauds. The men of Judah embraced the unreal and repudiated the one true and living God. And even after this folly is pointed out to them they refuse to return (v. 5). To Jeremiah this was unreasonable behavior. The prophet listened attentively for some word, some slight indication that the people intended to repent. No such word was forthcoming. On the contrary they continue to

speaking what is not right, what is not appropriate. There is no sorrow for sin, no acknowledgement of wrong doing, no request for forgiveness. They rush to their idolatry like a horse charges into battle (v. 6).

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 and even thousands of miles to return to the home they have left. 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 which He has ordained. Men stifle the instinct to worship their Creator and instead produce gods of their own making, gods they can manipulate and control, gods made in man's image.

B. Unwise Proclamations by National Leaders 8:8-12

TRANSLATION

(8) How can you say, We are wise! The Torah of the LORD is with us. But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has labored falsely. (9) The wise shall be put to shame, they shall be dismayed when they are captured. Behold, they have spurned the word of the LORD and what kind of wisdom do they possess? (10) Therefore I will give their wives to others, their fields to dispossessors; for from least to the greatest everyone of them is out for illicit gain; from the prophet even unto the priest everyone of them practices deceit. (11) They heal up the hurt of the daughter of My people lightly, saying, Peace, Peace; when there is no peace. (12) They shall be put to shame because they have committed adomination; yea they do not at all feel ashamed nor

do they know how to blush; therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their visitation they shall stumble, says the LORD.

COMMENTS

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, so what use did they have for this agitator from Anathoth. "Let Jeremiah keep his advice to himself; for we are wise and we are the divinely appointed teachers of the people." Among the wise men the scribes are singled out for special comment. The scribes in Old Testament times were men who could write. They often served as officials of the royal court (II Kings 12:10) and sometimes as military officers (Jeremiah 52:25). 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 which 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, twisting, perverting 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" (John 10:35).

When men reject the wisdom that comes from the word of God what kind of wisdom do they possess? The fear of the Lord and the reverent respect for His word is the beginning of all true wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). How

utterly humiliated these wise men of Judah will be when calamities one after another fall upon the nation (v. 9). 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 is given into the hands of the Chaldean conquerors. Because of their greed the prophets and priests had deliberately deceived the people (v. 10). But in the end they will lose all that they had accumulated. 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 (v. 11). In misleading the people these men had committed abominable acts yet they show no shame whatsoever. But when the judgment falls on Judah these proud and confident men will stumble and fall before the sword of the enemy (v. 12).

C. Unavoidable Punishment at the Hand of God 8:13-17

TRANSLATION

(13) I will utterly consume them (oracle of the LORD). No grapes are on the vine and no figs are on the fig tree. The leaves are withered; and I will appoint for them those who overrun them. (14) Why are we sitting? Assemble yourselves that we may go unto the fortified cities that we may perish there; for the LORD our God has put us to silence and has caused us to drink poison water because we have sinned against the LORD. (15) We hope for peace but no good came, for the time of healing, but behold, terror. (16) From Dan is heard the snorting of his horses; from the sound of the neighing of his stallions, all the earth shakes. For they shall come and shall consume the land and its fullness, the

cities and their inhabitants. (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 the LORD).

COMMENTS

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; it is worthless; it must be destroyed. God has already appointed the destroyer. An army shall sweep through that worthless garden like a raging stream overflowing its banks (v. 13).¹ All will be destroyed.

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. The inhabitants of the countryside in gloomy despair urge one another to move into the fortified cities. They feel 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 will die of some pestilence or plague. But at least that is better than falling into the hand of the enemy. They knew that God was making them drink of the poisonous water of divine judgment. They admit now that it is too late that they have sinned against the Lord (v. 14). They had listened to their false prophets and consequently they had expected peace and national healing. But good times did not come; only the terrors of ruthless war.

Jeremiah must have been a spellbinding preacher. He makes his audience almost hear the snorting and neighing of the enemy horses as the Chaldean calvary bears down upon Dan, the northern-most city of Palestine. All the

1. On the phrase "those who overrun" see Isaiah 8:7; Daniel 11:10, 40.

known world trembles at the news that the mighty northern enemy is sweeping southward. The land and its produce, the cities and their inhabitants will be consumed by this mighty army (v. 16). 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 (v. 17). The doom is unavoidable.

D. Unbearable Pain on the Part of the Prophet

8:18—9:1

TRANSLATION

(18) O my Comfort against sorrow! My heart is faint within me! (19) Behold, the sound of the cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land: Is not the LORD in Zion? Is not her king in her? Why do they provoke Me with their images with their strange vanities? (20) The harvest is past, the summer has ended and we have not been saved. (21) Because of the hurt of the daughter of my people I have been hurt; I mourn, anguish has seized me. (22) Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? For why does not healing come to the daughter of my people? (9:1) Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears I would bewail day and night the slain of the daughter of my people.

COMMENTS

As Jeremiah sees the apostasy of his people and their impending destruction his heart is sick. He casts himself upon God his comforter (v. 18). The word comforter means literally, the one to cause me to smile, to be cheerful or be bright. Jeremiah hears as it were a dialogue

between those who will be taken into exile and God. In a distant land the former inhabitants of Judah lift up a cry for help: "Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King in her?" They cannot comprehend how Zion, the Temple mount, can be so humiliated and degraded if God is really still on His throne. To this astonished cry God makes answer: "Why do they provoke Me with their images?" (v. 19). Whatever has befallen Zion has come about because of the idolatry of the people there. Ignoring the explanation of God the exiles of the future continue with their complaint by citing a popular proverb: "The harvest is past, the summer has ended and we have not been saved" (v. 20). Once the summer harvest was over a farmer looked forward to a period of deliverance from arduous toil. But in the case of the Jewish exiles 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. The exiles were beginning to realize that no speedy deliverance was in the offing.

The unbelief and despair of the people causes even deeper despair in the heart of the prophet. "Because of the hurt (lit., shattering) of the daughter of my people I have been hurt." He loves 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. "Is there no balm (or medicine) in Gilead?" the prophet asks. Gilead, located east of the Jordan river, was famous in Old Testament times for its balm. It is not certain just what this balm was but the suggestion has been made that it was the juice of the turpentine tree. The material was exported (Ezekiel 27:17) and was very costly (Genesis 43:11). The balm of Gilead was prized for its medicinal properties. There was no healing ointment which could be applied

to the spiritual wound of Judah. There were no physicians who might be able to deal with the difficulty (v. 22). Nothing can cure the ailment of Judah except a whole-hearted return to the divine Physician (Exodus 15:26). Jeremiah wishes that his head could produce an inexhaustible supply of tears that he might lament the inevitable doom of his people (v. 1). 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.

II. NATIONAL CORRUPTION 9:2-26

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).

A. Prevailing Corruption 9:2-8

TRANSLATION

(2) Oh that I were in the wilderness in a travelers' inn, that I might leave my people and depart from them because all of them are adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men. (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 the LORD). (4) Be on guard each man from his friend and do not trust any brother; for every brother is very crooked and every friend is a slanderer. (5) Every man deceives his neighbor; they do not speak truth; their tongues have learned to speak lies. With iniquity they weary themselves. (6) Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit; in deceit they refuse the

knowledge of Me (oracle of the LORD). (7) Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold! I am about to refine them by fire and test them; for how else shall I do in view of the fact that she is the daughter of My people. (8) Their tongue is a sharp arrow, it speaks deceit; with his mouth he continues to speak peaceably with his friends; but in his heart he plans treachery.

COMMENTS

It is always nauseating for a righteous man to continue in daily contact with filthy and corrupt company. Jeremiah longs to leave the city with all its vices and take up residence in one of the desolate and dreary wayside shelters which dotted the major highways of antiquity. 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 tender and sensitive Jeremiah would rather live the life of a monastic, sit in an isolated shack and meditate and bemoan the fate of his people. But God had called him to preach to that godless generation, and preach he must!

Jeremiah's description of the corruption of Judah is truly remarkable. The tongue of the men of Judah is a bow which hurls falsehood and deceit. These mighty warriors do not contend for truth but for its opposite, lawlessness and injustice. Their starting point is evil and their ultimate goal is evil. This deplorable situation has developed because they do not know or have regard for the living God (v. 3). A willful ignorance of God and His word was at the root of their national corruption. No one could be trusted, not even the members of one's own immediate family. Every brother was "very crooked."

The Hebrew phrase here means literally, 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 (v. 4). Self-protection demanded that everyone be viewed with suspicion. These people had "learned" i.e., they had accustomed themselves, to speaking lies and falsehood. They actually weary themselves in sinning (v. 5). The sinner may have his wild fling but in the end he winds up exhausted, a physical, mental and moral wreck. The more abundant life is that of faithful and loving obedience to the divine will.

In verse 6 God addresses Jeremiah. He tells the prophet what he already knows *viz.*, that he should trust no one since he is surrounded by deceit. Hypocritical men have no desire to really know God and so they deliberately, purposely shut the Lord out of their lives (v. 6). Only the knowledge of God will cure them of their hypocrisy; yet they refuse to know God because of their hypocrisy. The only alternative is a judgment which will serve to purify and refine the nation. 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 (v. 7). Such people who use their tongue as an arrow to smite their neighbors, who speak peace but plot treachery (lit., set an ambush) are the dross which must be removed through the judgment process (v. 8).

B. Impending Destruction 9:9-21

Because of the national corruption, destruction is necessary and imminent. The land will become desolate (9:9-15) and death will reign supreme throughout the land (9:16-21).

1. *Desolation of the land* (9:9-16)

TRANSLATION

(9) On account of these things shall I not punish them (oracle of the LORD)? Shall not I take vengeance on a nation which is like this? (10) Upon the mountains I shall lift up weeping and lamentation and in the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation; 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. (11) And I will make Jerusalem heaps, the habitation of jackals, and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant. (12) Who is the wise man that he may discern this and to whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken that he may declare it? Why is the land destroyed, burned like a wilderness so that no one passes by? (13) And the LORD said: Because they forsook My law which I placed before them and they did not hearken to My voice nor walk in it. (14) But they walked after the stubbornness of their heart and after the Baalim which their fathers taught them. (15) Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I am about to cause them viz., this people, to eat wormwood and cause them to drink the poisoned water of gall. (16) And I will scatter them among nations which neither they nor their

fathers have known and I will send after them the sword until I have consumed them.

COMMENTS

In view of the terribly corrupt conditions which prevail in Judah God is perfectly justified in taking vengeance upon that land (v. 9). Jeremiah knows what will befall his beloved land. He knows that when the judgment falls he will be weeping and lamenting the desolation which will befall that once proud little country. The pasture lands of the wilderness i.e., the uninhabited region, which once were covered with flocks and herds will become so utterly waste that even the birds depart for lack of food (v. 10). The cities of Judah will not escape the desolation. Their ruins will become the habitation of wild creatures (v. 11). The "I" of verse 11 is no longer Jeremiah, but God.

In verse 12 Jeremiah challenges the wise men of the land and those who claimed to have received divine revelation to explain why the land has become desolate (v. 12). They are unable to explain it and so God himself gives the explanation. God had placed His law before this people at Sinai. He had amplified His law and kept it before the people through the preaching of the prophets. Yet the people forsook the law of God, refused to hearken to His instruction or walk in His way (v. 13). In their stubborn rebellion they followed after the Canaanite deities, the Baalim. This apostasy and idolatry they had learned from their fathers (v. 14). Where fathers go, sons will follow. What an ungodly legacy **the fathers had left** to their descendants! The iniquities of fathers are often magnified in the lives of sons and when iniquity is full the punishment is inevitable (cf. Exodus 20:5). The sons must now eat the wormwood and drink the water of gall (v. 15). Wormwood and gall, two bitter and noxious

substances, were symbols in the Old Testament for bitter affliction. Judah will become desolate because she will be depopulated. God will scatter the Jews among the far-distant foreign nations. Even in captivity the sword of divine retribution will pursue them until they are consumed (v. 16). Those who would be consumed in captivity are, of course, the unbelieving and unrepentant (cf. Amos 9:9, 10). Those who turned to God in sincerity and truth would be restored to their homeland (16:14, 15; 31:9, 18-19).

2. *Death throughout the land* (9:17-22)

TRANSLATION

(17) Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider and call for the mourning women that they might come and unto the wise women send that they might come. (18) And let them hurry and lift up over us wailing that our eyes may flow with tears and our eyelids stream with water. (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. (20) For hear the word of the LORD, O women, and let your ear receive the word of His mouth, and teach your daughters wailing and everyone her neighbor lamentation. (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. (22) Speak thus! (oracle of the LORD): The carcasses of men shall fall like dung upon the surface of the field and like sheaves behind the reaper; and there is no one to gather them.

COMMENTS

In view of the impending national disaster, Jeremiah calls for professional mourning women to come and bewail the death of the nation. Such women were "wise" or skillful in the ways of leading public lamentation (v. 17). 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 and sorrow only as he openly and outwardly expresses it. Jeremiah can seem to hear the wailing coming forth from Zion of Jerusalem. The people 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 (v. 19). 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 (v. 20).

Why this need for universal lamentation? Death will reign supreme in the land in that day. Death creeps through the windows of homes and palaces. The Grim Reaper stalks the streets and broadplaces or market places of the city. Innocent children are cut down, young men in the flower of their youth (v. 21). 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.

The picture of death throughout the land reaches its climax in verse 22. The first phrase, "Speak thus!" is abrupt and forceful and serves to arrest the attention of the hearer and draw his attention to this last dramatic announcement. The carcasses of the men of Judah 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. 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 (v. 22).

III. TRUE GLORY 9:23, 24

TRANSLATION

(23) Thus says the LORD: 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. (24) But let him that glories glory in this: The understanding and knowledge of Me, for I am the LORD who establishes kindness, justice and righteousness in the land because in these things I take delight (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The brief but beautiful treatment of true glory seems unrelated to either what precedes or what follows in the chapter. Men throughout history have been tempted to magnify the importance of wisdom, strength and wealth and fall down in adoration before this trinity in unholy worship. Wealth and strength are ephemeral and wisdom,

if it is not rooted in reverent fear for God, is vain (cf. Psalms 111:10). Destruction and death await the nation or the individual who places undue confidence in the arm of flesh (v. 23). True glory belongs not to the wealthy, the strong, and the wise but to those who understand and 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. Those who understand and know the Lord practice daily those things which are pleasing to Him. They demonstrate lovingkindness to those who are of the household of faith. They strive for justice for the underprivileged and weak. They walk in the paths of righteousness, i.e., right conduct. These are the qualities which make the relationship between God and man and these are the qualities which must characterize the relationship between the man of God and his fellowman (v. 24).

IV. THE UNCIRCUMCISED HEART 9:25, 26

TRANSLATION

(25) Behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will bring punishment upon all circumcised in their uncircumcision. (26) Upon Egypt and Judah and Edom and the children of Ammon and Moab and all those who cut the corners (of the hair) who dwell in the wilderness, for all the nations are uncircumcised and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.

COMMENTS

Circumcision was given by divine command to Abraham and his descendants as a sign of the covenant between God and that people. (Genesis 17:10). The men of Jeremiah's day while outwardly bearing the sign of the cove-

nant 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 (v. 25). Other nations of antiquity practiced circumcision as well as did the Jews. Five such peoples are named in verse 26: Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites and "those who cut the corners of the hair." This latter phrase refers to the Arabian tribes who shaved the temples at puberty and consecrated them to their deities.¹ The circumcision practiced by these heathen nations was not done in obedience to the command of God and therefore their circumcision was regarded by God as uncircumcision. God's judgment would fall upon them. But God's judgment would also fall upon the men of Judah who were in this respect no different from their pagan neighbors. They were physically circumcised but not spiritually so.² Just as the men of Israel were not living up to their circumcision, so many today are not living up to their baptism. Many have had their bodies immersed in water but their minds, hearts and will remain unbaptized.

V. GOD VS. THE IDOLS 10:1-25

In chapter 10 Jeremiah ridicules idolatry (vv. 1-5) and extols the incomparable God of Israel (vv. 6-16). He points out the folly of forsaking God (vv. 17-22). The chapter closes with a prophetic prayer (vv. 23-25). The Jeremian authorship of the first sixteen verses has been questioned by various scholars on the grounds that they interrupt the thought sequence of the section and

1. Herodotus III. 8. This practice was forbidden to the Israelites. See Leviticus 19:27; Deuteronomy 14:1

2. See Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:25-29.

on the grounds that they are written in a different style. But one author may employ more than one style of writing depending upon the subject he is treating and the audience he is addressing. As the present section of the Book of Jeremiah is in the nature of an anthology of prophetic utterances no appeal to the interruption of thought sequence would seem to be appropriate. In short there is no good reason to suspect that Jeremiah was not the author of the first sixteen verses of chapter 10.

A. The Folly of Idolatry 10:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) Hear the word which the LORD spoke against you, O house of Israel. (2) Thus says the LORD: Do not learn the way of the nations and do not be dismayed because of the signs of the heavens; for the nations are dismayed because of them. (3) For the customs of the people are vanity; for it is a tree which one cuts out of the forest, the work of the hands of the carpenter with an ax. (4) With silver and gold he adorns it; with nails and hammers they secure them so that it might not be made to totter. (5) They are like a post in a cucumber patch. They cannot speak. They must even be carried about for they are immobile. Do not fear because of them for they cannot do evil nor can they even do good.

COMMENTS

Through His prophet God exhorts His people (v. 1) not to learn, i.e., become accustomed to, the idolatrous ways of the heathen. The people of God need not become upset by the signs of the heavens—eclipses, meteors, and the like—which other nations regarded as portents of evil (v. 2). Numerous tablets from the ancient Near East

have been found which indicate how closely the heavens were observed and how carefully every movement of the heavenly bodies was recorded. Modern astrology had its birth in the pagan temples of Mesopotamia. 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 utterly empty and without content (cf. Isaiah 40:19f.; 44:12ff.). Idols are in reality nothing more than a tree which has been cut out of the forest by the ax of a woodsman (v. 3). Though beautifully adorned with gold and silver overlay that idol is still nothing more than lifeless wood. An idol cannot even stand on its own two feet. It must be fastened down with hammer and nails in order to prevent it from tottering (v. 4).¹ The idol is as harmless as a post erected in a cucumber patch for the purpose of scaring away the birds. They cannot speak nor can they move about without being carried by someone. They cannot harm any one, 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.

B. The Incomparable God of Israel 10:6-16

TRANSLATION

(6) There is none like You O LORD; great are You and great is Your name in power. (7) Who would not fear You, O King of the nations; for You are worthy of it. Because among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their royalty there is none like You. (8) They are altogether stupid and foolish; the instruction of vanities is wood. (9) Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from

1. The description here is similar to that in Isaiah 40:19, 20; 41:7.

Uphaz. They are the work of a craftsman and the hands of the goldsmith; blue and purple is their clothing, all of them the work of wisemen. (10) But the LORD is the true God. He is the living God and eternal King. Before His wrath the earth trembles; nations cannot endure His indignation. (11) Thus you shall say to them: the gods which did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from beneath the heavens. (12) It is He who made the earth by His power who founded the world in His wisdom; and in His understanding stretched out the heavens. (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. (14) Every man is stupid, without knowledge! Every goldsmith is put to shame because of his image, for his molten image is a fraud, and there is no breath in them. (15) They are vanity, a ridiculous work; in the time of their visitation they shall perish. (16) Not like these is the Portion of Jacob; for He is the Maker of everything and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is His name.

COMMENTS

None of the idols can compare to the Lord in greatness and in power (v. 6). He is not merely a tribal deity restricted theologically and geographically in His sphere of influence. He is worthy of reverence by all mankind. No wise man of the earth can equal Him in wisdom. No prince of mankind is His equal in majesty and power (v. 7). On the other hand the idols are nothing but lifeless lumber. They are stupid and foolish and are utterly unable to render intelligent counsel. From

an idol of wood one can only obtain "wooden," lifeless, worthless guidance (v. 8). Men go to no little trouble in producing their idols. The wooden image is covered by the finest silver and gold sheets. Silver is secured from Tarshish, generally thought to be located on the south-west 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, which is also mentioned in Daniel 10:5, is to be identified with Ophir.¹ 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. Embellished with precious metals and adorned with costly garments an image was in reality a work of art produced by cunning and skillful men. It was no wiser and more powerful than the craftsmen who produced it (v. 9).

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. All nations tremble before His indignation. (v. 10).

Verse 11 is regarded as a gloss by most commentators. The verse is in the Aramaic language rather than Hebrew. It does seem strange, however, that a copyist would have inserted an Aramaic gloss into a Hebrew text either accidentally or purposely. It is best then to regard verse 11 as having originally been part of the text and written by Jeremiah himself. Why then is the verse in Aramaic? Probably Jeremiah is here utilizing some proverb which was current in his day in the Aramaic language. The basic

1. This interpretation of Uphaz appears in the Syriac versions of the Old Testament and in the Aramaic Targum.

idea of the verse is clear. All the gods of the nation which were in reality false gods will eventually perish.

Every man who engages in idolatry is stupid. Only when men accept the self-revelation of God through His word do they have any insight into the true meaning of life. 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. In spite of the elaborate ceremonies in which the spirit of the god came to make its abode in the images Jeremiah declares "there is no breath in them" (v. 14). Those idols are utterly vain, empty, ridiculous. They, along with their worshipers, shall experience the visitation of judgment of the true God. In that time the images shall perish, unable to save themselves, let alone those who held them in esteem (v. 15). None of the gods so popular in the days of Jeremiah remain on the scene today. They have indeed perished. The Lord of hosts is not like the idols. He who is the Creator of everything is the "Portion of Jacob" and Israel is "the tribe of His inheritance." Though He is God of all nations, yet He belongs to Israel in a special way (Psalms 73:26; 119:57; 142:5) and Israel belongs to Him in a special way (v. 16).

C. The Folly of Forsaking God 10:17-22

TRANSLATION

(17) Gather your bundle from the land, you who dwell in the siege. (18) For thus says the LORD! Behold, I am about to hurl out the inhabitants of the land at this time and I shall distress them in order that they might be found. (19) Woe to me because of my hurt! My wound is grievous. But as for me, I said, Alas, this is a grief that I must bear. (20) My tent is destroyed and all my cords have been snapped; 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. (21) For the shepherds are stupid and they do not seek the LORD. Therefore they have not acted wisely, and all of their flock is scattered. (22) Hark! A report! Behold, it comes! A great shaking out of the land of the north, to make the cities of Judah a desolation, the habitation of jackals .

COMMENTS

Idolatry has inevitable consequences as far as God is concerned. In verse 17 Jeremiah sadly addresses his people and urges them to gather together their possessions and prepare to go into captivity when the siege of the land has ended (v. 17). The inhabitants of Judah are about to be violently expelled from their land, hurled forth as a rock is hurled from a sling. Because of their idolatry God Himself becomes their antagonist. He will bring them into this distress. The last phrase of verse 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.

As he contemplates the future of his people Jeremiah bursts forth into another lamentation. The knowledge of what will befall his people is compared to a hurt, a wound, a grief or sickness for which there is no cure. Jeremiah must simply live with his mental suffering (v. 19). The prophet compares Judah to a tent which has collapsed because the cords have been snapped or cut. 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 (v. 20). All of this calamity has come about because the shepherds, the political and religious leaders, have not sought the Lord. The word "seek" here is a technical word meaning to inquire of, to seek an oracle from the Lord. Spurning divine revelation these leaders were making decisions which 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. 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. 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 by wild creatures.

D. A Prophetic Prayer 10:23-25

TRANSLATION

(23) I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not his own and that a man in walking cannot direct his step (24) Chastise me, O LORD, but in measure, not in Your wrath lest you cause me to become small. (25) Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You and upon tribes which have not called on Your name for they have consumed Jacob, they have consumed him and finished him and his habitation they have made desolate.

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 and 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 which God has marked out for him in the word. If a man fails to acknowledge his relationship to God, fails to submit to divine direction, 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 (v. 23). He therefore requires divine discipline and correction.

Jeremiah feels himself to be one with his people. The "me" of verse 24 is really "us." The prophet knows that God must chastise or discipline His people; he only prays that God will be merciful. Let God punish His people, but not in the wrath they deserve lest the nation "become small" and dwindle into insignificance. Rather let God punish Judah "in measure," i.e., with enough punishment to bring about the reformation of Judah. Jeremiah is willing to endure all that God intends to do to Judah so long as the judgment stops short of absolute and total annihilation of the nation.

Israel deserves punishment and Jeremiah admits it. But the nations by whom and through whom God would bring judgment upon Judah also deserve divine judgment. These nations had gone beyond the appointed bounds (Isaiah 10:6, 7; 47:6; Zechariah 1:15). God intended for these nations to punish Israel; instead they aimed at destroying the people of God. Quoting Psalms 79:6, 7,

1. The Hebrew word is usually translated "justice" or "judgment." That it also means "measured amounts" is indicated by I Kings 4:28 where the same word is used.

Jeremiah calls upon God to pour out His wrath upon them as well as Israel.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHT

I. Facts to Master.

1. The name of the northern-most town of Palestine (8:16).
2. "The _____ is past, the _____ is ended and we are not saved" (8:20).
3. "Is there no _____ in Gilead" (8:22).
4. Significant titles for God (10:7, 16).
5. Distant lands from which precious metals were brought to be made into idols (10:9).
6. The peculiar thing about 10:11.
7. The identity of the shepherds and the flock in 10:21.

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. What is the point of the contrast between the migratory birds and the people of God? 8:7.
2. In what way had sin blinded the eyes of the people of Judah? See 8:8.
3. What is meant by the expression "the false pen of the scribes hath wrought falsely?" (8:8).
4. Who is a wise man? See 8:9, 9:12.
5. The inhabitants of Judah could not blush (8:12). Has the present generation lost its sense of shame?
6. What are the wormwood and the gall mentioned in 8:14 and 9:15?
7. What is meant by the expression, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved?" (8:20).
8. Is there a suggestion for every Gospel preacher in 8:18—9:9, the lament of Jeremiah? What is it?

JEREMIAH

9. What strong impulse does Jeremiah have as he views the corruption of the society of his day? (9:2). Did God intend for Christians to live in monasteries?
10. What was the fulfillment of the prophecy uttered in 9:10-11?
11. What were some of the mourning customs in ancient Israel? Check a Bible dictionary.
12. Is it wrong for a Christian to boast? See 9:23-24, also Galatians 6:14.
13. Two kinds of uncircumcision are distinguished in 9:25, 26. What does circumcision in this passage symbolize? Sometimes preachers are heard to say: "you people may have been baptized but your hearts were never really yielded to God." Is this good theology? Can a person be baptized and remain unconverted?
14. Is there anything wrong with the Christian wearing good luck charms? Should he be afraid of Friday the 13th, broken mirrors, or walking beneath ladders? What about astrology? See 10:1-5.
15. How would you describe Jeremiah's attitude toward his own personal grief? (10:19)
16. Analyze the prayer which closes chapter 10. What confession is made? What personal petition? What imprecation?

CHAPTER NINE

CONSPIRACIES AGAINST GOD AND HIS PROPHET 11:1—13:27

It is well nigh impossible to precisely date the discourses and activities contained in chapter 11-20. Naegelsbach feels that a date prior to the battle of Carchemish should be assigned because of the lack of any reference to the Chaldeans. Most commentators, however, regard 13:18-27 as coming from the time of king Jehoiachin who reigned after the battle of Carchemish. One unit of this section, 14:1—17:18, originated during a time of famine which cannot be dated.

These ten chapters of the book contain excerpts from sermons, narratives and autobiographical elements. There are two collections of brief oracles, 14:1—15:9 and 17:1-18; and two parables, the parable of the linen girdle (13:1-11) and the parable of the wine jars (13:12-14). Of most interest, however, are the five confessions of Jeremiah which are contained in this section. These autobiographical glimpses into the inner thought processes of the prophet are unique in prophetic literature.

THE CONFESSIONS OF JEREMIAH

11:18—12:6

15:10-21

17:14-18

18:18-23

20:7-18

The materials in 11:1—12:17 are related to two conspiracies. In the view of Jeremiah the people of Judah had conspired to violate the covenant which God had given at Sinai (11:1-17). The prophet's forthright preaching on this theme aroused hostility especially among

the inhabitants of his home town of Anathoth. God reveals to Jeremiah that these acquaintances were conspiring to put him to death. The prophet went to his God in prayer about this matter and laid his case at the bar of divine justice (11:18-23). Some time passed and the wicked schemers of Anathoth experienced no divine retribution. Jeremiah prayed again, this time calling upon God to pour out his wrath upon the wicked. God answered that prayer, but not in the way Jeremiah expected (12:1-6). As the prophet wallows in self-pity he comes to realize what true pain God is experiencing because of the impending destruction of Judah, His beloved portion (12:7-13). Finally, by revealing to Jeremiah the ultimate destiny of the wicked foreign nations God places the whole matter of divine judgment in proper perspective (12:14-17).

I. THE PREACHING OF THE PROPHET

11:1-17

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. He exhorted his people to fulfill with their covenant obligations (11:1-8). Yet even as he gave forth this exhortation he came to realize that the men of Judah were conspiring to violate that covenant (11:9-17).

A. Exhortation to Keep the Covenant 11:1-8

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD: (2) Hear the words of this covenant and speak unto the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (3) Then you shall say unto them: Thus says the LORD God of Israel: Cursed is the man

who does not hear the words of this covenant (4) which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them from the land of Egypt, from the furnace of iron and said: Obey My voice and do them, according to all which I have commanded you. Then you will be My people and I will be your God; (5) in order to establish the oath which I swore to your fathers to give to them a land flowing with milk and honey as at this day. And I answered and said, Amen, O LORD. (6) And the LORD said unto me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. (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! (8) But they did not hearken nor did they incline their ear, but went on every man in the stubbornness of their heart. Therefore I brought against you all the words of this covenant which I commanded them to do, but they did not.

COMMENTS

The exhortation to keep the covenant of the Lord is usually dated by commentators just after 621 B.C., that crucial year when the lost law book was discovered in the Temple. Others would assign this material to the early years of king Jehoiakim. The truth of the matter is that either date remains somewhat speculative. However it is most difficult to read this paragraph and not think of the covenant recently renewed by king Josiah.

Six times in 11:1-8 Jeremiah calls upon the people of Judah to "hear" (i.e., obey) the words of the covenant. The imperative "speak" in verse 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 Gospel make the impact which God would have it make upon this generation. It is the old covenant of Sinai which had been renewed several times in the history of God's people that Jeremiah would have restored in his day.

Jeremiah's message on the covenant begins on a negative note. Utilizing the language of Deuteronomy (cf. Deuteronomy 27:26) Jeremiah pronounces a curse upon any one who refuses to hear (obey) the words of the covenant (v. 3). The covenant to which Jeremiah alludes is that ancient covenant which God had made with the Israelites when He brought them forth from the land of Egypt. That trying and bitter experience of bondage in Egypt is metaphorically called the "furnace of iron" i.e., a furnace used for smelting iron. As the captivity of the past was a furnace of affliction even so would be the captivity of the future (Isaiah 48:10).

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 and observe the individual commands which he had given to them. Israel's unique relationship to God would continue only so long as the nation was obedient (v. 4). The land

promises made to the Patriarchs were also conditional. They would continue to dwell in that land flowing with milk and honey only if they continued to be faithful to the covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 7:8ff; 8:18ff.).

In Deuteronomy Moses instructed the children of Israel to gather at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim in Canaan and 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." (Deuteronomy 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! (v. 5). "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.

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. His object is to influence the people to obey the recently discovered law of God (v. 6). The 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 (v. 7). The phrase "rising early and testifying," a favorite expression of Jeremiah, means to earnestly and incessantly undertake a task. 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 man doing whatever he set his heart to do. As a result, all of the penalties for covenant breaking stipulated in the law of Moses had come upon the people (v. 8).

B. Exposure of the Conspiracy 11:9-17

TRANSLATION

(9) And the LORD said unto me: Conspiracy is found among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (10) They have returned to the iniquities of their first fathers who refused to listen to My words, and they walked after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers. (11) Therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to bring unto them a calamity which they will not be able to escape; and they will cry unto Me but I will not hearken unto them. (12) And the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall go and cry unto the gods to whom they continue to make offerings, but they shall utterly fail to save them in the time of their calamity. (13) For according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah, and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have made altars to Shame, altars for making offering to Baal. (14) But as for you, do not pray on behalf of this people and do not raise up a cry and prayer on their behalf; for I will not hear in the time of their calling unto Me, because of their calamity. (15) What business does My beloved have in My house since she commits treachery? Will a multitude (of sacrifices) and holy flesh remove (sin) from you When you do evil then you rejoice. (16) The LORD has given you the name "a green olive tree, beautiful, with well-formed fruit." At the noise of great tumult He has kindled a fire against it and its branches are broken. (17) For the LORD of host, who planted you, has spoken evil against you because of the evil of the house of Israel and Judah, which they have committed to their

own harm in order to provoke Me by offering to the Baal.

COMMENTS

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 and evident revolt against God. The men of Judah were encouraging one another to engage in apostasy and idolatry and this in the eyes of God constituted a conspiracy (v. 9). For awhile under the influence of the godly king 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," the Israelites of the wilderness period and the period of the Judges. Like their forefathers the present generation has walked after other gods to serve them. The house of Judah as well as the house of Israel had violated the terms of the ancient covenant made at Sinai (v. 10). Rebellion against the crown brings inevitable punishment. In that hour of calamity the men of Judah will desperately try to call upon God but He will not be inclined to answer their prayers (v. 11). They shall turn in that time of crisis to the gods they have continued to worship;¹ but these man-made gods shall be powerless to save (v. 12). Every city had its tutelary deity. Altars to Shame, i.e., Baal could be found on every street of Jerusalem (v. 13). Like the men of Athens the population of Jerusalem was very religious. But their religiosity would not save them from the wrath of the God of judgment.

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. The Hebrew here uses

1. The Hebrew participle suggests that even while they were crying to God they continued to make offerings to their gods.

a participle which implies that God will continue to refrain from hearing no matter how hard or long the people might cry unto Him (v. 14). Because of her adulterous apostasy God's "beloved," the nation Judah, no longer has any business in the House of God. As long as the nation continues in this treachery no amount of sacrifices will be able to remove their sin. Sacrifice without repentance and contrition is valueless. Far from feeling any remorse or shame because of their evil the people of Judah actually rejoiced in wrong doing (v. 15). In earlier days God had regarded Israel as beautiful green olive tree because the nation had produced the finest fruit. The olive tree is one of the most hardy and productive trees of Palestine. But that tree is now worthless. The branches are dead and unfruitful. 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 (v. 16). The Lord of hosts, who had planted that olive tree, has the power to also uproot it and 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 have provoked God by offering sacrifices to Baal. The Lord has therefore pronounced evil or calamity against His people. One branch, Israel, had already been destroyed by the Assyrian empire. The second branch, Judah, is about to experience the same fate at the hands of the Chaldeans.

II. THE PLOT AGAINST THE PROPHET

11:18-23

Jeremiah was to suffer much during his ministry. At times his enemies almost got the best of him. But God was faithful to His promise to deliver Jeremiah from his enemies. In the present paragraph Jeremiah experiences his first personal crisis. He learns through releva-

tion that the men of his home town are plotting against him (11:18-23). These developments seem to catch Jeremiah by surprise and in great distress he cries 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. The Case Which He Presents 11:18-20

TRANSLATION

(18) And the LORD made known to me that I might know; then You showed me their deeds. (19) But I was like a pet lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they were plotting against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit and let us cut him off from the land of the living that his name be remembered no longer. (20) But, O LORD of host, who judges with righteousness, who tries the kidneys and heart, I will see Your vengeance upon them for I have revealed my case unto You.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah learned that the men of his home town were plotting against him through special revelation from God. God caused Jeremiah to correctly analyze and interpret the deceitful deeds of these cunning adversaries (v. 18). Jeremiah had never suspected that they were plotting against him. He was as unsuspecting and trusting as a lamb being led to the slaughter. As Jeremiah had been comparing Judah to a tree which God would destroy (vv. 16, 17) so the men of Anathoth contemptuously refer to Jeremiah as a tree which 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 life work, his prophetic ministry. If they

could slay Jeremiah there would be no descendant to perpetuate his name. Thus they schemed and plotted in an effort to find an opportunity to assassinate Jeremiah or have him publicly executed (v. 19).

Upon learning of the plot against him, Jeremiah turns immediately in prayer to God. As a petitioner before a court of law the prophet presents his case to the righteous Judge knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do right. God alone can test or try the "kidneys and heart," the innermost feelings and thoughts of a man. The Lord knows that Jeremiah has been utterly sincere in his ministry. There has been no guile or bitterness in his heart. On the other hand God knows the hypocrisy and the evil intent of the men of Anathoth. Jeremiah is confident of the verdict which the righteous Judge will render in his behalf. Divine vengeance will be poured out upon the evil schemers and thus the cause of God and His prophet will be vindicated. Jeremiah has only to "reveal" his case to God and the just verdict will be rendered (v. 20). God, of course, was aware of the plight of the prophet; Jeremiah is not telling God something which He did not already know. To "reveal" one's case is to publicly, formally plead one's case before the bar of justice.

When the conspiracy against Jeremiah was exposed the men of Anathoth openly and outwardly began to threaten the life of the prophet. Only if he ceased to prophesy in the name of the Lord would his life be spared (v. 21). Other prophets had been threatened. Amos was ordered to leave Bethel (Amos 7:10ff.). Elijah had to flee for his life to Mt. Horeb (I Kings 19:1-4). Some prophets had died because they fearlessly preached in the name of God. Zechariah was slain in the Temple (II Chronicles 24:20-22) and Isaiah, according to tradition, 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 everytime he uttered an oracle in the name of the Lord.

B. The Verdict Which He Receives 11:21-23

TRANSLATION

(21) Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life, saying, Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD and you will not die at our hand; (22) therefore thus says the LORD of host: Behold, I am about to punish them! The young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters will die by the famine; (23) and they shall not have a remnant, for I will bring calamity unto the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.

COMMENTS

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 young men of military age would die by the sword of the enemy. Younger children would die in the famine which would result because of prolonged siege (v. 22). No remnant of those conspirators¹ would survive the calamity which God was about to bring upon the land. The year of their visitation or punishment is upon them (v. 23). They shall not be able to escape the ruthless armies of Nebuchadnezzar.

1. 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.

C. The Prophet's Complaint 12:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) Righteous are you, O LORD, when I present my case unto You; yet I will speak to You with regard to matters of judgment. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do those who practice treachery live peacefully? (2) You have planted them, yea they have taken root; they grow, yea they produce fruit. Near are You in their mouth but far from their hearts. (3) And as for You, O LORD, You know me, You see me and You have tested my heart in respect to Yourself. Drag them away as sheep to the slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaying. (4) How long shall the land mourn and the vegetation of the whole field wither? Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it, the cattle and the birds are snatched away, because they say, He shall not see our end.

COMMENTS

Some time has elapsed since Jeremiah has 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 enemies of the prophet continue to prosper and live a life of ease while the circumstances of the prophet become ever more difficult. Jeremiah reopens his case in the heavenly courtroom. He admits that God is just and righteous yet he is perplexed and wishes to inquire concerning His judgments, i.e., His dealings with the sons of men. Even those who have received divine revelation and who have experienced the most intimate communion with the Almighty are not immune from moments of doubt and spiritual distress. And so the prophet asks: "Why do wicked men like those

in Anathoth prosper? Why do men who commit treacherous deeds (lit., treacherous committers of treachery) live in peace?" (v. 1). Jeremiah can only conclude that they 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 and schemes seem to be successful. While it is true that these men are outwardly pious, God is far distant from their hearts (v. 2).

Jeremiah not only disparages his foes as he stands before the bar of divine justice, he also defends himself. God knows his prophet; He observes him continuously (Hebrew imperfect). God knows that Jeremiah is not hypocritical when he speaks for and about God. How then can God allow His faithful servant to continue to be harassed by his adversaries? There is no doubt in the mind of the prophet what he would do if he were the judge: "Drag them away as sheep to the slaughter!" he cries (v. 3). Is Jeremiah here simply giving vent to the spirit of retaliation and vengeance? Is it crimes committed against Jeremiah personally that 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. Nature itself—the land, the vegetation, the cattle and the birds—suffer because of the wicked inhabitants of the land. The reference here is probably to some disciplinary drought which God has sent upon the land in order to cause the people to realize the folly of sin and turn from it. But if the land suffers, so do the few righteous ones who still live in it. As Jeremiah views the matter this is unjust. Furthermore the more vocal opposition had been taunting God's messenger by saying "he shall not see our end" (v. 4). They are confident that they will outlive Jeremiah. The predictions of this

prophet of doom are mere 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 calls for an immediate execution of the sentence of judgment against them. With these words Jeremiah has presented his case once again before God.

D. The Answer of God 12:5-6

TRANSLATION

(5) If with foot racers you have run and they have made you weary, then how shall you hotly contend (in a race) with horses? And if you are trusting in a peaceful land then what will you do in the pride of Jordan? (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.

COMMENTS

In verses 5 and 6 God replies to His prophet but not in the way which Jeremiah anticipated. God does not explain the delay in the execution of the sentence against the ungodly nor does He promise any cessation of hostilities against His servant. The divine reply is designed to correct the impatience of the prophet. "If you have become weary running with foot racers how will you be able to compete against horses?" God does not deny that Jeremiah has been having a time of it. Things have been bad; but they are going to get worse. If Jeremiah is not able to triumphantly face the relatively minor hostility of the present, how will he endure the severe trials of the future? Jeremiah is currently passing through a "land of peace" i.e., a land in which one is safe and 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 which 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. If Jeremiah was counting on, hoping for, confidently expecting to traverse a peaceful and safe land what would he do when faced with the dangers of the pride of Jordan? As one example of what lay ahead for the prophet, God reveals to him that even the members of his own family cannot be trusted. These relatives have plotted against him. They have "cried aloud" 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.

IV. THE PAIN OF GOD 12:7-13

TRANSLATION

(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. (8) My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the woods; she has raised against Me her voice; therefore I hated her. (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. Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard; they have trodden underfoot My portion. They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. (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. (12) Upon

all the bare heights in the wilderness the spoilers have come; for the LORD has a sword which devours from one end of the land unto the other; so there is no safety for anyone. (13) They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns; they pained themselves, they have not profited. Be ashamed because of your increases, because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

COMMENTS

Most commentators have failed to note how 12:7-13 is related to its context. The passage is usually wrenched from its connection with the preceding prayer and treated as a separate unit from a much later period of the prophet's ministry. Cheyne, for example, feels that the passage is descriptive and not predictive and assigns it to the period of the guerrilla warfare against Jerusalem (II Kings 24:1, 2). The present writer believes that 12:7-13 is part of God's answer to the prayer of Jeremiah and therefore is to be assigned to the early years of Jehoiakim. This, of course, means that the passage is predictive. God is describing the destruction and desolation which will shortly befall His people. The future is known to God and therefore He 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 persecution and trial which he experiences is really nothing compared to what God must bear. In 12:7-13 one can feel the pain of God as He speaks of the ruination of "My house," "My inheritance," "My pleasant portion," and "the

beloved of My soul." 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 (v. 7). As the lion in the woods challenges those who come near, so Judah has 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" here in the absolute sense would be to contradict what has just been said, *viz.*, that Judah is the beloved of God (v. 7). "I hate her" is the strongest possible way of saying that God withdrew His love for Judah when He gave her into the power of her enemies. In astonishment God asks if Judah has become in respect to Him a many-colored bird of prey. Other birds of prey would gather about such a queer looking bird and pluck it to pieces. All the scavenger beasts of the field are bidden to come and join in devouring the strange looking bird (v. 9). In Isaiah 56:9 the wild beasts are symbolic of the heathen powers employed by God to chastise His people (cf. Ezekiel 34:5).

One can sense the pathos as God continues to describe what has and will befall the nation of Judah. Human shepherds, political rulers both foreign and native, have destroyed the vineyard of the Lord, Israel and Judah. By their actions they have made the pleasant portion of God, the land of Judah, a desolate wilderness (v. 10). Because he, i.e., the enemy, has made the land a desolation, the land mourns, unable to produce its fruit. The land mourns

"before Me," literally, upon me. Freedman suggests that this phrase be rendered "to My grief."¹ 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" (v. 11). Even in the most remote areas of the land the sword of divine judgment wielded by the enemy will do its deadly work. No one is safe from the spoiler (v. 12). Why will all of this tragedy befall Judah? By use of a common proverb Jeremiah gives the answer: "They have sown wheat, but they have reaped thorns." The leaders of Judah have plotted, schemed, planned, worked and invested in formulating what they believed to be an adequate national policy. Unfortunately they had planted their "wheat" without divine direction and consequently their harvest would be one of thorns, i.e., humiliation, ruin, destruction and death. Of such a harvest they would be ashamed for it clearly indicates that they are under the wrath of God (v. 13).

V. THE PREDICTION CONCERNING THE NATIONS 12:14-17

TRANSLATION

(14) Thus says the LORD concerning all my wicked neighbors who lay their hands on the inheritance which I caused My people Israel to inherit: Behold, I am about to pluck them up from their land, and the house of Judah I will uproot from their midst. (15) And it shall come to pass after I have plucked them up I shall again have compassion upon them and I shall cause them to return each one to his inheritance and each man to his land. (16) And it shall come to pass if they completely learn the ways

1. Freedman, *op cit.*, p. 90.

of My people to swear by My name, as the Lord lives, even as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up the midst of My people. (17) But if they do not hear, then I will uproot that nation, uprooting and destroying (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

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. In the present passage God speaks of the deportation (v. 14) and restoration of the foreign nations (v. 15). He then sets forth the alternative of conversion or condemnation which these nations will face (vv. 16, 17). The main thrust of this brief paragraph is that one day in the future foreign peoples will have the opportunity of being incorporated into the Covenant people.

What is the relationship of 12:14-17 to its context? Once again most commentators see no connection whatsoever between these words about foreign nations and what precedes. However it would seem that 12:14-17 is in fact 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 goes a step further. Jeremiah was greatly concerned about justice and judgment. God wants him to see the ultimate objective of that judgment. God wants Jeremiah to realize that judgment is not an end in itself but a

means to an end. The judgment will cleanse the nation of Judah. They will again be the people of God. Even the heathen, the most wicked, will have an opportunity to become part of the community of faith. Jeremiah wants the wicked destroyed immediately, permanently; God wants them cleansed, restored, redeemed. Thus in response to Jeremiah's bitter prayer of complaint the prophet came to learn much of God's judgment, the pain of it and the purpose of it.

God's neighbors who border on the land of Judah will not escape divine judgment. Judah's land belongs to God and therefore Judah's neighbors are God's neighbors. The various states of Syria-Palestine—Edom, Moab, Philistia and the rest—time and again had made encroachments upon the territory of God. For this they will be "plucked up" i.e., deported, carried away into captivity. Judah too shall experience this deportation at the hands of the Babylonian armies (v. 14). But God's purpose in bringing this judgment upon both Judah and the nations is that they might experience His salvation. After the judgment God will have compassion upon these displaced peoples and will restore them 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 B.C. 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.

Not only does the Lord promise the nations restoration, but He also holds out to them the prospects of conversion. If these heathen people completely and thoroughly learn the right ways of God's people, if they are truly converted to the worship of the living God, they will be recognized and blessed by Him. They will dwell "in the

midst of My people" for by their conversion they actually become part of the people of God. One specific criteria of their conversion is named: They must swear by the name of the Lord. To use the name of a deity in an oath implied recognition of the claims of that deity. These heathen must be as zealous for the claims of the Lord as they once were for their god Baal (v. 16). On the other hand, if these nations refuse to hear, i.e., obey the Lord then God will uproot and continually bring destruction upon them (v. 17).

VI. THE PRIDE OF THE NATION 13:1-27

Arrogant, willful, stubborn pride was at the root of all Judah's sins. In chapter thirteen Jeremiah issues five stern warnings concerning pride and its consequences. Pride results in deterioration (vv. 1-11), drunkenness (vv. 12-14), darkness (vv. 15-17), dishonor (vv. 18, 19), and disgrace (vv. 20-27).

A. WARNING: Pride Results in Deterioration 13:1-11

Prophets frequently relied upon object lessons to attract attention to their message and 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. By means of an action parable (vv. 1-7) and the application of that parable (vv. 8-11) Jeremiah forced the nation to see the ultimate consequences of their sinful pride.

1. *The action parable* (13:1-7)

TRANSLATION

(1) Thus said the LORD unto me: Go and purchase for yourself a girdle of linen and put it about your

loins and do not put it into water. (2) And I acquired the girdle according to the word of the LORD and I put it about my loins. (3) And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, Take the girdle which you acquired which is upon your loins. Arise and go to the Euphrates and hide it there in a rock crevice. (5) And I went and hid it at the Euphrates as the LORD commanded me. (6) And it came to pass at the end of many days that the LORD said to me, Arise, go to the Euphrates and take from that place the girdle which I commanded you to hide there. (7) And I went to the Euphrates and dug and took the girdle from the place in which I had hidden it; and, behold, the girdle was ruined and good for nothing.

COMMENTS

The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and instructs him to purchase a girdle or loin-cloth. The loin-cloth was a strip of cloth, sometimes leather, wound several times around the waist with its ends hanging down over the thigh. The loin-cloth served the purpose of holding up the loose upper garment when walking or working. Jeremiah is to wear his new linen loin-cloth both to attract the attention of people and to provide the basis for the symbolism which he will later explain. The prophet is specifically instructed not to put his new loin-cloth in water (v. 1). Various explanations of this prohibition have been offered. Some think he was not to wash the garment; he was to wear it until it became filthy. Others think he was not to soak the garment in order to soften it and make it more comfortable for wearing. Doubtlessly Jeremiah was puzzled by this instruction to purchase and wear a new loin-cloth. But he obeyed the

Lord in full confidence that further revelation would be forthcoming (v. 2).

After wearing the garment about for some time Jeremiah received additional instruction from the Lord (v. 3). He is to take his new loin-cloth and hide it at the Euphrates river or perhaps the town of Parah in the crevice of a rock (v. 4). Once again Jeremiah complied with the commandment of the Lord even though he must have thought it very strange (v. 5). After many days Jeremiah received still further instruction from the Lord. He is to retrieve his loin-cloth (v. 6). 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 loin-cloth. Naturally the garment was moldy, rotted, filthy and utterly worthless (v. 7).

Commentators are divided into two major schools of thought as regards this episode. Some feel that the story has no foundation in fact. The account is to be interpreted as a vision or perhaps a parable which was related for purely didactic purposes. But if this were the case, would Jeremiah have represented the events as actually happening? Other commentators feel that this was 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 feel that two trips to the Euphrates river some 300-400 miles north of Anathoth is out of the question. These scholars translate the Hebrew word *perathab*, "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 feel that in the Hebrew text at least, a trip to the Eu-

phrates 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 returned later to retrieve the tattered garment. For additional comment see the special note which follows.

SPECIAL NOTE

JEREMIAH'S TRIP TO THE EUPHRATES

As one surveys the various commentaries on the Book of Jeremiah he will discover five basic arguments which are advanced to support the position taken in this work that Jeremiah actually made a trip to the Euphrates river during his ministry. Some of these arguments have little if any weight. In order to aid the student in separating the wheat from the chaff as he peruses the various commentaries on the book, the following critique of the various arguments is offered.

ARGUMENT ONE: Jeremiah was forced to go into hiding after the fifth year of Jehoiakim (36:9-32) and probably would have been secure only in the far north. Another prophet who tried to take refuge from Jehoiakim in Egypt was extradited and executed (Jeremiah 26:20-23). **RESPONSE:** The present narrative gives not the slightest 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

JEREMIAH'S TRIP TO EUPHRATES

activities exist. Does every silent gap indicate that Jeremiah was absent from Jerusalem? Even if the prophet was 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 B.C. and 597 B.C. Those Jews who deserted to the Chaldeans during the siege would certainly have been interrogated by their captors. Since Jeremiah was perhaps the one most responsible for those desertions his name must have been frequently mentioned. The Chaldeans knew Jeremiah by reputation only.

ARGUMENT FOUR: The Euphrates is "the essential point of the parable" representing the corrupting religious influence of Mesopotamia on Judah.¹ 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. Thus the word should be translated and thus the word should be understood in this passage. RESPONSE: This is perhaps the best argument to back the position that Jeremiah actually made a

1. Elmer A. Leslie, *Jeremiah Chronologically Arranged, Translated, and Interpreted* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), pp. 86, 87.

trip to the Euphrates river. However even this argument is not without its difficulties. The Hebrew word *Pbrath* 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 *Pbrath* occurs in the Hebrew Bible. Yet the very fact that in three passages *Pbrath* 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 *Pbrath* mean anything other than the Euphrates river.

After studying all the arguments on both sides of the controversy concerning where Jeremiah hid his waistcloth the present writer has opted for the view that Jeremiah actually made a trip to the Euphrates river. The alternate view that he buried the waistcloth near his home town at Parah cannot be ruled out altogether. The distance to the Euphrates still remains a problem for those who hold the prophet went there. Yet it should be remembered that the prophets often did curious and sometimes almost impossible acts in order to dramatize their message.

2. *The application of the parable (13:8-11)*

TRANSLATION

(8) And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,
(9) Thus says the LORD: Like this I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.
(10) This evil people who refuse to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart and follow after other gods to serve them and bow down to them shall be like this girdle which is good for nothing. (11) For as a girdle 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 the

LORD), to be My people and a name, a praise and a glory; but they would not listen.

COMMENTS

When Jeremiah returned from the Euphrates he carried or perhaps even attempted to wear his tattered loin-cloth through the streets of Jerusalem. Naturally people would ask about the filthy piece of cloth and then Jeremiah would relate the story narrated above. Then he would begin to make the application of the parable. Judah and Jerusalem were guilty of sinful pride and self-exaltation. But their pride is about to be marred, tattered and torn, like the loin-cloth (v. 9). God will rend Judah to pieces as easily as a rotten piece of cloth is torn. Perhaps as Jeremiah uttered these words he actually tore the old loin-cloth to illustrate his point. He then describes the pride of Judah in more detail. That pride manifested itself in refusal to hear i.e, obey the word of God. They wanted no part of the old stern God of Sinai with His prohibitions and restrictions. That God 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 and at the same time condone their sensuality. For this reason the children of Israel began to follow after, bow down to and serve the gods of Canaan. The corrupting influence of idolatry had slowly eaten away at the strength of the nation until finally the nation, like Jeremiah's loin-cloth, had become utterly worthless, fit for nothing but destruction (v. 10).

In this action parable Jeremiah represents God and the lovely new linen loin-cloth represents the Covenant people, both Judah and Israel. In the ancient Near East the loin-cloth was the principal ornament of a man's dress. This article of clothing was one of the most prized

possessions of a man.¹ As Jeremiah had chosen his waistcloth so God had selected Israel from among all the nations as his special possession. Three times Jeremiah notes that the loin-cloth was worn close to the body. The prophet wishes to emphasize the intimate and beautiful relationship which had once existed between God and His chosen people. Israel was His people, the means by which God's name would be made known throughout the world. They were a source of praise and glory to God. But as time went on Israel would not obey the word of God. They continued to deteriorate spiritually and morally until they were of no more value to God (v. 11).

THE PARABLE OF THE RUINED WAISTCLOTH

13:1-11

Jeremiah selected and purchased his waistcloth as a personal possession.

Jeremiah wore his waistcloth about his waist for a time.

The waistcloth was not to be washed but worn till filthy.

When removed from the waist the waistcloth no longer was performing its proper function.

The garment when removed from the person of Jeremiah degenerated rapidly.

Jeremiah journeyed far to bury the waistcloth.

The waistcloth was buried near the Euphrates river.

When retrieved the waistcloth was damaged beyond repair.

The rotted garment could be easily ripped and torn.

God selected Israel as His special possession.

Israel cleave to God in intimate fellowship for a time.

God maintained his relationship to Israel until the nation became utterly filthy with sin.

When Israel departed from the Lord she was no longer fulfilling her function in the divine plan.

When Israel turned her back on God she rapidly deteriorated.

Israel had traveled a long way from God.

Israel would be carried into exile to lose its glory and be despised among the nations.

Judah in Jeremiah's day was marred beyond recognition, good for nothing.

God will rip asunder the tattered remains of the nation.

1. When Jonathan made a covenant with David he gave him his robe, his armor "even his sword and his bow and his girdle" (I Samuel 18:4).

the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after the useless ones.

COMMENTS

"Hear the word of the Lord" is a characteristic introduction to a prophetic oracle. This formula occurs at least twenty-three times in Jeremiah with slight variation. Note that Jeremiah calls upon all families of the house of Israel to hear his message (v. 4). 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. In pointing out the present apostasy of the people Jeremiah makes three points: the apostasy is (1) unjustified (v. 5); (2) ungrateful (vv. 6, 7) and (3) universal (v. 8).

1. *Unjustified apostasy* (2:5)

In verse five God asks a question and that question implies an emphatic negative answer: "What fault did your fathers find in Me?" There is no reason or fault on God's part which can account for the infidelity of the nation. Yet they have forsaken Him and gone after idols, "vain things" (lit., a breath, a vapor). With all of its pomp and pagentry idolatry in the eyes of Israel's prophets was mere nothingness, utterly futile, useless and vain. Following after these vain deities, the men of Israel became vain.¹ 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

1. II Kings 17:15 uses the same wording as the present verse. Bright sees a word play here: They think that they are following *habbaal*, The Baal, but in reality they are following *hahebel* the wind, emptiness.

that which they loved" (Hosea 9:10). A man is no better than the god that he worships.

2. *Ungrateful apostasy* (2:6-7)

Once the great apostasy set in, Israel seemed to forget about the God who had led them through the barren desert wastes. The word rendered "wilderness" in this verse may have the connotation "pastureland" or it may refer to a barren and inhospitable region. Several phrases are added to the word "wilderness" to paint a picture of the Sinaitic peninsula through which the Israelites had passed so many years before. It was a land of drought, deserts, and darkness. The word "darkness" in the Old Testament frequently connotes distress or extreme danger (cf. Psalms 23:4). A trackless desert can be every bit as bewildering as Stygian darkness. But God had brought Israel through that hostile land of pits, holes, rents and fissures in the soil to a beautiful land (v. 7). The Hebrew uses the word "Carmel" to describe this land. A Carmel-land is a land planted with vines and other choice plants.¹ Bright translates the phrase "a land like a garden" while Freedman renders it "a land of fruitful fields." Yet the Israelites were still unappreciative. They took that holy land that God had consecrated to His own purposes and defiled it by their idolatry. With their pagan rites they made the holy land an abomination to God.

3. *Universal apostasy* (2:8)

The apostasy extended even to the political and spiritual leaders of the nation. Even the priests and those who handle, i.e., were skillful in, the law were guilty. One can know the Book but not really know the Lord of the

1. Cf. Jeremiah 4:26; Isaiah 29:17; 37:24.

Book! The shepherds' or rulers of the nation did not restrain the apostasy but in fact they too transgressed against the Lord. Many prophets began to walk after idol gods and prophesy by Baal. The reference is not to the band of the prophets which appears in I Samuel 10 and 19 or to the sons of the prophets which appear in connection to Elijah and Elisha. The Scriptures nowhere link these early prophets to Baal worship. Rather the reference is to prophets like those in the court of Ahab who actually had gone over to the cult of Baal (I Kings 18:19). Since Jeremiah himself was both a priest and a prophet it must have particularly 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 and had begun to follow useless things, gods which had not done nor could do anything for them.

C. Penetrating Analysis 2:9-19

TRANSLATION

(9) So yet I present My case against you (oracle of the LORD), and with your children I must contend. (10) For pass over to the isles of Kittim and look! To Kedar send and make serious investigation! See if there was ever the like. (11) Has a nation changed gods (and they are non-gods)? But My people have exchanged their Glory for the useless one. (12) Be appalled, O heavens, at this! Bristle and be exceedingly amazed (oracle of the LORD). (13) For two evils My people have done: Me they have forsaken, a fountain of living water, to hew for themselves cisterns, cracked cisterns which cannot contain water. (14) Is Israel a bondman? Is

1. The term "shepherds" in the Old Testament generally refers to civil, not spiritual, leaders. See Jeremiah 3:15; 10:21; 22:22; 25:34; Zechariah 10:3; 11:5, 8, 16; Isaiah 44:28.

he a house-born slave? Why does he become a prey? (15) Against him the lions roar, they let their voice resound; they have made his land a desolation, his cities are laid waste without inhabitant. (16) Also the children of Noph and Tahpanhes have cracked your skull. (17) Did you not bring this upon yourself in that you forsook the LORD your God when He was leading you in the way? (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? (19) Your wickedness shall chastise you and your backslidings shall rebuke you. Know and see that bad and bitter is your forsaking the LORD your God, and My fear you do not possess (oracle of the Lord, GOD of host).

COMMENTS

In verses 9-19 the prophet analyzes the present apostasy pointing out (1) the deplorable condition of apostasy (vv. 9-13) and (2) the terrible consequences of their backsliding (vv. 14-19).

1. *The deplorable condition of apostasy (2:9-13)*

As a prosecutor arguing his case before a jury the Lord presents His case against Israel. A technical legal word is actually used in verse 9 which means to plead in a legal sense or present one's case. The "you" of verse 9 probably refers to the past generation of apostates about whom the prophet has been speaking in verses 4-8. The children's children would be the present generation to which Jeremiah was preaching. Repeated acts of rebellion through the years have called forth repeated reproach and punishment on the part of God.

The prophet argues that the apostasy of Judah is unprecedented in all the history of the world. He challenges his hearers to go westward to Kittim and eastward to Kedar to see if they could uncover another example of a nation which had changed deities (v. 10). Kittim refers to the isles of the Mediterranean (cf. Numbers 24:24; Daniel 11:30) and perhaps also the coastlands of Italy and Greece (cf. Genesis 10:4). Kedar was the name of one of the sons of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13) and is here used of Arabia in general. 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 (v. 11). Yet Israel has changed their Glory (God)¹ for the useless one (Baal). When a nation ceases to trust in God that nation has lost its true glory.

It is characteristic of the divine lawsuit that God or the prophet calls upon the heavens to bear testimony in the case (e.g., Micah 6:1f.; Isaiah 1:2). Thus in verse 12 the prophet calls upon the heavens to be appalled, 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 (Deuteronomy 32:1). Now they look down upon the willful and reckless transgression of the divine will. Nature which 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.

Two specific charges are leveled against the people of God in verse 13. They have forsaken the Lord, a fountain of living water,² in order to hew out for themselves

1. The use of Glory for God occurs in Psalms 106:20 and Psalms 3:3. A similar title for God is "the Pride of Israel" (Amos 8:7; Hosea 5:5).

2. Jeremiah uses the figure again in 17:13. Many years earlier David had said of the Lord: "With you is the fountain of life" (Psalms 36:9).

cisterns. A cistern in antiquity had three fundamental deficiencies: (1) The 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 has the color of weak soapsuds, tastes like the earth and is full of worms.¹ (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. Who in their right mind would prefer this 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 over-flowing, 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 (John 4:13).

2. *The terrible consequences of apostasy* (2:14-19)

In making the transition from considering the condition of apostasy to pointing out the consequences of apostasy, Jeremiah points to the example of the northern kingdom of Israel. 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 (Exodus 4:22). That Israel should be captive in another land is an unnatural state of affairs and demands a reasonable explanation. Why then has Israel become a prey to the nations, helpless to resist the advances of neighboring states? (v. 13). Israel's enemies

1. W. M. Thompson, *The Land and the Book* (London: Nelson, 1873), p. 287.

like lions have roared against God's people, have made the land a desolation and laid waste the cities (v. 14). Why?

From Israel in the north Jeremiah turns his attention to Judah in verse 16. The verse is best regarded as a prediction written as though it has already been fulfilled.¹ The translation "cracked your skull" is based on a slight alternation in the Hebrew vowel points which, in effect, the American Standard Version has also followed. Noph and Tahpanhes are important Egyptian cities, the latter being a fortress commanding the road to Palestine (44:1; 46:15). The prophecy then 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 and the consequent subjugation of Judah (II Kings 23:29).² Unable to learn from the fate of the northern kingdom, Judah was doomed to repeat that fate.

Now why had Israel suffered? Why was Judah yet to suffer? "You have brought it upon yourself," says the prophet. From the time of the wilderness wanderings to the present they had refused to follow the leading of the Lord (v. 17). 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 Euphrates³ in Assyria (v. 18). These broken cisterns could not provide the life-giving water the nation needed. In the view of Jeremiah there was no advantage whatsoever for Judah to become entangled in international politics.⁴ The his-

1. The 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.

2. Some would date these verses after 609 B.C. and since the passage is not dated, this possibility cannot be ruled out.

3. The Euphrates river was regarded as the boundary between Syria-Palestine and Assyria. Genesis 15:18 points to the fact that "the River" is the Euphrates.

4. Isaiah (30:2-5; 31:1) and Hosea (7:11, 16) had already inveighed against an Egyptian alliance.

torical books of the Old Testament bear witness to the fact that Israel's vacillation between Egypt and Assyria proved disastrous. Since they had forsaken the Lord and no longer feared Him they were doomed to chastisement and punishment at the hands of their enemies (v. 19). Through the depths of their suffering they would come to realize how heinous was their crime against God. They had sowed the wind and they were about to reap the whirlwind.

D. Pointed Accusation 2:20-28

TRANSLATION

(20) For from of old you have broken your yoke, you have burst your bands and you said, I will not serve. For upon every high hill and under every green tree you reclined, committing harlotry. (21) But as for Me, I planted you a choice vine of wholly reliable stock. How sad it is that you have become a degenerate, strange vine unto Me! (22) But if you scrub with lye and multiply to yourself soap your iniquity is a permanent stain before Me (oracle of the lord GOD). (23) How sad it is that you say, I have not defiled myself; after the Baalim I have not gone. Look at your conduct in the Valley! Understand what you have done! A swift camel running hither and yon! (24) A wild ass accustomed to the wilderness, in her desire, snuffs at the wind; in her occasion who can restrain her; all who seek her will not become weary; in her month they shall find her. (25) Withhold your foot from bareness and your throat from thirst. But you say, It is no use! No! for I love strangers and after them I will continue to go. (26) As the shame of a thief that is found thus the house of Israel shall be put to shame—they,

their kings, their princes, their priests and their prophets—(27) who say to a tree, You are my father, and to a stone, You brought me forth! For they turn unto Me the back and not the face; but in the time of their calamity they shall say, Rise up, Save us! (28) But where are your gods which you have made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in the time of your calamity; for according to the number of your cities are your gods O Judah.

COMMENTS

In a series of brilliant metaphors Jeremiah sharpens his accusation against Judah. The nation is compared to (1) an ox that breaks his yoke (v. 20); (2) a vine that bears strange fruit (v. 21); (3) a stain that will wash off (v. 22); (4) a roving dromedary (v. 23); (5) a wild ass in heat (v. 24); (6) a persistent paramour (v. 25); and (7) a thief caught in the act (vv. 26-28).

1. *An ox that breaks his yoke* (2:20)

Verse 20 presents some difficult textual problems and consequently the differences between English translations of the verse are considerable. The 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 American Standard Version. Like a stubborn ox Israel refused to submit to the yoke of divine restraint and the bands 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." Having demanded freedom from the Lord, Israel became the slave to the passion and lust of idolatrous worship. On the bare treeless heights Israel offered sacrifices to the Baalim. 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 and thus Jeremiah likens the national apostasy to harlotry and adultery.

2. *A vine that bears strange fruit* (2:21)

To produce choice grapes takes many years of patient and tender care of the vines. The divine Horticulturist had planted a choice¹ 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. But 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 and care expended by the One who had planted the vine. It was a degenerate plant worthy only of destruction. In this brief but 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 journeyings, the Egyptian bondage and the wilderness wandering God had patiently and lovingly watched over the tender young plant. When the people reached Canaan they refused to yield the fruit of service and obedience to the Lord but on the contrary rendered their allegiance to other gods. How sad it is,²—says the prophet, as he shakes his head in amazement at what has become of that noble vine.

1. 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 which this type of vine produced.

2. The Hebrew interjection used here is one of the distinctive words in the vocabulary of lamentation as can be seen in Ezekiel 26:17; Jeremiah 48:39; II Samuel 1:19, 25, 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.

3. *A stain that will not wash off* (2:22)

The iniquity of Israel is clearly visible to the Holy One of Israel. It is an indelible stain which cannot be removed through human effort. The best cleansing agents of the day are not sufficient to eliminate that blot. Lye (Hebrew, *neter*) is a mineral alkali deposited on the shores and on the bed of certain lakes in Egypt. This substance was collected for making lye for washing purposes (see Proverbs 25:20). Soap (Hebrew, *borit*) is the corresponding vegetable alkali (see Isaiah 1:25). Though the outward man may be scrubbed clean yet the ugly blot of iniquity remains upon the heart and the soul. Only God can wipe it away. What joy it is for the Christian to know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin (I John 1:7).

4. *A roving dromedary* (2:23)

The people who were secretly worshipping Baal apparently did not regard this as apostasy as long as they went through the formal acts of worshipping the Lord. Perhaps they even went so far as to claim that the rites of Baal were performed in the service of God. 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. The prophet compares their conduct to that of a swift young camel running hither and yon. Most commentators have interpreted this figure to be that of a female camel in heat, driven by lust, pacing to and fro. Kenneth Bailey, who spent seventeen years in the Middle East, argues that this is not the point of comparison in verse 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 verse is feminine, but all references since verse 16 have been feminine singular. It is not the *femaleness* that is being stressed in this verse, 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.¹

5. *A wild ass in heat* (2:24)

In verse 24 the prophet compares the apostasy of Israel to the dramatic and vulgar actions of a female ass in heat. In the month of mating, sires need not weary themselves in seeking out the female ass; on the contrary she will eagerly seek them out. So Israel eagerly turns to the lewd rites of Baalism. 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) snuffs at 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 and then straightens her neck and, with head high, closes her nostrils and "sniffs the wind." What she really is doing is *snuffing* the dust which is soaked with the urine of the male ass. With her neck stretched to the utmost she slowly draws in a long, deep breath, then lets out an earthshaking bray and doubles her pace, racing down the road in search of the male.²

1. Kenneth E. Bailey and William L. Holladay, "The 'Young Camel' and 'Wild Ass' in Jer. II. 23-25," *Vetus Testamentum* XVIII (April, 1968), 256-260.

2. *Ibid.*

6. *A persistent paramour (2:25)*

In verse 25 the divine Husband pleads with his adulterous wife, Israel, to cease from her wild pursuit of illicit lovers. The difficult first part of the verse might allude to the fatiguing practices of the Baal cult—the barefoot dances and endless repetition of the name Baal (see I Kings 18:26). 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." In any case 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."

7. *A thief caught in the act (2:26-28)*

A thief caught in the act is embarrassed and ashamed. Under the Mosaic law a thief if apprehended in the act had to restore what he had stolen and pay a stiff fine (Exodus 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 the shame of disappointment when the folly of their ways became manifest (v. 26). In times of peace and prosperity the Israelites turned their back upon God to experiment with idolatry. They bowed down before a tree, a sacred pole or idol made of wood and piously confessed, "You are my father," i.e., my guardian, my protector. Before the cold and lifeless stone pillar or idol made of stone they bowed and said, "You brought me forth," i.e., you are my mother, my creator. But in the hour of national or personal calamity when their idols of wood and stone proved utterly worthless they would cry out to the

living God in their desperation (v. 27). With Elijah-like sarcasm Jeremiah taunts the idolaters in verse 28: "Your gods are as numerous as the cities of your land!¹ Surely among the multiplicity of the gods you have made for yourselves there is one deity who can aid you in the day of your calamity!"

E. Pungent Argument 2:29-37

TRANSLATION

(29) Why do you continue to complain to Me? All of you have transgressed against Me (oracle of the LORD). (30) In vain I have smitten your sons; they have not received correction; your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravening lion. (31) O generation, see the word of the LORD! Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness? Why do my people say, We are free; we will not come again unto you? (32) Does a virgin forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten Me days without number. (33) How skillfully you set your course to seek love! Therefore even the wicked women you have taught your ways. (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. (35) But you say, I am innocent; surely His wrath has turned from me! Behold, I am about to enter into judgment with you because you have said, I have not sinned. (36) Why is it such a very light thing for you to change your way? Also because of Egypt you shall be ashamed as you were ashamed because

1. The 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.

of Assyria. (37) **Indeed from this place you shall go out with your hands upon your head for the LORD has rejected the object of your trust and you shall not prosper because of them.**

COMMENTS

In the closing verses of the inaugural sermon Jeremiah drives home his final arguments against the apostasy of the people. He points out that their complaints against God are unjustified (vv. 29, 30). Their rebellion indicates ingratitude (vv. 31, 32), their protestations of innocence are useless (vv. 33-35) and their alliances with foreign powers are utterly unprofitable (vv. 36, 37).

1. *Unjustified complaints* (2:29, 30)

The brazen-faced apostates actually attempted to justify themselves before God. They contended with Him or complained against Him. The Hebrew word used here is the same technical legal term used in verse 9. It means to go to court with, to present a legal case against. 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! (v. 29). They cannot blame Him 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. God had raised up mighty men to preach his word and call His people to repentance. Instead of heeding the message of God the people destroyed the messengers (v. 30). Jeremiah probably has reference here to the reign of Manasseh when much innocent blood was shed (II

Kings 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.

2. *Ungrateful rebellion* (2:31-32)

Rather than the usual "Hear the word of the Lord" Jeremiah here 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. Has God been barren? Has He failed to provide for His people? God has not been a wilderness to His people nor a land of thick darkness. The latter expression is literally in the Hebrew "land of the darkness of the Lord." It probably refers to that deep kind of darkness such as the Lord sends in judgment upon the wicked (Exodus 10:21-23). This thick darkness is symbolic here of misery and uncertainty. God did not leave Israel to grope in such darkness without guidance. Yet the people of Israel have declared, "We are free!"¹ The word translated "free" means basically, to wander restlessly, to roam. As used here 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 is asking His people in verse 31, "How can you say such terrible things? How can I be deserving of such treatment?" A maiden will not forget the ornaments or jewels which are part of her dowry, nor will a bride forget the girdle or sash which is 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.

1. The King James Version has taken this word to be from an entirely different root and has translated it "we are lords."

3. *Useless protestations* (2:33-35)

The evidence in the case against Israel is clear. Israel is 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 (v. 33). Their very garments were stained as it were with the blood of poor innocent people. No doubt the reference here is to the persecutions which spring up during the wicked reign of Manasseh (II Kings 21:16). What a paradox! Those who were most skillful in pursuing "love" were at the same time belligerent towards, and intolerant of those who tried to remain faithful to the laws of God. The populace to a large degree must have supported their king in his attacks upon the faithful and the humble. Had these folks been caught red-handed attempting to break through (lit., dig through) the mud brick sides of a house then perhaps homicide might have been justified (Exodus 22:2). But this was not the case. Those who had been slain were innocent of wrong doing. They were executed "because of all those things," *viz.*, the apostasy and zeal for the false gods (v. 34).

In spite of the clear evidence against them Israel continued to raise strong protestations of innocence of any wrong doing. 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." The fatal flaw in this reasoning is that God sometimes delays the punishment for sin in order to give the sinners ample time to repent. "It will not be long now," says the prophet, "and God will enter into judg-

ment with you" (v. 35). In that hour Israel would come to realize how utterly corrupt and sinful she had been.

4. *Unprofitable alliances* (2:36, 37)

Israel will not be able to maintain the status quo and forestall the divine judgment by political alliances. The political history of both Israel and Judah since the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C. had been characterized by frequent and often disastrous shifts in foreign policy. One king would yield to Assyria; his successor would secretly negotiate 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 would not be in danger of attack from the north so long as Egypt was a friendly ally. Sadly Jeremiah warns these political optimists that Egypt would disappoint them just as Assyria had done many years before. The prophet probably has 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 but at the same time demanded that the king of Judah render tribute to him. Ahaz stripped the Temple and his own palace to bribe Tiglath-pileser (II Chronicles 28:20).

Political alliances with Egypt would not be able to deliver Jerusalem from destruction. The day would come when they would go out from Jerusalem with their hands upon their heads in a gesture of shame and surrender (cf. II Samuel 13:19). They will not prosper because of their political schemes for God had rejected that nation in whom Israel trusted, *viz.*, Egypt. Hosea had warned against alliance with Egypt (Hosea 7:11, 12:1) and

Isaiah had repeated the warning (Isaiah 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 and resumed the siege which he had temporarily suspended (Jeremiah 37).

II. GOD'S APPEAL TO HIS PEOPLE 3:1—4:4

After the blistering indictment of his inaugural sermon Jeremiah takes up the subject of repentance. He speaks here of (1) the possibility of repentance (3:1-5); (2) the need for repentance (3:6-10); (3) the call to repentance (3:11-15); (4) the blessings of repentance (3:16-22a); (5) The prayer of repentance (3:22b-25) and (6) the rewards of repentance (4:1-4).

A. The Possibility of Repentance 3:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) They say if a man divorce his wife and she shall go from him and shall become another man's, may he return unto her again? Would not that land become greatly polluted? But you have committed harlotry with many lovers; yet return unto Me (oracle of the LORD). (2) Lift up your eyes unto the high hills and look! Where have you not been lain with? Along the ways you have sat for them as an Arabian in the desert; you have polluted a land with your harlotry and with your iniquity. (3) So the showers were withheld and there was no latter rain; yet the forehead of a harlot you possessed, you refused to be ashamed. (4) Will you not

right now call to Me, "My Father! You are the Husband of my youth!" (5) Will He keep His anger forever? Will He keep it always? Behold, you have spoken but you have done evil things and you have succeeded.

COMMENTS

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 (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). In the light of this law is it *legally* possible for the Lord to take Judah back again? The answer is No! Judah's case is much worse than that envisaged 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 has cavorted around with many lovers, 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 repentance and reconciliation God calls upon Judah to return to Him (v. 1).

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 noll in all the land which had not been defiled by the licentious rites of Baal. Like a lonely Arab in the midst of the desert who eagerly joins himself to any caravans or passers-by, Israel has embraced every form of idolatry which has come along. This iniquitous spiritual harlotry has polluted the land (v. 2). Therefore God has punished them by withholding the showers and especially the latter rain of early spring which was so essential to an abundant harvest. Yet no amount of divine discipline could make Israel

feel the shame of her wantonness. 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 (v. 3).

The past can be forgotten and forgiven if Israel right now, at this very moment, will acknowledge the Lord as God. Instead of calling the idols of wood and stone "my father" will you not give that appellation to Me?, the Lord pleads. Will you not acknowledge Me as the husband of your youth? (v. 4). The translation "husband" here is justified on the basis of Proverbs 2:17 where the same word is used. The word can also mean intimate friend and even "guide" as in the American Standard and King James versions. As a matter of fact, according to verse 5 Judah had spoken the things which God had requested in the previous verse. At the same time, however, they had continued to do evil things thus indicating that their words were insincere and hypocritical. So far they had gotten by with this hypocrisy but God will not keep His anger for ever (v. 5). Shortly they will face the God of judgment.

B. The Need for Repentance 3:6-10

TRANSLATION

(6) And the LORD said unto me in the days of Josiah the king: Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She continuously goes upon every high mountain and under every green tree and you commit harlotry there. (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. (8) And I saw, when, because of the fact that Backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I put her away and gave a writing of divorce unto her, yet the Treacherous One, Judah

her sister, did not fear but she went and committed harlotry. (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. (10) And even in all of this her treacherous sister Judah did not return unto Me with all her heart, but deceitfully (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The need for repentance in Judah was made manifest by what had happened in the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel was Backsliding personified. Throughout her history Israel had recklessly pursued the false gods upon every prominent noll where they would feel closer to the deities and under every green tree which would furnish welcome shade for the practice of their lustful desires. The last clause of verse six 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 which are presently in exile or else the prophet points to his hearers and declares "you too have engaged in such licentious acts."

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. But 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 (v. 7). Even when God divorced His adulterous wife Israel by sending her into Assyrian captivity Judah did not fear but continued in her own harlotry (v. 8). 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 (v. 9). 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. Some scholars think that in verse 10 Jeremiah is giving his assessment of the reformation of Josiah, that it was not sincere but hypocritical. It is not certain, of course, that this paragraph should be dated after the reform.

C. The Call to Repentance 3:11-14

TRANSLATION

(11) And the LORD said unto me, More righteous is Backsliding Israel than Treacherous Judah. (12) Go and call these words to the north and say, Return, O Backsliding Israel (oracle of the LORD). I will not frown on you for I am kind (oracle of the LORD): I will not keep anger for ever. (13) But realize your iniquity, that against the LORD your God you have transgressed and you scattered your ways to strangers under every green tree and you did not obey My voice (oracle of the LORD). (14) Return, O Backsliding sons (oracle of the LORD), for I am married to you and I will take you one of a city and two from a family and I will bring you to Zion.

COMMENTS

The present paragraph indicates that Jeremiah had a warm regard for the exiles of the northern kingdom. The sins of Israel though considerable were less than those of Judah (v. 11). Why does God regard Judah as more guilty? Because Judah had before her the example of Israel. More light brings greater responsibility in the sight of God. Furthermore, Judah was guilty of hypocrisy in her dealings with God (see v. 10). God still yearns for Israel's repentance and 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 (II Kings 17:6; 18:11). The word "return" in the Old Testament carries the idea of going back to the original point of departure.¹ If Israel repents they will find that God is kind and anxious to receive them. He will not frown upon them and continue to be angry with them if they will but repent (v. 12).

The return to God must be accompanied by sincere confession and acknowledgement of sin. Confession, which always precedes forgiveness, is telling God what He already knows about us. In the present case the confession was to involve acknowledgement of iniquity, transgression and disobedience. 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 (v. 13).

In verse 14 the Lord, first as a Father and then as an Husband, 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 "you" in this verse is plural in the Hebrew referring to individuals. Not many will

1. W. L. Holladay, *The Root Subh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1958).

accept the gracious invitation to 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 (v. 14). The verse clearly underlines the fact that God is concerned with individuals and that 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 B.C. But 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.

D. The Blessings of Repentance 3:15-22a

TRANSLATION

(15) And I will give you shepherds according to My heart who shall feed you with knowledge and wisdom. (16) And it shall come to pass when you have multiplied and grown numerous in the land in those days (oracle of the LORD) they will no longer say, The Ark of the Covenant of the LORD! It will not enter the mind; they will neither remember it nor miss it, nor shall one be made again. (17) In that time they shall call Jerusalem "The throne of the LORD" and all nations shall be gathered unto it, to the Name of the LORD and to Jerusalem; and they shall not go any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. (18) In those days the house of Judah shall walk

with the house of Israel and they shall come together from the land of the north unto the land which I caused your fathers to inherit. (19) But I said, How can I put you among the sons, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of the nations? Then I said, You must call me "my Father" and you must not turn back from after Me. (20) Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband thus you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel (oracle of the LORD). (21) A voice is heard upon the bare heights, weeping supplications of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their ways, they have forsaken the LORD their God. (22) Return, O backsliding sons, I will heal your backslidings.

COMMENTS

If individuals of the ten northern tribes truly repent and are brought by God into spiritual Zion they will experience many wonderful blessings. First, they will be blessed with a new leadership (v. 15). 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 (John 6:35-63), and the faithful men of God who have fed the flock through the centuries.

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.¹ The Book of Acts contains the record of the thrilling ful-

1. See Genesis 15:5-6; 17:2; 28:14; Jeremiah 23:3; Ezekiel 36:11; Hosea 1:10; 2:23.

fillment 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.

In the Messianic age a new covenant will replace the cherished Ark of the Covenant (v. 16). The Ark of the Covenant was vital to the religious life in Old Testament times. It must have come as a shock to even the most devout Jew to hear for the first time the announcement that the Ark would not play any role whatsoever in the New Israel. After all, the God-ordained worship of the Old Testament centered around the Sanctuary and around the Ark. The Ark is represented in the law of Moses as the throne of the Lord. It was the tangible, 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 when 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. "The Ark will disappear," says the prophet. So it did. 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.

In years to come a *new city* would replace earthly Jerusalem (v. 17). The throne of God will no longer be the Ark of the Covenant¹ but rather the holy city, the new Jerusalem. The New Covenant Jerusalem is none other than the New Testament Church. The Apostle Paul calls it the "Jerusalem which is above" i.e., spiritual

1. The Ark of the Covenant is never called in the Old Testament the throne of God, yet it was in fact no less than that.

Jerusalem of which all believers are citizens (Galatians 4:24-31). Jesus Christ sits on the throne of God and rules over His church and in the midst of His church (Ephesians 1:20-23). Ezekiel speaks of that same city when he says "the name of the city from that day shall be, 'the LORD is there'" (Ezekiel 48:35).

In the Messianic age Jerusalem will be blessed with a *new attractiveness*. Jerusalem shall become the spiritual center of the world and all nations shall gather there. The gathering of Gentiles into the Church of Christ is another frequent theme in Messianic prophecy (e.g., Isaiah 60; 62). Because they have experienced genuine conversion these Gentiles no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart. But what is it that attracts these Gentiles to the New Covenant Jerusalem, the Church? The verse seems to suggest that it is "the Name of the Lord" which attracts them. The name of God in the Old Testament was very significant. It revealed something of the character and nature of God. The Name of God in this verse is not an abstract idea or even a personification but a person.¹ 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 John 1.

A new fellowship shall characterize the Israel of the future. Israel and Judah shall be reunited for the first time since the great schism of 931 B.C. The reunion of these two estranged sister nations is also a major theme in the Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament.² The Israelites and Jews are depicted returning together from the land of the north, i.e., Assyria and Babylonia, to the land of Canaan which God had given to their fathers centuries earlier. The Apostle Paul quotes a similar "re-

1. Note the language of Isaiah 30:27; 26:8; 59:19 where the "name of God" is personalized.

2. Jeremiah 2:4; Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 37:16ff.; Hosea 2:2; 1:11.

union" passage from Hosea and applies it to the unity of believers that exists in the Church of Christ (Romans 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.

In verse 19a God asks,¹ in effect, "How shall I give you this wonderful heritage of which I have been speaking in view of the fact that you have rejected Me?" God then answers His own question, "I can thus bless you if you will call Me 'my Father' and not turn away from Me." The most wonderful inheritance that can befall a man is to be part of the kingdom of heaven. "That," says Jeremiah, "is the most beautiful inheritance of the nations." One is only entitled to that inheritance when he is able by virtue of the New Birth to call God "my Father." One can only claim that inheritance when he has been faithful unto death.

From an idealistic view of the distant future the prophet returns in verse 20 to a realistic view of the present. As God looks upon the nation all he presently sees in the whole house of Israel i.e., the whole nation, is unfaithfulness and apostasy. Just as a faithless wife departs from her husband so has the covenant nation departed from the divine Husband (v. 20). The sad description of the present state of affairs ends abruptly and 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 listens for some sign that the long apostasy has ended. Finally, He hears it. On the high places where once their boisterous idolatrous festivities were conducted now comes forth lamentation and mourning, and prayers pleading for forgiveness for having perverted their ways and having for-

1. The American Standard Version and a number of commentators prefer to render the first half of verse 19 as an exclamation instead of a question. Either rendering is possible.

saken the Lord (v. 21). Lest they feel that their sin is too grievous and their repentance futile the Lord immediately offers them words of encouragement. He addresses them as "sons" and calls upon them to return to Him. He, the Great Physician, will heal them of their spiritual maladies and restore them to spiritual health if they will but come unto Him (v. 22a).

E. The Prayer of Repentance 3:22b-25

TRANSLATION

(22b) Here we are, we have come to you because you are the LORD our God. (23) Truly the hills are a swindle, the tumult of the mountains; Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. (24) But shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. (25) Let us lie down in our shame and let our reproach cover us, for against the LORD our God we have sinned, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day; we have not hearkened to the voice of the LORD our God.

COMMENTS

The exact nature of the verses in this section has puzzled commentators. Does this forthright confession represent the longing of the Lord? Do these verses 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 and honest. The present writer feels that the prophet intended these verses 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."¹

The last part of verse 22 depicts the eager response of the people to the gracious invitation which the Lord has just offered in the first half of the verse. The people confess that the pagan worship conducted on the hills has proved to be vain. They admit that they had been spiritually swindled by the tumult of the mountains, i.e., the wild orgies² which accompanied idol-worship (v. 23). True spiritual power is not always proportionate to the boisterousness of the religious observance. The Hebrew word translated "shame" in verse 24 is the word *bosheth* which often serves in the Old Testament as a euphemism for Baal.³ For as long as these folks can remember Baal worship has devoured the resources of the nation. Their flocks and herds and even their sons and daughters had been offered as sacrifices to the pagan deities (v. 24). Then, too, because of their idolatry divine punishment came upon them which 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 which the Baal demanded and the subsequent punishment which the Lord exacted. The repentant sinners are so ashamed that they resolve to prostrate themselves, an expression of the deepest sorrow. Their guilt is so intense that it seems to enshroud them. In bitter tears of shame and remorse they cry out, "We have sinned against the Lord our God!" This is the godly sorrow that leads to

1. Laetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

2. For an example of tumultuous Baal worship see I Kings 18. Others take the tumult of the mountains to refer to the multitudes who gathered on the mountains to worship Baal. Still others feel the word refers to the idols themselves.

3. For examples where *bosheth* is substituted for Baal, see Jeremiah 11:13; Hosea 9:10; II Samuel 11:21; Judges 6:32; II Samuel 2:8 and I Chronicles 8:33.

repentance (II Corinthians 7:9-11). When one realizes the true nature of sin and the true nature of the God against who he has sinned, he cannot help but feel the agonizing shame depicted so vividly in verse 25.

F. The Rewards of Repentance 4:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) If you return, O Israel, (oracle of the LORD) unto Me return; and if you will remove your abominations from before Me, and never waver (2) and you swear, As the LORD lives, in truth, in justice and in righteousness then nations shall bless themselves in Him and in Him they shall glory. (3) For thus says the LORD, to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: Plow up your unplowed ground! Do not sow among the thorns! (4) Circumcise yourselves to the LORD. Remove the foreskins of your heart, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, 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.

COMMENTS

If she was to reap the rewards of repentance Israel must make sure that she turns unto the Lord. The pronoun "Me" is in an emphatic position in the Hebrew sentence structure of verse 1. 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." A genuine return to the Lord will involve three distinct actions on the part of the nation. (1) They must remove all their abominations, i.e., their idols and the rites conducted in their worship, from before the face of the Lord. (2) From that point on they must never waver, i.e., run to and from other gods, but rather

remain stedfastly faithful to the Lord. (3) They must swear by the life of the Lord. "As the Lord lives" was the common form of the Jewish oath. 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.¹ 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 (a) in truth, i.e., in sincerity; (b) in justice, i.e., in keeping with that which is right; and (c) in righteousness, i.e., in accordance with the commandments of the law of God (Deuteronomy 6:24, 25). Following this lengthy statement of the stipulations concerning repentance, the Lord adds a beautiful promise. If Israel truly repents then the Lord will make them a blessing to the whole world and the promise of 3:17 will be fulfilled. The heathen will come to bless and glorify the Lord when they see the way in which He will bless penitent Israel (v. 2).

From the explicit promise of reward in verse 2 the prophet develops two metaphors which contain implicit promises to penitent sinners. In the first metaphor, which Jeremiah has borrowed from Hosea (10:12), the heart of the men of Judah is like a field which has never been cleared of dense brush and plowed for planting. (v. 3). It is no easy task to clear that land of thorn and thistle and plow that virgin soil. Superficial plowing will 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 which 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 which harbors the roots of sin. But the more thorough the plowing, the richer the harvest.

1. Cf. Deuteronomy 26:17f.; II Kings 23:3; Nehemiah 9:1—10:39.

In verse 4 the metaphor changes as Jeremiah calls upon the men of Judah to circumcise themselves to the Lord. Here the prophet is taking a slap at the mere formal, ritualistic notions of 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 but also of their hearts (Deuteronomy 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. 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 will break forth against them and no one will be able to extinguish that fire (v. 4).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FIVE

I. Facts to Master.

1. The time of these sermons (3:6).
2. The great act in the past that demonstrated God's special favor (2:6, 7).
3. Places which Jeremiah challenges the people to look for similar examples of apostasy (2:10).
4. Something that foreign nations had never done (2:11).
5. What the people had substituted for the Fountain of Living Waters (2:13).
6. The two cities representative of Egypt (2:16).
7. The identity of the waters of Sihor and "the River" (2:18).

8. The significance of the term "harlotry" in Jeremiah's preaching.
9. A key word in Jeremiah: "Your children have received no _____ (2:30).
10. The law which Jeremiah cites in 3:1.
11. The two faithless sisters mentioned in 3:6-10.
12. That which would no longer be missed in the Messianic Age (3:16).
13. The name that Jerusalem would have in the Messianic Age (3:17).
14. The great reunion in the Messianic age.
15. The name by which God desired to be called (3:19).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. How would you compare and contrast Jeremiah's reference to "living" water with Jesus' use of the term in John 4:5-26?
2. What are some of the broken cisterns which men have hewed out for themselves today?
3. In what ways does Jeremiah indicate the worthlessness of idols in chapter 2?
4. Should 3:1-5 be regarded as an appeal to the people or as a rejection of Israel? Are these verses a *plea* or a *protest*?
5. Should the call for repentance in 3:6-10 be dated *before* or *after* the reformation of Josiah in 621 B.C.? See the hint in verse 10.
6. What lesson of history had Judah failed to learn? See 3:8. Why is it important for a citizen to know the history of his country?
7. What is repentance? What are the idols from which men need to turn in our days?
8. What principle was the prophet employing when he declared in 3:11 that Israel (Northern Kingdom) was more righteous than Judah?

JEREMIAH

9. What role does confession play in repentance? What should the sinner confess? Why should he confess if God already knows all the sin that he has committed? See 3:13, 23-25.
10. Who are the shepherds that God promises to give to his restored people? Why are they necessary? See 3:15. Do you think that enough emphasis is put on *conserving* those who are *converted* to Christ today?
11. Is it legitimate to regard Jerusalem in 3:17 as a prophetic reference to the church and the reunification of Judah and Israel as prophetic of the union of Jew and Gentile in the church?
12. What are the various conditions which the people were to meet if they were to enjoy the blessings of God? 4:1, 2.

CHAPTER SIX

SERMONS FROM THE REIGN OF JOSIAH (Continued)

III. GOD'S WARNING TO HIS PEOPLE

4:5—6:26

Following his treatment of repentance Jeremiah takes up at length the subject of divine judgment. Using bold figures of speech he first announces the coming judgment (4:5-18) and then adds a somewhat detailed description of that judgment (4:19-31). Chapter 5 in its entirety is devoted to discussion of the causes of the impending disaster. In chapter 6 the prophet sees the judgment approaching ever closer to his country.

A. Announcement of Coming Judgment 4:5-18

Jeremiah builds the announcement of divine judgment around three figures. He compares the armies which will destroy Judah to a lion who ravishes the countryside (vv. 5-10), to a tempest which swirls through the land (vv. 11-13) and to "watchers" who station themselves outside the fortifications of Jerusalem and guard against any escape on the part of the inhabitants of the city (vv. 14-18).

1. *The first figure: the lion* (4:5-10)

TRANSLATION

(5) Declare in Judah and publish in Jerusalem, and say: Blow the trumpet in the land; cry out boldly and say: Gather yourselves and let us go unto the fortified city. (6) Set up a standard toward Zion. Take refuge. Do not hesitate; for I am about to bring calamity from the north and great destruction. (7)

A lion has gone up from his thicket, yea, a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out of his place to make your land a desolation. Your cities shall fall to ruins, without inhabitant. (8) Because of this gird on sackcloth, mourn and howl for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned back from us. (9) And it shall come to pass in that day (oracle of the LORD) that the heart of the king shall perish and the heart of the princes as well. The priests shall be astonished and the prophets shall be dumb-founded. (10) And I said, Ah Lord GOD! Surely you have completely deceived this people and Jerusalem saying, you shall have peace, while the sword reaches to the soul.

COMMENTS

Verses 5-10 present a picture of impending disaster. 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. Jeremiah urges the people to sound the alarm throughout the land by means of trumpet and word of mouth. He urges them to cry out as loudly¹ as they possibly can in order that the scattered population might rush to safety in the fortified cities of the land (v. 5). Jeremiah urges them to set up a standard, a signal flag or signpost, to guide the fleeing refugees to Zion or Jerusalem. He pleads with fugitives not to hesitate (literally, stand around). They should not linger or tarry in order to have their possessions. It is an urgent hour. The Babylonian forces

1. The 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.

in the north are sweeping southward to bring calamity and destruction to Judah (v. 6).

Jeremiah compares Nebuchadnezzar to a lion which 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. Unlike the literal lions which might attack individuals, this mighty and ruthless lion attacks and destroys whole nations. 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" (lit., has broken up his camp). His purpose, declares the prophet, is to make the whole land of Judah a desolation (v. 7). In view of this impending disaster Jeremiah urges the people to gird on sackcloth as a sign of extreme distress. They should mourn and howl as in lamentation over the dead. The destruction of the land is inevitable because the fierce anger of the Lord has not turned away from Judah (v. 8) as the people naively believed (2:35). In that day of disaster the heart of the king and his princes shall perish. The heart in the Old Testament 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. The spiritual leaders who had so confidently been predicting that God could not and would not destroy Jerusalem will be utterly dumbfounded at the extent of the calamity (v. 9).

In verse 10 Jeremiah reacts to the vivid description of the future judgment which he has just faithfully related to the people. Shocking as it may seem, Jeremiah accuses God of deceiving or beguiling the nation, promising them peace while the sword of divine retribution was about to reach to the very soul or life of the nation. This is not the only passage where Jeremiah charges God with deceit (cf. 20:7). 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 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 (6:14; 14:13; 23:17). 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 is told that they are prophesying lies in the name of God.

2. *The second figure: the tempest* (4:11-13)

TRANSLATION

(11) In that time it shall be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A wind scorching hot of the bare heights in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow, not to cleanse; (12) a wind too strong for these things shall come for Me; now also I will speak judgments against them. (13) Behold, like clouds he comes up and like a whirlwind are his chariots. His horses are more swift than eagles. Woe to us! for we are devastated.

COMMENTS

When the judgment falls upon Judah people will use the figure of a blasting wind to describe what has befallen the land. The foe sweeping down upon Jerusalem will not be like the gentle wind which separates the grain

from the chaff but will be like the fierce sirocco which blasts in annually from the Arabian desert (v. 11). 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. God had spoken in times past through His prophets. Now God will speak to His people in the only language which they will understand, the language of judgment and punishment (v. 12). The hosts of God's warriors will come up like the clouds (Ezekiel 38:16) which accompany a violent whirlwind (Isaiah 5:28; 66:15). The horses of the enemy are more swift than eagles (Habakkuk 1:8; Deuteronomy 28:49). As the inhabitants of Judah see that vast horde descending upon them the wail of lamentation shall be taken up in the land (v. 13).

3. *The third figure: the keepers* (4:14-18)

TRANSLATION

(14) Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you might be saved. How long will you harbor in your midst wicked thoughts? (15) For hark! A messenger from Dan, one who announces bad tidings from the hills of Ephraim! (16) Report it to the nations: Behold! Publish concerning Jerusalem, Watchers are coming from a distant land and they shall give forth their voice against the cities of Judah. (17) Like watchmen of a field are they against her round about for she has rebelled against Me (oracle of the LORD). (18) Your way and your deeds have done these things to you; this is your evil. Surely it is bitter! Surely it has touched your very heart.

The third figure opens with an appeal to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse themselves from evil in order that they might be saved. Amid the crashing threats of divine judgment it is easy to overlook these quiet and sincere appeals. 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" (v. 11). Repentance is so urgent for Jeremiah can see in prophetic vision the rapid advance of the enemy. He dramatically depicts a messenger arriving from Dan, the northern border of Palestine. Almost as quickly as the first messenger reaches Jerusalem a second runner from the hills of Ephraim ten miles from Jerusalem arrives with equally bad tidings. The enemy is rapidly advancing toward Jerusalem (v. 15). Even the neighboring nations are called upon to take heed to what is taking place at Jerusalem for the divine visitation there has universal significance. Watchers, i.e., the besieging army, station themselves around the cities of Judah. They lift up their voices against the besieged cities in ridicule, in taunts and demands for total surrender (v. 16). The enemy erects pavilions, booths and tents about the besieged city like unto those erected by those who guard a field (cf. Isaiah 1:8). The enemy watches the city lest any within make good their escape. All this has come upon Judah because she has rebelled against the Lord (v. 17). The sin of Judah is bitter indeed. It has reached to the very heart of the nation dealing a death blow to her (v. 18).

B. Description of Coming Judgment 4:19-31

In the last half of chapter four Jeremiah describes the coming judgment. He emphasizes that this judgment

will be (1) terrifying (vv. 19-22); (2) devastating (vv. 23-26); and (3) inevitable (vv. 27-31).

1. *Terrifying judgment* (4:19-22)

TRANSLATION

(19) O my bowels, my bowels! I writhe! O walls of my heart! My heart roars within me! I cannot remain silent! for the sound of the trumpet you have heard, O my soul, the battle cry! (20) Destruction upon destruction is called for; the whole land is spoiled; suddenly they have spoiled my tents, in a moment my curtains. (21) How long shall I see a standard, hear the noise of a trumpet? (22) For My people are foolish, they know not Me; they are stupid sons! they are senseless ones. They are wise to do evil but they do not know how to do good.

COMMENTS

Let no one think that Jeremiah enjoyed preaching his message of judgment. He was no sadist who took delight in the suffering of others. As he contemplates the imminent destruction of his people he is emotionally shaken. His heart pounds; his bowels, considered by the ancients to be the seat of emotion, are in agony. He cannot remain silent. He must give vent to his intense feelings (v. 19). When he hears the war trumpet, the battle cry and sees in his mind's eye wave after wave of destruction sweeping across his land he is completely overwhelmed. Suddenly, in a moment it seems, the land and all its "tents" and "curtains" fall into the hands of the enemy (v. 20). Of course the people of Judah had long since given up the tents and curtains of their nomadic age for more permanent dwellings. Here Jeremiah is using

tents and curtains as a metaphor for the habitations of the citizens of Jerusalem.¹

In verse 21 the agony of the prophet reaches a climax as he cries out, "How long shall I see a standard, hear the noise of a trumpet?" The prophet seems to be rebelling against the visions of divine judgment which he has so frequently seen. The trumpet and standard here may be those of the enemy who attack Jerusalem or those of the Judeans who are defending their capital. Jeremiah seems to have hoped for some breakthrough in divine revelation, some note of hope. Yet all he has received thus far in his ministry are revelations of death and destruction. He asks the question, "How long?" He really means "Why?" God answers that question in verse 23 by giving a three-fold justification for the impending destruction of the nation. (1) The Judeans are foolish and no longer truly know God in their hearts. (2) When it comes to spiritual things, God's people are stupid and senseless sons. (3) These people are brilliant in planning further evil but do 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 verse 22 is that these revelations will continue so long as the people continue to be foolish and disobedient.

2. *Devastating judgment* (4:23-26)

TRANSLATION

(23) I looked at the land, and behold, it was waste and void; and unto the heavens, but there was no light. (24) I looked at the mountains, and behold, they were shaking; and all the hills shook themselves.

1. Jeremiah 30:18; II Samuel 20:1; I Kings 8:66; 12:16; Psalms 132:3.

(25) I looked, and behold, there was no man and all the birds of the heaven had fled. (26) I looked, and behold, Carmel was a wilderness and all his cities were pulled down because of the presence of the LORD and His fierce anger.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah regains his composure after the emotional outburst of verses 19-21. God's explanation of the forthcoming destruction in verse 22 seems to have satisfied the reluctant preacher. He takes up anew the description of the divine judgment by picturing the desolate condition of Judah during the years of the exile. Four times in verses 23-26 he declares that he "saw" what he describes to his hearers. What he saw was not a pretty picture. He saw "waste and void." The same two words are used in combination in the second verse of Genesis to describe the state of primeval matter before the spirit of God molded it into order and form. He sees darkness prevailing over the land as the heavens refuse to give forth light (v. 23). The mountains and hills, despite their massive weight, are "shaking" (lit., to be light or move lightly), swaying, tossing and heaving (v. 24). Not a man could he see! Not even a bird remained in the land (v. 25). When birds flee a land the desolation is complete. Carmel, the "fruitful field," had become a wilderness. All the cities of the land are in ruins. All had been laid waste and destroyed by the wrath of the God of judgment.

3. *Inevitable judgment* (4:27-31)

TRANSLATION

(27) For thus says the LORD: All the land shall become a desolation; but I will not make a full end of

it. (28) On account of this the land shall mourn, the heavens above shall be dark because I have spoken, I have purposed it and I have not repented nor turned back from it. (29) From the noise of the horsemen and bowmen all the city flees. They go into the thickets and go up into the rocks. Every city is forsaken and there is not a man dwelling in them. (30) And you who are about to be spoiled, what are you doing that you clothe yourself with scarlet, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with eye shadow. In vain you primp! Your lovers despise you, they seek your life. (31) For a sound as a woman in labor I have heard, anguish as one who brings forth her first-born, the sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, spreading forth her hands. Woe is me now for my soul faints before the murderers.

COMMENTS

However severe the punishment of Judah may be God "will not make a full end of it" (v. 27). A remnant will escape and become the seed for a holier nation.¹ Without such a conviction the work of the prophet would be meaningless. Yet God has proposed and decreed the destruction of the nation as a political entity. For this reason both earth and heaven are pictured as entering into mourning (v. 28). The figure of the earth mourning may mean that the soil will not produce its fruit. The lamentation on the part of nature is justified. Screaming, galloping horsemen and expert bowmen will sweep down upon "the city." The inhabitants of the city will flee for safety to the thickets and rocks, the limestone caverns which abound in Palestine. Every city is forsaken, deathly silent (v. 29).

1. See Amos 9:8; Isaiah 4:2; 6:13; 10:20; 11:11; Hosea 6:1, 2.

In view of the impending national disaster Jeremiah cannot comprehend the nonchalance of his countrymen. Like the wrinkled old Jezebel who painted her face in a desperate attempt to allure and seduce her antagonist Jehu (II Kings 9:30), Judah is using every device to gain the favor of the powers of the world. Judah puts on scarlet robes and beautiful ornaments of gold. She applies cosmetics to her eyelids in order to make her eyes seem larger. But all of this primping is in vain. Judah's political lovers actually despise her and are seeking to destroy her (v. 30). 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. Three times in verse 30 Jeremiah emphasizes Judah's efforts to please her political friends; three times he records the futility of her efforts. Too late the silly maiden will realize the folly of her ways. The dying daughter of Zion will experience agony akin to that experienced by a woman giving birth to her first child. She gasps for breath and spreads forth her hands in desperate appeal, crying out in anguish, "Woe is me!" At last she realizes that her lovers (*hoge bim*) are really her murderers (*bore gim*).

C. Causes of Coming Judgment 5:1-31

In chapter five Jeremiah discusses the various reasons why God must judge His people. The nation has been guilty of at least six terrible sins: (1) moral corruption (vv. 1-6); (2) sexual impurity (vv. 7-9); (3) treacherous unbelief (vv. 10-18); (4) religious apostasy (vv. 19-24); (5) social injustice (vv. 25-29); and (6) international deception (vv. 30, 31).

1. *Moral corruption* (5:1-6)

TRANSLATION

(1) Roam through the streets of Jerusalem, look and find out for yourself! Seek in her broad places if you can find a man or if there is one who does justly, seeking truth, that I may forgive her. (2) And though they swear, As the LORD lives, surely they swear falsely. (3) O LORD are not Your eyes on truth? You have smitten them but they felt no pain; You consumed them, they have refused to accept instruction. They have made their faces harder than a rock. They refuse to repent. (4) And as for me, I said, Surely these are poor! They are foolish for they do not know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God. (5) I will go up unto the great ones and speak to them for they know the way of the LORD, the judgment of their God. But they altogether have broken the yoke, they have burst the straps. (6) Therefore a lion from the forest shall smite them, a wolf from the desert shall plunder them, a leopard watches over their cities. Anyone who goes out from thence shall be torn because their transgressions are many, their backslidings are without number.

COMMENTS

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 and make a personal observation of the moral condition of the city. Specifically he is to search in the broad places or marketplaces for a man, i.e., someone who was worthy to be called a man. Jeremiah was to search for a man who does what is just and right and who seeks truth

or faithfulness. The Hebrew word translated "truth" often times refers to the faithfulness of a man in performing his duties to God and his fellowmen.¹ The prophet is looking for a man who was true to God, true to man and true to himself. But sometimes in the Old Testament this Hebrew word has a more specialized meaning. It refers to faith in the promise of God to bring a Redeemer into the world.² Faith in the Gospel promise sustained the Old Testament heroes.³ It may well be that Jeremiah here is to search for a man who possessed Messianic faith.⁴ Abraham prayed that Sodom be spared if there were ten righteous men. But God here goes even further. If Jeremiah can find one just man in the city who seeks truth or faith He will forgive Jerusalem and withhold the execution of His wrath.

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 that which was untrue (v. 2). To use God's name in a solemn oath and then lie was tantamount to blasphemy against the holy name. God was looking for truth or faithfulness or faith in the hearts of men. Not finding it 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 almost completely destroyed them but they refused to accept the correction. With stoic determination they endured the discipline of God hardening their faces and refusing to repent (v. 3).

Jeremiah could not believe what he saw among the common people on the streets of Jerusalem and so he began to make excuses for them. These people are poor;

1. I Chronicles 9:22, 26, 31; II Chronicles 31:15, 18, etc.

2. Habakkuk 2:4. Cf. Romans 1:17.

3. Genesis 4:1; 5:29; 49:18; II Samuel 7:18-29; Hebrews 11.

4. Laetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

they are uneducated in the way of the Lord; they know nothing of the judgment, i.e., religious law of their God. It is their lack of education which causes them to foolishly sin, and the hardship of their poverty has caused them to harden their hearts in unbelief (v. 4). 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. They had all the advantages of education and instruction in the way of the Lord. They were literate and could read the law of God for themselves. But Jeremiah found that the up and out were worse than the down and out. Among the elite he found nothing but lawlessness and license. They had altogether broken the yoke of divine restraint (v. 5). The straps which they burst were the thongs by which the yoke was secured to the neck (cf. Isaiah 58:6). These men wanted to be free from the law of God and from any divine control. They wanted to do their own thing. Thus, in the entire nation Jeremiah could not find one man who by God's standards was a real man.

Because of the all-pervasive apostasy, God will bring judgment upon Judah: a lion from the forest, a wolf from the desert¹; and a leopard or panther watching over their cities (v. 6). Lions were common in the hills and valleys of Palestine. A few leopards are still to be found in the hills of Galilee. The singular words: lion, wolf, leopard, are probably to be regarded as collective singulars. These animals may be symbols of the calamity which would befall Judah. On the other hand, numerous prophecies make it clear that the land would be overrun by wild creatures after the Jews had been deported.²

1. Following the marginal reading in the American Standard Version.

2. Ezekiel 14:15, 21; Leviticus 26:22; Deuteronomy 32:24; II Kings 17:25ff.

2. *Sexual impurity* (5:7-9)

TRANSLATION

(7) Wherefore should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken Me and have sworn by no-gods; and when I fed them, then they committed adultery and they flocked to the house of a harlot. (8) They have become well-fed stallions roaming about; each man neighs unto the wife of his neighbor. (9) On account of these things shall I not punish (oracle of the LORD)? Shall not My soul take vengeance on a nation which is like this?

COMMENTS

Persistent unbelief makes divine forgiveness of Judah impossible. The children of Judah have forsaken God and have indicated their allegiance to idols by swearing in the name of these non-entities. God had fed them, granted to them prosperity. But instead of gratitude, here is depravity. They had committed the sin of adultery. The prophet may be referring to literal adultery here or he may be using adultery as a metaphor for apostasy. The men of Judah flocked (lit., assembled in troops) to the house of the harlot (v. 7). They were utterly unashamed of their actions and made no attempt to hide their immoral acts. The reference here might be to the obscene orgies which characterized certain of the Canaanite cults. In any case, the immoral acts of the Baal cult could not be confined to "religious" exercises. The men of Judah roam about like well-fed¹ stallions, each one neighing to the wife of his neighbor (v. 8). The morals of a nation have sunk to rock bottom when sexual desire becomes merely an animal appetite to be satisfied in any manner

1. The meaning of the Hebrew word is obscure. The best Hebrew authorities suggest that the word means "weighted or furnished with weights."

and with anyone. Can God do anything other than bring punishment and divine vengeance upon such a nation? (v. 9). Divine vengeance in Scripture is just retribution for sins which are an affront to God.

3. *Treacherous unbelief* (5:10-18)

TRANSLATION

(10) Go up against her rows and destroy, but do not make a full end; Remove her shoots for they do not belong to the LORD. (11) For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been thoroughly treacherous with me (oracle of the LORD). (12) They have lied against the LORD and have said, He is not and the calamity shall not come against us. We shall not see sword and famine. (13) And the prophets are windbags and the word is not in them. Thus let it be done to them. (14) Therefore thus says the LORD God of Hosts: because you have said this thing, behold, I am about to place My words in your mouth as fire and this people as wood and it shall consume them. (15) Behold, I am about to bring against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel (oracle of the LORD), a powerful nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose tongue you do not know nor can you understand what they say. (16) Their quiver is like a open grave; all of them are mighty men. (17) They shall eat your harvest and your bread, they shall eat up your sheep and your cattle, they shall eat your vines and your fig trees, they shall batter with the sword your fortified cities in which you are trusting. (18) But even in those days (oracle of the LORD) I will not make a full end of you.

COMMENTS

Frequently in prophetic literature the Lord through his prophet will exhort the enemy to get busy with the work of judgment against Israel. In verse ten Judah is compared to a vineyard or perhaps an olive orchard. The enemy is instructed to go up against the rows¹ of vines and begin a ruthless pruning operation. The degenerate and dead shoots,² the apostate people who no longer render allegiance to the Lord, are to be removed. But the enemy is not to completely destroy the vine. Through the process of their pruning the degenerate members of the nation will be removed and the believing kernel of the nation will be left (v. 10). Here again is the idea of the remnant which plays such an important role in the Old Testament (cf. 4:27).

But why must any judgment against Judah take place? The house of Israel and the house of Judah, both kingdoms, have been "treacherous" with the Lord (v. 11). The word "treacherous" in the Old Testament carries the idea of violating the most sacred relationships as, for example, marriage vows (Malachi 2:11). Furthermore, the people of Judah have lied against the Lord (v. 12). 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. In the view of the present writer the people were saying,

1. The American Standard and King James versions 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.

2. The rendering of the American Standard, "branches," is much to be preferred over the King James "battlements."

"God will not turn against us, He will not bring calamity upon us." The notion that God could not destroy Judah because of the covenant with them was deeply rooted in the popular theology of that time. Whatever it was that they were saying God regarded it as a lie concerning Himself.

Not only were the people lying against God, they were ridiculing the prophets of God. They regarded the prophets who claimed to be men of the Spirit as nothing but windbags.¹ 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 (v. 13). But God will not let the slanderous words of the people go unchallenged. He acknowledges Jeremiah as His spokesman and affirms that He, the Almighty, has placed those words upon the lips of the prophet. The judgment words spoken by Jeremiah will eventually consume the people as fire consumes dead timber (v. 14). The title "Lord God of Hosts" appears in verse 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.

The threat of divine judgment so repugnant to the people of Judah is repeated in verses 15-18. God is about to bring a powerful and ancient nation against the house of Israel. The "house of Israel" is here the kingdom of Judah, for after the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C. Judah became the sole representative of the people of Israel. The attacking nation is "powerful." The word used here is one used primarily of rivers which flow the year around. The enemies have inexhaustible resources and

1. The same Hebrew word can be rendered "spirit" or "wind."

therefore do not fail in the purpose which they undertake. The nation is ancient, dating back to the very dawn of history. They speak a language which the men of Judah cannot comprehend (v. 15). Here Jeremiah seems to borrow the terminology used earlier by Isaiah to describe the Assyrians (Isaiah 28:11; 33:19). Every man in the enemy army is a mighty of valor. The arrows of their archers are deadly (v. 16). The armies of the enemy sweep over the land and 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 which the children would normally eat. This would mean, of course, that the children would then die of starvation. 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 (v. 17). Yet as terrible as this judgment is, the nation will not be utterly destroyed. A remnant will survive (cf. 4:27; 5:10).

4. *Religious apostasy* (5:19-24)

TRANSLATION

(19) And it shall come to pass when you shall say, For what reason did the LORD our God do all these things to us? Then you shall say unto them, Just as you have forsaken Me and served strange gods in your land, thus you shall serve strangers in a land not your own. (20) Declare this in the house of Jacob and make it known in Judah, saying, (21) Hear now this: O foolish people who are without understanding, who have eyes and see not, who have ears and do not hear. (22) Do you not fear Me (oracle of the LORD)? Do you not tremble from before My face who placed the sand as a border to the sea, an eternal statute and it shall not cross over

it. (23) But this people has a revolting and rebellious heart; they have revolted and gone. (24) They did not say in their heart, Let us fear now the LORD our God who gives us the rain in season, even showers of autumn and spring, who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

COMMENTS

Once the divine calamity begins to fall upon Judah men will inquire of the prophet as to why their nation is suffering so. His answer is to be honest and uncompromising: "You willingly forsook God and served strange gods in your own land. As your punishment you must serve strange people in a foreign land" (v. 19). The divine punishment corresponds to the crime which the people have committed against God. On at least four occasions, possibly more, Nebuchadnezzar led away captives from Jerusalem, in 605, 597, 587 and 582 B.C.

In order to impress once again the seriousness of the national apostasy upon the people Jeremiah is commissioned to deliver another oracle to "the house of Jacob," i.e., Judah (v. 20). The people of Judah are foolish, without understanding. They have eyes and ears but they do not see and hear (v. 21). This same terminology is used in Psalms 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. Ezekiel 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. As but one example of His handiwork Jeremiah mentions how the Creator has placed the sand as an impassable barrier to the sea. This is an eternal statute or

perpetual decree, a law of nature (v. 22). But while inanimate nature is submissive to the divine will, Israel has a rebellious heart or will. They have actually defied and opposed their God and gone away from His will (v. 23). They were utterly blind to their dependence upon God for their sustenance. God had faithfully given to His people the autumn and spring rains upon which the agricultural prosperity of Palestine depends. Year in and year out God kept the weeks of the harvest for the benefit of His people. 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 restrained the rain when it would have been harmful to them. Yet in blind ingratitude they never thought of rendering to God the fear and reverence due to Him (v. 24).

5. *Social injustice* (5:25-29)

TRANSLATION

(25) Your iniquities have turned away these things and your sins have withheld good from you. (26) For wicked men are found among My people. They watch, with the crouching of fowlers; they set the traps; they catch men. (27) As a cage full of birds so their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they become great and they become rich. (28) They have become fat, they are sleek, they have surpassed the deeds of the wicked. 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. (29) On account of these things shall I not punish (oracle of the LORD)? Shall not My soul take vengeance on a nation which is like this?

JEREMIAH
COMMENTS

The iniquities of the people of Judah have deprived them of continued divine blessing (v. 25). 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). These judgments are necessary because there are wicked men among the people of God, men who will stop at nothing to enrich themselves. Like the fowler (cf. Micah 7:2) they crouch and wait until an innocent and helpless victim is ensnared in their trap. By wicked and diabolical schemes they are attempting to catch men (v. 26). As the home of the successful fowler is full of caged birds, so the homes of these wicked schemers give evidence of their prowess. Their homes are full of deceit, i.e., objects obtained through deceit, ill-gotten gain (v. 27). These wicked men grow fat and sleek as their riches increase. Their wickedness grows ever more bold and reprehensible. They exceed or go beyond the deeds of the most wicked men. No crime is out of the question if it serves to enhance their wealth and power. They were totally inconsiderate of the rights of helpless minorities, the poor and the fatherless. Never would one of these powerful men intervene to help the less fortunate get justice in the courts (v. 28). Repeating the rhetorical question of verse 9 the Lord asks, "Shall I not take vengeance on such a nation as this?" Acts of injustice are offences against God and He must avenge them. The intervention of God on behalf of the helpless and in judgment upon those who oppress them is one of the major themes of prophetic literature.

6. *Intentional deception* (5:30, 31)

TRANSLATION

(30) An astonishing and horrible thing has come to pass in the land. (31) The prophets have prophesied falsehoods and the priests rule at their side and My people love it so! And what shall you do at its end?

COMMENTS

That which 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 and horrible (v. 30). Not only the political rulers (v. 28) but the spiritual rulers as well were utterly corrupt. Jeremiah was both prophet and priest and he criticized those who held both offices. The prophets were prophesying falsehoods, promising the people that God was on their side and no ill would befall their nation. They peddled a false security based on empty forms and rituals. It was a superficial religion, a religion which did not get in the way of one's everyday life. The priests "rule at their side," i.e., at the beck and call of the prophets. But the people were as guilty as their religious leaders for they encouraged and supported them. Falsehood is generally far more pleasant to the ear than truth and the men of Judah were quite anxious to hear the assurances of peace and prosperity. But 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 as a nation stand face to face with God.

D. Approach of Judgment 6:1-30

Chapter 6 contains a dramatic description of the advance of the foe against Jerusalem (vv. 1-5) and the

subsequent siege of that city (vv. 6-8). The enemy will be completely successful in destroying the city (vv. 9-15). At this point in the chapter Jeremiah offers to the people a prescription of deliverance from impending judgment (vv. 16-21). Then he reverts to a description of the coming conqueror (vv. 22-26). The chapter concludes with an indication of the hopeless task of the prophet of God (vv. 27-30).

1. *The advance of the foe* (6:1-5)

TRANSLATION

(1) Seek refuge, O children of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem and in Tekoa blow a trumpet! At Beth-Hakkerem rise up a signpost! for calamity peers down from the north, great destruction. (2) The beautiful and dainty one, the daughter of Zion, I will cut off. (3) Unto her shall come shepherds with their flocks; they shall pitch against her tents round about; they shall graze each man what is at his hand. (4) Sanctify against her war. Rise up! Let us go up at noontime. Woe to us when the day turns for the shadows of evening are stretching out. (5) Rise up that we may go up by night, that we may destroy her palaces.

COMMENTS

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 appears to be safe and the prophet can see refugees streaming southward from her gates. Being himself a Benjaminite, Jeremiah calls for his fellow tribesmen to get out of the midst of Jerusalem. The city of Jeru-

salem was actually located on the border between Judah and Benjamin and hence many Benjaminites made that city their home. In Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, a trumpet is sounded to assemble the people in their flight to the wilderness of southwestern Judah. At Beth-Hakkerem, thought to be a hill east of Bethlehem, a sign post or fiery beacon is set up to give further guidance to fugitives. This flight is wise and necessary because the ugly monster of calamity is peering down (lit., bending forward) from the north (v. 1). By means of the ruthless armies of Nebuchadnezzar God will cut off or destroy the beautiful and dainty daughter of Zion, i.e., the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 2). Zion was the hill chosen by the Lord as His earthly abode and was part of the city of Jerusalem. No longer will the delicate lady, the bride of God and daughter of Jerusalem, receive the loving and tender treatment of the past. Instead, foreign commanders with their armies will come up against Jerusalem like shepherds with their flocks. Each "shepherd" will allow his flock to graze that part of Judah which is "at his hand" i.e., which has been assigned to his jurisdiction. As sheep graze a pasture land until nothing but bare soil remains so will these "shepherds" and their "flocks" utterly depasture and devastate the land of Judah (v. 3).

Verse 4 opens with an exhortation addressed to the invading force. "Sanctify against her war!" War in antiquity was a sacred undertaking. Sacrifices were frequently offered before battle (e.g., I Samuel 7:9; 13:9) and inspirational addresses were given (e.g., Judges 7:18). Following the exhortation which he addresses to the enemy, Jeremiah takes his audience into the very camp of the enemy. The enemy is planning a surprise attack at noon-time, a time when usually both sides in a conflict rested. As the shadows of evening lengthen the enemy forces lament the fact that they have not been able to complete their work of destruction (v. 4). Rather than retire to

the camp for rest and refreshment the enemy commanders urge their men forward in a daring and decisive night attack designed to bring them within the walls of Jerusalem. They will not wait till morning for the final assault (v. 5).

2. *The siege of Jerusalem* (6:6-8)

TRANSLATION

(6) For thus says the LORD of hosts: Cut her trees and pour out against Jerusalem a mound! This is the city to be punished; everywhere there is oppression in her midst. (7) As the well causes its water to bubble forth so she bubbles forth her wickedness; violence and oppression are heard in her; before Me continually are sickness and wounds. (8) Be corrected, O Jerusalem, lest My soul be removed from you; lest I make you an astonishment, a land not inhabited.

COMMENTS

The God of Israel is the Lord of the enemy hosts. He issues the commands; they are merely instruments in His hands. "Cut her trees! Pour out against Jerusalem a mound!" The 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. Baskets of earth were poured out to form high mounds from which missiles could the more easily be hurled against the walls or into the besieged city. Jerusalem is to be punished by God because oppression exists throughout that city (v. 6). Just as a well always yields a supply of cool, fresh water so Jerusalem seems to constantly cause her wickedness to bubble forth. Deeds of violence and oppression

against the less fortunate are commonplace. As a result of this mistreatment people suffer physical agony. Diseases produced by deprivation, want and wounds resulting from violent deeds cause the people to cry out to God about their plight (v. 7). Jeremiah earnestly appeals to Jerusalem to accept divine chastisement, to amend her ways, to repent. If they fail to heed this appeal God will 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 (v. 8).

3. *The success of the foe* (6:9-15)

TRANSLATION

(9) Thus says the LORD of hosts: They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel; turn again your hand like a grape gatherer over the basket. (10) To whom may I speak and give warning that they may hear. Behold, their ear is uncircumcised; they are not able to pay attention. Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them, they do not delight in it. (11) Therefore with the wrath of the LORD am I filled; I weary myself containing it! Pour it out upon the child in the street and upon the gathering of young men. For a husband along with his wife shall be taken captive, the old man with the one full of days. (12) And their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and their wives together. For I shall stretch out My hand over the inhabitants of the land (oracle of the LORD). (13) For from their least to their greatest everyone is greedy for gain, from the prophet even unto the priest everyone practices deception. (14) They have healed the wound of My people with

platitudes, saying, Peace! peace! when there is no peace. (15) They shall be put to shame because they have committed abomination; they neither are ashamed nor do they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who are falling. At the time that I punish them they shall be thrown to the ground said the LORD.

COMMENTS

Once again comparing Israel to a vineyard Jeremiah paints the picture of 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, is to undergo a severe sifting process. The enemy will 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 (v. 9). Here is a picture of the repeated calamities, deportations, and attacks which Judah experienced in the twenty years following the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. So was the remnant of Israel, Judah, itself made a remnant.

Jeremiah's prophetic discouragement comes out in verse 10. No one will listen to him as he sounds the warning of impending judgment. The word of the Lord is treated with derision. The ear of the people seems to be uncircumcised, covered as it were with a foreskin which prevents the prophetic word from penetrating their mind (cf. Acts 7:51). Discouraged though he is, Jeremiah cannot refrain from preaching the word of judgment. He is filled with the message of divine wrath; it burns within him. He tries very hard to hold it back but only succeeds in making himself weary. In the last part of verse 11 the problem arises as to who is speaking

and to whom. 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. Whether or not the people listen he 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 (v. 11). Their houses, and fields, and wives will be turned over to the invading soldiers; for the hand of the Lord, once stretched out against the enemies of Israel (Exodus 3:20; Deuteronomy 7:19) is now stretched out against them (v. 12).

The judgment described in verse 12 is appropriate to the root sin of the men of Judah, covetousness. Everyone in the nation, from the least to the greatest, was greedy for illicit gain. Even the prophets and priests practice deception and fraud to curry favor with the populace and thereby secure their good will and their gifts (v. 13). For the love of filthy lucre they would offer flattering pictures of the future prospects of the nation (cf. Micah 3:5). "All is well," they would say. "Peace! Peace!" 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. These leaders feel no shame at present, they have no conscience, they do not know how to blush. But the leaders will eventually share the fate of those they had misguided. They shall fall among those who are slain in battle; they shall disrespectfully be thrown to the ground by the ruthless conqueror (v. 15).

4. *Prescription for deliverance* (6:16-21)

TRANSLATION

(16) Thus said the LORD: Stand along side the ways and observe. Ask for the old ways where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your soul. But they said, We will not walk in it! (17) I have set over you watchmen. Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they have said, We will not hearken! (18) Therefore hear, O nations! Know, O congregation, what is in them. (19) Hear, O earth. Behold, I am about to bring calamity unto this people, the fruit of their thoughts; for they have not paid attention to My words and as for My law, they have rejected it. (20) Why should you bring incense from Sheba, and sweet cain from a distant land. Your burnt offerings are not pleasing and your sacrifices do not satisfy Me. (21) Therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to give unto this people stumbling and they shall stumble over them, fathers and sons together. The neighbor and his friend shall perish.

COMMENTS

In the view of Jeremiah the nation was at a cross-roads. He calls upon the people to stand, i.e., halt their headlong rush to destruction. Jeremiah urges them to select the old path of fidelity to God and adherence to His holy law and then to walk in that path. The old paths are those which previous generations have trodden to find salvation and divine blessing. There is but one way which has the blessing of the Lord and that is the way of obedient faith. True reformers are not those who are advocating new things but those who give due weight to old truths. 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. 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. Their defiant response to the appeal is, "We will not walk in it!" (v. 16). Again God appeals to them to hearken to the alarm sounded by the prophetic watchmen whom He has placed over the nation (cf. Ezekiel 3:17; 33:1). Like watchmen of a city who stood on a high tower scanning the horizon for the first appearance of danger, so God's watchmen would constantly be on the lookout for any danger to the continued existence of the nation of Judah. 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. God's second appeal is also rejected. The hardened people declare that they will not hearken to the alarm of the watchmen (v. 17).

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. Micah 1:2; Isaiah 18:3). The congregation of nations should note the sin and ingratitude which dwells in the heart of God's chosen people. 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 will be able to apply the lesson to themselves (v. 18). The whole earth hears the horrible sentence of judgment: "I am about to bring calamity unto this people." This punishment is the ripe fruit, the direct result, of their wicked and rebellious thoughts. They have not paid any attention to the word of God spoken through the prophets and furthermore they had rejected his written law (v. 19). Everywhere the Jews were scattered among the

nations they became witnesses to their own guilt and the righteousness of the divine retribution against them.

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 1500 miles south of Jerusalem in southwestern Arabia. This may well have been the nearest location from which the proper ingredients specified in the law (Exodus 30:34) could be obtained. Sweet cain or calamus (Exodus 30:23), an ingredient of the holy anointing oil, was imported from a "distant land," perhaps India. There was nothing wrong, of course, with the zeal of these people in obtaining these rare materials. 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 (17:26; 27:21, 22; 33:10, 11, 18). But Jeremiah, like all the prophets before him, regarded sacrifices without obedience as worthless.¹ 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. The men of Judah thought they were keeping God happy and on their side by going through the outward motions of worship. It was a tragic theological miscalculation, one which ultimately resulted in the destruction and ruin of the nation. They might be able to sidestep or rationalize the various disciplinary disasters which God had brought upon them. But in a very short

1. I Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11; Amos 5:21-24; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8.

period of time God would place before them a stumbling-block, Nebuchadnezzar, which they would not be able to sidestep. The whole nation would stumble over that obstacle and fall to their ruin (v. 21).

5. Description of the foe (6:22-26)

TRANSLATION

(22) Thus said the LORD: Behold, a people is about to come from a north land, a great nation shall be aroused from the uttermost parts of the earth. (23) Bow and spear they bear. They are ruthless and have no compassion. Their voices roar like the sea. Upon horses they ride equipped as men for war against you, O daughter of Zion. (24) We have heard the report of them. Our hands are feeble. Anguish has taken hold of us, pain as a woman in childbirth. (25) Do not go out into the field nor walk in the way for the enemy has a sword, terror round about. (26) O daughter of My people, Gird on sackcloth and wallow in the dust; make for yourselves the mourning of an only son, most bitter lamentation for suddenly the spoiler shall come upon us.

COMMENTS

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. In contrast to tiny Judah the northern foe is a great nation. They come "from the uttermost part of the earth" (v. 22). In 31:8 this phrase is used of Babylon (cf. 25:32; Isaiah 14:13). The enemy soldiers carry both bow and spear. They are ruthless and have compassion on no one. The cruelty of the Mesopotamian armies in

antiquity is well documented in the monuments. They were feared throughout the ancient Near East (cf. Nahum 3:1; Habakkuk 1:6, 7). The noise of their countless horsemen and chariotry resembled the roar of the sea. This vast and invincible army will shortly come to make war against the daughter of Zion, the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 23).

In verse 24 the prophet again projects himself into the future to describe the reaction of the populace of Jerusalem as this vast host approaches. He identifies himself with his people and expresses the general feeling of anxiety and pain which will prevail in the city at that time. The Jewish soldiers lose their courage; they are too scared to resist. Throughout Jerusalem there is panic and pain which can only be compared to that which a woman experiences in childbirth (v. 24). No one is safe; the enemy is everywhere. No one should venture outside the walls of Jerusalem. Terror surrounds the city (v. 25). In view of the spoiler's rapid descent on Jerusalem, Jeremiah calls his countrymen to bitter lamentation. The bereavement for the loss of an only son was the most severe a Hebrew could suffer (cf. Amos 8:10; Zechariah 12:10). Jeremiah loves his nation as a father loves his daughter and thus he addresses Judah as "the daughter of my people." They refused to shed the tears of repentance; they will now be forced to shed the tears of lamentation (v. 26).

6. *The hopeless task of the prophet* (6:27-30)

TRANSLATION

(27) A tower have I made you among My people, a fortified city that you may know, then test their way. (28) They are all rebellious revolvers, those who go after slander, brass and iron all of them, corrupters are they. (29) The bellows are scorched!

The lead is consumed by fire. In vain he continues to smelt but the wicked are not removed. (30) Refuse silver they shall call them, for the LORD has rejected them.

COMMENTS

In verse 27 God addresses Jeremiah. God has made His prophet as strong as a tower¹ a fortified city; the people will not be successful in attacking him. Jeremiah can then fearlessly test and try the way of the people by his preaching² (v. 27). In this and the following verses 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 corruption; all of them are rotten to the core (v. 28). Try as he may the assayer is not able to extract any precious metal from the worthless ore of the nation Judah. The fire is so hot that the bellows are scorched. The lead which served as a flux to carry away the impurities melts. But no silver remains. There were no righteous ones from whom the wicked could be separated (v. 29). Once Israel had been as precious to God as silver (Deuteronomy 5:27-29). Now that silver had become "refuse silver" i.e., worthless silver, good for nothing dross (v. 30).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SIX

I. Facts to Master.

1. The interpretation of "evil from the north" and "destroyer of nations" (4:6, 7).

1. Another possible rendering is "smelter, prover or trier." For lengthy discussion and defense of the translation "tower" see Laetsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

2. Elsewhere in Scripture men are tested in fire or furnace of trials and tribulations in order to refine and purify them from the dross of sin. See Proverbs 17:3; Zechariah 13:9; Jeremiah 6:29; 9:7.

JEREMIAH

2. The charge which Jeremiah makes against God (4:10).
3. That which was essential if Judah was to be saved in the coming invasion (4:14).
4. Jeremiah's personal feelings as he contemplated the impending disaster (4:19-22).
5. That which the nation tried to do to avert disaster (4:30).
6. A favorite comparison of Jeremiah (4:31).
7. The search which Jeremiah is bidden to undertake (5:1).
8. The words they used in taking an oath (5:2).
9. What the people had been saying about their prophets (5:13).
10. The fate of those who had served foreign gods (5:19).
11. The appalling thing which had happened in the land (5:30).
12. The figure with which Jeremiah describes the obstinacy of the people (6:10).
13. That which the false priests and prophets were proclaiming (6:14).
14. That for which the people should ask (6:16).
15. That which was no longer acceptable to God (6:20).
16. Two metaphors used to describe the prophet (6:27 ASV).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. How can the heart of the sinner be compared to fallow ground? How can the preacher of the Gospel precondition the soil of the heart for a favorable reception of the seed of the Word?
4:3
2. Why does Jeremiah call upon these Jews to circumcise themselves?

SERMONS — JOSIAH'S REIGN

3. What literary technique does the prophet employ in 4:5-18 and 6:1-6?
4. What was the prophet's personal reaction to the destruction of his people? 4:19-22.
5. What is meant by the expression "yet I will not make a full end"? 4:27; 5:10, 18.
6. Was the sin of Judah a matter of ignorance? Justify your answer. 5:1-6.
7. What were some of the pagan gods worshiped in Judah in the days of Jeremiah?
8. What was the root cause of the apostasy in Judah? 5:23.
9. What was the attitude of Jeremiah toward social injustice? 5:28. Should church leaders today become involved in social action projects?
10. What does the prophet mean in 6:8 when he urges the people of Jerusalem to "be instructed"?
11. What is the significance of the figure of the grape gatherer in 6:9?
12. Who is speaking in 6:11b? Is this a prayer on the part of the prophet or a command on the part of God?
13. What inadequate remedies for the hurt of God's people are the spiritual leaders of our nation offering? See 6:14.
14. Why do you think 6:16 was such a popular preaching text among the preachers of the Restoration Movement?
15. What kind of "rest" comes to those who walk the old paths? Is it the rest of inactivity? See 6:16. Also Matthew 11:28.
16. Why is ritual without righteousness worthless? Does Jeremiah here completely repudiate the Mosaic sacrificial system? 6:20.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERMONS ON WORSHIP

7:1—8:3

The dating of the materials in this section is a vexing problem. Laetsch assigns this section to the days of king Josiah early in the ministry of Jeremiah. However most commentators, on the basis of what they believe is a parallel passage in chapter 26, assign the section (or at least 7:1-15) to the early days of King Jehoiakim. Though one dare not be dogmatic on this point the present writer feels there is nothing in this material that demands a date later than the reign of king Josiah.

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. After a brief introductory note (vv. 1-2) the prophet speaks of (1) presumptuous worship (7:1-15); (2) pagan worship (7:16-20); (3) priorities in worship (7:21-28); and (4) polluted worship (7:29—8:3).

INTRODUCTION 7:1, 2

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jerusalem from the LORD, saying, (2) Stand in the gate of the house of the LORD and proclaim there this word. Say: Hear the word of the LORD all Judah who are entering these gates to worship the LORD.

COMMENTS

Acting upon the definite instructions from the Lord (v. 1) Jeremiah went to one of the eight gates of the Temple to deliver a blistering sermon on worship. He is to proclaim the word to "all Judah who are entering these

gates to worship the Lord" (v. 2). During the three annual festivals of Israel all the males were obligated to come to the Temple to worship (Leviticus 23:1-44; Deuteronomy 16:1-17).

Later in his ministry Jeremiah preached a sermon similar to the one recorded here in chapter 7. Some commentators have identified this "Temple Sermon" with the sermon preached in chapter 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 this that the sermon of chapter 7 is identical with that of chapter 26 and to therefore assign chapter 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.¹ It would be *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. It is the feeling, then, of the writer that chapter 26 represents a later sermon of Jeremiah preached during the days of Jehoiakim. Chapter 7 represents an earlier sermon from the reign of good king Josiah.

I. PRESUMPTUOUS WORSHIP 7:3-15

The men of Judah, like the majority of all ages, took worship for granted. They were content simply to show

1. Jeremiah 19:14; 35:2, 4; 36:5-10; 28:1, 5.

up at the Temple and participate in the prescribed ritual. They assumed that God was pleased with their conduct. In the opening paragraph of his Temple sermon Jeremiah attacks this presumptuous attitude toward worship by (1) indicating a fundamental requirement of true worship (vv. 3-7,); (2) challenging the fallacious assumption that worship had no bearing on conduct nor *vice versa* (vv. 8-11); and (3) threatening the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the populace (vv. 12-15).

A. A Fundamental Requirement 7:3-7

TRANSLATION

(3) Thus says the LORD of host, God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds that I may cause you to dwell in this place.¹ (4) For your own sake do not trust in the words of the lie: The Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD are these. (5) If you thoroughly amend your ways and your deeds; if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbor; (6) if you do not oppress stranger, orphan and widow; and if you do not shed innocent blood in this place; and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt; (7) then I will cause you to dwell in this place in the land which I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

COMMENTS

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 (v.

1. Another ancient reading is "then I might dwell with you."

3). Jeremiah begs his hearers for their own sake not to give any credence to the superstition that the presence of the Temple of the Lord was a guarantee for the safety of the city. 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 when Jeremiah thrice repeated the phrase for emphasis gesturing as he did so to the courts and building that were part of the Temple complex (v. 4).

Verses 5-7 contain a conditional sentence of which verses 5-6 are the protasis and verse 7 the apodosis. Five conditions for national survival are laid down: (1) Repeating the basic demand of verse 3, they must thoroughly amend their ways and their deeds. (2) They must make sure that justice is executed in the courts (v. 5). (3) They must not oppress the stranger, the orphan and the widow. The Old Testament enjoined Israel to show respect for peoples of other nationalities and races simply because they were fellow human beings. Many Christians have not yet caught up with this passage. There was to be a concern for the weak and for those who had lost their natural protector. No other code of laws from antiquity is marked by such humanity in respect to the unfortunate. (4) Innocent blood must no longer be shed in the land through violence and miscarriage of justice. (5) They must cease to follow after other gods "to their own hurt." Idolatry would lead deeper and deeper into sin and have dire repercussions both on the national and personal level. If they fulfilled these fundamental requirements God would cause them to continue to dwell in the land. God had given that land to their forefather "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 which God specifies here.

B. A Fallacious Assumption 7:8-11

TRANSLATION

(8) Behold, you are trusting in the words of the worthless lie. (9) Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, offer incense to Baal, walk after other gods which you do not know (10) and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My Name and say, We are safe; in order to do all these abominations? (11) Has this house which is called by My Name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen this (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

God cannot continue to allow His people to dwell in the Promised Land so long as they continue to trust in deceitful words (v. 8). In verse 4 the prophet has already given an example of the words of the worthless lie. The fact that the Lord has His Temple in Jerusalem will profit them nothing if they continue to live godless lives. The people were engaging in every conceivable sinful activity: stealing, murder, adultery, false swearing, worship of false gods (v. 9). Yet they would come and stand before God in His house and think that because they had expressed this outward concern for the Lord they were completely safe from all harm. 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! With

amazement the Lord asks, "Has this house which 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 into which they would flee after committing their criminal acts. But God has seen all. He knows their hearts. He is aware of their evil intentions and sinful attitudes. He is not deceived by the outward manifestations of religious zeal.

C. A Forceful Threat 7:12-15

TRANSLATION

(12) For go now to My place which 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. (13) And now because you have done all these things (oracle of the LORD) and I spoke earnestly and persistently unto you but you did not hear; and I called you but you did not respond; (14) therefore I will do to the house which is called by My Name, in which you are trusting, and to the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. (15) And I will cast you forth from My presence as I cast forth all your brethren, all the seed of Ephraim.

COMMENTS

If the people of Judah had been more aware of their history they would have been more correct in their theology. In verse 12 Jeremiah attacks the popular false confidence in the Temple by pointing to another sacred sanctuary which 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 which had been transported through the wilderness wanderings was eventually replaced by or perhaps encased in some type of permanent structure which is called a "house" (Judges 18:31; 19:18) or "temple" (I Samuel 1:9). The historical books of the Old Testament do not specifically mention the destruction of Shiloh. The place was probably captured and destroyed by the Philistines after the battle of Ebenezer (I Samuel 4:1ff.) in the days of the judgeship of Eli. On the basis of their excavations archaeologists have dated the destruction at about 1050 B.C. 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 is under some solemn obligation to preserve Jerusalem.

In spite of the fact that God had earnestly and persistently called the people to repentance, they had not responded to the appeal (v. 13). To emphasize the zeal of the Lord in speaking to His people Jeremiah uses the idiom "rising early and speaking." It is an expression peculiar to Jeremiah and means that the appeals were oft repeated and eager. In view of this rebuff and rejection God will destroy the Temple in Jerusalem just as he destroyed Shiloh (v. 15). 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. In more recent history Jeremiah finds another analogy. Just as God had cast forth into exile the seed of Ephraim, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom,¹ so now He will cast forth the inhabitants of Judah (v. 15). The land of Israel belonged to the Lord (Hosea 9:3; Leviticus 25:23)

1. See Isaiah 7:2; Hosea 4:17; 5:1-9; 12:1.

and here the divine Landlord is issuing an eviction notice to His tenants.

II. PAGAN WORSHIP 7:16-20

The worship in Jerusalem was so corrupt that God instructs Jeremiah to cease interceding for the apostates (v. 16). The depravity of the nation is further described (vv. 17-19) and again the prophet announces that judgment will be poured out on the nation (v. 20).

TRANSLATION

(16) 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 for I will not hear you. (17) Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? (18) The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire and the wives knead dough to make sacrificial cakes to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to provoke Me. (19) Is it Me they are provoking (oracle of the LORD)? Is it not themselves to the shame of their faces? (20) Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, My anger and My wrath are about to be poured out upon this place—upon man, cattle, the tree of the field, and the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn and shall not be quenched.

COMMENTS

A prophet not only represented God to the people, he also represented the people before God through intercessory prayer. Abraham prayed for Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32); Moses prayed for Israel (Exodus 32:11-14; 17:11; Numbers 14:13-20) as did Samuel (I Samuel 7:9,

10; 12:17, 18, 23). Jeremiah here is told that conditions in Judah were so bad that such prayer was useless. Still Jeremiah prayed and one of his great intercessory prayers is recorded in 14:19-22.

Four words for prayer are used in verse 16. The first Hebrew word, translated "pray," means to intercede on behalf of someone. God told Abimelech that Abraham would pray for him (Genesis 20:7). In Numbers 21:7 the people ask Moses to intercede on their behalf. Moses interceded on behalf of Aaron (Deuteronomy 9:20). Samuel assured the people that he would not cease to intercede on their behalf (I Samuel 12:23). The second Hebrew word carries the idea of entreaty or supplication. It is sometimes used of a ringing cry of praise to the Lord. In the present context the word would convey the idea of a loud, vehement prayer.¹ The third word, translated "supplication," is often used synonymously with the preceding word. The fourth word, translated "plead," literally 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 he might sell a cave (Genesis 23:8).

Verses 17-19 indicate the reason why intercessory prayer on the part of the prophet would be useless. In view of the open and flagrant practice of idolatry in the cities of Judah the prohibition of intercession is justified (v. 17). The entire population is engaged in the service of the false gods. The children gather the wood for the cooking fires; the men kindle the fire and the women bake some kind of sacrificial cakes. 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

1. Psalms 17:1; 88:2; Jeremiah 11:14; 14:12.

Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, the planet Venus. Statuettes of Astarte have been found all over Palestine indicating how wide spread her cult was. The exact nature of the cakes which were baked is unknown as the word used here is found elsewhere only in 44:19. Apparently they were made in the likeness of the goddess Astarte or in the shape of a star which was her symbol. With these pastries liquid refreshment was also served. An ivory carving dating to the eighth century B.C. suggests that the whole ceremony was performed to accompaniment of music played entirely by women.¹

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 Him² (v. 18). 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 (v. 19). God's burning wrath is about to be poured forth upon Judah and no one will be able to extinguish it. The cattle, trees and crops will be consumed as well as the wicked apostates of Jerusalem (v. 20). Scripture emphasizes over and over again that all creation suffers because of the sin of mankind (cf. Isaiah (24:4); Hosea 4:3).

III. PRIORITIES IN WORSHIP 7:21-28

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

1. Benjamin Mazar (ed.), *The Illustrated World of the Bible Library* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), III, pp. 102-103.

2. "Provoke," one of the characteristic words of Jeremiah, is used here for the first time.

(v. 21). He reminds his listeners that there are obligations which take priority over such outward acts (vv. 22, 23). He then points out that through the centuries the people of Israel had been obstinate in their disobedience (vv. 24-28).

A. Prior Obligations 7:21-23

TRANSLATION

(21) Thus says the LORD of hosts, God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices and eat the meat. (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. (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 way which I command you in order that it might be well with you.

COMMENTS

By means of a sarcastic imperative Jeremiah urges the men of Judah to increase their already numerous sacrificial offerings. Normally the burnt offerings were wholly consumed on the altar while in other sacrifices (e.g., the peace offering) parts of the animal were eaten by the priests and by those who made the offering. 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 and thereby derive some benefit from them. The offerings certainly had no religious value (v. 21). Contrary to the popular theology of the day the sacrificial ritual was not the heart and core of their covenant obligations to God.

Verse 22 has played an important role in the debate which has raged over the origin of the sacrificial system in ancient Israel. In the Pentateuch sacrifice is instituted by Moses in compliance with the instructions given by God to him in the mount. According to the modern critical view of the Old Testament the so-called priestly legislation of the Pentateuch is a product of the postexilic age, a thousand years after Moses. Jeremiah 7:22 seems on the surface to support the critical contention that Moses did not have anything to do with the sacrificial ritual. The verse seems to deny that the Lord gave any instructions concerning sacrifice at Mt. Sinai. In interpreting this verse 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 will continue to permit them to come to Jerusalem "bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meal offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the Lord." As he looks beyond the destruction of Judah to the Israel of the future he 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 verses say nothing of the origin of the sacrificial system; but they do seem to imply that the Lord and his prophet regard that system with favor. To these passages may be added 33:17-24 which speaks of the covenant with the priests, i.e., that portion of the covenant of Sinai which included the duties and regulations of the priesthood as regards sacrifices.

2. Jeremiah seems to have supported the reforms of king Josiah which included the observance of the Passover ritual (II Chronicles 35:1-9).

3. Jeremiah was never charged by his priestly and prophetic 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 (I Samuel 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 verse 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 verse then would not be denying that commandments concerning sacrifice were given at Mt. Sinai but rather would be denying 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. Leviticus 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 Old Testament.¹ 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, verse 22 is not denying the existence of Mosaic legislation concerning sacrifice. God is simply saying, "When your fathers came out of Egypt I did not give legislation in the interest of or for the sake of sacrifices." The verse would then by denying

1. Deuteronomy 4:21; II Samuel 18:5; II Kings 22:13; Psalms 7:1; Jeremiah 7:22; 14:21.

that sacrifice was the chief goal or purpose of God in the Mosaic system.¹

9. Another possibility is that the denial of verse 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 verse 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 Old Testament religion. The fundamental requirement of the Sinai covenant was that of obedience. The people of Israel had to hearken to the divine voice and walk in the divine way 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 (v. 23). The phrase "that it might be well with you" is characteristic of Jeremiah.² The obedience which God demands is for the ultimate benefit of man.

B. Persistent Obstinacy 7:24-28

TRANSLATION

(24) But they would not hearken and they did not stretch out the ear but walked in the counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart and they went backwards and not forwards. (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). (26) But they did not hearken unto Me nor did they incline their ears, but made hard the neck and committed evil more than their fathers. (27) When you

1. O. T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1949), pp. 168ff.

2. Cf. 42:6; 38:20; 40:9. The phrase is also frequent in the book of Deuteronomy.

Speak unto them all these words they will not hearken unto you; when you call unto them they will not answer you. (28) Therefore you shall say unto them: This is the nation which will not hearken to the voice of the LORD their God nor will they accept correction. Faith has perished, it is cut off from their mouth.

COMMENTS

The people of Israel had a record of obstinacy. They had no desire to listen to the commandments of God. They followed instead the inclinations of their own evil hearts. In relationship to God they had gone backward and not forward (v. 24). In other words they had turned their back to God and 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.

From the days of the Exodus from Egypt God had continually and earnestly communicated with His people through prophets (v. 25). But the people paid no heed to these servants of the Lord. Rather than inclining their ears in the direction of these messengers of God they made their necks hard. Each generation seemed to become more sinful than the preceding one (v. 26). The people will not listen to Jeremiah any more than they listened to his predecessors in the prophetic ministry (v. 27). All he can do is publicly accuse them of obstinacy: "This is the nation which will not hearken to the voice of the Lord their God nor accept correction." No other nation had been so blessed, so honored, so trained and guided. Yet *this* is the nation which refuses to heed the word of God. Faith or truth has vanished from their prayers and from their praise (v. 28).

IV. POLLUTED WORSHIP 7:29—8:3

Again Jeremiah takes up the subject of paganized worship. He speaks of the present defilement of the population of Jerusalem (v. 29), of the Temple (v. 30) and of the land of Judah (v. 31). Then Jeremiah describes the destruction which will come as a result of the polluted worship: defilement of the sanctuaries (vv. 32, 33), desolation of the land (v. 34) and desecration of the dead (8:1-3).

A. The Present Defilement 7:29-31

TRANSLATION

(29) Cut off your hair and cast it away and take up a lamentation upon the bare hills for the LORD has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath. (30) For the children of Judah have done evil in My eyes (oracle of the LORD); they have set their abominations in the House which is called by My Name to defile it. (31) They have built the high places of Topheth which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire which I did not command nor did it even enter My mind.

COMMENTS

In verse 29 Jeremiah resorts to one of his most devastating oratorical devices, the sarcastic imperative. He urges the daughter of Jerusalem¹ to shave off her long hair² as a sign of mourning and take up a lamentation. The present generation has been rejected and forsaken by God. In ancient times the divorce of a woman was a

1. The pronoun and the verb are feminine.

2. The Hebrew word usually refers to the long hair of a Nazarite. But here the word seems to have lost its primary meaning and refers to the long, unshorn hair of a woman.

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 which will experience the wrath of the living God (v. 29).

Denial of apostasy was impossible for it was open and flagrant. The abominations of heathendom, the cult objects used in pagan cults, 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 (II Kings 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 (v. 30). Furthermore they had built special high places in the valley of the son of Hinnom¹ where human sacrifice was openly practiced. The meaning and etymology of the word Topheth are uncertain. It seems to be akin to a word meaning fireplace. Most likely the Topheth was the pit in which human victims were burned.² Such human sacrifices were to the god Moloch who sometimes generically is called Baal (Jeremiah 19:5). God had never commanded the wretched practice of offering children as burnt offerings and never did He condone it (v. 31).

B. The Future Destruction 7:32—8:3

TRANSLATION

(32) Therefore behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) 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

1. Since the days of Joshua this valley near Jerusalem had been known as the valley of the son of Hinnom. See Joshua 15:8; 18:16

2. Cf. Jeremiah 19:5; 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20-21; II Kings 23:10.

for lack of place to bury. (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. (8:1) In that time (oracle of the LORD) they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of his princes and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. (2) And they shall spread them to the sun and to the moon and to all the host of the heavens which they loved and served and went after and which they sought and which they worshiped. They shall not be gathered nor buried; they shall become dung upon the face of the ground. (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 the LORD of hosts).

COMMENTS

The polluted worship of the people of Judah will be punished in a most decisive way. A disaster will befall Judah in which so many people will be slain or die 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 (v. 32). 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 room for burial places 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 (v. 33).¹ In antiquity the lack of proper burial

1. Verse 33 echoes the threat of Deuteronomy 28:26.

was the worst indignity which could befall a man. The thought of a corpse exposed to the elements of nature horrified the ancient Hebrews.

The cities of Judah met the same fate as Topheth. All the normal sounds of joy and mirth will be removed. The entire land becomes a desolation (v. 34). The word translated "desolation" is used only of places which, having once been inhabited, have fallen into ruin. It is a gloomy picture indeed which the prophet paints of the future destruction.

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. In search of valuables the Babylonians will ransack the sepulchres of the leading citizens of Jerusalem (v. 1) and scatter their bones across the face of the ground. All the hosts of the heavens which the men of Judah had worshiped in life will helplessly look down upon this act of desecration (v. 2). 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.

For those who escape the destruction of Jerusalem and go into exile life will be so miserable that they will wish they were dead (v. 3). 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 587 B.C. can be seen in Psalms 137. 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 mind and their heart in respect to God their lot improved. They ad-

justed to their surroundings and many of them actually prospered in exile. Verse 3 must be describing the initial reaction of those who were carried away captive.¹

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SEVEN

I. Facts to Master.

1. The place where the sermon on worship was delivered (7:2).
2. The lying words which were being repeated (7:4).
3. The conditions necessary if they were to continue to dwell in the land (7:5b-6).
4. Five of the Ten Commandments which had been broken (7:9).
5. Two lessons from history which should have served to warn the inhabitants of Judah (7:12-15).
6. The strange command issued to the prophet (7:16).
7. The name of one deity so zealously worshiped in Judah (7:18).
8. The metaphor frequently used in Jeremiah to describe the earnestness of God in calling His people to repentance (7:25).
9. The place where child sacrifice was conducted (7:31).
10. The new name which would be given to the valley of Hinnom after the destruction of 587 B.C. (7:32).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. Is the sermon recorded in 7:1—8:3 the same as that recorded in 26:1-19?

1. Laetsch views verse 3 as a conditional threat which was unfulfilled because of the repentance of the exiles.

JEREMIAH

2. Should a Christian champion the cause of justice for minorities? See 7:6.
3. What false attitude toward worship was prevalent in the days of Jeremiah? See 7:10, 11. Will merely attending worship services deliver us from the judgment of God?
4. What is the history of the sanctuary at Shiloh? Consult a good Bible dictionary.
5. Who was "the queen of heaven"? See 7:18.
6. What rhetorical technique is employed by the prophet in 7:21? Should this technique be used today?
7. What is the basic problem involved in 7:22? How is the verse used by critics?
8. What are the priorities in Old Testament worship? In New Testament worship? What acts of worship tend to be abused most today?
9. What is meant by the expression "generation of his wrath" (7:29)? Do you think it would be appropriate to use that designation for the present generation?
10. What is the meaning of the name Topheth? 7:31ff.
11. What might be the motivation for removing dead bodies from graves? See 8:1-2.
12. What was the attitude of the ancient Hebrews with regard to the burial of the dead? A good Bible dictionary will help you here.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SERMONS FROM THE EARLY REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM 8:4—10:25

The oracles in 8:4—10:25 are undated. They may well represent excerpts from the sermons of Jeremiah preached in the streets of Jerusalem between 608 B.C. and 597 B.C. 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 B.C.

For the most part this section contains excerpts from the sermons of Jeremiah. Those excerpts in 8:4—9:26 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). Chapter 10 contains a longer message on the subject of idolatry. The section ends with a prophetic prayer (10:23-25). If one were to attempt to provide the sermonettes of this section with captions the following might be suggested: (1) Stubborn Apostasy (8:4—9:1); (2) National Corruption (9:2-26); (3) True Glory (9:22, 23); (4) The Uncircumcised Heart (9:24, 25); (5) God vs. the Idols (10:1-25).

I. STUBBORN APOSTASY 8:4—9:1

Stubborn apostasy was ultimately responsible for the downfall of Judah. It is no wonder then that Jeremiah returns to this subject again and again. Here he dwells on the unreasonable persistence in rebellion (8:4-7); the unwise proclamations by the leaders (8:8-10) and the unavoidable punishment which would fall upon the people (8:13-17). All of this causes Jeremiah to give expression to the unbearable pain of his own soul (8:18—9:1).

A. Unreasonable Persistence in Apostasy 8:4-7

TRANSLATION

(4) And you shall say unto them, Thus says the LORD: Do men fall and not rise again? Does one turn away and not return? (5) Why has this people, Jerusalem, turned away with perpetual backsliding? They cling to deceit, they refuse to return. (6) I have been attentive and listened, but they continue to speak what is not right. There is not a man who repented of his evil, saying, what have I done? Everyone turns away in their course as a horse rushing into battle. (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 the LORD.

COMMENTS

In attempting to jar the people into a realization of their stupid and stubborn apostasy Jeremiah appeals to common sense. 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 (v. 4). Yet Jerusalem has turned away from God and refuses to turn back to Him. Tenaciously they cling to deceit, i.e., idols. As far as Jeremiah was concerned, idols were outright frauds. The men of Judah embraced the unreal and repudiated the one true and living God. And even after this folly is pointed out to them they refuse to return (v. 5). To Jeremiah this was unreasonable behavior. The prophet listened attentively for some word, some slight indication that the people intended to repent. No such word was forthcoming. On the contrary they continue to

speaking what is not right, what is not appropriate. There is no sorrow for sin, no acknowledgement of wrong doing, no request for forgiveness. They rush to their idolatry like a horse charges into battle (v. 6).

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 and even thousands of miles to return to the home they have left. 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 which He has ordained. Men stifle the instinct to worship their Creator and instead produce gods of their own making, gods they can manipulate and control, gods made in man's image.

B. Unwise Proclamations by National Leaders 8:8-12

TRANSLATION

(8) How can you say, We are wise! The Torah of the LORD is with us. But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has labored falsely. (9) The wise shall be put to shame, they shall be dismayed when they are captured. Behold, they have spurned the word of the LORD and what kind of wisdom do they possess? (10) Therefore I will give their wives to others, their fields to dispossessors; for from least to the greatest everyone of them is out for illicit gain; from the prophet even unto the priest everyone of them practices deceit. (11) They heal up the hurt of the daughter of My people lightly, saying, Peace, Peace; when there is no peace. (12) They shall be put to shame because they have committed adomination; yea they do not at all feel ashamed nor

do they know how to blush; therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their visitation they shall stumble, says the LORD.

COMMENTS

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, so what use did they have for this agitator from Anathoth. "Let Jeremiah keep his advice to himself; for we are wise and we are the divinely appointed teachers of the people." Among the wise men the scribes are singled out for special comment. The scribes in Old Testament times were men who could write. They often served as officials of the royal court (II Kings 12:10) and sometimes as military officers (Jeremiah 52:25). 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 which 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, twisting, perverting 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" (John 10:35).

When men reject the wisdom that comes from the word of God what kind of wisdom do they possess? The fear of the Lord and the reverent respect for His word is the beginning of all true wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). How

utterly humiliated these wise men of Judah will be when calamities one after another fall upon the nation (v. 9). 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 is given into the hands of the Chaldean conquerors. Because of their greed the prophets and priests had deliberately deceived the people (v. 10). But in the end they will lose all that they had accumulated. 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 (v. 11). In misleading the people these men had committed abominable yet they show no shame whatsoever. But when the judgment falls on Judah these proud and confident men will stumble and fall before the sword of the enemy (v. 12).

C. Unavoidable Punishment at the Hand of God 8:13-17

TRANSLATION

(13) I will utterly consume them (oracle of the LORD). No grapes are on the vine and no figs are on the fig tree. The leaves are withered; and I will appoint for them those who overrun them. (14) Why are we sitting? Assemble yourselves that we may go unto the fortified cities that we may perish there; for the LORD our God has put us to silence and has caused us to drink poison water because we have sinned against the LORD. (15) We hope for peace but no good came, for the time of healing, but behold, terror. (16) From Dan is heard the snorting of his horses; from the sound of the neighing of his stallions, all the earth shakes. For they shall come and shall consume the land and its fullness, the

cities and their inhabitants. (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 the LORD).

COMMENTS

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; it is worthless; it must be destroyed. God has already appointed the destroyer. An army shall sweep through that worthless garden like a raging stream overflowing its banks (v. 13).¹ All will be destroyed.

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. The inhabitants of the countryside in gloomy despair urge one another to move into the fortified cities. They feel 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 will die of some pestilence or plague. But at least that is better than falling into the hand of the enemy. They knew that God was making them drink of the poisonous water of divine judgment. They admit now that it is too late that they have sinned against the Lord (v. 14). They had listened to their false prophets and consequently they had expected peace and national healing. But good times did not come; only the terrors of ruthless war.

Jeremiah must have been a spellbinding preacher. He makes his audience almost hear the snorting and neighing of the enemy horses as the Chaldean calvary bears down upon Dan, the northern-most city of Palestine. All the

1. On the phrase "those who overrun" see Isaiah 8:7; Daniel 11:10, 40.

known world trembles at the news that the mighty northern enemy is sweeping southward. The land and its produce, the cities and their inhabitants will be consumed by this mighty army (v. 16). 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 (v. 17). The doom is unavoidable.

D. Unbearable Pain on the Part of the Prophet

8:18—9:1

TRANSLATION

(18) O my Comfort against sorrow! My heart is faint within me! (19) Behold, the sound of the cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land: Is not the LORD in Zion? Is not her king in her? Why do they provoke Me with their images with their strange vanities? (20) The harvest is past, the summer has ended and we have not been saved. (21) Because of the hurt of the daughter of my people I have been hurt; I mourn, anguish has seized me. (22) Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? For why does not healing come to the daughter of my people? (9:1) Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears I would bewail day and night the slain of the daughter of my people.

COMMENTS

As Jeremiah sees the apostasy of his people and their impending destruction his heart is sick. He casts himself upon God his comforter (v. 18). The word comforter means literally, the one to cause me to smile, to be cheerful or be bright. Jeremiah hears as it were a dialogue

between those who will be taken into exile and God. In a distant land the former inhabitants of Judah lift up a cry for help: "Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King in her?" They cannot comprehend how Zion, the Temple mount, can be so humiliated and degraded if God is really still on His throne. To this astonished cry God makes answer: "Why do they provoke Me with their images?" (v. 19). Whatever has befallen Zion has come about because of the idolatry of the people there. Ignoring the explanation of God the exiles of the future continue with their complaint by citing a popular proverb: "The harvest is past, the summer has ended and we have not been saved" (v. 20). Once the summer harvest was over a farmer looked forward to a period of deliverance from arduous toil. But in the case of the Jewish exiles 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. The exiles were beginning to realize that no speedy deliverance was in the offing.

The unbelief and despair of the people causes even deeper despair in the heart of the prophet. "Because of the hurt (lit., shattering) of the daughter of my people I have been hurt." He loves 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. "Is there no balm (or medicine) in Gilead?" the prophet asks. Gilead, located east of the Jordan river, was famous in Old Testament times for its balm. It is not certain just what this balm was but the suggestion has been made that it was the juice of the turpentine tree. The material was exported (Ezekiel 27:17) and was very costly (Genesis 43:11). The balm of Gilead was prized for its medicinal properties. There was no healing ointment which could be applied

to the spiritual wound of Judah. There were no physicians who might be able to deal with the difficulty (v. 22). Nothing can cure the ailment of Judah except a whole-hearted return to the divine Physician (Exodus 15:26). Jeremiah wishes that his head could produce an inexhaustible supply of tears that he might lament the inevitable doom of his people (v. 1). 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.

II. NATIONAL CORRUPTION 9:2-26

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).

A. Prevailing Corruption 9:2-8

TRANSLATION

(2) Oh that I were in the wilderness in a travelers' inn, that I might leave my people and depart from them because all of them are adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men. (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 the LORD). (4) Be on guard each man from his friend and do not trust any brother; for every brother is very crooked and every friend is a slanderer. (5) Every man deceives his neighbor; they do not speak truth; their tongues have learned to speak lies. With iniquity they weary themselves. (6) Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit; in deceit they refuse the

knowledge of Me (oracle of the LORD). (7) Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold! I am about to refine them by fire and test them; for how else shall I do in view of the fact that she is the daughter of My people. (8) Their tongue is a sharp arrow, it speaks deceit; with his mouth he continues to speak peaceably with his friends; but in his heart he plans treachery.

COMMENTS

It is always nauseating for a righteous man to continue in daily contact with filthy and corrupt company. Jeremiah longs to leave the city with all its vices and take up residence in one of the desolate and dreary wayside shelters which dotted the major highways of antiquity. 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 tender and sensitive Jeremiah would rather live the life of a monastic, sit in an isolated shack and meditate and bemoan the fate of his people. But God had called him to preach to that godless generation, and preach he must!

Jeremiah's description of the corruption of Judah is truly remarkable. The tongue of the men of Judah is a bow which hurls falsehood and deceit. These mighty warriors do not contend for truth but for its opposite, lawlessness and injustice. Their starting point is evil and their ultimate goal is evil. This deplorable situation has developed because they do not know or have regard for the living God (v. 3). A willful ignorance of God and His word was at the root of their national corruption. No one could be trusted, not even the members of one's own immediate family. Every brother was "very crooked."

The Hebrew phrase here means literally, 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 (v. 4). Self-protection demanded that everyone be viewed with suspicion. These people had "learned" i.e., they had accustomed themselves, to speaking lies and falsehood. They actually weary themselves in sinning (v. 5). The sinner may have his wild fling but in the end he winds up exhausted, a physical, mental and moral wreck. The more abundant life is that of faithful and loving obedience to the divine will.

In verse 6 God addresses Jeremiah. He tells the prophet what he already knows *viz.*, that he should trust no one since he is surrounded by deceit. Hypocritical men have no desire to really know God and so they deliberately, purposely shut the Lord out of their lives (v. 6). Only the knowledge of God will cure them of their hypocrisy; yet they refuse to know God because of their hypocrisy. The only alternative is a judgment which will serve to purify and refine the nation. 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 (v. 7). Such people who use their tongue as an arrow to smite their neighbors, who speak peace but plot treachery (lit., set an ambush) are the dross which must be removed through the judgment process (v. 8).

B. Impending Destruction 9:9-21

Because of the national corruption, destruction is necessary and imminent. The land will become desolate (9:9-15) and death will reign supreme throughout the land (9:16-21).

1. *Desolation of the land* (9:9-16)

TRANSLATION

(9) On account of these things shall I not punish them (oracle of the LORD)? Shall not I take vengeance on a nation which is like this? (10) Upon the mountains I shall lift up weeping and lamentation and in the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation; 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. (11) And I will make Jerusalem heaps, the habitation of jackals, and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant. (12) Who is the wise man that he may discern this and to whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken that he may declare it? Why is the land destroyed, burned like a wilderness so that no one passes by? (13) And the LORD said: Because they forsook My law which I placed before them and they did not hearken to My voice nor walk in it. (14) But they walked after the stubbornness of their heart and after the Baalim which their fathers taught them. (15) Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I am about to cause them viz., this people, to eat wormwood and cause them to drink the poisoned water of gall. (16) And I will scatter them among nations which neither they nor their

fathers have known and I will send after them the sword until I have consumed them.

COMMENTS

In view of the terribly corrupt conditions which prevail in Judah God is perfectly justified in taking vengeance upon that land (v. 9). Jeremiah knows what will befall his beloved land. He knows that when the judgment falls he will be weeping and lamenting the desolation which will befall that once proud little country. The pasture lands of the wilderness i.e., the uninhabited region, which once were covered with flocks and herds will become so utterly waste that even the birds depart for lack of food (v. 10). The cities of Judah will not escape the desolation. Their ruins will become the habitation of wild creatures (v. 11). The "I" of verse 11 is no longer Jeremiah, but God.

In verse 12 Jeremiah challenges the wise men of the land and those who claimed to have received divine revelation to explain why the land has become desolate (v. 12). They are unable to explain it and so God himself gives the explanation. God had placed His law before this people at Sinai. He had amplified His law and kept it before the people through the preaching of the prophets. Yet the people forsook the law of God, refused to hearken to His instruction or walk in His way (v. 13). In their stubborn rebellion they followed after the Canaanite deities, the Baalim. This apostasy and idolatry they had learned from their fathers (v. 14). Where fathers go, sons will follow. What an ungodly legacy **the fathers had left** to their descendants! The iniquities of fathers are often magnified in the lives of sons and when iniquity is full the punishment is inevitable (cf. Exodus 20:5). The sons must now eat the wormwood and drink the water of gall (v. 15). Wormwood and gall, two bitter and noxious

substances, were symbols in the Old Testament for bitter affliction. Judah will become desolate because she will be depopulated. God will scatter the Jews among the far-distant foreign nations. Even in captivity the sword of divine retribution will pursue them until they are consumed (v. 16). Those who would be consumed in captivity are, of course, the unbelieving and unrepentant (cf. Amos 9:9, 10). Those who turned to God in sincerity and truth would be restored to their homeland (16:14, 15; 31:9, 18-19).

2. *Death throughout the land* (9:17-22)

TRANSLATION

(17) Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider and call for the mourning women that they might come and unto the wise women send that they might come. (18) And let them hurry and lift up over us wailing that our eyes may flow with tears and our eyelids stream with water. (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. (20) For hear the word of the LORD, O women, and let your ear receive the word of His mouth, and teach your daughters wailing and everyone her neighbor lamentation. (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. (22) Speak thus! (oracle of the LORD): The carcasses of men shall fall like dung upon the surface of the field and like sheaves behind the reaper; and there is no one to gather them.

COMMENTS

In view of the impending national disaster, Jeremiah calls for professional mourning women to come and bewail the death of the nation. Such women were "wise" or skillful in the ways of leading public lamentation (v. 17). 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 and sorrow only as he openly and outwardly expresses it. Jeremiah can seem to hear the wailing coming forth from Zion of Jerusalem. The people 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 (v. 19). 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 (v. 20).

Why this need for universal lamentation? Death will reign supreme in the land in that day. Death creeps through the windows of homes and palaces. The Grim Reaper stalks the streets and broadplaces or market places of the city. Innocent children are cut down, young men in the flower of their youth (v. 21). 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.

The picture of death throughout the land reaches its climax in verse 22. The first phrase, "Speak thus!" is abrupt and forceful and serves to arrest the attention of the hearer and draw his attention to this last dramatic announcement. The carcasses of the men of Judah 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. 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 (v. 22).

III. TRUE GLORY 9:23, 24

TRANSLATION

(23) Thus says the LORD: 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. (24) But let him that glories glory in this: The understanding and knowledge of Me, for I am the LORD who establishes kindness, justice and righteousness in the land because in these things I take delight (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The brief but beautiful treatment of true glory seems unrelated to either what precedes or what follows in the chapter. Men throughout history have been tempted to magnify the importance of wisdom, strength and wealth and fall down in adoration before this trinity in unholy worship. Wealth and strength are ephemeral and wisdom,

if it is not rooted in reverent fear for God, is vain (cf. Psalms 111:10). Destruction and death await the nation or the individual who places undue confidence in the arm of flesh (v. 23). True glory belongs not to the wealthy, the strong, and the wise but to those who understand and 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. Those who understand and know the Lord practice daily those things which are pleasing to Him. They demonstrate lovingkindness to those who are of the household of faith. They strive for justice for the underprivileged and weak. They walk in the paths of righteousness, i.e., right conduct. These are the qualities which make the relationship between God and man and these are the qualities which must characterize the relationship between the man of God and his fellowman (v. 24).

IV. THE UNCIRCUMCISED HEART 9:25, 26

TRANSLATION

(25) Behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will bring punishment upon all circumcised in their uncircumcision. (26) Upon Egypt and Judah and Edom and the children of Ammon and Moab and all those who cut the corners (of the hair) who dwell in the wilderness, for all the nations are uncircumcised and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.

COMMENTS

Circumcision was given by divine command to Abraham and his descendants as a sign of the covenant between God and that people. (Genesis 17:10). The men of Jeremiah's day while outwardly bearing the sign of the cove-

nant 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 (v. 25). Other nations of antiquity practiced circumcision as well as did the Jews. Five such peoples are named in verse 26: Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites and "those who cut the corners of the hair." This latter phrase refers to the Arabian tribes who shaved the temples at puberty and consecrated them to their deities.¹ The circumcision practiced by these heathen nations was not done in obedience to the command of God and therefore their circumcision was regarded by God as uncircumcision. God's judgment would fall upon them. But God's judgment would also fall upon the men of Judah who were in this respect no different from their pagan neighbors. They were physically circumcised but not spiritually so.² Just as the men of Israel were not living up to their circumcision, so many today are not living up to their baptism. Many have had their bodies immersed in water but their minds, hearts and will remain unbaptized.

V. GOD VS. THE IDOLS 10:1-25

In chapter 10 Jeremiah ridicules idolatry (vv. 1-5) and extols the incomparable God of Israel (vv. 6-16). He points out the folly of forsaking God (vv. 17-22). The chapter closes with a prophetic prayer (vv. 23-25). The Jeremian authorship of the first sixteen verses has been questioned by various scholars on the grounds that they interrupt the thought sequence of the section and

1. Herodotus III. 8. This practice was forbidden to the Israelites. See Leviticus 19:27; Deuteronomy 14:1

2. See Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:25-29.

on the grounds that they are written in a different style. But one author may employ more than one style of writing depending upon the subject he is treating and the audience he is addressing. As the present section of the Book of Jeremiah is in the nature of an anthology of prophetic utterances no appeal to the interruption of thought sequence would seem to be appropriate. In short there is no good reason to suspect that Jeremiah was not the author of the first sixteen verses of chapter 10.

A. The Folly of Idolatry 10:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) Hear the word which the LORD spoke against you, O house of Israel. (2) Thus says the LORD: Do not learn the way of the nations and do not be dismayed because of the signs of the heavens; for the nations are dismayed because of them. (3) For the customs of the people are vanity; for it is a tree which one cuts out of the forest, the work of the hands of the carpenter with an ax. (4) With silver and gold he adorns it; with nails and hammers they secure them so that it might not be made to totter. (5) They are like a post in a cucumber patch. They cannot speak. They must even be carried about for they are immobile. Do not fear because of them for they cannot do evil nor can they even do good.

COMMENTS

Through His prophet God exhorts His people (v. 1) not to learn, i.e., become accustomed to, the idolatrous ways of the heathen. The people of God need not become upset by the signs of the heavens—eclipses, meteors, and the like—which other nations regarded as portents of evil (v. 2). Numerous tablets from the ancient Near East

have been found which indicate how closely the heavens were observed and how carefully every movement of the heavenly bodies was recorded. Modern astrology had its birth in the pagan temples of Mesopotamia. 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 utterly empty and without content (cf. Isaiah 40:19f.; 44:12ff.). Idols are in reality nothing more than a tree which has been cut out of the forest by the ax of a woodsman (v. 3). Though beautifully adorned with gold and silver overlay that idol is still nothing more than lifeless wood. An idol cannot even stand on its own two feet. It must be fastened down with hammer and nails in order to prevent it from tottering (v. 4).¹ The idol is as harmless as a post erected in a cucumber patch for the purpose of scaring away the birds. They cannot speak nor can they move about without being carried by someone. They cannot harm any one, 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.

B. The Incomparable God of Israel 10:6-16

TRANSLATION

(6) There is none like You O LORD; great are You and great is Your name in power. (7) Who would not fear You, O King of the nations; for You are worthy of it. Because among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their royalty there is none like You. (8) They are altogether stupid and foolish; the instruction of vanities is wood. (9) Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from

1. The description here is similar to that in Isaiah 40:19, 20; 41:7.

Uphaz. They are the work of a craftsman and the hands of the goldsmith; blue and purple is their clothing, all of them the work of wisemen. (10) But the LORD is the true God. He is the living God and eternal King. Before His wrath the earth trembles; nations cannot endure His indignation. (11) Thus you shall say to them: the gods which did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from beneath the heavens. (12) It is He who made the earth by His power who founded the world in His wisdom; and in His understanding stretched out the heavens. (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. (14) Every man is stupid, without knowledge! Every goldsmith is put to shame because of his image, for his molten image is a fraud, and there is no breath in them. (15) They are vanity, a ridiculous work; in the time of their visitation they shall perish. (16) Not like these is the Portion of Jacob; for He is the Maker of everything and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is His name.

COMMENTS

None of the idols can compare to the Lord in greatness and in power (v. 6). He is not merely a tribal deity restricted theologically and geographically in His sphere of influence. He is worthy of reverence by all mankind. No wise man of the earth can equal Him in wisdom. No prince of mankind is His equal in majesty and power (v. 7). On the other hand the idols are nothing but lifeless lumber. They are stupid and foolish and are utterly unable to render intelligent counsel. From

an idol of wood one can only obtain "wooden," lifeless, worthless guidance (v. 8). Men go to no little trouble in producing their idols. 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, which is also mentioned in Daniel 10:5, is to be identified with Ophir.¹ 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. Embellished with precious metals and adorned with costly garments an image was in reality a work of art produced by cunning and skillful men. It was no wiser and more powerful than the craftsmen who produced it (v. 9).

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. All nations tremble before His indignation. (v. 10).

Verse 11 is regarded as a gloss by most commentators. The verse is in the Aramaic language rather than Hebrew. It does seem strange, however, that a copyist would have inserted an Aramaic gloss into a Hebrew text either accidentally or purposely. It is best then to regard verse 11 as having originally been part of the text and written by Jeremiah himself. Why then is the verse in Aramaic? Probably Jeremiah is here utilizing some proverb which was current in his day in the Aramaic language. The basic

1. This interpretation of Uphaz appears in the Syriac versions of the Old Testament and in the Aramaic Targum.

idea of the verse is clear. All the gods of the nation which were in reality false gods will eventually perish.

Every man who engages in idolatry is stupid. Only when men accept the self-revelation of God through His word do they have any insight into the true meaning of life. 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. In spite of the elaborate ceremonies in which the spirit of the god came to make its abode in the images Jeremiah declares "there is no breath in them" (v. 14). Those idols are utterly vain, empty, ridiculous. They, along with their worshipers, shall experience the visitation of judgment of the true God. In that time the images shall perish, unable to save themselves, let alone those who held them in esteem (v. 15). None of the gods so popular in the days of Jeremiah remain on the scene today. They have indeed perished. The Lord of hosts is not like the idols. He who is the Creator of everything is the "Portion of Jacob" and Israel is "the tribe of His inheritance." Though He is God of all nations, yet He belongs to Israel in a special way (Psalms 73:26; 119:57; 142:5) and Israel belongs to Him in a special way (v. 16).

C. The Folly of Forsaking God 10:17-22

TRANSLATION

(17) Gather your bundle from the land, you who dwell in the siege. (18) For thus says the LORD! Behold, I am about to hurl out the inhabitants of the land at this time and I shall distress them in order that they might be found. (19) Woe to me because of my hurt! My wound is grievous. But as for me, I said, Alas, this is a grief that I must bear. (20) My tent is destroyed and all my cords have been snapped; 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. (21) For the shepherds are stupid and they do not seek the LORD. Therefore they have not acted wisely, and all of their flock is scattered. (22) Hark! A report! Behold, it comes! A great shaking out of the land of the north, to make the cities of Judah a desolation, the habitation of jackals .

COMMENTS

Idolatry has inevitable consequences as far as God is concerned. In verse 17 Jeremiah sadly addresses his people and urges them to gather together their possessions and prepare to go into captivity when the siege of the land has ended (v. 17). The inhabitants of Judah are about to be violently expelled from their land, hurled forth as a rock is hurled from a sling. Because of their idolatry God Himself becomes their antagonist. He will bring them into this distress. The last phrase of verse 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.

As he contemplates the future of his people Jeremiah bursts forth into another lamentation. The knowledge of what will befall his people is compared to a hurt, a wound, a grief or sickness for which there is no cure. Jeremiah must simply live with his mental suffering (v. 19). The prophet compares Judah to a tent which has collapsed because the cords have been snapped or cut. 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 (v. 20). All of this calamity has come about because the shepherds, the political and religious leaders, have not sought the Lord. The word "seek" here is a technical word meaning to inquire of, to seek an oracle from the Lord. Spurning divine revelation these leaders were making decisions which were most unwise. Jeremiah is probably alluding to the scheming, plotting and outright revolt against Babylon the super-power. 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. 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. 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 by wild creatures.

D. A Prophetic Prayer 10:23-25

TRANSLATION

(23) I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not his own and that a man in walking cannot direct his step (24) Chastise me, O LORD, but in measure, not in Your wrath lest you cause me to become small. (25) Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You and upon tribes which have not called on Your name for they have consumed Jacob, they have consumed him and finished him and his habitation they have made desolate.

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 and 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 which God has marked out for him in the word. If a man fails to acknowledge his relationship to God, fails to submit to divine direction, 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 (v. 23). He therefore requires divine discipline and correction.

Jeremiah feels himself to be one with his people. The "me" of verse 24 is really "us." The prophet knows that God must chastise or discipline His people; he only prays that God will be merciful. Let God punish His people, but not in the wrath they deserve lest the nation "become small" and dwindle into insignificance. Rather let God punish Judah "in measure," i.e., with enough punishment to bring about the reformation of Judah. Jeremiah is willing to endure all that God intends to do to Judah so long as the judgment stops short of absolute and total annihilation of the nation.

Israel deserves punishment and Jeremiah admits it. But the nations by whom and through whom God would bring judgment upon Judah also deserve divine judgment. These nations had gone beyond the appointed bounds (Isaiah 10:6, 7; 47:6; Zechariah 1:15). God intended for these nations to punish Israel; instead they aimed at destroying the people of God. Quoting Psalms 79:6, 7,

1. The Hebrew word is usually translated "justice" or "judgment." That it also means "measured amounts" is indicated by I Kings 4:28 where the same word is used.

Jeremiah calls upon God to pour out His wrath upon them as well as Israel.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHT

I. Facts to Master.

1. The name of the northern-most town of Palestine (8:16).
2. "The _____ is past, the _____ is ended and we are not saved" (8:20).
3. "Is there no _____ in Gilead" (8:22).
4. Significant titles for God (10:7, 16).
5. Distant lands from which precious metals were brought to be made into idols (10:9).
6. The peculiar thing about 10:11.
7. The identity of the shepherds and the flock in 10:21.

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. What is the point of the contrast between the migratory birds and the people of God? 8:7.
2. In what way had sin blinded the eyes of the people of Judah? See 8:8.
3. What is meant by the expression "the false pen of the scribes hath wrought falsely?" (8:8).
4. Who is a wise man? See 8:9, 9:12.
5. The inhabitants of Judah could not blush (8:12). Has the present generation lost its sense of shame?
6. What are the wormwood and the gall mentioned in 8:14 and 9:15?
7. What is meant by the expression, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved?" (8:20).
8. Is there a suggestion for every Gospel preacher in 8:18—9:9, the lament of Jeremiah? What is it?

JEREMIAH

9. What strong impulse does Jeremiah have as he views the corruption of the society of his day? (9:2). Did God intend for Christians to live in monasteries?
10. What was the fulfillment of the prophecy uttered in 9:10-11?
11. What were some of the mourning customs in ancient Israel? Check a Bible dictionary.
12. Is it wrong for a Christian to boast? See 9:23-24, also Galatians 6:14.
13. Two kinds of uncircumcision are distinguished in 9:25, 26. What does circumcision in this passage symbolize? Sometimes preachers are heard to say: "you people may have been baptized but your hearts were never really yielded to God." Is this good theology? Can a person be baptized and remain unconverted?
14. Is there anything wrong with the Christian wearing good luck charms? Should he be afraid of Friday the 13th, broken mirrors, or walking beneath ladders? What about astrology? See 10:1-5.
15. How would you describe Jeremiah's attitude toward his own personal grief? (10:19)
16. Analyze the prayer which closes chapter 10. What confession is made? What personal petition? What imprecation?

CHAPTER NINE

CONSPIRACIES AGAINST GOD AND HIS PROPHET 11:1—13:27

It is well nigh impossible to precisely date the discourses and activities contained in chapter 11-20. Naegelsbach feels that a date prior to the battle of Carchemish should be assigned because of the lack of any reference to the Chaldeans. Most commentators, however, regard 13:18-27 as coming from the time of king Jehoiachin who reigned after the battle of Carchemish. One unit of this section, 14:1—17:18, originated during a time of famine which cannot be dated.

These ten chapters of the book contain excerpts from sermons, narratives and autobiographical elements. There are two collections of brief oracles, 14:1—15:9 and 17:1-18; and two parables, the parable of the linen girdle (13:1-11) and the parable of the wine jars (13:12-14). Of most interest, however, are the five confessions of Jeremiah which are contained in this section. These autobiographical glimpses into the inner thought processes of the prophet are unique in prophetic literature.

THE CONFESSIONS OF JEREMIAH

11:18—12:6

15:10-21

17:14-18

18:18-23

20:7-18

The materials in 11:1—12:17 are related to two conspiracies. In the view of Jeremiah the people of Judah had conspired to violate the covenant which God had given at Sinai (11:1-17). The prophet's forthright preaching on this theme aroused hostility especially among

the inhabitants of his home town of Anathoth. God reveals to Jeremiah that these acquaintances were conspiring to put him to death. The prophet went to his God in prayer about this matter and laid his case at the bar of divine justice (11:18-23). Some time passed and the wicked schemers of Anathoth experienced no divine retribution. Jeremiah prayed again, this time calling upon God to pour out his wrath upon the wicked. God answered that prayer, but not in the way Jeremiah expected (12:1-6). As the prophet wallows in self-pity he comes to realize what true pain God is experiencing because of the impending destruction of Judah, His beloved portion (12:7-13). Finally, by revealing to Jeremiah the ultimate destiny of the wicked foreign nations God places the whole matter of divine judgment in proper perspective (12:14-17).

I. THE PREACHING OF THE PROPHET

11:1-17

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. He exhorted his people to fulfill with their covenant obligations (11:1-8). Yet even as he gave forth this exhortation he came to realize that the men of Judah were conspiring to violate that covenant (11:9-17).

A. Exhortation to Keep the Covenant 11:1-8

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD: (2) Hear the words of this covenant and speak unto the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (3) Then you shall say unto them: Thus says the LORD God of Israel: Cursed is the man

who does not hear the words of this covenant (4) which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them from the land of Egypt, from the furnace of iron and said: Obey My voice and do them, according to all which I have commanded you. Then you will be My people and I will be your God; (5) in order to establish the oath which I swore to your fathers to give to them a land flowing with milk and honey as at this day. And I answered and said, Amen, O LORD. (6) And the LORD said unto me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. (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! (8) But they did not hearken nor did they incline their ear, but went on every man in the stubbornness of their heart. Therefore I brought against you all the words of this covenant which I commanded them to do, but they did not.

COMMENTS

The exhortation to keep the covenant of the Lord is usually dated by commentators just after 621 B.C., that crucial year when the lost law book was discovered in the Temple. Others would assign this material to the early years of king Jehoiakim. The truth of the matter is that either date remains somewhat speculative. However it is most difficult to read this paragraph and not think of the covenant recently renewed by king Josiah.

Six times in 11:1-8 Jeremiah calls upon the people of Judah to "hear" (i.e., obey) the words of the covenant. The imperative "speak" in verse 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 Gospel make the impact which God would have it make upon this generation. It is the old covenant of Sinai which had been renewed several times in the history of God's people that Jeremiah would have restored in his day.

Jeremiah's message on the covenant begins on a negative note. Utilizing the language of Deuteronomy (cf. Deuteronomy 27:26) Jeremiah pronounces a curse upon any one who refuses to hear (obey) the words of the covenant (v. 3). The covenant to which Jeremiah alludes is that ancient covenant which God had made with the Israelites when He brought them forth from the land of Egypt. That trying and bitter experience of bondage in Egypt is metaphorically called the "furnace of iron" i.e., a furnace used for smelting iron. As the captivity of the past was a furnace of affliction even so would be the captivity of the future (Isaiah 48:10).

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 and observe the individual commands which he had given to them. Israel's unique relationship to God would continue only so long as the nation was obedient (v. 4). The land

promises made to the Patriarchs were also conditional. They would continue to dwell in that land flowing with milk and honey only if they continued to be faithful to the covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 7:8ff; 8:18ff.).

In Deuteronomy Moses instructed the children of Israel to gather at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim in Canaan and 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." (Deuteronomy 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! (v. 5). "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.

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. His object is to influence the people to obey the recently discovered law of God (v. 6). The 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 (v. 7). The phrase "rising early and testifying," a favorite expression of Jeremiah, means to earnestly and incessantly undertake a task. 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 man doing whatever he set his heart to do. As a result, all of the penalties for covenant breaking stipulated in the law of Moses had come upon the people (v. 8).

B. Exposure of the Conspiracy 11:9-17

TRANSLATION

(9) And the LORD said unto me: Conspiracy is found among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (10) They have returned to the iniquities of their first fathers who refused to listen to My words, and they walked after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers. (11) Therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to bring unto them a calamity which they will not be able to escape; and they will cry unto Me but I will not hearken unto them. (12) And the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall go and cry unto the gods to whom they continue to make offerings, but they shall utterly fail to save them in the time of their calamity. (13) For according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah, and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have made altars to Shame, altars for making offering to Baal. (14) But as for you, do not pray on behalf of this people and do not raise up a cry and prayer on their behalf; for I will not hear in the time of their calling unto Me, because of their calamity. (15) What business does My beloved have in My house since she commits treachery? Will a multitude (of sacrifices) and holy flesh remove (sin) from you When you do evil then you rejoice. (16) The LORD has given you the name "a green olive tree, beautiful, with well-formed fruit." At the noise of great tumult He has kindled a fire against it and its branches are broken. (17) For the LORD of host, who planted you, has spoken evil against you because of the evil of the house of Israel and Judah, which they have committed to their

own harm in order to provoke Me by offering to the Baal.

COMMENTS

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 and evident revolt against God. The men of Judah were encouraging one another to engage in apostasy and idolatry and this in the eyes of God constituted a conspiracy (v. 9). For awhile under the influence of the godly king 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," the Israelites of the wilderness period and the period of the Judges. Like their forefathers the present generation has walked after other gods to serve them. The house of Judah as well as the house of Israel had violated the terms of the ancient covenant made at Sinai (v. 10). Rebellion against the crown brings inevitable punishment. In that hour of calamity the men of Judah will desperately try to call upon God but He will not be inclined to answer their prayers (v. 11). They shall turn in that time of crisis to the gods they have continued to worship;¹ but these man-made gods shall be powerless to save (v. 12). Every city had its tutelary deity. Altars to Shame, i.e., Baal could be found on every street of Jerusalem (v. 13). Like the men of Athens the population of Jerusalem was very religious. But their religiosity would not save them from the wrath of the God of judgment.

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. The Hebrew here uses

1. The Hebrew participle suggests that even while they were crying to God they continued to make offerings to their gods.

a participle which implies that God will continue to refrain from hearing no matter how hard or long the people might cry unto Him (v. 14). Because of her adulterous apostasy God's "beloved," the nation Judah, no longer has any business in the House of God. As long as the nation continues in this treachery no amount of sacrifices will be able to remove their sin. Sacrifice without repentance and contrition is valueless. Far from feeling any remorse or shame because of their evil the people of Judah actually rejoiced in wrong doing (v. 15). In earlier days God had regarded Israel as beautiful green olive tree because the nation had produced the finest fruit. The olive tree is one of the most hardy and productive trees of Palestine. But that tree is now worthless. The branches are dead and unfruitful. 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 (v. 16). The Lord of hosts, who had planted that olive tree, has the power to also uproot it and 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 have provoked God by offering sacrifices to Baal. The Lord has therefore pronounced evil or calamity against His people. One branch, Israel, had already been destroyed by the Assyrian empire. The second branch, Judah, is about to experience the same fate at the hands of the Chaldeans.

II. THE PLOT AGAINST THE PROPHET

11:18-23

Jeremiah was to suffer much during his ministry. At times his enemies almost got the best of him. But God was faithful to His promise to deliver Jeremiah from his enemies. In the present paragraph Jeremiah experiences his first personal crisis. He learns through releva-

tion that the men of his home town are plotting against him (11:18-23). These developments seem to catch Jeremiah by surprise and in great distress he cries 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. The Case Which He Presents 11:18-20

TRANSLATION

(18) And the LORD made known to me that I might know; then You showed me their deeds. (19) But I was like a pet lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they were plotting against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit and let us cut him off from the land of the living that his name be remembered no longer. (20) But, O LORD of host, who judges with righteousness, who tries the kidneys and heart, I will see Your vengeance upon them for I have revealed my case unto You.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah learned that the men of his home town were plotting against him through special revelation from God. God caused Jeremiah to correctly analyze and interpret the deceitful deeds of these cunning adversaries (v. 18). Jeremiah had never suspected that they were plotting against him. He was as unsuspecting and trusting as a lamb being led to the slaughter. As Jeremiah had been comparing Judah to a tree which God would destroy (vv. 16, 17) so the men of Anathoth contemptuously refer to Jeremiah as a tree which 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 life work, his prophetic ministry. If they

could slay Jeremiah there would be no descendant to perpetuate his name. Thus they schemed and plotted in an effort to find an opportunity to assassinate Jeremiah or have him publicly executed (v. 19).

Upon learning of the plot against him, Jeremiah turns immediately in prayer to God. As a petitioner before a court of law the prophet presents his case to the righteous Judge knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do right. God alone can test or try the "kidneys and heart," the innermost feelings and thoughts of a man. The Lord knows that Jeremiah has been utterly sincere in his ministry. There has been no guile or bitterness in his heart. On the other hand God knows the hypocrisy and the evil intent of the men of Anathoth. Jeremiah is confident of the verdict which the righteous Judge will render in his behalf. Divine vengeance will be poured out upon the evil schemers and thus the cause of God and His prophet will be vindicated. Jeremiah has only to "reveal" his case to God and the just verdict will be rendered (v. 20). God, of course, was aware of the plight of the prophet; Jeremiah is not telling God something which He did not already know. To "reveal" one's case is to publicly, formally plead one's case before the bar of justice.

When the conspiracy against Jeremiah was exposed the men of Anathoth openly and outwardly began to threaten the life of the prophet. Only if he ceased to prophesy in the name of the Lord would his life be spared (v. 21). Other prophets had been threatened. Amos was ordered to leave Bethel (Amos 7:10ff.). Elijah had to flee for his life to Mt. Horeb (I Kings 19:1-4). Some prophets had died because they fearlessly preached in the name of God. Zechariah was slain in the Temple (II Chronicles 24:20-22) and Isaiah, according to tradition, 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 everytime he uttered an oracle in the name of the Lord.

B. The Verdict Which He Receives 11:21-23

TRANSLATION

(21) Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life, saying, Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD and you will not die at our hand; (22) therefore thus says the LORD of host: Behold, I am about to punish them! The young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters will die by the famine; (23) and they shall not have a remnant, for I will bring calamity unto the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.

COMMENTS

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 young men of military age would die by the sword of the enemy. Younger children would die in the famine which would result because of prolonged siege (v. 22). No remnant of those conspirators¹ would survive the calamity which God was about to bring upon the land. The year of their visitation or punishment is upon them (v. 23). They shall not be able to escape the ruthless armies of Nebuchadnezzar.

1. 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.

C. The Prophet's Complaint 12:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) Righteous are you, O LORD, when I present my case unto You; yet I will speak to You with regard to matters of judgment. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do those who practice treachery live peacefully? (2) You have planted them, yea they have taken root; they grow, yea they produce fruit. Near are You in their mouth but far from their hearts. (3) And as for You, O LORD, You know me, You see me and You have tested my heart in respect to Yourself. Drag them away as sheep to the slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaying. (4) How long shall the land mourn and the vegetation of the whole field wither? Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it, the cattle and the birds are snatched away, because they say, He shall not see our end.

COMMENTS

Some time has elapsed since Jeremiah has 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 enemies of the prophet continue to prosper and live a life of ease while the circumstances of the prophet become ever more difficult. Jeremiah reopens his case in the heavenly courtroom. He admits that God is just and righteous yet he is perplexed and wishes to inquire concerning His judgments, i.e., His dealings with the sons of men. Even those who have received divine revelation and who have experienced the most intimate communion with the Almighty are not immune from moments of doubt and spiritual distress. And so the prophet asks: "Why do wicked men like those

in Anathoth prosper? Why do men who commit treacherous deeds (lit., treacherous committers of treachery) live in peace?" (v. 1). Jeremiah can only conclude that they 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 and schemes seem to be successful. While it is true that these men are outwardly pious, God is far distant from their hearts (v. 2).

Jeremiah not only disparages his foes as he stands before the bar of divine justice, he also defends himself. God knows his prophet; He observes him continuously (Hebrew imperfect). God knows that Jeremiah is not hypocritical when he speaks for and about God. How then can God allow His faithful servant to continue to be harassed by his adversaries? There is no doubt in the mind of the prophet what he would do if he were the judge: "Drag them away as sheep to the slaughter!" he cries (v. 3). Is Jeremiah here simply giving vent to the spirit of retaliation and vengeance? Is it crimes committed against Jeremiah personally that 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. Nature itself—the land, the vegetation, the cattle and the birds—suffer because of the wicked inhabitants of the land. The reference here is probably to some disciplinary drought which God has sent upon the land in order to cause the people to realize the folly of sin and turn from it. But if the land suffers, so do the few righteous ones who still live in it. As Jeremiah views the matter this is unjust. Furthermore the more vocal opposition had been taunting God's messenger by saying "he shall not see our end" (v. 4). They are confident that they will outlive Jeremiah. The predictions of this

prophet of doom are mere 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 calls for an immediate execution of the sentence of judgment against them. With these words Jeremiah has presented his case once again before God.

D. The Answer of God 12:5-6

TRANSLATION

(5) If with foot racers you have run and they have made you weary, then how shall you hotly contend (in a race) with horses? And if you are trusting in a peaceful land then what will you do in the pride of Jordan? (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.

COMMENTS

In verses 5 and 6 God replies to His prophet but not in the way which Jeremiah anticipated. God does not explain the delay in the execution of the sentence against the ungodly nor does He promise any cessation of hostilities against His servant. The divine reply is designed to correct the impatience of the prophet. "If you have become weary running with foot racers how will you be able to compete against horses?" God does not deny that Jeremiah has been having a time of it. Things have been bad; but they are going to get worse. If Jeremiah is not able to triumphantly face the relatively minor hostility of the present, how will he endure the severe trials of the future? Jeremiah is currently passing through a "land of peace" i.e., a land in which one is safe and 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 which 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. If Jeremiah was counting on, hoping for, confidently expecting to traverse a peaceful and safe land what would he do when faced with the dangers of the pride of Jordan? As one example of what lay ahead for the prophet, God reveals to him that even the members of his own family cannot be trusted. These relatives have plotted against him. They have "cried aloud" 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.

IV. THE PAIN OF GOD 12:7-13

TRANSLATION

(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. (8) My inheritance has become to Me like a lion in the woods; she has raised against Me her voice; therefore I hated her. (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. Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard; they have trodden underfoot My portion. They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. (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. (12) Upon

all the bare heights in the wilderness the spoilers have come; for the LORD has a sword which devours from one end of the land unto the other; so there is no safety for anyone. (13) They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns; they pained themselves, they have not profited. Be ashamed because of your increases, because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

COMMENTS

Most commentators have failed to note how 12:7-13 is related to its context. The passage is usually wrenched from its connection with the preceding prayer and treated as a separate unit from a much later period of the prophet's ministry. Cheyne, for example, feels that the passage is descriptive and not predictive and assigns it to the period of the guerrilla warfare against Jerusalem (II Kings 24:1, 2). The present writer believes that 12:7-13 is part of God's answer to the prayer of Jeremiah and therefore is to be assigned to the early years of Jehoiakim. This, of course, means that the passage is predictive. God is describing the destruction and desolation which will shortly befall His people. The future is known to God and therefore He 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 persecution and trial which he experiences is really nothing compared to what God must bear. In 12:7-13 one can feel the pain of God as He speaks of the ruination of "My house," "My inheritance," "My pleasant portion," and "the

beloved of My soul." 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 (v. 7). As the lion in the woods challenges those who come near, so Judah has 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" here in the absolute sense would be to contradict what has just been said, *viz.*, that Judah is the beloved of God (v. 7). "I hate her" is the strongest possible way of saying that God withdrew His love for Judah when He gave her into the power of her enemies. In astonishment God asks if Judah has become in respect to Him a many-colored bird of prey. Other birds of prey would gather about such a queer looking bird and pluck it to pieces. All the scavenger beasts of the field are bidden to come and join in devouring the strange looking bird (v. 9). In Isaiah 56:9 the wild beasts are symbolic of the heathen powers employed by God to chastise His people (cf. Ezekiel 34:5).

One can sense the pathos as God continues to describe what has and will befall the nation of Judah. Human shepherds, political rulers both foreign and native, have destroyed the vineyard of the Lord, Israel and Judah. By their actions they have made the pleasant portion of God, the land of Judah, a desolate wilderness (v. 10). Because he, i.e., the enemy, has made the land a desolation, the land mourns, unable to produce its fruit. The land mourns

"before Me," literally, upon me. Freedman suggests that this phrase be rendered "to My grief."¹ 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" (v. 11). Even in the most remote areas of the land the sword of divine judgment wielded by the enemy will do its deadly work. No one is safe from the spoiler (v. 12). Why will all of this tragedy befall Judah? By use of a common proverb Jeremiah gives the answer: "They have sown wheat, but they have reaped thorns." The leaders of Judah have plotted, schemed, planned, worked and invested in formulating what they believed to be an adequate national policy. Unfortunately they had planted their "wheat" without divine direction and consequently their harvest would be one of thorns, i.e., humiliation, ruin, destruction and death. Of such a harvest they would be ashamed for it clearly indicates that they are under the wrath of God (v. 13).

V. THE PREDICTION CONCERNING THE NATIONS 12:14-17

TRANSLATION

(14) Thus says the LORD concerning all my wicked neighbors who lay their hands on the inheritance which I caused My people Israel to inherit: Behold, I am about to pluck them up from their land, and the house of Judah I will uproot from their midst. (15) And it shall come to pass after I have plucked them up I shall again have compassion upon them and I shall cause them to return each one to his inheritance and each man to his land. (16) And it shall come to pass if they completely learn the ways

1. Freedman, *op cit.*, p. 90.

of My people to swear by My name, as the Lord lives, even as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up the midst of My people. (17) But if they do not hear, then I will uproot that nation, uprooting and destroying (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

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. In the present passage God speaks of the deportation (v. 14) and restoration of the foreign nations (v. 15). He then sets forth the alternative of conversion or condemnation which these nations will face (vv. 16, 17). The main thrust of this brief paragraph is that one day in the future foreign peoples will have the opportunity of being incorporated into the Covenant people.

What is the relationship of 12:14-17 to its context? Once again most commentators see no connection whatsoever between these words about foreign nations and what precedes. However it would seem that 12:14-17 is in fact 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 goes a step further. Jeremiah was greatly concerned about justice and judgment. God wants him to see the ultimate objective of that judgment. God wants Jeremiah to realize that judgment is not an end in itself but a

means to an end. The judgment will cleanse the nation of Judah. They will again be the people of God. Even the heathen, the most wicked, will have an opportunity to become part of the community of faith. Jeremiah wants the wicked destroyed immediately, permanently; God wants them cleansed, restored, redeemed. Thus in response to Jeremiah's bitter prayer of complaint the prophet came to learn much of God's judgment, the pain of it and the purpose of it.

God's neighbors who border on the land of Judah will not escape divine judgment. Judah's land belongs to God and therefore Judah's neighbors are God's neighbors. The various states of Syria-Palestine—Edom, Moab, Philistia and the rest—time and again had made encroachments upon the territory of God. For this they will be "plucked up" i.e., deported, carried away into captivity. Judah too shall experience this deportation at the hands of the Babylonian armies (v. 14). But God's purpose in bringing this judgment upon both Judah and the nations is that they might experience His salvation. After the judgment God will have compassion upon these displaced peoples and will restore them 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 B.C. 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.

Not only does the Lord promise the nations restoration, but He also holds out to them the prospects of conversion. If these heathen people completely and thoroughly learn the right ways of God's people, if they are truly converted to the worship of the living God, they will be recognized and blessed by Him. They will dwell "in the

midst of My people" for by their conversion they actually become part of the people of God. One specific criteria of their conversion is named: They must swear by the name of the Lord. To use the name of a deity in an oath implied recognition of the claims of that deity. These heathen must be as zealous for the claims of the Lord as they once were for their god Baal (v. 16). On the other hand, if these nations refuse to hear, i.e., obey the Lord then God will uproot and continually bring destruction upon them (v. 17).

VI. THE PRIDE OF THE NATION 13:1-27

Arrogant, willful, stubborn pride was at the root of all Judah's sins. In chapter thirteen Jeremiah issues five stern warnings concerning pride and its consequences. Pride results in deterioration (vv. 1-11), drunkenness (vv. 12-14), darkness (vv. 15-17), dishonor (vv. 18, 19), and disgrace (vv. 20-27).

A. WARNING: Pride Results in Deterioration 13:1-11

Prophets frequently relied upon object lessons to attract attention to their message and 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. By means of an action parable (vv. 1-7) and the application of that parable (vv. 8-11) Jeremiah forced the nation to see the ultimate consequences of their sinful pride.

1. *The action parable* (13:1-7)

TRANSLATION

(1) Thus said the LORD unto me: Go and purchase for yourself a girdle of linen and put it about your

loins and do not put it into water. (2) And I acquired the girdle according to the word of the LORD and I put it about my loins. (3) And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, Take the girdle which you acquired which is upon your loins. Arise and go to the Euphrates and hide it there in a rock crevice. (5) And I went and hid it at the Euphrates as the LORD commanded me. (6) And it came to pass at the end of many days that the LORD said to me, Arise, go to the Euphrates and take from that place the girdle which I commanded you to hide there. (7) And I went to the Euphrates and dug and took the girdle from the place in which I had hidden it; and, behold, the girdle was ruined and good for nothing.

COMMENTS

The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and instructs him to purchase a girdle or loin-cloth. The loin-cloth was a strip of cloth, sometimes leather, wound several times around the waist with its ends hanging down over the thigh. The loin-cloth served the purpose of holding up the loose upper garment when walking or working. Jeremiah is to wear his new linen loin-cloth both to attract the attention of people and to provide the basis for the symbolism which he will later explain. The prophet is specifically instructed not to put his new loin-cloth in water (v. 1). Various explanations of this prohibition have been offered. Some think he was not to wash the garment; he was to wear it until it became filthy. Others think he was not to soak the garment in order to soften it and make it more comfortable for wearing. Doubtlessly Jeremiah was puzzled by this instruction to purchase and wear a new loin-cloth. But he obeyed the

Lord in full confidence that further revelation would be forthcoming (v. 2).

After wearing the garment about for some time Jeremiah received additional instruction from the Lord (v. 3). He is to take his new loin-cloth and hide it at the Euphrates river or perhaps the town of Parah in the crevice of a rock (v. 4). Once again Jeremiah complied with the commandment of the Lord even though he must have thought it very strange (v. 5). After many days Jeremiah received still further instruction from the Lord. He is to retrieve his loin-cloth (v. 6). 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 loin-cloth. Naturally the garment was moldy, rotted, filthy and utterly worthless (v. 7).

Commentators are divided into two major schools of thought as regards this episode. Some feel that the story has no foundation in fact. The account is to be interpreted as a vision or perhaps a parable which was related for purely didactic purposes. But if this were the case, would Jeremiah have represented the events as actually happening? Other commentators feel that this was 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 feel that two trips to the Euphrates river some 300-400 miles north of Anathoth is out of the question. These scholars translate the Hebrew word *perathab*, "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 feel that in the Hebrew text at least, a trip to the Eu-

phrates 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 returned later to retrieve the tattered garment. For additional comment see the special note which follows.

SPECIAL NOTE

JEREMIAH'S TRIP TO THE EUPHRATES

As one surveys the various commentaries on the Book of Jeremiah he will discover five basic arguments which are advanced to support the position taken in this work that Jeremiah actually made a trip to the Euphrates river during his ministry. Some of these arguments have little if any weight. In order to aid the student in separating the wheat from the chaff as he peruses the various commentaries on the book, the following critique of the various arguments is offered.

ARGUMENT ONE: Jeremiah was forced to go into hiding after the fifth year of Jehoiakim (36:9-32) and probably would have been secure only in the far north. Another prophet who tried to take refuge from Jehoiakim in Egypt was extradited and executed (Jeremiah 26:20-23). **RESPONSE:** The present narrative gives not the slightest 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

JEREMIAH'S TRIP TO EUPHRATES

activities exist. Does every silent gap indicate that Jeremiah was absent from Jerusalem? Even if the prophet was 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 B.C. and 597 B.C. Those Jews who deserted to the Chaldeans during the siege would certainly have been interrogated by their captors. Since Jeremiah was perhaps the one most responsible for those desertions his name must have been frequently mentioned. The Chaldeans knew Jeremiah by reputation only.

ARGUMENT FOUR: The Euphrates is "the essential point of the parable" representing the corrupting religious influence of Mesopotamia on Judah.¹ 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. Thus the word should be translated and thus the word should be understood in this passage. RESPONSE: This is perhaps the best argument to back the position that Jeremiah actually made a

1. Elmer A. Leslie, *Jeremiah Chronologically Arranged, Translated, and Interpreted* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), pp. 86, 87.

trip to the Euphrates river. However even this argument is not without its difficulties. The Hebrew word *Pbrath* 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 *Pbrath* occurs in the Hebrew Bible. Yet the very fact that in three passages *Pbrath* 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 *Pbrath* mean anything other than the Euphrates river.

After studying all the arguments on both sides of the controversy concerning where Jeremiah hid his waistcloth the present writer has opted for the view that Jeremiah actually made a trip to the Euphrates river. The alternate view that he buried the waistcloth near his home town at Parah cannot be ruled out altogether. The distance to the Euphrates still remains a problem for those who hold the prophet went there. Yet it should be remembered that the prophets often did curious and sometimes almost impossible acts in order to dramatize their message.

2. *The application of the parable (13:8-11)*

TRANSLATION

(8) And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,
(9) Thus says the LORD: Like this I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.
(10) This evil people who refuse to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart and follow after other gods to serve them and bow down to them shall be like this girdle which is good for nothing. (11) For as a girdle 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 the

LORD), to be My people and a name, a praise and a glory; but they would not listen.

COMMENTS

When Jeremiah returned from the Euphrates he carried or perhaps even attempted to wear his tattered loin-cloth through the streets of Jerusalem. Naturally people would ask about the filthy piece of cloth and then Jeremiah would relate the story narrated above. Then he would begin to make the application of the parable. Judah and Jerusalem were guilty of sinful pride and self-exaltation. But their pride is about to be marred, tattered and torn, like the loin-cloth (v. 9). God will rend Judah to pieces as easily as a rotten piece of cloth is torn. Perhaps as Jeremiah uttered these words he actually tore the old loin-cloth to illustrate his point. He then describes the pride of Judah in more detail. That pride manifested itself in refusal to hear i.e, obey the word of God. They wanted no part of the old stern God of Sinai with His prohibitions and restrictions. That God 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 and at the same time condone their sensuality. For this reason the children of Israel began to follow after, bow down to and serve the gods of Canaan. The corrupting influence of idolatry had slowly eaten away at the strength of the nation until finally the nation, like Jeremiah's loin-cloth, had become utterly worthless, fit for nothing but destruction (v. 10).

In this action parable Jeremiah represents God and the lovely new linen loin-cloth represents the Covenant people, both Judah and Israel. In the ancient Near East the loin-cloth was the principal ornament of a man's dress. This article of clothing was one of the most prized

possessions of a man.¹ As Jeremiah had chosen his waistcloth so God had selected Israel from among all the nations as his special possession. Three times Jeremiah notes that the loin-cloth was worn close to the body. The prophet wishes to emphasize the intimate and beautiful relationship which had once existed between God and His chosen people. Israel was His people, the means by which God's name would be made known throughout the world. They were a source of praise and glory to God. But as time went on Israel would not obey the word of God. They continued to deteriorate spiritually and morally until they were of no more value to God (v. 11).

THE PARABLE OF THE RUINED WAISTCLOTH

13:1-11

Jeremiah selected and purchased his waistcloth as a personal possession.

Jeremiah wore his waistcloth about his waist for a time.

The waistcloth was not to be washed but worn till filthy.

When removed from the waist the waistcloth no longer was performing its proper function.

The garment when removed from the person of Jeremiah degenerated rapidly.

Jeremiah journeyed far to bury the waistcloth.

The waistcloth was buried near the Euphrates river.

When retrieved the waistcloth was damaged beyond repair.

The rotted garment could be easily ripped and torn.

God selected Israel as His special possession.

Israel cleave to God in intimate fellowship for a time.

God maintained his relationship to Israel until the nation became utterly filthy with sin.

When Israel departed from the Lord she was no longer fulfilling her function in the divine plan.

When Israel turned her back on God she rapidly deteriorated.

Israel had traveled a long way from God.

Israel would be carried into exile to lose its glory and be despised among the nations.

Judah in Jeremiah's day was marred beyond recognition, good for nothing.

God will rip asunder the tattered remains of the nation.

1. When Jonathan made a covenant with David he gave him his robe, his armor "even his sword and his bow and his girdle" (I Samuel 18:4).

B. WARNING: Pride Causes Drunkenness 13:12-14

TRANSLATION

(12) And you shall say unto them this word: Thus says the LORD God of Israel: Every bottle shall be filled with wine. Then they shall say unto you, Do we not know very well that every bottle shall be filled with wine? (13) Then you shall say unto them, Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land and the kings that sit on David's throne and the priests and the prophets and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with drunkenness. (14) And I will dash them against one another, the fathers and sons together (oracle of the LORD). I will not have mercy nor will I have pity nor will I have compassion to prevent them from being destroyed.

COMMENTS

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 which 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 expect 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." 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? (v. 12).

Jeremiah did have something more to say and when the crowd had finished its laughter he drove home his point. 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). They will be filled with drunkenness i.e., irrationality and helplessness. When men depart from the Lord they blunder, stagger and fall like a Skid Row drunk. 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 (v. 13).

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 here is probably to the internal confusion within Judah at the time she is under attack by her enemies. But God will have no pity upon these fallen sots and he will not intervene to prevent them from being destroyed (v. 14). The grace period has ended. Those who have through the years rejected the infinite mercy of God will now face His fierce wrath.

C. WARNING: Pride Brings On Darkness 13:15-17

TRANSLATION

(15) Hear and give ear! Do not be so high and mighty; for the LORD has spoken. (16) Give to the LORD your God glory 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 it pitch dark. (17) But if you do not hear it, in secret places my soul will weep because of pride; yea it will weep bitterly and my eye will flow with tears because the LORD's flock has been taken captive.

COMMENTS

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 thy servant heareth." Jeremiah urges his hearers to give glory to God. Men give glory to God when they acknowledge His claims and submit to His will. Life at best is a rocky, cregy 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. But when the day of grace ends and the sunshine of God's benevolent protection sinks over the horizon then those dangerous mountain paths become even more difficult to find and follow. The traveler hopes, wishes, longs for more light; but the sky grows darker and darker. Finally impenetrable darkness envelops the traveler and he is caught in the Stygian

darkness with no Guide. "While the day of grace remains," pleads Jeremiah, "give God glory. Before the midnight hour of divine judgment, humble yourselves, listen to His word" (v. 16).

If the men of Judah refuse to humble themselves and 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 stern and uncompromising messages was a broken heart. "My soul will weep" i.e., I will weep because of the pride which prevents these men from hearing the word of God. He 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 had already taken place (v. 17).

D. WARNING: Pride Leads to Dishonor 13:18, 19

TRANSLATION

(18) Say to the king and the queen-mother, Sit down in abasement for your headdress, your glorious crown has come down. (19) The cities of the south have been shut up and there is no one to open them. All Judah is carried captive, everyone is taken captive.

COMMENTS

Three problems face the interpreter of verses 18-19. 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) would be Nehushta, the widow of Jehoiakim and mother of Jehoiachin (II Kings 24:8). In the kingdom of Judah the position of queen-

mother seems to have been a position of no little prestige and dignity. 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 (I Kings 15:13). Athaliah was able to use this position as a stepping stone to the throne (II Kings 11).

The second problem is to identify the tone of this passage. 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. One needs to hear the voice inflection, and see the facial expression in order to be assured that sarcasm is being employed. Even then when sarcasm is used artistically the listener may ponder many moments before he is sure that this rhetorical device has indeed been employed. And if sarcasm is difficult to detect in speech how much more in writing! However a comparison with the sincere invitation to repent in verse 15 would lead one to conclude that verse 18 falls into the category of a sarcastic imperative. The meaning then would be that the king and queen-mother would be dethroned and dishonored, reduced to the status of commoners. They had refused to humble themselves before God. Therefore God would debase and dishonor them in the sight of all men. The royal crown and headdress of which they were so proud would topple from their brow. If the king is Jehoiachin the fulfillment of this prediction is recorded in II Kings 24:15.

The third problem concerns the tense of this utterance. Was Jeremiah predicting something which would take place in the future or was he describing what had recently happened? 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 had already happened. If verse 18

is indeed sarcastic imperative then it is predictive for such is the nature of this rhetorical device. In the case of verse 19 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. 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 B.C. If verse 19 is predictive it could be dated to almost any year between 609 and 587 B.C.

E. WARNING: Pride is Punished by Disgrace

13:20-27

TRANSLATION

(20) Lift up your eyes and see them who come from the north. Where is the flock that was given to you, your glorious flock? (21) What will you say when He shall appoint over you for a head the ones you trained to be friends to you. Will not pains seize you like a woman in childbirth? (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. (23) Can an Ethiopian change his skin? and a leopard his spots? Then also you shall be able to do good who are accustomed to evil. (24) And I will scatter them as the chaff that passes away before the wind of the wilderness. (25) This is your lot, the portion measured unto you from Me (oracle of the LORD); because you have forgotten Me and trusted in falsehood. (26) And also I will lift up your skirts over your face and shame shall be seen.

(27) I have seen your adulteries, your neighings, the lewdness of your harlotry, and your abominations upon the hills in the field. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! You will not be clean; how long shall it yet be?

COMMENTS

Verses 20-27 are related topically if not chronologically with the preceding two verses. In verse 19 all the outlying districts of Judah are depicted as having fallen to the enemy; only Jerusalem remains. Verses 20-27 are addressed to Jerusalem. The daughter of Zion¹ is urged to take note of the invading armies from the north. Then 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) Where is the glorious flock that was given to you? (v. 20). In this question Jerusalem, the capital, 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 has, of course, already been answered in the preceding verse. All the cities of Judah have fallen under enemy control. (2) What will you say when He, i.e. God, shall appoint as your head those you had cultivated as friends? The word translated "head" can also mean "poison." Perhaps a deliberate play on words is intended. Those you thought to be your friends and allies, those whose friendship you labored so hard to secure, will become your head, master, or perhaps, your poison. (3) At that time will you not experience the terror, pain and agony of a woman in childbirth? (v. 21). What a terrible and frightening thing it must be to see friends turn away or turn against one in an hour of need.

1. 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.

(4) 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 shall cry out, "Why has all this happened to me?" Jeremiah can answer that question. He had been giving the answer to that question for many years. Jerusalem must suffer disgrace and humiliation 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. Hosea 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 and she will be forced to walk barefoot into captivity (v. 22). What disgrace, what humiliation for the proud daughter of Zion!

(5) The fifth rhetorical question is intended to offer further reason for the impending humiliation of Jerusalem: Can an Ethiopian change his skin and a leopard¹ his spots? Obviously not! Just so it is impossible for the people of Judah to do good, to obey the commands of God. Men who are unwilling to humble themselves and submit to God can do nothing good (cf. Romans 8:7,8). The inhabitants of Judah were accustomed i.e., taught or trained in the ways of evil. They were in fact students of evil! It was impossible that they could do anything to please God so long as they were in rebellion against Him.

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 would be scattered as the chaff 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

1. 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 *Illustrated World of the Bible*, op. cit., III, 109.

away the worthless particles of chaff (v. 24). 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 (v. 25). Jerusalem's punishment is that of the adulteress caught in the act. She is stripped that her shame might be exposed to all. This judgment is the doing of God and that is emphasized by the emphatic position of the first person pronoun (v. 26). God knows of Jerusalem's adulteries. The people of Judah are noted for their "neighings," their passionate cravings for illegitimate objects of worship. The lewdness of the pagan rites practiced on the hills of the land He has observed. In view of all this sin and corruption Jeremiah can only pronounce a "woe" on Jerusalem. God for years had been offering the scarlet daughter of Zion cleansing and pardon 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 which God offers (v. 27).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER NINE

I. Facts to Master

1. The metaphorical description of Egyptian bondage (11:4).
2. The basic stipulation of the Sinai covenant (11:4, 7)
3. The number of the gods of Judah and Jerusalem (11:13).
4. A striking metaphor used to describe the apostate nation (11:16, 17).
5. The Canaanite deity so popular in Judah (11:13, 17).
6. Those who were plotting against Jeremiah (11:18-21; 12:6).
7. The question which Jeremiah raises before God (12:1, 2).

JEREMIAH

8. Others who will taste of the judgment of God (12:14).
9. That which Jeremiah is told to purchase and wear (13:1).
10. Place to which Jeremiah was to take and hide the girdle (13:4).
11. That with which God would fill the inhabitants of the land (13:13).
12. Can the Ethiopian change his _____ or the leopard his _____ (13:23)?

II. Question to Ponder

1. What is the background of Jeremiah 11:1-17? To what covenant does Jeremiah refer?
2. What is a covenant? What kind of covenants existed in the ancient world?
3. Does God hear all prayers? See 11:11. Why are prayers sometimes unanswered? What does God think of "fire escape" religion?
4. Should we ever stop praying for lost souls? See 11:14
5. How did Jeremiah come to know of the plot of the men of Anathoth against him? See 11:18
6. Does the Bible answer the question which Jeremiah raises in 12:1? How does God answer him? 12:5-6
7. What is meant by the expression "he shall not see our latter end"? 12:4
8. Is it right for Jeremiah to pray for the destruction of his enemies? See 12:3b
9. In what sense could Judah be referred to as "My house" i.e., the house of God? 12:7
10. What is the significance of the "speckled bird of prey" figure? 12:9
11. How does 12:13 show the blight of sin in the life of a nation?

CONSPIRACIES—GOD AND HIS PROPHET

12. Who were some of the "evil neighbors" against whom Jeremiah uttered prophecies? 12:14 See chapters 47-49
13. How can God use foreign nations to punish Israel and then punish those nations for having attacked His people? See 12:14
14. What is meant by the phrase "sware by My name"? What glorious future does Jeremiah see for Gentiles who are converted? 12:15-16
15. What did the new girdle which Jeremiah wore symbolize? What does the ragged girdle symbolize? 13:1-11
16. What is the background of the statement made by Jeremiah in 13:12? How does his audience react? How does Jeremiah use this simple truism as a point of departure for a solemn message?
17. Can a sinner ever drift beyond the limits of God's compassion and pity? See 13:14
18. What is the date and background of 13:18-27? Who is the queenmother mentioned here?
19. On the basis of 13:23 what would you say about Jeremiah's doctrine of sin?

CHAPTER TEN

NATIONAL DISTRESS AND PROPHETIC DISCOURAGEMENT

14:1—17:27

Sometime during the ministry of Jeremiah a terrible drought or series of droughts (the Hebrew word is plural) struck Palestine (14:1). This national crisis forms the background of most if not all of the materials in chapters 14-17. No date for the drought is given. But since in these chapters Judah's punishment is still future and since no reference is made to the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. it is likely that these events transpired in the reign of Jehoiakim. Droughts were not uncommon in Old Testament Palestine and numerous references to them occur in the Scriptures.¹ In the Book of Deuteronomy the Lord threatens to use drought as one of the disciplinary disasters which He will bring upon His people if they are unfaithful to Him (Deuteronomy 11:10-17; 28:23-24). Growing out of this crisis is a personal crisis—the second one—in the ministry of Jeremiah. Chapter 17 contains a series of utterances more appropriately called Jeremiah's sayings than Jeremiah's sermons. Perhaps these sayings were excerpts from the preaching which Jeremiah did during the drought.

I. PROPHETIC INTERCESSION 14:1—15:9

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

1. Genesis 12:10; 26:1; 42:1-2; Ruth 1:1; II Samuel 21:1; I Kings 8:37.

prayer without prior repentance on the part of the sinners is futile and useless.

A. The Description of the Drought 14:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah concerning the matters of the drought. (2) Judah mourns; her gates languish. They make themselves black to the ground and the cry of Jerusalem has gone up. (3) And their nobles have sent their inferiors for water. They have come to the pits, and have not found water; their vessels return empty; they are ashamed and dejected, they cover their heads. (4) Because of the ground which is dismayed—for there is no rain in the land—the ploughmen are bewildered, they cover their head. (5) For even the doe in the field gives birth and forsakes her kid because there is no grass. (6) And the wild asses stand on the bare hills, they gasp for air like jackals; their eyes fail because there is no grass.

COMMENTS

Whether or not verses 2-6 are to be considered a part of Jeremiah's prayer or a background to it is not clear. In either case these verses are a masterful description of the national plight created by the drought. This is Hebrew poetry of the first rank.

In verse 2 Jeremiah pictures the whole nation engaged in lamentation. Even the gates of cities are said to be participating, perhaps 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.¹ The nobles would send their inferiors (literally, their little ones) to the cisterns for water but they would return with empty vessels. Ashamed, dejected these servants would return to their master with heads covered as a sign of deepest mourning² (v. 3). 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 (v. 4). Even the wild animals are suffering in the drought. The tender doe is starving. Her natural affection for her young is forgotten as she desperately seeks food for herself (v. 5). The rough wild ass, accustomed to the harsh realities of desert life, 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 (v. 6).

B. The Prophet's Intercession Rejected 14:7-12

TRANSLATION

(7) If our iniquities testified against us act, O LORD, for the sake of Your name; for our backslidings are many, against You we have sinned. (8) O Hope of Israel! His Savior in the time of distress! Why should You be like a stranger in the land and like a wayfaring man who has turned aside for lodging. (9) Why have You become like a man astounded, like a mighty man that cannot save? But You are in our midst, O LORD, and we are called by Your name; do not let us down. (10) Thus says the LORD to this people: Thus they love to wander! Their feet they have not refrained. Therefore the LORD takes no pleasure in them. Now He will remember their iniquity that He may punish their sins. (11) And the LORD said unto me, Do not pray for the

1. See II Samuel 13:19; 21:10; Job 2:12; Lamentation 2:10.

2. II Samuel 15:30; 19:4; Esther 6:12.

good of this people. (12) When they fast I will not hear their cry and when they offer up burnt offerings and meal offerings I will not accept them; but with sword and famine and pestilence I am about to consume them.

COMMENTS

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" (v. 7). He is asking God to act in His own self-interest. Should God allow His people to be done in by the drought the heathen would 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.

The prophet still trusts in God in spite of the terrible drought. He addresses the Lord as "the hope of Israel" and as "his (i.e., Israel's) Savior in the time of distress." The concept of God as savior goes back to the period of the Judges when God would raise up saviors or deliverers for His people (Judges 3:9; Nehemiah 9:27). King Jehoahaz who was able to break the yoke of Aramaen oppression is also called a savior (II Kings 13:5, 25). God is first called savior in II Samuel 22:3, a psalm attributed to David. The name savior was one of the favorites of the prophet Isaiah who uses it at least eight times. God in the past has proved Himself to be a savior to Israel and Jeremiah is confident that God can and will so reveal Himself again in the present crisis.

While Jeremiah believes in God's ability to save he is unable to comprehend why the Lord delays His intervention on behalf of Israel. Two questions are directed to God both of which are in reality appeals for divine aid. (1) "Why have You, Lord, become to us like a stranger or wayfaring man?" (v. 8). One who merely passes through a country 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. (2) "Why have You become like a mighty warrior who is dumbfounded?" Jeremiah knows that God has the power to intervene; but God seems to have become like a soldier who in battle becomes terrified to the point of paralysis. The Septuagint renders the phrase "like a man in a deep sleep." The point is that God has not acted on behalf of His people and Jeremiah cannot understand it. He 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, "Do not let us down" (v. 9).

God's reply to the praying prophet is straightforward and blunt. He does not deny that He has in fact abandoned His people. But He has forsaken them because they first abandoned Him. They love to wander after other gods and neither the national leaders nor the people themselves have made any effort to curb that quest for idolatry. As a result God cannot accept or countenance such a people. The Lord reminds Jeremiah of the threat he had earlier spoken concerning Israel: "Now He will remember their iniquity that He may punish their sins" (v. 10). In view of the fact the judgment has already been decreed it is useless for Jeremiah to continue to pray for his people (v. 11). Nor will God be influenced by the ritualistic cries for help which might accompany the

burnt offerings and meal offerings. God is not ruling out the possibility of sincere repentance for later, in the eleventh hour of the final siege, Jeremiah still holds out to the people the possibility of survival if they will only submit to the Lord. The thrust here is that God knows the heart of a man and He will not accept outward forms in place of genuine repentance. Ritual will not work any longer. God is about to consume them with war and all of its accompanying calamities (v. 12).

C. The Prophet's Second Petition Rejected 14:13-18

TRANSLATION

(13) And I said, Ah Lord GOD, Behold, the prophets are saying to them, You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine; for I will give you peace in this place. (14) And the LORD said unto me: Falsehood the prophets are prophesying in My name. I did not send them nor did I command them, nor did I speak unto them. A lying vision and divination and a worthless thing and the deceit of their heart they prophesy to you. (15) Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets 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: By sword and famine those prophets shall be destroyed. (16) But the people to whom they prophesied shall be cast into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword and there will be none to bury them, neither they, nor their wives, nor their sons nor their daughters; and I shall pour out upon them their evil. (17) Now tell them this word: My eyes shall drip tears night and day and they shall not cease for the virgin daughter of my people is utterly shattered, a very grievous

wound. (18) If I go out to the field then behold, the slain of the sword! And if I go to the city, then behold, those who are famished with famine. For both the prophet and priest will rove about in a land they do not know.

COMMENTS

In spite of God's refusal to hearken to his first petition Jeremiah prays again on behalf of his people. The words of the prayer itself are in the form of a complaint. He calls God's attention to the false prophets who are deceiving and misleading the people. These influential religious leaders were saying that God will never bring the sword and famine upon Judah as predicted over and over again 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 which 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 verse 13 is for God to be merciful to the people as a whole in view of the fact that they have been misled by their leaders.

The Lord concurs with Jeremiah's evaluation. The false prophets are guilty of speaking falsehood to the nation in the name of the Lord. God did not send them, command them or speak to them. They are acting strictly on their own initiative. Their visions of peace and prosperity are spurious and utterly worthless. They themselves are deceived and consequently that which they prophesy is deception. The Lord likens what these prophets are saying to divination (v. 14). It may well 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 here as a means of showing the emptiness and futility of the message of these men.

The Lord assures his perplexed prophet that the false prophets will be punished for the role they have played in misleading the nation. The punishment which they experience will be most appropriate. They have said that sword and famine will not come upon the land. Therefore they shall meet their death by sword and famine (v. 15). But judgment will also fall upon the people of the land. Though they have been misled they are not excused from their iniquity and their sin. Those who die defending Jerusalem and those who die of the famine brought on by the siege of that city will simply be cast in the streets. No one will have the courage, inclination or strength to bury their dead bodies. 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 (v. 16).

In view of the fact that such a dire fate awaits both the leaders and the inhabitants of Jerusalem God instructs Jeremiah to go and speak a lamentation to them. The prophet is actually warning the people through this dirge. Jeremiah describes his uncontrollable weeping over the impending destruction of the "virgin daughter of my people." It is generally thought that Jerusalem is called a "virgin" because hitherto no enemy had completely conquered her.¹ Shortly she would suffer a grievous wound from which she would not recover (v. 17). Projecting himself into the not too distant future Jeremiah describes the situation that will exist when the siege of Jerusalem begins. Outside the safety of the city walls

1. Freedman, *op cit.*, pp. 103-104.

the sword of Babylon has already done its deadly work. Inside Jerusalem people are starving to death. The prophet and priest and every other leader for that matter will be forced to rove about (literally, peddle their wares) in a foreign land (v. 18). Some commentators connect the verb translated here "to rove about" with a verb in Aramaic which means to go about like a beggar. If this be the meaning then these ex-nobles will go begging their way into the unknown land.¹

D. Jeremiah's Third Petition Rejected 14:19-22

TRANSLATION

(19) Will You completely reject Judah? Will Your soul loath Zion? Why have You smitten us when there is not healing for us? We hope for peace but there was no good and for a time of healing and behold, terror. (20) We know, O LORD, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers for we have sinned against You. (21) For the sake of Your name do not spurn, do not demean Your glorious throne. Remember, do not forget Your covenant with us. (22) Is there any among the vanities of the nations who can produce rain? Can the heavens give showers? Are not You He, O LORD our God? And we wait for You for You have made all these things.

COMMENTS

Twice he has had his intercession rejected by God but still Jeremiah prays. With increased fervency he asks God how He can utterly reject Judah, how He can smite Judah and provide no divine healing for the wound. Misled by the false prophets the nation was confident of

1. Cheyne, *op cit.*, I, 356.

peace and a time of healing. But the drought continues. Nothing appeared on the horizon but the terror that accompanies any national calamity (v. 19). Jeremiah readily admits the sin of the nation. They are worthy of chastisement. The iniquity of Judah stretches back over the centuries to the fathers, the early ancestors of the nation (v. 20).

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 a fourfold appeal for the intervention of God. (1) He asks God not to spurn the nation "for the sake of Your name." When Israel suffers humiliation, the reputation of Israel's God also suffers in the eyes of the nations. A similar appeal was made by Moses in the earlier history of the nation (Exodus 32:11-12; Numbers 14:13-16). (2) Jeremiah then asks God not to demean, disgrace or dishonor His glorious throne, either Jerusalem (Jeremiah 3:17) or the Temple (Jeremiah 17:12; Ezekiel 43:7). According to the Old Testament the Lord dwells between the cherubim in the Temple (Isaiah 37:16; Psalms 80:1; 99:1). (3) Jeremiah urges God to remember His covenant with Israel even though the people have broken their side of that covenant (v. 21). (4) Jeremiah's final basis for appeal is simply 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 heavenly bodies which were the object of worship in Mesopotamia and Canaan as well certainly could not send the rain. It is the Lord, the God of Israel Who created the heavenly bodies and Who alone controls the processes of nature. He is the only hope for the nation. Therefore Jeremiah, speaking for his sinful people, affirms "we wait for You" (v. 22).

E. The Final Rejection of Prophetic Intercession

15:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) And the LORD said unto me: If Moses and Samuel were standing before Me, I would have no affection for this people. Cast them away from My presence and let them go out. (2) And it shall come to pass if they say unto you, Where shall we go? Then you shall say unto them: Thus says the LORD: Those for death to death; those for the sword to the sword; those for famine to famine; and those for exile to the exile. (3) I have appointed against them four types of punishment (oracle of the LORD): the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field to devour and to destroy. (4) And I will make them a sight that will horrify all the kingdoms of the earth on account of Manasseh son of Hezekiah king of Judah for that which he did in Jerusalem. (5) For who shall have mercy upon you, O Jerusalem? And who shall mourn for you? Who shall turn aside to ask concerning your welfare? (6) You have abandoned Me (oracle of the LORD); backward you go. Therefore I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you. I am weary with having compassion. (7) And I will winnow them with a winnowing in the gates of the land; I will deprive them of children, I will destroy My people since they have not turned aside from their ways. (8) Their widows have become to me more numerous than the sand of the sea. I will bring against them, against the mother of the young men, a destroyer at high noon; I will cause to fall upon her suddenly distress and terrors. (9) The one who has borne seven has

grown feeble, her soul gasps. Her sun has gone down while it is yet day; she is ashamed and confused. I will give their remnant to the sword before their enemies (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

It is useless for Jeremiah to continue to intercede for the people of Judah. Not even Moses and Samuel, the two greatest intercessors the nation had ever known, would be able to move God to show any affection or pity to the present sinful generation. God had hearkened to Moses and Samuel and 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 and consequently intercessory prayer was useless. Jeremiah was to quit praying and go back to preaching the message of judgment which God had commissioned him to preach. In and through his preaching he is to "cast away" the inhabitants of Judah from the presence of the Lord that they might go out from before Him (v. 1). If the people ask him to explain this cryptic statement "go out" the prophet is to have a ready answer. Every man will go out to the punishment which has been decreed for him. Some will suffer death by pestilence, others will die in battle, others will perish with hunger, still others will be taken into foreign captivity (v. 2). All will suffer; none will escape. Four types, families or modes of punishment have been decreed for many of the inhabitants of Judah. They will be first slain by the sword of Babylon and then their unburied bodies will be ripped, torn and eaten by dogs, birds and beasts of the field (v. 3). The nations of the world would witness the terrible things which happen to Israel and will fear for their own safety. All of this must befall Judah because of the sins

of Manasseh, the most wicked king who ever sat on the throne of Judah (v. 4).

From speaking about the people God turns and speaks directly to the people in verse 5. By means of three rhetorical questions He drives home the point that no one in the world will really care when Judah falls. No one will show any sympathy or pity, no one will mourn, no one will even ask about the condition of the city (v. 5). Many times in the past Israel had forsaken God and thereby had incurred the threat of divine wrath. But in the past God had always withheld the threat and had taken His people back. Now it is too late. He 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 (v. 6). Judgment will be executed. As the winnowing process separates the chaff from the grain, so God will cause the parents of Judah to be separated from their children. The children who served as soldiers would be slain as they attempted to defend the gates of their cities from the invading enemy. This terrible judgment is necessary because the inhabitants of Judah have not turned from their sinful ways (v. 7). Wives will be deprived of their husbands and hence the land will be left defenseless. Against the mother of the young men, i.e., Jerusalem, God will bring a destroyer at the most unexpected time—at high noon when normally military operations temporarily ceased. Distress and terror will fall upon the mother when she realizes the danger which she faces (v. 8). The woman with numerous children,¹ usually the most proud and joyous inhabitant of the city, will be filled with consternation. With the loss of her children her sun has gone down while it is yet day. In the prime of life all has become dark and dreary for her. All of her hopes, dreams, aspirations are dashed to

1. "She that has borne seven" is a proverbial expression meaning one who bears numerous children. See I Samuel 2:5 and Ruth 4:15.

pieces when the enemy slays her sons. The shame of childlessness¹ comes upon her in full force when the remnant of the nation is given over to the sword of the enemy (v. 9).

II. PROPHETIC AGONY 15:10-21

Jeremiah suffered a great deal of mental anguish during his ministry. The rejection of his prophetic intercession on three successive occasions plunges Jeremiah to the depths of despair. This is the second personal crisis in the life and ministry of this great man of God. In response to the complaint of the prophet (v. 10) God offers consolation (vv. 15-18). But Jeremiah is not satisfied. He feels that God has deceived him and he does not hesitate to tell God so (vv. 15-18). To these wild accusations the Lord does not even bother to respond except to tell his disgruntled prophet that if he will repent he may be reinstated in the ministry (vv. 19-21).

A. Prophetic Lamentation and Divine Consolation 15:10-14

TRANSLATION

(10) Woe to me, O my mother, because you gave birth to me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole land. I have not lent nor have they lent to me, yet every man curses me. (11) The LORD said, surely I will set you free for good; surely I will cause the enemy to entreat you in the time of evil and in the time of distress. (12) Can iron break iron from the north and bronze? (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. (14) And I will cause you

1. The shame of childlessness is repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament. See Jeremiah 50:12; Isaiah 54:4; Genesis 16:4; 30:1, 23.

**to serve your enemies in a land you do not know;
for a fire is kindled in My anger; against you it
will burn.**

COMMENTS

The divine refusal to hearken to the intercession of the prophet has caused Jeremiah to sink into the slough of dispondency. He begins to reflect upon his ministry and to think of the trouble that had come to him as he attempted to carry the message of God to his people. His preaching had produced no repentance. He had only succeeded in arousing the animosity of those to whom he preached. This tender and timid soul from Anathoth had become the center of controversy. He wishes he had never been born. To bring a thundering message of accusation and condemnation was contrary to the personality of this man. People viciously curse him just as they might curse a hard hearted creditor. Dealings between money-lenders and debtors in antiquity were anything but cordial. This is the kind of relationship which now exists between Jeremiah and his countrymen (v. 10).

The introductory formula "the Lord said" occurs only in verse 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 American Standard Version in the text renders it "strengthen" and in the margin offers the alternative "release." The King James Version gives an altogether different translation, "it shall be well with thy remnant." Probably the best rendering is "set free" or "release." God promises to release Jeremiah from the hostility and animosity which he has been experiencing in this phase of his ministry. Those who are currently so bitter against him will humbly come

to him to seek his aid and 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).

Verse 12 is enigmatic. It is not clear whether God is still speaking to the prophet or whether these words are addressed to the people. Iron from the north, the region of the Black Sea, was of 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 has told him at his call that he would be an iron pillar and a bronze wall (1:18). Is God here reminding Jeremiah of that promise? Possibly so. But it is more likely that verse 12 is a transition to the two verses which follow. God would then be assuring Jeremiah that his prophecy of an invincible foe from the north would indeed be fulfilled, and the fulfillment of that prophecy would serve to vindicate Jeremiah as a spokesman for God.

The description of the invincible foe from the north continues in verses 13 and 14. The enemy will roam throughout the land plundering and looting because of all of the sins which the inhabitants of the land had committed. The phrase "without price" (v. 13) 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. The inhabitants of Judah will be forced to serve their enemies in a foreign land. Borrowing an expression from Deuteronomy 32:22 God declares "a fire is kindled in My anger" (literally, in My nostril). The judgment described in the Song of Moses centuries earlier is now about to fall on Judah.

What consolation is it to the despondent Jeremiah to know that his land and his people will be destroyed? None unless it would be the thought that 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.

B. The Prayer of Jeremiah 15:15-18

TRANSLATION

(15) You, O LORD, know; remember me, visit me, and avenge me of my persecutors. Do not take me away by deferring your anger. Know that for Your sake I have been bearing reproach. (16) Your words were found and I ate them; and Your words were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts. (17) I have not sat in the assembly of the merry-makers, that I might rejoice. Because of Your hand I sat alone, because you filled me with indignation. (18) Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? You have surely become unto me like a deceptive stream, like waters that fail.

COMMENTS

In verse 15 the second of the so-called "confession" of Jeremiah begins. The prophet begins by affirming the

omniscience of God, "You know, O Lord." The fact that God knows what the prophet has been going through comforts Jeremiah. His petition contains three positive requests and one negative one: (1) He wants God to remember him. (2) He needs to see some visible sign of God's continued care; He wants God to visit him. (3) He asks 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. He is asking that these persecutors receive their just deserts. (4) Jeremiah asks that he not be taken away, i.e., that he not be allowed to die an early, premature death. If God continues to exercise long-suffering with regard to the wicked enemies of Jeremiah, the prophet fears that he will be killed.

From petition Jeremiah moves in his prayer to narrative. Even though God knows all, still Jeremiah rehearses before his God the particular difficulties which he has recently been experiencing. First he asks God to take note of the reproach which he bears daily for His sake (v. 15). When the Lord initially put His word in the mouth of the prophet (1:7) Jeremiah "ate" them. To eat words means to make them one's own, to digest them, to absorb them, to make them the constant food of one's spiritual life (cf. Ezekiel 3:1ff.; I Timothy 4:14-16). Jeremiah's whole life revolved around the word of God. It was to him a source of great joy to learn that he had been called of God to be His prophet, His messenger (v. 16). But as time went on Jeremiah found out that being God's man had distinct disadvantages. His preaching made him unpopular. This man was filled with God's indignation against sin. His messages centered in the wrath and judgment of God. For this reason he was excluded or perhaps excluded himself from the joyous festivals.

He lived a lonely, solitary life because the touch of God's hand had set him apart. The Old Testament contains numerous references to a prophet being touched by the hand of God.¹ "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 suffered alone (v. 17).

Verse 18 contains interrogation and accusation. Jeremiah asks the question that many other discouraged saints through the ages have asked, Why? In earlier passages (e.g. 12:1ff.; 14:8-9, 19) Jeremiah was asking how God could finally forsake Israel. But now Jeremiah feels that God has forsaken his servant; and so the question "Why" is renewed but this time with a personal application. Thus far his ministry had not been blessed with success. He had faithfully sown the word of God but had reaped only hatred and opposition. His mental anguish is perpetual, like a wound which will not heal. He would love to preach salvation but instead he must preach damnation. In this moment of anguish and despair he cries out against God: "You have surely become to me as a deceptive stream, a brook that runs dry in summer." He had publicly preached that God was a fountain of living water (2:13); now privately he accuses God of being a dried up stream! He is accusing God of being unreliable, untrustworthy, unfaithful. To soften the thrust of the last part of verse 18, some make this sentence a question. While this is a possible translation there is no real indication that a question is intended. Jeremiah has simply reached the breaking point. In this moment of weakness Satan has placed this blasphemous thought in the mind of Jeremiah.

1. See II Kings 3:15; Isaiah 8:11; Ezekiel 3:14.

C. The Reply of the Lord 15:19-21

TRANSLATION

(19) Therefore thus says the LORD: If you return, then I will restore you; before Me you shall continue to stand. And if you cause the precious to come forth from the vile, you shall be as My mouth. Let them return unto you; but as for you, do not return unto them. (20) And I will make you to this people a fortified brazen wall. They shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you. For I am with you to deliver you and to save you (oracle of the LORD). And I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the power of the ruthless.

COMMENTS

God does not bother to directly answer the blasphemous accusation of his prophet. Rather His reply consists of an invitation to re-enter 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 tantemount to his resignation from the prophetic ministry. But God does not chide or rebuke His prophet, not directly at least. He simply suggests that Jeremiah needed to do two things: (1) return, i.e., go back to the original point of departure; and (2) separate the precious from the vile and worthless within his own heart. The refuse of doubt and mistrust had somehow gotten mingled with the precious gold of faith, love and trust within the heart of Jeremiah. Inward purification is now essential. 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 re-enter the ministry. That he does so is taken for granted.

The reinstatement in the prophetic ministry is described in three expressions in verse 19. (1) "I will cause you to return." The reinstatement is not automatic. Only God can make a prophet. If Jeremiah returns to God, then the Lord can return him to a right relationship to Himself so that he might continue to be God's minister. (2) "Before Me you shall continue to stand." The figure here is of a servant standing in the presence of his master waiting for commands. Counselors and courtiers are said to stand before a king (I Kings 12:6; Proverbs 22:29). Angels are said to stand before God (Luke 1:19). Elijah and Elisha used this expression to describe their relationship to God (I Kings 17:1; II Kings 3:14). To be permitted to minister before the Great King would be the highest privilege accorded a man. (3) "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.

The invitation to repent is followed by the exhortation to remain steadfast. The last sentence of verse 19 is not a simple future as in the American Standard Version but a jussive as in the King James: "Let them return unto you, but do not let yourself return unto them." He must not allow the skeptical inhabitants of Judah to drag him down to their level, but, on the contrary, he should by his continued preaching raise them up to a higher plane. In effect God is saying do not join them, let them join you! Jeremiah is weakening, he is giving in. 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.

Jeremiah had accused God of forsaking him. But that 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 brazen wall against which the assault of the persecutors would ultimately fail. 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 and neither should Jeremiah. So God simply quotes the promise as originally given in 1:18f. only He adds at the end the precious and powerful formula "oracle of the Lord" (v. 20). And then, as if it were not enough to cite the original promise, God rephrases that promise in more specific terms. The wicked and ruthless men who would attempt to suppress the message of God will not prevail over Jeremiah. God will deliver and redeem, i.e., save him from their power (v. 21). Though times may get difficult and no way of escape seems apparent God will bring His prophet through. God is no deceptive stream!

III. PROPHETIC CONDUCT 16:1-21

Jeremiah came through his personal crisis. He repented and God took him back. Now that the rebellious prophet was humble and contrite, God gives him further instructions concerning his personal conduct (vv. 1-9) and his message (vv. 10-13). God pulls back the curtain to reveal to His prophet the purpose and reason for the forthcoming judgment (vv. 14-18). To all of this the prophet responds with a ringing affirmation of faith and vision (vv. 19-21).

A. Directions to the Prophet 16:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (2) Do not take a wife for yourself nor shall

you have sons and daughters in this place. (3) For thus says the LORD 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 shall die. (4) They shall not be mourned nor shall they be buried. They will be as dung upon the face of the ground. They shall be consumed by the sword and famine; and their corpses shall be food for the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the land. (5) For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning nor go to lament or bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people (oracle of the LORD), loving-kindness and compassion. (6) Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried nor shall lamentation be made for them nor shall one cut himself nor make himself bald for them. (7) Neither shall men break bread for them in mourning to comfort anyone for the dead; neither shall they give them the cup of consolation for one's father and for one's mother. (8) And to the house of feasting do not go to sit with them, to eat and to drink. (9) For thus says the LORD 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.

COMMENTS

A minister must live a life that is consistent with the message he brings else he will be charged with hypocrisy and insincerity. 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 bring the life of Jeremiah into harmony with the message he was to deliver, God laid down three prohibitions for His prophet.

In the first prohibition Jeremiah is commanded not to marry and father children (v. 2). Hosea was married as was Isaiah and Ezekiel. Probably most of the prophets had helpmates. But Jeremiah was denied wifely companionship. He had complained of his pain and loneliness and 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 Old Testament 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 marriage. Furthermore the nation was about to go through a period of brutal warfare. Children as well as their parents would die "painful deaths" (literally, deaths of sickness), including starvation (v. 3). Those who died of sword and famine would be left as dung upon the ground, their corpses being eaten by bird and beast alike (v. 4). 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 (I Corinthians 7:26).

In the second prohibition Jeremiah is forbidden to attend funerals (v. 5). How difficult it must have been for the prophet to abstain from the customary extension

of sympathy to the family of those who were near and dear to him. Again Jeremiah's action would have predictive significance. His abstinence from the normal visitation to homes where there had been a death would provide an opportunity for him to describe the great slaughter which would shortly take place in Judah. So many would die in that day of famine, pestilence and warfare that the few survivors would not be able nor inclined to conduct the normal funeral service. Nobles and commoners will die but no one will bury them or take up a lament over them. The pagan rites of showing remorse by cutting oneself or shaving the head would not be performed (v. 6). Both of these latter customs were forbidden in the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 14:1; Leviticus 19:28; 21:5). The funeral feast normally conducted in the home of the bereaved after the burial will be dispensed with (v. 7). This meal no doubt was accompanied by lamentation and prayers for comfort (cf. II Samuel 3:35; Ezekiel 24:17; Hosea 9:4). 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. All of this will befall Judah because God had withdrawn His peace, loving-kindness and compassion from the nation (v. 5). Judah is forsaken by her God. She is helpless and hopeless.

A third prohibition forbade Jeremiah to attend joyous feasts and festivals as, for example, a wedding meal (v. 8). Jeremiah was no recluse. In fact in his previous prayer he complains that he has been excluded from the assemblies of merrymakers (15:17). Again Jeremiah's abstinence is to have a didactic purpose, it is intended to be an object lesson to the people of that generation. The nation was crumbling to destruction. This was no time for feasting and rejoicing. In the very near future all joyous activities would cease (cf. 7:34). When faced with extermination men would no longer think of feast-

ing and banqueting (v. 9). While the prohibition had a valid and useful objective it nonetheless added to the burden which Jeremiah had to bear.

B. Instructions for the Prophet 16:10-13

TRANSLATION

(10) And it shall come to pass when you declare to this people all these things that they will say unto you: For what reason does the LORD speak against us all this great evil? What is our iniquity and what is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God? (11) You shall say unto them: Because your fathers forsook Me (oracle of the LORD) and went after other gods and served them and bowed down to them; and forsook Me and did not keep My law. (12) But you have done greater wickedness than your fathers; and behold, you are continuing to walk each man after the stubbornness of his evil heart so that you do not listen unto Me. (13) So I will hurl you from this land unto a land which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers. There you shall serve other gods by day and by night, because I will not give grace to you.

COMMENTS

Provoked by the strange anti-social behavior of the prophet the people become defiant. Two rhetorical questions are asked not for the sake of information but for protestation. "Why do you bring your message of doom? What sin have we committed?" (v. 10). As is frequent in the Book of Malachi the people are challenging the message of God's prophet by means of questions. Either these people were self-righteous and totally blind to their iniquity or else they were attempting to bluff the prophet

into silence by this brazen challenge. If the latter was their aim then they failed. Jeremiah had a ready answer. The history of Israel had been one continuous record of apostasy (v. 11). But the present generation is worse than their predecessors (v. 12). Contrary to the optimistic analyses of some historians one generation may be worse than another in the sight of God. The fathers who had sinned against God in the wilderness were denied access to Canaan. The apostate sons of 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 them from their land as a man hurls a javelin into the air. 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 (v. 13).

C. Explanation on Behalf of the Prophet 16:14-18

TRANSLATION

(14) Therefore behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when it shall no more be said, As the LORD lives who brought us up from the land of Egypt, (15) but, As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from the lands to which He drove them. For I will cause them to return unto the land which I gave to their fathers. (16) Behold, I am about to send for many fishers (oracle of the LORD) and they shall fish for them. And after this I will send for many hunters and they shall hunt them from every moun-

tain and from every hill and from the clefts of the rocks. (17) For My eyes are upon all their ways; they are not hidden from before Me; yea their iniquity is not consealed from before My eyes. (18) First I will recompense their sin and iniquity double because they have profaned My land; with the carcasses of their abomination and their detestable things they have filled My inheritance.

COMMENTS

Verses 14-15 plainly predict that God will in days to come bring His people home from the Exile into which He was about to hurl them. The new Exodus from Babylon would be of such magnitude and glory that it would eclipse the old Exodus from Egypt. When one used an epithet for God in an oath he would in the future make mention of this new manifestation of divine power. In the view of the Old Testament 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.

Verses 14-15 serve a dual purpose in chapter 16. First, these verses provide confirmation of the coming judgment. That it is the intent of these verses to underscore the certainty of the coming judgment is indicated by the introductory word "therefore." This word usually introduces a statement of judgment in the Old Testament. It is unnecessary then to follow most commentators in regarding verses 14-15 as an interpolation or even to regard these verses as a misplaced fragment intended to soften the threat of verses 11-13. While these verses 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.

Verses 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 while sure and certain 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.

In verse 16 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 (v. 16). The prophet Habakkuk also compared the Chaldeans to fishermen who drag in their nets full of helpless captives (Habakkuk 1:15). The ruthless fishing and hunting is punishment for the iniquity of the men of Judah of which God has been and is constantly aware (v. 17). Before He can restore the Jews to their homeland He must first recompense their iniquity "double." God had on numerous occasions and by a variety of means punished his people in the past. They had experienced war, famine, pestilence, plague, and invasion before. 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? Their lifeless images like dead carcasses pollute and defile the land (v. 18).

D. Affirmation by the Prophet 16:19-21

TRANSLATION

(19) O LORD my strength and my fortress and my refuge in the day of trouble: Unto You the nations shall come from the ends of the earth and they shall

say: Our fathers have inherited nothing but a lie, vain things which are good for nothing. (20) Shall a man make for himself gods? They are no-gods! (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 the LORD.

COMMENTS

In his first prayer since the bitter complaint of 15:15-18 Jeremiah indicates how completely he has changed. His whining, complaining 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 which God had made concerning the conversion of the Gentiles (12:15-16). His mind leaps forward to that glorious day when chastened and redeemed Israel will be joined by peoples from distant lands who renounce forever their ancient attachment to idolatry. Those converted Gentiles realize that they have inherited nothing from their fathers religiously speaking but false and vain gods which are utterly worthless (v. 19). These Gentiles are amazed that anyone could ever have thought that the work of their own hands was deity (v. 20).

God responds to the prophet's prayer of faith by revealing a little more of His grand purpose to him. Just

as the forefathers of Israel had learned the significance of the name Yahweh (American Standard, Jehovah) when they were delivered from Egypt, so in the deliverance from Babylon they would come again to learn the significance of that name. God's power and might in watching over, blessing and preserving His people in a foreign land would prove that He was universal sovereign and also a God of love.

IV. PROPHETIC SAYINGS 17:1-11

The first eleven verses of chapter 17 contain three independent sayings of the prophet probably from three different sermons. These sayings do not seem to have any logical connection with one another. In them Jeremiah is concerned about the guilt of the nation (vv. 1-4), trusting the Lord (vv. 5-8) and the nature of the human heart (vv. 9-11).

A. The Guilt of the Nation 17:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) The sin of Judah is written with a stylus of iron; with a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart and upon the horns of your altars: (2) while their children remember their altars and their Asherahs beside the green trees and on the high hills. (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. (4) And you even in yourself shall lose your hold on your inheritance which I have given to you; and I will cause you to serve your enemies in a land which you do not know; for you have kindled a fire in My anger which shall burn forever.

COMMENTS

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 the ravishes of time and today can be studied first hand by students of ancient history. Sin also leaves a record; and Jeremiah points to three areas where the record of Judah's sin could be found. (1) Judah's sin was indelibly written upon the tablet of their heart. The inhabitants of the land had made their hearts as hard as stone and consequently the word of God could not penetrate their lives. If the people would but examine their own hearts they would see clearly the record of every rebellion and disobedience. (2) Judah's sin was also written upon the horns of their altars (v. 1). 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. 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 which had perverted true worship. (3) Perhaps most important, the sin of Judah has been inscribed on the memory of the children of the land. 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 hill tops where the licentious rites were conducted in honor of the fertility gods (v. 2).

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. Jerusalem is here addressed as "My mountain in the field" (v. 3). The word "field" here is

best understood as meaning an open place rather than a level place. Mt. Zion upon which Jerusalem is built rises abruptly, like a mountain, out of the midst of the surrounding valleys. The inhabitants of Judah will lose their inheritance and be deported to a distant land. By their perpetual rebellion they have kindled the fire of divine wrath (v. 4). People who play with the fire of sin are bound to get scorched!

B. The Desert Shrub and the Flourishing Tree 17:5-8

TRANSLATION

(5) Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart departs from the LORD. (6) For he shall be like a tamarisk in the wilderness, and he shall not see when good comes; but he shall dwell in the parched areas of the wilderness, in a land of salt which is not inhabited. (7) Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose object of trust is the LORD. (8) He shall be as a tree planted alongside of waters and alongside of the river he puts forth his roots. He shall not fear when heat comes. His leaf shall be green. In the year of drought he will not be anxious nor shall he cease from producing fruit.

COMMENTS

In verses 5-8 Jeremiah draws a picture of contrast between the unbeliever and the believer. Verse 5 mentions two characteristics of the unbeliever. The unbeliever continuously (Hebrew imperfect) puts his trust in flesh i.e., he puts his trust in what is weak, sinful, mortal and temporal. While he may give lip service to the Almighty he has departed from the Lord in his own heart. It is

interesting that two Hebrew words for man are used in verse 5. The first word is *gever* which refers to man in his strength, man as he was intended to be. The second word is *adam* which signifies man in his creaturely weakness. Thus, cursed is the man (*gever*) who trusts in man (*adam*). After indicating the characteristics of the unbeliever Jeremiah describes in verse 6 the conditions of such a man. He is like the tamarisk, a twisted, gnarled, dwarfed little tree which grows in the most barren and rocky parts of the desert. The roots of the tamarisk 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 shall not see when good comes." He is always groping, searching for the good life, the more abundant life, but alas he never finds it. In spite of the riches he might possess he is not living, he is only existing. His life is a parched wilderness, "a land of salt," i.e., a land absolutely barren (cf. Deuteronomy 29:23).

In contrast to the life of the unbeliever the one who puts his trust in God is blessed (v. 7). In terminology reminiscent of Psalms 1:3 Jeremiah describes the life of the believer. He is like a tree which puts its roots down alongside a perennial stream. That tree will flourish and be fruitful because the supply of water is never exhausted. So the believer has put down his roots beside the inexhaustible stream of divine grace. Even during the drought period of life, the times of severe testing and trial, he does not wilt, he does not fear. On the contrary he continues to flourish and bear fruit.

C. The Deceitful Human Heart 17:9-11

TRANSLATION

(9) The heart is deceitful more than anything and incurable; who can know it? (10) I am the LORD

who searches the heart, tries the mind in order to give to man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. (11) A partridge that broods but does not hatch is he who acquires wealth unjustly; in the midst of his days he shall leave it and in his end shall be a fool.

COMMENTS

The heart, according to Hebrew psychology, was the center of one's intellect, emotions and will. Modern psychology would agree with the observation of Jeremiah that the heart is deceitful. Few have insight into their real motivations. The heart of man is incurable or desperately sick or, according to the King James Version, desperately wicked (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 search the hearts of men. He tries and tests the mind (literally, the kidneys), a term which in Hebrew psychology indicated the emotional aspect of man. On the basis of His divine knowledge of the inner thoughts and feelings of men, God is able to dispense justly both reward and punishment (v. 10). This doctrine of reward and punishment appears also in 32:19 (cf. Psalms 62:12; Job 34:11).

In verse 11 Jeremiah offers an illustration of the kind of deceit which is referred to in verse 9. Those who acquire wealth unjustly are like a partridge that broods but does not hatch her eggs. 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. He shall be deprived of his wealth as swiftly as the partridge who begins to sit upon her nest but is soon robbed

of her eggs. In the midst of his days the man who has made wealth his god shall leave it all behind. His attachment to the material and temporal will prove him to be a fool in his last desperate hours. A fool in the Old Testament is not necessarily one who is stupid but one who is lacking in moral understanding and in the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.¹ One cannot read this passage without thinking of the foolish farmer spoken of in the parable of Jesus (Luke 12:16-21). Building bigger barns was uppermost in his mind. He had forgotten that life is but a vapor of uncertain duration. In an unexpected moment this fool was summoned into eternity.

V. PROPHETIC PRAYER 17:12-18

TRANSLATION

(12) O throne of glory exalted from the beginning, the place of our sanctuary! (13) O hope of Israel, the LORD! All that forsake You shall be put to shame. Those who turn from me shall be written down in the land, for they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, the LORD. (14) Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed! Deliver me and I shall be delivered! For You are the object of my praise. (15) Behold, they are saying unto me: Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come! (16) And as for me, I did not hasten from being a shepherd after you, and the incurable day I did not desire. You yourself know! That which came out of my lips was before Your face. (17) Do not be to me a terror! You are my refuge in the evil day. (18) Let those who persecute me be put to shame, but do not let me experience consternation. Bring upon them the evil day and with double shattering shatter them.

1. Freedman, *op cit.*, pp. 120.

It is difficult to know in verse 12 whether "throne of glory" and "place of our sanctuary" refer to Jerusalem or to God Himself. The American Standard and King James versions suggest the former interpretation; but the Hebrew would allow just as well for the latter view. If the reference is to Jerusalem it is difficult to see how the verse relates to the rest of the prayer. The verse fits well however as part of the address of the prayer. God is called "the throne exalted from the beginning" by metonymy. This title suggests that God from the beginning of time was the exalted ruler over all the earth. God is called "the place of our sanctuary" because true worship is grounded in Him. In verse 13 the Lord is called "the hope of Israel" and "the fountain of living waters." It is interesting to note that the prophet who called God a deceitful stream in a recent prayer (15:18) now refers to Him as the fountain of living waters. 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 lime-light; but in short order he fades from the scene and his name is forgotten.¹

From invocation and declaration of faith in the Lord Jeremiah moves in his prayer to petition. He cries out for healing but not the healing of the body; he yearns for

1. M. J. Dahood has recently suggested another interpretation of this verse. On the basis of certain Ugaritic evidence he takes "earth" here to mean underworld or death. The apostates then will be listed for death. *Biblica* XL (1959) pp. 164-166.

the spiritual and mental healing. His heart is broken because the people he loves rejected the message. He cries out for deliverance from the sneers and jeers of the apostates. He knows that God can and will heal and deliver him and for this reason he makes God the object of his praise (v. 14).

Jeremiah moves on in his prayer to narrative. He describes to God his own situation. The people are mocking Jeremiah. They are demanding that his prophecies be fulfilled. According to Deuteronomy 18:22 one whose prediction did not come true was to be treated as a false prophet. So far none of Jeremiah's dire predictions concerning the fate of Jerusalem had come to pass. No doubt this prayer dates to the period prior to the first Babylonian invasion of Judah in 605 B.C. For years Jeremiah had been predicting a calamity which would befall Judah at the hands of the enemy from the north. So far nothing had happened. Some, no doubt, were charging Jeremiah with being a false prophet. Others may have even gone so far as to question whether the Lord had the power to carry out His threats. The recent drought which God had sent upon the land had utterly failed 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!"

In his prayer Jeremiah defends himself and calls attention to his loyalty to God. He makes three points. (1) Jeremiah had not hastened or hurried away from his responsibility of being God's shepherd to Israel. Even though he faced opposition and persecution almost from the outset of his ministry he had not quickly abandoned his work. He did not quit when the going got tough. Rather he continued in his position as an undershepherd following "after" the Lord. Jeremiah walked in the footsteps of his God and sought to lead the flock of God in those old paths which the Lord had so clearly identified

in His word. (2) Jeremiah did not desire the incurable (same word used in verse 9) day or woeful day. Here the day of Judah's punishment is metaphorically called "sick" or incurable. Jeremiah took no malicious delight in announcing the doom which 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 brought was personally distasteful, Jeremiah kept preaching. (3) Jeremiah was utterly sincere in his ministry. God knew that. Every word which the prophet had uttered was known to the Lord. He had not diminished from nor added to the word which was laid upon his heart. He had been a faithful messenger.

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 which the prophet had been threatening God was allowing Jeremiah to become the object of ridicule and harassment. Jeremiah therefore prays that God will keep His word, that He will not be a terror to his prophet. In effect Jeremiah is praying that he will not be embarrassed, dismayed or terrified because of his loyalty to God and His word. Jeremiah knows that he personally has nothing to fear in the evil day i.e., the day of divine punishment (v. 17). Therefore he calls upon God to utterly silence the sneering, scoffing enemies by sending the threatened judgment. He asks that his enemies be confounded and confused. He asks that they receive double destruction i.e., complete, total destruction.

Some commentators see a contradiction between what the prophet has previously said in his prayer and what he asks God to do in verse 18. In verse 16 Jeremiah said that he did not desire the evil day; here he calls on God to send the evil day. The solution to this apparent con-

tradition is simple. Jeremiah desired and prayed for the salvation of Judah as a nation. But within the nation are certain hard core, utterly perverse antagonists who are the enemies of God as well as the enemies of God's prophet. They deserve the punishment which Jeremiah has been threatening. When the prophet asks God to pour out his wrath upon these hardened sinners there is no personal animosity or vindictiveness. Rather here as in similar prayers Jeremiah is jealous for the Lord his God.

VI. PROPHETIC PROCLAMATION 17:19-27

Chapter 17 ends with a prose discourse urging the keeping of the Sabbath. Like Amos (Amos 8:4-6) and Isaiah (Isaiah 56, 58) before him, Jeremiah regarded violation of the Sabbath as a serious offense. Jeremiah in this sermon addressed to the royal house makes Sabbath observance the condition for national survival. The sermon moves through three phases: (1) exhortation (vv. 19-23); (2) promise (vv. 24-26); and (3) threat (v. 27).

A. Exhortation 17:19-23

TRANSLATION

(19) Thus said the LORD 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; (20) and say unto them, Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are coming in these gates. (21) Thus says the LORD: Watch out for your souls! Do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring them into the gates of Jerusalem. (22) Do not bring out a burden from your houses on the Sabbath day and cease all work. Sanctify the Sabbath day as I commanded your

fathers. (23) But they did not hearken nor did they incline their ears but made their neck stiff neither to hear nor receive correction.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah is commissioned to preach this sermon in the gates of the city of Jerusalem. He is to start at that gate which was most frequently used by the kings. This gate, called "the gate of the children of the people," cannot be identified (v. 19). He addresses his message to the kings of Judah, the population of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 20). 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. But more likely Jeremiah is 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 here the word "kings" is used loosely to refer to all the princes of the realm.

Jeremiah's object in this message is to get the people to hallow the Sabbath day. Apparently the Sabbath law was disregarded. Goods from far and near were being transported into the city and 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 (v. 21) and calls upon the people to cease bringing articles from their houses with which to barter for the produce of the merchants. He exhorts the inhabitants of Jerusalem to sanctify the Sabbath in the way in which God commanded their fathers to do (v. 22). 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 (v. 23). The nation had con-

tinued on the path of disobedience until now Judah was faced with the inevitable national destruction.

B. Promise and Threat 17:24-27

TRANSLATION

(24) And it shall come to pass if you fully hearken unto Me (oracle of the LORD) 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, (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 and their princes, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhabited forever. (26) And they shall come from the cities of Judah and from the environs of Jerusalem and from the land of Benjamin and from the Shephelah and from the hill country and from the Negev bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices and meal offerings and incense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. (27) 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, then I will place a fire in her gates, and it shall consume the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be extinguished.

COMMENTS

If there was any manifestation of national repentance with regard to the Sabbath observance the city would be spared. Things would continue as usual with kings and their entourages passing through the gates of the city (vv. 24, 25). From all parts of the territories of Judah

and Benjamin men would continue to come to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice. The Shephelah, the Negev and the hill country are the three geographical regions of Judah. The Shephelah was the lowland region which 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. He mentions (1) burnt offerings, (2) sacrifices or peace offerings, (3) meal offerings, (4) incense, and (5) thank-offerings. If the people of Judah would only keep the Sabbath commandment business and worship would continue as usual. But if the exhortation to sanctify the Sabbath is ignored, then God will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem. Fire here as in Amos 1:4—2:5 is symbolic of war.

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 repentant sinner and forgive him. While Jeremiah had on numerous occasions spoken of the judgment to come as inevitable, he here makes it clear that he had a program for the people, a program which 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. The Lord had promised to so bless their six days of labor that they could afford to set aside the seventh day for His service (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). If they really had faith in God they would not hesitate to sanctify the Sabbath. Of course the generation of Jeremiah's day did not comply with the conditions stipulated in this sermon and consequently the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar.

NATIONAL DISTRESS-DISCOURAGEMENT
REVIEW OF CHAPTER TEN

I. Facts to Master

1. The time when Jeremiah received this word from God (14:1).
2. Two titles of God used in 14:8.
3. Number of times God forbids Jeremiah to pray on behalf of his people.
4. What would not avail to spare the people from further clamity. (14:12).
5. The message of the false prophets (14:13, 15).
6. The divine explanation of false prophecy (14:14).
7. The fate of the false prophets (14:15).
8. Two great prophetic intercessors from the past (15:1).
9. The four fates awaiting the sinners of Judah (15:2).
10. The four destructive agencies God has appointed over them (14:3).
11. The one king in particular whose sin necessitated the destruction of Judah (15:4).
12. That of which Jeremiah accused God (15:18).
13. Three prohibitions in chapter 16.
14. The great event of the future which would make Israel forget the Exodus from Egypt (16:14, 15).
15. The unique figures by which the Chaldeans are described (16:16).
16. The sin of Judah is written with _____ with the point of a _____ (17:1).
17. Their sin was engraved upon their _____ and the _____ (17:1).
18. The heart is _____ and is exceedingly _____ (17:9).
19. The place where Jeremiah delivered his sermon on Sabbath observance (17:19).
20. What they were not to do on the Sabbath (17:21, 22).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. Just how serious was the drought which occasioned the oracles in this block of material? See 14:2-6.
2. Who is responsible for the prayer in 14:7-9, the prophet or the people? Is it sincere? Were the people really willing to pay the price of divine blessing? What was God's response to the prayer? See 14:10-12.
3. What is the point of the reference to the sojourner and wayfaring man in 14:8?
4. By what criteria could a false prophet be distinguished from a true prophet? How can the message of a false prophet today best be countered? See 14:17.
5. Who is praying in 14:19-22?
6. What is the mood of the prophet at this time? See 15:10. How does God answer Jeremiah's complaint? 15:11-14.
7. Why does Jeremiah feel that God owes him something? 15:16-18a.
8. Did Jeremiah go too far in his complaint? How does God answer His bitter and discouraged prophet? 15:19-21.
9. Why was Jeremiah refused permission to marry? See 16:3-4. Are wives a help or hindrance to the Gospel minister?
10. Does God expect Christians to cease mourning for the dead (16:5) and to eliminate times of rejoicing (16:8)? Why these prohibitions to Jeremiah?
11. Is a sinner aware of his iniquity? See 16:10.
12. What is meant by "recompense their iniquity and their sin double"? 16:18.
13. In 16:19-20 Jeremiah expresses confidence that Gentiles will eventually cast away their idols. How does God respond to that prayer in 16:21? Does God

NATIONAL DISTRESS-DISCOURAGEMENT

have a plan for the nations? Where do Christians fit into that plan?

14. What is "my mountain in the field"? 17:3.
15. In 17:5-8 the believer and the unbeliever are contrasted. How do they differ?
16. Does 17:9 teach total depravity?
17. What is the point of the proverb about riches in 17:11?
18. For what does Jeremiah pray in 17:12-18?
19. What does Jeremiah's sermon on Sabbath observance prove as regards his attitude toward religious observances?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE POTTER AND HIS VESSELS 18:1—20:18

Chapters 18-20 are composed of various types of literature centering around the common theme of the potter's vessels. The first seventeen verses might be captioned "the marred vessel." In the prose section 18:1-12 God's sovereignty over His creatures is compared to a potter's sovereignty over his clay. The passage 18:13-17 is a poetic expression of the unnaturalness of Israel's sin. The passage 18:18-23 might be entitled "the human vessel" for it records Jeremiah's prayer for vengeance upon those who were plotting against him. The breaking of a potter's vessel as a symbol of divine judgment and the consequences of this action for Jeremiah personally are recorded in 19:1—20:6. In the final paragraph of this section (20:7-18) the spotlight is back on the human vessel again as Jeremiah records the saddest and most bitter of his "confessions."

It is impossible to date with precision the events of this section. These chapters 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.

I. THE MARRED VESSEL 18:1-17

In 18:1-17 Jeremiah learns an important theological truth through visiting the workshop of a potter. The first twelve verses are prose narrative and relate (1) the observation of the prophet (vv. 1-4), (2) the interpretation of the Lord (vv. 5-10); and (3) the proclamation to the people (vv. 11-12). To this narrative is appended a poetic oracle in which the prophet makes an accusation against the people (vv. 13-15) and then announces that the nation will be destroyed (vv. 16-17).

A. The Observation of the Prophet 18:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD saying, (2) Arise and go down to the house of the potter and there I will cause you to hear My word. (3) And I went down to the house of the potter and behold, he was busy at work upon the wheels. (4) And the vessel which he was making with the clay was marred in the hand of the potter. And again he made it into another vessel as it was fitting in the eyes of the potter to make it.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah received instructions from the Lord to go down to the house of the potter where God would reveal to him something of vital significance for His people (vv. 1, 2). The verb "go down" suggests that the potter's workshop was located in the lower part of the city. 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 the 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.¹

1. Thompson, *op cit.*, p. 520.

As Jeremiah observed the potter at work he noticed that the emerging vessel developed some imperfection which displeased the eye of that artisan. The potter rolled the clay into a lump again and reshaped it into an object that met with his approval (v. 4). The narrative does not reveal the cause of the ruination of the original vessel. This is not the point. 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 jar or vase into a shapeless mass of mud and then begin the whole process all over again.

B. The Interpretation for the Prophet 18:5-10

TRANSLATION

(5) And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (6) Am I not able to do to you as this potter (oracle of the LORD)? Behold, like clay in the hand of the potter, thus are you in My hands, O house of Israel. (7) One moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, to tear down and to destroy; (8) but if that nation repents of its evil on account of which I have spoken, then I will relent concerning the evil which I had thought to do unto it. (9) One instance I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant; (10) but if it does evil in My eyes that it not hearken to My voice, then I will relent concerning the good which I have spoken to benefit it.

COMMENTS

The nation of Israel is but clay in the hands of the divine Potter. He can dispose of them as he wills. If the nation yields and submits to the working of the divine hand, He will produce from it a beautiful and useful vessel. But if Israel refuses to allow the Potter to have his way then Israel will be discarded and God will 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 God's dealing with Israel He has been at fault in the ruination of the vessel. The potter which 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 to willfully rebel against the Potter. Man can choose to be pliable in the hands of the Creator or to be as hard as sun-baked clay. Every child of God should be praying: "Have Thine own way Lord, Have thine own way. Thou are the potter, I am the clay."

A most important principle of Biblical interpretation emerges in verses 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. God may decree the destruction of a nation and give no hint that the nation can survive. Yet if that nation repents of its sin God will rescind the execution order. One thinks immediately of Jonah's mission to Nineveh. "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be over-

thrown," he cried. The message was absolute and unequivocal without any hint of hope. Yet Nineveh repented and Nineveh found forgiveness. The threat was not executed and Jonah's prophecy of doom went unfulfilled. The principle enunciated by Jeremiah in these verses helps to explain why some prophecies in the Bible have not been fulfilled. Biblical prophecies *must* be interpreted as conditional even though the conditional element may at times be missing.

C. The Proclamation to the People 18:11-12

TRANSLATION

(11) And now speak please unto the men of Judah and unto the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the LORD! Behold, I am about to form calamity against you and I am about to plan destruction against you. Turn now each man from his evil and amend your ways and your deeds. (12) But they say, It is hopeless; for after our thoughts we will walk and we will do every man according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.

COMMENTS

Great theological truths are not to be jealously guarded but freely shared with all who will receive them. So it is that Jeremiah is told to proclaim the great truth that he has discovered at the potter's house. The Lord is in the process of forming (Hebrew participle) and planning the destruction of the nation. The verb translated "form" is identical with the word translated "potter" in the preceding verses. 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. Just as the potter crushed the marred vessel in his hand

and began anew, so God is about to destroy Judah and start all over again. In view of this impending disaster God pleads through his prophet for the people to repent (v. 11). It is not too late if they will only turn to God.

The men of Judah respond to this last-ditch effort to secure their repentance in the same language which they used in 2:25. "It is hopeless," they say. The mood here is not one of despondency but one of defiance. The leaders are warning the prophet that it is useless for him to continue trying to convert them. They are saying in verse 12, "We have chosen our path and we will continue to walk in it regardless of what you say the consequences will be."

D. The Accusation Against the Nation 18:13-15

TRANSLATION

(13) Therefore thus says the LORD: Ask now among the nations who has heard such things. An exceedingly horrible thing has the virgin of Israel done! (14) Does the snow of Lebanon depart from the rock of the field? Shall the strange, cold flowing waters be dried up?' (15) Yet My people have forgotten Me; they offer incense to vanities which caused them to stumble in their ways, the paths of old, to walk in by-paths, a way that is not built up.

COMMENTS

In verses 13-15 Jeremiah presses the point that the nation has a serious flaw of which the divine Potter is acutely aware. Judah's horrible sin, unheard of among foreign nations, is that she has rejected her God. A virgin should keep herself undefiled for her future husband; but

1. The Hebrew says "plucked up." The reading "dried up," which is followed by the American Standard Version, necessitates reversing two letters in the word in question.

the virgin of Israel has defiled herself with the worship of heathen deities (v. 13). That this national apostasy is unnatural is brought out by two rhetorical questions in verse 14. "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. "Shall the strange, cold flowing waters be dried up?" The reference here is probably to the mountain streams which perpetually flow down the slopes of the Lebanon mountains. These waters are called strange or foreign because they are not of Israel. The basic implication of the two questions is that nature pursues her course unchanged whereas Judah has unnaturally changed her course. They 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. The people of God have forsaken the old paths (cf. 6:16) to walk in by-paths. A great deal of effort went into preparing a first class roadway in antiquity (see Isaiah 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 but just carelessly trodden down. Instead of the ancient, well-marked paths of righteousness the people of God had chosen rather to walk in footpaths which were not clearly defined and led to no place. Such paths are unfit for any child of God to trod!

E. The Devastation of the Land 18:16-17

TRANSLATION

(16) The result of this is that they will make their land a desolation, an object of everlasting derision. Everyone who passes by it shall be astonished and will shake his head. (17) Like the east wind I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them

the back and not the face in the day of their calamity.

COMMENTS

The inevitable result of abandoning the God-ordained way is desolation and destruction. All who pass by will be amazed, shocked and astonished at what has befallen the once proud little nation of Judah. They will wag their heads in a scornful sneer at the wicked and stupid folly of the people who had forsaken their God (v. 16). God will scatter the men of Judah before their enemies just as men scatter and seek refuge when the torrid east wind, the so-called sirocco, begins to sweep in from the desert. God will turn his back upon them in that day of calamity and he will not listen to their cries for help¹ (v. 17)

II. THE HUMAN VESSEL 18:18-23

In verses 18-23 Jeremiah experiences the third personal crisis of his ministry. These verses contain (1) the plan of the adversaries (v. 18), and (2) the prayer of the prophet (vv. 19-23).

A. The Plan of the Adversaries 18:18

TRANSLATION

(18) And they said, Come and let us devise a plot against Jeremiah that instruction may not perish from the priest, counsel from the wise or an oracle from the prophet. Come, let us smite him with the tongue in order that we might not have to listen to all of his words.

1. An alternate translation of the last part of verse 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 and will not intervene to save them.

Any man of God who preaches the word of God with boldness will inevitably make enemies. Their patience exhausted, the enemies of Jeremiah secretly began making plans to rid themselves of the prophetic pest. After all, they had the priests, the wisemen and other prophets so why should they tolerate a dangerous preacher like Jeremiah. They seemed to fear that if left alone Jeremiah might gain a popular hearing and the regular leaders of the nation might loose their positions of influence. Thus the enemies plan to "smite Jeremiah with the tongue" i.e., to slander him and make lying accusations against him. By twisting his words they hoped to turn the masses against him and perhaps lay the ground work which would result in legal action against the prophet.

Verse 18 is instructive in pointing to the three groups within ancient Israelite society from which one might receive divine instruction. It was the special duty of the priests to give instruction based on the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 33:10; 17:9-11). The priests of Jeremiah's day had not been mindful of their high mission. The second class of religious instructors were the wise men. In the period of the United Monarchy 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 Old Testament. 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 and not faith. The third class of religious teachers were the prophets who were to deliver to the people the word or oracle which 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 who maintained their positions by giving oracles which were pleasing to both the general populace and the ruling powers.

B. The Prayer of the Prophet 18:19-23

TRANSLATION

(19) Give ear unto me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of my adversaries. (20) Shall evil be recompensed instead of good? For they are digging a pit for my soul! Remember that I stood before You to speak good on their behalf and to cause Your wrath to turn from them. (21) Therefore give their sons to famine and deliver them to the power of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widows, and let their husbands be slain by death, their chosen young men smitten by the sword in battle. (22) Let a cry be heard from their houses when You bring a troop suddenly upon them; for they have dug a pit to capture me and snares they have hidden for my feet. (23) But as for You, O LORD, You know all of their counsel against me for death. Do not pardon their guilt and do not blot out their sin from before Your face; but let them be made to stumble before You! Deal with them in the time of Your anger!

COMMENTS

The text does not indicate how Jeremiah became aware of the plot against him. But when he hears what his enemies have planned for him he cries out to God asking Him to take note of the threat against His messenger (v. 19). Jeremiah cannot understand why he is the object of such a vicious plot. He has preached bluntly but al-

ways with the ultimate good of his people at heart. He had wept for his people, pled with them and interceded for them at the throne of grace. He was the only true friend that the nation really had. When the people should be honoring him for what he has been doing, they are instead plotting against him. Jeremiah is both perplexed and perturbed by this turn of events. Borrowing the terminology from the Psalmist¹ he cries, "They are digging a pit for my soul!" (v. 20).

The prayer moves from narrative to petition and the petition takes the form of bitter imprecation. He prays that the sons of his enemies might experience famine and that they might be delivered over to (literally, poured out to) the power of the sword. The same terminology occurs also in Psalms 63:10 and Ezekiel 35:5 and the meaning is that the young soldiers would be thrust upon the sword until their life-blood had been poured out. He prays that the wives of his enemies will become childless and widows (v. 21). He prays that the homes of his enemies might be plundered by a troop of enemy soldiers (v. 22). He asks God not to pardon these men and to deal with them in the time of divine anger (v. 23).

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 his 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 and 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.

1. See Psalms 57:6; 35:7.

5. The particular blasphemy which the enemies hurled at Jeremiah was that his prophecies had not been fulfilled and that consequently he was a false prophet. Jeremiah now is calling upon God to execute those threats which he has so boldly proclaimed (4:6-31; 9:17-22; 14:15-18; 15:2-9).

6. The prophet does not pray for these hardened people because the Lord has already indicated His unwillingness to forgive. Cf. 7:16; 14:10, 12; 15:1, 6; 16:5b.

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.

III. THE BROKEN VESSEL 19:1—20:6

In the parable of the potter and his clay the point was the possibility of remaking a vessel which has not met with approval; in chapter 19 the emphasis is on the destruction of a vessel which proves useless. Jeremiah first gathers the elders of the people and takes them to the edge of the valley of Hinnom and preaches to them (19:1-9). He dramatically illustrated his message by smashing a clay vessel before them (19:10-13). Returning to the Temple Jeremiah attempted to deliver the same message but was arrested (19:14—20:6).

A. The Message to the Elders 19:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) Thus said the LORD: Go and acquire the clay vessel of a potter and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests (2) and go out unto the valley of the son Hinnom which is in front of the gate Harsith and proclaim there the words which I will speak unto you. (3) And you shall say, Hear the word of the LORD, O

kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold I am about to bring calamity upon this place so that the ears of everyone who hears of it shall tingle. (4) Because they have forsaken Me and made this a foreign place by making offerings in it to other gods which they do not know, neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah; and they have filled this place with the blood of innocents. (5) And they have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as a burnt offering to Baal which I did not command nor did I speak of it nor did it enter My mind. (6) Therefore behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when this place will no longer be called Topheth, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. (7) And I will empty out the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their lives; and I will make their corpses food for the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the land. (8) And I will make this city a desolation and a hissing. Everyone who passes by shall be astonished and shall hiss over all the smiting she has suffered. (9) And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters and each man shall eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress which their enemies and those who seek their lives shall administer to them.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah needed to make certain preparations before he preached his next message. First, he is told to purchase the clay vessel of a potter i.e., a vessel fashioned by a potter. Then he is told to gather the elders of the people

and the elders of the priests to hear his message (v. 1). Just how Jeremiah secured the cooperation of these leaders is not indicated in the text. 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 in front of the gate Harsith or gate of the potter (v. 2). 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 at which the sermon was delivered got its name no doubt from the scraps of pottery which were thrown there. The ancient Aramaic Targum suggests that it was the dung gate through which the city rubbish was taken to be disposed of. 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.

Jeremiah delivered a message of doom to that group of dignitaries. A calamity is about to fall upon the land so severe that when people hear of it their ears will tingle (v. 3). The figure of tingling ears is used in connection with threats of severe judgment (I Samuel 3:11; II Kings 21:12) and probably represents the emotions of astonishment and fear. The word "kings" here, as in 17:20, seems to be used in the nontechnical sense for all the leaders of the nation. Jeremiah accuses his audience of making the city and land a heathen place by introducing foreign cults and practices and filling the land with the blood of innocents (v. 4). 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. Certainly verse 5 makes it clear that children had been offered to Baal as burnt offerings (cf. 7:31). Such sacrifices were absolutely contrary to the will and purpose of the Lord. The term Baal is used loosely here for the god Molech, the pagan god who de-

manded child sacrifice. High places of Baal are to be distinguished from the high places of the Lord throughout the Old Testament. The former were always illegitimate places of worship. The latter became illegitimate after the building of Solomon's Temple.

Jeremiah announces the judgment which is about to fall on Judah in language which he had used on a previous occasion (cf. 7:31, 32). Pointing in the direction of that abominable valley Jeremiah declares that no longer will that place be called Topheth, i.e., fireplace; nor will it be known by the name of its former owner, Valley of Hinnom. Because of the great slaughter which will fall upon the land that valley will be used as a burial place for the dead and henceforth will be designated "Valley of Slaughter" (v. 6). God will empty out the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem. The verb translated "empty out" is derived from the same Hebrew root as the word for "bottle" in 19:1 and 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, counsel which 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. 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 (v. 7). The city of 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 (v. 8). In the desperate hour of siege the last

vestige of parental love shall disappear. People would 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 (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53). . At least one example of such cannibalism is recorded earlier during the siege of Samaria by Benhadad (II Kings 6:28ff.). This terrible picture of parents eating their own flesh and blood also appears in the writings of Jeremiah's great contemporary Ezekiel (Ezekiel 5:10). The Book of Lamentations records the horrible fulfillment (Lamentations 4:10). Warned by the Law and by the prophets, yet the hardened men of Judah persisted in the apostasy which would bring upon them this terrible curse.

B. The Symbolic Act and Its Interpretation 19:10-13

TRANSLATION

(10) Then you shall shatter the bottle in the presence of the men who are accompanying you (11) and you shall say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: Like this I will break this people and this city as the potter might break a vessel which can no longer be repaired; and they shall bury in Topheth because there will be no room for burial. (12) Thus will I do to this place (oracle of the LORD) and to its inhabitants even making this city as Topheth. (13) The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall 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.

COMMENTS

The smashing of the bottle here reminds one of the practice current in Egypt where the names of enemy

nations were written on pots or jars which were then smashed. The idea behind the practice in Egypt 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 to dramatically make his point that the nation would be smashed as easily as the brittle Palestinian pottery is smashed when it falls to the ground. Verse 11 is based on 7:32. The words are absent in the ancient Greek version though they are appropriate here. 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. Furthermore the entire city would become as Topheth (v. 12), unclean by virtue of the bones of human sacrifices and by virtue of the official desecration of king Josiah (II Kings 23:10). The houses of Jerusalem upon which incense was offered and libations poured out to pagan gods would be desecrated by the dead bodies which would fall in the city (v. 13). 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 (Jeremiah 32:29; II Kings 23:12; Zephaniah 1:5). 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.¹

C. The Arrest of the Prophet 19:14—20:6

TRANSLATION

(14) And Jeremiah went from Topheth where the LORD had sent him to prophesy and he stood in the court of the house of the LORD and spoke unto all

1. Freedman, *op cit.*, p. 134.

the people. (15) Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to bring against this city and against her cities all the evil which I have spoken concerning it for they have stiffened their neck that they might not hear My words. (1) Now Pashur the son of Immer, the priest who was chief overseer in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesy these things. (2) Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks which were in the upper Benjamin Gate which was in the house of the Lord. (3) And it came to pass the next morning that Pashur released Jeremiah from the stocks. And Jeremiah said unto him, The LORD has not called your name Pashur but Magor-missabib. (4) For thus says the LORD: 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. 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. (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 and take them and bring them to Babylon. (6) And you, Pashur, and all the inhabitants of your house shall go into captivity; and you shall go to Babylon and there you shall die and there you shall be buried both yourself and all your friends to whom you prophesied falsely.

COMMENTS

The prophet had pronounced his message of doom so courageously and boldly that no one dared to interrupt

him or raise a hand against him. So he leaves the valley of Hinnom and returns to the Temple area to preach to the throngs there (v. 14). It is impossible to determine whether verse 15 is merely a summary of what Jeremiah said in the court of the Temple or whether on the other hand he had only 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. Pashur the priest who was chief overseer in the house of the Lord heard that sermon (20:1). 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. Pashur "smote Jeremiah" which probably means that the prophet was scourged with forty stripes (Deuteronomy 25:3). He then ordered that Jeremiah be put in the stocks. The exact nature of this instrument of torture is not clear but the Hebrew word suggests a device which distorts or twists the body, or forces it into a cramped posture. The stocks are mentioned again in 29:26. The Book of Chronicles refers to a house of stocks (II Chronicles 16:10), so apparently the punishment was not uncommon. But in the case of Jeremiah the stocks were in public, "in the upper Benjamin gate which was in the house of the Lord" (v. 2). The tribe of Benjamin lay north of Jerusalem. Thus this gate was probably on the north side of the Temple. The phrase "which was in the house of the Lord" serves to distinguish this gate from the city gate of the same name (37:13; 38:7). This is probably the same gate called by Ezekiel the "higher gate" (9:2) which was built by king Jotham (II Kings 15:35). It probably was one of the main gates leading from the Temple area to the city proper.

When Jeremiah was released from the stocks the next morning he had a special message for Pashur. "The Lord has not called your name Pashur but Magor-missabib" (v.

3). Pashur's new name means "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. Pashur would live to see his friends slain by the sword and the rest of the men of Judah either slain or taken captive to Babylon (v. 4). All the wealth of the nation will be given by the Lord to the enemies of Judah and the national treasures will be taken to Babylon along with the captives (v. 5). Pashur himself and the members of his household would be taken to Babylon where they would all die and be buried. For a misguided patriot like Pashur the worst fate imaginable would be to die and be buried in a foreign land. 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 (v. 6). What the nature of these lies were cannot be ascertained from the account.

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 and caused the terror which was about to come upon the land. In 29:26 Pashur's office is filled by a fellow named Zephaniah. This would suggest that Jeremiah's prophecy had already been fulfilled. No doubt Pashur was taken captive either in the deportation of 605 B.C. or in the deportation of 597 B.C. The latter is more likely.

IV. THE HUMAN VESSEL 20:7-18

In his public confrontation with Pashur Jeremiah had remained as firm as a rock. Now in his private moments with God he breaks down completely. He looks upon his ministry not as a high privilege but as an intolerable burden. He is discouraged with his task; he is dis-

grunted with his God. This is the fourth personal crisis in the ministry of Jeremiah. His "confession" moves through three stages: (1) complaint (vv. 7-10); (2) conviction (vv. 11-13); and (3) curse (vv. 14-18).

A. Complaint 20:7-10

TRANSLATION

(7) You have enticed me, O LORD, and I was enticed; You have completely overpowered me. I have become an object of ridicule all the day, everyone mocks me. (8) For as often as I speak, I cry out, Violence! and destruction I must proclaim! Surely the word of the LORD has become to me shame and derision all the day! (9) But when I say, I will not remember Him nor will I speak again in His name, then there is in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones. I weary myself trying to contain it but I cannot. (10) For I have heard the whispering of many: Terror round about! Denounce him! Let us denounce him! All of my intimate friends are watching my step. Perhaps he will be enticed and we shall prevail over him and take our revenge on him.

COMMENTS

In this bitter moment Jeremiah accuses God of deceiving him. The same Hebrew verb is used of seducing a maiden (Exodus 22:16) or enticing a husband (Judges 14:15; 16:5). In I Kings 22:21 a spirit from God enticed Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead in order that he might meet his death. Of course this accusation against God is absolutely false. God had not deceived His prophet in the least about his mission. He had pointedly warned His prospective prophet that his mission was fraught with

danger and disappointment (cf. 1:18). The accusation continues: "you completely overpowered me," literally, you took hold of me and you prevailed. Jeremiah seems to be complaining that he was compelled against his own will to preach the word of God. Now because of the nature of his ministry Jeremiah has become the object of ridicule and mockery (v. 7). Jeremiah could face physical torture without flinching but he seems to cringe before the barbs of ridicule. He blames his plight upon the nature of his message. He must be a prophet of doom. He must constantly cry "Violence! Destruction!" This message had brought him nothing but reproach and derision (v. 8).

A tremendous battle rages in the heart and mind of this sensitive man of God. On the one hand he wanted to resign his ministry and retreat to the peaceful and 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 and never preach another sermon again. On the other hand his heart was burdened with a sense of prophetic obligation and divine mission. The fire of God's wrath against sin burns fiercely within him. He tries to hold it back but cannot. He becomes utterly exhausted from trying to fight his compulsion to preach. In spite of himself he must follow the divine call, he must resume his ministry (v. 9).

Jeremiah knows the dangers attendant upon his resumption of the prophetic ministry. He knows his enemies are plotting against him. He even seems to hear them urging one another to lay false charges against him. Even his friends (literally, all the men of my peace)—those who greeted him with familiar greetings of friendship—are watching his every move. They hope that he will take one false step so that they may take advantage of it. Perhaps, they think, the prophet can be enticed or seduced into making some mistakes or saying something on which a charge of treason can be based. These enemies will stop

at nothing. They are out for revenge against the meddling prophet who had dared contradict their pro-Egypt policy and pronounce the doom of their nation (v. 10).

B. Conviction 20:11-13

TRANSLATION

(11) But the LORD is with me like a fearsome warrior. Therefore my persecutors shall stumble and they shall not prevail. They shall be utterly put to shame because they shall not succeed, eternal shame which shall not be forgotten. (12) But O LORD of hosts who tests the righteous, who sees the reins and the heart, I shall see Your vengeance on them, for unto You I have revealed my case. (13) Sing unto the LORD! Praise the LORD! For He has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evil-doers.

COMMENTS

The light seems to suddenly shine through Jeremiah's personal gloom and the prophet bursts forth in expressions of joyous trust in God. He suddenly seems to realize that God is on his side after all. Perhaps he recalls the words of promise given to him at the time of his call: They shall not overcome! For I am with you to deliver you! The Lord, a fearsome warrior, will fight the battles of His prophet. Those enemies who are plotting, whispering, and watching would not succeed. On the contrary they will stumble and fall and experience eternal and unforgettable shame (v. 11). Jeremiah simply resolves to lay his case at the feet of the Judge of all the earth knowing that He will do right. He alone is qualified to test and judge the righteous, for He alone can observe the inward thoughts and motives. Jeremiah is confident that he will be vindi-

cated at the judgment bar of God and that his enemies will experience the vengeance¹ of the living God who is a consuming fire (v. 12). So confident is Jeremiah of deliverance from his foes that he bursts forth in a song of praise to his divine deliverer (v. 13). Faith has been victorious over doubt!

C. Curse 20:14-18

TRANSLATION

(14) Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day on which my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! (15) Cursed is the man who brought the good news to my father, saying, A son is born to you! and made him exceedingly glad. (16) And may that man be as the cities which God overthrew and did not relent; may he hear a cry in the morning and a battle cry at noontime; (17) because he did not slay me from the womb so that my mother might be my grave and 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?

COMMENTS

From the mountain top of victorious faith Jeremiah plunges suddenly, unexpectedly, unexplainably into the abyss of despair and self-pity. His sights have suddenly dropped from the Righteous Judge who reigns above to the wicked men who plot against him here below. His song of praise has turned to bitter lament. Like Job (3:3-12) before him he curses the day of his birth (v. 14). When news came that a son had been born, Jeremiah's

1. The latter part of verse 12 can be translated as a simple declarative: "I shall see your vengeance on them" or as a cohortative: "Let me see your vengeance on them."

father rejoiced exceedingly. How ironic. The father rejoices over the birth of one who would live a life of tragedy. Cursed be the man who brought that "good news" to my father, cries the prophet (v. 15). He wishes that this messenger would experience the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. He hopes that this messenger will hear the cry of the terrified inhabitants of the city when the enemy comes smashing through the walls in the morning hours of the day. He hopes that at noontime this man will hear the bloodthirsty battle cry of the invaders as they plunder the city (v. 16). Why such a curse on this anonymous messenger? Because he should have slain me when I was born or else simply left me in my mother's womb (v. 17). Jeremiah simply could not understand why God would allow him to be born only to suffer such heartache, pain, distress and disgrace (v. 18).

Was it right for Jeremiah to curse the day of his birth? It is easy for one who has not experienced the persecutions of Jeremiah to condemn him. Those who have undergone similar trials can empathize with him. The experience of Jeremiah here might be compared to that of the prophet Elijah. After descending from the triumph of Mt. Carmel, Elijah sat under his juniper tree of depression (I Kings 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 which God was able to use for His glory.

How is it possible that such a curse could follow immediately after the joyous confidence of verse 13? Some would argue that verses 14-18 have been mislocated and do not belong here. This is hardly necessary. Nor is it necessary to postulate an interval of time between verse 13 and verse 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 frank and honest revelation of a tortured soul. Such passages indicate that,

of all the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah is probably the most human and also the most heroic.¹ 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 proved to be, God could forgive him and still use him. The Lord does not reject His servant because of this momentary outburst.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER ELEVEN

I. Facts to Master

1. The place to which Jeremiah is directed to go (18:2).
2. That which Israel was in the hand of God (18:6).
3. The response of Israel to the prophet's call for repentance (18:12).
4. The figure by which the prophet illustrates the unnaturalness of Israel's apostasy (18:14).
5. The nature of another plot against Jeremiah (18:18).
6. That which Jeremiah is now commanded to purchase (19:1).
7. The place where the action parable was to take place (19:2).
8. That which Jeremiah was to do with the bottle after he preached his sermon (19:10).
9. Two acts of worship to the astral deities (19:13).
10. The place of defilement and death which Jerusalem will shortly resemble (19:12).
11. Name of the chief officer of the temple who smote Jeremiah and put him in the stocks (20:2).
12. Location of the stocks and length of time Jeremiah spent there (20:2-3).
13. New name given to Pashur and significance of that name (20:3).
14. Fate of Pashur (20:6).
15. That of which Jeremiah accuses God (20:7 RSV).

1. C. R. Erdman, *The Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1955), pp. 46, 47.

JEREMIAH

16. That which Jeremiah felt within himself whenever he tried to resign from his prophetic ministry (20:9).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. What is the basic lesson that Jeremiah learned in the house of the potter? Where does the analogy of the potter and clay break down?
2. What bypaths have this modern generation chosen above the ancient paths of fidelity to God? In what sense is the road that leads to destruction a broad and smooth way and in what sense is it an illdefined and unprepared way?
3. What is meant by the expression "I will show them the back and not the face."? 18:17.
4. How were the people of Judah rendering to Jeremiah evil for good? See 18:20.
5. Is 18:21 a petition or a recognition of the inevitable? Can you cite other examples of this type of verse in the Old Testament? Are verses 21-23 the cry of a vengeful spirit?
6. How are the words "eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters" to be interpreted? 19:9.
7. What was the significance of the smashed bottle? 19:11.
8. Was Pashur a priest or a prophet? See 20:1, 6.
9. In what respect did Jeremiah feel that God had deceived him? 20:7-8.
10. Jeremiah experienced discouragement and even despair during his ministry, yet he did not quit! Why do so many leave the Gospel ministry today?
11. Why did Jeremiah become so discouraged? 20:10.
12. How does Jeremiah's confidence shine through the gloom of despair? 20:11-13.
13. In 20:14-18 does Jeremiah lapse back into despair or could these verses be assigned to another occasion?
14. Why did Jeremiah curse the day of his birth? 20:15-18.

CHAPTER TWELVE

POLITICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS OF THE PROPHET 21:1—25:38

The oracles in chapters 21-25 are concerned mainly with political matters. These materials come from the reigns of three kings and may be arranged chronologically according to the following scheme:

1. From the reign of Jehoiakim
 - a) 22:1-23
 - b) 25:1-38
2. From the reign of Jehoiachin
 - a) 22:24-30
3. From the reign of Zedekiah
 - a) 24:1-10
 - b) 21:1-14
 - c) 23:1-40

In addition to these oracles, other literary elements are clearly present in this section including narrative (21:1, 2; 25:1, 2), autobiography (23:9), vision (24:1, 2) and action parable (25:15-29). Topically this section of the book can be divided into two subdivisions: (1) God and the leaders of Judah (21:1—24:10); and (2) God and the World Order (25:1-38).

I. GOD AND THE LEADERS OF JUDAH 21:1—24:10

Chapters 21-24 contain mainly oracles addressed to the leaders of Judah particularly the kings and the prophets. The material is not in chronological order as already noted. The section begins with a reply to king Zedekiah (21:1-14) which is followed by general remarks directed to the royal house (22:1-9). Standing next are three oracles directed to Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin

(22:10-30). Chapter 23 begins with the promise of an ideal ruler who is to come (23:1-8) and continues with a lengthy condemnation of the false prophets (23:9-15). The section closes with a vision and the interpretation thereof (24:1-10).

A. A Reply to King Zedekiah 21:1-14

The time is 588 B.C. A new Pharaoh had taken the throne, Pharaoh Hophra (588-569 B.C.), known in secular literature as Apries. Hoping to re-establish 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 rebell against Babylon. This act of indiscretion brought on the invasion of the great Nebuchadnezzar. City after city in Judah was falling to the Chaldeans. Having no one to whom to turn except the man of God, Zedekiah sent a delegation to Jeremiah. The present paragraph contains (1) the appeal of the king (vv. 1, 2), (2) the answer of the prophet (vv. 3-7), (3) advice to the people (vv. 8-10), and (4) the alternatives for the royal house (vv. 11-14).

1. *The appeal of the king* (21:1, 2)

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD when king Zedekiah sent unto him Pashur son of Malchiah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying, (2) Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon is fighting against us; perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to His wonderous works and cause him to go up from us.

COMMENTS

Zedekiah selected two men to form his delegation to the prophet. Representing the civil authority was Pashur th son of Malchiah. This is not the same Pashur who appeared in 20:1 as a high ranking priest and false prophet. Representing the ecclesiastical authority was Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah who is mentioned again in 29:25 and 37:3. 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 to now seek him out for counsel and guidance.

The delegation was in no position to make demands. Rather they humbly petition the prophet to inquire of the Lord for them. The word "inquire" here is a technical word in the Hebrew which means to seek an oracle. They were seeking a revelation from God. 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. They seem to be expecting some positive response on the part of God. No doubt they fully expected Him to 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 (II Kings 19:35). Zedekiah and his counselors and court theologians could not believe that God had abandoned them. They seem to have forgotten all that Jeremiah had been saying throughout his ministry.

The spelling of the name of the Chaldean king in this verse should be noted. This is the spelling which predominates in Jeremiah and Daniel and is the only form in Ezekiel. Actually this form of the name is closer to the Babylonian original Nabukudurri-uzur. In the Bible the spelling Nebuchadnezzar is also found.

2. The answer of the prophet (21:3-7)

TRANSLATION

(3) But Jeremiah said unto them, Thus shall you say to Zedekiah: Thus says the LORD 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; and I will gather them into the midst of this city. (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. (6) And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of great pestilence. (7) And after this (oracle of the LORD) 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. He shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not have pity upon them nor mercy nor compassion.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah was not impressed or flattered by the coming of this royal delegation. He does not hesitate a moment to fire back an oracle to the king. Those soldiers who are attempting to defend the walls of Jerusalem will not be successful. God Himself will "turn back" i.e., render ineffective or inoperative, the defensive weapons of the armies of Judah. God will actually gather the Chaldean soldiers into the walls of Jerusalem (v. 4). Far from intervening on behalf of Judah the Lord will actually be fighting against them. His outstretched hand and strong arm which had on so many occasions in the past been

directed against the enemies of the nation (e.g., Deuteronomy 26:8) are now turned against Judah. He who was the Captain of the host of Israel is now leading the charge of the Chaldean enemy. He is still the God of might and miracle but He is now using that power in His wrath against His apostate people (v. 5).

Not only is God directing the Chaldean attack against Jerusalem, He is about to unleash from his arsenal the weapons of plague and pestilence against His people (v. 6). 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. Furthermore many rural folks would flock to the city during the time of attack thus swelling the population and placing an extra strain upon the community resources. Those who survive the terrible siege with its bloody assaults, its plague and famine the Lord will give into the ruthless hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah the king and the royal household are specifically included in this threat. The Chaldean will have no mercy or compassion upon those who fall into his hands (v. 7).

3. *The advice to the people* (21:8-10)

TRANSLATION

(8) And unto this people you shall say, Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. (9) The one who remains in this city shall die by the sword or by the famine or by the pestilence; the one who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live, and his life shall be as spoils to him. (10) For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good (oracle of the LORD). Into the hand of the king of Babylon it shall be given, and he shall burn it with fire.

To the gloomy message for king Zedekiah Jeremiah adds an oracle addressed to the people in general. Using the solemn language of Deuteronomy 30:15ff. God places before His people the alternatives of life and death (v. 8). While it is clear that Jeremiah is referring to the Deuteronomy passage, he is using the word "life" in a more restricted sense. In Deuteronomy the word "life" meant prosperous existence whereas here the word "life" means escape from death. The way of death is to remain in the besieged city of Jerusalem; the way of life is surrender to the enemy (v. 9). Jeremiah gave this same advice on other occasions (e.g., 38:1, 17). It would appear that not a few Jews followed this advice (38:19; 39:9; 52:15). Those who surrender (literally, fall away) to the enemy will be rewarded only by the preservation of their lives. They 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. Resistance is useless for God has set His face against the city of Jerusalem for evil i.e., to destroy it, rather than for good i.e., to deliver the place. By continuing the struggle the fanatical defenders of the city are in reality fighting against God. He will deliver Jerusalem into the hand of the king of Babylon. The torch will be put to the holy city (v. 10). While there may be hope for individuals if they surrender, the doom of the city as a whole is sealed.

4. *The alternatives for the royal house* (21:11-14)

TRANSLATION

(11) And to the house of the king of Judah: Hear the word of the LORD! O house of David, thus says the LORD: Judge with justice in the morning and

deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor lest My wrath go forth like fire unquenchable because of the evil of your' deeds. (13) Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain (oracle of the LORD), who say, Who shall terrify us and who shall come into our habitation? (14) But I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds (oracle of the Lord); I will kindle a fire in her forest and it will consume all that is round about her.

COMMENTS

The third brief oracle which comes as a response to the inquiry of Zedekiah is a last ditch appeal to the royal house (v. 11). They can still save their city if they are willing to make a radical change in the national policy. Two things are required: First, they might be able to escape the unquenchable fire of divine wrath if they will immediately—"in the morning"—begin to practice and encourage social justice. The king and his administration must judge with justice and deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor (v. 12). The word "oppressed" comes from a root which means to take by force, tear away, seize. The "oppressed," then are those who have had their rights or properties taken away by force, i.e., by crooked justice. The Old Testament prophets had much to say in the area of social ethics. They were ahead of their times. Many Christians do not seem to have caught up with them in concern for the unfortunate and down-trodden.

The second thing that the royal house must do if disaster is to be averted is to cease their insane and irrational confidence in the inviolability of Jerusalem. In verse 13 God declares that he is against Jerusalem, "the

1. Another reading is "their deeds."

valley and rock of the plain." Jerusalem and Mt. Zion rise abruptly out of the surrounding valleys. Hence Jerusalem is the inhabitant of the valley. The city is like an impregnable rock which juts up from a plain. The word plain does not necessarily mean a level place but a plateau, either level or hilly. Because of the superior defenses of the city the Jewish defenders were confident of their ability to withstand the invader. "Who shall come into our habitation"? they boasted. Such boasts would suggest that the siege was in its early stages at the time Zedekiah sent the delegation to meet with Jeremiah. The confidence manifested by the Jerusalem leadership was ill-founded in view of the fact that God was punishing His people. "According to the fruit of your deeds" points to the fact that the punishment would correspond to the sins committed against God and man. Because of all of her crimes God will kindle a fire in the forest of Jerusalem i.e., in the houses of the city, and that fire will consume everything. (v. 14).

B. General Remarks Regarding the Royal House

22:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) Thus says the LORD: Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word, (2) And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, who sits upon the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates. (3) Thus says the LORD: Execute justice and righteousness and deliver the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor. And do not oppress or do violence to the stranger, orphan or widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. (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. (5) But if you do not hearken to these words, I swear by Myself (oracle of the LORD) that this house shall become a desolation. (6) For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah: A Gilead are you to Me, the top of Lebanon! Surely I will make you a wilderness, as cities uninhabited. (7) And I will appoint against you destroyers each man and his weapons; and they shall cut down your choice cedars and cast them upon the fire. (8) And many nations shall pass by this city; and they will say one to another, Why did the LORD deal with this great city in this manner? (9) Then they will say, Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God and they bowed down to other gods and served them.

COMMENTS

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 (v. 1). In this oracle Jeremiah stresses the obligations of the royal house (vv. 2, 3) and promises that if these obligations are met then the dynasty of David would continue (v. 4). But if the words of God are ignored then the nation is doomed to destruction (vv. 5-9).

1. *Obligations* (22:2, 3)

The king and princes who passed through the gates of the palace each day may have been 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 (v. 2).

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. Specifically 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 in order that the king might undertake lavish building projects. (see vv. 13ff.). Jeremiah cries out the necessity for the king to cease oppressing the helpless ones of society—the strangers, orphans and widows. Other nations looked with suspicion on strangers but the Bible teaches tolerance for those of other nationalities. Jeremiah also demands in the name of his God that Jehoiakim cease his violence and the shedding of innocent blood (v. 3). That innocent blood was shed during this period is evident from case of Uriah the prophet who was executed because he spoke out against the king. Jeremiah was putting his life on the line when he preached this sermon at the gates of the royal palace!

2. *Promise* (22:4)

To his list of royal obligations Jeremiah adds a promise which he has previously made (see 17:25). If the monarch will only heed the message of the prophet the Davidic line will 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.

3. *Threat* (22:5-9)

If the royal family chooses to reject their obligations then the most dire punishments will befall Jerusalem. Because He could swear by no greater, God swears by

Himself¹ that the royal dwelling of the king of Judah would become desolate (v. 5). Because of the height of this building and because it was constructed from cedar-wood the prophet calls it figuratively "Gilead . . . the top of Lebanon." Both Gilead and Lebanon were noted in antiquity for their stately forests. Such forests were often denuded in time of war to provide fuel and weapons for an attacking army. So God would bring destruction upon the kingdom of Judah, making that land a virtual wilderness (v. 6). The divinely appointed destroyers will take their weapons and cut down the choice cedars of the land i.e., the princes and leaders of the nation (v. 7). 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 (v. 8). They will rightly conclude that the destruction has come upon the land because the people of the Lord forsook their covenant with Him and worshiped other gods (v. 9). Jeremiah is definitely influenced in these last two verses by Deuteronomy 29:23ff.

C. Oracles Concerning Specific Kings 22:10-30

Three separate oracles concerning specific kings have been gathered together in 22:10-30. Here Jeremiah speaks of the future of Jehoahaz (vv. 10-12), the folly of Jehoia-kim (vv. 13-23) and the fate of Jehoiachin (vv. 24-30).

1. *The future of Jehoahaz* (22:10-12)

TRANSLATION

(10) Do not weep for the dead nor bewail him! Weep bitterly for the one who goes away; for he shall never again see the land of his birth. (11) For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum son of

1. The same expression occurs in Jeremiah 49:13; Genesis 22:16; and Isaiah 45:23. A similar expression occurs in Amos 6:8 and Jeremiah 51:14.

Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went out from this place: He shall no more return! (12) For in the place where they took him captive, there shall he die and this land he shall not see again.

COMMENTS

After the untimely death of the godly king Josiah at the pass of Megiddo in 609 B.C., the people of the land selected his son Jehoahaz to occupy the throne of Judah. Jehoahaz had reigned but three months when Pharaoh Necho summoned him to Riblah, put him in chains, and deported him to Egypt (II Kings 23:30ff.). Jeremiah's oracle must have been delivered shortly after the deportation of Jehoahaz.

The death of Josiah was bitterly lamented. Even Jeremiah himself joined in the lamentation for this righteous man (II Chronicles 35:25). But as far as Jeremiah was concerned, tears were more appropriate for Jehoahaz than for Josiah. By his premature death Josiah would be delivered from the horrors of those final years of Judah's history. But Jehoahaz would live out his life as a captive in a foreign land (v. 10). Though some people apparently believed that Jehoahaz would shortly return from Egypt to reclaim his throne, Jeremiah knows that this will not be the case. "He shall not return," cries the prophet. "He will never see this land again" (vv. 11, 12). That Shallum here is identical with the Jehoahaz of II Kings is made clear by I Chronicles 3:15. Shallum was his given name; Jehoahaz was his throne name.

2. *The folly of Jehoiaikim (22:13-23)*

TRANSLATION

(13) Woe to him that builds his house with unrighteousness and his upper chambers with injustice; who

makes his neighbor serve for nothing and does not give his wages to him; (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. (15) Shall you continue to reign because you are striving earnestly to excell in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and establish justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. (16) He judged the cause of the poor and needy. Then it was well. Is not this what it means to know Me (oracle of the LORD)? (17) But your eyes and your heart are fixed solely upon your ill-gotten gain, and upon shedding innocent blood and upon practicing oppression and violence. (18) Therefore, thus says the LORD to Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah: They shall not lament for him: Ah my brother! or Ah sister! They shall not lament for him: As lord! or Ah his glory! (19) With the burial of an ass shall he be buried, dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem. (20) Go up to Lebanon and cry out, and lift up your voice in Bashan, cry out from Abarim! for all of your lovers are destroyed! (21) I spoke unto you in your prosperity. But you said, I will not harken. This has been your way from your youth, that you have not hearkened to My voice. (22) The wind shall shepherd all of your shepherds, and your lovers will go into captivity; surely then you will be ashamed and perplexed because of all of your evil. (23) O inhabitant of Lebanon, you who make your nest among the cedars, how you are to be pitied when pangs come on you, travail like a woman in childbirth.

JEREMIAH
COMMENTS

Jehoiakim was placed on the throne of Judah by Pharaoh Necho when Jehoahaz was deported to Egypt in 609 B.C. The stupidity of this monarch was only equaled by his pride, cruelty and covetousness. Jehoiakim was not satisfied to occupy the palace which his father Josiah had occupied before him. He wanted a bigger and more luxurious home like the rulers of Egypt or Babylon. With Solomon-like zeal this puny prince set about to build a magnificent palace. Contrary to the teaching of the law and the prophets he forced his countrymen to labor on this ill-conceived project without remuneration. The Hebrew prophets denounced this practice which was common in the ancient Near East. Not even a king could demand unpaid services from his subjects! Thus Jehoiakim was building his house with "unrighteousness" and "injustice" (v. 13). And what a house that was to be—a roomy house with upper chambers and windows, the interior paneled with cedar and painted red (v. 14).

In verse 15 Jeremiah drives home the point that there is more to being a king than surrounding oneself with luxury. Jehoiakim need not think that he is entitled to reign merely because he can rival others in the building of cedar houses. 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. As a result Josiah prospered and was blessed of God because he put first things first (v. 15). He judged the cause of the poor and needy, i.e., he was cognizant of the rights and needs of the less fortunate. A man who really

knows the Lord will see and seek to alleviate human suffering (v. 16).

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 (v. 17).

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 king Josiah (II Chronicles 35:25). But no one will shed a tear when Jehoiakim passes from the scene. The word "Ah" is part of the vocabulary of lamentation and signifies extreme distress and sorrow. "Ah my brother!" or "Ah sister!" was no doubt a lament commonly uttered by relatives and friends of the deceased (I Kings 13:30) while the cry "Ah lord!" or "Ah his majesty!" was presumably an expression of grief reserved for the death of a king (cf. Jeremiah 34:5). 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 (v. 18). On the contrary Jehoiakim who loved to live in pomp and splendor would be buried with the burial of an ass. The burial of an ass would be no burial. The carcass of the animal would simply be left to rot in the open field. No specific passage states that this prophecy was fulfilled. But II Kings 24:6 does state

"Jehoiakim slept with his fathers"¹ 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. 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 B.C. 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.

Divine punishment awaits the nation as well as the king. Under the figure of a woman, Israel is 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 would shortly 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 Mt. Nebo was one of the prominent peaks. Everywhere the cry of lamentation is taken up as the enemy moves toward Jerusalem. No help arises from any quarter for all the "lovers" have been destroyed (v. 20). These "lovers" are nations which had foolishly banded together in some sort of political pact to withstand Nebuchadnezzar.

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 she had refused to give heed to the word of God (v. 21).

1. The same terminology is used of Ahab who died a violent death at the hands of the Syrians (IKings 22:40).

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. But God will "shepherd the shepherds" of Israel by means of the wind of divine judgment. The political lovers, allied nations in whom Israel trusted, will also go into captivity. The men of Judah will be ashamed and perplexed as they come to realize the terrible evil which they have committed against their God (v. 22). 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." The use of the figure Lebanon for Jerusalem is also 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 (I Kings 7:2; 10-17, 21). Jeremiah has nothing but pity for the proud city as he contemplates the terrible agony which she must shortly endure, an agony comparable only to that suffered by a woman in travail (v. 23).

3. *The fate of Jehoiachin* (22:24-30)

TRANSLATION

(24) As I live (oracle of the LORD), even if Coniah son of Jehoiakim king of Judah was a signet upon My right hand, I would pull you off; (25) and I will 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. (26) And I will cast you and the mother who bore you into another land where you were not born, and there you shall die. (27) But to the land where they long to return, they shall not return. (28) Is this man Coniah a despised and broken vessel? Is he a vessel

in which there is no delight? For what reason were he and his seed hurled away, and cast into a land which they do not know? (29) O land, land, land! Hear the word of the LORD! (30) Thus says the LORD: Write this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for he shall not be successful in having one of his descendants sit on the throne of David or rule again over Judah.

COMMENTS

Having spoken of the future of Jehoahaz (vv. 10-12) and the folly of Jehoiakim (vv. 13-23) Jeremiah now adds an oracle dealing with the fate of Coniah whose throne name was Jehoiachin.¹ Jehoiachin apparently was a carbon copy of his father (II Kings 24:9). For this reason God declares 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 and 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 and hence could be compared to a signet on the hand of the Lord. But God swears with an oath formula ("as I live") that Jehoiachin will be removed from this royal dignity (v. 24).

Not only will God remove Jehoiachin from the throne of Judah, but He will see to it that the king is delivered into the hands of the ruthless Nebuchadnezzar (v. 25). He along with the queen-mother, the influential Nehushta,²

1. Jeremiah 52:31. This monarch is also designated as Jeconiah (27:20), Jeconiah (24:1) and Joiakin (Ezekiel 1:2). The name in its various forms means "The Lord will establish."

2. See 29:2; II Kings 24:8. An oracle has already been delivered to this prominent woman in 13:18.

will be taken into the distant land of Babylon where they will die (v. 26). To die in a foreign land was considered one of the worst fates which could befall a man. The prophecy was fulfilled in 597 B.C. 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 (II Kings 25:27-30). Jehoiachin must have died in Babylon before the restoration of the Jews in 537 B.C. or else he surely would have been made the leader of the returnees at that time.

Verses 24-26 speak of the exile of king Jehoiachin as something in the future. But verses 27-30 presuppose that the exile has already begun. Here, as so often in prophetic literature, the prophet has projected himself into the future beyond 597 B.C. 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 (v. 27).

Jeremiah finds it hard to believe the words of his own prophecy. By means of a favorite literary device, a series of questions,¹ he expresses his incredulity. In astonishment he asks, "Is Coniah no better than a cracked piece of pottery which one might cast on the top of a trash pile?" Why must Jehoiachin and his seed suffer the terrible fate of deportation to a foreign land? Jeremiah seems in verse 28 to be reflecting a great deal of sympathy toward the young king who was destined to reign only three months on the throne of Judah (II Kings 24:8). Though Jehoiachin was but eighteen years old when taken captive he had wives (II Kings 24:15) and apparently "seed", i.e., children.

1. Jeremiah elsewhere employs the repeated question to state an unnatural, incomprehensible fact. See 8:4f.; 8:22; 14:19.

As Jeremiah reaches the climax of his pronouncement against Jehoiachin he dramatically calls the entire land to listen to the announcement of the tragic fate of this king. "O land, land, land! Hear the word of the Lord!" (v. 29). The three-fold repetition of "land" anticipates the solemnity of the message which follows. "Write this man childless", i.e., enter Jehoiachin in the register of the citizens as one who has no heirs. The word "childless" is not to be taken here in the absolute sense since verse 28 already has mentioned the "seed" or children of Jehoiachin. Rather the meaning is that as far as the throne is concerned Jehoiachin would be childless. The rest of the verse makes this perfectly clear. 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.

D. The Promise of an Ideal Ruler 23:1-8

TRANSLATION

(1) How sad it is that shepherds are destroying and scattering the flock of My pasture! (oracle of the LORD). (2) Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who are caring for My people; you have scattered My flock and driven them away, and you have not visited them; behold, I am about to visit upon you the evil of your deeds. (3) Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands where I have driven them and I will cause them to return to their pasture; and they shall be fruitful and multiply. (4) And I will raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not fear anymore nor shall they be terrified, nor shall they be lacking (oracle of the LORD). (5) Behold, days are coming

(oracle of the LORD) when I will raise up for David a righteous Shoot and He shall reign as king and he shall act wisely and execute justice and righteousness in the land. (6) In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell securely; and this is His name which He will be called, The LORD our Righteousness. (7) Therefore behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when they will no longer say, As the LORD lives who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, (8) but, As the LORD 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. Then they shall dwell in their land.

COMMENTS

It is a sad situation which the prophet is describing in verse 1. The shepherds, the national leaders (cf. 2:8; 10:21), are responsible for the impending destruction of the flock which God has committed into their care. Under the leadership of these unscrupulous men 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 and corruption which was rampant in the land. These 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, pay attention to, etc. 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 verb is used in both senses in verse 2. 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. 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 and followed their wicked leaders.

The corrupt shepherds who governed Judah were responsible for the impending national deportation and dispersement. But sometime in the future the Good Shepherd would again assemble His flock. Only a remnant, a small portion, of those who were carried away into captivity would ever return. Apparently the majority would be lost during the period of exile. God will gather His people from the various lands—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon—where He had scattered them. Upon returning to their homeland the remnant of Judah will be made fruitful and they will multiply (v. 3).¹ After their return God will raise up for His people a new kind of ruler. The wicked shepherds took care of themselves and not the flock; but the new shepherds will have the interest of the people at heart. The old shepherds had left the flock of God exposed to the ravishes of wild beasts (cf. Ezekiel 34:8); under the new shepherds the flock will contentedly graze without fear. Not one of them will be lacking or missing due to any neglect on the part of the new shepherds (v. 4). Who are the new shepherds of whom Jeremiah speaks? Some contend that he is 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

1. Compare Ezekiel 34:12-15.

case in prophecy prophecies of restoration blend in with prophecies of the Messiah and His kingdom.

The word "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. Verses 5 and 6 are of such importance that nearly every phrase is deserving of comment. The following information can be gleaned from these verses concerning the coming Messiah.

1. The promised Messiah is to be the descendant of David.¹ Through the prophet Nathan, God had promised David that his progeny would sit forever on the throne of Israel (II Samuel 7).

2. The Messiah is called in the standard English version 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 which grows directly out of the ground. The title "shoot" is here applied unmistakably to the Messiah for the first time. In Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 "shoot" becomes a proper name for the Messiah.

3. The Messianic Shoot is raised up by direct action of God. This was necessary because the old stock of David was worn out, incapable of reproducing from itself a mighty tree.

4. The Messiah will be a righteous Shoot. All other descendants of David had to confess their sins and ask divine forgiveness. The Messiah would be sinless (Isaiah 53:9). He did not *become* righteous; he *was* righteous (Isaiah 53:11).

5. The Messiah shall reign as king. Jeremiah looks forward here to the rule of a second David. That the

1. Cf. Isaiah 9:7; 11:1; Micah 5:2.

reign of Christ has already begun is the clear testimony of the New Testament.¹

6. He shall deal wisely. The same Hebrew verb could be translated "he shall prosper." But in the light of Isaiah 11:2 probably the former translation is preferable. The 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 well-being to all His subjects.

7. The Messiah will execute justice and righteousness. This sums up the function of the ideal ruler (cf. II Samuel 8:15). He is able to create or establish a new norm, a new standard, a new righteousness.²

8. Israel and Judah will be reunited under the rule of the Messiah. Ezekiel held out a similar hope (Ezekiel 37:19). The salvation and deliverance spoken of in verse 6 are spiritual blessings. Reunited Judah and Israel never regained political independence except for one brief period under the Hasmonean rulers in the second century before Christ.

9. The Messiah shall bear the name "The LORD our Righteousness." In 33:16 Jeremiah gives this same name to the city of Jerusalem. 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—Genesis 17:5b); nor does he say: Call His name (as in the case of Ishmael—Genesis 16:11, 13); nor yet does he say: This shall he be called (as is used of Jerusalem—Jeremiah 33:16). The phraseology used here is unique in the entire Old Testament: "And this is His name which one shall call Him." According to Laetsch two facts are underscored by this construction:

1. See Hebrews 1:3-13; 10:12-13; Revelation 3:21; I Corinthians 15:20-28; Acts 2:19-34.

2. Seven times Jeremiah uses the Hebrew verb meaning "do or make" with the word for justice. Thus the Messiah creates or makes justice and righteousness.

(1) The name given the Messiah here is not a mere label or tag. Rather it designates the very nature or essence of the Messiah. He IS righteousness! (2) God desires that mankind should refer to the Messiah by the title here given, "Yahweh, our Righteousness."

In verses 7 and 8 the prophet moves back from the distant Messianic future to the more immediate future. Using essentially the language of 16:14f. Jeremiah speaks once again of the return from Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah never wavered on this proposition: God would bring a remnant of His people home from Babylon. This return from Babylon would overshadow the Exodus from Egypt. The promise is introduced by the word "therefore." One noted expositor has suggested that whenever one sees in Scripture a "therefore" he ought to try to discover what it is there for. The suggestion here is 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 verses 5 and 6. Since the Exodus from Egypt was foundational to the establishment of the old covenant and to all the theology of the Old Testament, 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.

E. The Condemnation of False Prophets 23:9-40

The heading over verse 9 reads "against the prophets." In this section of the book which deals with national leaders past, present and future a section concerning the prophets is to be expected. The question is, what prophets are addressed in this oracle? Jeremiah is not referring to the prophets of Baal (see vv. 13, 27), nor is he referring to the so called "sons of the prophets" who are always

described as true prophets of the Lord. As a matter of fact there is no positive proof that the institution known as the "sons of the prophets" which was founded by Elijah and Elisha was still in existence. 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 which appear in I Kings 22 as part of the court of Ahab. These pseudo prophets apparently enjoyed a large measure of popular support in the days of Jeremiah probably because they tickled the ears of the people with the kind of preaching which they craved. These men were perhaps the greatest hindrance to the effective proclamation of the revealed word of God. That there existed a mutual antagonism between the true messenger of God and these charlatons is evident in the passages where they are mentioned.¹ Jeremiah lashed out against them throughout his ministry. Here he points out the menace of false prophets (vv. 9-15) and analyzes their message (vv. 16-22) and their methods (vv. 23-32). Finally he blasts them for the way they caused the people to mock the true messenger of God (vv. 33-40).

1. *The menace of the false prophets* (23:9-15)

TRANSLATION

(9) Against the prophets. My heart is broken within me, all my bones shake; I am like a drunk man, and like a strong man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of His holy words. (10) For the land is full of adulterers; for the earth mourns because of a curse; the pastures of the wilderness have dried up. Their course is evil, and their strength is not right; (11) for both the prophets and

1. See Jeremiah 5:30f.; 14:13-18; 26:7-16; 28:1-17; 29:30-32; 37:18-21.

the priests are profane; yea in My house I have found their wickedness (oracle of the LORD). (12) Therefore their way shall become to them as slippery places in deep darkness. They shall be pushed forward and fall on it; for I shall bring against them calamity, the year of their visitation (oracle of the LORD). (13) In the prophets of Samaria I saw unseemliness; they prophesied by Baal and caused My people Israel to err. (14) But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen an astonishing thing: committing adultery, walking in lies; and they have strengthened the hands of the evil ones, with the result that no one turns from his evil. They are all to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. (15) Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: Behold, I am about to feed them wormwood and cause them to drink poison water; for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out to all the land.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah did not fit the stereotype of the hell-fire and damnation preacher. As he contemplated the guilt of his people and their impending destruction his heart is broken, his bones shake in terror. He loses all self-control and becomes in that respect like a man who is intoxicated. Four reasons for the grief and distress of the prophet are given. (1) Jeremiah is upset because of the Lord and His word (v. 9). The knowledge that God is about to bring judgment upon the wicked and sinful people of Judah has caused the prophet much grief and no little perplexity. (2) Jeremiah is grief-stricken because of the sinfulness of the masses. The land is full of adultery. Both literal and spiritual adultery is doubtlessly meant. The course of the people, their way of life, that which

they pursue is only evil. They use their might for that which is not right i.e., crookedness. (3) The condition of the land brings the prophet much distress. The land is under the curse of God because of the sin of its inhabitants. The curse here is that with which God punishes the wicked.¹ The earth mourns because it is unable to bring forth its produce. The pastures have dried up (v. 10). This passage may well date to the time of the drought mentioned in 14:1. (4) But 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 profane, unholy, disobedient to the commands of God. In the very Temple of God evidence of their wickedness could be found (v. 11). Just exactly what wickedness Jeremiah is referring to here is uncertain. Ezekiel tells of the totemistic worship of figures of animals in the inner chambers and of women weeping for the nature god Tammuz in the courts of the Temple (Ezekiel 8:10-14). These pagan practices could not have been going on without the active cooperation of the priests. The 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.

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 Psalms 35:6. By circumstances and by Satan these wicked men are driven forward to ever more treacherous ground until they finally will fall to their destruction. Their year of visitation i.e., time of their punishment, will overtake them (v. 12).

1. See Zechariah 5:3; Daniel 9:11; Isaiah 24:6; Leviticus 26:14ff.; Deuteronomy 28:15ff.

In the eyes of God the prophets of Judah were more wicked than the prophets of Samaria. Those Baal prophets of the north had been found to be unseemly (lit., unsalted, tasteless). They had caused God's people in the north to err (v. 13). But the prophets of Judah were far worse. By professing themselves to be spokesmen for God they were in effect putting God's stamp of approval upon the most terrible deeds. They themselves were immoral and unscrupulous and furthermore through their false prophecies they strengthened the hands of those who engaged in evil practices. They did not preach repentance or judgment and consequently no man turned away from his evil deeds. By constantly preaching peace and prosperity these prophets had succeeded in turning Judah into a virtual Sodom (v. 14). 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 of evil conduct on the part of clergymen spread throughout the land and every sinner will use it as an excuse to commit even greater evils. These prophets who preached such a disastrous message and set such a terrible example will be forced to partake of the wormwood and the gall, bitter poisonous plants which here symbolize divine judgment (v. 15). In 9:15 this same expression was used in reference to the judgment upon the people of the land. Here the preachers are depicted as suffering the same fate as the people to whom they preached. There is no exemption for the clergy when it comes to divine judgment!

2. *The message of the false prophets* (23:16-22)

TRANSLATION

(16) Thus says the LORD of hosts: Do not hearken to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are causing you to become vain! They

speak a vision of their heart and not from the mouth of the LORD. (17) They say continually to those who despise Me, The LORD has said: You shall have peace; and to all who walk in the stubbornness of their heart they have said: Calamity shall not come upon you. (18) For who has stood in the secret council of the LORD that he might see and hear His word?' Who has paid attention to His word and heard it? (19) Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in fury, a whirlwind; it shall whirl upon the heads of the wicked. (20) The anger of the LORD shall not be turned back until He has accomplished and performed the plans of His heart. In the end of the days you will fully understand it. (21) I have not sent the prophets, yet they ran! I have not spoken unto them, yet they prophesied! (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.

COMMENTS

The prophets of Judah are bolstering the false hopes of the people with false prophecies. Jeremiah calls for the people to repudiate these deceivers. Their prophecies did not come from the mouth of the Lord but from the vain imaginations of their own hearts. Giving heed to such empty prophecies would only cause the people to act in a vain and foolhardy way (v. 16). The false prophets were continually grinding out their pious platitudes. The Hebrew uses a grammatical device to emphasize the ceaseless flow of words which were pouring forth from these pseudo prophets. To the hardened and rebellious sinners

1. "His word" may also be read "My word." The ancient versions are divided on the translation. Actually it makes little difference which reading is adopted.

of Judah these men were giving assurance that all would be well. "The Lord has said, You shall have peace. No calamity will befall you!" The expression "the Lord has spoken" nowhere else in the Old Testament 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.

By means of two rhetorical questions Jeremiah denies the authority of the false prophets and at the same time implicitly affirms his own inspiration. "Who has stood in the council of the Lord that he might see and hear His word?" The answer is obvious. Corrupt men like the false prophets could never have stood in the presence of God. Amos asserted, "Surely the Lord 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 (Psalms 25:14). Sometimes the prophets had visions in which they saw the Lord in consultation with His trusted servants (Isaiah 6:1; I Kings 22:19). Eliphaz asked Job, "Were you listening in the council of God? (Job 15:8). The picture here is of the heavenly council chambers. True prophets are privy to the decisions of God relating to the children of men. This is another way of saying that the prophet receives direct revelation from God. The second rhetorical question of verse 18 points to another way in which man can ascertain the will of God. "Who has paid attention to His word and heard it?" 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.

The message which Jeremiah brought in the name of

God was quite different from that which the false prophets brought. God's judgment is already approaching like a whirlwind. It will literally dance around upon the head of the wicked. The hurricane of divine wrath is upon them (v. 19). 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. 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 (v. 20). The term "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 Old Testament that it refers to the end of the world. (2) Others think that "end of days" refers to the Messianic age as in 48:47; 49:39; Isaiah 2:2; Hosea 3:5. The idea would then be that God's dealing with Israel would be placed in proper perspective when the Messiah comes. (3) A third view is that the term "end of days" simply means "in future days." Cheyne points to an Assyrian inscription where precisely the same phrase is used in the general sense of future time. It is the view of this writer that "end of days" refers to the New Testament age.

In verses 17-20 Jeremiah emphasizes the point that the message of the false prophets is diametrically opposed to true revelation. 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 (v. 21). As further proof that these men were deceivers Jeremiah points out that their preaching was not designed to effect any moral change.

Their message has no rebuke for sin and no appeal for reformation. Therefore these men cannot be true prophets of the Lord! If they truly had stood in the secret council of God they would be diligently laboring to turn people from their evil ways (v. 22).

3. *The methods of the false prophets* (23:23-32)

TRANSLATION

(23) Am I a God near at hand (oracle of the LORD), and not a God far off? (24) Can a man hide himself in secret places that I am not able to see him (oracle of the LORD)? Do not I fill the heavens and the earth (oracle of the LORD)? (25) I have heard that which the prophets who have been prophesying lies in My name have said: I have dreamed! I have dreamed! (26) How long? Do the prophets who prophesy falsehood and are prophets of the deceit of their own heart think, do they plan to make My people forget My name with their dreams which they relate each one to his neighbor as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? (28) The prophet who has a dream, let him relate a dream; and the one who has My word let him speak My word faithfully. What does straw have to do with wheat (oracle of the LORD)? (29) Is not My word like fire (oracle of the LORD) and like a hammer that shatters rock? (30) Therefore behold, I am against the prophets (oracle of the LORD) that steal My words everyone from his neighbor. (31) Behold, I am against you, O prophets (oracle of the LORD), who take their tongue and say, Oracle. (32) Behold, I am against the prophets of lying dreams (oracle of the LORD) who narrate them and cause My people to err with their lies and their recklessness when I did not send them nor did I command

them nor will they profit this people at all (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

In a series of three rhetorical questions Jeremiah presents deep theological truth. (1) Am I a God near at hand and not a God far off? (v. 23). This question brings out the thought of God's transcendence. Unlike the pagan gods the Lord is not restricted to one place at a time. He was not confined to a temple or shrine. He dwells afar off where no man can approach Him, let alone manipulate Him. (2) Can a man hide himself in secret places that I cannot see him? This second question brings out the thought of God's omniscience. God's vision and knowledge embrace all things happening on the earth. The remote past and the distant future are equally known to Him. (3) Do not I fill the heavens and the earth? (v. 24). This question points to the fact that God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at once. Three times in verses 23 and 24 the phrase "oracle of the Lord" occurs. This transcendent, omniscience, omnipresent God is the Lord, 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 which they have been prophesying in His name. These prophets boasted of their dreams as though the mere claim to having received revelation was sufficient to prove that they were prophets of God (v. 25).

The question here is whether or not dreams in the Old Testament were a legitimate mode of divine communication. In Deuteronomy 13:1 a false prophet is described as a "dreamer of dreams." God did at times reveal His will through dreams (Genesis 15:12; 20:3; 31:24; 37:5). In Numbers 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 Numbers 12:6 which refers to the very early period of Israel's history and Joel 2:28 which refers to the distant Messianic age scarcely anything is said of dreams as a medium of revelation to prophets. Often times prophets received communications from God in the night but these are called visions and not dreams (II Samuel 7:14, 17; Zechariah 4:1). While dreams were not then 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. Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

Verses 26 and 27 are difficult to translate. Two questions are asked in these verses. The first question is quite general: How long? How much longer will these men continue their deception and falsehood. 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? Error and false teaching lead men away from the Lord. As these prophets peddled their pernicious platitudes from door to door (lit., each man to his neighbor) they were sabotaging the 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 (v. 27). There is nothing wrong with these men relating their dreams. But when they do so 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. Chaff and wheat, the word of God and the dreams of men, must be kept separate. That which is worthless should never be allowed to contaminate in the least that which is pure. A preacher who presents personal views and opinions and theories from the pulpit as if they are 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 faithfully, honestly, forthrightly (v. 28). When this is done the word of God has dynamic power to accomplish the purpose of God. The word of God is like fire: It burns the conscience, purifies the life, illuminates the mind, energizes the will, warms the heart, fuses the fellowship, and consumes the ungodly. God's message for Jeremiah's day was a message of judgment, crushing like a hammer (v. 29). What a contrast between the feeble falsehoods of the pseudo prophets and the dramatic truth of the pure word of God!

Three times in verses 30-32 God declares that He is against the false prophets. His opposition to them is three-fold. (1) They have stolen the words of God from their neighbors i.e., another prophet who had received a genuine revelation from God. What elements of truth may have been in the message of the false prophet were stolen. No doubt these men carefully scrutinized the sermons of Jeremiah and tried to imitate his style and technique. Perhaps to a certain extent they even copied the content of his message. (2) They 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 (v. 31). (3) God opposes these prophets because they are causing the people to err. 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. How presumptuous, how arrogant, how boastful 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. Such men are of no value at all to a nation (v. 32).

4. *The mockery of the false prophets* (23:33-40)

TRANSLATION

(33) And when this people or the prophet or the priest shall ask you, What is the burden of the LORD? Then you shall say unto them, You are the burden and I will cast you off (oracle of the LORD). (34) And the prophet and the priest and the people who continuously say, The burden of the LORD, I will punish that man and his house. So shall each one say unto his neighbor and unto his brother, What is the answer of the LORD? and, What is the word of the LORD? (36) The burden of the LORD you shall not mention any more, for the burden to every man shall be his word; for you have perverted the words of the living God, the LORD of host our God. (37) Thus you shall say unto the prophet: What has the LORD answered and what has the LORD said? and if you say, Burden of the LORD, then thus says the LORD: Because you have said this word, Burden of the LORD, when I sent unto you saying, Do not say, Burden of the LORD, therefore behold, I will completely forget you and I will remove you and the city which I gave to you and to your fathers from before My face. (40) And I will make you eternal reproach and an eternal shame which shall not be forgotten.

The people of Judah and their religious leaders constantly mocked Jeremiah by asking him, "What is the burden of the Lord?" The word "burden" in Hebrew can mean a heavy object or it can mean a weighty utterance. The apostates of Judah regarded every message from God as a heavy and wearisome burden. Wherever they would meet Jeremiah they would with a sneer ask the man of God, What new BURDEN do you have for us, you prophet of doom? The next time that question is put to him Jeremiah is instructed to say: You are the burden! This reading of the Hebrew is based on a slightly different division and vocalization of the consonants and 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."

Since the term "burden" had been so misused by the people and their religious leaders Jeremiah is commanded to use it no longer in his prophetic utterances. Whoever continues to mockingly use the term "burden" will be punished by God (v. 34). If a person in the future wished to inquire concerning the word of the Lord he should adopt new terminology. He should ask, "What is the answer" or "What is the word of the Lord?" (v. 35). Apparently Jeremiah felt it was better to adopt a new phrase than to run the risk of misunderstanding or, even worse, profanity. Those who persist in using the term "burden" will find that their own words will be a burden which will crush them to the ground. By peddling their sugar-coated lies as being a "burden" from the Lord these prophets were not only guilty of mockery they were also guilty of perverting the word of God (v. 36).

After issuing his warning concerning the use of the term "burden" Jeremiah turns to the false prophets and challenges them with a question: "What message do you

have from the Lord?" (v. 37). If in their reply these deceivers use the forbidden term "burden" Jeremiah is to pronounce sentence over them. God will utterly forget them and remove them from His presence, i.e., cause them to go into captivity (vv. 38, 39). The Hebrew here is very interesting. The word rendered in English "utterly forget" sounds very much like the forbidden word *massa* (burden). No doubt the prophet intended this as a pun or play on words. The scoffers and deceivers who made a reproach out of the word of God would themselves become an object of shame and reproach (v. 40). 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.

F. The Vision of the Fig Baskets 24:1-10

The terminology "the Lord showed me" or "caused me to see" introduces a prophetic vision. Chapter 24 contains such a vision. There are two types of prophetic visions in the Old Testament, 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, 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. In the opinion of the present writer the vision of the two fig baskets falls into the category of objective vision. Chapter 24 describes the experience of the prophet in having his attention drawn to the two baskets (vv. 1-3). Then the Lord explains to Jeremiah the meaning of the basket of good figs (vv. 4-7) and the basket of bad figs (vv. 8-10).

1. *The experience of the prophet* (24:1-3)

TRANSLATION

(1) And the LORD showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs placed before the Temple of the LORD 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. (2) The one basket contained very good figs, like figs that are first ripe; the other basket contained very bad figs, which were so bad they could not be eaten. (3) And the LORD 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.

COMMENTS

Verses 1-3 describe the time, place and contents of the prophetic vision. The vision is dated after the deportation of 597 B.C. In this deportation Jeconiah, better known as Jehoiachin (cf. 22:24), was taken captive along with all the artisans of the land. Jeremiah seems to have been outside the Temple at the time of the vision. God directed his attention to two baskets of figs which had been left for some unexplained reason near the entrance of the Temple (v. 1). Jeremiah noticed that the first basket contained good figs which were a delight to the eye. Small figs which appear along with the first leaves of spring after ripening are called "first-ripe figs." The first-ripe figs are considered a delicacy (cf. Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1). The prophet noticed that the other 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 spoiled and

hence worthless, fit only to be thrown away. Another suggestion is that the second basket contained figs which had been allowed to remain too long on the tree. Such fully mature figs taken from the tree late in the season are untasty. As is frequent in prophetic visions the Lord asked Jeremiah to relate what he had observed and the prophet quickly does so¹ anticipating the interpretation of these symbols which follows (v. 3).

2. *The meaning of the good figs* (24:4-7)

TRANSLATION

(4) Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 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. (6) And I will set My eye on them for good, and I will cause them to return unto this land; and I will build them up and not tear them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. (7) And I will give to them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD. They shall be My people and I will be their God, for they shall return unto Me with all their heart.

COMMENTS

The good figs represent those who had been taken captive in 597 B.C. God is smiling upon those who have been carried away to Babylon. One might think just the opposite, that those who were allowed to remain in the homeland were God's favorites while those who were taken away were in His disfavor. But God saw in those captives who were in Babylon the nucleus of the New Israel. Perhaps the trip to far off Babylon had brought a change in the attitude of those Jews (cf. v. 7). While those who

remained behind were still belligerent and rebellious the exiles were beginning to show signs of repentance. At any rate God regarded with more favor those who had been deported than those who had been left behind. Though far from home and loved ones, from the Holy Land and the Temple, yet they were not beyond the tender and loving watchcare of their God. As long as they were in captivity God's eye would be upon them. In His own good time He will bring them back to Canaan and will bless their efforts to rebuild their land (v. 6). This restoration will be possible because they shall get acquainted with God all over again. When they return to God with all their heart they shall be reinstated as the people of God and the Lord will give them a heart and mind to truly know Him (v. 7). Repentance precedes restoration. 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 Old Testament and the teachings of the New Testament 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.

3. *The meaning of the bad figs* (24:8-10)

TRANSLATION

(8) But as the bad figs which were so bad they could not be eaten, surely thus says the LORD: Thus will I make Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land and who dwell in the land of Egypt. (9) And I will give them over for trembling, for evil to all the kingdoms of the land; for reproach and for a proverb, for a by-word and for a curse in

every place where I drive them. (10) And I will send against them the sword, the famine and the plague until they are utterly consumed from upon the ground which I gave to them and to their fathers.

COMMENTS

The basket of bad figs is symbolic of those who had not been taken into captivity in 597 B.C., those to whom Jeremiah was to proclaim the word of God for yet a decade. God would "make" Zedekiah the king, his princes, and those who remained in Jerusalem like the basket of bad figs. This probably means that in His permissive will God would allow these hardened sinners to continue in their course of obstinacy and rebellion until they finally were fit for nothing but destruction. The phrase "who dwell in the land of Egypt" (v. 8) refers to those who were taken captive by Pharaoh Necho in 609 B.C. when king Jehoaahaz was deported and sent to Egypt in chains. It may well be that other Jews fled to Egypt during the Babylonian invasions of 605 B.C. and 597 B.C.

The future of those 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 would be ridiculed and mistreated by foreigners. They would be so low and despicable that wherever they go men will refer to these Jews in their reproaches, proverbs, by-words and curses. Whenever one might wish to pronounce a curse against another he would say, "May you become like the accused Jews" (v. 9). Those who were not able to flee the doomed land would die by the sword of the enemy and by the famine and plague which were the direct results of enemy invasion. Thus by one means or another the nation Judah would be

utterly consumed from upon the land which God had given to their fathers (v. 10).

II. GOD AND THE WORLD RULER 25:1-38

Chapter 25 is one of the most important chapters in the entire book. A great deal can be learned about the message of Jeremiah from this single chapter. After a brief introduction (vv. 1-3) Jeremiah speaks of God's judgment on Judah (vv. 4-11), Babylon (vv. 12-14), surrounding nations (vv. 15-29) and finally the whole world (vv. 30-38).

COMMENTS

Chronologically chapter 25 precedes the last four chapters. The precision in dating the events of this chapter indicates that Jeremiah was aware of the tremendous importance of the year 605 B.C., the fourth year of Jehoiakim and first year of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 1). The battle of Carchemish was certainly 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 sees his prophecies fulfilled. This was to be the year in which the first of four recorded deportations to Babylonia took place. Just before the armies of Nebuchadnezzar arrived, Jeremiah is bidden to make one last appeal to his countrymen for repentance (v. 2). Even though God knew that His call for repentance would be unheeded yet His love for Judah constrained Him to issue the appeal through the mouth of His prophet.

A. Judgment on Judah 25:1-11

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah concerning

all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoia-kim son of Josiah, the king of Judah, (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), (2) which Jeremiah the prophet spoke unto*all the people of Judah and unto all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (3) From the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, unto this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come unto me, and I have spoken unto you in earnest but you have not listened. (4) And the LORD sent unto you all of His servants the prophets in earnest, but you did not hearken nor did you incline your ear to listen. They said, Turn now each man from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and you shall live in this land which the LORD has given to you and to your fathers forever and ever; (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. But you did not hearken unto Me (oracle of the LORD) in order to provoke Me with the work of your hands to your own hurt. (8) Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not listened to My words, (9) behold, I am about to send and take all the families of the north (oracle of the LORD), and also Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon My servant, and I will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them, and I will make them an astonishment an object of hissing and perpetual desolations. (10) And I will destroy from them the sound of joy and the sound of rejoicing, the voice of bridegroom and the voice of bride, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. (11) And all this land shall become a desola-

tion and astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

COMMENTS

For some twenty-three years Jeremiah had been preaching the word of God to the people of Judah but they had not hearkened. His ministry had begun in the thirteenth year of Josiah. Since Josiah reigned a total of thirty-one years (II Kings 22:1) Jeremiah prophesied for eighteen or nineteen years in the reign of that good king. Then followed three months of the reign of Jehoahaz (II Kings 23:31) and three years of the reign of Jehoiakim. Throughout this period Jeremiah had been receiving divine revelations and had been communicating them to the people. He emphasizes the earnestness of his proclamation by using a Hebrew idiom which if translated literally would be "rising early and speaking." But in spite of the earnestness of Jeremiah throughout his ministry the people had not been receptive.

God had sent other prophets besides Jeremiah to plead with the people of Judah. It is not certain whether Jeremiah is referring to prophets who preceded him or prophets who were contemporary with him. Since most of the prophets who were contemporary with Jeremiah were unfaithful, he probably is referring to his prophetic predecessors. In either case verse 4 indicates that 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 which had caused the people to reject his message, for they had rejected others before him (v. 4). 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 which God had given to their fathers (v. 5). God's gift of the promised land to the descendants of Abraham

was conditional and 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 (v. 6). But the people would not hearken to the earnest appeals of God's messengers. They continued to provoke God with their idolatry to their own hurt (v. 7). When one disobeys God he courts disaster! All of God's commandments are for the benefit and well-being of man.

In view of the fact that the people of Judah had not listened to and obeyed the word of the Lord (v. 8), God was about to execute judgment upon them. As he had done so many times before, Jeremiah makes mention of the powerful enemy from the north which was about to descend upon Judah. But here for the first time in his ministry Jeremiah positively identifies that ominous foe. The enemy from the north is Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon whose forces even at that very moment were poised for the strike against Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar is about to sweep down upon Judah and her neighbors and utterly destroy them all. The tiny nations of Syria-Palestine would be so completely destroyed that travelers would 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 would last for a very long time (v. 9). Silence will reign supreme in these lands. All joyous sounds as, for example, the voice of bridegroom and bride will cease. 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. No light from oil lamps will illuminate the darkness of the night. There is absolutely no sign of life throughout the lands (v. 10). The land of Judah will become such a desolation that men will be astonished at what has taken

place there. For seventy years Judah and the neighboring nations of Syria-Palestine will serve the king of 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 Isaiah 23:17. In this case "seventy years" would simply mean a very long time. Other commentators insist that the figures are to be taken literally but they disagree as to when the seventy years commenced. For a detailed discussion of the seventy years prophecy see the special study at the end of this chapter.

Nebuchadnezzar is called by God in verse 9 "My servant." Cyrus the Persian is called in prophecy "My shepherd" and "My anointed" (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). 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. Daniel 6:20). The chosen people are called "My servant" (Jeremiah 30:10; 46:27, 28; Ezekiel 37:25) 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. The Chaldean king is called the servant of God because he was the unconscious agent of the Lord. It is interesting to note that in each case where the title "My servant" is applied to Nebuchadnezzar the Septuagint translation omits the title.

B. Judgment on Babylon 25:12-14

TRANSLATION

(12) But it shall come to pass when seventy years are completed I will visit upon the king of Babylon, even upon that nation, their iniquity, even upon the Chaldeans; and I will make it desolate forever. (13) And I will bring upon that land all My words which

I have spoken concerning it, all that is written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied concerning all the nations. (14) For many nations and great kings shall make servants of them, even them; and I will repay them according to their works, and according to the deeds of their hands.

COMMENTS

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. Here he makes a specific prediction that after seventy years of Babylonian world rule that nation too would be visited by the God of judgment. To visit someone's sins upon them is to punish them for their wrong doings. The land of the Chaldeans would become a perpetual desolation (v. 12). Every word which God had spoken and which Jeremiah had preached and written about Babylon would be fulfilled (v. 13). God would recompense the Chaldeans for their wicked works. Many kings and great nations would again and again enslave the Chaldeans (v. 14). Babylon fell first to the Medes and Persians, and then to the Greeks and Parthians.

C. Judgment on Surrounding Nations 25:15-29

TRANSLATION

(15) For thus says the LORD, God of Israel, unto me: Take this cup of wine, wrath, from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I am about to send you to drink it. (16) And they shall drink and they shall stagger and behave like a madman because of the sword which I am about to send among them. (17) And I took the cup from the hand of the LORD

and I caused all nations to whom the LORD had sent me to drink it. (18) Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and her kings and her princes, to make them a desolation, and astonishment, a hissing, and a curse, as it is this day. (19) Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and all of his servants, his princes, and all of his people; (20) and all the mingled people; all the kings of the land of Uz; and all the kings of the land of the Philistines (even Ashkelon, and Gaza, and Ekron and the remnant of Ashdod); (21) Edom and Moab and the children of Ammon; (22) and all the kings of Tyre, and all the kings of Sidon, and all the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea; (23) 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; (25) 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 which are upon the face of the earth. And the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. (27) Then say unto them; Thus says the LORD of hosts God of Israel: Drink, and be drunk, vomit, fall and do not arise because of the sword which I am about to send among you. (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 the LORD of hosts: You shall surely drink! (29) For behold, if I am beginning to destroy the city which is called by My name, shall you go completely unpunished? You shall not go unpunished; for I am about to call a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The figure of drinking from the wine cup of God's wrath is not one which is uncommon in prophetic literature.¹ The origin of the figure is uncertain. Some relate it to the practice recorded in Numbers 5:11-31 where a woman suspected of adultery was required to drink a loathsome potion with disastrous results to her if 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. Be that as it may, Jeremiah is here commanded to take the cup of wrath from the hand of God and cause the nations of the world to drink of it (v. 15). The nations after drinking of that brew will become as intoxicated men, like raving lunatics. Their incoherence and utter confusion is brought about by news of the approach of the sword of the Lord, the armies which He will use to execute His judgment (v. 16). Jeremiah relates that he complied with the commandment of the Lord and caused the nations of the world to drink of God's deadly cup (v. 17).

The real problem is to determine the nature of the episode recorded here. If the student of Jeremiah will take the time to locate all the countries named in verses 18-26 he will immediately see that it would have been impossible for Jeremiah to literally visit all the nations. What then took place in this passage? Is this a vision or a symbolic act or merely rhetoric? Some think that Jeremiah in a visionary experience 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

1. Isaiah 51:17, 22; Ezekiel 23:31-34; Habakkuk 2:16; Psalms 60:3; Jeremiah 49:12; 51:7, etc.

wine, explained its significance, and passed it around among the ambassadors of these various lands who were present in Jerusalem. It's difficult, however, to imagine that ambassadors from distant Media and Elam would have been present in Jerusalem. Other commentators think that the cup which 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. However the account 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 it seems to this writer that a symbolic act was performed most likely involving the ambassadors of the various lands mentioned in verses 18-26.

In verses 18-26 Jeremiah enumerates the nations to whom he carried the cup of God's wrath. First, of course, stands Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. The kings (Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah) and princes of Judah shall drink of that cup of judgment and their land will become a desolation, a horrible and shocking sight "as at this day" (v. 18). The last phrase of verse 18 implies that in the view of Jeremiah the desolation of Jerusalem had already begun in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. This episode of the wine cup of wrath must have occurred not long after the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. In the view of Jeremiah the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem began with that invasion, not with the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The foreign nations which were required to drink the cup of God's judgment are fourteen in number.

1. 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 of Jeremiah.

The mixed multitudes or mingled people mentioned in verse 20 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 (Numbers 11:4).

2. The location of the land of Uz is uncertain. It seems to have been in close proximity to Edom (cf. Lamentations 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.

3. Philistia to the southwest of Judah would next taste the cup. Four of the major Philistine cities, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod are named specifically. Gath, the fifth city of the Philistine pentapolis, is omitted here as in Amos 1:6-8. Of Ashdod only a remnant remained after the siege and capture by Pharaoh Psammetichus I (663-609 B.C.).

4, 5, 6. The transjordan kingdoms of Edom, Moab and Ammon are next named. These kingdoms are named in order from south to north.

7. Phoenicia with her two major cities of Tyre and Sidon and her overseas colonies would also drink from the cup.

8, 9, 10. Three tribes of northern Arabia, Dedan, Tema, and Buz are next named. The Dedanites were descended from Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:3) and had a reputation for being traders (Ezekiel 27:15, 20; 38:13). Tema was a tribe related to Abraham through his son Ishmael (Genesis 25:15). Buz was a tribe descended from Nahor, Abraham's brother (Genesis 22:21). 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 Leviticus 19:27. No doubt the custom had some pagan religious significance.

11. 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.

12. 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 verse 25.

13. Elam, east of Babylon, had already begun to fade as an independent people and was shortly to be absorbed by the Medes and later by Persia.

14. 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 B.C. Media eventually merged with Persia under the leadership of 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, indeed all kingdoms of the civilized world would drink. But last of all the king of Sheshach would drink of that deadly cup. Sheshach is a cipher, 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 Sheshech. 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.

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, staggering, vomiting, 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 marches against these lands (v. 27). If the representatives to whom he offers the symbolic cup refuse to receive it from his hand, Jeremiah is to assure them that they must indeed drink of the cup of divine destruction whether or not they cooperate in sipping from the symbolic cup (v. 28). The rationale for the impending destruction of the nations is very simple. God had already begun to bring judgmental calamity upon the beloved city of Jerusalem, the city where His Temple stood, the city where some of His faithful worshipers lived. Jerusalem is called by the name of God i.e., it belonged to Him, it was His special city. If Jerusalem must taste of divine wrath, do the nations think that they shall escape scot-free? They too will suffer at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the divinely appointed sword (v. 29).

D. Judgment on the World 25:30-38

TRANSLATION

(30) But as for you, prophesy unto them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD from on high will roar, and from His holy habitation He will give forth His voice; He will mightily roar against His pasture. He will give forth a shout like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth.
(31) A noise will come unto the ends of the earth,

for the LORD has a controversy with the nations. He is about to judge all flesh; the wicked He shall give to the sword (oracle of the LORD). (32) Thus says the LORD of hosts: Disaster proceeds from nation to nation, and a tempest is being stirred up from the farthest bounds of the earth. (33) Those slain by the LORD in that day shall be from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the face of the ground. (34) Howl, O shepherds! Cry out! Wallow, O lords of the flock! For the days of your slaughter and dispersions have been filled up, and you shall fall like a precious vessel. (35) Flight shall perish from the shepherds, and escape from the lords of the flock. (36) A sound! The cry of shepherds, the howl of the lords of the flock! For the LORD is destroying their pastures. (37) The peaceful folds are brought to silence because of the fierce wrath of the LORD. (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.

COMMENTS

Verses 30-38 contain a poetic description of the world-wide judgment of the Lord. In the first two verses of this section the prophet presents four pictures of the Lord in the act of executing judgment upon the wicked. (1) 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. (2) 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. (3) As a prosecutor reads his indict-

ment against the accused, so the Lord enters into a controversy i.e., a court case, with the nations of the world. (4) He not only prosecutes the nations but 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. The "noise" in verse 31 refers to the tumult of warfare.

God will raise up against the nations of the world a tempest or whirlwind from the uttermost parts of the earth. In 6:22 the phrase "uttermost part of the earth" refers to the north country and therefore it is obvious that the prophet has in mind Babylon. This whirlwind of divine wrath will sweep from nation to nation (v. 32). Those slain by this agent of God will fill the earth. 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. (v. 33). Neither shepherds (rulers) nor lords of the flock (rich and influential people) will escape. Their days of slaughtering other nations, deporting and scattering captive peoples, are ended. The nations of the world in all their glory shall fall and be broken like a precious vessel which has fallen to the ground (v. 34). 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 (v. 35). The proud and pompous world leaders will howl in agony and cry out in distress as they see their pasture, the land which they rule, devastated (v. 36). The peaceful pastoral regions ("peaceful folds") will be reduced to silence because neither man nor flock will be there any more. Their land has become an appalling waste because the lion, the Lord of hosts, has left His lair.¹ God has become a fierce destroyer to the peoples of the earth.

1. An alternative interpretation: The Lord forsakes His desolate land just as a young lion forsakes his lair when it has been destroyed.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWELVE

I. Facts to Master.

1. The occasion of the oracle addressed to king Zedekiah (21:1-2).
2. The two ways God placed before the people (21:8).
3. That which Jeremiah urged the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do (21:9).
4. The identity of Shallum and his fate (22:11, 12).
5. The type of burial predicted for Jehoiakim (22:19).
6. Identity of the "lovers" in 22:20-21.
7. Identity of Coniah and his fate (22:25).
8. Identity of the shepherds who had scattered the flock of God (23:2).
9. Description of the King whom God would raise up (23:5).
10. Three activities of the coming King (23:5).
11. The name of the coming King (23:6).
12. The group of leaders to whom a long sermon is addressed in chapter 23.
13. The two wicked cities to which God compares the inhabitants of Judah (23:14).
14. The basic message of the false prophets (23:17).
15. Test of the veracity of a prophet (23:22).
16. Two metaphors depicting the Word of God (23:29).
17. The expression which Jeremiah is no longer to use (23:33-36).
18. That which the Lord showed Jeremiah (24:1, 2).
19. The significance of the good and bad figs (24:4-10).
20. The date of the messages in chapter 25 (25:1).
21. The length of time Jeremiah had thus far been preaching (25:3).

POLITICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS

22. The commander of the armies of the north (25:9).
23. The length of time the nations would serve the king of Babylon (25:11).
24. That which would transpire after the seventy years (25:12-14).
25. That which Jeremiah was to cause the nations to drink (25:15).

II. Questions to Ponder.

1. Was Jeremiah a traitor in view of the counsel which he offered the people in time of war? 21:9.
2. To the reign of what king can 21:11-22:9 be assigned? In this passage what is (a) the exhortation, (b) the promise, (c) the warning?
3. What can you deduce about the reign of Jehoiakim from 22:13-17?
4. Did Jehoiachin have children? See 22:30; I Chronicles 3:17, 18; and Jehoiachin tablets in *Documents from Old Testament Times*, pp. 84-86. In what sense would he be "childless"?
5. What is the New Exodus predicted in 23:8? How does it exceed the great Exodus from Egypt?
6. Why does Jeremiah react as he does in 23:9?
7. How were the prophets of Jerusalem worse than the prophets of Samaria? 23:13-14.
8. By what methods did the false prophets try to imitate the true prophets? Is this true today as well? See 23:23-32.
9. Why is Jeremiah told to abandon the prophetic terminology "burden of the Lord? (23:33-38) What good Bible terms are misused or misapplied today? Should such terms continue to be used by New Testament Christians?
10. Should chapter 25 be dated before or after the battle of Carchemish? See 25:1.

JEREMIAH

11. Did Jeremiah literally take a cup and pass it among the nations? (25:15, 17, 28) How *might* this have been possible?
12. What peculiarity is to be found in the Septuagint version of chapter 25?
13. Who was the king of Sheshach? 25:26.
14. What judgment is being described in 25:30-38?

SPECIAL STUDY

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
AND THE
SEVENTY YEARS
PROPHECY

JEREMIAH

The Jehovah's Witnesses have made Jeremiah's seventy years prophecy the basis for all chronology prior to 539 B.C., the year that Babylon fell to Cyrus. They assume that the seventy years are to be counted back from 537 B.C., the date they assign to the return of the Jews in the first year of Cyrus. This yields the date 607 for the 18th (or 19th) year of Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was destroyed (Jeremiah 52:29, 12). So certain are the Witnesses that their methodology is correct that they are willing to toss aside all the standard chronological works and declare that they alone have the key to Bible chronology.

It is important to note that these students accept 539 B.C. uncritically as "an absolute date" from which to begin their count. They never state WHY they accept 539 as a starting point or WHY 539 is an "absolute" date. They fail to realize that 539 was reached by the same methodology which they reject for the years prior to 539. The truly absolute years in antiquity are those in which astronomers can pin-point an eclipse of the sun. The year 539 was not such a year. It was computed by adding together the regnal years of dozens of kings, both Assyrian and Babylonian and adding them (or subtracting them as the case might be) to some "absolute" year. Now if this process is accepted for arriving at the year 539, why is it invalid for the years prior to 539?

Since the Jehovah's Witnesses repudiate standard chronology, they are faced with the embarrassing prospects of talking about kings who were taken off thrones before they were ever put on thrones and men dying before they were born. Though they never mention this in their books, the Witnesses are forced to redate *every* Egyptian, Assyrian, Hittite, and Mitannian king prior to 539. It never seems to occur to these people that their understanding of Jeremiah's seventy year prophecy might just be faulty. Most Bible believing Christians are perfectly

at home within the framework of the standard chronology which has been painstakingly established by means of astronomy, archaeology, and scientific historiography. They find the seventy years prophecy a marvelous confirmation of the word of God. They do not have to resort to manipulation of ancient history and juggling of years as do the Jehovah's Witnesses. In the interest of truth, and with a sincere desire to aid those who want to know the plain truth, this special study is offered.

I. WHAT WAS THE SEVENTY YEARS PERIOD?

In order to ascertain the precise significance of the seventy years period it will be necessary to examine carefully each of the verses in the Old Testament which speak of this period.

A. Jeremiah 29:10

"When seventy years are completed for (literally, to) Babylon, I will visit you (the Israelites)."

This verse shows that the seventy years is allotted to Babylon i.e., to the world dominion of the Neo-Babylon empire. NO MENTION IS MADE HERE OF ANY SEVENTY YEARS OF DESOLATION IN JERUSALEM.

B. Jeremiah 27:6, 7

"Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes."

Surely this passage is dealing with the seventy years. The nations will serve Nebuchadnezzar for a set period of

time. At the end of that period of time, Babylon will be overthrown. Now this prophecy was given in the reign of Zedekiah (27:3) and it appears that the prophet is saying that the period of service to the Babylonian king has already begun.

C. Jeremiah 25:11, 12

“This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.”

Again these verses do not assert that the land of Judah and Jerusalem would lie desolate for seventy years. The seventy years are THE YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE KING OF BABYLON BY ALL THE NATIONS. After the seventy years, the king of Babylon will be destroyed.

The seventy year period need not be a literal period of that length. It may be a symbolic number or round number. The use of round numbers in the Bible is not uncommon. In Genesis 15:13, for example, the figure 400 years is given for the length of the Egyptian bondage of the Israelites. This Egyptian bondage actually lasted 430 years (Exodus 12:40). It is not difficult to discover why the figure seventy years was chosen by Jeremiah for his prophecy of the LENGTH OF BABYLONIAN WORLD POWER. Seven in the Bible is a perfect number and ten appears to be the number of worldly power. So ten times seven is seventy, the complete number of years which God allotted to the dominion of Babylon. The number seventy in Jeremiah's prophecy is symbolic and there is no reason to assume *a priori* that it was ever intended to be understood as seventy years to the day.

D. Daniel 9:2

"In the first year of his reign (Darius, the Mede) I Daniel perceived in the books the number of years which, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years."

This passage simply tells us that at the end of seventy years the desolations in Palestine must cease. Jeremiah had predicted that at the end of the seventy years of Babylonian world dominion, God would destroy the king of Babylon and deliver His people from bondage (Jeremiah 29:10f). Thus Daniel knew that shortly the Jews would be returning to rebuild the waste places of Judah since the seventy years were completed.

II. WHEN DID THE SEVENTY YEARS BEGIN?

The seventy years could not have begun before the fourth year of Jehoiakim, for this was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 25:1). The Babylonian king took the throne in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 B.C.). This was also the year in which he invaded the Hatti land (Syria-Palestine) and received heavy tribute from ALL the kings there.¹ In this year he besieged the city of Jerusalem, succeeded in binding Jehoiakim the king of Judah with fetters to carry him to Babylon (II Chronicles 36:6, 7) but finally allowed him to remain as a Babylonian vassal of Judah (II Kings 24:1). Apparently Jehoiakim was forced to render tribute to his new master and to send hostages to Babylon according to the custom of that time (Daniel 1:1, 2).

Thus the FOURTH YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM (first year of Nebuchadnezzar) was a crucial year for Judah.

1. See *Documents from Old Testament Times*, *op cit.*, p. 79.

JEREMIAH

This was the year that brought Jerusalem, and Judah under the yoke of Babylon. It was the beginning of the service to the king of Babylon prophesied by Jeremiah.

The prophecy of the seventy years was first given in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 25:1). Jeremiah predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would come (25:9) and he did come, that very year. This was the year that Judah and all the kingdoms of Syria-Palestine began to SERVE THE KING OF BABYLON (25:11). The nations which Jeremiah had in mind are mentioned in 25:18-26. These nations were not all conquered nor left "desolate" in a year or even several years. They were gradually brought under the control of Babylon. But when did this service to the king of Babylon begin? Most of the nations mentioned came under the control of Babylon in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign when he "marched victoriously in the Hatti land." The city of Ashkelon, mentioned by Jeremiah (25:20), was in fact CAPTURED in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar.¹ Ashkelon's service to the king of Babylon must have begun in that year not some nineteen years later as required in the chronology of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jeremiah seems to indicate that he considered the desolation to have already begun in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. In Jeremiah 25:18 the prophet states: "Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and princes, to make them a desolation, and a waste, a hissing and a curse AS AT THIS DAY." Since this prophecy was delivered in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (25:1) what more conclusive proof is needed on the matter of when the desolations were to begin?

Generally in Bible prophecy desolation which is predicted upon a country comes on the country *gradually*, not all at once. Take the Babylon prophecies for instance. At the end of seventy years God promises to visit Babylon

1. *Ibid.*

and make it an everlasting desolation (Jeremiah 25:12). But at the end of seventy years Babylon was merely captured. It did not become a desolation immediately. For some years the city thrived but during all those years Babylon was GRADUALLY becoming a complete desolation. The same applies to Jerusalem and Judah. With Nebuchadnezzar's attack in 605 the land GRADUALLY began to become desolate. That desolation of course reached its height in 587 when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. But the desolation BEGAN in 605, the first year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

The desolation which Jerusalem was to experience was to involve MORE THAN ONE KING. The plural "kings and princes" in Jeremiah 25:18 is important. Again this points to 605, the fourth year of Jehoiakim (first year of Nebuchadnezzar), as the beginning of the seventy year period. Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah would all be involved in the fulfillment. Even when Jehoiakim attempted to rebel against the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar sent warriors to ravish the land of Judah (II Kings 24:1-2). How could the desolation of Jerusalem be said to involve KINGS if in fact it began in the 11th year of Zedekiah, last king of Judah, as the Jehovah's Witnesses claim.

Important in this discussion is the passage found in II Chronicles 36:20-21.

"He (Nebuchadnezzar) took into exile unto Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they were servants to him and his sons until the dominion of the kingdom of Persia (21) to fulfill (literally, to fill up) the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept its sabbaths, to fulfill (literally, to fill up) the seventy years."

JEREMIAH

At the time of the destruction of Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar took additional exiles to Babylon. There they were servants to the king of Babylon. This FILLED UP the prophecy of Jeremiah. This verse does not say that the service to the king of Babylon BEGAN with the deportation after the destruction of Jerusalem. Both the Bible and secular history agree that the Jews BEGAN to serve the king of Babylon some nineteen years earlier. This service in exile was to FILL UP the seventy years prophecy of Jeremiah, i.e., to fill up the remaining years of service to the king of Babylon. The service to the king of Babylon was to last until the beginning of the dominion of the Persian empire.

This service to the king of Babylon was also to last until the land of Palestine had enjoyed its sabbaths. This is an obvious reference to Leviticus 25. The Law of Moses provided for a sabbatical year (every seventh year) in which the land went untilled. At the end of seven sabbaths of years (49 years) a year of jubilee was celebrated in which captives went free and land reverted back to the original owners. According to the standard chronology Jerusalem fell in 587 and the captives returned home to claim their land in 538, exactly 49 years. During the last part of Jeremiah's seventy year period the land of Palestine did keep its sabbaths—seven sabbatical years of time. These 49 years of sabbath rest for the land and continued service to the king of Babylon in Babylonia, filled up the remaining portion of Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of service to the king of Babylon.

In the first year of Cyrus (538-537) the captives experienced their jubilee year—they were released from their servitude and returned to their original possessions.

III. WHEN DID THE SEVENTY YEARS END?

The seventy years plainly ended with the overthrow

THE J.W.'S AND THE SEVENTY YEARS

of Babylon, not the return of the Jews as claimed by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

A. Jeremiah 25:12

"Then AFTER seventy years are complete, I will punish the king of Babylon."

Babylon was "punished" in 539. Thus this must be the end of the seventy year period. The Jehovah's Witnesses acknowledge that Babylon fell in 539. They claim that the seventy years began in 607. This is a period of only 68 years. How do the Witnesses explain that AFTER seventy years the king of Babylon will be punished? Was Jeremiah wrong? OR are the Jehovah's Witnesses wrong when they insist on interpreting the seventy years literally as seventy years to the day?

B. Jeremiah 29:10

"When seventy years are completed FOR BABYLON, I will visit you (the Israelites)."

The seventy year period allotted to Babylon ended when Babylon fell in 539. It is AFTER that period is completed that God visits His people.

C. II Chronicles 36:22

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom."

The proclamation of Cyrus releasing the Jews filled up the words of Jeremiah because Jeremiah had predicted that AFTER the seventy year period the Jews would be released. This verse does not indicate that the year or so

between the fall of Babylon and the actual return of the Jews to Palestine was to be INCLUDED in the seventy year period as the Witnesses claim.

IV. THE SEVENTY YEARS OF INDIGNATION

In addition to Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years of service to the king of Babylon there is a second, altogether different, seventy years period mentioned in Zechariah 1:12 and 7:5.

A. Zechariah 1:12

"How long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah against which You have had indignation these seventy years?"

This question was asked by the angel of the Lord in a vision seen by Zechariah in the second year of Darius, 520 B.C. Jerusalem still had not been fully restored. The Temple had not even been built yet. Because the Temple of the Lord was being neglected the people were under the wrath of God. God had sent a desolation (Hebrew *chorev*). See Haggai 1:3-11. There was drought and crop failure. This was the seventy years of indignation which began with the destruction of the Temple and ended with the rebuilding of that same Temple in 516 B.C.

This passage alone is sufficient to *prove* that the Jehovah's Witnesses chronology is completely wrong. They place the destruction of the Temple in 607. But the Temple was not rebuilt until 516, a period of NINETY-ONE YEARS. How can the Witnesses fit this seventy year period mentioned by Zechariah into their chronology?

B. Zechariah 7:5

"Say to all the people of the land to the priests, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and

THE J.W.'S AND THE SEVENTY YEARS

seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?"

Again the seventy year period since the destruction of the Temple is referred to. In this chapter the people are concerned as to whether it is any longer necessary to observe certain fast days now that the Temple was being rebuilt. For seventy years, 587-516 they had been observing fasts in the 5th and 7th month (7:5) as well as in the 4th and 10th month (8:19). These are not fasts required in the Law of Moses but fasts which commemorated events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. They had a fast to bewail the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem (10th month), the breach in the walls of Jerusalem (4th month), the burning of the city (5th month), and the death of Gedaliah (7th month). Now that the Temple was being rebuilt they wanted to know whether or not they should keep these fasts.

Again let it be noted that the period from the destruction of the Temple to the rebuilding of some was seventy years, NOT NINETY-ONE YEARS AS NECESSITATED BY THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES.

V. OBJECTIONS TO THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS' VIEW THAT JERUSALEM WAS DESTROYED AND ZEDEKIAH REMOVED FROM THE THRONE IN 607 B.C.

NOTE: Page references in the following comments refer to *Babylon the Great has Fallen* published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

The Jehovah Witnesses have a profound misunderstanding of the means by which ancient chronology is established. On page 138 the writers assert that chronologists base their calculations on the astronomical Canon

JEREMIAH

of Ptolemy "whose system of astronomy has long since been exploded" (p. 138). As a matter of fact the exact reigns of certain Assyrian kings can be computed on the basis of astronomical data contained in Assyrian King Lists which are contemporary with the events which they recorded. For example, an eclipse of the sun is recorded in the 9th year of the Assyrian king Ashurdan III. By means of astronomy this can be computed to have been on June 15, 763. This date is confirmed by the Canon of Ptolemy. From this date the reigns of all the Assyrian kings and neo-Babylonian kings can be computed by means of various king lists and building inscriptions. It is interesting that one of the truly absolute dates in antiquity is 853 the famous battle of Qarqar at which king Ahab was present. He is actually named in the records of king Shalmaneser III. But according to the Jehovah's Witnesses Ahab died in 922—SIXTY-NINE YEARS BEFORE HE WAS PRESENT AT THE BATTLE OF QARQAR. The misunderstanding of Jeremiah's seventy year prophecy has thrown off the chronology of the Witnesses.

The Jehovah's Witnesses twist the Scriptures to make them fit predetermined theories of history. On page 136-37 the Witnesses assert that there were no captives taken by Nebuchadnezzar in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. In order to maintain this false position the Witnesses twist Daniel 1:1. They assert that the third year of Jehoiakim mentioned here is not the third year of Jehoiakim's reign but the third year of his vassalship to Nebuchadnezzar. BUT NO OTHER PLACE IN THE BIBLE OR IN THE LITERATURE OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST DID ANY KING DATE HIS REIGN ACCORDING TO HIS VASSALSHIP TO A FOREIGN RULER. Here again the Witnesses reveal their ignorance of simple facts about the ancient Near East. To any unprejudiced mind Daniel 1:1 plainly means that Nebuchadnezzar did take hostages to Babylon in the first year of his reign which

was also the 3rd year of Jehoiakim by the Babylonian method of reckoning regnal years.

In repudiating the scientific chronology prior to 539 the Witnesses make no attempt to point out where the reasoning of the historians has gone astray (p. 372). Now there is nothing wrong with suggesting that every chronologer outside the Witnesses' sect is wrong. But it would only seem fair that anyone who would make such a suggestion would indicate where everyone else went wrong in their thinking. THIS THE WITNESSES NEVER BOTHER TO DO.

It is known from Babylonian records that Nebuchadnezzar reigned 43 years, his son Amel-Marduk reigned two years. The next king reigned 4 years, his son three months and Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, seventeen years. This totals 66+ years. BUT THE WITNESSES MAKE THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE LAST FOR 85 YEARS. Where do these additional years fit in? Was there some king who reigned for 20 years about whom the cuneiform sources, the Bible, the classical historians, and Jewish tradition knew nothing? What king that reigned 20 years could have been COMPLETELY forgotten? Did any of the five kings mentioned above reign more than the time assigned to them by the historians? If so, which one? The Witnesses are silent. Not one shred of proof is offered.

The Witnesses ASSUME (without evidence) that the Hebrew word translated "desolation" means "without inhabitant." They further ASSUME that when the Jews made their hasty exit to Egypt following the death of Gedaliah that ALL the people left the country. Judah was left "without inhabitant"(pp. 163, 64).

Now these ASSUMPTIONS are hard to reconcile with the plain statement of Jeremiah 52:30 which records a deportation of Jews to Babylon FIVE YEARS AFTER JERUSALEM WAS DESTROYED. But here again the Witnesses

JEREMIAH

twist the evidence. They assert without a shred of proof that "these were not taken off the land of Judah but were captured when Nebuchadnezzar made nations that bordered on the desolated land of Judah drink of the bitter potion of being violently conquered" (p. 167). Any unprejudiced mind can see here an effort to MAKE the Bible say what one WANTS it to say. Jeremiah 52:28-30 records three deportations of the Jews, the first two of which "were off the land of Judah." By what rule of interpretation is one to assume that the third deportation mentioned here was not off the land of Judah?

Conclusion

There are in the Bible TWO SEVENTY YEAR periods. The first of these was prophesied by Jeremiah in 605 and began in that year. It lasted until 539, the year in which the Neo-Babylonian Empire came to an end. The prophet uses a symbolic number to represent the period of Babylonian domination.

The second seventy year period began with the destruction of the Temple (587) and lasted until the rebuilding of the Temple (516).

The Jehovah's Witnesses declare that there were 2,520 years in the times of the Gentiles. (*"Your will be done on Earth,"* p. 104). Adding these years to 607 they arrive at the year 1914 for the beginning of the reign of Christ. But since the Witnesses are wrong about the date of the fall of Jerusalem, then THE WITNESSES MUST BE WRONG ABOUT THE "TIMES OF THE GENTILES" ENDING IN 1914. Now since the Witnesses have been using both 607 and 1914 as foundation stones in their system of prophetic interpretation, and since they are WRONG on both dates, one certainly has ground for suspicion that their whole system of prophetic interpretation is questionable.

PART THREE

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JEREMIAH FACES OPPOSITION

26:1—29:32

The material in chapters 26-29 is primarily biographical in character and written in the third person. Some autobiographical material is also included here (see 27:1-28:4). The most unique literary feature of this section is chapter 29. This chapter contains the complete text of a letter sent by Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon (29:1-23) and also parts of two letters, one of which was sent to Shemaiah, and the other sent by him (29:24-32). The materials in this section come from two different periods of the prophet's ministry. The events in chapter 26 take place in the early days of Jehoiakim. Chapters 27-29 cover events about fifteen years later, in the fourth year of king Zedekiah when 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.

I. THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF THE PROPHET 26:1-24

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 and 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 (II Chronicles 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! In the present chapter Jeremiah is put on trial for his life because of his uncompromising and forthright presentation of the word of God.

A. The Arrest 26:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, (2) Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the house of the LORD, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which are coming to worship at the house of the LORD, all the words which I command you to speak unto them. Do not omit a word! (3) Perhaps they will hear and turn each man from his evil way, that I might relent concerning the calamity which I am planning to bring upon them because of their evil deeds. (4) Say unto them, Thus says the LORD: If you will not hearken unto Me, to walk in My law, which I have set before you, (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); (6) then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth. (7) And the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. (8) And it came to pass when Jeremiah had finished speaking all which the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, You shall surely die! (9) Why have you prophesied

in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall become like Shiloh and this city shall become desolate without inhabitant? And all the people had assembled against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. (10) And hearing these things, the princes of Judah went up from the house of the king to the house of the LORD and sat down at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah was a soldier on a holy crusade, carrying out the instructions of his heavenly Superior. Acting under a divine directive (vv. 1-3), Jeremiah preaches a stirring message (vv. 4-6) which arouses the anger of those who heard him (vv. 7-10) and nearly costs him his life.

1. *A divine directive* (26:1-3)

Four specific points relating to a divine directive which came to Jeremiah are brought out in verses 1-3. First, there is a word as to the *time* of the directive. The word of the Lord came to the prophet "in the beginning of the reign of king Jehoiakim" (v. 1). This probably refers to the year 608 B.C. Righteous Josiah had been slain the year 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 Necho. 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 which force emerged as world conqueror.

The divine directive contains a specific word as the *place* Jeremiah is to preach (v. 2). He is to go to the

court of Solomon's Temple and preach to the masses of people who assembled there from all the cities of Judah to worship the Lord. On a previous occasion in the reign of Josiah, Jeremiah had stood in this same courtyard and preached the word (see 7:1-8:3). Many scholars, perhaps a majority, believe that chapter 26 contains a summary of that earlier message and relates the consequences of it. However the grounds for equating the Temple sermon of chapter 7 and the Temple sermon of chapter 26 are singularly and collectively weak.¹ There is not one hint of hostility to Jeremiah's first Temple sermon. The message no doubt received a sympathetic hearing in the days of good king Josiah. But now the climate has changed. The religious and civil authorities are in no mood to tolerate criticism.

The divine directive to Jeremiah also contains a specific *obligation* (v. 2b). The Lord commands 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, "whatsoever I shall command you, you shall speak" (1:7). 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 and unpleasant portions of his message when faced with the prospects of arrest, imprisonment and possibly death. No longer would Jeremiah enjoy the protection of the pious Josiah; he would feel for the first time the full impact of public hostility.

The divine directive also included a note as to the *purpose* for Jeremiah's preaching on this occasion. 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 will hearken! This verse reveals

1. For a discussion of these arguments, see comments on chapter 7.

the eagerness of God to turn away from His announced purpose to destroy the nations. If they would only repent! 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).

2. *A 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. Doubtlessly in verses 4-6 only a brief summary of the sermon preached on this occasion has been preserved. Had the entire message been recorded it would probably have included a stinging indictment for injustice, hypocrisy and rebellion against God. No doubt it included threats of the enemy from the north which would devastate the land. The summary which has been preserved here contains two points of emphasis. First, there is *an oblique call for repentance* (vv. 4, 5). Jeremiah is here threatening the people that if they do *not* do certain things they will 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. This involves two distinct responses on the part of the people. First they 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. Second, the people must listen to the contemporary spokesmen of God, 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 (v. 5).

In no uncertain terms Jeremiah spells out *the consequences of impenitence* in this Temple sermon (v. 6). Two distinct threats are contained here in the summary

of his message. First, God threatens 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 (I Samuel 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 here marshals the facts of history to support his contention that no spot was too sacred to be decimated when God pours out His wrath upon a sinful people. The second threat in verse 6 concerns the city. God would make it a curse among the nations of the earth. That is to say, God would so destroy Jerusalem that when anyone wished to pronounce a curse on a city he would say, "May such and such a city become like Jerusalem!"

3. *An angry response* (26:7-10)

Those who were assembled in the court of the Temple that day listened sullenly and indignantly as the mighty man of God delivered the word (v. 7). Though Jeremiah saw the scowling faces, the clenched fists, the threatening gestures yet 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 Jeremiah (v. 8). "Death!" they cried. "You have spoken words worthy of death, Jeremiah!" Buffeted, battered and berated by the angry throng Jeremiah remembered the words God had spoken to him at his call: "they shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail" (1:19).

One wonders what the fate of the prophet might have been had not certain princes arrived from the royal palace (v. 10). Apparently they had heard the commotion in the Temple court and had hastened there to determine the cause of the tumult. Their arrival seems to have had a soothing effect upon the hostile crowd. After order was restored the princes sat down at the entrance of the

New Gate to conduct a formal, legal inquiry into the matter.

B. The Trial 26:11-24

The proceedings at the New Gate were similar to those in any court of law. Formal charges were lodged against Jeremiah (v. 11) and then the prophet was allowed to speak in his own defense (vv. 12-15). A legal precedent was cited which seems to justify acquittal (vv. 16-19). But then a counter-precedent which would demand the death of the prophet was submitted to the court (vv. 20-23). The account closes with an explanation of how Jeremiah escaped death at the hands of his adversaries (v. 24).

1. *Indictment and defense* (26:11-15)

TRANSLATION

(11) And the priests and the prophets said unto the princes and unto all the people, saying, A sentence of death for this man! For he has prophesied against this city as you have heard with your own ears. (12) Then Jeremiah said unto all the princes and unto all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the things which you heard. (13) And now amend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will relent concerning the calamity He has spoken against you. (14) And as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do to me as it is good and right in your eyes. (15) But you surely know that if you proceed to put me to death you will surely be bringing upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants innocent blood; for truly the LORD did send me unto you to speak in your presence all these words.

The false prophets and priests open the formal trial proceedings with their accusation against Jeremiah. They demand a judgment of death. Apparently they feel that Jeremiah has prophesied falsely in the name of the Lord and therefore was worthy of the death penalty (Deuteronomy 18:20). They could not conceive of such threatening prophecy coming from the Lord. To declare that the Lord would destroy the Temple was blasphemy, a capital crime! It seemed to be an open and shut case. Everyone in the court had heard Jeremiah's sermon.

It is to the credit of the princely tribunal that they gave Jeremiah 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 nor does he make any apology. In his defense he makes four points: (1) The Lord sent me with this message (v. 12). (2) If you repent of your sins no calamity will befall you (v. 13). (3) You may do with me as you please (v. 14). He seems to be saying here that he is willing to die for what he has done if the court deem that an appropriate punishment. (4) If I am executed you will be guilty of shedding innocent blood (v. 15). Jeremiah closes his defense as he had begun, by affirming in no uncertain terms the divine origin of his message. 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.

2. *A legal precedent* (26:16-19)

TRANSLATION

(16) Then the princes and all the people said unto the priests and the prophets, There will be no judgment of death for this man! For he has spoken to

us in the name of the LORD our God. (17) Now certain men from the elders of the land had arisen and said unto all the assembly of the people, saying, (18) Micah the Morashtite was prophesying in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he said unto all the people of Judah, saying, Thus says the LORD 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. (19) Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all of Judah make any attempt to put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and make entreaty before the LORD, and the LORD relented concerning the calamity which he had spoken concerning them? But we are on the verge of doing great harm unto our souls!

COMMENTS

It does not seem to have taken the princes long to reach a decision regarding the case. "This man is not worthy of death for he has spoken in the name of the Lord" (v. 16). The people seem to have concurred with their judicial officers in the decision. They too had been convinced by Jeremiah's defense. It was the testimony of the elders of the people (v. 17) which seemed to sway the court and lead to the verdict announced in verse 16. 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. Usually the term "elders" refers to those who held an official status in the community. Here however it seems best to take the word in its literal sense. These men because of their age and experience occupied a position of honor and respect among the people. Their testimony would bear considerable weight.

The elders cite the case of Micah who made pronouncements against Jerusalem very similar to those which Jeremiah had made. Micah was from the town of Moresheth-gath (Micah 1:14) and so here is called the Morash-tite (v. 18). The elders recalled and quoted the exact words of Micah 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 and yet these elders were able to quote verbatim the same text of Micah which 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 point that the elders are making is not merely that Micah, a recognized man of God from an earlier period, had prophesied negatively against Judah. There is more to their argument. They point out that king Hezekiah did not punish Micah for such negative prophecy (v. 19). On the contrary Hezekiah had heeded the warning of Micah and had led the people in a great revival. As a result God had relented with regard to the pronouncement of doom against Jerusalem. The elders conclude their testimony by declaring "therefore we shall be procuring great evil against our souls" if we execute Jeremiah now.

3. *A counter-precedent* (26:20-23)

TRANSLATION

(20) But there was also a man who was prophesying in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah of Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land just as Jeremiah had done. (21) When king Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the princes heard his words, the king sought to kill him. When Uriah heard of it he feared

and fled and went to Egypt. (22) But king Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achbor and certain men with him to Egypt. (23) And they brought Uriah out of Egypt and brought him unto king Jehoiakim, who smote him with the sword and threw his corpse unto the graves of the common people.

COMMENTS

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 and inserted here to emphasize the extremely precarious position which Jeremiah had just escaped. However the present writer is inclined to accept 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.

Nothing is known of Uriah apart from that which is recorded here. The text relates that (1) he was the son of Shemaiah; (2) that he was from the city of Kiriath-jearim seven miles north-west of Jerusalem; (3) that he prophesied against Judah and Jerusalem in the same manner as did Jeremiah; (4) that he fled to Egypt when his life was threatened by Jehoiakim; (5) that he was extradited from Egypt through the instrumentality of an Elnathan;¹ (6) that Jehoiakim slew him or had him slain with a

1. This Elnathan is again mentioned in Jeremiah 36:12, 25. If identical with the Elnathan of II Kings 24:8, he was Jehoiakim's father-in-law.

sword; (7) that he was buried in the graveyard of the common people (v. 23).¹

Why did Uriah flee from Jehoiakim? Was this not sinful cowardice on his part? It should be remembered that Elijah fled from the wrath of wicked Jezebel (I Kings 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 (Matthew 2:13-23). John relates that Jesus hid himself from those who would have stoned him on one occasion (John 8:59). Paul secretly escaped from the city of Damascus to avoid those who were waiting to slay him (Acts 9:23ff.). One is reminded of the advice which Jesus gave to his disciples: "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matthew 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.

One other question with regard to the Uriah incident needs to be answered. Why was it that Jehoiakim was so easily able to secure the extradition of Uriah from the land of Egypt? Why could not or 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 Necho and a treaty must have existed between the two kings. Such treaties usually included a provision for reciprocity with regard to fugitives. The Uriah episode must have taken place during the first three years of Jehoiakim's reign when he was an Egyptian vassal. In his fourth year Jehoiakim became a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar.

1. 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.

4. *Jeremiah's deliverance* (26:24)

TRANSLATION

(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.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah had one very influential supporter during his trial. Ahikam son of Shaphan is credited with having influenced the court in favor of tolerance with respect to the prophet. Ahikam's father, Shaphan, had served as secretary of state under Josiah (II Kings 22:8). Ahikam himself was deputed by Josiah to consult with the prophetess Huldah concerning the law book which had been found in the Temple (II Kings 22:14). The son of Ahikam, Gedaliah, befriended Jeremiah on several occasions (36:10; 39:14; 40:5). Gedaliah was later appointed governor of the land by Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 40:5). From all of this one would conclude that Ahikam was a devoutly religious man as well as a man of quite some political influence. Here he courageously defends Jeremiah. His 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!

II. THE WARNING OF THE YOKE

27:1—28:17

In chapters 27 and 28 Jeremiah uses an ox yoke 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 Jere-

miah continued to forcefully assert that his pronouncements were of God. National survival demanded submission to the yoke of Babylonian world rule. In chapters 27 and 28 the warning is sounded to the foreign nations (27:1-11), king Zedekiah (27:12-15), the priests and people (27:16-22) and the fake prophets (28:1-17).

A. Instructions for the Prophet 27:1-3

TRANSLATION

(1) In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, (2) Thus says the LORD: Make for yourself thongs and yoke-bars and put them upon your neck, (3) and send them unto the king of Edom, and unto the king of Moab, and unto the king of the children of Ammon, and unto the king of Tyre, and unto the king of Sidon by the hand of the messengers who are coming to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah.

COMMENTS

Verse 1 clearly sets forth the date of the events in chapter 27 as being "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim." However the remaining portion of the chapter makes very clear that these messages are to be dated in the reign of Zedekiah (see vv. 3, 12, 20). As a matter of fact according to 28:1 the events of chapter 27 can be dated precisely to the fourth year of Zedekiah. How then did the name Jehoiakim get into 27:1? It is conceded by practically all scholars that the name of Jehoiakim in this verse is the error of a copyist. Some scribe as he copied the manuscript of the Book of Jeremiah was probably subconsciously influenced by the heading which appears over the preceding chapter and inadvertently wrote Jehoiakim for Zedekiah in 27:1.

It is not infrequent in prophetic books to find the Lord instructing His prophets to do some dramatic and sensational things in order to call attention to their messages and vividly illustrate their points. Here Jeremiah is commanded by the Lord to "make bands (thongs) and bars" i.e., an ox yoke consisting of wooden bars held together by leather bands. He is then to put this yoke upon his neck. Jeremiah seems to have appeared in the streets of Jerusalem for several days with his yoke-bar around his neck proclaiming his message of submission to Babylon. From what is said in verse 3 it would appear that Jeremiah made at least six other yoke-bars, perhaps miniature replicas, to be sent to various kings of the region.

Ambassadors from several neighboring states had gathered in Jerusalem for a consultation with Zedekiah. Representatives from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon were present. While the purpose of the meeting is not stated, it is evident from the warning of the prophet that revolt against Babylon was being contemplated. Perhaps the envoys were attempting to persuade Zedekiah to join the revolt. Jeremiah appeared in some public place where the ambassadors would be sure to pass, with a yoke upon his neck and in this strange guise 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.¹

It is perhaps worth noting here that 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 which was being plotted in this chapter.

1. For other possible examples of prophets addressing messages to foreign ambassadors see Isaiah 14:28-32 and 18:1-3.

B. Instructions for the Foreign Ambassadors 27:4-11

TRANSLATION

(4) Command them to say to their lords: Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Thus say unto your lords: I have made the earth, and the men and beasts which are upon the face of the earth by My great strength and by My outstretched arm and I can give it to whoever is appropriate in My eyes. (6) Therefore I have given all of these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon My servant and even the beasts of the field I have given to him to serve him. (7) All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until also the time of his land comes when many nations and great kings shall impose servitude upon him. (8) 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, I will punish that nation with sword, famine and pestilence (oracle of the LORD) until I have consumed them by his hand. (9) But as for you, do not hearken unto your prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers and sorcerers, who repeatedly say unto you, Do not serve the king of Babylon. (10) For they are prophesying a lie to you which will only serve to remove you from your land; for I will drive you out and you will perish. (11) And the nation which 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 the LORD) and they will till it and dwell in it.

COMMENTS

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. Basically the message drives home the point 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 makes four points in this message to the nations.

He points out *the basis of God's sovereign decrees* (v. 5). God's right to direct the affairs of men is grounded in the fact that He is creator of the world and all that is in it. The God of creation is also the God of history. Because He is Creator, God may do with His creation whatsoever seems good to Him. He may, if He so chooses, appoint an overseer, a superintendent, a governor over His world. God need not consult with the children of men to see when and if He should take such action. He simply exercises His prerogative as Creator and appoints the one who seems right to Him.

Jeremiah *announces God's sovereign will* with regard to the world of the early sixth century before Christ (vv. 6, 7). God has given all the lands of the Fertile Crescent into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Even the beasts of the field have been brought under his jurisdiction. All nations are to serve him (v. 6). Thus decrees the Great King! Nebuchadnezzar is here again called "My servant" (cf. 25:9). 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 (cf. 28:14; Daniel 2:38).

As if to temper somewhat the divine decree which he has just announced Jeremiah hastens to add that the supremacy of Babylon will not be permanent. "All nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land" (v. 7). In other passages Jeremiah has indicated that the duration of the Babylonian world em-

pire would be seventy years. Here he is probably saying the same thing in different words. It is unlikely that Jeremiah had in mind three specific kings.¹ Rather he seems to be saying that the nations would serve Babylon for a long time but not forever.² "The time of his own land" would refer to the time when Babylon would become subservient to another power. God Almighty has predetermined the duration of the Babylonian empire. Babylon is nothing more than a tool in His hands which is discarded when God no longer has need of it. At the end of the appointed time "many nations and great kings shall enslave him." After the appointed time of world supremacy Babylon would become subservient to other nations. This prophecy was fulfilled when Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.

The prophet *warns those nations which refuse to submit to God's sovereign decrees* (vv. 8-10). God will severely punish the nations which refuse to submit to the yoke of Babylon. God would use Nebuchadnezzar as the agent of His wrath to bring the sword against those nations which were in rebellion against the will of the Almighty. Famine and pestilence usually accompanied war in antiquity (v. 8).

A further warning appears in verses 9 and 10. The foreign ambassadors are warned not to listen to those other voices which were counseling revolt against Babylon. Five classes of prognosticators are singled out: prophets, diviners, dreams (or perhaps dreamers), soothsayers and sorcerers. Exact distinctions between each of these classes is impossible. It is interesting though that Jeremiah here recognizes the existence of prophet-like individuals among the foreign nations. The closest parallels to the Biblical

1. The successive sovereigns of Babylon were: Nebuchadnezzar, 44 years; Evil Merodach, 2 years; Neriglissor, 4 years; and Nabonidus, 17 years.

2. Deuteronomy 4:25 and 6:2 use an equivalent expression in the general sense of a long time.

prophets yet discovered are to be found at Mari in the eighteenth century B.C.

Those who were advocating rebellion against Babylon and pretending that such advice came from the deity were lying (v. 10). 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 peoples.

Following the warning, there is *a promise to those who submit to God's sovereign decrees* (v. 11). Those nations which humbly and obediently submitted their neck to the yoke of Babylon would be allowed by God to remain in their own land. Thus it has always been that people who submit to the will of the Almighty have a peace which the world cannot know.

C. A Warning to Zedekiah 27:12-15

TRANSLATION

(12) And unto Zedekiah king of Judah I spoke in a similar manner, saying, (13) Why will you die, you and your people, by sword, famine and pestilence, as the LORD has spoken concerning the nation which does not serve the king of Babylon? (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; (15) For I have not sent them (oracle of the LORD), but they keep on prophesying falsely in My name, with the result that I will drive you out, and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying unto you.

In verses 12-15 Jeremiah moves from the general warning which 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 of action which these small states might follow. But naturally his concern for his native Judah in these perilous days was paramount. So the prophet directly addressed Zedekiah and his advisers perhaps on the very same occasion on which he addressed the foreign ambassadors. The short resume of his message to the king contains three elements. First, there is *exhortation* (v. 12). Jeremiah exhorts 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."

Exhortation is followed by *argumentation* (v. 13) and *warning* (v. 14). 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 which 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 sword, famine and pestilence when you might live in peace if you would only submit to Babylon. Jeremiah moves hastily to deal with a possible objection which might be arising in the mind of the king. Other prophetic voices were urging an independent course for Judah. They were promising success in the rebellion against Babylon. Jeremiah does not hesitate to brand these prophets as liars. They are no better than the prophets of the heathen nations mentioned in the previous paragraph.

God has not sent these prophets! To hearken to their voice will bring disaster on the land. Verse 15b does not indicate the *purpose* of these prophets but the inevitable *result* of their lies.

D. A Warning to the Priests and People 27:16-22

TRANSLATION

(16) And unto the priests and all this people I spoke, saying, (17) Thus says the LORD: Do not hearken unto the words of your prophets who keep on prophesying to you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the house of the LORD shall be returned from Babylon in just a short time; for they are prophesying falsehood to you. (18) But if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them entreat the LORD of hosts in order that the vessels which remain in the house of the LORD, the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem, do not go to Babylon. (19) For thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the pillars, and the sea, and the bases, and concerning the rest of the vessels which remain in this city, (20) which 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. (21) Surely thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels which remain in the house of the LORD, and in the house of the king of Judah, and Jerusalem: (22) They shall be brought to Babylon and there they shall be until the day I visit them (oracle of the LORD). Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.

COMMENTS

One cannot be absolutely positive that this message

was delivered on the same day as the preceding two 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 and his court, they had raised false hopes among the priests and the people. Jeremiah now moves to shatter those delusions. The message as it has been recorded here contains a warning against the false prophets (vv. 16-17), a challenge to the false prophets (v. 18), and a contradiction of the false prophets (vv. 19-22).

1. *A warning against the false prophets (27:16-17)*

Lies are often more attractive than truth. Certain prophets in Jerusalem were optimistically predicting that the vessels of the house of God which had been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar on his two previous assaults against Jerusalem (in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C.) would shortly be brought back from Babylon (v. 16). The implication of such a prediction was that Babylon would shortly 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 would most likely have gained the support of the influential priests for the proposed revolt against Babylon. Again, for the third time in this chapter alone, Jeremiah calls such prophets liars. He urges the priests and people not to hearken to these lies, to face reality. "Rebellion against Babylon will mean the desolation of this city! Do not support the proposed revolt and you will live." In other words Jeremiah is saying, you should not be so concerned about getting those Temple vessels back but about preventing a policy which would destroy the entire city including the Temple.

2. *A challenge to the false prophets* (27:18)

In verse 18 Jeremiah challenges the false prophets to prove that they are men called by God. If they are true spokesmen for God as they claim let them be *praying* as well as *preaching*. Let them pray that the vessels still remaining in Jerusalem be not carried away to Babylon. True prophets of God were always fervent and effective intercessors on behalf of their people. Jeremiah in this verse seems to be saying that not only are the prophets creating a delusion by insisting that the subservience to Babylon will shortly be ended, they are in reality powerless to prevent further humiliation at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. They can neither create good fortune by their preaching nor prevent disaster by their praying.

3. *A contradiction of the false prophets* (27:19-22)

Before concluding his message to the priests and people Jeremiah produces a double "thus saith the LORD" which directly contradicts all that the false prophets had been propagating. Those vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had left behind in the Temple when he took Jeconiah (i.e., Jehoiachin) into captivity in 597 B.C. will shortly be carried away by the Great King. This of course implies that Nebuchadnezzar will successfully besiege and conquer Jerusalem. Among the items which had not yet been taken away are named 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 no doubt one of the most attractive and distinctive aspects of the Temple of Solomon. Jachin and Boaz were broken up by the Chaldeans and carried to Babylon in 587 B.C. (Jeremiah 52:17). The large molten sea of Solomon's Temple is described in I Kings 7:23-26. It was forty-five feet in cir-

cumference 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 "bases" referred to by Jeremiah were ten in number. The author of Kings gives an elaborate description of them (I Kings 7:27-37). The bases supported portable lavers.

The vessels of the house of God would not remain forever in Babylon. In God's own good time He would visit (i.e., punish) Babylon and then the vessels would be returned to Jerusalem (v. 22). Jeremiah's prediction was fulfilled when in 539 B.C. Cyrus conquered Babylon and issued a decree allowing the Jews to take their sacred vessels and return 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.

E. A Warning to the False Prophets 28:1-17

Alongside of the genuine prophet in ancient Israel the counterfeit prophet arose. The appearance of such fakes had been anticipated in the law of Moses and provisions were made in the Book of Deuteronomy (18:22; 13:1-3) for ascertaining whether or not a man was a true prophet of the Lord. In chapter 26 false prophets were named among the fanatic adversaries who sought the life of Jeremiah. Chapter 27 relates the continued opposition of these men during the reign of Zedekiah. Chapter 28 describes dramatic confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah, one of the false prophets. The account can be broken down into four paragraphs: (1) The prediction of Hananiah the false prophet (vv. 1-4); (2) The response of Jeremiah (vv. 5-9); (3) The reaction of Hananiah (vv. 10-11); and Jeremiah's final word to Hananiah (vv. 12-17).

1. *The prediction of Hananiah* (28:1-4)

TRANSLATION

(1) 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, that Hananiah son of Azzur, the prophet, who was from Gibeon, said unto me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, (2) Thus says the LORD of hosts the God of Israel: I have shattered the yoke of the king of Babylon. (3) Within two years I will bring back unto this place all the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took from this place and carried to Babylon. And Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon I will bring back to this place (oracle of the LORD), for I shall shatter the yoke of the king of Babylon.

COMMENTS

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 chapter must have occurred sometime during the first four months of that same year.

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." Nothing is known of him except what is here recorded: he was a prophet; he was son of Azzur; and he was from the priestly city

of Gibeon some eight miles northwest of Jerusalem. Because of this latter circumstance some have suggested that Hananiah may have been a priest as well as a prophet.

Hananiah chose well the place of his showdown with Jeremiah. The confrontation took place in the Temple in the presence of the priests and the people. 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 which symbolized submission to Babylon. One cannot determine from the brief account whether Hananiah's action was preplanned or whether he simply was roused to action by the appearance of Jeremiah.

Hananiah was not secretive about what he did. He boldly approached Jeremiah and in a loud voice, no doubt, announced that he had an oracle from the Lord: "Thus says the LORD of host, the God of Israel." It sounded authentic. Either this solemn introductory formula was usual with all who claimed the prophetic gift or Hananiah assumed it as implying an equal claim to inspiration with Jeremiah. The oracle is brief, but Hananiah made three distinct points. First, Hananiah announces that God had broken the yoke of the king of Babylon (v. 2). 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 which was frequently used by true prophets in predicting the future.

Hananiah's second prediction concerned the Temple vessels (v. 3). Since Babylon was to shortly fall, nothing would prevent the return of the Temple vessels to Jerusalem. The return of the Temple vessels seems to have been a prominent theme in the prognostications of the false prophets. Perhaps the capture of those sacred vessels by a foreign king created real theological problems for the priests and religious leaders. "Within two full years,"

Hananiah confidently predicted, 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 time-table of the nations which were plotting revolt against Babylon.

Hananiah's third prediction concerned those who were in exile in Babylon. When the yoke of Babylon was broken, Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) and all the other captives from both the 605 and 597 B.C. deportations would be permitted to return. Jeremiah had been predicting an exile of long duration (see e.g. 25:11). Furthermore Jeremiah had explicitly predicted that Jehoiachin would never return to Judah and would never have descendants to follow him upon the throne (22:24-30). Because King Zedekiah is not mentioned in the prediction of Hananiah some have concluded that there is here 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.

2. The response of Jeremiah (28:5-9)

TRANSLATION

(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 the LORD, (6) and Jeremiah the prophet said, Amen! Thus may the LORD do! May the Lord establish your words which you have prophesied, to return the vessels of the house of the LORD and all the captives from Babylon unto this place. (7) But hear please this word which I am about to speak in your presence and in the presence of all the people. (8)

The prophets who were before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and great kingdoms of war and famine and pestilence. (9) The prophet who prophesies of peace can be recognized as a prophet truly sent of the LORD only when the word of that prophet comes to pass.

COMMENTS

It is not hard to imagine the reaction of the crowd to the forthright and positive predictions of Hananiah. Thunderous applause and joyous shouts of agreement clearly indicated where the sentiments of the crowd lay. But 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 gave reply to his antagonist.

Jeremiah's initial response must have shocked the audience and temporarily disarmed his opponent. "Amen," he said. "May the LORD establish your words. May your prophecy be fulfilled." These words are not sarcastically spoken. Jeremiah truly desired in his own heart that the captivity would speedily come to an end. He dearly loved his people. He had prayed on behalf of his nation on more than one occasion. Nothing would please him more than to hear that Babylon had fallen and the exiles were coming home. But while in his heart he wishes Hananiah was right, in his mind he knows that Hananiah is dreaming the impossible dream.

Jeremiah's personal response is followed by his official response (vv. 7-9). He calls upon his opponent to hear the true word of the Lord. He alludes first to the precedent of past prophecy. True prophets of God in the past prophesied against many countries and against great kingdoms of war and of evil and pestilence. In other words

the tenor of preceding prophecies has been judgmental. Now of course Jeremiah did not mean that the pre-exilic prophets were completely negative—that they had no positive word of hope. It is a misuse of this verse to argue from it, as some of the older liberal scholars did, that all notes of hope found in the pre-exilic prophets must be later interpolations from after the time of Jeremiah. 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. The point that Jeremiah is making is that his own condemnatory-type prophecy is part of the main stream of Israelite prophecy. Jeremiah implies that Hananiah's unconditional peace prophecy has probabilities strongly against it. It is interesting that Jeremiah speaks of *many* countries and *great* kingdoms. He obviously felt that 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 against foreign nations stand side by side with oracles against Israel and Judah. The present verse gives early and authoritative testimony to the genuineness of these so-called foreign nation oracles which have often been questioned by modern liberal scholars.

After establishing a presumptive case against the prediction of Hananiah in verse 8, Jeremiah proceeds in verse 9 to indicate the criteria by which such a prophecy can be judged true or false. If contrary to the analogy of previous prophecy a prophet speaks unconditionally of peace, then that prophecy can only be authenticated by the actual fulfillment. In effect Jeremiah is suggesting that everybody simply wait and see if Hananiah's prediction will be fulfilled. 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 the LORD and heart-felt obedience to His word would God bring His people home (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).

3. *The reaction of Hananiah* (28:10-11)

TRANSLATION

(10) Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from upon the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and smashed it. (11) And Hananiah said before all the people, Thus says the LORD: Like this I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon within two years from upon the neck of all the nations. Then Jeremiah the prophet went on his way.

COMMENTS

Hananiah, instead of any rejoinder to Jeremiah, resorts to an act of violence which will 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 which 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 which 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 (v. 10). As he smashes 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 had previously said except that this time he adds the climax "from off the neck of all nations."

Jeremiah submitted to the indignity of the moment. He simply "went his way" (v. 11). No explosion of

anger. No hastily spoken word of rebuttal. 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 his life in danger. Perhaps under the circumstances he felt it useless to repeat the admonition which he had earlier made.

4. *The final word to Hananiah* (28:12-17)

TRANSLATION

(12) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had shattered the yoke from upon the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, saying, (13) Go and say unto Hananiah, Thus says the LORD: You have shattered yokes of wood but you have made instead of them yokes of iron. (14) For thus says the LORD 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. (15) And Jeremiah the prophet said unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear please, O Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, but you have caused this people to trust a falsehood! (16) Therefore, thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you will die because you have spoken rebellion against the LORD. (17) And Hananiah the prophet died that year in the seventh month.

COMMENTS

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 of these two prophets was public or private, the likelihood is that the two men were alone on this occasion. The oracle which Jeremiah pronounced to Hananiah is two-fold in thrust. He first replies to the public prophecies of Hananiah (vv. 13-14) and then he has a prediction concerning Hananiah personally (vv. 15-16).

It was easy enough for Hananiah to break the symbolic yoke which Jeremiah had been wearing about his neck; but by so doing he shall create a yoke of iron for the people (v. 13). The act of Hananiah would serve to excite the Jews to resistance against Babylon and thereby cause 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 he had actually made the situation worse. Perhaps Jeremiah is hinting here 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." Verse 14 seems to support this view. God has now placed a yoke of iron about the neck of the nations that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar. On the idea of the beasts of the field serving Nebuchadnezzar see comments on 27:6.

As regards Hananiah personally, Jeremiah had some rather harsh words to say. In verses 15 and 16 there is a stern word of indictment and a prediction of imminent death. As for the indictment, three charges are made: (1) Hananiah is an impostor. God has not sent him and therefore he is not entitled to call himself a prophet. He is called throughout the chapter "Hananiah the prophet" because that was his official title. But he was not a proph-

et by the will and call of God. (2) Hananiah has caused the people to trust in a lie. His optimistic but unfounded 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 might have been quite sincere and even patriotic his words were leading the people down the road to national suicide. (3) Hananiah has spoken rebellion against the Lord (v. 16). 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 has perverted the word of the Lord. In either case it is a serious accusation to make.

Because of these crimes against God and the nation Hananiah must be punished. The law of Moses clearly states that if a prophet is guilty of speaking rebellion against the Lord he should be put to death (Deuteronomy 13:5). To advocate rebellion against God was a capital crime. The Great Judge announces the verdict: "Behold, I am about to remove you from upon the face to the earth" (v. 16). God did not *send* Hananiah to the people of Judah (v. 16) but He now will *send* him away to die. The same Hebrew word is used in both verses. The prophets were quite fond of using paronomasia or play on words. "This year you shall die!" What an awesome thought. One can only wonder how Hananiah received this word from the Lord. The crowds which had bolstered his courage in the Temple encounter 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 on other occasions. Now he must have been trembling as the finger of Jeremiah pointed in his direction and those solemn words were uttered.

In the seventh month of that same year Hananiah died. This would have been about two months after the Temple episode (cf. 28:1). Not only did the death of Hananiah serve as a punishment for this teacher of lies, it also served to vindicate Jeremiah as a true prophet of God.

III. CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE CAPTIVES 29:1-32

Judging from the contents of chapter 29, the Jews in captivity in Babylon were free to correspond with their relatives and friends back in Palestine. This chapter contains two (possibly three) letters which Jeremiah sent to Babylon and alludes to several letters which were sent from Jews in Babylon to those in 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 605 B.C. and still in greater measure in 597 B.C. 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 those Jews in Babylon yet he was a realist. He could not allow those Jews to go on deluding themselves. As long as they thought the exile to Babylon was a mere episode to be endured and shortly to be ended there was no real incentive to repentance. The letters in this chapter are a blend of realism and idealism, of discouragement and hope.

A. The First letter to Babylon 29:1-23

1. *Introduction to the letter (29:1-4)*

TRANSLATION

(1) These are the words of the letter which 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 whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. (2) (This was after king Jeconiah and the queen-mother, the officers, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and artisans had departed from Jerusalem). (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 sent to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in Babylon. The letter said: (4) Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the captives whom I caused to go captive from Jerusalem into Babylon:

COMMENTS

Jeremiah's first letter to Babylon is addressed to "the residue of the elders of the captivity, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried captive to Babylon" (v. 1). In the main these would be the leaders of the nation who had gone captive in 597 B.C. when Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) had surrendered to the great Babylonian monarch (v. 2). Why does Jeremiah speak of the "residue" of the elders? Perhaps 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 that which existed in Judah. This particular letter is intended for all segments of the population. It is an "open letter."

For some unexplained reason king Zedekiah was sending an embassy to Babylon at this time. Perhaps the purpose was to carry the annual tribute to Nebuchadnezzar. The embassy consisted of, or was led by, two outstanding men. Elasah the son of Shaphan is named first. The

family of Shaphan were among the most loyal friends which 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 no doubt 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. Could this Hilkiah be the high priest who took such an active part in the reforms of king Josiah (II Kings 22:4; II Chronicles 34, 35)? Could Gemariah have been a brother of Jeremiah (see 1:1)? These questions must remain unanswered. But it is likely that Gemariah too was a loyal believer. Even though the Judean leadership was by and large corrupt still there were those who bore witness for Him in the inner councils of the nation.

The letter deals with the immediate situation of the captives. The prophet offers to the captives practical advice (vv. 5-7), warning (vv. 8-10), and a word of hope (vv. 11-14). Then he undertakes a refutation of the fake prophets in Babylon (vv. 15-20) and finally makes a prediction respecting the fate of two notorious false prophets there (vv. 21-23).

2. *Practical advice for the captives* (29:5-7)

TRANSLATION

(5) Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens that you may eat their fruit. (6) Take wives and beget sons and daughters, and 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. (7) Seek the peace of the city to which I have deported

you, and pray on behalf of it unto the LORD; for your welfare depends on its welfare.

COMMENTS

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 B.C. No doubt 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 and were making no effort to accommodate themselves to the new situation. Jeremiah had some inspired counsel for the exiles. Basically he encourages them to settle down for a long captivity. He urges them (1) to build permanent houses; (2) plant gardens; (3) take wives; (4) beget sons and daughters; (5) seek the peace of the city; and (6) pray for it.¹ They are to make Babylon their homeland for the next seventy years and be loyal subjects of the government. They are to live as nearly as possible normal, peaceable lives. They should pay no heed to the dangerous agitators among them who viewed quiet submission as treasonous capitulation.

3. *A warning to the captives* (29:8-10)

TRANSLATION

(8) For thus says the LORD 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 which you cause to be dreamed. (9) For they are prophesying to you false-

1. C. Paul Gray calls this the first admonition in the Old Testament to pray for one's enemies.

ly in My name; I have not sent them (oracle of the LORD). (10) For thus says the LORD: When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill for you My good word to bring you back unto this place.

COMMENTS

In verses 8-9 Jeremiah points to three agents likely to lead the captives astray—prophets, diviners and dreams. False prophets promising a speedy deliverance had arisen in Babylon as well as in Jerusalem. Their object was to lead the people to dissatisfaction and revolt. The diviners were echoing the same optimistic prognostications as the prophets. Diviners are those who use external objects to discover what the future holds. Several different forms of definition are mentioned in and condemned by the Old Testament.¹ It is therefore impossible to determine what particular form of the occult art had been appropriated by the Jewish diviners in Babylon. Dreams of early emancipation were also dangerous to the captives. The unusual phrase “dreams which you caused to be dreamed” indicates that the supply was created by a demand for dreams of this nature.² The people wished to be deceived; they preferred darkness to light. So they *caused* or *made* the prophets to tell them encouraging dreams.

Jeremiah agreed with the prophets and diviners that the Lord would eventually visit His people and deliver them from bondage. But in the view of Jeremiah this deliverance would come only after the seventy years which God had prescribed for the duration of the Babylonian world empire. For the exiles to continue to believe in the

1. E.g., rhabdomancy, the use of sticks and arrows, and hepatascopy, examination of the liver of animals, are mentioned in Ezekiel 21:21. Astrology is also a form of divination.

2. E. H. Plumptre, “Jeremiah,” *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers*, Charles John Ellicott, editor (New York: Cassell, 1901), V, 98.

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 (v. 10).

4. *A word of hope for the captives (29:11-14)*

TRANSLATION

(11) For I know the plans which I am making for you (oracle of the LORD)—plans of peace and not calamity, to give to you a future and hope. (12) When you call upon Me and come and pray unto Me I will hearken unto you. (13) 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 the LORD). 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 the LORD), and I will cause you to return unto the place from which I sent you into exile.

COMMENTS

Since the explicit declaration that the exile is to last seventy years probably would have caused discouragement and doubt in the hearts of the captives, Jeremiah quickly adds in verses 11-14 a note of hope. God assures them that His thoughts toward them are for their peace and well-being and not their destruction. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you!" The pronoun in the Hebrew is emphatic. God knows His plan and purpose even when men are unable to comprehend and fathom the circumstances of life. The exiles needed to hear this. They needed to realize that their captivity was not an accident but 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 and well-being.

God assures 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 (vv. 16-19), 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.

Genuine conversion of the people will be both a result of the seventy years of captivity and a prerequisite for deliverance from captivity (vv. 12-14). 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 would die and a new generation would arise which would turn to God. Return to the homeland would only be possible when they seek the Lord with all of their heart. God would answer their prayer and 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. 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 dire and 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.

5. Refutation of the false prophets in Babylon
(29:15-20)

TRANSLATION

(15) Because you have said, The LORD has raised up for us prophets in Babylon—(16) Surely, thus

says the LORD 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—(17) Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I am about to send against them the sword, famine and pestilence, and I will make them like rotten figs which are so bad they cannot be eaten. (18) And I will pursue them with sword, famine and pestilence; and I will make them an object of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, a curse, an astonishment, a hissing and a reproach among all nations where I have driven them, (19) because they did not hearken unto My words (oracle of the LORD) when I earnestly and persistently sent My servants the prophets; but you did not obey (oracle of the LORD). (20) But as for you, hear the word of the LORD, all you captives, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah's correspondence with the captives was not appreciated. Some felt that the prophet from Anathoth was meddling where he had no business. "God has raised up for us prophets here in Babylon," they protested. "We have no need to hear from would-be prophets in Jerusalem!" (v. 15). 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. If the captives only could realize the agony which 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 would come upon the land in the not-too-distant future.

Using a figure he used earlier (24:2-10) Jeremiah likens the inhabitants of Jerusalem to rotten figs which are good for nothing but to cast out (v. 17). The nations of the world would see the terrible calamity which would befall Judah and they would shutter with fear and hiss or whistle in amazement. Thus instead of promising a speedy return of the Jews already in Babylon, Jeremiah declares that there would be further deportations of Jews from the homeland. In view of what would shortly befall Jerusalem, the exiles should be thankful that they had been spared the horrors of the last days of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah relates 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 (v. 19). In the sudden shift from third to second person in verse 19, Jeremiah includes those who read the letter in the charge of disobedience to God. He then pleads with the captives to hear the genuine word of the Lord (v. 20): "Those in Judah have refused to hear; then *you* in Babylon give heed to the word of God."

6. *The fate of two notorious false prophets*
(29:21-23)

TRANSLATION

(21) Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are continuing to prophesy to you a falsehood in My name: Behold, I am about to give them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will smite them before your eyes. (22) A curse shall be derived from them by all the captives of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab which the king of Babylon

roasted in the fire, (23) because they have done folly in Israel, and have committed adultery with the wives of their neighbors, and they have spoken a word in My name falsely, which I had not commanded them. But I know this, and am a witness to it (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

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. Jeremiah makes two serious accusations against them. First, he accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the LORD (v. 21). Then he accuses them of committing adultery (v. 23). Loose theology often is accompanied by loose morality. Jeremiah indicates that these two scoundrels would be delivered into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar who would "roast" them in a fiery furnace. The Babylonian king no doubt regarded their oracles as treasonous. 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 (Daniel 3:6ff.). Ahab and Zedekiah would be remembered, but not as prophets. Their names would become part of a gruesome formula of imprecation which angry men would hurl at one another (v. 22). God Himself has taken note of the sins of these two hypocrites and He will see to it that they receive their just due (v. 23).

B. A Letter from Babylon 29:24-29

TRANSLATION

(24) And concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall say, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have sent in your name letters unto all the people which are in Jerusalem and unto

Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, and unto all the priests, saying, The LORD has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, to be chief overseer of the house of the LORD for every mad man when he prophesies that you might place him in the stocks and the collar. (27) And now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah from Anathoth who is prophesying to you? (28) For he has sent unto us in Babylon, saying, It is long! Build houses and settle down and plant gardens that you may eat their fruit. (29) And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the presence of Jeremiah the prophet.

COMMENTS

The letter of Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon stirred up a great deal of hostility. One of the false prophets there, Shemaiah by name, sent letters to Jerusalem in an attempt to have Jeremiah silenced. In one letter Shemaiah urged Zephaniah, a leading priest in Jerusalem, to imitate his illustrious predecessor Jehoiada who had taken bold action in executing the idolatrous prophets (II Kings 11:1-20). Shemaiah feels that action should be taken against the frenzied, "mad" prophets who were roving around the Temple area. Of course he has Jeremiah particularly in mind (v. 27). Jeremiah is regarded as a madman simply because he held a minority opinion with regard to the duration of the captivity (v. 28). It is to the credit of Zephaniah that he did not yield to the pressure which Shemaiah tried to bring against him. He seems to have been sympathetic towards Jeremiah and actually showed him the letter (v. 29).

C. A Second Letter to Babylon 29:30-32

TRANSLATION

(30) And the word of the LORD came unto Jere-

miah, saying, (31) Send unto all the captives, saying, Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, though I did not send him, and he has caused you to trust a falsehood; (32) therefore thus says the LORD: 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, and he shall not look with pleasure on the good which I shall do for My people (oracle of the LORD), for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah received an oracle from the Lord concerning Shemaiah and proceeded to send a second letter to the captives. In it he affirms that the Lord will punish Shemaiah for perpetuating the delusion of a short captivity and encouraging the Jews there to rebell against Babylon. The punishment is two-fold: (1) Shemaiah would be deprived of descendants to carry on his name, and (2) he would not live to see the restoration of the people to their own land at the end of the seventy years of captivity (v. 32).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I. Facts to Master

1. Time, place, and results of the message delivered in Chapter 26.
2. Verdict rendered by the princes in the case of Jeremiah (26:16).
3. Name of the earlier prophet who prophesied against Jerusalem in the name of the Lord (26:17-19).

JEREMIAH

4. Name of a prophet who had been slain in the reign of Jehoiakim (26:20-23).
5. The name of the prince who intervened on behalf of Jeremiah (26:24).
6. That which Jeremiah sent to the neighboring kings (27:2, 3).
7. Names of five countries which had sent ambassadors to Jerusalem in the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah.
8. The one into whose hand God had given the world (27:6).
9. The title which is given to the king of Babylon (27:6).
10. The length of time during which all nations must serve Babylon (27:7).
11. Various types of prognosticators among the nations (27:9).
12. Those who urged Zedekiah not to serve Babylon (27:14).
13. The predictions of the false prophets regarding the Temple vessels already taken captive (27:16).
14. One of the important functions of a true prophet (27:18).
15. Specific parts of the Temple yet in danger of going to Babylon (27:19).
16. Identity of Jeconiah (27:20).
17. Name of a prophet who confronted Jeremiah in the Temple (28:1).
18. That which Hananiah did to Jeremiah (28:10).
19. The fate of Hananiah (28:16, 17).
20. The two men by whose hand Jeremiah sent his letter to Babylon (29:3).
21. The advice which Jeremiah gave to the captives in Babylon (29:5-7).
22. Two false prophets mentioned in Jeremiah's letter and their fate (29:21-22).

JEREMIAH FACES OPPOSITION

23. The name of a priest in Jerusalem who received a letter from Babylon protesting the activities of Jeremiah (29:24-28).

24. The fate of Shemaiah the fake prophet (29:32).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. What was it in Jeremiah's message that so upset his hearers? 26:1-7.
2. Was Uriah a faithful prophet? Why did not God protect him as he protected Jeremiah?
3. What is the gist of Jeremiah's defense during his trial? 26:12-25.
4. Why the reference to Micah the Morashtite during the trial of Jeremiah? 26:18.
5. Why does God have the right to appoint the World Ruler? 27:5.
6. What is so significant about the title "My Servant"? 27:6.
7. Why does God specify that "the beasts of the field were given to Nebuchadnezzar? 27:6.
8. How is 27:7 to be harmonized with 25:11?
9. Why did Jeremiah say "Amen" to the false prophecy of Hananiah? 28:6.
10. Summarize Jeremiah's argument in 28:8, 9.
11. Why did Jeremiah simply walk away after Hananiah took the yoke off his neck and broke it? 28:11.
12. Why did Zedekiah have to send an embassy to Babylon? 29:3.
13. Why does Jeremiah tell the captives to pray for the peace of Babylon? 29:7.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JEREMIAH'S FAITH IN THE FUTURE 30:1—33:26

Chapters 30-33, the so-called Book of Consolation, is the only consistently hopeful section of the Book of Jeremiah. It is likely that these chapters date to the tenth year of Zedekiah (588 B.C.). At least that is the date assigned to chapters 32 and 33.¹ These 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. 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 rather suspected that he was collaborating with the enemy. These dark and dire 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 which 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.

From the literary standpoint this section contains the following elements: an introduction (30:1-3); a collection of poetic oracles (30:4-31:22); two collections of prose sermons (31:23-40; 32:26-33:26); a narrative ac-

1. Chapters 30 and 31 have been assigned to periods all the way 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 chapters 32 and 33.

count of a symbolic act (32:1-15); a prayer for enlightenment (32:16-25). A topical analysis of the material in these chapters suggests the following outline: (1) the promise of restoration (30:4-24); (2) the blessings of restoration (31:1-40); and (3) confidence in restoration (32:1-33:26).

INTRODUCTION 30:1-3

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD saying, Thus says the LORD God of Israel: Write for yourself all the words which I have spoken unto you in a book. (3) For behold, the days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will reverse the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will cause them to return unto the land which I gave unto their fathers and they shall repossess it.

COMMENTS

The first three verses of chapter 30 serve to introduce the Book of Consolation. Here Jeremiah is commanded by the Lord to record in a book¹ the words which God had spoken to him concerning the future of the nation. Unlike the collection of prophecies referred to in chapter 36:1-6, this "book" does not seem to be intended for public proclamation but rather for the personal comfort of the prophet. This is suggested by the words "write for your own sake" (v. 2). The Hebrew word *sepher* (book) can refer to any size document from a single page to an extensive treatise.

Chapters 30-33 have been described as "a little green

1. While some scholars think that the "book" mentioned here comprises only chapters 30-31, it is probably best to include chapters 32-33 as well.

oasis" in the midst of a "dry and barren desert."¹ Verse three sets the tone of the whole section. The reason Jeremiah is to compile another book is because there are glorious things for the covenant people. "Behold! days are coming" is an expression which points to a certain, but indefinite, time in the future. Three wonderful things are stipulated as part of those future days. (1) God will turn again the captivity i.e., reverse the fortunes of His people. (2) Israel and Judah will once again be reunited. (3) God's people will return to the land which He had given to their fathers.

I. THE PROMISE OF RESTORATION 30:4-24

In Chapter 30 the focus is upon the promise of restoration to the homeland. Running throughout the chapter are four points of emphasis: (1) The yoke is removed from Jacob; (2) the wounds of Zion are healed; (3) the restored community is blessed; and (4) the purposes of God are certain.²

A. The Promise to Enslaved Israel 30:4-11

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. *The day of distress* (30:4-7)

TRANSLATION

(4) And these are the words which the LORD has spoken concerning Israel and Judah, (5) For thus says the LORD: We have heard a cry of terror,

1. F. Cawley, "Jeremiah," *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 626.

2. Hall (*op. cit.*, pp. 273-75) has presented an appealing outline of this chapter: Divine Judgment (4-11); Divine Chastisement (vv. 12-17); Divine Blessing (18-22); Divine Purpose (vv. 23-24).

fear, and there is no peace! (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? (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.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah begins the prophecy which is to contain the promise of deliverance in a manner that will intensify the contrast that is coming. He describes in graphic terms the distress that Jacob, the entire covenant nation, is to experience. He hears the people saying, "We have heard a voice (or sound) of trembling, of fear, and not of peace" (v. 5). A great host is advancing. The people must submit themselves to the uncertainties and horrors of war and siege; they are scared. Convulsive pain grips the men of the nations so that they clutch their loins like a woman in travail (v. 6). That day of trouble which ushers in deliverance for the people of God will be great in suffering and distress (v. 7). This period of fearful tumult and upheaval is called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (v. 7). 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 Jacob's trouble" in Scripture.

It is not easy to determine precisely what period of time is being described in verses 5-7. Three basic views can be found among the commentators. (a) Some regard the time of Jacob's trouble to be the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. According to this view Jeremiah is describing something that was *presently* taking place. (b) Others see here a prediction of confusion and fear that would grip the Jews at the fall of the Babylonian

empire in 539 B.C. As this view would interpret it, the exiles in Babylonia would share the consternation of their captors when the Persians armies started marching south toward Babylon. (c) A third interpretation would regard the "time of Jacob's trouble" as a period that is yet future. It is not uncommon to find commentators who regard the *prefillment* of the passage in the events of 539 B.C. while regarding the *fulfillment* to be yet future.

The present writer is inclined to think that the period of Jacob's trouble began with the first deportation of Israelites to foreign soil in 733 B.C. 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 587 B.C. the nation ceased to exist. Israel was a people without a land. The time of Jacob's trouble extended to 539 B.C. 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 (v. 7).

2. *The day of deliverance* (30:8-11)

TRANSLATION

(8) And it shall come to pass in that day (oracle of the LORD of hosts) that I will shatter his yoke from upon your neck, and I will snap his bonds; and strangers shall no more enslave him. (9) But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their King, whom I will raise up for him. (10) And as for you, O my servant Jacob, Do not fear (oracle of the LORD), and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. And Jacob shall return, and rest and be secure, and no one shall

disturb him. (11) For I am with you (oracle of the LORD) to deliver you; for I will make a full end of all the nations where I scattered you; but I will not make a full end of you. But I will correct you in measure, and I certainly will not regard you as innocent.

COMMENTS

In stark contrast to the time of Jacob's trouble is the glorious day of his deliverance. The yoke of the oppressor will be shattered and the bonds of captivity will be loosed. Foreigners would not subject Israel to bondage anymore (v. 8).

The question arises whether or not verse 8 refers exclusively to the deliverance from Babylonian bondage which occurred in 539 B.C. Two facts might lead one to think that the reference reaches beyond 539 B.C. First, the name of the oppressor is omitted. More weighty is the statement that foreigners would no more subject Israel to bondage. Of course, 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. If verse 8 refers exclusively to the release from Babylonian captivity then the last clause must be taken to mean that never again would Israel experience a bondage such as they experienced under the Babylonians. Never again would they be carried away en masse to a foreign land. The other alternative is to regard verse 8 as a general prediction that God would shatter the yoke of any nation which tried to oppress Israel down to the time that Messiah would come.

Once the yoke of the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity is removed from the neck of Israel, once more they would be able to worship and serve the Lord in their homeland. Freedom of religion is the highest form of liberty. They

would also serve "David their king" whom the Lord would raise up for them. In this verse Jeremiah is reiterating the prediction of Hosea 3:5. This verse does not imply that David will literally reappear to rule over Israel as some modern cults have alleged. Rather it is the Messiah about whom the prophet speaks. Elsewhere He is spoken of under the name David as well (e.g., Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24). There is obviously a time gap between the two halves of verse 9.¹ Frequently in predictive prophecy events which are separated by centuries of time are woven together as if they followed one another in immediate chronological order.

In view of the fact that God has promised a grand deliverance to His people they need not be terrified at the horrors of the present day. God will deliver them from the land of exile no matter how distant it may be. Jacob shall one day return to his own land there to dwell peaceably (v. 10). This deliverance will be possible for two reasons: (a) The Lord is with them to deliver them; and (b) God will utterly destroy the nations which had taken Israel captive (v. 11). Throughout the bitterness of the day of distress Israel should realize that God has not utterly rejected them. He is discipling them "in measure," literally, according to what is just. In bringing judgment upon Israel God was not acting capriciously or merely to satisfy a feeling of revenge. Israel must be punished; but that punishment had a positive purpose. Through exile and suffering Israel would experience a national regeneration. The nation would be purged and purified from idolatry in preparation for the coming of Messiah.

B. The Plight of Apostate Israel 30:12-17

TRANSLATION

(12) For thus says the LORD: Your wound is in-

1. As an alternative Laetsch argues that long before Bethlehem the Messiah was worshiped.

curable, your hurt is fatal. (13) There is no one to plead your case that you may be bound up; you have no healing medicines. (14) All of your lovers have forgotten you, and they do not inquire about you; for I have smitten you with the blow of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, because your iniquity is so great and your sins so numerous. (15) Why are you crying out concerning your wound? Your pain is incurable! Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous, I have done these things unto you. (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. (17) For I will restore health to you and with regard to your wounds I will heal you (oracle of the LORD), for they have called you an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.

COMMENTS

After soaring ahead in the time to the grand day of Israel's deliverance the prophet now returns to the present plight of the nation. He first indicates in some detail the present sad situation of Israel, then points out reasons for that condition, and finally moves forward positively to predict deliverance for the nation.

In a few bold strokes of the pen Jeremiah paints a picture of the present wretched condition of Israel. The nation has an incurable wound (v. 12) for which there are no healing medicines (v. 13b). No one pleads for the nation at the judgment bar of God where their own iniquities condemn them (v. 13a).¹ The nation has been forgotten by her lovers i.e., her allies who had encouraged

1. Jeremiah has woven together two different figures of speech in vv. 12-13. This is a characteristic of his writing. See Streane, *op. cit.*, p. xxix.

her to revolt against Babylon (v. 14a). The Lord Himself has treated Israel like an enemy. He has smitten them so severely that it would appear He was their implacable foe (v. 14b).

Attacked! Devoured! Carried away! How did Israel come to be in such desperate straits? Twice the prophet indicates the reason for the present plight. "Because of the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins are great." The chastisement of Israel was well deserved because of the enormous guilt piled up by their innumerable sins (vv. 14-15).

The thought in the paragraph takes a sharp turn at verse 16. The word "therefore" at the beginning of the verse is most significant. Because of the extremity of your need, *therefore* I will intervene on your behalf. Because you are unable to aid yourself, *therefore* I will act on your behalf. Because I have afflicted you so severely for your sins, *therefore* I will now mete out to your tormentors their rightly-deserved punishment. The end of the present plight will come when God brings punishment upon all the adversaries of Israel (v. 16). Humanly speaking the case of Israel was hopeless. But God, the great and gracious Physician, then turns his attention to the wounds of Israel. Zion's health is restored despite all the ridicule of her enemies. The sneering enemies had called Zion an "outcast" for whom no one was concerned. Yet the day will surely come when God in an act of pure grace will restore the nation (v. 17).

C. The Picture of Regenerate Israel 30:18-22

TRANSLATION

(18) Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will reverse the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings. A city shall be built upon its mound and the palace shall stand in its appropriate

place. (19) Thanksgiving and the sound of laughter shall go out from them. I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish; exalt them, and they shall not be lowly. (20) Their children shall be as in olden days, and their congregation shall be established before Me; and I will punish all of their oppressors. (21) And their Prince shall be of themselves, and their Ruler shall come out of the midst of them; and I will allow him to draw near, and He shall come near unto Me; for who otherwise would put his life on the line by approaching Me (oracle of the LORD). (22) And you shall be My people, and I shall be your God.

COMMENTS

Having alluded to the destruction of Israel's enemies and the restoration to Palestine, the prophet now paints a picture of the regenerate commonwealth of Israel. It is the picture of a happy, prosperous people enjoying freedom and security in their own land. Note the specific promises contained in this paragraph: (a) the Jews who were taken captive will dwell again in their land as aforetime (v. 18a).¹ (b) The city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt upon its own hill or mound i.e., on its original site (18b).² (c) The palace will be restored and shall be occupied in its usual fashion (18b).³ (d) Thanksgiving and happiness shall characterize the inhabitants of the land (19a). (e) The population of the restored community will be greatly

1. The phrase "I will turn again (or return to) the captivity of Jacob's tents" seems to mean that God will cause the desolate, uninhabited tents or dwelling places to be rebuilt and inhabited. Streane thinks literal tents are meant but this is unlikely.

2. Laetsch contends that "city" in this verse, which does not have the article in the Hebrew, is a collective singular referring to every city of Judah.

3. This need not be pressed to mean that the restored community would have a king (Streane). The word "palace" here may mean nothing more than "governmental building." Freedman suggests that "palace" here is an allusion to the Temple in Jerusalem.

increased (v. 19b). (f) As aforetime in the golden age of David and Solomon, God will protect them from their adversaries (v. 20). (g) A glorious Prince shall rule over them (v. 21). (h) They shall enter into a new relationship with God (v. 22).

A further comment is necessary with regard to verse 21. That this verse is Messianic in character has generally been acknowledged even by Jewish rabbis. The King James Version is somewhat misleading at this point in translating "their nobles." The American Standard Version is more accurate in reading the singular "their prince." A still more literal translation of the Hebrew would be "his Glorious One and his Ruler." The masculine possessive pronoun throughout this passage refers to the nation. Two significant points about this glorious Ruler are brought out in the passage. (a) He shall be a Jewish as opposed to a foreign Prince.¹ (b) The Prince shall draw near to God without a go-between. This implies that He will be Priest as well as King.

The last clause of verse 21 is extremely difficult. The King James Version renders: "who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me?" The American Standard Version translates: "who is he that hath had boldness to approach unto me?" Perhaps a better translation would be: "who is he that has staked his life (or risked his life) to approach unto Me?" Under the Old Testament 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 Ruler whose coming is predicted in this verse would be Priest as well as King. Zechariah a few years

1. 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.

later would make it crystal clear that the Messiah would be "priest upon his throne" (Zechariah 5:13).

D. The Purposes of a Sovereign God 30:23—31:1

TRANSLATION

(23) Behold, the tempest of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a sweeping tempest! It will whirl upon the heads of the wicked. (24) The fierce anger of the LORD shall not turn back until He has done it, until He has accomplished the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you shall understand it. (1) In that time (oracle of the LORD) I will be the God of all the tribes of Israel and they shall be My people.

COMMENTS

The three verses¹ of this paragraph serve to point to the purpose of God in history. Verses 23 and 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. The wrath of God like a whirlwind goes forth to execute the intents of His heart. He will not relent until (a) evil has been punished and (b) the families or clans of Israel acknowledge His lordship. 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 Old Testament seers commenced with the coming of Jesus Christ.²

1. The Hebrew chapter division places 31:1 as the last verse of chapter 30.

2. See Hebrews 1:1; Acts 2:16, 17; I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 3:1; I John 2:18.

II. THE BLESSINGS OF RESTORATION

31:2-40

In this second major section of the Book of Consolation the focus is upon the blessings which those who return from exile will enjoy. Both Israel, the northern kingdom, and Judah are addressed. Verses 2-22 deal mainly with Israel, 23-26 with Judah, and 27-40 with both kingdoms. It is absolutely clear that *both* kingdoms will return to Palestine and jointly share the blessings of God.

A. The New Concord 31:2-6

TRANSLATION

(2) Thus says the LORD: The people who escaped the sword have found grace in the wilderness. Go, O Israel, to dwell peacefully. (3) From afar the LORD appeared to me. With everlasting love I have loved you. Therefore in loving kindness I have drawn you to Me. (4) Again I will build you, and you will be built up, O Virgin of Israel! Again you will adorn yourself with timbrels, and go out in the dance of those who rejoice. (5) Again you will plant vineyards in the mountains of Samaria; the planters who plant shall enjoy the fruit. (6) For there shall be a day when the watchmen upon the hills of Ephraim shall cry, Arise and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God.

COMMENTS

Verses 2-6 of chapter 31 are an amplification of the first verse of the chapter. The prophet here paints the picture of the concord and harmony which characterize the relationship between God and His people in that glorious day of restoration. In making his point Jeremiah uses four figures: the divine Lover (vv. 2, 3), the joyous

virgin (v. 4), the satisfied farmer (v. 5), and the anxious watchman (v. 6).

Those who had escaped the sword of the Babylonians have found favor in the eyes of God in the wilderness of exile (v. 2). The last part of verse 2 is extremely difficult to translate. The Hebrew reads literally "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 places¹ who have found favor in the wilderness joyously acknowledge the grace of the Lord. It is best to regard verse 3 as the words of the nation speaking collectively. In captivity the people discover anew the everlasting love of God. By His grace He has once again drawn His people to Himself.² How wonderful and incomprehensible is the love of God!

The "virgin" who had committed such horrible sins against her divine Husband by idolatrous flirtation is still the precious object of God's love. He treats her as a pure and chaste virgin. She has been completely forgiven. God will build her up again or make her to prosper. She shall again go forth joyously dancing to the accompaniment of her tabrets or timbrels as young maidens were wont to do (v. 4).

Farmers will plant new vineyards in the hills surrounding Samaria. After waiting the prescribed length of time these farmers would enjoy the fruit of their labors (v. 5). The fruit produced by a tree for the first three years was not to be gathered and that of the fourth year was to be consecrated to God. Only in the fifth year could the owner eat of that fruit.³ The present verse uses

1. Following here the American Standard Version marginal reading which is decidedly superior to the reading "of old."

2. Some commentators have rendered the clause "I have prolonged lovingkindness to you." But the Hebrew verb is frequently used in the sense of drawing toward oneself. Cf. Hosea 11:4; Isaiah 5:18; Judges 5:4.

3. See Leviticus 19:23-25; Deuteronomy 20:6; 28:30.

the technical Hebrew word (*chillel*) which is used in the law of Moses to indicate the use of fruit by the owner after the waiting period was over.¹

On the hills men would anxiously be watching for the crescent of the moon which would be a signal for the celebration of the new moon.² The schism between the north and south is over. The Ephramites are anxious to join in the worship of God in Jerusalem. "Come," they say, "Let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord our God." What a beautiful picture of the new relationship which will exist between God and His people. Laetsch makes the point that to go to Zion in the Old Testament prophecy is to join the church of Christ. See Hebrews 12:22ff. There are many examples in the New Testament of inhabitants of Ephraim or Samaria who were converted to the Lord Jesus Christ.³

B. A New Consolation 31:7-20

Verse 7 sets the tone for the four paragraphs which follow. The prophet foresees the day when salvation will be accomplished and 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 verse are in the plural. Jeremiah is probably calling upon all those 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.⁴ In the verses of this section

1. The translation of *chillel* in the King James Version is unfortunate "shall eat them as common things." This translation misses the sense of the original.

2. Freedman has a slightly different interpretation. He thinks the watchmen are looking for the procession of pilgrims from the more distant cities approaching. When they would spot the procession they would signal their own pilgrims to make ready to join the band.

3. John 4:1-42; Acts 1:8; 8:5-17; 10:1ff.

4. Amos 3:2; Deuteronomy 7:6; 4:7, 8.

Jeremiah offers divine consolation to four different groups: the distressed (vv. 8-9), the disheartened (vv. 10-14), the disconsolate (vv. 15-17) and the despondent (vv. 18-20).

1. *The distressed* (31:8-9)

TRANSLATION

(7) For thus says the LORD: Shout joyously for Jacob! Rejoice over the head of nations! Proclaim! Praise! Say, Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel. (8) Behold, I am about to bring them from the land of the north, and I will gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them shall be the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together. As a great throng they shall return to this place. (9) With weeping they shall come, and with supplication I will lead them; I will guide them alongside streams of water, in a straight way in which they will not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born.

COMMENTS

The journey home from exile would be particularly difficult for certain segments of the population. Nonetheless, those in distress—the blind, the lame, the woman travailing with child—will return with tears of joy and contrition upon their cheeks, and with supplications upon their lips. God will hear their prayers and will lead them in a straight way where there will be no danger of stumbling. He will lead them beside streams of water where they can find refreshment. How careful were the prophets to always include the distressed of humanity in God's program of salvation and deliverance. The reason for God's concern for the distressed is clearly stated: "For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born." 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 (Exodus 4:22). The heavenly Father will not allow His son, the spiritual remnant of the nation, to remain in captivity.

2. *The disheartened* (31:10-14)

TRANSLATION

(10) Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the distant isles! Say, The one who scattered Israel has gathered him, and keeps him as a shepherd keeps his flock. (11) For the LORD redeemed Jacob, and bought him back from the grip of one who was stronger than he. (12) They shall come and shout in the height of Zion, and they shall stream unto the goodness of the LORD because of the grain, the new wine, the oil, the sheep and the cattle. Their soul shall be as a well-watered garden, and they shall not languish again. (13) Then shall a virgin rejoice in dance, young men and old men as well; For I will turn their mourning to joy, and I will comfort them, and give them joy after their sorrow. (14) I will give the priests their fill of fat things, and My people shall be gorged with My goodness (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

Israel was the flock of God, but during the exile a scattered and miserable flock (cf. Jeremiah 13:17). The day will shortly come, says the prophet, when the Good Shepherd shall seek His own. The Gentiles, the nations, are called upon to "hear the word of the Lord" i.e., to accept His word with a believing heart. Then they in

turn are to become proclaimers of the Good News to Israel (v. 10). The Lord will redeem Jacob, the true Israel of God, from the hand of his captor (v. 11). The proclamation of the Gentiles will not be in vain. Together Jews and Gentiles will flow like a mighty stream to Zion. There they will both enjoy the blessings of the Lord—grain, wine, oil, the young of the flock and herd. God's people will be like a well-watered garden in the midst of a barren waste in that day. What an exquisite picture of the peace, contentment and prosperity of the people of God! Zion shall echo with glad songs of praise. God's people shall sorrow no more (v. 12). Their mourning shall be turned into joy. Old and young, men and women rejoice together in the joyous deliverance which they have experienced (v. 13). So many sacrifices will be brought to the Temple that the priests, to whom portions of the sacrificial animals belonged (Leviticus 7:31-34), will have more than enough to fill their own needs. The paragraph closes with a declaration which only the child of God who has come to spiritual Zion can appreciate: "My people shall be satisfied with My goodness!"

3. *The disconsolate* (31:15-17)

TRANSLATION

(15) Thus says the LORD: Listen! In Ramah lamentation is heard! bitter weeping! Rachel is weeping over her children. She refuses to be comforted concerning her children, because they are no more. (16) Thus says the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from tears. For there is a reward for your labor (oracle of the LORD) when they shall return from the land of the enemy. (17) There is hope for your latter end (oracle of the LORD) when sons return to their borders.

COMMENTS

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 (Genesis 30:1), died with sorrow in giving birth to Benjamin (Genesis 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. He hears the cry of the ewe in Ramah (literally, 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 who had lost sons through death and deportation.

Rachel is disconsolate because her children are being slain and snatched away. No one can comfort her in this moment of sorrow because her children are not, i.e., they are dead. The following verses seem to indicate that the prophet primarily has in mind the symbolic death of exile. But since many were slain when the Assyrians and Babylonians conquered the people of God, and since many died in captivity in foreign lands, an allusion to literal death cannot be absolutely eliminated from the expression "they are not." The question arises as to whether Rachel is weeping over the deportations of Israelites to Assyria or of Jews to Babylon. One cannot be absolutely sure. But in view of the fact that verses 18-20 speak exclusively of Ephraim it is likely that it is the early Assyrian deportation which is in mind.

The mention of Ramah raises an exegetical problem.

Which Ramah does the writer have in mind and why does he mention the place? Two places called Ramah are prominent in the Old Testament. Both of them were some miles north of Jerusalem.¹ Some think that the reference is to another Ramah in the vicinity of Bethlehem which is otherwise unknown in the Old Testament. Still others feel that 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.

Why is Ramah mentioned in this passage? Various suggestions have been made. 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 at which the exiles were assembled before being slain or deported.² Jeremiah himself was taken in chains to Ramah (40:1; 39:11, 12). He may have actually heard the women of Israel weeping and 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.

Matthew cites Jeremiah 31:15 as being "fulfilled" in the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem by Herod. Because of the inspired statement of Matthew some commentators have argued that Jeremiah 31:15 is a direct prophecy of what would transpire in Bethlehem centuries

1. One Ramah is mentioned in Joshua 18:25 and was five miles north of Jerusalem; the other Ramah, the home town of Samuel (I Samuel 1:19; 25:1) about four miles north-west of Jerusalem.

2. The mention of Ramah in Isaiah 10:29 seems to indicate that it was the scene of some special massacre by Sennacherib in the days of king Hezekiah.

later.¹ However the word "fulfilled" as used in Matthew 2:17 probably only means that the words in Jeremiah aptly express the event which Matthew is recording. The language used by Old Testament writers to describe events of their own or previous times is often so full and rich that it can be appropriately used to describe New Testament events which occurred in similar circumstances and were of similar import. In such cases the language of the Old Testament is said to have been fulfilled in the New Testament.² Thus the slaughter of the Bethlehem infants was not the fulfillment of a *prediction* of Jeremiah, but only of certain *words* spoken by the prophet.³ Rachel's grief was reawakened by the slaughter of the innocent babes of Bethlehem.

The word "fulfilled" does not seem to have the same force in every passage of the New Testament where it occurs. Some time ago J. W. McGarvey suggested that the word was used by Matthew in the second chapter of his Gospel in three different ways. He writes:

The three quotations from the prophets contained in this chapter (6, 15, 18) belong to and illustrate three distinct classes of such quotations which are found in the New Testament, and which especially abound in Matthew. The first, concerning the birth-place of Jesus, is strictly a prediction, for it refers directly to the event. The second, concerning the call out of Egypt, is an example of words used with a double reference, having both a primary and secondary reference and fulfillment. Such predictions are some-

1. Laetsch (*op. cit.*, p. 250), has, perhaps, the most capable defense of this position. According to Laetsch, Rachel is introduced as bewailing her children because her tomb was located at Bethlehem where the infants were to be slain.

2. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Matthew and Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), p. 17.

3. J. W. McGarvey, *The New Testament Commentary: Matthew and Mark* (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1875), p. 30.

times called *typical*, because they are originally spoken concerning a type and find another fulfillment in the antetype. The third, concerning the weeping at Bethlehem, is an example in which the event fulfills the meaning of words used by a prophet, though the words had originally no reference at all to this event. It is a verbal fulfillment, and not a real fulfillment, as in the other two cases.¹

In verses 16-17 God wipes away the tears from the cheek of the disconsolate Rachel. Using the language of the prophet Azariah (II Chronicles 15:7) Jeremiah assures the mother of Israel that there will be a reward for her work. The "work" refers to the parental weeping for her children.² Rachel is not weeping in vain. Her children will one day return to their homeland. Though the present prospects are exceedingly dismal, there is hope for the future of Israel.

4. *The dispondent* (31:18-20)

TRANSLATION

(18) I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, You have chastened me and I was chastened, like a calf that would not be taught; restore me that I might be restored, for You are the LORD my God. (19) For after I strayed, I repented; and after I learned my lesson, I slapped my thigh; I am ashamed and embarrassed, for I bore the reproach of my youth. (20) Is Ephraim My precious son? Is he My darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I longingly think of him. Therefore My heart yearns for him; I surely will show compassion to him (oracle of the LORD).

1. *Ibid.*

2. Others take the "work" to be the travail of childbirth.

JEREMIAH
COMMENTS

Not only does the prophet hear Rachel weeping for for her children he also hears despondent Ephraim lamenting his waywardness. Like a calf which would not submit to the yoke, Ephraim went his own rebellious way and thus incurred the chastisement of the Lord. Finally the prodigal son came to himself and cried out unto God to help him repent: "Turn me that I may return!" (v. 18). That prayer was answered. Through the discipline of exile Ephraim came to recognize his miserable condition. He was confused and confounded, utterly ashamed of the reproach of his youth, the sins committed in the earlier history of the nation. He smote his thigh in consternation and contrition (v. 19). This sets the stage for one of the most beautiful verses in the Book of Jeremiah. God asks the question "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child?" literally, a child of delights i.e., one in whom a parent takes intense pleasure. It is as though God is expressing surprise at His own mercy for wayward man. Ephraim had certainly been unworthy of the love of the heavenly Father. He had not been the kind of child in whom a parent could delight. But as often as God speaks of Ephraim He remembers the close relationship which in the past existed between them. His bowels (the seat of the emotions in Hebrew thought) yearn (literally, sound, moan) for the wayward son. God must exercise mercy on behalf of Ephraim! (v. 20).

C. A New Creation 31:21-22

TRANSLATION

(21) Erect for yourself road marks, set up guide-posts! Set your heart toward the highway, the way you have walked! Return, O Virgin of Israel, return to these your cities! (22) How long will you dilly-

dally, O backsliding daughter, for the LORD has created a new thing in the earth: A woman shall compass a man.

COMMENTS

Verse 21 and 22 form a distinct unit within chapter 31. The certainty of restoration is indicated in verse 21 as 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, waymarks (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. Jeremiah calls upon the "virgin of Israel," the nation, to return to Palestine (v. 21). "How long," asks the prophet, "will you hesitate to return to your land?" The backsliding daughter is admonished to put away her rebellious reluctance.

In the last part of verse 22 the prophet 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 which completely reverses ordinary human experience. It is something entirely new, something that had never happened before. "A woman shall compass (or surround) a man." Many interpretations of these words which have been proposed clearly do not satisfy the requirements of the context.¹ In order to set forth the marvelous prophecy of this verse 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

1. 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.

allusion to the nation as "the virgin of Israel" in the previous verse and a "backsliding daughter" in the present verse. While this interpretation cannot be absolutely ruled out, another interpretation is altogether 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 which states that the Lord would *create a new thing*. This particular section of Jeremiah (chapters 30-31) contains several Messianic predictions and thus a reference to the virgin birth of Christ would not be out of place.

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 or the Lord. It is the view of the present writer that the Man here is none other than the Messiah. Certainly the use of the Hebrew word *gever* and related words for the Messiah is not without parallel (see Zechariah 13:7).

3. What is involved in the verb that is used here? The Hebrew verb translated "compass" literally means "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 which was born of her who was to be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35) then certainly this could be a "new thing" created by the Lord Himself.

D. New Conditions 31:23-30

TRANSLATION

(23) Thus says the LORD of hosts the God of Israel: Yet they shall speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities when I reverse their fortunes: May the LORD, the Habitation of Justice, bless you, O mountain of holiness! (24) And Judah and all of its cities will dwell there together, farmers and nomadic shepherds. (25) For I satiate the weary soul and every languishing soul I fill up. (26) At this moment I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me. (27) Behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of men and the seed of cattle. (28) And it will come to pass as I have looked upon them to uproot, tear down, raze, destroy and do hurt, so will I look upon them to build and to plant (oracle of the LORD). (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. (30) But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats sour grapes, his own teeth shall be set on edge.

COMMENTS

After the prophet has promised Ephraim, the ten northern tribes, an abundant material and spiritual blessing from God he does the same for Judah. When God's people return from exile completely new conditions will exist throughout the land. Pure religion will be restored. The people will again pronounce blessings upon the sacred sanctuary and the holy city. Throughout the cities of Judah the people will say, "May the Lord, the Habitation of Justice, bless you, O mountain of holiness" (v. 23).

In both the title for God¹ and the designation of the holy city² the people who return from exile seem to realize the important place of justice and holiness for the first time.

Not only will idyllic conditions exist in the realm of religion but also among the various elements of society. Peace and harmony shall exist between farmers and nomads (v. 24). The weary world shall find rest and the sorrowful will find abundant comfort (v. 25).³

At this point Jeremiah says something rather unexpected. He declares that he awoke from a sleep.⁴ 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.⁵ Since the prophecies just enunciated were hopeful and comforting it is quite understandable why the prophet describes his sleep as sweet.

It is impossible to tell whether or not an interval of time elapsed between verse 26 and verse 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. At any rate the four verses which follow continue the picture of the new conditions which will exist in the Messianic age.

There is in these verses, first, a promise of fruitfulness. God will make the people and their cattle multiply

1. On the basis of 50:7 the present writer takes the phrase "Habitation of Justice" to be a title for God. Others regard this as a title for Jerusalem and/or the Temple.

2. The expression "mountain of holiness" or "holy mountain" is used both for the Temple mountain and for Jerusalem itself. See Psalms 2:6; Isaiah 11:9; 27:13; 66:20; Daniel 9:16; Zechariah 8:3.

3. In Hebrew the verbs are in the perfect or completed state. It is another example of the so-called prophetic perfect which represents future facts as already accomplished.

4. There can be little doubt that it is Jeremiah who is speaking in verse 26 for the language would not be appropriate to God or to the exiles.

5. Cf. Genesis 31:10, 11; I Kings 3:5; 9:2; Joel 2:28; Zechariah 1:8.

so fast that it will seem as though they spring up like seed sown in fertile soil (v. 27). It is both Israel and Judah reunited into one people who are the recipients of this promise.

Secondly, there is here a promise of faithfulness. Just as God has been "watchful" over the fulfillment of the prophecies of judgment and destruction, so will He now be equally zealous in fulfilling his promises of restoration (v. 28). In this chapter Jeremiah is beginning to develop that more positive side of his message of which mention was made in his call (1:10).

Thirdly, there is a promise of fairness. 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, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the teeth of the children are set on edge." Such a proverb could only be uttered by a generation blind to their own sin and disobedience and utterly deluded in thinking that they were innocent of all wrong-doing. Ezekiel (chapter 18) attacks this proverb as a blasphemy of God's justice. On the other hand, Jeremiah is 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 and involvements in Jeremiah's prediction that the sour grapes proverb will no longer be used in the Messianic age.

a) The prophet may be suggesting that individuals in the 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 here would involve a change of attitude on the part of the people.

b) 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.

c) 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. Individual responsibility will be the mark of the new age. Heretofore the basic unit of responsibility before God was the nation; in the future it would be the individual.

d) 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 or corporate 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.

E. A New Covenant 31:31-34

TRANSLATION

(31) Behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. (32) It will not be like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt which covenant of mine they broke though I was lord over them (oracle of the LORD). (33) But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days (oracle of the LORD): I will place My law within them and I will write it upon their heart and I will be their God and they shall be My people. (34) No more will they teach each man his neighbor and his brother saying, Know the LORD, for all of them shall know Me from the least of them to the greatest (oracle of the LORD), for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

COMMENTS

The verses translated above are the four most important verses in the book of Jeremiah. Here Jeremiah envisions a time when the covenant between God and Israel instituted at Mt. Sinai will be replaced by a new and better covenant. After giving the promise of the new covenant (vv. 31, 32) Jeremiah then outlines some of the provisions of that covenant (vv. 33, 34).

1. *The promise of the new covenant (31:31-32)*

The new covenant will be made with reunited Judah and Israel. In Old Testament 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 but all the redeemed would be one in Christ Jesus. Both Peter (I Peter 2:10) and Paul (Romans 9:25f.) so interpreted the earlier prophecies of Hosea (1:10-11) with regard to the restoration of the northern kingdom and 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 wrong by such passages as Hebrews 8:8-12 which quotes at length from Jeremiah 31 and applies it to the Christian dispensation. Paul again and again takes up the matter of the new covenant and emphasizes the distinction between it and the old Sinai covenant (e.g., II Corinthians 3:6, 14-16). Jesus alluded to this new covenant when he instituted the Lord's Supper by saying "This is my blood of the new testament (covenant) which is shed for many" (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24). In the prophetic view of the future the restoration of Israel reaches its climax with the institution of the new covenant.

Verse 32 compares the old covenant to a marriage in which God was the "lord" or husband and Israel was the

bride. God being the perfect Husband never gave His bride any cause for desiring the dissolution of the matrimonial connection. But Israel had again and again been unfaithful to the marriage vows, i.e. she had been disobedient to the covenant.¹ A new arrangement or agreement between God and His people was therefore necessary.

2. *The provisions of the new covenant (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 in time was to reveal in broad outline the basic character of that future covenant. Four statements are made with regard to the promised covenant.

a) "I will place My law within them, and write it on their heart" (v. 33a). Here is a new spiritual dimension. Heretofore the laws of God had been written on tablets of stone; now they are to be written on the heart. Under the new covenant men will respond to the divine will from inward motivation rather than outward compulsion. Every 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) "I will be their God and they shall be My people" (v. 33b). Here is a new relationship. Those who enter into the 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" (I Peter 2:9). Only such as have today the law of God written upon their hearts have this unique relationship to God.

1. Exodus 32; Numbers 14:16; Psalms 95:8-11; Acts 7:51-53.

c) "All will know Me from the least to the greatest" (v. 34a). Infants and small children were members of the old covenant Israel; but this would 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 which 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" (John 17:3). To know the Lord is saving faith, that basic and 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 shall be no longer any need of instruction in religion, but that here will be a directness of access to God for both Jew and Gentile, which did not exist under the old covenant.

d) "I will forgive their sin and their iniquity will I remember no more" (v. 34b). 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 Old Testament foreshadowed and typified that once-for-all perfect sacrifice that took place on the hill called Calvary. The Hebrew verbs in the present verse are in the imperfect state denoting that the forgiveness here predicted will take place again and again as men and women appropriate to themselves the benefits of the Saviour's sacrifice.

F. A New Commitment 31:35-37

TRANSLATION

(35) Thus says the LORD 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; the LORD of hosts is His name: (36) If these statutes shall be removed from before Me (oracle of the LORD), then the seed of Israel shall cease being a nation before Me forever. (37) Thus says the LORD: 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 the LORD).

COMMENTS

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 and therefore the nation was rejected by the Lord. This will no more take place under the new covenant. God's faithfulness in keeping His ordinances in the realm of nature are here 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. The waves of the sea never cease their constant ebb and flow, roaring, crashing against the beach (v. 35). As certainly as the laws of nature are inviolable, so certainly shall Israel everlastingly continue as a nation before the Lord (v. 36). To the end of this world God will always 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. At times during those centuries since Jacob and his family migrated to Egypt all formal, outward governmental organization

ceased to exist. Israel as a nation ceased to exist in 587 B.C. but Israel as a people survived the destruction of their homeland and deportation to a foreign land. Jeremiah is in the present passage looking to a time when the outward form of Israel would change once again. The Israel he envisions would be a pure theocracy ruled from heaven itself. It would be an invisible kingdom, a kingdom not of this world, a kingdom unlike anything this world has ever known.

Verse 37 underscores the same thought as is found in the previous two verses. The heavens above are immeasurable and the earth beneath unsearchable. 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 had the Israel of old. This is equivalent to saying that God will never cast off His people.

G. The New City 31:38-40

TRANSLATION

(38) Behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when the city of the LORD shall be built from the tower of Hananeel unto the Corner Gate. (39) And the measuring line shall go out farther right on to the hill Gareb, and then around to Goath. (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 the LORD; it shall never again be uprooted or thrown down.

COMMENTS

In the closing paragraph of the chapter 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 and may be dealt with summarily.

a) Tower of Hananeel—northeast corner of the city of Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate.¹

b) Gate of the Corner—northwest corner of Jerusalem.²

c) Hill of Gareb—location unknown. but if the etymology of the word has any significance (Gareb-itch or leprosy) this hill would be the hill outside the limits of Jerusalem proper where the unclean lepers lived.

d) Goath—location unknown; mentioned only here.

e) Valley of the Carcasses—Probably the Valley of Hinnom.³

f) Brook Kidron—a torrent-bed which begins north of Jerusalem, passes the Temple mount and Mount of Olives *en route* to the Dead Sea.

g) Horse Gate—on the east side of Jerusalem near the Temple.⁴

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 there is some increase in the size of old Jerusalem here in Jeremiah seems fairly obvious from the boundaries which are listed. 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. It would seem that the circumference of the city is extended only so far as to include certain spots which were at present 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, sancti-

1. Nehemiah 3:1; 12:39; Zechariah 14:10.

2. II Kings 14:13; II Chronicles 26:9; Zechariah 14:10.

3. II Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:32-33; 19:11-13.

4. Nehemiah 3:28; II Chronicles 23:15.

fied, cleansed and the entire city will be "holy to the Lord" (v. 40).

Of what Jerusalem is the prophet speaking in this passage? Those commentators who think he speaks here of the spiritual Jerusalem, the church of Christ, are certainly correct. Some rather cogent arguments can be raised in favor of this view.

a) Jeremiah has already alluded to the church as spiritual Jerusalem in 3:17.

b) 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.¹

c) The church of Christ is called in the New Testament "Mt. Zion," "the city of the living God," "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22).

d) The context of chapter 31 is that of the Messianic Age as has been clearly demonstrated earlier.

e) 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 well be alluding to the incorporation of Gentiles—peoples formerly thought to be unclean and profane—into the church of Christ.

f) 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

1. Streane, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

be fulfilled by that kingdom which cannot be moved (Hebrews 12:28).

g) Other prophets speak of the Messianic kingdom under the figure of Jerusalem (e.g., Zechariah 2:1-5; 8:3-6).

III. CONFIDENCE IN RESTORATION

32:1—33:26

In chapter 32 God directs 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 commanded Jeremiah to purchase a field. Jeremiah, quite perplexed, 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.

A. The Present Plight 32:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah. That was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. (2) At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was imprisoned in the court of the guard, which was in the house of the king of Judah, (3) Where Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him saying, Why do you prophesy the following things. Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it;

(4) and Zedekiah king of Judah shall 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 eyeball to eyeball. (5) Zedekiah shall be brought to Babylon, and there shall he remain until I visit him (oracle of the LORD); for he shall fight against the Chaldeans but he shall not be successful?

COMMENTS

To set the stage for the dramatic action recorded in chapter 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.

1. *The present plight of the nation* (32:1-2a)

Late in the ninth year of the reign of king Zedekiah (January 588 B.C.) the Babylonian army began the siege of Jerusalem (52:4; II Kings 25:1f.). According to the Jewish system of counting, the tenth year of Zedekiah would have begun in March/April of 588 B.C. In the summer of 588 the Babylonians were forced temporarily to lift the siege of Jerusalem. An Egyptian army was attacking from the south and Nebuchadnezzar felt that he must deal with that threat before effecting the capture of Jerusalem (37:3-5). Shortly the Babylonian army returned just as Jeremiah had said it would (37:8).

The chronological problem arises as to whether the events in chapter 32 should be assigned to phase one of the siege (before the lull in the summer of 588 B.C.) 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 and the prospects of deliverance nil. Many Judeans were now at long last able to interpret the handwriting on the wall. The overthrow of Jerusalem was certain to all those who were not completely blind. Jerusalem's doom was sealed.

2. The present plight of the prophet (32:2b-5)

At the time Jeremiah was commanded to purchase the field of his cousin he was confined in the court of the guard. Chapter 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 chapter 32 chronologically follows chapter 37. It should be noted, however, that in chapter 32 Jeremiah is arrested because of his preaching not because of alleged treason as in chapter 37. This would suggest 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.

B. The Purchase of a Field 32:6-15

TRANSLATION

(6) And Jeremiah said: The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, (7) Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle shall come unto you, saying, Purchase for yourself my field which is in Anathoth,

for you possess the right of redemption to purchase it. (8) And Hanamel my cousin came unto the Court of the Guard just as the LORD had spoken, 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! And I knew that it was the word of the LORD. (9) And I purchased the field which was in Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin and I weighted out to him the silver, seventeen silver shekels. (10) Then I wrote a deed and sealed it and had men witness it and weighed out the silver on the scales. (11) And I took the deed of purchase, the sealed copy as is customary and lawful, and the opened copy; (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. (13) And I commanded Baruch in their presence, saying, (14) Thus says the LORD 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. (15) For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Once again houses and fields and vineyards shall be purchased in this land.

COMMENTS

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 of the guard requesting that he exercise his right and duty as near kinsman to purchase a field in Anathoth. That Hanamel was

a cousin to Jeremiah is made clear in verses 8 and 9.¹ The law of land-tenure in ancient Israel provided that an estate remain within a family (Leviticus 25:25). If a piece of property had to be sold, the nearest of kin had the duty and right to purchase it. The procedure that was followed in such cases is clearly outlined in the fourth chapter of Ruth. The tribe of Levi did not receive a tribal inheritance following the conquest, the priests were allotted thirteen cities (Joshua 21:19) and the Levites forty-eight (Joshua 21:41; Numbers 35:2-9). Hence, the priests would have owned property which could be sold only to fellow members of the tribe of Levi (Leviticus 25:32-34).

Hanamel made his appearance at the court of the guard just as God had revealed. 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.²

A business transaction was conducted there in the court of the guard. With careful attention to all legal details, the sale was concluded and the deed executed in the customary manner. The purchase price was mutually agreed upon and the pieces of silver—seventeen shekels—were carefully weighed. The price appears to be very low and several explanations of this fact have been proposed. Perhaps the field was small to start with. It is not at all

1. The words "your uncle" refer to Shallum in verse 7. In verse 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 verse 12. The hypothesis that the Hanamel in verse 12 is a different individual from the one mentioned in the earlier verses is most unlikely.

2. Hanamel either had no children or else they were too young to assume ownership of the property.

unlikely that 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 for in that year all real estate reverted back to the original owners.

The business transaction conducted by Hanamel and Jeremiah has been illuminated by numerous finds in the ancient Near East. (a) Jeremiah wrote in the book (v. 10). The word translated "book" (Hebrew *sepher*) can refer to any size document. Here the book is either the bill of sale or the deed or both. Jeremiah set forth in this business document all the particulars of the transaction.

(b) 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 tampered with. 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 verses 11 and 14 is to the inner tablet and the outer envelope.

(c) Witnesses were summoned (v. 10). They apparently read and then signed the contract (v. 12).

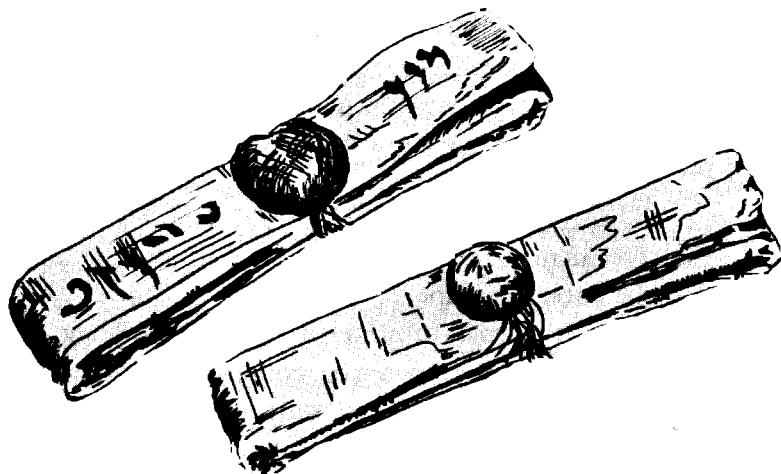
(d) The silver was weighed out in the balance (v. 10).

(e) The two copies of the contract were given to Baruch to be put into an earthen jar which served as sort of a filing cabinet. Such jars have been excavated. This

JEREMIAH



A cuneiform "envelope" and business document from the second millennium B.C.



In Jeremiah's day the double registration of purchase may have been recorded on papyrus. One copy was then rolled up and sealed while the other was rolled, left unsealed and placed in a closed cylinder.

is the first reference to Baruch in the Book of Jeremiah although *chronologically* his first appearance is recorded in chapter 36.

The purpose of the whole elaborate transaction is indicated in a brief oracle contained in verse 15. By his purchase of the field in Anathoth the prophet was dramatically demonstrating his faith in God's word that "houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land." 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 (v. 12).

C. The Prayer for Further Explanation 32:16-25

TRANSLATION

(16) Then I prayed unto the LORD after I had given the deed of purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, saying, (17) Ah, O Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and Your outstretched arm. Nothing is too marvelous for You! (18) You are the One who shows loving kindness to thousands and repays the iniquity of fathers upon the bosom of their sons who follow them. You are the great, the mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts; (19) great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are opened upon all the ways of the sons of men, giving to each man according to his way and according to the fruit of his deeds. (20) You did 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. (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. (22) You have given to them this land which you had sworn to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. (23) And they came and possessed it but they did not obey Your voice and they did not walk in Your law; all which you commanded them to do they did not do; and You have brought all this calamity against them. (24) Behold, the siege instruments have come to the city to capture it; and the city has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it by sword, famine, and pestilence. That which You have spoken has come to pass; behold, You are observing it! (25) But you have said unto me, O Lord GOD, Purchase for yourself the field with silver, and secure witnesses while the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

COMMENTS

Even though Jeremiah had faithfully executed the command of God to purchase the field in Anathoth, even though he had 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 which 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 truly outstanding prayers of Scripture. Cawley has proposed an appealing two-fold analysis of this prayer. In the first part of the prayer

the prophet dwells on the God of the people (17-22), and in the second part, on the people of God (23-25). That Jeremiah is here pouring out his heart before God is indicated by the opening words of the prayer, "Ah Lord God!" The Hebrew particle "ah" expresses the most intense emotions; it is usually a cry of anguish. The prophet passes immediately to the praise of his God. In this part of his prayer Jeremiah depicts God as (1) the God of creation. As such He is omnipotent; nothing is too difficult for Him (v. 17). (2) He is the God of justice dispensing grace to thousands who turn to him and punishment to those who follow after iniquity (v. 18).¹ (3) He is God of wisdom. As such he is omniscient (v. 19). Unlike human counselors, God has the power to execute the plans of His counsel. (4) He is God of all the earth whose wonders had been performed in Egypt as well as Israel and whose fame is universal (v. 20).² (5) He is the God of history who brought forth His people from the bondage of Egypt and gave to them the Land of Promise (vv. 21, 22). 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.

Jeremiah's prayer moves from praise to confession in verse 23. The prophet admits the gross ingratitude of the fathers who, having been blessed with possession of Canaan, refused to hearken to the Law of God. He acknowledges the justice of the present situation in which Jerusalem finds itself. He then describes that situation: siege mounds have been erected which will shortly enable the enemy to

1. According to Rashi, God "recompenses the iniquity of the father unto the bosom of their children" when the children follow the footsteps of their fathers.

2. 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."

ascend the walls and enter the city. Sword, famine and pestilence have combined to smite the beleaguered defenders. Verse 24 is narration and narration is part of Biblical prayer. The petitioner tells God something that God already knows. The closing words of verse 24 are instructive: "You see it." Jeremiah is not telling God something that He does 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" so to speak. Furthermore, the narration element in prayer often helps one to think through more carefully a situation—to analyze it and crystallize his thinking about it. Prayer-narration may help one sharpen his focus and present a petition which is more apropos for the circumstances and more in harmony with the will of God.

The narrative portion of the prayer continues in verse 25. "In spite of the fact that this city is about to be taken by the Chaldeans You, O Lord, have told me to purchase a field." This is narration; but it is also implied petition. It is interesting that in this prayer there is no direct petition. Jeremiah does 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. The problem is apparent inconsistency between the impending fall of the city which is taking place by divine decree and the command to purchase a field. The implied petition is "Lord, how do I reconcile these two seemingly discordant facts? Will You enlighten my mind; will You solve the problem?"

D. The Plan of God 32:26-44

Jeremiah not only prayed; he also listened. Prayer is dialogue. Too often a Christian prays but does not tarry in meditation to listen to the still, small voice speaking to the heart and mind. Jeremiah requested; God answered.

After a brief but important introductory word (v. 27) God makes announcements regarding the present (vv. 28-35) and future (vv. 36-41) circumstances of His people. These announcements are followed by assurance that God is true to His Word.

1. *A basic proposition* (32:27)

TRANSLATION

(26) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for Me?

COMMENTS

The reply to the prayer of Jeremiah fittingly begins with a declaration. The Lord declares Himself God, Elohim, the strong, the mighty, the God of creation and therefore the Ruler over all flesh. The contrast here between God and flesh is obvious—the exalted and powerful overagainst 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 and plans of God can be thwarted neither by the most bitter attacks of His enemies nor the unbelief, misgivings or misunderstandings of His friends. He will not allow His actions to be circumscribed by the limits of human comprehension. He is God. Jeremiah needed to be reminded of that fact and so does every perplexed child of God today.

The declaration that the Lord is God is followed by a question: "Is there anything too hard for Me?"¹ 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

1. The same question is asked when Sarah laughed at the promise of a son in her old age (Genesis 18:14).

God he would not have seen any difficulty in the promise that God would resurrect Judah and Jerusalem from the grave of desolation. How easy it is to utter great truths without fully understanding their import. So God asks Jeremiah a question in order to make him think. It is as if God were saying, "Jeremiah, you have the right convictions; but why have you not made the right deductions. If, as you say, nothing is too hard for Me, then trust Me that I can and will do all that I have promised to do."

In verses 28-41 God makes two announcements regarding the immediate and ultimate fate of Judah and Jerusalem. Both announcements are introduced by "therefore" (vv. 28, 36) which connects them logically with the basic proposition of verse 27. Since nothing is impossible to the Lord, *therefore* He destroys Jerusalem (vv. 28-35) and restores it (vv. 36-41). Because he is God—Almighty and Sovereign—both destruction and restoration are within His power.

2. *God's plan for the present* (32:28-35)

TRANSLATION

(28) Therefore thus says the LORD: 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. (29) And the Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come and 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. (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 the LORD). (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, (32) because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah which 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. (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. (34) They put abominations in the house which bears My name with the result that it was defiled. (35) They built high places of Baal which 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.

COMMENTS

The answer of God for Jeremiah continues with a reaffirmation of the fact that Jerusalem would fall to the Chaldeans (vv. 28, 29) and a summation of the reasons why this calamity must take place (vv. 30-35).

Throughout his ministry Jeremiah had been preaching that the enemy from the north, the Chaldeans, would destroy Jerusalem. God now assures 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 (v. 28) and the Chaldeans would put the torch to the city (v. 29). The blinded Jews thought it impossible that the chosen place of the sanctuary could be destroyed (7:4; 21:13). They did not stop to think that with the Lord nothing was impossible. But it is not the might of the enemy which will 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.

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 (v. 30). 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.¹ Because of its sin Jerusalem must be removed out of the sight of God (v. 31). Idolatry permeated every strata of society including the professional priests and prophets (v. 32). Time and again God tried to teach them, instruct them, discipline them but to no avail (v. 33). The last vestige of allegiance to God disappeared when they erected abominable images in the Temple (v. 34). Yahweh thereby became just another god and His Temple 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 (v. 35). Could such sin be ignored? Surely Jerusalem must fall!

3. *God's plan for the future* (32:36-41)

TRANSLATION

(36) And now therefore thus says the LORD the God of Israel concerning this city about which you people are saying that it has been given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, famine, and pestilence: (37) Behold, I will gather them from all

1. The 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."

the lands where I have driven them in My wrath, anger, and great fury; and I will bring them back unto this place and cause them to dwell in safety. (38) They shall be My people, and I will be their God; (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. (40) And I will make for them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good for them; and I will put My fear into their heart so that they will not turn aside from following Me. (41) I will rejoice in doing good for them, and I will truly plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My Soul.

COMMENTS

While the present prospects of Jerusalem and Judah were quite grim and dark the future was filled with bright hope. God's plan for the nation as announced here has two basic features, restoration (vv. 36, 37) and reconciliation (vv. 38-41).

"Therefore" in verse 36 corresponds to "therefore" in verse 28 and introduces the second deduction from the proposition that nothing is too hard for God (v. 26). As destruction which was thought to be utterly impossible was about to take place, so restoration which appeared to be equally impossible would take place in the future. 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 (Deuteronomy 30:1-5). According to Moses repentance was a prerequisite for restoration (Deuteronomy 30:3). In the present passage the emphasis is upon the changed spiritual conditions which will characterize the remnant after and presumably before the restoration.

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." Six aspects of this reconciliation are mentioned in the paragraph.

a) A *new relationship* will exist between God and His people: "They shall be My people and I will be their God" (v. 38).

b) 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) God will enter into a *new covenant* with His people (v. 40). 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 them; the people shall never turn aside from God. 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.

d) God will evidence His *new joy* by gladly doing good for His people (v. 41a). 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.

e) The people will enjoy *new security* in the land (v. 41b). They shall be planted securely in their land by

the Lord.¹ 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.

4. *The assurance of God's plan* (32:42-44)

TRANSLATION

(42) For thus says the LORD: As I have brought against this people all this great trouble, so I will bring upon them all the good which I have been speaking concerning them. (43) Fields shall 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 shall 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; for I will reverse their fortunes (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

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 verse 42. Here God argues that the same degree of certainty which attends the threats of divine judgment also attends the promises of divine favor. The thought is the same as that in 31:28.

In view of the certainty of God's promises of restoration the action of Jeremiah in purchasing the field in

1. The Hebrew reads literally, "I shall 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.

Anathoth was altogether fitting and proper. Normal business transactions would indeed again take place in the land (vv. 43-44). The enumeration of the several regions of the kingdom is, according to Keil, "rhetorical individualization for strengthening the thought."¹ God would reverse the fortunes of His people. He would bring them out of the shame and degradation of captivity and lead them home. This was the oracle of God!

D. The Promise of God 33:1-26

Shortly after he had received the comforting revelation of the preceding chapter, Jeremiah received yet another word from the Lord. At the time, Jeremiah was still imprisoned in the court of the guard (cf. 32:2). The genuineness of this passage has been questioned. But Hall is surely correct when he argues: "The situation, the language of the passage, and the comparison with other phrases of Jeremiah combine to refute the critical liberal claim that this is not genuine Jeremianic prophecy."² The chapter contains promises which apply first to the people and kingdom in general (vv. 4-13) and then to the royal and priestly offices in particular (vv. 14-26).

1. *An introductory word* (33:1-3)

TRANSLATION

(1) And the word of God came unto Jeremiah a second time while he was yet imprisoned in the court of the guard, saying, (2) Thus says the LORD who is the Creator of it, the Former of it so that He has established it, The LORD is His name: (3) Call unto Me, and I will answer you, and I will declare to you great and unsearchable things that you do not know.

1. Keil, *op. cit.*, II, 60. This same rhetorical device is used in 17:26.

2. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

COMMENTS

The first three verses of chapter 33 are in the nature of a bridge between the preceding and the present chapter. The verses contain a declaration, an invitation and a promise.

The God who speaks to Jeremiah in the court of the guard declares Himself to be the Lord, Yahweh. The use of the Tetragrammaton (the four Hebrew consonants which form the name of God par excellence) is significant in this passage. The name seems to have the meaning "He Who Is" and consequently denotes God as the Eternal, Self-existent One. The name Yahweh is also the covenant name of God and as such denotes God as the keeper of covenant promises, as the merciful benefactor of His people. Being eternal, God can look beyond the present difficulty and darkness to the bright and hopeful future when He in His mercy will restore Israel to Canaan.

God not only observes the future, he creates it. Thus God declares Himself to be "the Maker of it" and "the Former of it." "That He may establish (or accomplish) it." Commentators have puzzled over the significance of the objective pronouns in verse 2. What does God create, form, establish or accomplish? Whether "it" here 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. God's very name, Yahweh, is a pledge that He will keep His word to His people (31:35; 32:18).

In the opening words of verse 3 God invites His prophet or perhaps the nation as a whole to "call unto Me." What a wonderful invitation! Jeremiah had prayed, inquiring as to the meaning of an act which God had required him to perform (32:16-25). Here God places His stamp of approval on that prayer and encourages His

prophet to approach the Lord more frequently with such requests. The prayer that grows out of perplexity often is labeled as doubt and is therefore discouraged. But here the God of all wisdom encourages the searching out of the mysteries of life through prayer. Furthermore, God undergirds His invitation with a gracious promise: "I will answer you!" Prayer is more effective than perhaps 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 (v. 3).

2. *General promises* (33:4-13)

TRANSLATION

(4) For thus says the Lord the God of Israel concerning the houses of this city, and the houses of the kings of Judah, which have been torn down so as to provide protection against the siege instruments and the sword—(5) 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, and I have hidden My face from this city on account of all their evil: (6) Behold, I will bring to her healing and cure, and I will heal them; and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth. (7) I will reverse the fortune of Judah and Israel, and I will build them as they were at the first. (8) I will cleanse them from all their iniquity which 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. (9) And it shall be for a name of joy, praise, and glory before all nations of the earth,

which shall hear all the good which I am doing for them, and they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and the well-being which I will make for her. (10) Thus says the LORD: Once again in this place which you say is desolate without man or beast, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem which are desolate without man or inhabitant or cattle (11) shall be heard the sound of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and bride, saying, Give thanks unto the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, and His mercy endures forever; while they are bringing their thank offerings to the house of the LORD. For I will reverse the fortunes of the land and make it as in the beginning, says the LORD. (12) Thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again there shall be in this place which is desolate, without man or beast, in all its cities, pasture for shepherds who rest their flocks. (13) In the cities of the hill country, the lowland, the Negev, the land of Benjamin, the environs of Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, flocks shall once again pass under the hand of the one who counts them, says the LORD.

COMMENTS

The general promises contained in the verses now under consideration are in reality but a continuation and expansion of concepts in the preceding prophecy. God promises here to restore the people to the land (vv. 4-9) and to restore prosperity to the land (vv. 10-13).

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 mounds¹ and weapons² of the Chaldeans (v. 4). 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 Judeans rushed to defend their walls in a heroic but futile attempt to defend the city but their resistance only added to the heaps of slain (v. 5). As one reads verses 4 and 5 he can feel the sense of desperation that prevailed within Jerusalem as the city prepared to make its final stand.

After painting this rather gloomy picture of the present conditions of Jerusalem the Lord outlines the glorious future He has planned for His people. After the day of wrath has accomplished its purpose the people of God will receive healing (vv. 6-7), cleansing (v. 8) and blessing (v. 9). Destruction would be the gateway to restoration; death the gateway to life. Old Israel dies; a new Israel arises.

Though the Judeans had suffered a grievous wound at the hands of the Chaldeans, God would apply to the city a bandage which would result in healing (v. 6). 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. The nature of the healing is spelled out in verse 7. God will reverse the captivity of both Israel and Judah i.e., He will reverse the fortunes of the whole covenant nation. The wretchedness and misery of the moment will give way to permanent happiness and well-being. God

1. Ramps of debris and dirt which 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.

2. The word "sword" in v. 4 as frequently denotes the entire arsenal of weapons.

will build them up as a nation and they will again know the prosperity of the Golden Age of David and Solomon.

That the healing is spiritual as well as physical and material is made clear by verse 8. The restoration of Israel to Palestine is never depicted in the Old Testament 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 nation cleansed and purified. The Messianic cleansing here depicted has already been strongly emphasized in 31:34 and will again be discussed in 50:20.

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 and glory to the God of Israel for so blessing His people. The second reaction among the nations is fear. They shall behold all the good that God does for Jerusalem and they shall come to have that reverential awe that leads to conversion and salvation.¹

Verses 10-13 tend to amplify the picture of prosperity which was painted in the previous verses. Here the prophet becomes more specific, showing how the joy and prosperity will affect the city (vv. 10-11) and the country (vv. 12-13). Throughout this chapter *prosperity follows purification*. Spiritual health is the key to material well-being.

Three times previously in the Book of Jeremiah the curse of God has been pronounced over Judah and Jerusalem: "I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the

1. A popular but manifestly wrong interpretation of the "fear" in verse 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 verse makes it clear that the fear mentioned here is a positive fear, a fear growing out of joy.

voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall become a waste" (7:34; 16:9; 25:10-11). Here he announces that the day will come when that curse will be removed. The streets of Jerusalem will once again echo with the sound of mirth and marriage. The majestic strains of the Temple liturgy will also be heard again and worshipers will bring their offerings as expressions of their praise for the Lord¹ (cf. 17:26).

Passing from the joyous scenes within the cities, the Lord turns to the prosperity which will characterize the rural areas in the day of restoration. In those areas of the land which are presently so desolate sheep will once again find pasture (v. 12 cf. 9:10; 6:2). 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 (v. 13).²

3. *Special promises* (33:14-26)

TRANSLATION

(14) Behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. (15) In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous sprout to spring forth to David; and He will establish justice and righteousness in the land. (16) In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited; and this is the name by which she shall be called: The LORD our Righteousness. (17) For thus says the LORD:

1. 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 II Chronicles 5:13; 7:3, 6; Ezra 3:11; Psalms 106:1:

2. The various geographical areas mentioned in verse 13 are not particularly important. This is another example of the literary technique already met in 32:44.

David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; (18) and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn meal offerings, and to make sacrifice forever. (19) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, (20) Thus says the LORD: 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, (21) then My covenant with David My servant shall be broken so that he will have no son to reign upon his throne; and for the Levitical priests, My ministers. (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. (23) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, (24) Have you not considered what this people have said, saying, The two families which the LORD chose, He has rejected? Thus they despise My people that they no longer regard them as a nation. (25) Thus says the LORD: If My covenant with the day and night shall not stand, if I did not establish the statutes of the heaven and the earth, (26) 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. For I will reverse their fortunes and have mercy upon them.

COMMENTS

In the grandiose promises of this paragraph the Book of Consolation reaches its climax. Since these verses are absent in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, some liberal critics have questioned the genuineness of the passage. They are also quick to point out that Messianic

concepts are introduced here which 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 emigrated to Babylon. If this was the case, then these verses 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. Here the prophet focuses first on the grand Davidic Ruler of the future (vv. 14-16) and then on the permanence of the royal and priestly offices in the new Israel (vv. 17-26).

In verses 14-16 the description of the happy future of Israel continues. 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). As if to remind Jeremiah of that promise, the Lord repeats it in verse 15. A Sprout of Righteousness shall spring from the stock of David who will restore justice and righteousness in the land. 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. In the days of Messiah the people of God, symbolized by Judah and Jerusalem,¹ will be delivered from their oppressors and enjoy peace and security. Literal Israel and Judah never regained political independence following the restoration to Palestine. They were dom-

1. In the parallel passage it is Judah and Israel which 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.

inated 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 and the deliverance and safety promised should be regarded as spiritual blessings.

In those glorious days of which the prophet is speaking, spiritual Jerusalem, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, will actually wear the name of her Messiah and Master. She shall be called "The Lord our Righteousness" (cf. 23:6). It is altogether fitting and proper that the church being the bride of Christ should wear the same name of her divine husband. The holy city has taken on the character of her King.

In verses 17-18 the permanence of the kingly and priestly lines is affirmed. The expression "shall never lack a man" used twice in these verses is hardly meant to refer to a whole line of kings or priests. Rather this expression guarantees that the *office* of king and the *office* of priest is to be perpetual. The new Israel will have a throne and the one who will occupy that throne will be a descendant of David. The prophet reproduces almost verbatim the ancient promise made to David (I Samuel 7:16) and repeated by David in his parting words to Solomon (I Kings 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 one on the verge of total extinction. The prophet, however, sees 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 Has-moneans called themselves king but they were not universally recognized as such. The Herodian dynasty, which 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.¹

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 priests" (NASV) points to the fact that under the old covenant the priestly functions were the exclusive right of the descendants of Levi (Numbers 3:10; 16:40; 18:7). The New Testament categorically affirms that the Levitical priesthood has passed away (Hebrews 7:11). That priesthood was replaced by a new and better one inaugurated by Christ who was made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Furthermore, the New Testament affirms that those who have been baptized into Christ have become part of a holy priesthood (Hebrews 10:19-22). Christians do not offer before God burnt-offerings and meal-offerings for the perfect sacrifice for sins was made upon the cross of Calvary. Rather the Christian priesthood offers the sacrifices of praise (I Peter 2:5) and the sacrifice of the body (Romans 12:1). Jeremiah himself hints at this dramatic change in the nature of the priesthood when he declares 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 Old Testament worship, points to a complete change in the nature of the priesthood.

In verses 19-22 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 (vv. 19-21).

1. See Luke 1:32, 33; John 18:36; Ephesians 1:20-23; Revelation 17:14.

The covenant with the line of David is given in II Samuel 7:12-16. The covenant with the Levi, referred to again in Malachi 2:4, 5, 8, is not so explicitly stated. Probably the reference is to the promise made to Phinehas in Numbers 25:13. The argument of verses 19-22 is the same as in 31:35-37 except that here the argument is applied specifically to the monarchy and priesthood while in the earlier passage it is applied to Israel as a nation.

Verse 22 affirms that the descendants of David and Levi will be innumerable. 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 and every member of the nation—even Gentile converts—would be able to serve in the priestly capacities (Isaiah 66:20-21). Just as Messiah is both priest and king, so also are his subjects. These Old Testament prophecies find their fulfillment in the New Testament concept of the royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:9-10). Christians offer the sacrifice of praise before the throne of grace continually (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15, 16; I Peter 2:5). Furthermore, Christians are said to reign with Christ (Revelations 5:10; 20:4, 6). Just as Christians are spiritually the seed of Abraham (Romans 9:7-8; Galatians 3:29) 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 (Revelation 1:6).

Apparently some found it hard to accept at face value these glorious promises regarding the future of the royal and priestly orders. God calls 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 (v. 24). In response to the despondency of Israel and the disdain of Gentiles the prophet renews his assurance of the permanence of the kingly and priestly lines and in fact strengthens that assurance in three ways.

First, he mentions the names of the three great patriarchs of the race with whom God had already demonstrated His faithfulness in covenant keeping. Secondly, He connects his promises concerning David with a promise of a return from captivity (v. 26). When that return came, it would be the pledge of the yet greater blessings which were involved in the new and everlasting covenant. Finally, he repeats the analogy between His covenant with nature and His covenant with Jacob and David. As surely ¹⁷ God is responsible for the orderly processes of nature so surely has He ordained a glorious future for Jacob in general and David in particular.

Many prophecies of the Old Testament 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 New Testament. 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 and Messianic prophecies but utopian dreams. 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 could present any meaning to those to whom they were delivered. Those in the New Testament 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 Old Testament 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 which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (I Peter 1:10, 11).

A NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL PLACEMENT OF CHAPTERS 32-33

Chapter 32 contains the following chronological details which aid in integrating this chapter into the chronological framework of the last days of Jerusalem: (1) It was the tenth year of Zedekiah which began in March/April 588 B.C.; (2) the Babylonian armies were besieging Jerusalem; and (3) Jeremiah was shut up in the "court of the guard." Now since the arrest of Jeremiah, his imprisonment and subsequent confinement to the court of the guard are recorded in chapter 37 commentators are all but unanimously agreed that chapter 32 follows chapter 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. The present writer, however, would like to offer an alternative reconstruction.

A close relationship exists between chapter 32 and chapter 34 of Jeremiah. Chapter 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 would imply that chapter 34 must be assigned to an early part of the siege. The Chaldean strategy seems to have been to eliminate all military outposts before beginning the siege of Jerusalem in earnest.

These were the circumstances which existed when

God told Jeremiah to go and deliver an oracle to king Zedekiah (34:2). The precise words of that oracle should be noted with great care. (See the chart which follows). Chapter 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. The present writer would suggest that 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 which was in the house of the king of Judah.

In support of the above suggestion the following points can be made:

1. Chapter 32 gives all the appearance of being the initial confinement of Jeremiah in the reign of Zedekiah. There is not the slightest hint that he had previously been confined by the king.

2. In chapter 32 Jeremiah is confined in the court of the guard as a punishment for what he had preached. In chapter 37 he is placed in the court of the guard as an act of mercy (see 19-21). Surely this would indicate that the confinement in chapter 32 and that in chapter 37 must be two different occasions.

3. The message for which Jeremiah is confined in chapter 32 is very similar to the message which he delivered to Zedekiah at the beginning of the siege in chapter 34. (See following chart).

How then are the events concerning the confinement of Jeremiah to be arranged chronologically? In the tenth year of Zedekiah (March/April 588 B.C.) 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). When the Babylonians temporarily raised the siege in the summer of 588 B.C. 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 de-

JEREMIAH'S FAITH IN THE FUTURE

taining the political prisoners who might have proved dangerous in time of siege. During the lull in the siege operations 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. As Jeremiah attempted to leave the city to tend to some business in Anathoth, he was arrested by the guard and hailed before the embittered princes who threw him into a dungeon as a traitor (37:11-15). 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. vs. 16). Zedekiah acquiesced in the request of Jeremiah and ordered him confined henceforth in the court of the guard (37:21). Jeremiah continued to preach even in the court of the guard and so the princes demanded that he be put to death. Zedekiah gave in to the princes and Jeremiah was thrown into an abandoned well (38:1-6). From thence he was rescued by Ebed-melech (38:7-13) and confined in the court of the guard until Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans (38:28).

THE SERMON WHICH GOT JEREMIAH ARRESTED DURING THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

32:1-5	34:1-7
Reference back to the sermon	The actual preaching
"Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon" (v. 3)	"Thus says the LORD, Behold I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon" (v. 2)
"and he shall take it" (v. 3)	"and he shall burn it with fire" (v. 2)
"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)	"and you shall not escape out of his hand but you shall surely be taken and delivered into his hand" (v. 3)

JEREMIAH

"and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes." (v. 4)

"and he shall bring Zedekiah to Babylon" (v. 5)

"and there shall he be until I visit him (oracle of the LORD). Though you fight against the Chaldeans you shall not prosper" (v. 5).

"and your eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with you mouth to mouth" (v. 3)

"and you shall go to Babylon" (v. 3)

ACTIVITIES OF JEREMIAH DURING THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

During the First Stage of the Siege	During the Period of Chaldean Withdrawal	During the Final Stage of the Siege
21:1-7 Zedekiah's request for prayer	34:8-22 Sermon on the breach of the covenant	37:17-20 Jeremiah summoned by the king from prison
21:8-10 Jeremiah urged desertion	37:1-10 A second prayer request by the king	37:21 Jeremiah put in the court of the guard
34:1-7 Jeremiah took a message to Zedekiah	37:11-16 Jeremiah accused of treason; imprisoned	38:1-18 Jeremiah urged desertion; thrown into a well
32:2 Jeremiah in the court of the guard		38:14-28 A final interview with Zedekiah
32:6-15 Jeremiah buys a field		
33:1 A second word when Jeremiah was in the court of the guard		

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I. Facts to Master

1. That which Jeremiah is told to write (30:2).
2. That which God will do for Israel and Judah (30:3).
3. The one the Israelites serve upon returning to their homeland (30:9).
4. That which will happen to the nations which had scattered Israel (30:11).

JEREMIAH'S FAITH IN THE FUTURE

5. The figure used in 30:12-17 to depict the terrible sin, punishment and restoration of Israel.
6. The identity of the Ruler mentioned in 30:21.
7. The new relationship which will exist between God and Israel in the future (31:1, 9).
8. The new thing which God will create in the land (31:22).
9. A proverb current in the days of Jeremiah (31:29).
10. That which God would make with Israel (31:31).
11. Jeremiah's personal condition during the siege of Jerusalem (32:1-3).
12. Jeremiah's prediction regarding king Zedekiah (32:4, 5).
13. The name of Jeremiah's cousin who offered to sell a field (32:7).
14. The price of the field (32:9).
15. Significance of this act of purchasing the field (32:15, 42-44).
16. Name of a pagan god to whom the Jews sacrificed their children (32:35).
17. Jeremiah's personal situation at the time he delivered the oracle in Chapter 33.
18. That which God will cause to sprout (33:15).
19. Special promises to the house of David and Levitical priests (33:17, 18).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. What is the fulfillment of the promises to bring Israel and Judah back to Palestine? Were they fulfilled in the returns of Zerubbabel (536 B.C.) and Ezra (458 B.C.)? Do these promises have any relationship to the Zionist movement of recent years?
2. In what way were the Jews encouraged to look upon their present trials? 30:4-11, esp. v. 11.

JEREMIAH

3. What is the permanent lesson that can be learned from 30:12-17?
4. What is the basis for thinking that the Prince of 30:21 is Christ?
5. What figures of speech set forth the new relationship between Israel and God after the restoration? 31:2-5
6. Matthew (2:18) quotes 31:15 and says it was "fulfilled" when Herod slew the Bethlehem innocents. Is 31:15 then a direct prophecy of what would happen at Bethlehem or does Matthew simply mean to say there is an analogy between the two events?
7. What is the new covenant predicted in Jeremiah 31? See Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17; Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20; I Corinthians 11:25. In what respect is the new covenant superior to the old?
8. What city does Jeremiah describe in 31:38-40, the earthly Jerusalem, the spiritual Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, or all three?
9. How does the principle "actions speak louder than words" especially apply in chapter 32?
10. How do the events of chapter 32 fit chronologically with chapters 30 and 37?
11. Is it necessary for a people to face the future with confidence? Why? What is the only solid basis for hope?
12. Why did the cousin come to Jeremiah and ask him to purchase the field? 32:6-8. Did Jeremiah fully understand the significance of the transaction?
13. What seeming contradiction is Jeremiah attempting to work out in his prayer? 32:16-25
14. What is significant about calling the Messiah a

JEREMIAH'S FAITH IN THE FUTURE

"Shoot"? 33:15. Where else is this designation used?

15. Have the promises of 33:17, 18 been fulfilled? When and how?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE

34:1—36:32

In chapters 34-36 Jeremiah relates three incidents which 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. Chapter 36 relates an event which transpired in the year 605-604 B.C. Chapter 35 can be assigned to almost any year between 602 and 598 B.C. The event in chapter 34 transpired during the final siege of Jerusalem (589-588 B.C.). The section contains narrative prose primarily biographical in character. An action parable is recorded in chapter 35.

I. AN INCIDENT DURING THE FINAL SIEGE OF JERUSALEM 34:1-22

Chapter 34 contains two messages delivered during the final siege of Jerusalem. The first of these messages is directed to king Zedekiah (vv. 1-7). According to verse 7 the message was delivered after Nebuchadnezzar had conquered all the outlying cities of Judah except Lachish and Azekah and was about ready to begin the assault against Jerusalem. According to the calculations of Finegan the siege of Jerusalem began on January 15, 588 B.C. The first message of Jeremiah then was delivered a short time before this date.

The second message in this chapter (vv. 8-22) is directed to the people in general and the nobles in particular. In the summer of 588 B.C. 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. A Solemn Declaration 34:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, 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, (2) Thus says the LORD the God of Israel: Go and say to Zedekiah king of Judah and say unto him, Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it. (3) And you shall not escape from his hand, but shall surely be taken and given into his hand; and eyeball to eyeball and face to face you shall speak to the king of Babylon, and you shall go to Babylon. (4) But hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you: You shall not die with the sword. You shall die in peace. As they made burnings for your fathers, the kings who preceded you, so shall they make a burning for you. They will lament you by saying, Ah lord! Because I have spoken a word (oracle of the LORD). (6) And Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem (7) while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah which were left, against Lachish and Azekah, for they alone of the fortified cities of Judah were left.

COMMENTS

During the last days of Jerusalem Jeremiah had several conversations with the king Zedekiah. It is not easy to

reconstruct the chronology of these interviews¹ but it is generally agreed that the present episode was one of the earliest. The message consists of two parts, condemnation and consolation.

The condemnatory word is first spoken concerning the city and then concerning the king. Again Jeremiah emphasizes that Jerusalem shall 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 would be burned with fire (v. 2). Zedekiah himself would be captured by the enemy. He would have to meet face to face the mighty Nebuchadnezzar against whom he had committed such a dreadful act of treachery in violating his solemn oath of allegiance. He would spend his last days as a captive in far away Babylon (v. 3). Apparently Jeremiah now regarded the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of a portion of the population as inevitable.

To his word of condemnation Jeremiah now appends a word of consolation to the hapless Zedekiah. The king would not die by the sword (v. 4) but would die in peace in captivity. He shall receive a royal funeral including the burning of spices² and appropriate lamentation³ (v. 5). Some commentators feel 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 and there is no reason to assume that he did not receive a royal burial in that land.

1. A probable reconstruction is: 21:1-10; 34:1-7; 32:3-5; 37:1-10; 37:16-21; 38:14-28.

2. That "burnings of your fathers" does not refer to cremation but to the burning of spices is made clear by II Chronicles 16:14; 21:19.

3. "Ah Lord" is a phrase used in lamentation over a king who was respected. See Jeremiah 22:18.

B. A Shameful Repudiation 34:8-11

TRANSLATION

(8) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom, (9) so that each man would set free his Hebrew slave or handmaiden, that no one should hold his fellow Jew in bondage. (10) And all the princes and all the people who entered into the covenant to set free his Hebrew slave or maid-servant, that they might not enslave them anymore; they hearkened and set them free. (11) But after they had done this they changed their mind and caused the slaves and maidservants whom they had set free to return and forced them once more to become slaves and handmaids.

COMMENTS

Verses 8-11 reveal the background of the blistering denunciation which is contained in the last half of the chapter. Here is recorded one of the most disgusting acts of hypocrisy ever recorded in the Bible. Israel, like other nations of the ancient Near East, had laws which 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 land owners—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. However 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 (Exodus 21:5f.; Deuteronomy 15:16f.). 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.

When Jerusalem came under siege in January 588 B.C., 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. 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 against the other with a passage between and 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 (Genesis 15:9f.).

What motivated the slave owners to suddenly 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 open and flagrant abuse of the law they might influence God to intervene on their behalf and spare the city.¹ 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

1. Sheldon Blank (*op. cit.*, p. 47) sees a vague hint that this was the motivation in verse 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."

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 farm lands which 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.

When the Egyptian forces came to the relief of Jerusalem in the summer of 588 B.C. 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! Thinking that normal conditions would soon be restored, the nobles issued a new proclamation: they revoked the freedom they had given, broke their solemn pledge, and brought the former slaves into servitude again. Thus is the usual sequel of religious commitments made under duress. This shameful repudiation of a sacred covenant made with God and man incensed Jeremiah and he delivered the stinging rebuke which follows.

C. A Stern Denunciation 34:12-22

TRANSLATION

(12) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, (13) Thus says the LORD, 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, (14) 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. But your fathers did not obey Me nor did they listen. (15) But as for you, you had turned and done that which 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. But then you turned and profaned My name, and you caused each man his slave and handmaid, whom you had set free, to return, forcing them to be your slaves and handmaids. (17) Therefore thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed Me to proclaim liberty one to another. Behold, I am about to proclaim to you liberty (oracle of the LORD) unto the sword, pestilence and famine; and I will make you an object of terror to all kingdoms of the earth. (18) I will also make the men who transgressed My covenant, who did not perform the words of the covenant which they made before Me, like the calf which they cut in two when they passed between the parts—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—(20) and I will give them into the hand of their enemies who seek their life. And their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth. (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 which has gone up from you. (22) Behold, I am about to issue a command (oracle of the LORD), and I will bring them back unto this city; and they shall fight against it and capture it and burn it; and the cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.

COMMENTS

God had something to say about the hypocritical actions of the Jerusalem nobles and Jeremiah was the instrument by which His word was spoken. In his message Jeremiah condemns the act of treachery which has just been committed (vv. 12-16) and spells out the consequences of that act (vv. 17-22).

Jeremiah begins his condemnation of the act of treachery by reminding his hearers of the stipulations of the Sinai covenant with regard to servitude. A Hebrew who served six years was to be released in the seventh year (vv. 13, 14). Apparently this law had been generally ignored because Jeremiah says the fathers of his hearers refused to hearken to this commandment of God (v. 14). God had actually been pleased that finally the nobles, whatever their ulterior motives, had complied with His law and had released their slaves (v. 15). But 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 charges that they had profaned the name of God.¹

Such an act of betrayal and treachery as committed by the nobles of the land will have serious consequences. 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. They will be free from those obligations which they regard as unbearable;

1. The idea that God's name suffers profanation because of His people has two different meanings in the Old Testament. (a) God is defamed by the shameful *conduct* of his people (Leviticus 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32; Amos 2:7; Jeremiah 34:16; Ezekiel 20:39; Malachi 1:12). (b) God is also disgraced because of the shameful *condition* of his people (Isaiah 48:11; Ezekiel 36:16ff.; 23 Ezekiel 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), pp. 117-126.

they will be free from the gracious protection of the Lord. God will deliver them over to that fourfold alliance of evils: sword, pestilence, famine and captivity (v. 17). Freedom from God, from divine obligations and restraint, 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.

The punishment of the hypocritical covenanters will be appropriate to the crime that was committed. They had piously passed between the halves of the calf they had cut in two and in so doing had pronounced upon themselves a self-malediction if they should be unfaithful to the terms of the covenant. Just as that calf had been slain, so they would be given over into the hands of the Chaldeans who would slay them. Like the carcasses of animals, their bodies would be left unburied, exposed to the ravaging appetite of scavenger birds and beasts (v. 20).

This paragraph closes with a specific word for Zedekiah the king and a specific word about the Babylonian armies which have withdrawn from the siege of Jerusalem. King Zedekiah would be handed over to the Chaldeans along with his princes (v. 21). The Chaldeans will return; Jerusalem will fall. The city will be burned and left desolate (v. 22). The word of God spoken by his prophet some forty years earlier will be fulfilled.

II. AN ILLUSTRATION FROM AN EARLIER PERIOD CHAPTER 35

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. Chapter 35 is unconnected chronologically with the preceding and following chapters. The event here narrated dates back to the reign of Jehoiakim (vv. 1, 11) who ruled from 609 to 598 B.C. It is difficult to place the

episode more precisely with the reign of that king. Jehoiakim started his reign as an Egyptian vassal (II Kings 23:35). After the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. he swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and remained faithful to him for three years, from 604 to 601 B.C. (II Kings 24:1). Encouraged by an Egyptian defeat of Nebuchadnezzar late in 601 B.C. 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 he sent local garrisons of Chaldean troops along with Syrian, Ammonite and Moabite mercenaries to raid Judah and harass Jehoiakim (II Kings 24:2). It was probably to this period of Jehoiakim's reign (599 or 598 B.C.) that the present episode is to be assigned.

A. The Fidelity of the Rechabites 35:1-11

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, (2) Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them to the house of the LORD unto one of the chambers, and offer them wine to drink. (3) And I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites. (4) And I brought them to the house of the LORD, unto the chamber of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which is beside the chamber of the princes, above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold. (5) And I placed before the sons of the house of Rechabites bowls full of wine, and cups; and I said unto them, Drink wine! (6) And they responded, We do not drink wine for Jonadab the son

of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Do not drink wine, you nor your sons, forever. (7) Furthermore do not build houses, sow seed, plant vineyards or own any such; but you shall dwell in tents all of your days, in order that your days may be many upon the face of the land in which you are sojourning. (8) And we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, every word which he commanded us, not to drink wine all of our days, neither we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, (9) nor to build houses in which to dwell; and we do not possess vineyards, fields or seed. (10) We dwell in tents, and we have obeyed, and done everything which Jonadab our father commanded us. (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.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah used many different methods to communicate God's truth to men. In the present instance he uses a dramatic demonstration involving a whole clan to drive home the truth to the people of Judah. The Rechabites are one of the most interesting groups mentioned in the Bible. They were apparently of Kenite descent (I Chronicles 2:55) and had joined the Israelites at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (Judges 1:16). It was Jehonadab (or Jonadab) the son of Rechab who gave to the name "Rechabite" its special connotation.

Jehonadab first appears in II Kings 9:15-31 as a militant worshiper of Yahweh. He participated in the revolution of 841 B.C. 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. Jehonadab had imposed rather strict regulations upon his descendants. But even though some 200 years had elapsed the Rechabites were still living by the rule of their father. Normally a nomadic group, the Rechabites had recently sought refuge in Jerusalem from the roving bands of Chaldeans and Syrians which were making repeated raids on the Jews living outside the walled cities (v. 11).

The narrative begins with Jeremiah receiving instruction to seek out the members of the Rechabite community.¹ 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 (v. 2). Scripture does not state whether or not Jeremiah informed Jaazaniah as to the purpose of the Temple visit but the impression is left that what transpired there came as somewhat of a surprise to the Rechabites.

Jeremiah chose the chamber of the sons of Hanan "the man of God"² as the spot for the demonstration (v. 4). 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.³ No doubt this particular chamber was able to accommodate several persons. It certainly was located in a prominent place being next to the chamber of the princes and

1. Literally, "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.

2. The title "man of God" was an honorable title of the prophets. It was applied to Samuel (I Samuel 9:6-10), Elijah (II Kings 1:9-13), Elisha (II Kings 4-13) and others. The term occurs only here in Jeremiah. Perhaps Hanan was a prophet. If so, his "sons" may have been his disciples. See Streane, *op cit.*, p. 237.

3. See I Chronicles 9:27; Ezekiel 40:17; Nehemiah 10:37-39.

just above the chamber of Maaseiah, the keeper of the door.¹ This would be a most advantageous spot for an object lesson to be seen by the leaders of Jerusalem. 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.

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 (v. 5). 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.² It was their loyalty and obedience to this way of life that Jeremiah wished to vividly portray before the national leaders. So he offered them wine and, as expected, the Rechabites vigorously declined the invitation to drink.³ They offered a reason for their refusal. Jonadab, the ancestor of their clan, had commanded them (1) not to drink wine; (2) not to build houses; and (3) not to engage in agricultural pursuits (vv. 6-7). The descendants of Jonadab had complied with these commandments for over 200 years (vv. 8-10). Surely this is one of the most noted examples of the influence of a father in all the annals of history! They wish it to be clearly understood that their presence in Jerusalem does not in-

1. 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 (Jeremiah 52:24; II Kings 25:18). They seem to have been in charge of money contributed for the Temple (II Kings 12:9).

2. 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.

3. The use of the Hebrew imperfect in the Rechabite refusal implies customary action and can be translated: "We never drink wine."

dicating 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 walls of the capital (v.11).

The Rechabites were a people who desired the simple pastoral life. But there is more involved. By their practices they were protesting the corruption which 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 Nazarites, 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 and courage were as rare in the sixth century before Christ as they are today. May God grant that the lives of His people today will be a perpetual protest against the debauchery and drunkenness of this world.

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 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 is pleasing

to God. They were a living rebuke to a faithless and disobedient nation.

B. The Faithlessness of the Jews 35:12-15

TRANSLATION

(12) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, (13) Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the man of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Will you not accept correction to obey My words (oracle of the LORD)? (14) The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which 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. But I have spoken unto you earnestly and persistently; yet you have not hearkened unto Me! (15) With urgency and persistency I sent unto you all My servants the prophets who said, Turn please each man from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them, then you shall continue to dwell in the land which I gave to you and to your fathers; but you would not pay any attention or obey Me.

COMMENTS

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. Pointedly God asks through His messenger, "Will you not receive instruction

to hearken to My words? Will you not learn from the Rechabites the lesson of obedience to My word?" (v. 13). For over 200 years the Rechabite clan had obeyed the command of a dead ancestor even though his commandment was merely a matter of human judgment. But time and again the living God had spoken to His people, yet they had ignored or deliberately disobeyed His commandments (v. 14). Again and again God had sent unto them prophets who pleaded with the rebellious people to repent and turn from idolatry and who promised them that they could continue to dwell in their land if they would only hearken to the voice of God. But the people had refused to hearken and on occasion actually had reviled and ridiculed the servants of God (v. 15). They had persisted in their rebellion against the Lord.

C. The Fate of the Rechabites and the Jews 35:16-19

TRANSLATION

(16) Because the sons of Jonadab the Son of Rechab have kept the commandment of their ancestor, and this people have not obeyed Me, (17) therefore thus says the LORD, 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 which I have spoken against them; because I have spoken unto them and they did not obey, I called out to them but they did not answer. (18) And to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, Thus says the LORD 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 which he commanded you; (19) therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever.

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. God declares: "I will bring upon Judah and Jerusalem all the evil (calamity) that I have pronounced against them" (v. 17). 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 (Deuteronomy 28). Every prophet from Amos onwards had reminded the nation of this fact. The fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. 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 verses 16 and 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.

The passage concludes with a word of commendation for the Rechabites. Because they had faithfully observed the commandments of their father, Jonadab "shall not want a man to stand before Me forever" (vv. 18, 19). To stand before anyone in Old Testament thought is to function as a servant to that person. Thus the promise here 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.¹ Perhaps it is better, however, to think in terms of a spiritual fulfillment of the promise.

1. Naglesbach, *op cit.*, p. 308.

Throughout history there have been and will be spiritual descendants of the Rechabites who remain true to their convictions and separate themselves from the sinfulness of the world.

III. THE INDESTRUCTIBLE WORD 36:1-32

As has been repeatedly emphasized thus far, the 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 which 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 permanently record the messages which he had been preaching for the past twenty-three years. It is difficult to determine which came first, the battle or the writing. Verse 29 has been submitted as proving that Nebuchadnezzar had not yet won at Carchemish, had not yet swept down through Syria-Palestine. But since Nebuchadnezzar invaded this area so many times it is hardly possible to dogmatically insist that verse 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 of course 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.

Chapter 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. Secondly, this chapter 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 Old Testament. Then too this chapter marks a turning point in the career of Jeremiah. While he was only a preacher, Jeremiah's influence was limited by and large to his native land. But when he committed his sermons to writing he was destined to influence the world for generations to come.

A. The Word Written 36:1-4

TRANSLATION

(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 the LORD, saying, (2) Take for yourself a book-scroll and write in it all the words which I have spoken unto you concerning Israel, and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I spoke unto you in the days of Josiah even unto this day. (3) Perhaps the house of Judah will hear of all the calamity which 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. (4) And Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he spoke unto him, upon the book-scroll.

COMMENTS

The first paragraph of chapter 36 relates how Jeremiah received a commandment from the Lord to commit

his messages to writing and how the prophet executed that command.

1. *The commandment received* (36:1-3)

Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to "take a roll of a book" (v. 2). The writing substance here is 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, so that as the scroll was gradually unrolled from one end to the other, the successive columns could be read. Upon this scroll Jeremiah is commanded to record "all the words which he has spoken" (v. 2). Some have suggested that Jeremiah had fragmentary written records which 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. At any rate the book was to contain excerpts from his twenty-three year ministry.

God's purpose for issuing the command to commit the divine word to writing is clearly outlined in verse 3. Three goals are in view: (1) that they 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; (2) that by hearing the word they might thereby be converted; and (3) that God might, in view of their conversion, be able to forgive their iniquity and sin. Perhaps the recent invasion of the area by Nebuchadnezzar and the capture of Jerusalem would make the people more receptive to the threats of destruction by the enemy from the north. At any rate 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?" (Isaiah 5:4).

2. *The commandment executed* (36:4)

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. Indeed there are hints within the book that the prophet did on occasion take the pen in hand (see 32:10 and 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."¹ Baruch, who appeared for the first time in 32:12, seems to have been from a noble family. His brother Seraiah was in the royal service (51:59) and according to Josephus his grandfather was Maaseiah (II Chronicles 34:8), the governor of the city.

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. The Word Read 36:5-19

The word of God was never intended to be written and then deposited in the public archives. God's word is meant to be read, studied, heeded, and obeyed. Therefore it is both significant and appropriate that Jeremiah not only published the word but saw to it that the word was

1. *Antiquities* X. 9. 1.

proclaimed. If the word of God is to have an impact upon individuals it must be transferred from the written page to the hearts and minds of individuals. Thus in the present paragraph Jeremiah requests of Baruch that he publicly read the scroll (vv. 5-7). Baruch complied with that request (vv. 8-10) and his reading of the scroll created quite a stir among the princes of the land (vv. 11-19).

1. *The request of Jeremiah* (36:5-7)

TRANSLATION

(5) And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am restrained; I am not able to go to the house of the LORD. (6) Now you go and read from the scroll which you have written from my mouth the words of the LORD in the presence of the people at the house of the LORD on a fast day. Also read them in the presence of all Judah who are coming from their cities. (7) Perhaps they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will turn each man from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath which the LORD has spoken against this people.

COMMENTS

Sometime after he had completed dictating the scroll to Baruch, Jeremiah requested that his secretary go to the house of God and read that which 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 verses 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.¹ He was literally "detained" or "restrained" from entering the Temple. The lesson to be learned from all this is that 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.

Jeremiah instructs Baruch to read the scroll on a fast day (v. 6). 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.² The main point is that Baruch was to read the scroll in the Temple at a time when he would have the largest audience. 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 (v. 7).

2. *The reading by Baruch* (36:8-10)

TRANSLATION

(8) And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all which Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading from the scroll the words of the LORD at the house of the LORD. (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 the LORD in Jerusalem; and all the people were coming from the cities of Judah into

1. Less likely are the suggestions that Jeremiah was sick or ceremonially unclean at the moment.

2. Only one fast day was prescribed in the law and it fell in the seventh month (Leviticus 16:29; 23:27). Streane (*op. cit.*, p. 242) suggests that the fast here may have been called to commemorate the recent capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Laetsch (*op. cit.*, p. 286) cites a passage from the Talmud which calls for a fast in the ninth month if the rains have not yet fallen.

Jerusalem. (10) And Baruch read in the scroll the words of Jeremiah in the presence of all the people in the house of the LORD 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 the LORD.

COMMENTS

As Jeremiah faithfully executed the commands of God, Baruch faithfully carried out the instructions of his master in every detail (v. 8). It was December (the ninth month according to the Jewish reckoning) when the Temple authorities proclaimed a fast and a large host of the inhabitants of Judah flocked to Jerusalem to the Temple (v. 9). 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 brother of Ahikam who was friendly to Jeremiah (26:24).¹ 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 which was elevated slightly above the court of the people. The location of the "new gate" is uncertain.² One of the doors of Gemariah's office must have led into the court of the people. It was from this elevated spot which afforded a view over the larger court of the people that Baruch read the scroll.

1. Another Gemariah is mentioned in 29:3.

2. Laetsch suggests that the new gate is to be identified with the high, or upper, gate of Benjamin mentioned in 20:2 which was built comparatively late in the time of Jotham (II Kings 15:35).

3. *The reaction of the princes* (36:11-19)

TRANSLATION

(11) When Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD as they were read from the book, (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. (13) And Micaiah declared to them the words which he had heard Baruch reading from the book in the presence of the people. (14) Then all the princes sent unto Baruch Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, 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. (15) And they said unto him, Sit please, and read in our presence. And Baruch read it in their presence. (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. (17) And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us please how you wrote all these things from his mouth. (18) And Baruch said unto them, He personally dictated unto me all these words while I wrote in the book with ink. (19) And the princes said unto Baruch, Go and hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and let no man know your whereabouts.

COMMENTS

One person who heard Baruch read the scroll that day was particularly touched. His name was Michaiah

and he 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. It so happened that Gemariah was engaged at that moment in a council of the princes in the office of Elishama. Michaiah declared to the princes the message which Baruch had been reading to the people in the Temple court (v. 13). The princes were so impressed that they dispatched Jehudi¹ to summon Baruch to appear before them with the scroll (v. 14). Since Baruch belonged to a family of distinction (see on v. 4) the princes received him respectfully and cordially. In the light of verses 19 and 25 it would appear that these particular princes were favorably disposed towards Baruch and his master.

When the princes heard the words of the scroll they looked at each other and trembled (v. 16). 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? Perhaps all of these factors mingled together to make these princes afraid. At any rate they were convinced that it was their responsibility as first officers of the realm to report the incident to the king (v. 16). Before doing so however they inquired more precisely about the scroll as to how it came into being and who was responsible for it (v. 17). Baruch honestly answered the question: "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 nor taken away from the words of the prophet. Anticipating the reaction of the king to the scroll the friendly princes urged Baruch and

1. The name of his ancestor leads one to suspect that Jehudi was of Cushite or Ethiopian descent.

Jeremiah to immediately hide themselves and to reveal to no one their whereabouts (v. 19).

C. The Word Attacked 36:20-26

TRANSLATION

(20) Then they went unto the king in the court, having deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and they report all the words to the king. (21) And the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he brought it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it in the presence of the king and all the princes who were standing alongside the king. (22) Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, and a brazier was burning before him. (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 which was upon the brazier, until the whole scroll was consumed by the brazier fire. (24) And they did not tremble nor rend their clothes, neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words. (25) Though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah had entreated the king not to burn the scroll, he did not listen to them. (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 the LORD hid them.

COMMENTS

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 (v. 20). 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 and 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 that 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 and would not wish to waste his time having it brought to him and read. The king however was very interested and dispatched Jehudi, who is not further identified, to get the scroll. Then Jehudi is ordered to read the scroll in the presence of the king, the princes mentioned in verse 12, and other princes of the realm (v. 21).

Since the temperature was chilly, the king was holding court that day in the winter house, the inner portion of the palace which was shielded from the winter winds. In order to keep warm the king was sitting beside a brazier filled with live coals. Jehudi began to read the scroll. But before he could read three or four columns (not leaves as in KJV)¹ Jehoiakim jumped from his throne, tore the book from the hand of the reader, slashed it to pieces with his penknife, and threw the fragments into the fire² (v. 23). The king and his ministers³ were so calloused that they manifested neither sorrow nor fear that the word of God was being destroyed before their very eyes (v. 24). In spite of the pleas of Elnathan,⁴ Delaiah and Gemariah the king persisted in burning the scroll until not a shred remained (v. 25). Having destroyed the written word Jehoiakim gave orders that Baruch and Jeremiah be ar-

1. 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.

2. That it was Jehoiakim who actually burned the scroll and not Jehudi is made clear by vv. 25, 27, 28, and 32.

3. 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.

4. 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.

rested.¹ The king planned to silence Jeremiah as he earlier had silenced Uriah the prophet (26:20-24). But the Lord hid His faithful servants and thus frustrated the plans of Jehoiakim (v. 26).

The document which 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 (paper) since 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.² Not all of these passages however were part of that first edition of Jeremiah (see v. 32). Certainly chapters 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 which appear toward the end of the present Book of Jeremiah. The scroll doubtlessly included chapter 25 which contains threats against numerous neighboring nations. As for the oracles concerning Israel and Judah it is impossible to identify specifically which chapters were part of that early book.

This is the first recorded effort to systematically 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 and 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

1. Jehameel the son of Hammelech is thought by some to be the son of Jehoiakim since the word Hammelech might be translated "the son of the king." However it is best to regard it as a proper name as in the KJV.

2. Chapters 2-18; 21:11-14; 22:1-23; 23; 25; 26:30-31; 46:1-12; probably most of 47-49:33.

people of God in their Scriptures. With the penknife of rationalism they have cut out from the Scriptures those passages which 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.

D. The Word Restored 36:27-32

TRANSLATION

(27) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch had written from the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, (28) Get yourself another scroll and write upon it all the former words which were upon the first scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned. (29) And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah say, Thus says the LORD: 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? (30) Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall not have a descendant to sit upon the throne of David, and his body shall be cast forth to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. (31) I will punish him, his seed, and his servants for their iniquity, and I will bring upon them—the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah—all the calamity which I have spoken against them, but which they refused to hear. (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 which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned; and many other words of a similar nature were added to them.

COMMENTS

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" (Isaiah 40:8). Kings may burn Scripture and burn those who read Scripture. Men may die because of the grand old book. But the word of God shall stand for ever! Destructive critics may undermine the faith of many individual Christians and they may return to the dismal swamp of the unregenerate life. But the word of God shall stand for ever! One can criticize Scripture and pass judgment upon it. One can ignore it, disregard it, show disrespect for it. But the books of Holy Scripture will be there in that final day as a standard and basis for judgment (Revelation 20:12).

Sometime later in his place of hiding, Jeremiah was commanded to rewrite the scroll which king Jehoiakim had destroyed (vv. 27, 28). The new edition of the book was to contain a specific word concerning¹ the king. Jehoiakim had been enraged about the threats at the hands of the Babylonians and had therefore destroyed the word of God (v. 29).² But the destruction of the scroll had not eliminated the divine threat against the king and his subjects. Four distinct threats against Jehoiakim are contained

1. The 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 which was just narrated.

2. The expression "the king of Babylon shall certainly come" by no means proves that Nebuchadnezzar had not come already. Nebuchadnezzar visited Jerusalem in 605 B.C. shortly after the battle of Carchemish and took hostages. That visitation may well have already 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 which Jerusalem had suffered.

in the closing verses of chapter 36. (1) Jehoiakim would 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.¹ 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* (permanently) on the throne of David. (2) Jeremiah predicts a violent and dishonorable death for Jehoiakim. It was the last and worst indignity for one to be left unburied and apparently that is what Jeremiah is predicting in verse 30. (3) The family and servants of the king as well as Jehoiakim himself would be punished by God. (4) God would bring upon the inhabitants to Judah and Jerusalem all the calamity which He, through His prophets, had been threatening for so many years (v. 31).

The final verse of the chapter 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." This would be the second edition of the Book of Jeremiah. It is impossible to say with any degree of certainty which sermons or episodes were added in this second edition of the book.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I. Facts to Master

1. The time of the events recorded in chapter 34 (34:1, 6, 7).
2. Summary of Jeremiah's message to king Zedekiah (34:2-5).
3. The covenant which the nobles of Jerusalem made and then broke (34:8-11).
4. The law regarding Hebrew slaves (34:14).

1. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody, 1957), p. 561.

JEREMIAH

5. The threat as regards the Chaldean army (34:22).
6. The time when the incident recorded in chapter 35 took place (35:1).
7. The group that Jeremiah was to take to the temple (35:2).
8. That which Jeremiah was to offer these people (35:2).
9. The distinguishing characteristics of the Rechabites (35:6, 7).
10. Name of the forefather who gave the Rechabites these commands (35:6).
11. The blessing pronounced on the Rechabites because of their faithfulness to the command of their father. (35:19).
12. The year when Jeremiah first committed his messages to writing (36:1).
13. The length of time Jeremiah had thus far been preaching (36:1).
14. The one to whom Jeremiah dictated the scroll (36:4).
15. The reason Jeremiah could not himself proclaim the Word in the temple (36:5, 6).
16. That which the princes advise Baruch to do when they heard the words of the scroll (36:19).
17. Time and place of the reading of the scroll before the king (36:9, 22).
18. Reaction of Jehoiakim to the reading of the scroll (36:23).
19. Commandment which came to Jeremiah after the destruction of the scroll (36:27ff.).
20. Prophecy regarding king Jehoiakim (36:30).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. From independent research what can you discover about the famous Lachish Letters? Is Jeremiah mentioned in these letters?

OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE

2. What is meant by "the burning of the fathers"? (34:5).
3. Why did the Jerusalem nobles suddenly release their Hebrew slaves and then just as suddenly re-enslave them? (34:8-11).
4. What is meant by the expression "cut the calf in twain and passed between the parts thereof"? (34:18).
5. Why is a covenant so sacred? (34:15, 16).
6. What valuable lessons can be learned from the Rechabites? Why were they in Jerusalem? Why does Jeremiah offer them wine? (35:1-11).
7. What details can be deduced from chapter 36 about how a Biblical book was produced?
8. Jehoiakim has been called "the first higher critic of the Bible." Is this an appropriate designation?
9. Chapter 36 contains the first recorded attempt to destroy the word of God. At what other periods of history have rulers attacked Scripture?
10. What chapters of the present book of Jeremiah were likely included in the scroll Jeremiah dictated to Baruch? How did the second edition of the book differ from the first?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EVENTS DURING THE LAST DAYS OF JERUSALEM 37:1—39:18

A period of some eighteen years separates the events of chapters 36 and 37. The focus in chapters 37 through 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

TRANSLATION

(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. (2) But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land obeyed the words of the LORD which he spoke through the instrumentality of Jeremiah the prophet.

COMMENTS

The first two verses of chapter 37 relate the background of this section of the book. Here Zedekiah is introduced as though he had not appeared before. This is somewhat strange since he has appeared many times prior

to this point. Perhaps these verses 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 B.C. when Jehoiachin (Coniah) his nephew was carried away to Babylon (37:1). 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 (37:2). Zedekiah was a weak-kneed monarch who suffered the pressures of a troubled conscience on the one hand and a group of radical and misguided young princes on the other. In the view of Jeremiah the security of the nation depended upon Zedekiah's faithfulness to his vassal oath (27:11-15). One senses that 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. He was a puppet in the hands of the princes.

Following the brief introduction (37:1, 2) this section records how Jeremiah was consulted (37:3-10), confined (37:11-38:28), and confirmed (39:1-14). The section closes with an appendix consisting of a brief message directed to Ebed-melech (39:15-18). The biographical accounts and prose discourses of this section are arranged in strict chronological sequence.

I. THE PROPHET CONSULTED 37:3-10

In 589 B.C. Zedekiah foolishly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar his overlord. Jerusalem had to pay the inevitable consequences. In 588 B.C. 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 588 B.C. things took a

turn for the better. Pharaoh Hophra came marching northward with a relief expedition. The Chaldeans were forced temporarily to suspend siege conditions 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

TRANSLATION

(3) And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Pray please on our behalf unto the LORD our God. (4) Now Jeremiah came and went among the people for they had not yet put him in prison. (5) Meanwhile the army of Pharaoh had gone out from Egypt. When the Chaldeans who were besieging the city heard this report they lifted the siege of the city.

COMMENTS

When the Chaldeans shifted their forces to counter the invasion of Pharaoh Hophra (v. 5) 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 strangle-hold 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, king Zedekiah sent a delegation to Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord. The two-man delegation consisted of Zephaniah the deputy high priest¹ 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

1. See 21:1; 29:25; 52:24, 26, 27; II Kings 25:18, 20, 21.

the moment no animosity is apparent. Though the princes were violently resentful of the threats and warnings which 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. As Hezekiah many years earlier had sent an embassy to Isaiah requesting prayer for besieged Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:6), so now they come and ask Jeremiah to "pray unto the Lord for us" (v. 3). Perhaps they 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 (II Kings 19:35).

Verse 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 verse is not to be interpreted in the absolute sense that Jeremiah had never yet been arrested for most certainly he had been (see chapter 26). Nor should this verse be pressed to mean that Jeremiah had not yet been arrested during the reign of Zedekiah. On the basis of this verse most all commentators place the episode in chapter 32 *after* the events of chapter 37. While this is not an impossible arrangement, it certainly is unnecessary. Jeremiah might well 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 verse would mean only that Jeremiah had not yet experienced the *final* arrest which was to keep him in custody until after the fall of the city. This arrest is recorded in 37:11ff.

B. Jeremiah's Response 37:6-10

TRANSLATION

(6) Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the prophet, saying, (7) Thus says the LORD God of Israel: Thus shall you say unto the king of Judah who sent you unto me to inquire of me: Behold, the army of Pharaoh which has come out to help you shall return to its own land, to Egypt. (8) The Chaldeans shall return and fight against this city, and capture it, and burn it. (9) Thus says the LORD: Do not deceive yourselves by thinking that the Chaldeans are permanently withdrawing, for they are not leaving. (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.

COMMENTS

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's response must have startled as well as angered the dignitaries who had approached him. In his response the prophet shattered all hope by emphasizing three thoughts. First, Jeremiah emphasized the failure of Egyptian aid. The Egyptians would be defeated and return to their land (v. 7). Secondly, he emphasized the fall of Jerusalem. The Chaldeans would shortly return, fight against Jerusalem, capture it, and burn it (v. 8). Thirdly, Jeremiah emphasizes the futility of optimism. There is absolutely no ground whatsoever for hope that the enemy would abandon the siege of Jerusalem (v. 9). 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 be able to overwhelm Jerusalem (v. 10). So certain was God's purpose that Jerusalem be destroyed that no amount of wishful thinking or active resistance could reverse it.

II. THE PROPHET CONFINED 37:11—38:28

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 another¹ 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, to deliver some favorable oracle, 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 authenticates him as a genuine prophet of God.

A. Arrested by the Guard 37:11-15

TRANSLATION

(11) And it came to pass when the army of the Chaldeans had lifted the siege of Jerusalem because of the army of Pharaoh, (12) that Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem in the midst of the people on his way to the land of Benjamin to divide a portion

1. 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).

from that place. (13) And when he was in the Benjamin Gate, the officer of the guard there whose name was Irjah, the son of Shelemiah the son of Hananiah, seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, You are deserting to the Chaldeans. (14) And Jeremiah replied, Not true! I am not deserting to the Chaldeans. But he would not listen to him. So Irijah seized Jeremiah and brought him unto the princes. (15) And the princes were enraged at Jeremiah and smote him, and put him in the prison house, the house of Jonathan the scribe which they had converted into a prison.

COMMENTS

When the Chaldeans lifted the siege of Jerusalem in order to deal with the Egyptian threat to their flank, Jeremiah decided to visit his home in Anathoth a few miles north of Jerusalem. He never reached his destination; he was arrested at the Benjamin Gate (north gate) by the sentry and charged with deserting to the Chaldeans (v. 13). 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 but somewhat foolish.

Why was Jeremiah leaving the city? The question is not easy to answer mainly because 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 home town at Anathoth. This seems to have been the view of the King James translators who render the verb "to separate himself thence in the midst of the people." But if Jeremiah was seeking to move his residence to Anathoth, why? Was it that he was attempting to leave Jerusalem 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.

The crucial phrase in verse 12 can be translated in another way: "to take his portion from thence." On this view 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 chapter 32 was not to be apportioned or divided as this verb implies, but merely purchased and (2) that purchase had not yet taken place.¹ The former argument is not particularly weighty and the latter argument is completely negated if in fact chapter 32 chronologically precedes chapter 37 as has previously been argued.

Commentators are also divided in their interpretation of the phrase "in the midst of the people." Did Jeremiah go out of the city in the midst of the people or did he take his portion in the midst of the people? Some commentators see in "the people" a reference to others who might have been involved in some way in the business transaction which was conducted at Anathoth. But it is better to connect the phrase "in the midst of the people" with the verb "went out." The idea would then be that Jeremiah did not leave the city secretly and alone but

1. Streane, *op cit.*, p. 248.

publicly and in company with many others, perhaps of those who believed in his prophetic utterances.

Jeremiah protested his arrest; he denied the accusation that he was deserting to the Chaldeans. But Irijah, the chief officer of the guard, brought Jeremiah before the princes of the land for further action. These were not the same princes who had evidenced their respect for Jeremiah on former occasions (e.g. chapter 26:16; 36:19). They had been hauled off to Babylon in the deportation of 597 B.C. along with the king Jehoiachin (24:1; 28:3; 29:2). Zedekiah's princes would be of a lower origin and type who would be anxious to accept any charge against an unpopular person without proper examination. They remembered the blistering sermons Jeremiah had preached, how he had compared them to a basket of rotten figs (chapter 24), how he had openly advocated surrender to the enemy and individual desertion. Now was their chance to rid themselves of this annoying pest. They ordered the prophet to be beaten¹ and cast into a dungeon in the house of Jonathan, a royal secretary. Just why his 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. At any rate there were parts of this house that were more than adequate for the purposes of detention. Two words are used to describe the place of imprisonment. The first word is *bor*, translated "dungeon." The word implies a subterranean cavity. The second word is *chanuyot*, a word which occurs only here and probably means "cells." The soft limestone beneath Jerusalem is honeycombed with vaults, caverns, cisterns, tunnels and the like.² For many days Jeremiah the prophet

1. Actually 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.

2. Laetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

of God was confined in this dark, damp, unventilated cell beneath the house of Jonathan the scribe.

B. Summoned by the King 37:16-21

TRANSLATION

(16) When Jeremiah had come into the dungeon vaults and had remained there several days, (17) Zedekiah the king sent and had him brought; and the king questioned him secretly in his house and said, Is there a word from the LORD? And Jeremiah responded: There is! Then he said further, you have been given into the hands of the king of Babylon! (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? (19) Where are your prophets who prophesied to you that the king of Babylon would not come against you or this land? (20) And now hear, O my lord the king; let my supplication be presented before you. Do not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe lest I die there. (21) And Zedekiah the king commanded that they commit Jeremiah to the court of the guard. 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. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

COMMENTS

It is impossible to know how much time elapsed between the confinement of Jeremiah in the subterranean prison and the summons of Zedekiah recorded in verse 17. The text says "many days" Jeremiah remained in the prison of Jonathan's house. During that interval 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.

INTERVIEWS BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND KING ZEDEKIAH		
Passage	Date	Situation
21:1-14	Early in 588	Attack on Jerusalem has begun
34:2-7	Early in 588	Most of the military outposts of Judah have been captured.
37:3-10	Early summer 588	Siege of Jerusalem temporarily lifted.
37:16-21	Fall of 588	After Jeremiah's arrest.
38:14-28	Early 587	After Jeremiah's release from the dungeon.

In pathetic desperation Zedekiah asked, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (v. 17). Maybe God had changed His mind. 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 and though he had strayed quite a ways from the teachings of his father Josiah yet now in this hour of desperation he falls back upon the religion of his youth. Is there any word from the Lord? Indeed there was. But it was a message of doom and not deliverance as far as Zedekiah was concerned. "You will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon" (v. 17). Many days in a dark dungeon had not softened the message of the prophet. He was still standing as tall and straight as an iron pillar.

Jeremiah took the opportunity while standing before the king to plead his own case. "What wrong have I done against you, your servants or this people that you have put me in prison?" (v. 18). 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 had only faithfully carried out his mission as a prophet of God. And had Jeremiah 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? (v. 19). Those prophets were the ones who ought to be in jail for so completely deceiving the nation. 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. Jeremiah knew that if he spent many more days in that wretched and foul hole he would surely die (v. 20). This prophet was no self-appointed martyr. He does not ask to be released from prison; he asks only for humane treatment.

Zedekiah did not set Jeremiah free. But he did order 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. As long as bread was to be found in the city Jeremiah was to receive his daily ration.¹

C. Imprisoned by the Princes 38:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) And Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur, the son of Malchiah heard the words which Jeremiah was speaking unto all the people, saying, Thus says the LORD: The one who dwells in this city shall die by the sword, famine, or pestilence. But the one who goes out to the Chal-

1. Various tradesmen seem to have had special streets either chosen by them or assigned to them. See I Kings 20:34. Hence the reference here to the "street of the baker."

deans shall live; his life will be his spoil and he will live. (3) Thus says the LORD: This city shall certainly be given into the hand of the king of Babylon and he will capture it. (4) Consequently the princes said to the king, it is our request that this man be put to death, for in this manner he is weakening the hands of the fighting men who remain in this city and all the people as well, by speaking these words. This man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm. (5) And king Zedekiah said, Behold, he is in your hand; for the king cannot oppose you in any way. (6) And they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the guard; and they let Jeremiah down by ropes. In the dungeon there was no water but mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

COMMENTS

The 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). Meanwhile 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. The princes, highly displeased with the leniency being shown the prophet, watched his every move. Four princes in particular seem to have been particularly bitter enemies. Shephatiah is mentioned only here. The second prince named is Gedaliah. His father Pashur is probably the one who had put Jeremiah in the stocks earlier in his ministry (20:1, 2). Jucal (or Jehucal) was one of the princes sent by the king only a few weeks before to request Jeremiah to pray for the city. Pashur was one of

the messengers of the king who had visited Jeremiah in an earlier interview (21:1).

There in the court of the guard Jeremiah openly proclaimed the message he had been preaching ever since the Chaldean armies had first appeared in the land. Those who defected to the Chaldeans would escape with their lives; those who remained within Jerusalem were doomed (38:2) for the Lord would shortly give the city into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (38:3). 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.

The charge against Jeremiah, that he weakened the hands of the men of war, is no doubt an accurate assessment of the impact of the preaching of Jeremiah. The phrase "men of war that remain" suggests that many had gone over to the Chaldeans (see also verse 19). The public statements of the prophet could well be classified as treason were it not for one fact. The words which Jeremiah spoke were not his own but the divine message which he had been charged to proclaim. It was Yahweh, the true sovereign of Israel, who was instructing and commanding His subjects to capitulate to the Chaldeans. The predictions of Jeremiah thus far had proven to be accurate thereby accrediting Jeremiah as a true spokesman of God. Only those who were spiritually blind could fail to see that Jeremiah was truly speaking the word of God.

For what they regarded as treason the princes demanded that Jeremiah be put to death (38:4). The struggle against the Chaldeans was literally a matter of life and death. In the view of these princes Jeremiah by his public stance against further resistance was playing into the hand of the enemy. They 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. How wrong they were when they declared

that "this man is no longer seeking the welfare of the people but their hurt" (38:4). Jeremiah was the only true friend which the people had left.

Weak-kneed Zedekiah capitulated to the demands of his princes. "Behold he is in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you" (38:5). What little influence Zedekiah might previously have had over his princes had eroded. He is only a puppet in their hands now. He does not even attempt to argue the point with them. What a cowardly abdication of responsibility! What a shameful betrayal of duty!

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 more cruel. They cast Jeremiah into a cistern which served as a dungeon. This particular cistern, located in the court of the guard, was under the charge of Malchiah the son of Hammelech (lit., the son of the king). Malchiah seems to have been a member of the royal family if not a son of Zedekiah himself. So deep was the cistern that they had to let Jeremiah down into it with ropes. 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 is lodged, no cry of revenge, no 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.

D. Rescued by Ebed-melech 38:7-13

TRANSLATION

(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. 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, (9) O my lord the king, these men have done evil in regard to all which they have done to Jeremiah the prophet in that they have cast him into the dungeon. He is as good as dead because there is no more bread any longer in the city. (10) And the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take with you from here thirty men and bring up Jeremiah from the dungeon before he dies. (11) 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 and 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 under your armpits beneath the ropes. And Jeremiah did so. (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.

COMMENTS

God had not forgotten His faithful prophet. He still had a service to render to his King. That dungeon would not become a death chamber for Jeremiah. God stirred

up the heart of a negro eunuch who was attached to the court of Zedekiah to take pity upon the prophet and to intercede on his behalf. When Ebed-melech heard of the imprisonment of Jeremiah he was filled with righteous indignation against the princes and courageous compassion with regard to the prophet. Ebed-melech—whose name means “servant of the king”—must have been a friend and follower of Jeremiah. He was an Ethiopian eunuch doubtlessly in charge of Zedekiah’s harem. 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.

As he stands 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 (38:9). Knowing the age and infirmity of the prophet Ebed-melech is confident that Jeremiah is 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 since 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.

Zedekiah may have been shocked to learn what the ruthless princes had done with Jeremiah. While he had relinquished all authority in the case and 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. His own guilty conscience no doubt had been bothering him ever since he had told those princes "Behold he is in your hand." Now he attempts to right the wrong which he had committed. He grants permission for Ebed-melech to rescue Jeremiah from his place of imprisonment. Lest the princes try to forcibly 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.

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) which was under the national treasure house. There he gathered some old rags and then hastened on to the cistern where Jeremiah was confined. At the mouth of the cistern he let these rags down to Jeremiah by ropes telling the prophet to pad his armpits with them before securing the ropes around his chest. How thoughtful and gentle 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 and now instructs the prophet to protect himself against it. Slowly, ever so gently, Ebed-melech and his men hoisted the helpless prophet to light, fresh air, solid earth and a measure of freedom (38:13). Jeremiah remained a prisoner in the court of the guard until Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans (38:28).

E. Interviewed by the King 38:14-26

TRANSLATION

(14) Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the

prophet brought unto him at the third entrance of the house of the LORD. And the king said unto Jeremiah, I am about to inquire about a matter; do not hide anything from me. (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! (16) And king Zedekiah swore unto Jeremiah in secret, saying, As the LORD 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. (17) And Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, Thus says the LORD the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will only go forth unto the princes of the king of Babylon, then you shall live, and this city shall not be burned and you and your house shall live. (18) But if you do not go out unto the princes of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hands of the Chaldeans; and they shall burn it and you shall not be able to escape out of their hand. (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. (20) Jeremiah replied, They will not give you into their hand. Obey, I beg you, the voice of the LORD in what I am speaking unto you, that it may be well with you and you may live. (21) But if you refuse to go out this is the word which the LORD has shown me: (22) Then behold, all the women who remain in the house of the king of Judah shall be led forth unto the princes of the king of Babylon; and they shall 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. (23) And all of your wives and your children they shall lead out unto the Chaldeans, and you yourself

will not escape from their hand, but by the hand of the king of Babylon you shall be seized, and this city you shall burn. (24) And Zedekiah said unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of this conversation in order that you may not die. (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; (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.

COMMENTS

Shortly after Jeremiah's rescue from the cistern King Zedekiah summoned him for another interview. The situation in Jerusalem had further deteriorated since the two men had faced each other before. Provisions in the city were exhausted. Chaldean battering rams continued to relentlessly pound the walls of Jerusalem in spite of all the defenders did to drive them off. It would only be a matter of weeks and a breach would be made in the walls and the enemy would come pouring through to completely overwhelm the faint and sickly inhabitants. Surely now in this desperation there would be hope from the Lord. Surely now that Zedekiah has permitted Jeremiah to be rescued from sure death the prophet would have some kind word. How completely the king misunderstands this messenger from God. Those who unflinchingly preach the word of God will always be a source of perplexity and bafflement to those who live by the rule of compromise and accommodation.

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 Tem-

ple. It may be identical with that which is elsewhere called "the king's entry" (II Kings 16:18). It must have been a somewhat secluded spot. There, probably in the darkness of night, Zedekiah urged Jeremiah to honestly answer his petition—not to withhold anything (38:14). The king was frantic; desperation was in his voice. He wanted to know the final issue of the siege.

Jeremiah knew the king really did not want to hear what he had to say. Somewhat sarcastically he said, "If I tell you will you not put me to death? and if I give you counsel you will not hear me"¹ (38:15). The desperate king then swore that he would not harm Jeremiah nor permit the princes to do so (38:16). The form of the oath is somewhat unique. "As the Lord lives who made this soul." The Hebrew word *nephesh* here as usual in the Old Testament 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. Convinced that Zedekiah was sincere in his oath, Jeremiah delivered the word of the Lord to him. It is the same message which Jeremiah had presented to king and people on numerous occasions: liberty and life are yours if you surrender to the Chaldeans; defeat and death lay ahead if you continue to resist (38:17, 18).

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. "I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand and they mock me" (38:19). 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 con-

1. The last clause of verse 15 is not a question in the Hebrew but a simple declarative sentence. Jeremiah knew from his five past interviews with the king that his message would not be accepted.

temptible! A man who feared the Jews in the camp of the enemy more than the God who time and again had demanded his allegiance. A man who put personal welfare about the welfare of his people.

Jeremiah immediately assured the king that his fears regarding the Jews on the outside would not be realized if he would but surrender. "I beseech you," says the prophet, "obey the voice of the Lord." If you will only surrender all will be well with you! (38:20). On the other hand Jeremiah warned Zedekiah that if he resisted the Chaldeans to the bitter and inevitable 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-song¹ aimed at Zedekiah.

"Thy friends have set thee on
and have prevailed against thee;
thy feet are sunk in the mire
and they are turned away back" (KJV)

This taunt-song pictures one naively being led by those he trusted out into a swampy bog, and when he has become mired in the muck they have gone back instead of helping him. The "friends" are of course Zedekiah's princes and counselors who had urged him on in the hopeless struggle and then are unable to suggest any course of action which would extricate the king from his difficulties. The phrase "set thee on" (KJV) perhaps is better rendered "deceived" as in the Revised Standard Version.

The fifth and final conference between Zedekiah and Jeremiah ends with a strong emotional appeal to the king. The prophet makes three final points. If Zedekiah continued to resist the Chaldeans (1) he would shortly see

1. Essentially the same proverb appears in Obadiah 7.

those he held most dear—his wives and children—being led out as spoils of war to the enemy soldiers; (2) he himself would not escape from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar; and (3) 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 (38:23). These are strong and daring words which 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.

F. Questioned by the Princes 38:27-28

TRANSLATION

(27) And all the princes came unto Jeremiah and questioned him; and he told them according to all the words which the king commanded. Then they dropped the matter, for the conversation had not been overheard. (28) And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured; and he was there when Jerusalem was captured.

COMMENTS

The interview with Jeremiah closed, not with the king accepting and acting upon the word of the prophet, but with a request that the princes not be told of the conversation. "Let no man know of these words and you shall not die" (38:24). The king carefully instructed Jeremiah as to what he should say if the princes interrogate 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 (38:25-26). The precautions of the king were well taken for shortly the princes pounced

upon Jeremiah, probing him with questions about the interview with the king. Jeremiah calmly answered them 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 by any stretch of the imagination be construed as falsehood. By speaking this half-truth Jeremiah protected not only himself but the monarch as well.

Jeremiah's answer seemed to satisfy the princes and they did not broach the subject to him any more "for the conversation had not been overheard" (38:27). Without further harassment Jeremiah was permitted to remain in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was captured by the Chaldeans (38:28).¹ The last clause of verse 38 as it is rendered in the King James Version is an impossible translation of the Hebrew. Actually this clause should be the introductory clause of chapter 39. At several places in the English versions bad chapter divisions have been made. The student should remember that the Scriptures were not originally written in chapters and verses.

III. THE PROPHET CONFIRMED 39:1-18

For years Jeremiah had been preaching that Jerusalem would fall to the enemy from the north, the Chaldeans. Only through national submission to Nebuchadnezzar the servant of the Lord was there any hope of deliverance.

1. The intention of this verse 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.

Because of this message Jeremiah had suffered. He had been ridiculed, condemned as a false prophet, tortured, accused of treason, buffeted, harassed, imprisoned. On more than one occasion he nearly lost his life. Yet he never ceased to preach. He never compromised his message. Chapter 39 relates the confirmation of Jeremiah as a prophet. All of which he had warned and threatened 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 Old Testament history. The account here in chapter 39 is one of four accounts of the events surrounding the fall of the city, the others being found in Jeremiah 52, II Kings 25 and II Chronicles 36. Naturally all these accounts should be studied together for the complete picture. The narrative in chapter 39 may be divided into four paragraphs: the collapse of the city (vv. 1-3); the capture of the king (vv. 4-7); the captivity of the people (vv. 8-10); and the command of Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 11-14).

It should, perhaps, be noted that the genuineness of the greater part of chapter 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 chapter 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 which follow.

A. The Collapse of the City 39:1-3

TRANSLATION

(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. (2) On the ninth day of the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the city was breached (3) and all the princes of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate, even Nergal-sharezer, Samgar, Nebosarsechim the Rab-saris, Nergalsharezer the Rab-mag, and all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon.

COMMENTS

The siege of Jerusalem had begun in the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah, i.e., in January 588 B.C. (39:1). The siege was brought to a successful conclusion in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, i.e., July 587 B.C. What a fateful day that was when the city was broken up, i.e., a breach was made in the walls (39:2). It was a day commemorated by fasting for nearly seventy years (Zechariah 7:3; 8:19). After eighteen long, weary months during much of which time 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 200 miles north of Jerusalem to the Syrian town of Riblah where 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.

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, perhaps a gate in the wall that separated the upper and lower parts of the city. Three or possibly four Chaldean officers of that provisional government are named in 39:3. First is Nergal-sharezer whose name means "may Nergal protect the king." The next name which appears in the King James Version is Samgar-nebo. There is quite some difference of opinion about this name. The present writer concurs with most modern scholars in connecting the "nebo" element with the next name. But what is to be done with Samgar? 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 who occupied the office of Rab-mag. From archaeological evidence it is now known that Rab-saris and Rab-mag were titles of high ranking military or diplomatic officials but their exact functions are unknown.¹ One of the Nergal-sharezers² mentioned in this verse is probably the same fellow by that name who succeeded the son of Nebuchadnezzar on the throne of Babylon in 560 B.C. He is more commonly known by his Greek name, Neriglissar. 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 (52:12).

1. The literal translation of the titles, "chief of eunuchs" and "chief soothsayer" does not do justice to the importance of these men.

2. Bright, (*op. cit.*, p. 243) contends that the two Nergalsharezers mentioned here are the same person.

B. The Capture of the King 39:4-10

TRANSLATION

(4) 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. And they went out toward the way of the Arabah. (5) And the Chaldean army pursued after them, and they caught up with Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, took him captive, and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the land of Hamath. There he passed sentence upon him. (6) And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes at Riblah. The king of Babylon also slew all the nobles of Judah. (7) Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with chains to take him away to Babylon.

COMMENTS

When the lower city fell to the Chaldeans, Zedekiah knew that within a matter of hours he would be captive in the hands of his enemies. Under cover of night he and what was left of the army made a desperate dash for safety. 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. It must have been his intention to cross the Jordan river (39:4). But in the plains around Jericho the Chaldean army overtook him. The king and his staff were taken in chains to the headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah¹

1. This is probably the same Riblah mentioned in Numbers 34:11 as on the eastern boundary of the promised land. Some years earlier Pharaoh Necho had made Riblah his military headquarters. There he had summoned Judean king Jehoahaz who was then deported to Egypt in chains (II Kings 23:33). Riblah was a strategic military point being at one of the major crossroads of western Asia.

some two hundred miles to the north. There Zedekiah was forced to stand in the judgment of the king against whom he had violated a sacred oath of allegiance (39:5).

Many vassal oaths from the ancient Near East have come to light in recent years. 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 which 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 overload 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 which was more or less 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 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." If Zedekiah said something to this effect when he was placed on the throne of Judah as the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar then no wonder he tried so desperately to escape the wrath of the great king. Those self-maledictions, uttered as part of a formal vassal treaty, were literally fulfilled at Riblah. The last sight which Zedekiah saw was the slaying of his own sons. Then his own eyes were blinded and he was carried away to Babylon (39:6-7).

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 (32:4, 5; 34:3). The prophet Ezekiel in far away Babylon also accurately predicted the course of events though his words must have seemed vague and contradictory at the time he uttered them. "I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not SEE it, though he shall die there" (Ezekiel 12:13). "As I live (oracle of the Lord God), surely in the place where the king dwells that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die" (Ezekiel 17:16).

C. The Captivity of the People 39:8-10

TRANSLATION

(8) The Chaldeans burned the house of the king and the houses of the people and tore down the walls of Jerusalem. (9) 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, Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, took captive to Babylon. (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.

COMMENTS

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 body guard, 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 and broke down the walls which had for so many months thwarted the Chal-

dean might (39:8). The Judeans who had already defected to the Chaldeans and those who were captured when the city fell were prepared for deportation to Babylon (39:9). Only the very poor of the land were left. The parallel accounts (52:16; II Kings 25:12) say that they were left as vinedressers and husbandmen. The text here indicates further that these poor were given the vineyards and fields (39:10).

D. The Command of Nebuchadnezzar 39:11-14

TRANSLATION

(11) Now Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had commanded Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard concerning Jeremiah, saying, (12) Take him and keep your eye on him and do not do any harm to him, but do with him as he tells you. (13) And Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard, and Nebushasban the Rab-saris, and Nergalsharezer the Rab-mag, and all the officials of the king of Babylon (14) sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard and committed him unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that he might escort him home; and he dwelled in the midst of the people.

COMMENTS

Nebuchadnezzar had given specific orders to the captain of his guard with regard to the welfare of Jeremiah (39:11). 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. Upon arriving in Jerusalem Nebuzaradan consulted with the Chaldean of-

ficials on the scene¹ in order to prevent any possible harm to Jeremiah by conflicting orders or ignorance of the royal decree (39:13). Thereafter Jeremiah was removed from the court of the guard (38:28) and committed into the care of Gedaliah who had been appointed or would shortly be appointed as governor of the land (40:5). Gedaliah was instructed "to carry him home"² (39:14). This phrase suggests that Jeremiah was physically infirm at the time of his release from confinement. His age coupled with the deprivation and hardship which he had suffered during those last few months had left the venerable man of God frail and emaciated. And so Jeremiah dwelt among the people. The prophet was free at last.

IV. APPENDIX: A MESSAGE FOR EBED-MELECH 39:15-18

(15) Now the word of the LORD had come to Jeremiah while he was still confined in the court of the guard, saying, Go and say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to bring My words concerning this city to pass for evil and not for good. And they shall be fulfilled before your eyes on that day. (17) But I will deliver you in that day (oracle of the LORD) and you shall not be given into the hands of the men of whom you are terrified. (18) For I will certainly cause you to escape and you shall not fall by the sword; but you shall have your life as spoils because you trusted in Me (oracle of the LORD).

1. Nebushasban seems to have replaced Sarsechim in the position of *Rabsaris* by the time that Nebuzaradan arrived (cf. verse 3).

2. This has been taken to be (1) Gedaliah's house; (2) the (chief) house, i.e., the king's palace; (3) Jeremiah's own house. The last is probably the best interpretation.

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 verses 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. In their present position these verses 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 and rewards men of faith who have the courage to act decisively.

While still in the court of the guard (39:15) 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. Ebed-melech would see the city of Jerusalem captured and destroyed just as the Lord had spoken through His prophet (39:16). 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. Ebed-melech must have been harassed with fear as to his personal future when Jerusalem was captured. As a royal servant he knew that he would most likely be killed by the Chaldeans. Jeremiah assures him that this will not be the case. "You shall not be delivered into the hands of the men of whom you are afraid" (39:17). Though his life would be endangered in that day, God would deliver him. His life would be given to him for a prey i.e., a prize of war. 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 among death; the king died a thousand deaths as he languished in blindness in a Chaldean dungeon.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I. Facts to Master

1. The man Nebuchadnezzar put on the throne as the last king of Judah (37:1).
2. The names of the two messengers who Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah (37:3).
3. Jeremiah's personal condition at this time (37:4).
4. The time of the request (37:5).
5. Jeremiah's prediction regarding the Egyptian army (37:7).
6. Name of the arresting officer and the accusation he made against Jeremiah (37:13).
7. That which the princes did to Jeremiah (37:15).
8. The nature of the area in which Jeremiah was imprisoned (37:16).
9. The results of a secret interview between Jeremiah and Zedekiah (37:17-21).
10. The place where Jeremiah was put when he continued to openly advocate surrender (38:1-6).
11. The name and nationality of the person who rescued Jeremiah (38:7).
12. The place where Jeremiah remained until the Chaldeans conquered the city (38:13, 28).
13. Two important dates in the reign of Zedekiah (39:1, 2).
14. The place where Zedekiah was captured (39:5).
15. Nebuchadnezzar's military headquarters (39:5).
16. The last sight seen by Zedekiah before his eyes were put out (39:6).
17. The Chaldean general who was in charge at the destruction of Jerusalem (39:9).

JEREMIAH

18. Those who were left in the land (39:10).
19. Person to whom Jeremiah was committed (39:14).
20. Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Ebed-melech (39:15-18).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. For what reason did Jeremiah desire to leave Jerusalem during the lull in the siege? (37:11, 12).
2. What are two possible interpretations of the phrase "in the midst of the people?" (37:12).
3. During the reign of Jehoiakim the princes were favorable to Jeremiah. How can you account for the change in attitude on the part of the princes in the reign of Zedekiah?
4. Why have a jail in the home of a scribe? (37:15).
5. Evaluate the attitude of king Zedekiah toward Jeremiah (37:2ff.; 37:17; 38:5; 38:14, 19, 24).
6. What excuses did Zedekiah give for not surrendering to the Chaldeans? (38:19).
7. Why did not Zedekiah wish the princes to know he had spoken to Jeremiah? (38:25). Did Jeremiah lie when questioned by the princes? (38:26, 27).

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TRAGEDY BEYOND TRAGEDY

40:1—45:5

Chapters 40-44 are a continuation of the narrative begun in chapter 37 which was interrupted briefly by the oracle to Ebed-melech in 39:15-18. The events take place in two geographical areas—Judah (40:1-43:7) and Egypt (43:8-44:30). Chapter 45 serves as an appendix to the entire second division of the Book of Jeremiah (chapters 26-45).

The introductory formula at the beginning of 40:1 would lead one to expect a prophetic utterance to follow. "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord." As a matter of fact no oracle or prophecy 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.¹ Others think that "the word" includes all the revelations given at various times during the critical period pictured in chapters 40-44.² Probably, however, the expression "the word" should be taken in a wider sense, including history as well as prophecy.³

I. EVENTS IN JUDAH 40:1—43:7

The events in Judah following the fall of Jerusalem center around the Babylonian appointed Gedaliah, his administration (40:1-12), his assassination (40:13—41:16) and the aftermath of his death (41:17—43:7). This section contains biographical narrative⁴ (40:1—42:6; 43:1-7) and one prose sermon (42:7-22).

1. Cheyne, *op. cit.*, II, 156.

2. Laetsch, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

3. Streane, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

4. With the exception of 40:1-6, a brief account of the release of Jeremiah, the life of the prophet is not mentioned in chapters 40 or 41. The term "biographical narrative" is still appropriate however in that these chapters are the necessary transition to the last chapter of the prophet's life, his forced immigration to Egypt.

A. The Preferential Treatment of Jeremiah 40:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, had let him go from Ramah, 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. (2) And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said unto him, the LORD your God spoke all this evil against this place; (3) and the LORD has brought about and accomplished all that He spoke. Because you have sinned against the LORD and you have not obeyed His voice, this thing has happened to you. And now behold, I have set you free this day from the chains which are upon your hands. If it is good in your eyes to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you; but if in your opinion it is not good for you to come to Babylon, then do not come. See, all the land is before you. Go wherever you think it good and proper to go. (5) 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. So the commander of the guard gave him provisions, and a present, and released him. (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.

COMMENTS

In chapter 39 Jeremiah was freed from prison and committed to the care of Gedaliah. He was taken to his home where he must have remained for some time. Evi-

dently while mingling with the people, Jeremiah was picked up by Babylonian soldiers under orders to fetter the Jews and prepare them 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. When Jerusalem was put to the torch the captives were removed to Ramah which appears to have been the processing point for deportation to Babylon (40:1).

Nebuzaradan, the commander of the occupational forces, found Jeremiah among the captives in Ramah. He quickly and apologetically removed the chains from the wrists of the prophet. How embarrassed Nebuzaradan must have been to discover that Jeremiah had been subjected to the indignities of being a captive when Nebuchadnezzar had expressly given orders that he be treated with kindness. This seems to be the first face to face meeting between Jeremiah and this powerful general. Nebuzaradan must have been quite accurately informed about the preaching of Jeremiah. He certainly speaks the very language of the prophet in verses 2 and 3. Most commentators regard these two verses as 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. At any rate there are several other examples in Scripture of amazingly perceptive language attributed to heathen leaders.¹

1. As for example the edicts of Cyrus (Ezra 1:3-4) and Darius (Ezra 6:1-12), of Hiram of Tyre (II Chronicles 2:11-12); Pharaoh Necho at the battle of Megiddo (II Chronicles 35:21) and Rabshakeh's boast outside the walls of Jerusalem (II Kings 18:25).

Upon freeing Jeremiah, Nebuzaradan allows the prophet to choose his own course of action. He may either go to Babylon with the other captives or remain in the homeland with the remnant of the people. If he should choose the former alternative, Nebuzaradan promises to personally see to his welfare. "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. So Jeremiah was given a supply of food, a present of some kind, and then was sent on his way. The prophet elected to follow the advice of Nebuzaradan and join 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 (I Samuel 7:5); Saul was publicly named king of Israel (I Samuel 10:17). Excavations have revealed no signs of a destruction of Mizpah in the sixth century B.C. It may be that Mizpah opened its gates to the Babylonians and as a result was made an administrative center by the conquerors.

B. The Program of Gedaliah 40:7-12

TRANSLATION

(7) 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 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, (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 Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite. These came along with their men. (9) And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan swore unto them and to their men, saying, Do not fear to serve the Chaldeans. Remain in the land and serve the king of Babylon and it will be well with you. (10) And as for me, Behold, I shall dwell in Mizpah to represent you before the Chaldeans. As for you, gather wine, summer fruit, and oil and put them in vessels and live in the cities which you have taken. (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, (12) all the Jews returned from all the places to which they had been driven; and they came to the land of Judah to Gedaliah at Mizpah. And they gathered wine and very much summer fruit.

COMMENTS

After the fall of Jerusalem, Judah became a province of the Babylonian empire. The Holy City, of course, had been completely destroyed, reduced to a heap of ashes. Jerusalem had been a thorn in the flesh of Nebuchadnezzar for so many years that he had unleashed his vengeance against her. But it was not the intention of Nebuchadnezzar to leave the whole land desolate. In case of future campaigns against Egypt it would be very advantageous to have cultivated land available in that area

which could furnish at least part of the provisions for his huge armies.

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 family¹ which through the years had supported the contention of Jeremiah 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. Under his leadership Nebuchadnezzar intended to create in Palestine a self-governing commonwealth under 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.

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 into which the remnant of the people was divided. Scattered throughout the land were small guerrilla bands which had somehow escaped capture and destruction by the Chaldean army. Once the main body of foreign troops withdrew, these guerrilla units

1. Gedaliah'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 (II Kings 22:8).

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 are Ishmael who later turned traitor and murdered Gedaliah; 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 which was located near Bethlehem; and Jezaniah, the son of the Maachathite.¹ With the cooperation of these men Gedaliah hoped to form a central government which would be adequate to the needs of the people during these dark days.

Gedaliah honestly and forthrightly presented his program to these captains and urged them to use their influence to secure peace throughout the land. First he assured these 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. Secondly, Gedaliah calls upon these leaders and their followers to dwell peacefully in the land and render service to the king of Babylon. If they continue to do this he promises them a life of peace and tranquility (40:9). Gedaliah assures them that he would stay at Mizpah and handle the affairs of government.² He would act as liaison between Judeans and the Chaldean officials who might appear from time to time in the land. Finally, he urges the people to get busy and gather the harvest for the coming winter (40:10).

News of Gedaliah's appointment and the progress he had made in reorganizing the remnant spread far and wide. Many homesick Jews, who had fled across the

1. The name Jaazaniah was found on a seal discovered at what is thought to be ancient Mizpah in 1932.

2. The verb in 10a translated "serve" is not the same verb that is used in verse 9. The verb here literally means "stand before" and means to be the minister of another and look after his interests.

Jordan some months earlier when hostilities had broken out in Palestine, now began to filter back to their native land. From Moab, Ammon and Edom as well as other lands they came. Catching the spirit of the reorganized community they joined in harvesting the land. After reaping an abundant harvest the remnant settled down in their homeland (40:11, 12). 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.

C. The Plot of Ishmael 40:13—41:16

The peace and tranquility of the tiny remnant in Palestine was soon shattered. Ishmael, a member of the royal family, began plotting behind the scenes to assassinate Gedaliah. 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 and hated Gedaliah for collaborating with the Chaldeans. Whatever the explanation for the dastardly deed which 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 and decided that Gedaliah was standing in the way. Envy, jealousy and greed must surely have been the factors which drove Baalis and Ishmael into their unholy alliance.

1. *The plot revealed* (40:13-16)

TRANSLATION

(13) Then Johanan the son of Kareah and all the officers of the army which was in the field came unto Gedaliah at Mizpah. (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. (15) So Jonathan 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 and no man will know of it. 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? (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.

COMMENTS

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 (40:13, 14). 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 and foolish 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 and that it would be best to disregard such malicious slander. But Johanan knew that the death of Gedaliah would mean disaster for the tiny remnant. He was convinced that the reports concerning Ishmael were true. Privately he pressed the matter with the governor, offering to immediately slay Ishmael if Gedaliah so desired. He underscored the point that if Gedaliah were slain the Jewish remnant in Palestine would be scattered and destroyed (40:15). If Gedaliah had merely been putting up a brave front before there is no reason

for him to do so now. He ordered that no action be taken against Ishmael and he accuses Johanan of making false accusations against a fellow officer (40:16). While of course 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.

2. *The plot executed* (41:1-3)

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, who was of royal descent, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam accompanied by ten men who were also royal princes. And they ate bread there together in Mizpah. (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. (3) Ishmael also smote all the Jews who were with Gedaliah in Mizpah, the Chaldeans who were found there, and all the soldiers.

COMMENTS

It was in the seventh month that 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 which lasted a few years. The Chaldean armies which were to avenge the death of governor Gedaliah arrived in Judah

in 582 B.C. (Jeremiah 52:30). If Gedaliah died in the seventh month of 587 B.C., 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.

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 (41:1). During the course of the meal, in flagrant violation of the rules of oriental hospitality, the assassins suddenly rose up and slew Gedaliah (41:2). In the ensuing panic these dedicated extremists were also successful in slaying all the Jews present in the banquet hall and even the Chaldean bodyguard (41:3). What a dastardly deed! In the ancient Near East when a man accepted an invitation to dine with another the host was honorbound to protect his guests from all harm and the guests were expected to reciprocate in good faith.¹ Given these circumstances Gedaliah was actually defenseless. Josephus² 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 (Zechariah 7:5; 8:19).

3. *The massacre of the pilgrims* (41:4-9)

TRANSLATION

(4) And it came to pass on the day after the murder of Gedaliah, while no man yet knew of it, (5) eighty men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria who had shaved their beards, torn their garments, and cut themselves, came with offerings and incense in their hand to present at the house of the LORD. (6) And

1. Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

2. *Antiquities* X. 9.

Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them weeping as he went. (7) And when he reached them he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. (7) And when they came into the midst of the city Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them and cast them into the cistern, he and the men who were with him. (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. (9) Now the cistern into which Ishmael threw all the bodies of the men he had slain in addition to Gedaliah is the one which 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.

COMMENTS

For two days Ishmael and his brigands controlled the town of Mizpah. No one was allowed to leave the town and therefore no one outside Mizpah knew that the crime had been committed (41:4). The women, children and old men left in Mizpah were no match for the armed soldiers of Ishmael though they were few in number. 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 group of eighty pilgrims approached the town of Mizpah on their way to offer sacrifices at the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem. These men were pious Israelites living in the former territory of the Northern Kingdom. Though the Temple had been destroyed and Jerusalem was in ruins these faithful few continued to observe the appointed festivals of

the law of Moses. However, the festivals were no longer occasions for joy but for lamentation. The shaved beards, torn clothes and cut bodies are signs of the most intense mourning (41:5).

Cunning Ishmael, shedding crocodile tears as though he too were sharing in the lamentation of the hour, went out to meet the pilgrims. He lured them into the town of Mizpah with the appeal that they should salute Gedaliah the governor of the land while they were in the vicinity (41:6). As the unsuspecting pilgrims entered the town, Ishmael's gang pounced upon them and murdered seventy of these harmless and helpless people. The corpses of the unfortunate victims were thrown into an old cistern 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 (41:9).¹ Some fifty such cisterns have been found at the ancient site of Mizpah. It is impossible, of course, to identify the one which was made by Asa.

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 (41:8). Probably these goods were stored away in underground cisterns on their fields. The bribe was sufficient and Ishmael spared the lives of these men. Perhaps this reveals Ishmael's motive in the massacre. He is seeking supplies and booty for his band of robbers and for the king of Ammon, who had sponsored the enterprise.

4. *The deliverance of the hostages* (41:10-16)

TRANSLATION

(10) Then Ishmael took captive the rest of the

1. Cf. I Kings 15:22; II Chronicles 16:6. Apparently Gedaliah's body was also in this cistern for verse nine states that their bodies were "by the side of Gedaliah" (ASV). The KJV wrongly translates here "because of Gedaliah" and creates the false impression that the pilgrims died because of some connection to Gedaliah.

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. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out with the intention of crossing over unto the Ammonites. (11) And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the officers of the forces which were with him heard all the terrible things that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done. (12) And he took all the men and set out with the intention of fighting with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah; and they caught up with him at the great pool which was in Gibeon. (13) And when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the officers of the forces which were with him, they rejoiced. (14) And all the people which Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned and went back to Johanan the son of Kareah. (15) But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan the son of Kareah with eight men and went to the Ammonites. (16) Then Johanan the son of Kareah and all the officers of the forces which 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 which he brought from Gibeon.

COMMENTS

After the slaughter of the Israelite pilgrims Ishmael and his men took captive the entire population of Mizpah. Among the captives were "the daughters of the king," i.e., princesses of the royal house whom Nebuchadnezzar had permitted to remain in Judah. 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? In view of the detail in which the escapades of Ishmael are recounted, one cannot help but wonder if Jeremiah and Baruch were among the Mizpah captives. This, of course, must remain a matter of speculation.

It was not long before the Mizpah massacre was discovered. When Johanan and the other captives heard what had happened they took decisive action (41:11). They immediately gathered together their fighting men and set out in pursuit of the brigands. The force of Johanan caught up with Ishmael at the great waters near Gibeon¹ three miles southwest of Mizpah (41:12). When the frightened captives saw the forces of Johanan approaching they took new heart, broke ranks and ran in the direction of their deliverers (41:13, 14). Ishmael and eight of his men were successful in escaping from Johanan, but two of the murderers apparently were caught and slain (41:15).

D. The Plight of the Remnant 41:17—43:7

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. This section of the book moves rapidly through four stages: (1) the reasoning of the people (41:17, 18); (2) the request to the prophet (42:1-6); (3) the response

1. The pool is mentioned in II Samuel 2:13 as the place of the battle between Abner and Joab.

of the Lord (42:7-22); and (4) the rashness of the leaders (43:1-7).

1. *The reasoning of the people* (41:17-18)

TRANSLATION

(17) And setting out they lodged at Gerut-Chimham near Bethlehem with the purpose of going on to Egypt. (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.

COMMENTS

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 and 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. 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 Chimham.¹ The Hebrew word translated "habitation" (*geruth*) occurs only here. Along major thoroughfares in antiquity benevolent souls would erect rude and simple shelters for the benefit of travelers.² It

1. Chimham was a son of Barzillai (II Samuel 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 Chimham in gratitude for what his father had done.

2. Streane, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

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. 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.

2. *The request of the prophet* (42:1-6)

TRANSLATION

(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 (2) and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, May our petition, we beg you, be accepted before you. Pray on our behalf unto the LORD your God on behalf of all this remnant—for we are only a few left from many, as you can observe with your own eyes—(3) that the LORD your God may declare to us the way which we should go and the thing we should do. (4) And Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard. Behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words. And it shall come to pass that any word which the LORD shall answer you, I will relate to you. I will not withhold from you a thing. (5) And they said unto Jeremiah, May the LORD be a true and faithful witness between us if we do not act in accordance with every word which the LORD your God shall send you concerning us. (6) Whether it be good or bad we will hearken to the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you in order that it may be well with us, because we obey the LORD our God.

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 Chimham it would seem reasonable to assume that he had been among the captives led away by Ishmael.¹ At any rate Jeremiah now comes to the fore again as the spiritual counselor of the people. The entire group of fugitives assembled before the prophet in order to receive an oracle from the Lord. Johanan and Jezaniah² acted as spokesmen for the group (42:1). Very courteously they made their request. They desire that God might direct their path (42:2).

Jeremiah listened to the well-worded plea of the leaders with sympathetic ears. He still loved his people dearly and so agrees to fulfill their request. Jeremiah knew, however, 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 and they assumed that this decision would be indorsed and confirmed by the Lord. After all, what other alternative was there? Anticipating that God would not approve of their plan, Jeremiah warns the people that he will speak only that which the Lord reveals. He will not alter the word of God to suit the present circumstances. He would not hold back the truth (42:4). Somewhat over enthusiastically the people take a vow that they will act in accordance with the word of God (42:5, 6). 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.

1. 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.

2. Another Jezaniah is mentioned in 40:8.

3. *The response of the Lord* (42:7-22)

TRANSLATION

(7) And it came to pass at the end of ten days that the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah. (8) And he called Johanan the son of Kareah, the officers of the forces which were with him, and all the people small and great, (9) and said unto them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him: (10) If you will continue to dwell in this land then I will build you up; and not tear you down; I will plant you and not pluck you up; for I am grieved concerning the calamity which I brought upon you. (11) Do not fear the king of Babylon whom you fear. Do not fear him (oracle of the LORD), for I am with you to deliver you and to save you from his hand. (12) I will extend mercies to you so he will show mercy to you and cause you to return unto your land. (13) But if you say, We will not dwell in this land, thereby disobeying the LORD your God, (14) 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: (15) Now therefore hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah! Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: If you firmly set your faces to go to Egypt and you go to sojourn there, (16) then the sword which you fear shall catch up with you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine which you dread shall hang on to you in Egypt, and there you shall die! (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 shall remain or escape from the calamity which I will bring against them. (18)

For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: As My wrath and My anger was poured out against the inhabitants of Jerusalem, thus shall My wrath be poured out against you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an imprecation, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach; and you will never again see this place. (19) The LORD has spoken concerning the remnant of Judah, Do not go to Egypt. Be certain of this: I have testified against you this day. (20) You made a fatal mistake when you sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray on our behalf unto the LORD our God and whatever the LORD our God shall say, tell us that and we shall do it. (21) Now I have told you this day, but you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God in regard to anything for which He sent me unto you. (22) And now be certain of this: By the sword, famine, and pestilence you shall die in the place where you wish to go to sojourn!

COMMENTS

Jeremiah waited ten days before the Lord clearly made known His will to the mind of the prophet. It seems as though God was preparing 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 they 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. Jeremiah immediately called for the entire encampment to hear God's word. The response of the Lord contains two parts: the way of peace (42:10-12), and the way to punishment (42:13-18). To this is added a word of exhortation by Jeremiah (42:19-22).

a) *The way of peace* (42:10-12). The word of the Lord came as a complete shock to the assembled remnant. It was God's will that they remain in Judah! If they chose to remain in the land, God would build them up i.e., cause them to prosper. God was not angry with them. Quite the contrary. The Lord declares: "I repent Me of the evil that I have done unto you" (42:10). This is not a confession of mistake or of remorse for the disasters which He has brought upon them. Rather it means that His attitude and conduct toward His people now has changed. He is not hostile toward them any longer. Human reason would indicate that they flee to Egypt and place themselves under the protection of Pharaoh. To remain in the land would be an act of faith.

After the general promises of peace and prosperity, the Lord addressed Himself to the specific fears of the community. Their anxiety concerning the reaction of Nebuchadnezzar to the death of his governor were groundless. God was with them and would deliver them out of the hand of the Chaldean king (42:11) and the king whom they feared would actually show mercy to them (42:12).¹ How often in the life of a Christian the worst fears prove to be ungrounded.

b) *The way of punishment* (42:13-18). 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 flight to Egypt they would experience the punishment of God. The choice was up to them. God lets man choose his destiny.

Anticipating the reaction to the people to the commandment of God to remain in the land Jeremiah undercuts the major argument of the Egypt-bound remnant. In Egypt the people imagined that they would enjoy

1. With the change of only one vowel in the Hebrew the phrase "cause you to return" can be read "cause you to dwell." This reading is preferable in view of the circumstances here.

peace and plenty. They would escape, so they thought, the ravishes of war (42:14). Not so, said Jeremiah. The sword will follow you to Egypt and there you will experience all the horrors of war (42:16). There you will die of the sword, famine, and pestilence (42:17). 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 of God. They would become an object of execration and horror; they would be accursed and derided. They would never again see their homeland (42:18).

c) *The prophetic exhortation* (42:19-22). 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. "This is not my personal opinion; the Lord has spoken concerning you O remnant. You surely know that I have admonished or testified against you this day (42:19). Your guilt is all the more serious¹ in that you sent me unto the Lord to inquire concerning His will and you pledged yourselves to submit to that will (42:20, 21)." This disobedience had sealed their own death warrant. Unbelief does not alter the word of God. "Be absolutely sure of this one thing," says the prophet: "If you persist in your manifest intentions to go to Egypt you shall die of the sword, famine, and the pestilence (42:22)."

4. *The rashness of the leaders* (43:1-7)

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass after Jeremiah finished speaking unto all the people all the words of the

1. "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.

LORD their God which the LORD their God sent him, even all these words, (2) that Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men began saying unto Jeremiah, You are speaking falsehood! The LORD our God did not send you to say, Do not go to Egypt to sojourn there. (3) But Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us in order to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans that they might slay us or take us captive to Babylon. (4) And Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the officers of the forces, and all the people would not obey the voice of the LORD to dwell in the land of Judah. (5) And Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the officers of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah who had returned from all the nations to which the LORD 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 which Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah; (7) and they went to the land of Egypt for they would not obey the voice of the LORD. And they came to Tahpanhes,

COMMENTS

While the people heard the prophet, it was obvious that the word of God was not getting through to them. Scarcely had he finished speaking when opposition arose. A certain Azariah, most likely a brother of Jezaniah (42:1),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 who have the audacity to speak out against

1. 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 Hoshaiah.

God and question His word. "You are a liar!" they yelled at the prophet. "God did not send you to say, 'Do not go down to Egypt!'" They did not attempt to answer Jeremiah's arguments; instead they challenge his integrity and veracity. They point the finger of accusation at Baruch and hurl a groundless but vicious charge at the faithful scribe: "Baruch has set you against us in order to give us into the hands of the Chaldeans" (43:3). Just what the basis of this violent outburst against Baruch was is not made clear. Defiant disobedience must be rationalized and Baruch was made the scapegoat. Perhaps he was in the employ of the Chaldeans in some capacity. At any rate the attack made against him was patently absurd. Jeremiah does not even bother to try to dissuade the crowd, which 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.

Having determined to disobey the commandment of God, Johanan instructed the people to hastily make preparation for the flight to Egypt. Too much time had already been wasted waiting on Jeremiah to deliver his oracle. They could feel, so they thought, Nebuchadnezzar breathing down their neck. Therefore all the men, women, children, and the king's daughters are told to pack their meager belongings for the trip southward. 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 since 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.

One of the saddest verses in the whole book of Jeremiah is 43:7. "So they come into the land of Egypt; for they obeyed not the voice of the Lord; thus they came

even to Tahpanhes." 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. The remnant ended their flight at Tahpanhes (modern Daphne), a fortress city just inside the Egyptian border.

II. EVENTS IN THE LAND OF EGYPT

43:8—44:30

It is impossible to determine precisely what year the Jews immigrated to Egypt. The year 583 or 582 B.C. 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 B.C. to punish the Jews for the death of Gedaliah. Therefore it would seem appropriate to assume that the flight to Egypt had occurred shortly before the coming of the Chaldeans. The present section contains the last recorded oracle of Jeremiah. That oracle was delivered *before* the death of Pharaoh Hophra in 569 B.C. Therefore, 43:8-44:30 covers at the maximum a period of thirteen years, from 583 to 570 B.C. However, the likelihood is that the actual number of years covered here is less than half the maximum figure.

A. A Prophetic Announcement 43:8-13

TRANSLATION

(8) And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, (9) Take in your hand large stones and hide them in the mortar in the brick pavement which is at the entrance of the house of Pharaoh in Tahpanhes in the presence of the men

of Judah. (10) Then say unto them, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to send and take Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, My servant, that I may set up his throne over these stones which I have hidden; and he shall stretch out his canopy over them. (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. (12) And I will kindle a fire in the house of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them or carry them away captive. He will wrap himself in the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps his garment about him; and he shall go out from that place unmolested. (13) And he shall break down the images of Bethshemesh which is in the land of Egypt and he will burn the houses of the gods of Egypt.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah did not cease from his prophetic activity in the land of Egypt. Indeed the final three oracles of his ministry were delivered on Egyptian soil. In the first of these Jeremiah elaborates upon the warning which he made to the remnant at their encampment near Bethlehem. He boldly predicts that Nebuchadnezzar would attempt to conquer Egypt and the remnant would greatly suffer in the ensuing war.

1. *Announcement of coming invasion (43:8-10)*

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah at Tahpanhes 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 there. 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.

Shortly after the Jews arrived in Tahpanhes Jeremiah delivered his first oracle to them (43:8). No doubt the exiles would be compelled to halt here in order to secure permission from the Egyptian government to sojourn in their land. As on so many occasions in his ministry Jeremiah chose to dramatize his message. Now God instructed him to "take great stones . . . and hide them in the mortar in the brickwork, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes" (43:9). "Pharaoh's house" is not the royal palace—that was located at Sais—but a government building of some sort which Pharaoh used as his residence when in Tahpanhes. The "brickwork" (ASV) is most likely the brick pavement at the entrance of this royal residence. Sir Flinders Petrie discovered a large brick platform at the main entrance of the fortress in Tahpanhes. This platform may well 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 and therefore have tolerated his actions. But this much is certain: The men of Judah were present to observe the prophet performing this strange act. When Jeremiah had finished burying the stones beneath the brickwork he rose to make a startling announcement. He predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would come to Egypt and place his throne on the very spot where the stones were hidden (43:10). Here on this very spot the Great King

would spread his royal canopy (43:10).¹ This is probably not the tent where the king would reside but an awning or covering borne by attendants designed to protect the monarch from the rays of the sun.

2. *Consequences of the coming invasion* (43:11-13)

The invasion of Nebuchadnezzar would have terrible consequences for the inhabitants of Egypt and for the Jews who were seeking refuge there. Some would die of deadly wounds suffered in battle, others from famine which would result when cities were besieged. Still others would be carried away into captivity or given over to the sword of the executioner (43:11).

Nebuchadnezzar would have no respect for the gods of Egypt. He would put the torch to the temples of the land and carry their images away to Babylon as trophies of war. He will break the images of Beth-shemesh as well. The word translated here "images" is the same word rendered "pillar" in Isaiah 19:19. In both of these passages the word probably refers to the obelisk. "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 Tahpanhes and about ten miles northeast of modern Cairo. A famous temple dedicated to the sun was located here which 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 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.

Jeremiah's prediction of a Chaldean invasion of

1. The Hebrew word occurs only here and is of uncertain meaning. Though "canopy" seems to be the best translation, some have suggested "carpet" as the best translation.

Egypt were fulfilled in a marvelous way. The Jewish historian Josephus tells of an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar five years after the fall of Jerusalem. In this invasion the king of Egypt was killed and the Jews in Egypt carried away captive to Babylonia.¹ Many scholars questioned the accuracy of the Josephus account until a fragmentary inscription² from the archives of Nebuchadnezzar was discovered which told of a Chaldean invasion of Egypt. To be sure this invasion did not occur until the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, nineteen years after the fall of Jerusalem (i.e., 568 B.C.). 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 B.C.) 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 and therefore it may be regarded as fulfilled by one or both of the invasions mentioned above.

B. A Prophetic Admonition 44:1-19

Nothing is more inspiring than to see an old soldier of God faithful until death on the battlefield for the Lord. Chapter 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. The present paragraph contains his warning to remnant in Egypt (44:1-14) and the rejection of that warning by the incorrigible people (44:15-19).

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, X. 9. 7.

2. See *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, *op. cit.*, p. 308. The tablet, now in the British Museum, has unfortunately been badly damaged.

1. *The warning presented* (44:1-14)

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which 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, (2) Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You have seen all the calamity which I brought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah. Behold, they are a desolation this day and there is no inhabitant in them (3) because of their evil which they committed in order to provoke Me—sacrificing to and serving other gods which neither they, nor you, nor your fathers knew. (4) I earnestly and persistently sent unto you all of My servants the prophets, saying, Please do not this abominable thing which I hate. (5) But they did not obey or listen to turn from their evil that they no longer offer sacrifice to other gods. (6) And My wrath and My anger was poured out upon them and it burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, and they became a waste and a desolation as they are this day. (7) And now thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel: Why are you placing your lives in jeopardy by continuing to do this great evil which 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? (8) Why do you provoke Me by the works of your hands—offering sacrifice to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to sojourn—in order to cut yourselves off that you might be a curse and a reproach among the nations of the earth. (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, which was done in

the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? (10) To this day they have not humbled themselves nor feared nor walked in My law and My statutes which I have set before you and before your fathers. (11) Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts the God of Israel: Behold, I will set My face against you for evil even to cut off all of Judah. (12) And I will take the remnant of Judah which have set their faces to come to the land of Egypt to sojourn, and they shall all perish. In the land of Egypt they shall fall by the sword or perish in the famine; from the least even to the greatest they shall die by sword and famine; and they shall become a imprecation, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach. (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. (14) Of the remnant of Judah which 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 shall not return except a few who might escape.

COMMENTS

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 paths of covenant faithfulness to the Lord. But Jeremiah had failed to stem the tide of national apostasy. Jerusalem was made to drink of the bitter cup of God's wrath in 587 B.C. Now the remnant which had survived that disaster by God's grace have turned from Him to serve gods of their own making. It is with a heavy burden upon his 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 Tahpanhes, where Jeremiah seems to have resided, Jews had settled at Migdol, Noph, and the country of Pathros (44:1). 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 means "land of the south" and 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 Tahpanhes was the site of the gathering.¹ This may have been the last opportunity that Jeremiah had to address the entire remnant which had fled to Egypt.

The warning of the prophet passes through three distinct phases. First he offers to these Jews an explanation of the past calamity which has befallen the nation (44:1-6). Then he expostulates with them concerning their present sin (44:7-10). Finally he declares that judgment will yet befall them even in Egypt (44:11-14).

a) *Explanation of past calamity* (44:1-6). As was his usual custom Jeremiah turned first to history. He reminds his hearers that Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were uninhabited and in ruins (44:2). 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 (44:3). 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; but still they persisted in this wickedness (44:5). Because of this stubborn refusal to turn from the path of idolatry, the

1. On the basis of verse 15 some suggest that the festival was held in Pathros or Upper Egypt.

anger and fury of God was poured out upon the cities of Judah (44:6). The rubble and ruins of those once proud cities should serve for all time as a warning of the consequences of sin and apostasy—death, destruction, and desolation.

b) Expostulation concerning present sin (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 two questions he addresses to the remnant in this paragraph. "Why do you continue to commit¹ this great evil against yourselves?"² (44:7). Persistence in this violation of the most elemental commandment of the word of God will result in national suicide. If it continues every man, woman, child and infant of Judah will be cut off in the wrath of God (44:7). The nation will become an object of cursing and a reproach among all the nations of the earth (44:8). "Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers?" he asks, and then, using the technique of emphasis by enumeration, he adds "and the wickedness of your kings . . . and their wives . . . and your own wickedness and of your wives"? (44:9). Surely they had not so soon forgotten that the wages of sin is death! But alas it is true. They have 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 (44:10).

c) Declaration of future judgment (44:11-14). The maxim "They who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it" is vividly illustrated in verses 11-14. God

1. A Hebrew participle implies continuous action.

2. Against your souls (KJV) is but another way of saying in Hebrew "against yourselves."

declares that He will set His face against His people. All Judah will be cut off (44:11). 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 verse twelve spells out the disaster: they shall fall, they shall die, they shall be consumed. What irony! They fled to Egypt in order to escape bloodshed, privation, carnage, and exile. But these Jews who had stubbornly set their will against that of their God and had emigrated to Egypt would meet with war and famine, destruction and death in that land. Whatever imagined horrors drove them from their homeland following the death of Gedaliah would overtake them in reality. "From the least to the greatest," none would escape the terrible onslaught. Though the remnant in Egypt would die, their memory would live on in the minds of men for use in expressions of astonishment, execration, cursings, and reproach (44:12). 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 (44:13). None would escape the judgment in order that they might return to Judah even if they might have a desire so to do.

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 but such as shall 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, to jar and hopefully thereby to lead these people to repentance.

2. *The warning rejected* (44:15-19)

TRANSLATION

(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, (16) As regards the word which you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken to you. (17) On the contrary we will continue to do everything which we have vowed to do—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. (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. (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 libations to her?

COMMENTS

Jeremiah's ministry ended on the same note with which it began. The people rejected the word of God which he brought to them. God had warned him at the outset, "they shall fight against you but they shall 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 tender hearted and timid youth had indeed become the iron pillar, fenced

city and brazen wall that God had predicted (1:18). With unflinching courage he stands up in the midst of that pagan festival to manfully preach the word. Resentment in the faces of that apostate audience is quite obvious as Jeremiah strikes at them with the whiplash of divine rebuke. That resentment boils over into violent anger when Jeremiah mentions the guilt of the women of Judah. 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.

a) *Their resoluteness in idolatry* (44:15-17a). The defiant reply of the accused people is not clothed in diplomatic camouflage. They mince no words. "As for the word that you have spoken unto us in the name of the Lord," they sarcastically say, "We will not hearken unto you" (44:16). They do not accuse Jeremiah of speaking falsely in the name of the Lord as they had charged him at Bethlehem (43:2, 3). Now they do not even bother to argue the point. They could not care less what the God of Jeremiah expected or demanded of them. Even if the word of the prophet does come from the Lord, they will not receive it. Rather they declare "we will certainly do whatsoever thing goes forth out of our own mouth." They are here 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.¹

b) *Their rationalization of idolatry* (44:17b-19). In attempting to rationalize their idolatry the assembly offers three arguments. First they argue that the worship of

1. Further evidence of the existence of the Ishtar cult in Egypt is provided by an Aramaic papyrus dating from the fifth century B.C. found at Hermopolis in which the temple of the "queen of heaven" is explicitly mentioned. *Illustrated World of the Bible*, op. cit., III, 102.

the queen of heaven is 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 by so many be wrong?

In the second place, the assembly argues that the worship of the queen of heaven is advantageous to the nation. "When we faithfully worshiped this goddess all was well; but from the day we ceased to worship her we experienced one calamity and disaster after another" (44:18). Rather than thanking the Lord for the blessings He had poured out upon them they attributed their prosperity to their false gods. On the contrary all of the misfortune which had befallen the nation from the death of Josiah to the present time they blamed upon those prophets and leaders who had made a valliant effort to stamp out idolatry in the land. The people were forced to cease the open worship of the queen of heaven during the reformations of king Josiah. But no sooner had the reform under Josiah commenced then one calamity after another struck the nation culminating finally 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.

Now history can be read in different ways. Jeremiah had one interpretation for the events of the past few years while the people had an altogether different one. They interpreted the decline and fall of their nation as being due to the exclusive worship of the Lord and the neglect of other deities who might have been able to save them. On the other hand the prophet regards the disasters which had befallen his people as due to the gradual degradation of the people through idolatry practiced in the days of Manasseh and Amon and renewed subsequent to the death of Josiah. Apart from the fact that Jeremiah was guided

by the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the significance of past events, any objective analysis of the history of Judah in her last years must vindicate the prophet's interpretation of those events. Had the nation heeded his advice and followed his direction the course of history would have been altered.

Boiled down to its simplest terms, this second 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. Like so many people today those Jews were searching for a religion which would give them the maximum amount of blessing for the minimum amount of service.

The third argument is added by the women who were present.¹ "Whatever acts of worship were performed by us," say the women, "were done with the consent of our husbands." In other words, since we have the approval of our husbands for this worship you have no right, Jeremiah, to interfere with it. Thus the whole community is involved in this final rejection of the Lord as the sole deity of Israel.

C. A Prophetic Affirmation 44:20-30

TRANSLATION

(20) Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, the women and all the people who had answered him, (21) Did not the LORD remember and bring to mind the incense which 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? (22) The LORD was no longer able to bear your evil deeds and the abominations which

1. Some think that the entire reply recorded here was framed by the women.

you committed and so your land became a desolation, an astonishment, and a curse without inhabitant as it is today. (23) Because you offered incense and sinned against the LORD and did not obey the voice of the LORD and did not walk in His law, statutes, and testimonies therefore this present calamity has come upon you. (24) And Jeremiah said unto all the people and all the women, Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah which is in the land of Egypt! (25) Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You have made pledges with your mouths and carried them out with your hands, saying, We will certainly perform our vows which we have made to offer incense to the queen of heaven and pour libations to her. By all means carry out your vows! By all means perform your vows! (26) Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who are living in the land of Egypt: I have sworn by My great name, says the LORD, 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 Lord GOD lives! (27) Behold, I am watching over you for misfortune, and not for well-being; and every man of Judah who is in the land of Egypt shall perish by the sword and famine until they are annihilated. (28) Those who escape the sword to return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah shall be few in number and all the remnant of Judah who have come to the land of Egypt to sojourn shall know whose word shall be fulfilled, theirs or mine. (29) And this shall be the sign to you (oracle of the LORD) that I am about to bring punishment upon you in this place, in order that you might know that My words shall surely be fulfilled against you for misfortune. (30) Thus says the LORD: 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 seeking his life.

COMMENTS

The last recorded words of Jeremiah come in response to the brazen remarks of the remnant in Egypt. Jeremiah does not wilt under pressure nor does he run from controversy. He stands 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 takes careful pains to include them in his closing remarks (vv. 20, 24-25). Stooped by age and weakened by infirmity, the old warrior can 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.

The final recorded message of Jeremiah contains a rebuttal to the apostates (44:20-23); emphasizes punishment for the apostates (44:24-28); and sets forth a sign for the apostates (44:29-30).

1. *Rebuttal to the apostates* (44:20-23)

Implicit in the preceding remarks of the assembly was the contention that the Lord had forgotten them. Because God did not immediately punish them for their idolatry back in the days of Manasseh did not mean that He had failed to take note of their sin. God did remember their iniquity, Jeremiah affirms (44:21). Because of His longsuffering and patience He 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 and that is why that land is desolation, an astonishment and a curse without inhabitant this very day

(44:22). It is because of your idolatry and flagrant disobedience to the word of God that you are in your present condition (44:23).

2. *Punishment of the apostates* (44:24-28)

The Jews in Egypt served their idols with greater loyalty than they had ever shown for the service of the Lord. With bitter sarcasm Jeremiah declares: "You have made vows to worship the queen of heaven. Very well, then, fulfill your vows!" (44:25). Then Jeremiah, abandoning his sarcastic tone, becomes deadly serious. "But if you perform those vows you have made your choice of deities. You have committed the ultimate rebellion and therefore you will experience the ultimate punishment." Jeremiah holds out two threats. First, God will withdraw His name from the lips of His people (44:26). At least three different views have been taken as to the meaning of these words. Some 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 the Lord no longer regards Himself as their covenant God and therefore they have lost the right of calling upon His name. Still another view is that God punishes their apostasy by allowing them to sink into a state of secularism which does not even think of God. Of these interpretations the second is decidedly the best.

In the second threat God assures the remnant in Egypt that He will watch over them for evil and not for good (44:27). What a dreadful thought! Just as God watches over His word to fulfill it (1:12), so now He is watching over His people to see that they are punished for their apostasy. None of their pagan deities or religious rites will be able to divert the disaster which will befall them. All the Jews who live in the land of Egypt will die by the famine and the sword (44:27).

Just as in verse 14 of this chapter, the assertion that all the Jews in Egypt would perish is here immediately qualified. A tiny remnant shall escape the general slaughter in Egypt and shall return to the land of Judah (44:28). 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. He is pleading with them to turn to the Lord. He can offer no hope to the Egyptian community of Jews as a whole, but he can hold out some hope to those who might turn in faith to the Lord. That is exactly what he seems to be doing in verse 28.

3. *A sign for the apostates* (44:29-30)

Lest any of his hearers think that the message he has delivered originated in his own imagination Jeremiah offered the audience a sign which would confirm the prophetic character of his dire threats. God would 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 (44:30). The Greek historian Herodotus¹ relates that Hophra was captured by Amasis, the succeeding Pharaoh, who had him strangled to death after ten years of captivity (about 560 B.C.). 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.

III. A PERSONAL NOTE TO BARUCH 45:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which Jeremiah the prophet spoke

1. Herodotus, II, 161, 169.

unto Baruch the son of Neriah when he wrote these words in a book from the mouth of Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: (2) Thus says the LORD the God of Israel concerning you Baruch: (3) You have said, Woe is me now! for the LORD has added grief to my hurt. I am weary with my sighing and I cannot find rest. (4) Thus you shall say unto him, Thus says the LORD: 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. (5) 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 the LORD); but I will give you your life as spoil wherever you shall go.

COMMENTS

Chapter 45 dates back to the fourth year of Jehoiakim.¹ That was the 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 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.

Chronologically chapter 45 would have fitted much better after 36:8 or at least at the conclusion of that chapter. 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 chapter here for a definite purpose. Perhaps this chapter serves as his 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

1. This is the third time the fourth year of Jehoiakim has been mentioned (cf. 25:1, 36:1).

Book of Jeremiah he is content to remain in the background and simply record the message of his master. Whatever the reason for the placement of chapter 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.

After an introductory word (45:1) chapter forty-five contains a gentle rebuke (45:2-4) and a gracious promise (45:5).

A. A Gentle Rebuke 45:2-4

The gentle rebuke contained in verses 2-4 is in the form of a vivid contrast. In verse 3 the self-pity of Baruch is indicated. In contrast to this, in verse 4, the genuine and justifiable grief of God is indicated.

1. *The self-pity of Baruch* (45:3)

Baruch had been complaining. He was disturbed, weary and tired. "Woe is me now! for the Lord has added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest" (45:3). There is no indication as to why Baruch felt this way. But since the incident is associated with the writing of the scroll there is probably some relationship between Baruch's state of mind and what he had just written. Perhaps Baruch had become discouraged and 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.

Added to the burden which future prospects laid upon his heart was his present predicament. 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 that one heartache, disappointment and sorrow had been added to another. The burden 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. "Why?" he would ask. "Why must this be my lot?" 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 587 B.C. Baruch was to suffer much as the companion and scribe of the weeping prophet.

2. *The genuine grief of God* (45:4)

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. Nor does God 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 chapter is that God too experiences pain. One can sense the pathos in the words "What I Myself built I am about to demolish." Perhaps here in Jeremiah 45 is the antidote to the self-pity of those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord today. 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 impressed upon the mind. When the modern Baruch comes to mentally grasp the depth of divine agony over lost mankind he must come to realize how trivial and superficial are the circumstances which cause him to feel discouraged and despondent. There are many Baruchs in the Bible. Elijah sat for a time under his Juniper tree (I Kings 19:4); Jonah became terribly despondent over the loss of a shade-giving plant. Some of the Psalmists are in this category and 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. A Gracious Promise 45:5

Having pointed out to Baruch His own genuine grief, the Lord seems to chide this scribe by saying "And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not!" What were these 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 plan and purposes of God. Baruch should have been praying "Not my will but Thine 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 thinking and hopeful dreams to the contrary, the judgment upon all flesh is coming. God's purpose will be carried out regardless of who it affects.

There is a note of consolation for Baruch in this verse. In the day of destruction and death God promises, "I will give you your life for a prey." This expression, which occurs several times in Jeremiah,¹ probably originated in the army. Victorious soldiers customarily brought home the booty they had seized. A soldier returning after a defeat when asked where his share of the booty was might well have replied that his life was all the "booty" that he could bring away.² Baruch would escape from the forthcoming conflagrations with his life. That would 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 would spare him for the task of being the secretary of a prophet.

That 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 and now he was being poured into a new mold. He was able to triumph over despondency and alter 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 which record the events subsequent

1. Jeremiah 21:9; 38:2; 39:18.

2. Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

to 604 B.C. there is never any hint that Baruch ever faltered again.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I. Facts to Master

1. The choice which the Chaldeans gave to Jeremiah at Riblah (40:4).
2. The man the Chaldeans appointed governor (40:5).
3. The headquarters of Gedaliah and the new home of Jeremiah (40:6, 10).
4. Names of the king of Ammon and the Jewish officer who plotted against Gedaliah (40:14).
5. The various ones slain by Ishmael (41:2-5).
6. Place where Ishmael buried those he had slain (41:9).
7. Place to which Ishmael was attempting to flee after the assassination of Gedaliah (41:10).
8. The captain who rescued the hostages (41:11).
9. Place at which the rescue took place (41:12).
10. Fate of Ishmael (41:15).
11. The request which the captains made of Jeremiah (42:1-3).
12. Amount of time which elapsed before the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah (42:7).
13. Substance of Jeremiah's advice to the remnant (42:8-22).
14. The one the captains blamed for the oracle of Jeremiah (43:3).
15. Place in Egypt to which the remnant came (43:7).
16. That which Jeremiah was commanded to do in Egypt (43:9).
17. Substance of the threat which followed the above act (43:10-13).

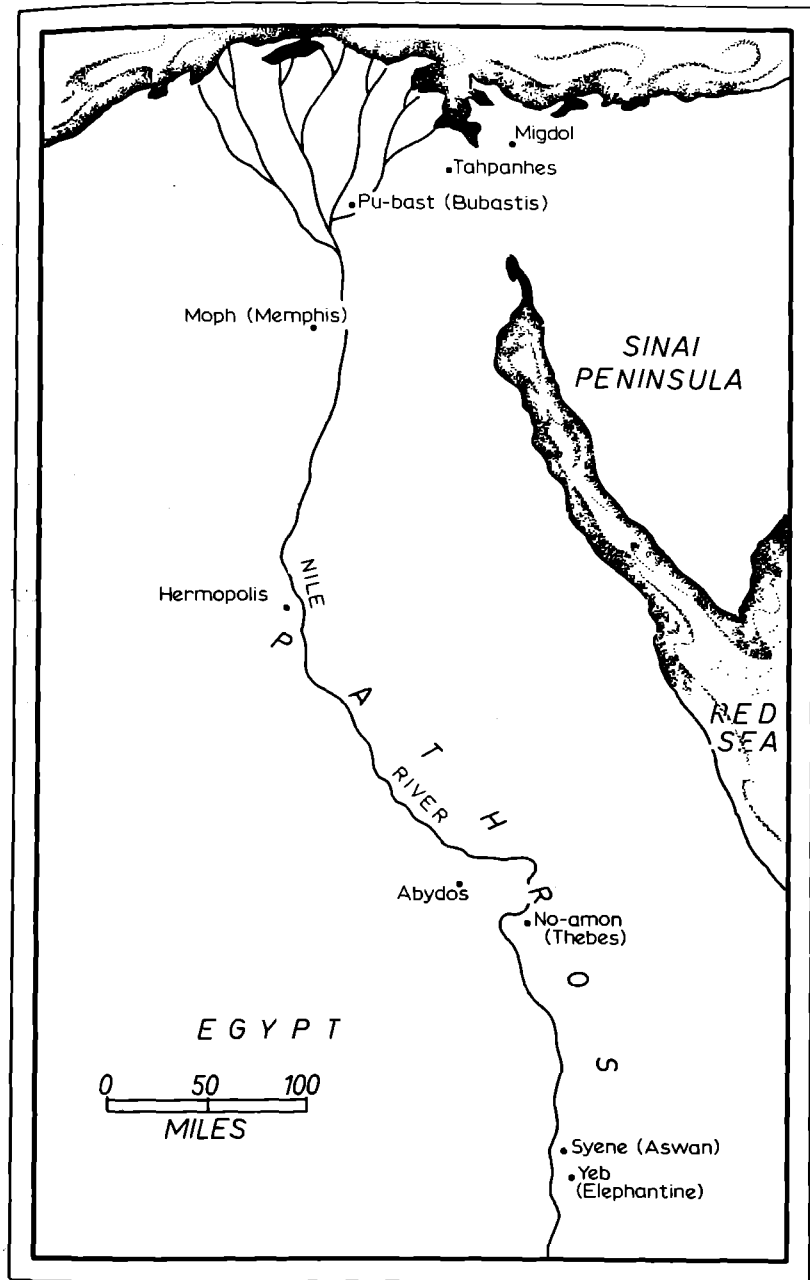
18. Locations in Egypt where Jews had settled (44:1).
19. The accusation Jeremiah made against the remnant in Egypt (44:7-8).
20. The threat against the remnant in Egypt (44:12, 14).
21. The goddess being worshiped by the remnant (44:17).
22. The oath which God had taken regarding the remnant in Egypt (44:26).
23. The name of the Egyptian pharaoh who would be given into the hands of his enemy as a sign (44:30).
24. The person to whom Jeremiah directed a personal word (45:1).
25. The time and occasion of the oracle in chapter 45.

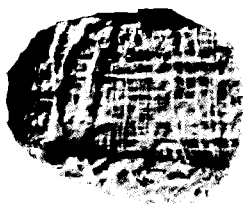
II. Questions to Ponder

1. Why were the Chaldeans so kind to Jeremiah? (39:11-14; 40:4, 5).
2. What were Jews doing in foreign countries? Why did they come back after the destruction of Jerusalem? (40:11, 12)
3. Why did Gedaliah refuse the warnings of his faithful officers concerning the plot against his life? (40:13-16)
4. Where were the eighty going to worship? Why the signs of mourning? Why no sacrificial animals? (41:5)
5. Why did Ishmael slay these pilgrims? (41:7) Why take the rest of the people in Mizpah captive? (41:10)
6. Why does the narrator go into so much detail concerning the administration of assassination of Gedaliah?
7. Were the captains sincere in asking Jeremiah to

JEREMIAH

- seek divine guidance for the remnant? (42:1-6; 43:2)
8. What is the meaning of "Beth-shemesh"? To what Egyptian city is Jeremiah likely referring? (43:13)
 9. Why so much emphasis on the destruction of Egyptian temples? (43:12, 13)
 10. Summarize the argument for idolatry which the remnant offered in response to Jeremiah's denunciation. (44:17-19)
 11. Summarize the rebuttal which Jeremiah gave to the women in Egypt (44:20-23)
 12. Would *all* the remnant in Egypt perish in war? (See 43:14; 44:28)
 13. In what way would the death of Pharaoh Hophra be a sign to the Jews? What were the circumstances of his death?
 14. Why did Baruch feel self-pity? (45:3)
 15. How does God deal with the self-pity of this disciple? (45:4)
 16. What is the meaning of the words "I will give you your life for a prey"?
 17. What other great men of God experienced self-pity? How did God deal with them?





"And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler" (II Kings 25:22).

A clay seal which was found in the ruins of Lachish may well serve as confirmation of what the Bible says, for the translation of the inscription runs: "Gedaliah, who is over the house." This is undoubtedly the same Gedaliah who was appointed regent by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem and who was assassinated soon after: "... and (they) smote Gedaliah, that he died ... at Mizpah" (II Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:2).



Seal of "Jaazaniah, servant of the king", which was found at Mizpah and which also takes us back to the time immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. Above a fighting cock is inscribed the name of the official of the royal household of Judah who is mentioned in II Kings 25:23: "And when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah to Mizpah ... Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite ..." (also Jeremiah 40:8).

NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND THE
NATIONS
46:1—49:39

With the exception of the Book of Hosea, every prophetic book of the Old Testament contains at least one oracle concerning a foreign nation. Rather large collections of such oracles can be found in the books of Isaiah (chaps. 13-23) and Ezekiel (chaps. 25-32) as well as here in Jeremiah (chaps. 46-51). The prophets of Israel could not avoid bringing heathen nations also with 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 and this necessitated utterances concerning the destiny of the nations.

It is probable that of all parts of the Old Testament the oracles concerning the foreign nations are the least frequently read. Even among Old Testament 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 of the Book of Jeremiah represent a characteristic feature of prophetic preaching, and 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 chapter 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 chapters 46-51 are treated roughly in the same order in which they are treated in chapter 25. In chapter 27 Jeremiah confronts 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 this present section of the book.

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 places together a number of oracles addressed to smaller nations of his day which, 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 chapters 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 and 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.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE OF THE
FOREIGN NATION ORACLES**

I. SOMETIME BEFORE THE BATTLE OF CARCHEMISH	PHILISTINE ORACLE	47:1-7
II. JUST PRIOR TO THE BATTLE OF CARCHEMISH	FIRST EGYPT ORACLE	46:1-12
	MOAB ORACLE	48:1-47
	AMMON ORACLE	49:1-6
	EDOM ORACLE	49:7-22
	DAMASCUS ORACLE	49:23-27
III. AFTER THE BATTLE OF CARCHEMISH	KEDAR-HAZOR ORACLE	49:28-33
IV. EARLY REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH	ELAM ORACLE	49:34-39
V. AFTER EMIGRATION TO EGYPT	BABYLON ORACLE	50:1—51:58
	SECOND EGYPT ORACLE	46:13-28

I. THE FIRST ORACLE CONCERNING EGYPT 46:1-12

Standing first in the collection of oracles against the nations are two utterances against Egypt. The first of these, found in 46:1-12, is dated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 B.C.). The theme of this oracle is the Egyptian defeat at Carchemish. The author develops his theme in two graphic pictures.

A. The First Picture of Egyptian Defeat 46:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) The word of the LORD which came unto Jeremiah concerning the nations. (2) For Egypt: Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, who was beside the river Euphrates at Carchemish,

which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah. (3) Prepare the buckler and shield! Draw near for battle! (4) Harness the horses! Mount, O cavalry! Stand firm in your helmets! Polish your spears! Put on armor! (5) Why have I seen it? They are dismayed, turning backward and their mighty men are beaten down; they have fled and not turned; terror is on every side (oracle of the LORD). (6) Let not the swift flee or the mighty one escape. In the north by the river Euphrates they have stumbled, they have fallen.

COMMENTS

Verse 2 serves as a preface to the first oracle concerning Egypt. The oracle describes the defeat of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish in the fourth year of Jehoiakim i.e., 605 B.C. It is important to note that verse 2 dates the battle of Carchemish, not the oracle which follows. The poetic oracle in verses 3-12 may have been composed at any time during the early ministry of Jeremiah; but it probably was not written until a few months before the decisive showdown at Carchemish.

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 (vv. 3-4). One can feel the excitement here as the Egyptian officers bark orders to their men. "Prepare the buckler and shield! Draw near to battle!" The buckler was the small round shield carried by the light infantry; the shield covered the entire body and was borne by the heavy-armed. The chariotry and cavalry forces as well are directed to make ready for battle. "Harness the horses" shouts an officer, and the deadly chariots which were such an important part of the ancient army of Egypt are im-

mediately made ready for action. "Mount up," shouts the officer in charge of the cavalry unit. The weapons are polished; the armor or "coat of mail" (the word translated "brigandines" in KJV) is put on. Finally comes the command, "Stand forth with your helmets." Since helmets were not worn except when actually in battle this command is equivalent to an order to engage the enemy. Confident of victory the mighty army of Egypt rushes forward. The battle that would decide the fate of the world and the destiny of nations has been launched.

The picture suddenly changes in verses 5 and 6. 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 and routed. Jeremiah uses his favorite expression "fear was round about" to describe the terror that plunged those hardened soldiers into flight. 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. Why does this happen, the prophet asked in the opening line of verse five. The answer is found in the "saith the Lord" (lit., oracle of the Lord) in the last line of the same verse. Egypt will meet with the defeat at Carchemish because God has so decreed it. It is His judgment against Egypt.

B. The Second Picture of Egyptian Defeat 46:7-12

TRANSLATION

(7) Who is this that goes up like the Nile, whose waters toss themselves like the river? (8) Egypt goes up like the Nile and his waters toss themselves

like the rivers. And he says, I will go up, I will cover the land, I will destroy a city and its inhabitants. (9) Go up, O horses! Rage O chariots! Let the mighty men go out, Cush and Put who handle the shield, the Ludim who handle the bow. (10) For that day belongs to the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance to take vengeance upon His adversaries; and the sword shall devour and be satisfied and and drink its fill of blood; for the LORD of hosts has a sacrifice in the land of the north at the river Euphrates. (11) Go up to Gilead and take balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt. For naught you have multiplied medicines. You shall not recover. (12) Nations have heard of your shame; your cry fills the earth; for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty man; together the two of them shall fall.

COMMENTS

In this stanza of the poem Jeremiah sees the armies of Pharaoh Necho rolling toward Carchemish like the mighty Nile in flood time. The "rivers" mentioned in verses 7 and 8 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. The pride and confidence of Pharaoh is revealed in his boast "I will go up and cover the earth;; I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof" (v. 8). By means of a sarcastic imperative Jeremiah urges the hosts of Egypt to hasten onward to their destination (v. 9).¹ Cush, Put

1. Actually it is impossible to determine here 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.

and Lud¹ (Ethiopians, Libyans and Lydians in KJV) refer to the countries of Pharaoh's mercenary troops. From the days of Pharaoh Psammetichus (663-610) these African mercenaries formed the major part of the Egyptian army. Who could withstand such a vast and heavily armed host? No wonder Pharaoh makes his boast. But God alone decrees what nation will rule His world, and God has chosen Nebuchadnezzar. Pharaoh will meet his doom at Carchemish!

Verse 10 presents a glaring contrast to what has preceded in this stanza.² Verses 7-9 pictured the might and confident expectation of the Egyptian forces as they set out for Carchemish. Verses 10-12 picture the results of that battle. Instead of victory for Egypt or for Babylon, Carchemish will be a day of victory for the Lord. By describing the defeat at Carchemish as a "sacrifice" Jeremiah indicates the religious significance of the battle. The phrase "the day of the Lord of hosts" designates a day which God has reserved for the punishment of His adversaries and the deliverance of His people. Every day of the Lord throughout history is a preview of that "great and notable day of the Lord" which will be the final decisive and conclusive battle in the age-long struggle between righteousness and evil.

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

1. Exact 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. John Bright *op. cit.*, p. 306.

2. Laetsch proposes that the conjunction which introduces verse 10 should be rendered "but" or "yet" in English instead of "for" as in KJV and ASV.

people of God in more recent days. Pharaoh had harbored the enemies of God's anointed king of Israel (I Kings 11:14ff); he had warred against Jerusalem (I Kings 14:25f.); he had come to the aid of the tottering Assyrian Empire which 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 which finally brought about the doom of that country. Thus there is good reason to call Egypt the adversary of God.

Verse 11 describes the Egyptian defeat at Carchemish as a wound for which there is no known cure. 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 which would heal Egypt of the mortal wound received at Carchemish. Even the famed balm of Gilead would avail nothing.¹ The delicate virgin daughter of Egypt is doomed to death as a nation. 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. In their haste to escape from the battlefield the mighty men of the Egyptian army stumble over one another.

Jeremiah's prediction of what would take place at Carchemish was marvelously fulfilled. 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 which was situated in Carchemish and . . . they fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He defeated them in the district

1. Gilead lies east of the Jordan between the Arnon and Yarmuk rivers.

of Hamath, so that not a single man escaped to his own country.¹

II. THE SECOND ORACLE CONCERNING EGYPT 46:13-26

The second poem concerning Egypt points to an invasion of that land by Nebuchadnezzar (46:13). 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 B.C. 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.

This poem also is divided into two stanzas. In verses 14-19 Jeremiah emphasizes the certainty of invasion and in verses 20-26 he emphasizes the consequences of the invasion. To this oracle is appended a promise to the Judean captives (vv. 27, 28).

A. The Certainty of Invasion 46:13-19

TRANSLATION

(13) The word which the LORD spake unto Jeremiah concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar and his smiting of the land of Egypt. (14) Declare in Egypt and publish in Migdol, Memphis and Tahpanhes. Say: Stand forth and prepare yourself; for a sword has devoured round about you. (15) Why did Apis flee, your bull not stand? Because the LORD did drive him. (16) He made many to stumble, yes, they fell upon each other. And they said, Come let us

1. *Documents from Old Testament Times*, op. cit., p. 78.

flee unto our people, unto the land of our birth because of the sword of the oppressor. (17) They cried there, Pharaoh king of Egypt is a noise. He has caused the appointed time to pass by. (18) I swear (oracle of the king, the LORD of hosts is His name) that like Tabor among the mountains and Carmel in the sea he shall come. (19) Prepare for yourself vessels of exile, O inhabitress, daughter of Egypt; for Memphis shall be a desolation, burned without inhabitant.

COMMENTS

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 (46:14). Noph (Memphis) and Tahpanhes¹ have been previously mentioned in the book (cf. Jeremiah 2:16; 43:7-9). To these cities the Jews had fled after the death of Gedaliah (44:1ff.). Jeremiah had previously warned these Jews of the coming invasion and had predicted that they would perish in the slaughter.

Verse 15 as it is translated in the King James Version is somewhat misleading. Instead of "valiant men" (KJV) or "strong ones" (ASV) probably here the translation should be singular: "Why has your strong one been swept away?"² The reference is to Apis, the sacred bull, one of the high gods of the land of Egypt.³ The mighty one of Egypt cannot stand before the armies of the Mighty One of Israel. Apis shall be "thrust down" (ASV margin).

1. Ezekiel too predicted conflict in Tahpanhes (Ezekiel 30:18). But Ezekiel seems to be speaking of the Egyptian campaign of the Persian king Cambyses II who conquered Egypt in 525 B.C.

2. The Hebrew noun is actually plural but at least three other grammatical features of the verse point to a singular reading. Sixty-five Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint and Vulgate translations also reflect a singular reading of the noun.

3. Just as the Lord is called "the Mighty One of Jacob" or "the Mighty One of Israel" (Genesis 49:24; Isaiah 1:24; 49:26 etc.) so in Egypt Apis was called "the mighty or strong one."

When the Lord brings Nebuchadnezzar against Egypt he shall demonstrate His superiority to the gods of Egypt.

Not only does the Lord 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. Jeremiah hears the mercenaries urging one another: "Arise, let us go again to our own people and the land of our birth" (v. 16). Being devoid of patriotic feeling, it is natural that these hired soldiers should flee from the doomed country. In their respective countries these mercenaries report the ruin of Egypt and heap ridicule upon Pharaoh. "Pharaoh king of Egypt is only a noise," they say. Pharaoh is nothing but a noisy braggart who makes big boasts and promises but cannot make them good. "He passed the appointed time." Some take this expression to mean that Pharaoh has let his hour of opportunity go by. That is to say he makes elaborate preparations but never capitalizes upon the opportunity. Another 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. The grace period was over. While all of these views of the phrase have something to be said in their behalf, in the opinion of this writer the standard commentaries have really missed the point. The idea here is that every nation has its appointed time for glory and power. That appointed time for Egypt was passed. With this interpretation agrees the apostle Paul when he says that God has appointed the times and seasons of the nations (Acts 17:26). Egypt's appointed time has come to an end. Therefore, the Lord swears by an oath that the coming of Nebuchadnezzar is sure and certain. No one shall be able to withstand him for he is the appointed instrument of the Lord. As surely as Mt. Tabor and Mt. Carmel

tower over the surrounding landscape in Palestine, so Nebuchadnezzar will tower over Egypt in overpowering splendor and majesty (v. 18). In view of the certainty of the coming invasion, Jeremiah urges the inhabitants of Egypt to prepare themselves for captivity for their capital city, Noph (Memphis) shall be laid waste (v. 19).

B. The Consequences of Invasion 46:20-26

TRANSLATION

(20) A very beautiful heifer is Egypt. A gadfly from the north has come against her. (21) 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; for the day of their destruction has come upon them, the time of their visitation. (22) Her voice is like a serpent going away; for they go with an army and with axes they come against her like those who hew wood. (23) They shall cut down her woods (oracle of the LORD) since it is impenetrable; for they are more than locust and are innumerable. (24) The daughter of Egypt is put to shame; she is given into the hand of the people of the north. (25) The LORD 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. (26) And I will deliver them into the power of those who seek their life, even into the power of Nebuchadnezzar and his servants and afterwards it shall be inhabited as in olden days (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The second stanza of the poem emphasizes the plight of Egypt by means of several figures. The first picture is of the heifer and the gadfly (v. 20). Egypt had hither-

to enjoyed wealth and luxury. She is like a very fair heifer, well-fed, sleek and beautiful. This beautiful animal suddenly finds herself pained and fleeing from the sting of a tiny gadfly¹ from the north. The picture is intended to describe the weakness of Egypt in the face of her new enemy to the north.

The second picture is of the fleeing fat calves (v. 21). 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 and have become fat and prosperous in the process. But now they read the handwriting on the wall and hastily flee to their native lands. It was the day of accountability for Egypt, the time of calamity and divine visitation.

The third picture is that of the advancing woodsmen and the hissing serpent (vv. 22, 23). The woodsmen are of course the Babylonians who will unmercifully demolish that which belongs to Egypt as the axmen clearing a forest. Egypt can only emit a hiss of defiance as she slithers towards her hole in the face of the advancing woodsmen. Thus the ancient power of Egypt which Ezekiel once compared to a crocodile (Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2) has become nothing but a serpent hissing with impotent rage.

The fourth picture is that of a great swarm of locust (v. 23b). The phrase "it cannot be searched" could refer to the forest of the preceding figure or could equally well refer to the vast number of the invaders who are compared to a huge swarm of locust. In Joel 1:4 four stages of that insect'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. One wonders if the famous locust plague of Exodus was in the

1. The 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.

mind of Jeremiah as he penned this description of the forthcoming Chaldean invasion. Plagues of locust are not at all uncommon in this region of the world.

In the closing verses of the poem the prophet drops his figures of speech and becomes much more precise in his predictions. Egypt will be completely humiliated by being given into the hands of the people from the north (v. 24). God has decreed that He will punish "Amon of No" (ASV). 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 located in Upper or southern Egypt. Thebes was located some 450 miles south of modern Cairo. Beginning about 2100 B.C. the city served as the seat of the Pharaohs. Thebes reached the height of its power between 1500 and 1000 B.C. 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 all 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 69 feet and are 34 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 up

to the third Christian century is a succession of attacks by foreigners and insurrections by local inhabitants. First came Nebuchadnezzar (568-567 B.C.) who surely must have conquered Thebes though the evidence falls short of conclusive proof. Then came Cambyses II (525 B.C.) 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 B.C. Alexander the Great next conquered Egypt (332 B.C.). In the first pre-Christian century Ptolemy IX completely destroyed Thebes in order to quell an uprising. The prophecy of Ezekiel 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. That there will be no doubt as to who the conqueror of Egypt will be, Jeremiah specifically names him in verse 26. It will be none other than Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. Liberal critics have tried to discredit the prophecy by arguing that Nebuchadnezzar never actually conquered Egypt. However, history does record a successful Chaldean invasion of that land.

At the conclusion of the Egypt oracle Jeremiah holds out brighter prospects for the Egyptians. "And afterwards it shall be inhabited as in the days of old" (v. 26). Ezekiel predicts that after forty years of desolation Egyptians would be restored to their land; but Egypt would

then be "the basest of kingdoms" (Ezekiel 29:12ff.).¹ Does Jeremiah have in mind here the future political prospects of Egypt as did Ezekiel? This interpretation is possible. But Laetsch has offered a somewhat more spiritual interpretation of this sentence. He points out that "afterwards" here and elsewhere in these oracles against the nations (e.g., 49:6) is equivalent to the phrase "the latter days" found in 48:47 and 49:39. In the latter days God will bring back the captivity (i.e., reverse the fortunes) of Moab and Elam (48:47, 49:39). Concerning Ammon God declares: "But afterward I will bring back the captivity of the children of Ammon" (49:6). Thus Laetsch would seem to be justified in equating the term "afterward" and the "latter days." Now 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. This being the case, the reference here to the restoration of Egypt may well point to the conversion of Egypt to the Christian faith. Egypt shall 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 which settled in the fertile Nile valley. So when Egypt in the future, in the latter days, shall hear the Gospel of Christ the inhabitants will know a peace and tranquility which 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.

C. A Promise to the Judean Captives 46:27-28

TRANSLATION

(27) But as for you, O my servant Jacob, do not

1. The forty years of Ezekiel 29:12 has also been taken to refer to the period of Persian occupation of Egypt (570-530 B.C.). Keil regards the forty years as symbolically "denoting a period appointed by God for punishment and penitence."

fear! Do not be confounded, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return and be undisturbed and at ease with none to make him tremble. (28) As for you, do not fear, O my servant Jacob (oracle of the LORD), for I am with you! Surely I will make a full end of all the nations to which I have driven you; but I will not make a full end of you. I will correct you in measure; yet I will not leave you wholly unpunished.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah cannot think of the defeat of Egypt without at the same time contemplating the salvation of Israel. The prophet here quotes two verses from an earlier passages, 30:10-11. 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: "Fear not! Do not be dismayed!" God will save Israel from afar, i.e., He will bring them back to the promised land. Once restored to Palestine Jacob will enjoy peace and tranquility and no foreign power shall again make him afraid (v. 27). "Fear not," the prophet repeats, "for I am with you." Those nations which were responsible for taking the people of God captive would be utterly destroyed. While the captivity is for Jacob a divine punishment yet 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.

III. AN ORACLE AGAINST THE PHILISTINES 47:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) The word of the LORD which came unto Jeremiah concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh smote Gaza. (2) Thus says the LORD: Behold, waters are rising from the north and they shall become an overflowing stream. They shall overflow the land and all in it, the city and its inhabitants. Mankind shall cry out and all inhabitants of the land wail. (3) At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his mighty ones, from the shaking of his chariots and the noise of his wheels fathers will not turn back unto children because of feebleness of hands. (4) Because the day comes to destroy all Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every remaining helper; for the LORD is about to destroy the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Caphtor. (5) Baldness is come upon Gaza. Ashkelon is made silent, the remnant of their valley. How long will you cut yourself? (6) Alas! O sword of the LORD, how long will you not be quiet? Put yourself into your scabbard! Rest! Be silent! (7) How can you be quiet when the LORD has commissioned you against Ashkelon and the seashore, there has He appointed it.

COMMENTS

The oracle against the Philistines has a heading which furnishes a date for the oracle in terms of a battle that must have been familiar to the prophet's audience. According to the heading this word came from the Lord "before Pharaoh smote Gaza" (v. 1). Unfortunately for the modern student of the book, the prophet did not identify the particular Pharaoh who conquered Gaza.

Since Pharaoh Hophra (588-569 B.C.) made an expedition as far north as Sidon during his reign he has been nominated as the mysterious Pharaoh of Jeremiah 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 Necho who captured Gaza some time before the battle of Carchemish. Perhaps evidence¹ for this conquest will be forthcoming from the new materials which are constantly coming to light concerning the relations of the Pharaohs and Palestine.

A. The Overflowing Stream 47:2-4

Borrowing a figure used earlier by Isaiah (Isaiah 8:7) Jeremiah describes the conqueror of the Philistines as an overflowing flood. The prophet sees the waters slowly rising in the north, gradually swelling, and then sweeping southward like a torrential stream which carries ruin and destruction along its course. That mighty river shall overflow all the land of the Philistines (v. 2). Jeremiah can hear the shrieks, screams and howls of despair mingled with the sounds of the prancing steeds and rumbling chariots and grinding wheels of the Chaldean forces. The fathers are so terrified that they abandon their wives and children to the onrushing enemy (v. 3). The day of ruin has come to Philistia. No Philistine will be able to go to the aid of Tyre and Sidon and those cities as well will taste the wrath of the invincible conqueror.² Those who inhabited Philistia in the days of Jeremiah are only the

1. Some scholars feel there is a reference to the capture of Gaza by Pharaoh Necho in Herodotus II, 159 but the evidence is far from conclusive.

2. Ezekiel 26:1-21 and 27:1-36 describes at length the humiliation of the two proud commercial cities of Phoenicia.

remnant of the original invaders from Caphtor, the island of Crete. The Philistines had already 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 (v. 4).

B. The Devouring Sword 47:5-7

In the second stanza of the poem the figure changes from an overflowing stream to a devouring sword. The sword of the Lord 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 verse 5 are both signs of deep mourning. By self-mutilation these heathen folks tried to arouse the pity of the gods.

In verse 6 someone asks, "O sword of the Lord, how long will it be before you are quiet?" Then follows the appeal, again addressed to the sword, "Put yourself into your scabbard, rest, and be still!" 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 or genuine repentance is manifested, the prophet as God's spokesman, must reject their plea in the following verse. Now 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, cries out for the sword of God's wrath to be returned to its scabbard. After further reflection and possible divine revelation Jeremiah realizes that the sword of the Lord cannot be sheathed until its work of judgment is done. The righteous wrath of God must be poured out upon Ashkelon and the whole seashore, all of Philistia (v. 7). Justice must be done. When Almighty God brandishes His sword of wrath there is no stopping until the work is complete.

This brief oracle does not reveal the reason for the divine wrath against Philistia. Certainly the Philistines had been most bitter enemies of the people of God from the time of the judges. This alone would be reason enough for the awful destruction which is here depicted. But in addition to this Jeremiah emphasized again and again that the nations which refused to submit to the yoke of Babylon would have to drink of the cup of God's wrath. Oracles threatening ruination of Philistia are found in Amos 1:6-8; Isaiah 14:29-31; Zephaniah 2:4-7; Ezekiel 25:15-17 and finally in Zechariah 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; 9:32-43).

IV. THE 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 and 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 which thus became a natural border on the north. In more vigorous periods the kingdom 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 (Numbers 22-24). This was the beginning of a long history of enmity between the two nations.¹

1. See Judges 3:12-30; I Samuel 14:47; II Samuel 8:2; II Kings 3:4-5; 3:6-27; II Chronicles 20:1ff.; II Kings 13:20. Only briefly was this hostility interrupted as for example when Elemelech and later David took refuge in Moab (Ruth 1:1f.; I Samuel 22:3, 4).

The Moabite Stone as well as the Bible reflects the hostility between the Israelites and the Moabites.¹

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 (Numbers 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 (Zephaniah 2:8-10).

Jeremiah's oracle against Moab is the most unique and in some respects the most difficult of all the foreign nations oracles found in his book. In at least three respects this oracle is unique. It is by far the longest oracle addressed to any of the smaller neighbors of Israel. Secondly, this oracle contains an enormous number 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. Thirdly, this oracle is unique because of its similarities to other portions of Scripture. It would appear that the Holy Spirit directed Jeremiah to gather, rearrange, and reaffirm the utterances made concerning Moab by his predecessors. Jeremiah utilizes the earlier prophecies and incorporates their phrases and ideas into his own picture of the future of Moab.

A. Advancing Devastation 48:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) Concerning Moab: Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Woe unto Nebo! for it is laid waste; Kiriathaim is put to shame, is captured; Misgab is put to shame and confounded. (2) The glory

1. This inscription tells how Mesha, king of Moab, was able to recapture from Israel territory north of the river Arnon.

of Moab is no more; in Heshbon they have plotted calamity against her. Come, let us cut her off from being a nation. Also, O Madmen, you shall be silent; the sword shall pursue you. (3) Hark! A cry from Horonaim, desolation and great destruction. (4) Moab is shattered; her little ones cause a cry to be heard. (5) For by the ascent of Luhith they shall go up with continual weeping; for at the descent of Horonaim they have heard the distress of the cry of destruction. (6) Flee! Run for your life! that you may be like the heath in the wilderness.

COMMENTS

The poem opens with a resounding "Woe." This word is derived from the Hebrew vocabulary of lamentation and 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. The prophet sees 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 near-by 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 (v. 1). In Heshbon, the main city north of the river Arnon, the destroyers from the north assemble for the final push into Moab proper.¹ "Come, let us cut her off from being a nation!" The villages of Madmen (v. 2) and Horonaim (v. 3) just south of the Arnon are sacked and destroyed by the enemy. Jeremiah

1. Heshbon was a border town between Reuben and Gad and served as one of the forty-eight Levitical cities (Joshua 21:39). In Jeremiah's day the city seems to have been occupied by Ammonites (Jeremiah 49:3).

can hear the wails of panic-stricken men and 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 unknown.

B. Urgent Exhortation 48:7-10

TRANSLATION

(7) Surely because you trusted in your works and in your treasures, you also shall be captured. Chemosh shall go out into captivity, his priests and his princes together. (8) And the destroyer shall come upon every city and no city shall escape. The valley shall perish and the plain shall be destroyed just as the LORD has said. (9) Give wings to Moab, for she must fly; and her cities shall become a desolation without inhabitant. (10) Cursed be the one who does the work of the LORD negligently; and cursed be the one who withholds his sword from blood.

COMMENTS

Knowing the destruction that awaits Moab Jeremiah urges the inhabitants of that nation to flee for their lives. "Be like the heath¹ (desert shrub) in the wilderness" (v. 6). 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. Judged by this criteria many nations today would fall under the prophetic indictment. The Moabites should also flee because their national god Chemosh will not be able to save them. Indeed

1. The RSV follows the Septuagint version and renders "wild ass." Others suggest the translation "destitute man." In any case the thought is the same: Get out of the cities and take your chances in the uninhabited areas.

Chemosh will not even be able to prevent his own captivity: "Chemosh shall go forth into captivity with his priests and his princes together" (v. 7). The inhabitants of Moab shall flee because the destruction will touch every part of the land. No city shall escape. The Jordan valley which formed part of the boundary of Moab on the west shall perish. The plain or plateau, the Transjordanian highland which stretches from the Arnon north to Heshbon, shall also experience the devastation (v. 8). In order to escape the destroyer Moab will need wings and the prophet prays that she shall be provided with them (v. 9). While the prophet feels sympathy for Moab he realizes that the destruction of the Moabites is the work of the Lord which he has committed to human destroyers. A curse is pronounced upon the destroyer if he is negligent in performing the task which the Lord has given him (v. 10).

C. Prophetic Explanation 48:11-17

TRANSLATION

(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. (12) Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will send to him tilters, and they shalt tilt him; and they shall empty his vessels, and smash their bottles. (13) Then Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their trust. (14) How can you say; We are mighty men, valiant men of war? (15) Moab is plundered, and one assaults her cities, and the finest of her young men have gone down to the slaughter (oracle of the king whose name is the LORD of hosts). (16) The calamity of Moab is close at hand, and his misfortune hastens quickly. (17)

Mourn for him all you who are round about and who know his name. Say: How sad it is that the strong staff is broken, the glorious staff.

COMMENTS

Why is Moab to suffer so terribly? In answering this question Jeremiah utilizes the figure of wine and wine jars. Owing to its mountainous terrain and some-what 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 and periodically had been subject to tribute. But unlike surrounding nations which 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 which 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.¹ All that is about to change. God is about to send to Moab what the KJV renders as "wanderers." The ASV gives a better translation, "them that pour off," and the RSV a still better translation "tilters." 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 who will come to Moab will not perform their task in the careful manner which men of that profession normally used. They will in fact pour Moab on the ground and then smash his vessels (v. 12). Moab is to experience a radical and

1. Many commentators take the figure "settled on his lees" in a somewhat more negative sense: Moab is compared to an inferior wine which has been left too long on the lees and hence had become sour and bitter.

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.

Two aspects of Moabite pride are doomed to horrible disappointment. First, their confidence in Chemosh will be shaken in that day when they discover that he is 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,¹ the Moabites would come to realize the folly of misplaced trust (v. 13). They would come to realize that Chemosh was a nonentity. Secondly, their pride in military might will prove unjustified. How sad it is, says Jeremiah, that you are saying, We are strong men, powerful men of war! (v. 14). What sinful vainglory! Moab shall be spoiled, the walls of her cities scaled by the enemy,² her chosen young men slaughtered in battle. This is the oracle which the King of all nations and the God of history, the Lord of Hosts, has spoken concerning Moab (v. 15). The ruin of Moab was prophesied by Balaam eight hundred years before (Numbers 24:17) and foretold by Amos (2:1-3) and Isaiah (chaps. 15-16) is now rapidly approaching (v. 16). All who are friends of Moab are sincerely urged by the prophet to bemoan the fate of that nation for the scepter of Moabite sovereignty and the rod of Moabite splendor is broken (v. 17).

D. Complete Degredation 48:18-28

TRANSLATION

(18) Go down from your glory! Sit in thirst, O deli-

1. Jeroboam I established a counterfeit form of worship for the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. Golden calves were erected at Bethel and Dan and later at Samaria. Israel was carried away into captivity in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians.

2. 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 "and gone up out of her cities."

cate daughter of Dibon; for the destroyer of Moab has gone up against you; he will destroy your fortifications. (19) Stand by the way and watch, O inhabitress of Aroer! Ask the fleeing man and the fugitive woman, What has happened? (20) Moab is put to shame for it is dismayed! Howl and cry out! Declare in Arnon that Moab is plundered. (21) Judgment has come upon the land of the plain, upon Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, (22) Dibon, Nebo, Bethdiblathaim (23) Kiriathaim, Bethgamul, Beth-meon, (24) Kerioth, Bozrah and upon all the cities of the land of Moab both far and near. (25) The horn of Moab is cut off and his arm is broken (oracle of the LORD). Moab shall wallow in his own vomit and he also shall be an object of derision. (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? (28) Forsake the cities and dwell in the rock, O inhabitants of Moab, and he like the dove that makes her nest on the far sides of a gorge.

COMMENTS

Even Dibon, the highly honored royal city (cf. II Kings 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. Why this ignominy and shame for the proud city built on two hills? The mighty strongholds of Moab are destroyed by the invader (v. 18). The inhabitants of Aroer spot the fugitives from the north coming down the King's Highway which passed through Dibon and Aroer and ask them what has happened (v. 19). In anguished cries the refugees reply: "Moab is confounded; Moab is shattered!" Jeremiah urges the inhabitants of Moab to "howl and cry" i.e., take up a lamentation for their land.

He urges the fugitives and inhabitants of Aroer to spread the word that Moab has been destroyed (v. 20) and that the judgment of God has come upon the land. City after city has fallen (vv. 21-24).¹ The horn of Moab (symbol of power) is cut off and the arm (symbol of authority) has been broken (v. 25).

The divine command has been issued: Moab must drink the wine of God's wrath. Like a drunken man, Moab reels and totters, vomits and then falls into his own filth. Neighboring nations who observe Moab in this helpless and debased condition will make that nation the object of derision. But is this not exactly the attitude which Moab had toward Israel? From the very beginning of their dealings with one another the Moabites had treated the Israelites with the same contempt which one has for a thief caught in the act of stealing (v. 27). As often as the name Israel was mentioned the Moabites would "wag their heads" (ASV)² in a gesture of contempt (cf. Matthew 27:39). By so despising the people of God the Moabites had in effect magnified themselves against the Lord" (v. 26). Because of the impending judgment Moab is advised to seek refuge where the dove or wild pigeon makes its nest in the inaccessible rocky crevices of the mountains (v. 28).

E. Abhorrent Exhaltation 48:29-30

TRANSLATION

(29) We have heard of the pride of Moab, so very proud; his loftiness and his pride, his arrogancy and the haughtiness of his heart. (30) I know (oracle of the LORD) his insolence. His boasts are empty, he is not able to perform them.

1. The location of most of the cities in these verses is uncertain. Several of them are named in the famous Moabite Stone which was found at Dibon in 1868.

2. The rendering of the KJV is: "thou skippedst for joy." The ASV rendering is preferred by most commentators.

COMMENTS

Without question the major theme running through the oracles against the nations is that of national arrogance. Indeed nearly every conceivable facet of this theme is treated in one or more of these oracles. National arrogance is an affront to the Lord and He must deal with it. The proud will be humbled. With poignant pictures Jeremiah depicts 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. Isaiah many years earlier had emphasized this characteristic of the Moabites and now Jeremiah borrows his terminology to make the same point here. The point is forcibly made by piling up synonyms for pride and haughtiness (v. 29). In verse thirty the Lord corroborates the assertion of the prophet in the previous verse: "I know his wrath (oracle of the LORD)." The term "wrath" here probably refers to the arrogant, angry outbursts to which proud men are so prone. The last part of verse thirty is extremely difficult to translate and there is no agreement among the standard English translations as to how it should be rendered. The King James Version is extremely vague. The American Standard Version renders: "his boastings have wrought nothing." The Revised Standard Version offers this interpretative translation: "his boasts are false, his deeds are false." The basic idea is that in his words and in his works Moab is essentially untrue.

F. Bitter Lamentation 48:31-38

TRANSLATION

(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. (32) With more than the weeping of Jazer I will weep for you, O vine of Sibmah. Your

branches passed over the sea, they reached unto the sea of Jazer. Upon your summer fruit and your vintage the destroyer has fallen. (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. (34) From the cry of Heshbon unto Elealeh, unto Jahaz they have uttered their voice; from Zoar unto Horonaim, Eglath-selishiah; for even the waters of Nimrim shall become desolations. (35) And I will cause to cease in Moab (oracle of the LORD) the one who offers sacrifices on the high places and the one who offers incense to his gods. (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. (37) For every head is bald, every beard is shorn; on all hands are gashes, and sackcloth on the loins. (38) Upon all the roofs of Moab and in all her streets there is lamentation; for I will shatter Moab as a vessel in which there is no delight (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

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 (v. 31) is the chief fortress of southern Moab and in mourning the loss of that city the prophet suggests that the conquest of Moab is complete. The prophet's sorrow is deeper than that of the city of Jazer located fifteen miles north of Heshbon. Jeremiah is distressed to think that the luxuriant vineyards of Sibmah (located near

Heshbon) which stretch as far as the Dead Sea and the sea of Jazer (location unknown) must now be destroyed. These famous and beautiful vineyards will be hopelessly ruined, ruthlessly trampled down and destroyed by the enemy, together with the summer fruits (v. 32). Joy and gladness, normally characteristic of that plentiful land, shall disappear. Since the vineyards will be destroyed, the winepresses or winevats will contain no wine. The shouting which shall be heard in the land will not be the joyous shoutings of the grape treaders, but the battle shout of the invading soldiers (v. 33). Throughout the land a cry of woe is heard (v. 34). The King James "a heifer of three years old" is probably a proper name, Eglat-shelishiah, as in the ASV. The Hebrew language has no capital letters and it is not always possible to distinguish between common and proper nouns. Since the whole land of Moab is depopulated no longer will sacrifice be offered at the shrines, nor incense burned before the idols (v. 35).

In verse 36 Jeremiah again expresses his personal sorrow over the destruction of Moab. He compares the agony of his heart to the pipes or flutes whose monotonous and mournful sounds filled the air during funeral services. The prophet weeps because the riches, the abundance of Moab, have perished (v. 36). Everywhere he looks the prophet sees signs of mourning: bald heads, clipped beards, cuttings upon the body, sackcloth about the loins (v. 37). On every roof and in every street the lamentation can be heard. The Lord, the God of Israel has broken Moab like a vessel which no longer pleases Him (v. 38). What intense agony in the land of Moab and in the heart of a Judean prophet!

G. Inescapable Destruction 48:39-46

TRANSLATION

(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 round about! (40) For thus says the LORD: Behold, he shall fly as an eagle and spread his wings over Moab. (41) The cities are captured and the strongholds are seized and the heart of the mighty men of Moab shall be in that day like the heart of a woman in travail. (42) Moab shall be destroyed from being a people because he has exalted himself against the LORD. (43) Terror and pit and trap are upon you, O inhabitant of Moab (oracle of the LORD). (44) The one who climbs out of the pit shall be captured by the trap; for I will bring upon her, upon Moab, the year of their punishment (oracle of the LORD). (45) In the shadow of Heshbon the fugitives stand without strength; 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 son of tumult. (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.

COMMENTS

Surrounding nations will observe the fate of once proud Moab and will themselves take up a mocking lamentation: "Moab has turned the back with shame" i.e., fled before the enemy. But 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? (v. 39). The reason for their terror is completely justified. The conqueror of Moab will swoop down like an eagle and spread his wings over the whole land (v. 40). No doubt Jeremiah is here referring to Nebuchadnezzar

who is reported to have conquered Moab, Ammon and the neighboring peoples in 582-581 B.C.¹ The figure of an eagle is a favorite description of a victorious conqueror.² Victoriously the conqueror sweeps through the land. Kerioth (already mentioned in v. 24) and the strongholds of the land fall before him. The defenders of the land will be as terrified as a woman experiencing the pangs of childbirth (v. 41). When the conquest is complete Moab will be destroyed and eventually will cease to be a nation. All of this must happen because Moab has "magnified himself against the Lord," the God of Israel (v. 42). The meaning of this expression, which was used previously in this oracle (v. 26), is perhaps clarified by a verse in Zephaniah. "I have heard the reproach of Moab and the revilings of the children of Ammon, wherewith they have reproached My people, and magnified themselves against their border" (Zephaniah 2:8). The phrase "magnify themselves against" seems to mean that Moab and Ammon sought to dominate Israel, sought to regain possession of land which the Lord had taken from them and given to Israel. By so harassing Israel they were challenging the Lord himself.

The judgment coming upon Moab will be inescapable. To make this point Jeremiah again borrows from Isaiah (24:17, 18). In that day of divine visitation the Moabites will be confronted by fear, the pit and the snare (v. 43). 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 snare (v. 44). These verses seem to reflect a popular proverb meaning that men would go from one danger into another until they are finally, inescapably trapped. Some fugitives of Moab will attempt to seek safety in Heshbon, the neighboring city of the Ammonites. But Heshbon can offer no refuge. In the words of an

1. Josephus, *Antiquities* X. 9. 7.

2. See Jeremiah 49:22; Isaiah 46:11; Ezekiel 17:3.

ancient proverb¹ "A fire shall come forth out of Heshbon" which will consume the corner or side of Moab and the crown of his head (v. 45). Far from being a place of safety, Heshbon will be the spot from which the Chaldean flame will spread southward through Moab (cf. v. 2) just as centuries earlier the Amorite king Sihon launched his attack against Moab from the city of Heshbon (Numbers 21:28-30). The Moabites are called "tumultuous ones" because of their noisy and boastful opposition to the people of Israel and their God. The prophecy ends as it began with a "woe" against Moab. Those who worship the god Chemosh will go into exile. Their deity would not be able to save them from this fate (v. 46).

H. Ultimate Salvation 48:47

TRANSLATION

(47) But I will reverse the fortunes of Moab in the latter days (oracle of the LORD). Thus far is the judgment of Moab.

COMMENTS

A note of hope is appended to the prophecy of doom against Moab. "In the latter days," the New Testament age, God, because of His infinite grace, will turn the captivity, i.e., reverse the fortunes of the Moabite people. This is not a prediction of the restoration of Moab's national existence; rather it concerns the descendants of Moab who will hear the gospel and will become heirs to eternal life through Christ. The same prediction is made concerning Ammon (49:6) and Elam (49:39) and the nations which have harassed the people of God (12:14-17). Perhaps the fulfillment of the prophecy is the numerous Arab Christians of the countries of Syria and Jordan.

1. The proverb quoted in Numbers 21:28 is here given a new application.

V. AN ORACLE AGAINST AMMON 49:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) Against the children of Ammon. Thus says the LORD: Has Israel no sons; has he no heir? why does their king possess Gad, and his people dwell in his cities? (2) Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will cause Rabbah Ammon to hear the shout of battle; and it shall become a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned. Then Israel shall possess his possessors, says the LORD. (3) Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste! Cry out, O daughter of Rabbah! Gird on sackcloth, mourn, run to and fro with gashes; for their king shall go into captivity, his priests and princes together. (4) Why do you glory in the valleys, your flowing valleys, O backsliding daughter, who trusts in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me? (5) Behold, I am about to bring fear against you (oracle of the LORD of hosts) from all round about you. You shall be thrust out each man before him. There shall be no one to gather the fugitive. (6) After this I will reverse the fortunes of the children of Ammon (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The territory of Ammon lay just north of Moab with its capital Rabbah (modern Amman) on the Jabbok river. The Ammonites and Moabites were closely connected by descent and frequently united together 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 Am-

monites were able to gradually filter back into their ancient territory and occupy towns and villages which for centuries had belonged to Israel.

The oracle against Ammon lends itself nicely to an alliterative outline. Jeremiah speaks here of the crime (v. 1), conquest (vv. 2-5), and the conversion (v. 6) of Ammon.

A. The Crime of Ammon 49:1

The crime of Ammon is 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 (Judges 11:12-28). The king of Ammon refused to accept this reasoning and war broke out between the two peoples with Jephthah inflicting 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 B.C., the Ammonites were able to occupy certain villages in the tribal territory of Gad. It is to this incursion that Jeremiah refers in verse one. "Has Israel no sons? Has he no heirs?" the prophet asks. It is true that Israel has been carried captive but will not his descendants return to claim the land Ammon has wrongfully seized? "Their king" is better read as a proper name "Malcam" as in the ASV. Malcam or Milcom or Molech was the chief god of

the Ammonites (I Kings 11:5, 7) and here represents his people just as Chemosh (48:7) represents the Moabites.

B. The Conquest of Ammon 49:2-5

The seizure of Israelite territory is an affront to the Lord for "He is there" (Ezekiel 35:10), that is to say, it is His land.¹ Therefore, the Lord will bring about the conquest and destruction of Ammon. Rabbah and her daughters (minor cities depending on her) will be destroyed, burned and left desolate. Israel then will be able to recover the territory lost to Ammon (v. 2). 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 B.C. At this time the Ammonite king was Baalis who had been instrumental in the assassination of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 40:14).

In view of the forthcoming destruction of the land, Jeremiah calls upon the Ammonites to cry and howl in lamentation over their fate. In uncontrollable grief Jeremiah pictures them running hither and yon trying to find safety behind the "hedges" or stonewalls around fields and vineyards. Though a city of Moab, Heshbon seems at this period to have been under Ammonite control. The location of Ai, mentioned only here, is unknown. The reason for the grievous lamentation is that their god Malcam (see v. 1) has been carried off into captivity along with his priests and his princes (v. 3). What a disconcerting discovery to find that one's god is really more helpless than the people who worship him.

The Ammonites were proud of their fruitful valleys, particularly the valley of the Jabbok river. The apostate nation had turned from the living God and placed their trust in their natural resources and treasures. Ammon

1. II Kings 5:17; Hosea 9:3; Joel 2:18; 3:2; Leviticus 25:23; Psalms 85:1.

boasted, "Who shall come unto me?" (v. 4). That false confidence will be shattered when God brings a fear upon the land. It will be every man for himself. With only the thought of self-preservation in mind the inhabitants of Ammon will flee in all directions (v. 5). "Every man right forth" probably means that each man takes what he thinks is the shortest route to safety. No one bothers to collect or rally the fugitives. What a sad future awaits those who regarded themselves as invincible.

C. The Conversion of Ammon 49:6

As in the case of Moab, a note is appended to the oracle against Ammon indicating that the Ammonites will in the future 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.

VI. AN ORACLE AGAINST EDMON 49:7-22

Beyond the brook Zered, the southern boundary of Moab, lay Edom. Edom was an exceedingly mountainous country rich in copper and iron ore. Because of its mineral wealth and because a main north-south trade route, 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 (Genesis 33:1-16), the descendants of these two patriarchs remained implacable foes throughout most of their history.

A. The Inescapable Calamity 49:7-13

TRANSLATION

(7) Concerning Edom. This said the LORD of hosts:

Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? has counsel perished from the prudent ones? has their wisdom disappeared? (8) Flee! Turn! Go down deep to dwell, O inhabitant of Dedan; for I will bring the destruction of Esau upon him, the time of his punishment. (9) If grape-gatherers come to you they will not leave grapes. If thieves in the night, they will destroy until they have sufficient. (10) But I have stripped Esau, uncovered his hiding places and he shall not be able to hide himself. His seed and his brethren are destroyed; and he is no more. (11) Forsake your orphans! I will keep them alive! Let your widows trust in Me! (12) For thus says the LORD: Behold, if those whose judgment was not to drink the cup shall surely drink, shall you get off scot-free? You will not be exempt, but will certainly have to drink. (13) For I have sworn by Myself (oracle of the LORD) that Bozrah shall be desolation, reproach, waste, and curse; and all her cities shall be eternal desolations.

COMMENTS

The oracle against Edom begins with a series of rhetorical questions designed to mock the wisdom for which that land was renown. The calamity comes with such suddenness upon Edom that the professional wisemen, counselors, and statesmen are incapable of offering any helpful advice. Teman is a city in the northern part of Edom. Human wisdom is certainly inadequate in the face of the judgment of the living God. The calamity draws near. Jeremiah calls on the neighboring Dedanites who inhabited the region south of Edom. These merchant people apparently carried on extensive trade with Edom and they are here urged to avoid all contact with Edom lest they be caught up in the calamity which was about to befall that nation. "Dwell deep" probably means to

withdraw deep into the desert regions where they would be safe from the approaching destruction. It is the time of Edom's judgment; the Lord will bring calamity upon Edom (v. 8).

The complete devastation of Edom is indicated by two powerful figures of speech. The enemy like grape gatherers will leave no gleanings in the land. Like thieves they will unsparingly plunder the land until they have their fill (v. 9).¹ The Lord Himself will lay Esau (Edom) bare revealing to the enemy the secret retreats and hiding places thus insuring that all the treasures of the land will be plundered. The inhabitants of Edom will be able to find no safe retreat. The descendants of Edom, those who shared his land and those who lived around about his land, would all suffer in the coming calamity. Most important, Edom himself "is not" i.e., would cease to exist as a nation (v. 10). All the warriors of Edom shall be cut off in the conflict leaving their wives and children as helpless widows and orphans. Yet the gracious God of Israel will care for these helpless ones if they but look to Him for protection. What a beautiful promise here in the midst of ominous threats and dreadful judgments.

Edom must drink of the cup of God's wrath. The calamity is inescapable. After all, if the chosen people of God shall not escape His judgment, how could Edom? (v. 12). Since Israel must suffer, Edom cannot be unpunished. Furthermore, God has taken an oath that Bozrah, the chief city of northern Edom, and the other cities of the land shall become perpetual desolations (v. 13).

B. The Subsequent Conditions 49:14-18

TRANSLATION

(14) I have heard tidings from the LORD, and an

1. There is no real reason why verse 9 should be rendered in English as an interrogative as in KJV and ASV. The ASV marginal reading is superior.

ambassador has been sent to the nations: Gather yourselves and come against her! Rise up to battle! (15) For behold I have made you small among the nations, despised among men. (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 the LORD). (17) And Edom shall become an astonishment; every one who passes by shall be astonished and shall whistle over all of her wounds. (18) As the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors (says the LORD) a man shall not dwell there nor a son of man sojourn there.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah begins the second section of the Edom oracle by announcing that he has heard a rumor or report directly from the Lord. God has revealed to the prophet that He has sent an heavenly ambassador or messenger to the nations urging them to come to battle against Edom (v. 14). 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 has decreed that Edom shall be small among the nations and despised among men (v. 15). To this end he grants success to the enemies who march against Edom.

Again the finger of accusation points to national arrogance as the supreme cause of Edom's doom. "Your terribleness" should probably be understood as "the terror you inspire." No doubt many enemies upon approaching Edom were overcome with fear as they beheld what seemed to be unconquerable fortresses nestled in the inaccessible clefts of the mountains. This reputation of invincibleness had misled Edom and had given birth to pride or 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." Accessible only by a narrow ravine which could easily be defended by a handful of men this city was the ultimate confidence of the Edomites. The inhabitants had cut huge cisterns for the storage of water and supplies so as to be able 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 (v. 16).

Suddenly the picture changes. The battle is over and Edom has fallen. Centuries pass and Edom remains uninhabited, a complete desolation. Those who pass by the area will hiss or whistle in astonishment at the extent of the desolation. The destruction of Edom shall remind men of the earlier destruction of the cities of the plain in that the whole region would henceforth be uninhabited (v. 18). 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 Genesis 19, became proverbial for divine judgment. Their destruction became the norm for punishment—the standard which 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.¹

Some commentators call attention to the fact that whereas in the case of Moab and Ammon a promise of restoration is appended to the oracle of doom, no such promise appears in the Edom oracle. Edom will be de-

1. Cf. Isaiah 13:19, 20; Jeremiah 50:40.

stroyed as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah; there will be no restoration. That this observation is not particularly significant is indicated by two facts. First, Zephaniah (2:9) uses the Sodom and Gomorrah simile in reference to Moab and Ammon. Second, the prophet Amos (9:12) foretold that Edom would be included in the Messianic kingdom, at least that is the interpretation that James put upon the passage (Acts 15:15-18).

C. The Chosen Conqueror and the Divine Counsel

49:19-22

TRANSLATION

(19) Behold, as a lion from the pride of Jordan goes up unto the strong habitation, so will I suddenly make him run from it; and he who is chosen I will appoint over it; for who is like Me and who will appoint Me a time? Who is the shepherd who shall stand before Me? (20) Therefore, Hear the counsel of the LORD which He has counseled concerning Edom, and His purposes which He has purposed concerning the inhabitants of Teman: Surely they will drag them away, the small of the flock! Surely he will lay waste their pasture over them. (21) At the sound of their fall the earth shall tremble; the sound of her cry is heard beside the Red Sea. (22) Behold, like the eagle he shall go up and 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.

COMMENTS

The enemy which is to come against Edom is compared to a lion that comes up from the pride of the Jordan (ASV) to pounce upon the prey. The lion, which is extinct in Palestine today, posed quite a threat to the

inhabitants of the region in Biblical times. The lush vegetation which grows along side of 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 this beast. In the present passage 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 her" 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.

The one who comes to rend and ravage Edom is the appointee of the Lord. "And he who is chosen, him will I appoint over it." No mortal has the right to question the decision of the Lord, no one can "appoint Me the time." This terminology seems to be taken from the court of law. A plaintiff in a law suit 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. Neither can any shepherd or ruler of Edom stand before the Lord to resist Him or His appointee.

The prophet does not name the one appointed by the Lord to conquer the land of Edom. The Chaldeans dealt a crushing blow to Edom as is indicated by Malachi 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 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.

It was no accident of history that the Edomites were unable to withstand the invader who plundered their land. Nothing that they did or could have done would have

averted that destruction short of complete repentance and turning to the true God in faith. Even the wisdom for which the Temanites were famous could not avert that disaster. The God of the universe and the King of nations has decreed that Edom shall be destroyed. The Hebrew of the last part of verse 20 is difficult but the ASV seems to have captured the sense: "Surely they shall drag them away, even the little ones of the flock; surely he shall make their habitation desolate over them." The enemy will drag away the Edomites as sheep to the slaughter. Even the most feeble among them will not be spared. The pasture upon which the flock of Edom had grazed will be turned to desolation (v. 20).

The sound of Edom's fall will shake the earth and the wail that shall arise will be heard at the Red Sea (v. 21). In times of prosperity the southern border of Edom extended to the Gulf of Akabah, one of two great arms of the Red Sea (cf. I Kings 9:26). 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 heart of the most fearless men will become "as the heart of a woman in her pangs."

VII. AN ORACLE CONCERNING DAMASCUS

49:23-27

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 reached the height of its power under Hazael (841-801 B.C.) who oppressed Israel and Judah throughout his reign. Damascus suffered greatly in the campaign of Shalmaneser IV in 797 B.C. and the king of Israel was able to recover the territories which he had

lost to Hazael (II Kings 13:25). Under king Rezin (750-732 B.C.) Syria again oppressed the people of God (II Kings 16:6) and many Judeans were taken captive to Damascus (II Chronicles 28:5). In 732 B.C. the mighty Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser crushed Damascus and 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 which 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.

TRANSLATION

(23) Concerning Damascus. 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. (24) Damascus is feeble, she has turned to flee and trembling has seized her; sorrow and pangs have seized her as a woman in childbirth. (25) How sad that the city of praise is not forsaken, the city of my joy? (26) Therefore, her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of battle shall be silenced in that day (oracle of the LORD of hosts). (27) I will kindle a fire against the wall of Damascus and it will consume the palaces of Ben-hadad.

A. A Picture of Consternation 49:23, 24

COMMENTS

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,¹ prominent cities of northern Aram, melt in

1. Hamath is located about 110 miles north of Damascus and Arpad about 95 miles north of Hamath.

fear at the reported approach of the foe. The exact meaning of the phrase "there is sorrow on the sea" (v. 23) 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. As the news of invasion sweeps southward even Damascus, the once proud and powerful city, becomes paralyzed by fear. Using one of his favorite figures Jeremiah compares the anguish of Damascus to that of a woman in travail (v. 24).

B. A Picture of Conflict 49:25-27

The fear of the foe has so paralyzed the inhabitants of Damascus that they cannot flee from their city even though they realize that to remain there will mean disaster to them. The prophet laments, "How sad it is that the city of praise has not been abandoned." 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 in antiquity was prosperous and flourishing. In appreciation for the beauty of this place the prophet refers to it as "the city of my joy" (v. 25). But because the inhabitants of Damascus would not flee from before the enemy "her young men shall fall in her streets and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day" (v. 26). Verse 27 is based on Amos 1:4, 14. The phrase "kindle a fire" denotes the ravages of war (cf. Numbers 21:28; Deuteronomy 32:22). The conflagration shall consume the "places 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 of the kings of Damascus.

Information concerning the city of Damascus subsequent to the fall of that city to the Assyrians in 732 B.C. is scanty. To date no reference to a destruction of Damascus following the days of Jeremiah has been found. The destroyer of Damascus is unnamed in the prophecy for he is relatively unimportant. The important thing is that the destruction comes from the Lord the God of Israel. Most likely the prediction was fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar after the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.) when he victoriously marched throughout the Hatti land i.e., Syria-Palestine.

VIII. AN ORACLE AGAINST KEDAR AND HAZOR 49:28-33

TRANSLATION

(28) Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor which Nebuchadnezzar smote. Rise up! Go up to Kedar! Destroy the sons of Kedar! (29) Their tents and their flocks they shall take; their curtains and their vessels and their camels they shall bear away for themselves, and they shall cry unto them: Terror on every side! (30) Flee! Wander far off! Dwell deep, O inhabitant of Hazor (oracle of the LORD); for Nebuchadnezzar has taken counsel against you, he has conceived a purpose against you. (31) Rise up! Go up unto a nation at ease, dwelling securely (oracle of the LORD) with no doors and no bars, who dwell alone. (32) And their camels shall be spoil, and the multitudes of their cattle booty, and I will scatter to every wind those who cut the corners of their beard. From every side I will bring their destruction (oracle of the LORD), (33) And Hazor shall become a habitation of jackals, an eternal desolation. A man shall not dwell there nor a son of man sojourn in it.

COMMENTS

Kedar and Hazor represent the Arabian tribes which 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 Old Testament. It is not certain whether Hazor here is a city, a region, or, as seems most likely, a tribal name. The title of the oracle indicates the fulfillment of the prophecy in the words "which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon smote" (v. 28).¹ At the time this oracle was placed in its present position within the body of the oracles against the nations it had already been fulfilled and the editor of the book, Jeremiah himself or Baruch, makes note of that fact in the introductory verse.

A. Exhortation 49:28-32a

The opening verses of this oracle contain three words of exhortation addressed to (1) the attackers (49:28, 29); (2) the Arabs (49:30); and (3) the attackers again (49:31, 32a.).

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 (v. 28). 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 "fear on every side" (v. 29) is characteristic of Jeremiah.² Some regard the expression here 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.

Just as Jeremiah earlier urged the Dedanites (v. 8) to "dwell deep," i.e., retreat into the impenetrable desert,

1. The KJV wrongly makes the verb future. The ASV is preferable.

2. See 20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:29.

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 to 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, has carefully made his plans to attack these tribes. Therefore Jeremiah urges the desert people to retreat even farther into the trackless waste.

Again the prophet turns to the attackers and urges 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 and thus a Chaldean invasion would catch them off guard. Second, the Arabs have no walled cities which would involve the invaders in prolonged siege. Third, the Arabs dwell alone, i.e., they have no powerful neighbors or allies upon which they can call for aid.

B. Declaration 49:32-33

The second part of the oracle against the Arab tribes contains a divine declaration concerning the destruction and subsequent desolation of the area. The camels of the desert tribes will become spoil for the invader. Those who escape the initial onslaught will be scattered to the wind i.e., in all directions. The phrase "them that are in the utmost corners" (KJV) is more correctly rendered "them that have the corners of their hair cut off" (ASV). The Israelites were forbidden to shave or trim the beard (Leviticus 19:27) and they regarded the custom of the Arabs of cutting off the hair from the edges of the beard and from the temples as something unusual. The calamity of

invasion shall surround these Arab tribes (v. 32). As a result of the attack the area of Hazer will become a perpetual desolation, a habitation for jackals (not dragons as in KJV). No man will dwell in that area again (v. 33).

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 Nabonidus, 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.

IX. AN ORACLE AGAINST ELAM 49:34-39

TRANSLATION

(34) The word of the LORD which came unto Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah. (35) Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am about to break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might. (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 shall be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not come. (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 the LORD). I will send them the sword until I have consumed them. (38) I will place My throne in Elam and I will destroy from them king and princes (oracle of the LORD). (39) And it shall be in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

Elam was located in the hill country east of Babylon

and north of the Persian Gulf. Its capital was Shushan or Susa which was located about 200 miles due east of Babylon. Unlike the other nations mentioned in this section of oracles, Elam had very little contact with Israel throughout history. During the time of Abraham an Elamite king by the name of Chedor-laomer and his allies put down a revolt by certain city-states in the Valley of Siddim near the Dead Sea (Genesis 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 (Isaiah 22:6). The same prophet predicts that it will be the Elamites along with the Medes who will ultimately conquer Babylon (Isaiah 21:2-6).

The question will naturally be raised as to why Jeremiah delivered 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 (in 597 B.C.). Some evidence exists that Elam was giving Nebuchadnezzar trouble about this time and the Jewish exiles may have been looking to that nation for deliverance. False prophets had stirred their expectations of immediate return to Palestine and at the moment Elam looked like the most likely prospect to make the prediction of these deceivers come true. God then directed Jeremiah to utter this brief oracle against Elam in order that the illusions and delusions of the Babylonian exiles might be dashed to pieces. It may be that a copy of this oracle was sent to exiles along with the letter recorded in chapter 29.

The oracle against Elam is dated "in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah" (v. 34) 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 B.C. which

would fall in the early part of the reign of king Zedekiah.¹ It may be that this campaign of Nebuchadnezzar was the beginning of the fulfillment of the present prophecy.

A. Doom 49:35-38

In spelling out the doom of Elam the prophet makes four points. (1) The strength of Elam will be demolished. God declares that he will break the "bow of Elam," the weapon on which that nation chiefly relied (cf. Isaiah 22:6). (2) The inhabitants of Elam will be dispersed, scattered to the four winds, as they seek refuge in surrounding nations (v. 36). (3) 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 (v. 37). (4) 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 (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1), incorporated Elam as a province in his vast empire, the present prophecy was fulfilled.

B. Hope 49:39

In the "latter days" i.e., the days of the Messiah, the Lord will "bring again the captivity of Elam" i.e., reverse the fortunes 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 Saviour 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.

1. See D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the Museum, 1956), p. 36.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I. Facts to Master

1. The names of the eight nations concerning which Jeremiah has a message from the Lord in chapters 46-49.
2. The following facts about the great battle of Carchemish: (a) the location of Carchemish; (b) the commander of the losing army; (c) the commander of the winning army; (d) the synchronism with the history of Judah (46:2)
3. Names of the countries furnishing mercenary troops to Egypt (46:9).
4. Name of one of the leading gods of Egypt (46:25).
5. Names of four prominent cities of Egypt (46:14, 19, 25).
6. Name of the king who would smite the land of Egypt (46:13).
7. Name of the chief god of Moab (48:7, 13, 46).
8. Name of the chief god of Ammon (49:1, 3).
9. The ancestor of the Edomites (49:8, 10).
10. The previous overthrow to which God compares the destruction of Edom (49:18).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. In 46:1-12 is Jeremiah predicting the outcome of the battle of Carchemish or is he celebrating or commemorating it?
2. In the oracle concerning Egypt what literary technique is most prominent?
3. What is meant by the phrase "the time of her punishment" (visitation)?
4. What are the sins which the nations have committed which justifies their destruction? Is there an explicit accusation made in each of the oracles?

JEREMIAH

5. Which of the oracles conclude on a positive note? To what period of time does the phrase "the latter days" refer? What does the expression "bring back the captivity" really mean?
6. What important differences exist between the Hebrew text and the Greek version of this section of Jeremiah? How can you account for these differences? See comments in Chapter Three.
7. In how many of the prophetic books can oracles concerning foreign nations be found? Why were the Hebrew prophets interested in the destiny of foreign nations?
8. How would you arrange the oracles concerning the nations in chronological sequence? What purpose is there in the arrangement as it stands in the text?
9. What evidence is there in these oracles of Jeremiah's personal distress over the fate of the foreign nations?

CHAPTER NINETEEN

GOD AND BABYLON 50:1—51:65

Eichorn was the first to deny the authenticity of chapters 50-51 and he has been followed by most modern critics. Cornill affirms in regard to these chapters that "their non-genuineness has been so convincingly demonstrated that now hardly anyone can be found to defend their authenticity."¹ The critics generally consider the oracle against Babylon to be "a great conglomeration" which cannot possibly be traced back to Jeremiah.² They think these chapters to be 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.³ Pfeiffer contends that the forger "concocted" this poem in order to supply the missing book Jeremiah is said to have sent to the exiles in Babylon (51:59-64).⁴

The critics contend that the historical situation of the Babylon oracle is not that of Zedekiah's fourth year as claimed in 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 B.C., 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.⁵ Young proposes that Jeremiah

1. Carl Cornhill, *Introduction to the Canonical Books of the Old Testament* (New York: Williams and Norgate, 1907), p. 308.

2. Lawrence Cord Hay, "The Oracles Against Foreign Nations in Jeremiah 46-51" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, 1960), p. 187.

3. Heinrich Ewald, *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament* (1880), V, 1.

4. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 507.

5. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

JEREMIAH

wrote a first draft of this oracle in the fourth year of Zedekiah and 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 and considered the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as so certain that he could speak of it having already occurred in the fourth year of Zedekiah. The present writer tends to follow this latter alternative.

A second critical contention is 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. Here the critics have an erroneous view of Jeremiah's attitude toward Babylon. 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 Jeremiah 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.

The argument is made that an oracle against Babylon would only serve to undercut the strong emphasis in chapters 27-29 that the exile would be of long duration. The delusion of an imminent overthrow of Babylon was rampant among the Jewish captives and Jeremiah had done all

that he could to dissipell the delusion. If this oracle was sent to Babylon shortly after the deportation of 597 B.C. 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 but was sunk in a symbolic act in the river Euphrates.

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 and thus 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 his attitudes toward the Chaldean conquerors.

The question of the genuineness of the Babylon oracle should not require much debate since the text itself (50:1 and 51:60) attributes these chapters to Jeremiah.¹ Even the most determined negative critics admit that many Jeremian utterances, turns of thought and ideas appear in these chapters.² Furthermore, the narrative epilogue (51:59-64), the genuineness of which is generally conceded,

1. While the Babylon oracle is attributed to Jeremiah in the Hebrew text, the Septuagint translation omits "by the hand of Jeremiah" in 50:1.

2. Ewald, *op. cit.*, V, 1.

JEREMIAH

presupposes the existence of an extended anti-Babylon prophecy by Jeremiah¹. 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 Jeremianic authorship of the oracle against Babylon appears to be 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. Jeremiah, taking advantage of this opportunity, "wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon." Seraiah is commanded to read the prophetic message aloud in the face of the city. Then the book containing the message is to be sunk in the Euphrates river. By the first act Seraiah testifies that the Lord has 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.

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 here and there. 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 as the prophet chooses to drive home again and again his basic point. Any outline of the oracle is arbitrary and in the very nature of the case the subdivisions will overlap.

I. THE DEFEAT OF BABYLON 50:1-34

In the first part of the Babylon oracle the major

1. C. von Orelli, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah* (1889), pp. 374-75.

theme of Babylon's defeat and the minor theme of Israel's return are skillfully blended. A four-fold breakdown is observable: (1) Babylon's destruction and Israel's deliverance (50:2-10); (2) Babylon's desolation and Israel's restoration (50:11-20); (3) Babylon's visitation and Israel's vindication (50:21-28); and (4) Babylon's recompense and Israel's redemption (50:29-34).

A. Babylon's Destruction and Israel's Deliverance

50:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) The word which the LORD spoke against Babylon, against the land of the Chaldeans by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet. (2) Declare among the nations! Publish! Do not conceal it: Babylon is captured, Bel is put to shame, Merodach is dismayed; her images are put to shame, her idols are dismayed. (3) For a nation from the north has gone up against her. He shall make her land a desolation with no inhabitant in it. Both man and beast flee, they go away. (4) In those days and in that time (oracle of the LORD) the children of Israel and the children of Judah together shall go on their way weeping and the LORD their God they shall seek. (5) They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces turned in that direction: Come! Let us join ourselves unto the LORD in an eternal covenant which shall not be forgotten. (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. (7) All who found them devoured them, and their adversaries said; We are not guilty because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of righteousness, the hope of their fathers. (8) Flee

from the midst of Babylon and from the land of the Chaldeans go forth! Be like the he-goats before the flock. (9) For I am about to stir up and bring up against Babylon a company of great nations from the land of the north. They shall set themselves in array against her; from there she shall be taken. Their arrows shall be like a skillful warrior who does not return empty handed. (10) And the Chaldeans shall be spoiled; all of her spoilers shall be satisfied (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

The oracle begins with an announcement to all the nations of the destruction of Babylon. The news spreads like wild fire as signal standards are raised in the market places of lands under Babylonian hegemony. Bel-Merodach (Marduk), the chief god of Babylon, has been shamed by what has happened to his city. The idols and images of man's making are absolutely useless when God begins to intervene in human history (v. 2). In spite of all those gods can do, an army attacking from the north, the Medo-Persian armies led by Cyrus the Great, have defeated Babylon. The picture is so plain in the mind of the prophet that he can describe those events in 539 B.C. as though they had already taken place. The defeat of Babylon by Cyrus was the first in a long series of disasters which that city would suffer and the place would eventually become an uninhabited desolation (v. 3). Verse 3 is actually 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 verse and the desolation pictured in the second half of the verse.

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 which contends that Israel, the Northern Kingdom, migrated to Europe after

the collapse of the Assyrian empire. Here both of the former kingdoms join together in returning in repentance to the Lord their God (v. 4) and to Zion the holy city. Jeremiah hears the remnant of Israel exhorting one another to join themselves to the Lord in an "everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten" (v. 5). 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 which returned, God raised up the promised Messiah who established with spiritual Israel the New Covenant, the everlasting covenant, for which the remnant yearns in this verse.

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. On the mountains of Palestine they worshiped their pagan gods with immoral acts. Their resting place, the habitation of righteousness, the hope of their fathers was completely forgotten (v. 6). The enemies of Israel used this apostasy as an excuse for their heartless and cruel oppression of the people of God (v. 7). But now Jeremiah foresees an end to that dreary period of Israel's history. The hour of deliverance will come, for the Lord will stir up "a company of great nations from the north country" (v. 9) who will defeat and plunder Babylon (v. 10). For this reason Israel is urged to flee from the midst of Babylon, to be as he-goats who lead the flock (v. 8). When Cyrus conquered Babylon he allowed all peoples held captive in Babylon to return to their native lands. Israel is urged to be among the first to take advantage of this gracious act, to lead the way.

B. Babylon's Desolation and Israel's Restoration

50:11-20

TRANSLATION

(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 (12) your mother shall utterly be put to shame, she that bore you shall be embarrassed. Behold, the last of nations, a wilderness, a dry land, a desert. (13) Because of the wrath of the LORD she shall not be inhabited. All of it shall be a desolation; every one who passes by shall be astonished, shall whistle because of all her wounds. (14) Set yourselves in array round about, all you bowmen! Shoot against her! Do not spare an arrow; for she has sinned against the LORD. (15) Shout against her round about! She has put forth her hand. Her bulwarks have fallen; her walls are broken down; for it is the vengeance of the LORD. Take vengeance upon her! As she has done, do to her. (16) Cut off the sower from Babylon and the one who holds the sickle in the time of harvest. From before the sword of the oppressor each man shall turn to his people, yea, each man shall flee to his land. (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. (18) Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, God of Israel: I am about to punish the king of Babylon and his land as I have punished the king of Assyria. (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. (20) In those days and in that time (oracle of the LORD) the iniquity of Israel shall 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.

COMMENTS

The Chaldeans discharged their office as chastiser of Israel with arrogant and malicious joy. The satisfaction which they received in plundering Jerusalem is compared to a heifer calf frisking about the threshing floor eating her fill. Like strong stallions which neigh in triumph and challenge, the Chaldeans raise a loud and boastful cry after they have subdued Jerusalem (v. 11). But God has taken note of the arrogant amusement of the Chaldean conquerors and has decreed that the "mother" of Babylon (i.e., the land of Babylonia) "shall be utterly put to shame and confounded." Proud Babylon shall become the very least of nations—a wilderness, a dry land, a barren desert (v. 12). She shall experience the wrath of the God of Israel; she shall be utterly uninhabited. Visitors to the ruined city will be astonished by the desolation which marks the spot (v. 13).

The prophet next turns to the attacking armies and in direct address urges them to execute the divine vengeance on Babylon. He urges the nations to put themselves in battle array round about Babylon and unleash their deadly arrows "for she has sinned against the Lord" (v. 14). No defense of the city will be able to repel the attacking force for this is "the vengeance of the Lord." Realizing the futility of further resistance, the Chaldeans "give the hand" i.e., they surrender to the invader. Subsequently the walls of the famous city are razed and Babylon experiences the same humiliation which she has inflicted on others (v. 15). The agricultural regions of Babylon, famous in antiquity for abundant productivity,¹ will be destroyed by the invader. When Babylon is laid waste, the exiles from all nations flee to their respective lands (v. 16). The picture of the destruction of Babylon in verses 14-16 is a composite which includes prophetic

1. Herodotus (I. 193) declares that the yield in Babylonia was commonly two hundred-fold and sometimes even three hundred-fold.

allusions to many different sieges of Babylon. These verses were not entirely fulfilled by the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. because Cyrus did not raze the walls 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.

In contrast to the devastation that awaits Babylon the prophet points out the glory that Israel shall experience. Hitherto Israel had been a poor, frightened sheep, driven and devoured by two mighty lions, Assyria and Babylonia (v. 17). But the tables are due to be turned. Assyria has already received its chastisement; that of Babylon will not be delayed (v. 18).¹ Then will Israel again feed peaceably on its own pasture both west of Jordan (Carmel; Mt. of Ephraim) and east of Jordan (Bashan; Gilead) where they shall enjoy the spiritual and material blessings of the Lord (v. 19). In the postexilic times God will provide for the remnant of His people, the spiritual Israel of God, absolute forgiveness (v. 20). This verse 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. 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 verse 20 states the grounds of the promise of restoration in verse 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 knows will transpire at Calvary.

1. Note 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 B.C. when Cyrus conquered the city.

C. Babylon's Visitation and Israel's Vindication

50:21-28

TRANSLATION

(21) Against the land of Merathaim go up, against the inhabitants of Pekod! Slay and devote her to death (oracle of the LORD). Do according to all which I have commanded you. (22) The sound of battle is in the land and great destruction. (23) How sad that the hammer of all the earth is cut off and shattered! How sad that Babylon has become a desolation among the nations. (24) I laid snares for you, and you have been captured, O Babylon, and are not aware of it. You have been found and you have been caught; for against the LORD you have striven. (25) The LORD shall open His armory and bring out the weapons of His wrath; for it is a work of the Lord GOD of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans. (26) Go up to her from every side! Open her granaries! Pile her up as heaps of grain, utterly destroy her! Leave her no remnant! (27) Slay all her bullocks! Let them go down to the slaughter! Woe unto them; for their day has come, the time of their punishment. (28) Hark! Those who flee and escape from the land of Babylon come to Zion to declare the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of His Temple.

COMMENTS

Again the adversaries of Babylon are addressed. They are 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 (v. 21).¹ The idea in these two enigmatic designations for Babylon is that God will punish that land because of her excessive

1. Some think that Merathaim and Pekod refer to actual districts of Babylonia but the geographical reference seems rather doubtful.

rebellion. Following this summons the prophet describes the execution of the commission. He hears the terrible noise of war and destruction in the land (v. 22). "How sad it is," he says sarcastically, "that the hammer of the whole earth is broken and smashed." Babylon, the instrument which has smashed the whole world into submission, has served its purpose and is now broken. The once proud land has become a desolation among the nations (v. 23).

In verse 24 the prophet indicates that the element of secrecy and surprise which excludes all resistance will prevail at the capture of Babylon. Like an unsuspecting beast caught in the snare of the trapper, so has Babylon been captured. The reason for the calamitous fall of the city is that Babylon had "striven against the Lord." Babylon had exceeded the bounds of the divine commission to punish the nations and had thus in effect pitted herself against the Lord." The quick and surprising capture of the city will be possible because the Lord of Hosts has opened his armory and brought into use all the means of attack which it affords. Though God uses secondary agents to accomplish his purposes against Babylon that which they do there is the work of God (v. 25).

As the Lord has emptied His arsenal against Babylon so also shall all the storehouses in Babylon be emptied and the contents destroyed. The phrase "cast her up as heaps" refers to the huge piles of rubble which were left after a city had been totally demolished (v. 26). The doomed warriors of Babylon are compared to sacrificial animals (bullocks) to be slaughtered. Woe unto those armies! The time of their punishment has come, the day of national accountability (v. 27). Meanwhile the Jewish captives shall hasten to Zion to proclaim the good news that the Lord has executed vengeance upon the enemies of His people. The destruction of God's Temple has been avenged! (v. 28). Israel has been vindicated by the divine visitation upon Babylon.

D. Babylon's Reconpense and Israel's Redemption
50:29-34

TRANSLATION

(29) Summon against Babylon archers, all who handle the bow! Encamp against her round about! Let no one escape! Repay her according to her work, do to her as she has done; for she has been arrogant toward the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. (30) Therefore, her young men shall fall in her streets and all her men of battle shall be silenced in that day (oracle of the LORD). (31) Behold, I am against you, O Pride (oracle of the Lord, GOD of hosts); for your day has come, the time of your punishment. (32) Pride shall stumble and fall, and no one shall raise her up. I will kindle a fire against his cities and it shall devour all round about him. (33) Thus says the LORD of hosts: Oppressed are the people of Israel and the people of Judah too; and all who have taken them captive hold them fast, they will not let them go free. (34) Their Redeemer is strong, the LORD of hosts is His name. He will thoroughly plead their cause in order to give rest to the land and to disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.

COMMENTS

Again the prophet calls upon the archers to encamp round about Babylon and to thereby prevent the escape of any of the defenders of that doomed city. Again he calls 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 "has been proud against the Lord" (v. 29). Those who attempt to defend the doomed city will fall in the streets (v. 30). "Behold I am against you O Pride," de-

clares the Lord. The exact background of this formula¹ is unclear. The rather intriguing suggestion has been made that it originated in the formula of challenge with which a champion summoned his rival to combat.² Babylon is Pride personified and the Lord of hosts has appointed the day of her punishment (v. 31). The Lord will bring that proud one to totter and fall and no one will be able to lift her up again. God's judgment, like a fire, shall consume the cities of Babylonia (v. 32). Thus will the pride of Babylon be humbled.

In contrast to the recompense of Babylon is the redemption of Israel. As in the days of the Egyptian bondage the children of Israel and Judah are held fast in the iron grip of an oppressor (v. 33). Yet to those disheartened and discouraged captives Jeremiah strikes a note of hope. Their Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts, is strong! He will take up the cause of His helpless people. The word translated here "Redeemer" is the Hebrew *goel*, the title of the near kinsman, to whom belonged, according to ancient law, the duty of revenging a murder, as well as that of advocate and general protector. So now the Lord is about to rescue His people and take vengeance upon their foe. 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 and tranquility (v. 34). 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 land. This was not the first nor will it be the last time that the world has enjoyed blessing because of some action which God has performed on behalf of His people.

1. The formula "behold I am against you" also occurs in Ezekiel 26:3; 28:22; 29:10 and with slight variation in Zephaniah 2:5.

2. J. Eaton, *Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, Introduction and Commentary* (Torch Bible Commentaries) (1961), p. 71.

II. THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

50:35—51:26

In this section of the Babylon oracle 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

TRANSLATION

(35) A sword against the Chaldeans (oracle of the LORD), against the inhabitants of Babylon, her princes and her wisemen. (36) A sword against the boasters, and they shall become fools! A sword against her mighty men, and they shall be dismayed! (37) A sword against her horses, chariots, and all the mixed people which are in the midst of her, and they shall become women! A sword against her storehouses, and they shall be plundered. (38) A drought against her waters and they shall be dry; for it is a land of graven images and they are mad over terrors. (39) Therefore, desert creatures with wolves shall dwell there, ostriches shall dwell in it. She shall not be inhabited any more forever, nor populated for all generations. (40) As God overturned Sodom and Gomorrah and neighboring cities (oracle of the LORD), so a man shall not dwell there nor a son of man sojourn in her.

COMMENTS

The Lord will use the agents of sword and drought through the centuries to destroy all which supports Babylon's power and glory: the inhabitants of the city as well as the civil and religious leaders (v. 35), the liars, boasters or soothsayers, the strong armies and foreign mercenaries, the treasures of the city (v. 37), and the ancient and

elaborate irrigation system (v. 38).¹ This tidal wave of destruction will sweep Babylonia because that land was "a land of graven images and they are mad over idols" (v. 38). The Hebrew word translated "idols" literally means "horrors" or "terrors." The cruel, bloodthirsty and immoral gods of Babylon were indeed horrible creations of the depraved mind of man. What a pity that the highly cultured Babylonians had not used their wisdom and knowledge to turn to the true and 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 uncorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:22, 23).

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 (v. 40). The place will be fit only for desert creatures, the wolves or jackals (lit., "howling creatures") and the owls or ostriches (v. 39). In this description of the desolation of Babylon Jeremiah is echoing the prophecy of Isaiah where many of the same thoughts occur (cf. Isaiah 13:19-22).

B. Ruthless Destruction 50:41—51:5

TRANSLATION

(41) Behold, a people shall come from the north, a

1. One of the keys to the agricultural prosperity of Babylonia was the irrigation system which dates back to the time of Hammurapi in the eighteenth century before Christ. In fulfillment of the prophecy the famous canals of Babylon have silted up and all but disappeared.

great nation and many kings shall be stirred up from the distant parts of the earth. (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. (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. (44) Behold, like a lion going up from the pride of Jordan unto the perennial pasture, so will I suddenly make them run from it. 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? (45) Therefore, Hear the counsel of the LORD which He has made against Babylon and the plans which He has formulated against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely their pasture shall be shocked over what happens to them. (46) At the sound of the taking of Babylon the earth trembles and the cry is heard among the nations. (1) Thus says the LORD: I am about to raise up against Babylon and against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai a destroying wind. (2) I will send strangers to Babylon and they will winnow her and empty her land; for they shall be against her on all sides in the day of calamity. (3) Let the archer bend his bow against the archer, and against the one who rises up in his armor. Have no mercy upon her youths! Utterly destroy all of her hosts! (4) Slain shall they fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and thrust through in her streets. (5) For Israel and Judah have not been widowed of their God, the LORD of hosts; because their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel.

COMMENTS

For the third time the prophet announces the approach of the conquerors of Babylon: "Behold, a people shall come from the north." No doubt the prophet is presenting here a composite picture of the several conquerors who 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 the attack against Babylon (v. 41). The vast host surges forward towards Babylon armed for war. The sound of their coming is likened to the roar of the sea. They are cruel and ruthless warriors who show no pity to the daughter of Babylon, (i.e., the inhabitants of the city v. 42). 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 (v. 43). 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 (Daniel 5:6).

Babylon's judgment shall be that Edom (cf. 49:19-21). It matters nothing to the Lord whether the nation be small and insignificant like Edom or a mighty empire like Babylon. Any nation which 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. No shepherd or leader of Babylon will be able to withstand the impact of this divinely appointed

one (v. 44). The Lord God has taken counsel against Babylon and has laid plans for the destruction of that land. The invader will make desolate the inhabitants of that land like helpless sheep (v. 45). 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 (v. 46).

The description of the destroyers of Babylon continues in 51:1-5. God is raising up against Babylon a destroying wind (v. 1) and strangers (v. 2) by means of which He will winnow or sift the inhabitants of Babylonia as a farmer winnows the chaff from the grain. The reference in verse 1 to "Leb-kamai" (ASV) is most interesting. This term 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.

In verse 3 the attacking armies are again addressed. In spite of the fact that the Babylonians stand guard with their weapons and arrayed in their armor, yet the archers are urged to attack them from without. No one is to be spared; every Chaldean soldier is to be slain in the streets of the city (v. 4). The reason for the slaughter is twofold. First, by means of the destruction of Babylon the Lord will prove that Israel and Judah have not been forsaken (lit., widowed) by their God. Second, the land of Babylon is full of guilt with respect to the Holy One of Israel (v. 5). The word translated "though" in the KJV and ASV is best rendered "for" or "because" and the

"guilt" is best regarded as that of the Chaldeans and not the Israelites.

C. An Exhortation to Israel 51:6-10

TRANSLATION

(6) Flee from the midst of Babylon! Let everyone save his life! Perish not because of her guilt! For it is the time of the vengeance of the LORD; He will render to her a recompense. (7) Babylon was a golden cup in the hand of the LORD, making all the earth drunken. The nations drank from its wine; therefore, nations went mad. (8) Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken. Wail concerning her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be cured. (9) We would have healed Babylon, but she would not be healed. 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. (10) The LORD has brought forth our vindication. Come! Let us recount in Zion the work of the LORD our God.

COMMENTS

The description of the destruction of Babylon is briefly interrupted by words of exhortation directed to Israel. 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 lose their lives in that futile effort. Babylon's destruction is an act of divine vengeance; the city is doomed to destruction (v. 6). 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 (v. 7). But now

Babylon has served her purpose in the plan of the **Almighty**; she has acted out her role upon the stage of human history. The Lord will now smash Babylon as a man smashes a vessel which is no longer useful and no longer pleases him (v. 7).

Turning to sympathetic bystanders the prophet calls for lamentation over the fall of Babylon. Those addressed are foreigners who, whether by choice or force, have been resident in Babylon, and who therefore have an interest in the fate of that city. These are now summoned to heal Babylon, because they are now servants of the Great King and are thus obligated to render assistance to him (v. 8). Those who are addressed do not refuse to render the service, but their efforts are in vain. These captives nations affirm that they have honestly done what they could to prevent the destruction of Babylon and restore her to her former glory. But since their attempts have proved vain these 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 (or punishment) reaches unto the heavens" (v. 9). The Jewish captives in Babylon rush home to Zion to declare there what God has done to Babylon. "The Lord has brought forth our righteousness," they sing. The avenging hand of God had vindicated His people. The idolatry of Israel has been sufficiently punished and God's people are again to be accounted as righteous (v. 10).

D. Divine Destruction 51:11-26

TRANSLATION

(11) Polish the arrows! Fill the shields! The LORD has aroused the spirit of the king of the Medes; for His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it. For it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of

His Temple. (12) Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon! Make the watch strong! Set the guard! Prepare the ambushments! For the LORD has purposed and done that which He spoke against the inhabitants of Babylon. (13) O you who dwells beside many waters, abundant in treasure, your end has come, the measure of your gain. (14) The LORD of hosts has sworn by Himself: Surely I will fill you with men as with locusts and they shall lift up a shout over you. (15) 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 lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from His storehouse. (17) 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 shall perish. (19) The Portion of Jacob is not like these! For He is the former of everything including the tribe of His inheritance. The LORD of hosts is His name! (20) You were My battle axe, My weapons of war! With you I broke nations in pieces, destroyed kingdoms. (21) With you I shattered horses and their riders, chariots and their drivers. (22) With you I shattered man and woman, old man and youth, young man and maiden. (23) With you I shattered shepherd and flock, husbandman and yoke, governors and leaders. (24) But I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil that they did in Zion before your eyes (oracle of the LORD). (25) Behold, I am against you, O mountain of destruction (oracle of the LORD)

who destroyed all the earth! I will stretch out My hand against you and roll you down from the rocks, and will make you a burning mountain. (26) And they shall not take from you a stone for a corner nor a stone for a foundation; but you shall be an everlasting desolation (oracle of the LORD).

COMMENTS

In verse 11 the agents of the divine judgment upon Babylon are identified as the Medes. Media was a country located northwest of Persia. About the year 548 B.C. Cyrus the Great was able to unite the Medes and Persians and together they became the force that toppled the mighty Babylonian empire. The Medo-Persian army was the instrument used by the Lord to execute His vengeance upon Babylon for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (v. 11). The Lord Himself directs the attack against Babylon: "Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon!" No doubt the standards here are certain military signals which indicated the particular area of the wall which was to be attacked. "Make the watch strong! Set the watchmen!" The first order of business in any siege in antiquity was to blockade the city to prevent anyone from leaving or entering with supplies. Furthermore, a guard had to be posted about the camp of the besieging army lest the soldiers within the city launch a surprise attack. "Prepare the ambushes!" These would be small groups of soldiers strategically hidden who would press into the city when the besieged made a rally. The Lord has planned the fall of Babylon and He will execute that plan (v. 12).

The greatest supports of the power of Babylonia were the waters surrounding the city and the great riches which Nebuchadnezzar had accumulated. The fruitfulness of the Babylonian territory, the produce of the fields, depended on the overflowing of the Euphrates. By an extensive sys-

tem 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 water-courses 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. As for the riches of the city, one has only to think of the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar. The immense booty of Nineveh, the plunder of Jerusalem, the tributes of Syria and the Phoenician states filled his coffers. It is no wonder then that the prophet addresses Babylon as the city which "dwells on many waters, abundant in treasures." The mighty walls, the great waters, the fertile lands, the enormous wealth, the multitude of inhabitants, all together are helpless before the Lord of Israel who declares to mighty Babylon, "Your end has come!" 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. The covetousness of Babylon has reached full measure. Her plundering, profiteering, and exorbitant taxation will soon come to an end (v. 13). The Lord of hosts has bound Himself by an oath that the "shout" (lit., vintage song) would 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 would often sing 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. The phrase "surely I will fill you with men as with the cankerworm" has been taken by some commentators to refer to the enemy swarming over Babylon like the cankerworm or locust. Others feel that the Hebrew should be translated "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.

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 which he had used earlier in his ministry. Verses 15-19 are all but identical with 10:12-16, the only verbal difference being the omission in verse 19 of the word "Israel" before the words "the rod of His inheritance." 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 that controls the rains and brings the storms (v. 16). In contrast to Him, 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). 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 (v. 19).

After establishing that the Lord is superior to all the gods of Babylon, Jeremiah proceeds to address the conqueror of Babylon: You are my battle axe and weapons of war."¹ 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 will be able

1. Some commentators argue that Babylon itself is the "hammer" of these verses and some even argue that Israel is intended.

to stand before God's battle axe (vv. 20, 21). The strong as well as the weak, the old as well as the young, the exalted as well as the lowly will all be shattered by the conqueror (vv. 22-23). One cannot read these verses without recalling the earlier prophecies of Isaiah concerning Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1). By means of this mighty and powerful army the Lord 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 (v. 24).

The second major section of the Babylon oracle concludes with the Lord declaring His hostility to Babylon: "Behold, I am against you,¹ O destroying mountain." The Hebrew expression translated here "destroying mountains" occurs in II Kings 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 which 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. The picture here is of an active volcano which belches forth destruction to all the earth. The expression "roll you down from the rocks" probably refers to a volcanic eruption during which rocks mixed with burning lava are hurled from the crater and 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 completely exhausted (v. 25). So completely burned-out is that mountain that its stones are no longer fit for building material. 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 (v. 26).

1. This challenge formula occurs earlier in 21:13, 23:30-32, and 50:31.

III. THE DOOM OF BABYLON 51:27-58

The third section of the Babylon oracle which begins in 51:27 emphasizes the final doom of Babylon. The attack of the enemy is again described in vivid detail (vv. 27-33). Israel lodges a complaint before God concerning their treatment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord acknowledges their complaint and assures His distressed people that Babylon will be punished for her crimes (vv. 34-40). Babylon's demolition will mean Israel's liberation (vv. 41-46); Babylon's retribution, Israel's return (vv. 47-53). To all of this is added a final pronouncement against Babylon (vv. 54-58).

A. The Attack of the Enemy 51:27-33

TRANSLATION

(27) Lift up a standard in the land! Blow the trumpet among the nations: Sanctify against her nations! Summon against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz! Appoint over her a captain! Bring up horses like hairy locusts! (28) Sanctify against her nations, the kings of Media and her governors, and leaders and all the land of their dominion. (29) Then the land shall tremble and writhe, for the purposes of the LORD against Babylon stand to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant. (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. (31) Runner shall run to meet runner, messenger to meet messenger, to declare to the king of Babylon 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. (33) For thus says the

LORD 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 shall have come to her.

COMMENTS

Once again in this oracle the Lord calls upon the nations to make preparations for the final onslaught against Babylon. The standard and the trumpet were means of gathering and directing the operations of great hosts of men in antiquity (cf. 50:2; 51:12). "Prepare" i.e., consecrate or sanctify (ASV *mar*) "the nations against her." It was 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 the Lord (50:25) and the vengeance of His sanctuary" (50:28). Ararat, Minni and Ash-kenaz, located in present-day Armenia, were the northern allies of the Medes. The word translated "marshal" is an Assyrian word denoting a high military officer, perhaps an enlisting or mustering officer. The cavalry which 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 "rough" is unknown (v. 27). Led by the rulers of the Medes (v. 28) the vast army marches southward toward Babylon causing the land to tremble and be in pain at the news of their approach. God has determined to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant and that divine purpose is about to be fulfilled (v. 29).

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. Cowardice makes them withdraw into the strong fortification where they helplessly watch the bars and gates bat-

tered down and the dwelling places burned (v. 30). From every quarter of the city the messengers hasten to the royal palace with the news that the city has fallen to the enemy (v. 31). The enemy has seized the passages across the river Euphrates¹ which 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 there² (v. 32). But how can Jeremiah speak so confidently of the demise of Babylon which in his day was at the zenith of power? Jeremiah replies, Babylon is like a threshing-floor, a piece of ground made level by trampling or treading, which 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 shall come to Babylon (v. 33).

B. The Complaint of Israel and the Reply of the Lord 51:34-40

TRANSLATION

(34) Nebuchadnezzar has devoured us, has crushed us, has set us down like an empty vessel. Like a monster he has devoured us, filled his belly with my dainties, expelled us. (35) May the violence done to me and my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitress of Zion say. May my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say. (36) Therefore, thus says the LORD: Behold, I am about to plead your cause and execute your vengeance and

1. At right angles with the river were the main streets of Babylon. At the end of each was a gate and probably steps leading down to the river. Transportation across the river in boats was provided at each of these points. Other commentators understand the "passages" to be the fords across the canals around Babylon.

2. Considerable disagreement about the meaning of "reeds burned with fire" exists among commentators. The explanation offered here is that of John Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

I will dry up her seas and cause her fountains to fail. (37) And Babylon shall be heaps, a habitation of jackals, an astonishment and place over which one will whistle, without inhabitant. (38) They shall roar together like young lions, growl like lion's whelps. (39) When they become hot I will prepare a feast for them; I will make them drunken that they may rejoice and then sleep a perpetual sleep from which they shall not wake (oracle of the LORD). (40) I will bring them down like sheep to slaughter, like rams with he-goats.

COMMENTS

In verses 34 and 35 Jeremiah hears as it were the bitter complaints of the Jewish captives against the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar has devoured and crushed Israel; he has emptied his land and caused it to stand like an empty vessel. Like some great monster of the sea or river the king of Babylon had swallowed all in which Israel delights (his "delicacies"). 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 King James translation "dragon" is unfortunate and misleading. Nebuchadnezzar had "cast out" Israel i.e., he had rejected and discarded Israel as though the people of God were something worthless or repulsive (v. 34). For this violence, outrage and indignity Israel would see the vengeance of the Lord upon Babylon (v. 35). It is as though Israel is a plaintiff standing before a judge and demanding that the guilty oppressor be punished. The reference to the flesh and blood in verse 35 refers back to the figure of Babylon devouring Israel in the previous verse.

In response to the appeal of oppressed Israel the Lord declares that He will take up their cause and bring vengeance upon their enemies. The "sea" and "fountain" of Babylon shall dry up (v. 36). Probably the reference here

is to the Euphrates river and to the irrigation canals which crisscrossed the country bringing fertility to an otherwise arid land. 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. 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.¹ Those who pass by the desolate site of Babylon will hiss or whistle in astonishment at what has befallen the once proud metropolis (v. 37).

In Jeremiah's day the Babylonians were like lion cubs growling in exultation over the spoil which they had won from conquered nations (v. 38). But while the Babylonians are in the midst of their greedily enjoyment the Lord 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, become intoxicated, and fall into the drunkard's sleep—a sleep from which they never will awake (v. 39). The devouring lion shall become as a lamb led to the slaughter (v. 40). The mention of lambs, rams and he-goats in verse 40 may be a way of saying that all classes of the population will go down to the slaughter.

C. Babylon's Demolition and Israel's Liberation

51:41-46

TRANSLATION

(41) How sad that Sheshak is captured, the praise of all the earth is taken! How sad that Babylon has

1. The King James is again misleading in rendering the Hebrew word "dragons." A different Hebrew word from that used in v. 34 is used here and commentators are in general agreement that the word used here means jackals.

become an astonishment among the nations! (42) The sea has gone up against Babylon; she is covered with the tumult of its waves. (43) Her cities have become an astonishment, a dry land, a wilderness, a land where no man dwells and no human being passes by. (44) I will punish Bel in Babylon and make him disgorge that which he has consumed. No more shall nations flow unto him. Also the wall of Babylon shall fall. (45) Go out from her midst, O My people! Let every man flee for his life from the fierce anger of the LORD. (46) Let not your heart faint nor fear because of the report in the land; for a report shall come in one year, and after that in another year a report shall come: Violence is in the land and ruler opposes ruler.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah begins this section of his oracle with a sarcastic lamentation over the fall of Babylon. The "how" of verse 41 is not the how of amazement. The Hebrew word belongs to the vocabulary of lamentation and perhaps can best be rendered in English by "how sad it is!" No doubt the word is used here sarcastically. "How sad it is that Sheshach, the praise of the whole earth, is captured." "Sheshach" is a cryptic name for Babylon (see comments on 25:26). How sad it is that Babylon the mighty metropolis has become a desolation and an astonishment among the nations (v. 41). A sea¹ of foreign invaders sweeps over the land of Babylonia (v. 42) leaving in its wake a desolation, a desert, "a land where no man dwells" (v. 43). 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, will be forced to disgorge all that he has de-

1. Some prefer to interpret the word "sea" as referring to the annual inundations of the Euphrates which even to this day render many parts of the ruins of Babylon inaccessible.

voured of the riches of subjugated nations. No more would Babylonian conquests bring a stream of captives to the prison house of Babylon. Indeed those massive walls themselves would fall and all prisoners within would be free to return to their native lands (v. 44). The gods of Babylon had had their moment of glory and seeming triumph 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.

The fall of Babylon means liberation for the people of God and the prophet returns in verse 45 and 46 to this minor theme which runs throughout the Babylon oracle. He repeats what he earlier has urged (50:8) that when the captives see the fierce anger of the Lord beginning to be poured out upon Babylon they should flee from the city (v. 45). Meanwhile they should not be disturbed by rumors of war and internal conflict for these but forshadow that final day of doom for Babylon. Numerous upheavals and throne changes plagued Babylon after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C. The prophet warns his brethren lest these commotions disturb them and arouse premature hopes of release. One is reminded of the similar admonition of Christ concerning the wars and rumors of war which prelude the day of the Lord (Matthew 24:6; Luke 21:28).

D. Babylon's Retribution and Israel's Return

51:47-53

TRANSLATION

(47) Therefore, the days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon, and all her land shall be put to shame; her slain ones shall fall in her midst. (48) Heavens, earth and all in them shall sing

over Babylon, for spoilers shall come to her (oracle of the LORD). (49) As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the land. (50) O you who have escaped the sword, Go! Do not stand around! Remember from afar the LORD, and let Jerusalem come to your mind. (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 the LORD. (52) Therefore, behold, days are coming (oracle of the LORD) when I will punish her graven images, and in all her land the wounded shall groan. (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 the LORD).

COMMENTS

Using a formula which he has previously used some fourteen times, "Behold, the days come," Jeremiah develops anew the theme of the divine vengeance upon Babylon and the subsequent vindication of Israel. The threat against Bel in verse 44 is now expanded to include all the idols of Babylon (cf. also 50:2). Realizing that they have no higher power to whom they can turn the idolaters of Babylon are utterly confounded and ashamed. The defenders of Babylon are wounded and slain in the very midst of the city and the gods are unable to intervene on their behalf (v. 47). When the destroyer from the north, the Medo-Persian armies, capture Babylon the whole universe rejoices (v. 48). Heaven and earth rejoice because once again the Lord has demonstrated His wisdom, power and justice; once again it becomes evident that He and not Satan is the real Ruler of this universe. The sin of Babylon against Israel shall be recompensed. Just as Babylon had caused so many of Israel to fall in battle, so

many from all over the land of¹ Babylonia shall be slain when Babylon falls (v. 49).

The prophet next turns to those who have escaped the sword of divine vengeance against Babylon. He bids these exiles to remember the Lord and Jerusalem and not to tarry in Babylonia (v. 50). But the captives are so filled with grief and remorse at what has happened to their Temple that they seem not to hear or acknowledge the joyful prophetic exhortation of verse 50. "We are confounded, dismayed, confused because strangers have entered into the sacred sanctuaries of the Lord's house thus profaning them." 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 alone were subjected to constant reproach and ridicule by their neighbors (v. 51). But again the Lord reminds those captives of what He has previously stated in this oracle, that the days are coming when He will vindicate Himself by executing judgment on the gods of Babylon (v. 52). Though the city should raise up her defensive walls and towers even to the heavens, yet the city will not be able to withstand the assault of the destroyer sent against her by the Lord (v. 53).

E. The Final Pronouncement Against Babylon

51:54-58

TRANSLATION

(54) Hark! A cry from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans. (55) For the LORD is destroying Babylon, silencing her great noise. Her waves roar like many waters, the noise of their voice is given forth. (56) For a destroyer shall come against her, against Babylon, and her

1. The Hebrew word can also be translated "earth." Keil thinks this verse refers to the multitudes from all over the world who might be in Babylon at the time the city falls.

mighty men are taken, their bows shattered, for a God of recompense is the LORD; He will surely recompense. (57) And I will cause her princes, wise-men, governors, leaders and mighty men to drink and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and never awake (oracle of the King, the LORD of hosts is His name). (58) Thus says the LORD of hosts: The wide wall of Babylon shall be utterly razed, and her high gates shall be put to the torch. Thus people labor for nothing and nations get weary only for fire.

COMMENTS

With prophetic ear Jeremiah can hear the cry at Babylon as the destruction of the city commences (v. 54). The foe sweeps into Babylon like a great sea, its roar drowning out "the great voice" (the tumult) of the city (v. 55). The military arm of Babylon is crushed, the defensive weapons are destroyed (v. 56). The leaders of Babylon will drink the cup of God's wrath and fall into a helpless stupor that they may not be able to defend the city. Indeed they will be slain in their drunkenness and will "sleep a perpetual sleep," the sleep of death (cf. v. 39). The Lord of hosts, the King of creation, has spoken it and it shall come to pass (v. 57). The broad walls of Babylon, which 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 60 or 70 feet high and about 40 feet wide.¹ Herodotus further testifies that in the circuit of the wall of Babylon were a hundred gates, all of brass,

1. Streane, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

with brazen lintels and side-posts.¹ These gates will be "burned" i.e., attacked, destroyed and melted down. Countless thousands of workers from many nations of the world labored to make the citadel of Babylon impregnable. But when the Lord 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. It is very appropriate that Jeremiah closes the Babylon oracle with a quote from his contemporary Habakkuk: "The peoples shall labor for vanity, and the nations for fire; and they shall be weary" (cf. Habakkuk 2:13).

The abiding lesson in all this is succinctly stated in verse 56: "The Lord is a God of recompense. He will surely requite." The God of the Bible is a God of judgment however much moderns may wish it otherwise. He will require, 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" (Galatians 6:7).

IV. THE HISTORY OF THE BABYLON PROPHECY 51:59-65

TRANSLATION

(59) The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, when he went with Zedekiah, king of Judah, to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the chief quartermaster. (60) Now Jeremiah had written all of the misfortune which would come upon Babylon on one scroll, all of these words which are written concerning Babylon. (61) Jeremiah said to Seraiah: When you come to Babylon see that you read aloud all these words. (62) Then you shall say:

1. Herodotus I. 179.

O Lord, You have spoken concerning this place that you would cut it off so that there would be no living in it, neither man nor beast, because it shall be an everlasting desolation. (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 (64) and say: Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not arise because of the calamity which I am about to bring against her, and they shall be wearied. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

COMMENTS

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 and thus 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 (chap. 27). Hearing of this conclave, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Zedekiah to Babylon that he might reaffirm his loyalty and renew his vassal oath. Accompanying Zedekiah on the trip was Seraiah the chief chamberlain (not "quiet prince" as in KJV) whose job it was to prepare in advance the royal chambers. No doubt Seraiah would ride one day's journey ahead of the royal party to make all necessary arrangements at the next halting place along the way. Seraiah was a brother of Baruch,¹ Jeremiah's faithful scribe, and a friend of the prophet (v. 59).

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. The prophet gathered together into one book-roll all the oracles against Babylon

1. Both Baruch (32:12) and Seraiah are said to be sons of Neriah.

which he had written or uttered up until the fourth year of Zedekiah. Probably the reason Jeremiah was careful to use *one* roll (ASV *mar*) is because a single roll could be handled more easily and safely than two. The phrase "even all these words which are written concerning Babylon" points back to the content of chapters 50-51. Seraiah was given the scroll and commanded to read it aloud in Babylon (v. 61).

As he opens the scroll he is to summarize its contents (v. 62) before he begins to read. When the reading has been completed he is instructed to bind a stone about the scroll and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates (v. 63). As he does so he is to cry "thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again" (v. 64).

The words, "they shall be weary" (in Hebrew, one word) are the last words of the Babylon prophecy (cf. v. 58) of chapters 50-51. The repetition of the word by Seraiah serves to join together the symbolic act and the prophecy which 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 as this would be fraught with great danger to Seraiah and possibly even to Zedekiah himself. Rather this whole action was performed before certain trustworthy witnesses who would be able to testify in later days as to what they had heard and seen. But 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 this 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 and no doubt those who heard the reading and witnessed the sinking were called upon to recite again and again the wonderful message.

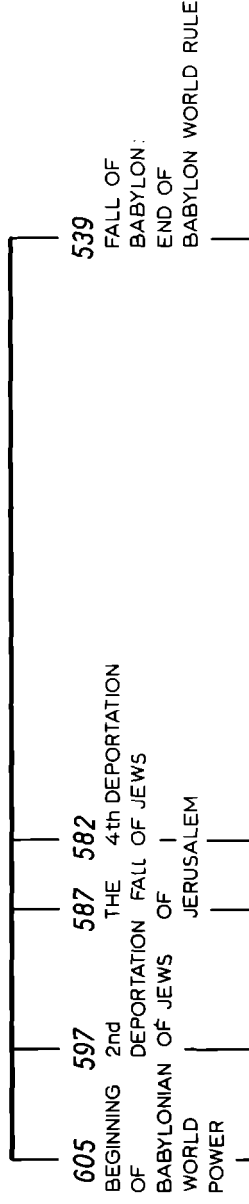
Still another question which needs to be answered is why was the Babylon scroll sunk in the Euphrates river? The sinking of the scroll was not an act of sympathetic magic such as was practiced among the heathen. By dramatically acting out an event pagan religious leaders believed that they magically were setting the wheels of fate in motion which 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.

A final question of importance: 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 which he sent to Babylon he added many similar threats against Babylon. For example, those words which suggested that the Temple has already been destroyed under this theory could be assigned to a date subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem. While this theory has much to command it the present writer does not feel that it is necessary. The impression left in v. 60 and in Seraiah's repetition of the last Hebrew word of verse 58 (cf. v. 64) is that the scroll which he read in Babylon was identical with the prophecy of 50:2-51:58.

THE TWO SEVENTY YEAR PERIODS

4th YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM
AND 1st YEAR OF
NEBUCHADNEZZAR

SEVENTY YEARS OF BABYLONIAN WORLD POWER



587 TEMPLE DESTROYED

TEMPLE REBUILT

SEVENTY YEARS OF INDIGNATION



"And for his (i.e. Jehoiachin's) diet, there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion, until the day of his death, all the days of his life" (Jeremiah 52: 34).

Two fragments of clay tablets which were found in Babylon, and which contain lists of rations delivered to captives there. The cuneiform text reads as follows:

"10 (sila of oil) for . . . Jaukin (Jehoiachin), king of Judah, 2½ sila for . . . the sons of the king of Judah, 4 sila for eight men from Judah" . . . "1½ sila (of oil) for three carpenters from Arvad, ½ sila each. 11½ for eight ditto from Babylon, ½ sila each, 3½ sila for seven ditto, Greeks, ½ sila each . . . 10 (sila) for Jakukinu (Jehoiachin), son of the king of Judah, 2½ sila for the five sons of the king of Judah by the hand of Qanama . . ." The clay tablets which date from 592 B. C. prove that the king of Judah must have lived in Babylon with his sons and some retainers, since they are still on the ration strength six years after the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation. They demonstrate the historical accuracy of the biblical text.



SPECIAL STUDY¹

THE FALL
OF BABYLON:
A PROBLEM IN
PROPHETIC
INTERPRETATION

1. The material in this special study appeared originally in *The Seminary Review*, XVII (Fall, 1970).

JEREMIAH

In comparison with their treatment of other foreign nations Isaiah and Jeremiah had a great deal to say about the fall of Babylon.¹ As regards the fulfillment of these prophecies two schools of thought have arisen. One view is that ancient Babylon will be restored, become once again the center of sin, and then be destroyed finally by eschatological judgments. This view might be called the futuristic view. Another view is that Babylon was destroyed once and for all and will never be restored. This might be designated as the historical view. The purpose of this study is to answer this question: Is the fall of Babylon as prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah an historical event of the past, or does it await a future fulfillment?

There are far-reaching involvements in the resolution of the question about to be considered. The ultimate issue underlying this whole discussion is: How literally are Old Testament prophecies to be interpreted? Some insight into this basic hermeneutical issue can be gained by presenting the arguments for and against the futuristic and historical views of the fall of Babylon.

I. THE FUTURISTIC VIEW OF BABYLON'S FALL

The view that the destruction of Babylon is yet future is defended by Newton,² Pember,³ Seiss,⁴ Newell,⁵ and others. Five lines of argument are offered in support of this position.

A. The Argument from Eschatology

It is the contention of the futuristic school of interpretation that in context the fall of Babylon is directly related to an eschatological setting. Certain passages relate the fall of Babylon to the Day of the Lord and to the Millennial Kingdom.

1. *Babylon's fall and the Day of the Lord*

The futuristic interpreters insist that Isaiah 13:6, 9, 13 definitely establish the setting for the fall of Babylon as the Day of the Lord. To these interpreters the Day of the Lord is always an eschatological event. Since in Isaiah 13:2-16 the terminology "Day of the Lord" appears these verses must have a future fulfillment. But if these verses have a future fulfillment then it would seem to be impossible to interpret verses 17 through 20 which describe the overthrow of Babylon as having been fulfilled in the past.⁶ The conclusion is therefore offered that since the fall of Babylon as prophesied in Scripture is to take place in the setting of the Day of the Lord; and since the Day of the Lord is yet future, then it follows that the destruction of Babylon yet awaits fulfillment.

2. *Babylon's fall and the Millennial Kingdom*

The futuristic interpreters point out that the prophecy of Babylon's fall not only relates to the Day of the Lord but also to the events which mark the beginning of the Millennium. The passage which most clearly supports this contention is Isaiah 14:1-7.⁷ James Gray argues that there are at least three things in these verses concerning Israel's history which have not come to pass: (1) God has not yet set them in their own land (14:1); (2) Israel does not yet possess the peoples of the earth for servants and handmaids (14:2); (3) Israel has not yet taken them captive whose captives they were, nor ruled over their oppressors (14:2).⁸ It is asserted that those who regard the fall of Babylon as historically complete must spiritualize these verses or pass them over completely. The futuristic interpreters categorically reject the suggestion that these promises of peace, prosperity and power have been fulfilled in the history of Israel.⁹

Thus Scripture makes Babylon's fall contemporaneous

with two concurrent events—the forgiveness of Israel and the coming Day of the Lord. Even if it could be shown that the desolation of Babylon and its land had reached a point which adequately answers to predictions of Scripture respecting it, a revival of Babylon would still be necessary in order for Scripture to be accomplished. Newton summarizes the argument when he writes: “Babylon can only be finally destroyed at *the time* and under *the circumstances* specified in the Scripture.”¹⁰

B. The Argument from History

A second line of argument used to support the futuristic view of Babylon’s fall is the argument from history. It is affirmed that the record of history and the prediction of Scripture are at variance with one another if the fall of Babylon is an event of the past. Scriptural prophecy is alleged to contradict the historical record on at least two points: (1) the suddenness of Babylon’s fall; and (2) the catastrophic nature of Babylon’s fall.

1. *The suddenness of Babylon’s fall*

The futuristic interpreters argue that the Scripture indicate a sudden destruction of Babylon whereas history records no such sudden destruction by which that city became a desolation. Isaiah 47, for example, indicates that the “mistress of kingdoms” would suffer loss of children and widowhood “in one day.” Both the loss of commercial relationships with other nations and depopulation would come upon Babylon suddenly and completely (“in their full measure”). But the continuous history of Babylon can be traced through many centuries subsequent to the capture of that city of Cyrus. This fact seems to contradict the prophetic picture of Babylon’s fall as given by Isaiah 47. Furthermore, Babylon will be destroyed “as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (13:19).¹¹

The destruction of these cities was not protracted through many centuries but was the result of a supernatural stroke. So Babylon's destruction is to be brought about suddenly and the weapons of judgment are to be largely elemental. The heavens and earth will become disordered and water will swallow up the site upon which the city stands (Isaiah 13:13; Jeremiah 51:42).¹² Because Babylon did not suddenly become a desolation, the futuristic interpreters argue that the prophecies concerning the fall of this city must await fulfillment in the future.

2. The catastrophic nature of Babylon's fall

The catastrophic nature of Babylon's fall is indicated in the following verses:

Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is taken shall fall by the sword. Their infants also shall be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be rifled, and their wives ravished (Isaiah 13:15-16).

The language of these two verses is the most descriptive that could be employed to picture the total, pitiless and barbaric slaughter of the inhabitants of Babylon. The argument is advanced that "nowhere in the history of Babylon's downfall did a destruction of human life occur in any degree comparable to that which is pictured by these verses."¹³

A second passage indicates the catastrophic nature of the destruction of the city itself.

Come against her from the utmost border; open her store-houses; cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly; let nothing of her be left (Jeremiah 50:26).

This verse probably means that all the property found in Babylon would be collected and then burned with the

city. But such a catastrophic destruction has not been literally fulfilled by any of Babylon's conquerors.¹⁴

From the futuristic view point the prophecies of a sudden and yet complete destruction and desolation of Babylon have not been fulfilled. History reveals that Babylon never was the object of such a judgment but on the contrary has persisted as a commercial center and political community even to the present.¹⁵ In view of this argument from history Newell concludes "it appears impossible that the great prophecies concerning Babylon's final overthrow . . . have been finally fulfilled."¹⁶

C. The Argument from the Present

The third line of evidence advanced to support the futurity of Babylon's fall is the argument from the present. It is affirmed that many passages which refer to Babylon's desolation present a picture which seems to contradict the existing condition of the city. The following excerpts from the Babylon prophecies make clear what the existing state of Babylon should be if the prophecies have been fulfilled.

It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there. For out of the north there cometh a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they are fled, they are gone, both man and beast. And they shall not take of you a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the Lord (Isaiah 13:20; Jeremiah 50:3; 51:26).

The futuristic interpreters do not feel that the present condition of the site of ancient Babylon corresponds to this prophetic picture of desolation. To be sure Baby-

lon has experienced widespread ruin and damage and these interpreters do not wish to undervalue or hide the extent of the ruin. But thus far only "premonitory blows" have fallen against Babylon.¹⁷ Seiss maintains that "Babylon, in all the deep calamities and desolations which have come upon her, never yet experienced all that has been thus prophesied."¹⁸

In contradiction to the prophecies of the perpetual desolation of Babylon flourishing villages exist today on the site of that metropolis. One city of more than ten thousand population probably lies within the walls of the ancient city.¹⁹ Larkin argues that it has never been true that "neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there" (Isaiah 13:20). Nor can it be said "and they shall not take of you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations" (Jeremiah 51:26) for many towns and cities have been built from the ruins of Babylon. Hillah was entirely constructed from debris of the city, and even in the houses of Bagdad Babylonian-stamped brick may be frequently noticed.²⁰ Newton emphasizes the fact that the LAND of Babylon has never yet experienced the desolation predicted and he cites numerous travelers who attest to the fertility of the LAND of Babylon.²¹

The futuristic interpreters feel that the prophecies concerning the destruction of Babylon have not yet passed into history. This being the case, they argue, three alternatives are left to the interpreter: (1) he can deny the inspiration of the prophets themselves; (2) he can boldly deny the facts and argue against realities; (3) he can speak the truth and say that Babylon has not yet received its final blow.²² Whether or not this exhausts the possible alternatives must be decided after the case for the historical view of Babylon's fall is heard.

D. The Argument from Revelation 17-18

A more positive argument supporting the futuristic

interpretation is found in Revelation 17-18. It is important to note that most of those who hold that Babylon is yet to be destroyed expound this view in exegeting Revelation 17-18.²³ The argument is that two Babylons are described in the Book of Revelation—mystical Babylon and literal Babylon. Literal Babylon will be restored at the end of time and then destroyed by eschatological judgments.

1. *The two Babylons of Revelation*

The key point in the argument from the Book of Revelation is that John is describing two Babylons. In Revelation 17 John speaks of a "woman" called "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth." In chapter 18 John speaks of a city called "Babylon the Great." Pember argues that the "woman" and the "city" cannot symbolize the same thing because what is said of the one does not apply to the other. The "woman" is destroyed by the "ten kings," (17:16) while the "kings of the earth" in the next chapter "bewail and lament" (18:9) the destruction of the "city." The "city" is not destroyed by the kings but by a sudden visitation by God in the form of a fire and earthquake. Furthermore, the first verse of chapter 18 ("after these things") indicates that it is after the destruction of the "woman" that the destruction of the "city" occurs.²⁴ Newell adds the following distinction: The particular sin of Babylon in chapter 17 is spiritual fornication; of Babylon in chapter 18, evil commercialism.²⁵ By such lines of argumentation the conclusion is reached that the "woman" and the "city" are not one and the same. Pember states that "whatever may be intended by the Babylon of the seventeenth chapter, it is, at least, something altogether distinct from that of the eighteenth."²⁶ These interpreters make a distinction between "Mystic Babylon" and "Literal Babylon" (Newell); "Ecclesiastical Babylon" and "Eschatological Bab-

ylon" (Bloomfield); "Mystical Babylon" and "Commercial Babylon" (Larkin). Mystical Babylon is the Devil's church through the ages; commercial Babylon is the ancient city on the Euphrates restored.

2. *The restoration of literal Babylon*

According to the futuristic school, Revelation 18 describes the reconstructed Babylon of the last days. In chapter 17 John dealt chiefly with symbols and an angel added an explanation. According to this view, no symbols are used in chapter 18 and no explanation is therefore needed. Govett insists that this means the chapter must be taken literally.²⁷ Larkin contends that since symbolical Babylon was destroyed in chapter 17 the city of chapter 18 must be literal Babylon. Since no such city exists today, the city of Babylon must be rebuilt at some point in the future.²⁸ The last world monarchy, with Antichrist at its head will make the restored city the seat of its government and the center of a federation of the God-defying nations of the earth.²⁹

3. *The final destruction of Babylon*

According to the futuristic interpreters, Revelation 18 also describes the overthrow of the future metropolis of restored Babylon. The chapter begins with the angelic announcement of doom: "Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great." God's people (in this case, godly Jews) are warned to flee out of Babylon.³⁰ The direct and catastrophic nature of Babylon's final fall is indicated. Babylon's destruction will come in "one hour" (v. 10) and in that one hour the city shall be made desolate (v. 19). The city will be destroyed by fire (vv. 8, 9, 18) which harmonizes with Isaiah 13:19 "As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah." The awful, perpetual curse of desolation that will follow the execution of the judgment (vv. 2,

22, 23). The kings and merchants of the earth mourn over the destruction of the great commercial metropolis (vv. 9-11; 15-19).

Little harmony exists among the interpreters as to who will destroy eschatological Babylon. Seiss believes that the final judgment upon great Babylon is so miraculous and direct from heaven that earthly agents have but little to do with it, if anything.³¹ Govett believes the judgment will be executed by Israel just before the nation is swallowed up by God.³² Bloomfield, on the other hand, feels that the city will be destroyed by the soldiers of Antichrist probably by means of an atomic bomb.³³

Such then is the argument from the Book of Revelation. After the fall of ecclesiastical Babylon, literal Babylon will be rebuilt, will become a great commercial center, and will be destroyed by eschatological judgments.

E. The Argument from Zechariah's Vision

Another line of positive testimony which is brought forth in support of the futuristic interpretation is Zechariah's vision of the woman in an ephah (5:5-11). The prophet sees a woman called "wickedness" sitting in an ephah (symbol of commerce) carried to the land of Shinar by two winged women. According to Bloomfield the woman symbolizes a wicked, universal system or Satan's church.³⁴ This prophecy was delivered subsequent to Babylon's captivity and at least half a lifetime after Babylon had been conquered by the Medes and Persians. Newell supposes this vision to portray the final concentration of wickedness in the reconstructed Babylon in the land of Shinar.³⁵ This passage is regarded as "confirmatory proof that the ancient city of Babylon is to be rebuilt and become the commercial center of the world."³⁶

The strength or weakness of these five lines of argument offered by the futuristic school of interpreters must

be evaluated in the light of the case put forward by the historical school of interpretation.

II. THE HISTORICAL VIEW OF BABYLON'S FALL

In contrast to the futuristic view of Babylon's fall the historical school holds that the Old Testament prophecies relating to the fall of Babylon have already been fulfilled. Among the advocates of this view are Alexander³⁷ Franz Delitzsch,³⁸ Ironsides,³⁹ and George Adam Smith.⁴⁰ In order to appreciate this view it will first be necessary to set forth concisely the hermeneutical framework within which these scholars interpret the Babylon prophecies.

A. Hermeneutical Perspective of the Historical School

This historical view of Babylon's fall is set forth within a very different hermeneutical framework from that of the futuristic view. Three important principles govern the interpretation of the Babylon prophecies by those who hold the historical view.

1. *The principle of generic prophecy*

One principle which is employed by the historical school is that predictive prophecy is sometimes generic. Alexander speaks of the difficulty of harmonizing all the details of the Babylon prophecies with the capture of that city by Cyrus. He then adds:

The true solution of this difficulty is that the prediction is generic, not specific; that it is not a detailed account of one event exclusively, but a prophetic picture of the fall of Babylon considered as a whole, some of the traits being taken from the first, and some from the last stage of

the fatal process, while others are indefinite or common to all.⁴¹

On this principle of an ideal event the historical school feels itself under no obligation to demonstrate a complete coincidence of prophecy and history in regard to the fall of Babylon.

2. *Principle of perspective shortening*

A second rule of interpretation employed by the historical school is the principle of perspective shortening. According to this principle events which are widely separated in time are sometimes blended as though they were continuous. Naegelsbach believes that the Babylon prophecies are "an example of that prophetic gaze which, as it were, sees in one plain that which in reality is extended through many successive stages of time."⁴² The prophet brings together in one paragraph, and sometimes one verse, the conquest, destruction, and desolation of Babylon "whereas in reality these were accomplished in the course of centuries."⁴³ Because of this principle the historical school does not feel compelled to find the fulfillment of every detail of the prophecies of Babylon's fall in the capture of Cyrus or anyone particular calamity which befell the city.

3. *Principle of poetic license*

A third principle which undergirds the historical interpretation of Babylon's fall is this: Allowance must be made for imagery, hyperbolic expression, and poetic diction in predictive prophecy. This must be the case, for instance, in such passages as Isaiah 13:10—"For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in its going forth, and the moon shall not cause its light to shine." This must

be understood as metaphorical because the revolutions and destructions of nations are often represented in the Scriptures under this image.⁴⁴ It is therefore considered to be unfair for anyone to argue that the prophecy of Babylon's fall is unfulfilled because there was no celestial disruption when that city fell to the Medo-Persian armies. Hyperbolic elements might be also found in the prophecies that Babylon will become an uninhabited desolation; that not a stone from the city will be used in building; that the fall of the city will be accompanied by a slaughter of man, women and children.

B. Rebuttal to the Futuristic Arguments

It is necessary now to ask this question: What rebuttal does the historical school of interpretation have to offer to the five lines of argument advanced by the futuristic school?

1. *The eschatological argument*

The futuristic school holds that since the fall of Babylon is prophesied in connection with the Day of the Lord and the Millennial Kingdom it must be a future event. The historical school argues in reply that the Day of the Lord as described in Isaiah 13:2-16 is not an eschatological event. The prophet is relating "the burden of Babylon" (13:1) in these verses. Hence the logical inference from context is that the language "Day of the Lord" as here used refers to the calamity of Babylon's fall. As for the Millennium the historical interpreters would simply insist that such passages as Isaiah 14:1-7 refer to the return from Babylonian captivity and not to any eschatological restoration of Israel.

2. *The argument from history*

The historical school of interpretation contends that

the prophecies regarding Babylon's fall do not relate to one specific historical situation but to an ideal fall of the city. These interpreters feel that when the principles of generic prophecy, perspective shortening, and hyperbolic utterance are applied to the Babylon prophecies it is evident that they have been fulfilled as much as they shall ever be. The definite historical beginning of the ideal fall of Babylon is indicated in the prophecies of the coming of the Medes (Isaiah 13:17; 21:2, 3; Jeremiah 51:11, 28). Cyrus is named as the leader in the expedition against Babylon (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). Because of these definite historical allusions the historical school of interpreters cannot see how the fall of Babylon could be an eschatological event.⁴⁵

3. *Argument from the present*

The futuristic school argues that the existing condition of the site of ancient Babylon does not completely fulfill the picture of utter desolation described by the prophets. The historical school grants that there are some predictions against Babylon which have not been literally fulfilled but this they consider unnecessary. Cheyne contends that the veracity of prophecy is not dependent upon "circumstantial fulfillment."⁴⁶ The following statement of Orelli reflects the general attitude of the historical school toward the town of Hillah which is located on or near the site of Babylon.

In sight of the ruined plains of Babylon it would be petty dogmatism to point to the present settlements there which are only important through their contrast to the former greatness and splendor of the imperial capital.⁴⁷

Even more straightforward is the contention of Newman, a nineteenth-century visitor to the site of Babylon.

In no sense is the Moslem town of Hillah, with its ten thousand inhabitants, the restoration of the ancient city. The walls, the temples, the palaces, the dwellings of Babylon, have not been rebuilt. The once proud city is a desolation without an inhabitant.⁴⁸

4. *Babylon in the Book of Revelation*

While the futuristic interpreters distinguish between the Babylon of Revelation 17 and that of chapter 18 the historical interpreters, as a rule, do not. Whatever interpretation is given to the harlot of Revelation 17 is also given to the metropolis of chapter 18. Among the interpreters who reject any reference to literal Babylon in Revelation, three views prevail. Some hold that John's Babylon is the figurative application of that name to a totally different city, *viz.*, Rome.⁴⁹ Others hold that the New Testament Babylon is the apostate church.⁵⁰ A third group holds that the term Babylon in Revelation applies to a system or civilization rather than to any specific geographical center.⁵¹

However diverse their explanations of John's Babylon may be, these interpreters are convinced that no reference to literal Babylon is intended by the Patmos Seer. They feel that the notion that literal Babylon is to be rebuilt is in conflict with the Old Testament prophecies which indicate Babylon is to be destroyed and never again inhabited.⁵² Furthermore, John's Babylon is contrasted with that of the Chaldees in that the latter was built upon a plain while the former is characterized by the seven mountains on which it sits.⁵³ For these reasons the literalistic interpretation is rejected and a symbolical application for the name Babylon in the Book of Revelation is suggested.

5. *Zechariah's vision*

The futuristic interpreters understand the vision of the woman in an ephah to indicate that the land of Shinar will become a great center of evil commercialism. The historical interpreters regard this vision as simply an illustration that iniquity is now removed from the Holy Land and taken to Babylonia. Shinar in this passage is a symbol of the secular world which wars against the truth, *viz.*, Satan's kingdom of wickedness.⁵⁴

III. THE HISTORICAL DECLINE OF BABYLON

Because of considerations of space only a brief outline of the stages in the decline of Babylon can be given here.

A. The Persian Period

1. The capture of Babylon by Cyrus (539 B.C.). The armies of Babylon were crushed at Opis on the Tigris. The seizure of Babylon itself was relatively peaceful. The city remained a great metropolis.

2. The capture of Babylon by Darius (522-521 B.C.) Herodotus (III. 151-159) reports a siege of almost two years. Darius destroyed one of the three broad walls which guarded the city and tore down the hundred gates of which Babylon was so proud.

3. The capture of Babylon by Xerxes (482 B.C.). The temple E-sagila was torn down. Quarters of the city that had been pillaged remained uninhabited and fell into ruins. Commerce dwindled; industry flagged. So thoroughly did Xerxes ravage Babylon that barely a half-dozen tablets have survived from the remainder of his reign over that city. Babylonia lost its identity through incorporation with Assyria and was henceforth ferociously taxed.⁵⁵

4. Under the later Persian kings Babylon experienced a brief revival but was not completely restored.

B. The Greek Period

1. Alexander the Great attempted to restore Babylon in 331 B.C. With the death of that great king the project was abandoned.

2. In the twenty-five years after the death of Alexander Babylon was sacked and put to the torch at least seven times.⁵⁶

3. The founding of Seleucia sometime between 307 and 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nicator I (312-281 B.C.). The new city, some ninety miles away from Babylon, was populated with colonists from Babylon.

4. Between 160 and 140 B.C. the city was taken by rival armies at least four times.⁵⁷ With the capture of the city by the Parthian king Mithridates I, the period of Greek dominance in Babylonia came to an end.

C. The Parthian Period

1. Nine years after the Parthians gained control of Babylonia the city fell once again, this time into the hands of Antiochus VII Sidetes (130 B.C.).

2. In 127-126 B.C. Babylon was conquered by Hy-spasines, the fifth conquest of the city since July 141 B.C.

3. Between 126 and 123 B.C. Himeros, a Parthian, dealt a death blow to the ancient city. He burned the marketplace of Babylon and some of the temples and completely destroyed the better part of the city. Many of the inhabitants were sent to Media as slaves.

4. In 122 B.C. Mithridates II recaptured the city.

The preceding survey has indicated that subsequent to the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. that city suffered innumerable sieges, captures and calamities. No fewer than eighteen times did Babylon "fall" to an enemy. With few

exceptions each successive conqueror treated the mighty metropolis with more severity than did his predecessor. At 10 B.C. all primary information about the city of Babylon disappears. From this time on classical historians, geographers, naturalists, travelers and commentators must supply the information concerning the city of Babylon. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus in the first century B.C. relates that only a small part of ancient Babylon was inhabited in his day (II. 9.9). Strabo the Greek geographer (63 B.C.-19 A.D.) describes Babylon as being "in great part deserted" (XVI. 1.5). Pausanias, the Greek traveler and geographer of the second Christian century, declares that nothing remained of Babylon except the temple of Belus and the walls of the city (VIII. 33.3). Lucian (ca. 129-180 A.D.) the Greek sophist and satirist says that Babylon will soon have to be searched for like Nineveh of which not a trace remained in his day.⁵⁸

Among the Latin writers the testimony concerning the condition of Babylon is similar. Pliny (23-79 A.D.), the Roman polymath, states that while the temple of Bel is still standing "in all other respects the place has gone back to a desert."⁵⁹ The Roman historian Dio Cassius describes Trajan's visit to Babylon in which he found only "mounds and stones and ruins."⁶⁰

Jewish sources confirm the picture of the desolate state of Babylon in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. Josephus describes how the Jews at Babylon were subjected to persecution by the native people and abandoned the city in the middle of the first Christian century (*Ant.* XV. 9.8, 9). The Talmud prescribed certain benedictions which one was to utter when he saw the ruins of Babylon (*Bera-koth* 57b).⁶¹

In Christian literature Babylon is mentioned in I Peter 5:13. This passage has been used to prove that Babylon in the first century was a thriving city with a Jewish population sufficiently large enough to demand

the ministry of the apostle Peter. For a number of reasons⁶² it is best to reject the literal interpretation of Babylon in this passage and to regard "Babylon" here as a cryptogram for Rome.

The only Christian reference to Mesopotamian Babylon is found in Jerome's commentary on Isaiah.⁶³ He makes reference to the fact that Babylon in his day had been made a game preserve by one of the Parthian kings.

IV. CONCLUSION

Upon the basis of the evidence heretofore presented the conclusion is reached that the fall of Babylon as prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah has already taken place. The conclusion that Babylon has fallen once and for all time has much in its favor:

1. The view that Babylon has fallen in fulfillment of prophecy is based upon sound principles of prophetic interpretation. The entire problem of whether the fall of Babylon is past or future is a hermeneutical one in which the factor of literality is a major issue. In the final analysis each individual must decide how literally he is going to understand these Babylon prophecies. But examples of prophetic interpretation by inspired New Testament writers seems to indicate that the principles of generic prophecy, perspective shortening, and poetic imagery must be taken into account in properly understanding predictive prophecy.

2. The opinion that Babylon has once and for all time fallen avoids a slavish but inconsistent literalism. The futuristic interpreters while insisting on a literalistic interpretation for such phrases as "none shall dwell therein," "shall not be inhabited," "they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner" do not so interpret other passages in the prophecies. They do not, for example, insist that the eschatological conquerors of Babylon must be Medes, ride

JEREMIAH

on horses, and attack the city with the bow and spear. In fact they talk of Babylon being destroyed in the future by an atomic bomb or by a supernatural stroke from heaven. This is entirely foreign to the picture of besieging armies presented in the Old Testament prophecies. The view that the destruction of Babylon has taken place recognizes all the numerous points where the prophecy was literally fulfilled but at the same time does not insist that every detail must have had circumstantial fulfillment before the prophecy against Babylon can be viewed as accomplished.

3. The view that the prophecies of Babylon's fall have been fulfilled is justified in the light of the historical evidence. It is difficult to understand how anyone acquainted with the history of Babylon between the years 538 and 10 B.C. could say that the things prophesied against Babylon have never come to pass. The city changed hands again and again and with each new conquest suffered untold damage. Certainly it was literally true that "many kings" (Jeremiah 50:42) took part in accomplishing God's will against Babylon.

4. The opinion that Babylon has fallen is consistent with the testimony of the ancient writers. A careful study of the Greek and Roman writers in regard to the condition of Babylon subsequent to the first century B.C. reveals that they unconsciously employ the language of the prophets in describing the desolate condition of Babylon in their day. Diodorus Siculus described the city as in "ruins." Strabo calls it "a great desert." Pausanias says that it has been "reduced to nothing." Pliny says "the place has gone back to a desert." In the light of these statements it is difficult to see how it could be affirmed that what has already befallen Babylon is but a "premonitory blow."

5. The theory that Babylon has been destroyed in accord with prophecy is most consistent with the long

silence of history respecting Babylon. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Babylon and Nineveh were only names. People read about them in the Bible, but no visible trace remained. Some were even skeptical that such places only existed in the imagination of ancient scribes.⁶⁴ Robert Lowth could write in 1778

Upon the whole, Babylon is so utterly annihilated that even the place where this wonder of the world stood, cannot now be determined with any certainty.⁶⁵

Babylon was for centuries a desolate heap of ruins. Hillah is not Babylon. Even if it were built upon the site of the ancient city, Hillah would not be Babylon. Babylon, the city ceased to exist in the first century A.D. or shortly thereafter.

The Babylon passages, if already fulfilled, have a definite apologetic value. The believer can direct the attention of the skeptic to these prophecies as a concrete example of fulfilled predictive prophecy. The amazing detail in which these Babylon prophecies were fulfilled centuries after they were recorded can be explained only on the hypothesis that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

FOOTNOTES

1. Isaiah 13-14; 21:1-10; chaps. 40-48; Jeremiah 25:12-14, 26; 27:7; chaps. 50-51.

2. Benjamin Wills Newton, *Babylon: Its Future History and Doom* (third edition; 1890), pp. 1-144.

3. G. H. Pember, *The Antichrist, Babylon, and the Coming of the Kingdom*, (second edition, 1888), pp. 67-124.

4. J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (eighth edition, 1901), III, 107-212.

5. William R. Newell, *The Book of Revelation* (1935), pp. 263-281.

6. Harry Goehring, "The Fall of Babylon—Historical or Future?" *Grace Journal*, II (Winter, 1961), 29.

7. Other passages alleged to support this relationship are Isaiah 48:14, 20; Jeremiah 50:3-5; 18-20; Habakkuk 2:14, 20.

8. James M. Gray, *Prophecy and the Lord's Return* (1917), p. 114.

9. Goehring, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

10. Newton, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

JEREMIAH

11. Pember (*op. cit.*, pp. 87-88) argues that the reference here is to the act of destruction, not to its permanent effects.
12. Herbert Mackenzie, "The Destruction of Babylon," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, XCII (1935), p. 228.
13. Goehring, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
15. Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation* (1919), p. 157; and Pember, *op. cit.*, p. 94. Cf. Goehring (*op. cit.*, p. 27) who grants that Babylon did come to an end about 1100 A.D. but feels that this gradual decline is not in accord with the prophecies of the fall of the city.
16. Newell, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
17. Newton, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
18. Seiss, *op. cit.*, III, 141.
19. Goehring, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
20. Larkin *op. cit.*, pp. 157-58.
21. Newton, *op. cit.*, p. 53. Cf. Jeremiah 50:1; 51:2, 29, 43.
22. Newton, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
23. Cf. A. C. Gaebelein, *The Revelation* (1915), pp. 97-8. Gaebelein denies that Babylon described in Revelation is literal Babylon but still holds that ancient Babylon will be rebuilt because the Old Testament prophecies have not yet been literally fulfilled.
24. Pember, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-74.
25. Newell, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-64.
26. Pember, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
27. Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture* (1920), p. 466; Cf. Seiss, *op. cit.*, III, 147; "there is no intimation whatever that this city of Babylon does not mean the city of Babylon."
28. Larkin, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
29. Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-119.
30. Newell (*op. cit.*, p. 267) argues that Jeremiah must have been speaking of this final destruction when he warned his people to flee out of the midst of Babylon (51:45, 46, 50) for when Cyrus took the city the Jews did not flee.
31. Seiss, *op. cit.*, III 172.
32. Govett, *op. cit.*, p. 474.
33. Arthur E. Bloomfield, *All Things New* (1959), p. 231. According to Bloomfield the angel in verse 21 acts out the scene as "he drops a bomb from the sky." The torment which the kings are afraid of (vv. 9-10) may be fall out.
34. Bloomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 229. He also believes the two carrying women to represent a church. Babylon will be rebuilt by a church.
35. Newell, *op. cit.*, p. 268.
36. Larkin, *op. cit.*, p. 161; cf. Newton, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-80.
37. Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*. Two volumes in one. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953. A reprint from 1847.
38. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*. Trans. James Martin. Two vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950.
39. H. A. Ironsides, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah*. New York: Loizeaux, 1952.
40. George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah, The Expositor's Bible*. Two vols. London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.
41. Alexander, *op. cit.*, I, 267.
42. C. Edward Naegelsbach, *Isaiah, Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 181.

THE FALL OF BABYLON

43. C. von Orelli, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (1895), p. 376.
44. Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (1950), I, 252, Cf. Isaiah 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7, 8; Amos 8:9.
45. Cf. William Richard Foster, "The Eschatological Significance of the Assyrian," (unpublished Doctor's Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1956), pp. 164-65. Foster maintains that the Medo-Persian empire represents in prophecy "the Messianic kingdom which overthrows the kingdom of antichrist and allows the remnant of God's people to return in restoration of their national economy." Goehring (*op. cit.*, pp. 30-31) goes so far as to say that the term Mede "cannot refer to the historical Medes under Cyrus."
46. Cheyne, *Isaiah*, *op. cit.*, I, 550.
47. Orelli, *Isaiah*, *op. cit.*, p. 377.
48. John P. Newman, *The Thrones and Palaces of Babylon and Nineveh* (1876), p. 175. It should be noted however that Newman places Hillah in the very center of the ancient site of Babylon (p. 163) and admits that this town was built from the ancient ruins of Babylon (p. 148).
49. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (1920). II, 54; Friedrich Dusterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John* (1887). p. 428; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (1954). p. 226; Edward A. McDowell, *The Meaning and Message of the Book of Revelation* (1951). pp. 166-174; Charles M. Layman, *The Book of Revelation* (1960), pp. 113-123.
50. The Papal Rome interpretation. J. G. Encell, *The Exiled Prophet* (1898), p. 215; B. W. Johnson, *A Vision of the Ages* (fifth edition; 1915), p. 282; H. C. Williams, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (1917), pp. 289-97. The apostate church in abstracto: A. Plummer, *Revelation, Pulpit Commentary*, p. 413; William A. Spurgeon, *The Conquering Christ* (1936), pp. 240-41; J. L. Martin, *The Voice of the Seven Thunders* (1870), p. 250.
51. Philip Mauro, *The Patmos Visions* (1925), pp. 243-44; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (1957), pp. 82-83; C. H. Little, *Explanation of the Book of Revelation* (1950), pp. 170-190; W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (1961), pp. 199-220; M. R. DeHaan, *Revelation* (1946), pp. 214-231.
52. C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, Comments on Revelation 18; Cf. Tenny, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
53. William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah* (fourth edition; 1947), pp. 164 ff.
54. E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets* (1885), II, 368-69; Cf. Theodore Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: The Minor Prophets* (1956), p. 434; C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (1951), II, p. 285; and Charles H. H. Wright, *Zechariah and His Prophecies* (1874), pp. 111-120.
55. A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (1948), pp. 236-37.
56. S. A. Pallis, *The Antiquity of Iraq* (1956), pp. 26-29.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-35.
58. *Charon or Inspectors*, p. 443 of Vol. II of Lucian's works in the Loeb Classical Library.
59. *Natural History*, VI. 30.
60. *History of Rome*, LXVIII. 30.
61. Certain passages in the Talmud which seem to picture Baby-

JEREMIAH

lon as a thriving city are best regarded as referring to Sura which was in the neighborhood of the old Babylon.

62. That "Babylon" in I Peter 5:13 is the famous Mesopotamian city is unlikely for the following reasons: (1) Peter is nowhere else associated with this region; (2) the Eastern Church did not until a late period claim any association with Peter in its church origins; (3) the area itself was very sparsely populated, especially in the period subsequent to the migration in A.D. 41 and the resultant massacre of large numbers of Jews at Seleucia; (4) Mark who is present with Peter in "Babylon" is connected with Rome in Paul's letters and with Peter in Rome by early Christian tradition; (5) Widespread tradition exists that Peter worked in Rome; (6) the term Babylon was used as a mystical designation for Rome by the Jews before it was inherited by the Christians; (7) until the time of Calvin no writer suggested that Babylon in I Peter 5:13 referred to the city on the Euphrates.

63. *Commentary on Isaiah*, XIII. 20-22; XIV. 22-23. In Vol XXIV of J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*.

64. David Masters, *The Romance of Excavation* (1923), p. 119.

65. Lowth, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER NINETEEN

I. Facts to Master

1. Name of the chief god of Babylon (50:2; 51:44).
2. The excuse which those who attacked Israel used to justify their cruelty (50:7).
3. The two great lions who had devoured the flock of God (50:17).
4. Two symbolic names for Babylon (50:21).
5. Direction from which the conquerors of Babylon would come (50:41).
6. Nationality of the conquerors of Babylon (51:11, 27, 28).
7. Identity of the man commissioned by Jeremiah to carry a scroll to Babylon (51:59).
8. The date when Jeremiah sent his scroll to Babylon (51:59).
9. That which Jeremiah commanded to be done with his scroll (51:63).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. Why does Jeremiah devote such a large amount of space to the subject of the fall of Babylon?

THE FALL OF BABYLON

2. How would you answer the charge that what Jeremiah says here about Babylon contradicts his earlier statements about that power?
3. Why does Jeremiah depict the exiles weeping as they return to Zion? What is the everlasting covenant of which they speak? 50:4f.
4. In what way had Babylon sinned against the Lord? 50:14
5. What is the main point in the comparison of the destruction of Babylon and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah? 50:40
6. Explain the significance of the cryptic names Leb-kamai (51:1) and Sheshach (51:41).
7. What is the relationship between the Babylon oracle recorded in 50:1-51:58 and the scroll which Seraiah dropped into the Euphrates river?
8. Why has the authenticity of the Babylon oracle been questioned by some critics?
9. Why did Jeremiah order his scroll to be sunk in the Euphrates river?
10. Why do some commentators insist that Babylon will be rebuilt? Have the Babylon prophecies been literally fulfilled?

CHAPTER TWENTY

AN HISTORICAL APPENDIX 52:1-34

Chapter 51 closes with an editorial note: "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah." Whoever was responsible for appending chapter 52 to the book must have added these words so as to carefully distinguish between his own contribution and that of the great prophet. Just who the author of Jeremiah 52 was nobody knows. Some have tried to argue that Jeremiah himself was the author even though the note at the end of chapter 51 seems to clearly imply the contrary. The argument for the Jeremian authorship of the chapter is basically this: Jeremiah 52 was taken from the Book of Kings and appended to the book of the prophet. Since Jeremiah is said in Jewish tradition to have been the author of Kings he must also be the author of Jeremiah 52. But this argument assumes that the Jewish tradition which attributes the Book of Kings to Jeremiah is reliable. It further assumes that Jeremiah 52 was in fact borrowed from Kings. Finally the argument for the Jeremian authorship of this chapter ignores the plain implication of the editorial comment at the end of chapter 51. The most likely candidate for the authorship of Jeremiah 52 is Baruch the faithful secretary of Jeremiah. He, no doubt, was the one responsible for putting the Book of Jeremiah together and he it was in all probability who added chapter 52.

But 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, and most of the material can be found in the Book of Kings and, in an abridged form, in Jeremiah 39. Baruch probably had a two-fold purpose in this appendix. First, this chapter describes in detail the fall of Jerusalem, the event which 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. Second, Baruch wished to call attention to the release of Jehoiachin (vv. 31-34) which gave promise that after the midnight tragedy of judgment a brighter day was beginning to dawn—a day which Jeremiah had foreseen and described in such grand style. Jeremiah 52, then, proclaims that God's word of judgment has been fulfilled; His word of promise must surely follow.

I. THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 52:1-23

A. The Reign of Zedekiah 52:1-11

TRANSLATION

(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. (2) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD just as Jehoiakim had done. (3) For because of the anger of the LORD this condition continued to be in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. (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 and encamped against her and built siegeworks against her on every side. (5) And the city was under siege until the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. (6) In the ninth day of the fourth month famine gripped the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. (7) The city was breached and the men of war fled going out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the walls which lies beside the garden of the king (the

Chaldeans were all around the city) and went off in the direction of the Arabah. (8) But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, all his army having been scattered from him. (9) And they took the king and brought him unto the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath who then pronounced sentence over him. (10) The king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and also slew all the princes of Judah at Riblah. (11) And 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.

COMMENTS

Zedekiah was but twenty-one years old when he came to the throne of his country as the vassal of a foreign king (v. 1). Religiously he followed the same course that his brother Jehoiakim had followed in that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (v. 2). Abundant evidence exists within the Book of Jeremiah to substantiate this general charge against Zedekiah (cf. 37:2, 3; 38: 5, 24 etc.). 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. 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, the Lord was angry with His people and saw to it that they were cast out of His presence (v. 3a).

Yielding to the advice and pressure of his youthful advisers, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (v. 3b). Jeremiah 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! 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 (v. 4). For almost seventy years the Jews took note of that sad occasion by fasting (cf. Zech. 8:19). Jerusalem withstood the Chaldean siege for eighteen months (v. 5). The sacred writer has shown amazing reserve¹ as he describes those last agonizing weeks: "the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land" (v. 6).

In the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year (July 587 B.C.) 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 Zechariah 8:19). Zedekiah and the remnants of his army attempted to flee by night, thus unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 12:12). The king and his men fled in the direction of the Arabah, the lowland region through which the river Jordan flows (v. 7). Perhaps they were attempting to escape across the Jordan to some friendly neighboring nation. 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 (v. 8).

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 judgement upon his faithless vassal (v. 9). 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

1. 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).

may well be that Nebuchadnezzar now read those maledictions to Zedekiah. If that be 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. First he 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. Finally, he 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!

B. The Destruction of Jerusalem 52:12-16

TRANSLATION

(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. (13) And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king; and all the houses of Jerusalem and every great house he burnt with fire. (14) And all the army of the Chaldeans that were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem round about. (15) 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. (16) But Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and laborers.

COMMENTS

The account of the destruction of Jerusalem, already summarized in 39:8-10, is almost identical with II Kings

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 guard¹ arrived from Riblah with the orders of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 12). 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. II Kings 25:8). The simplest solution is that Nebuzaradan arrived *at* Jerusalem on the seventh day and for some unexplained reason did not enter Jerusalem until the tenth day of the month.² 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 (v. 13) and the walls were razed (v. 14). Both Psalms (74:6, 7) and Lamentations (2:7-9) provide vivid poetic descriptions of this destruction. Those who had deserted to the Chaldeans during the siege, and the rest of the "multitude" (i.e., the country people)³ were prepared for the long trip to Babylon (v. 15). Only the very poorest people were left in the land to serve as "vinedressers" and "husbandmen" (v. 16).

C. The Plunder of the Temple 52:17-23

TRANSLATION

(17) As for the bronze pillars which belonged to the house of the LORD, the bases, the bronze sea which was in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans smashed them and carried away all the bronze to

1. On the title of Nebuzaradan see note on 39:9.

2. In the Hebrew the word Jerusalem has no preposition attached to it in II Kings 25:8 but has the preposition *beth* in Jeremiah 52:12.

3. Some prefer to translate the Hebrew word as "artisans." In the light of the parallel passage II Kings 25:11 "multitude" is the best translation.

Babylon. (18) They also took with them the pots, shovels, snuffers, sprinkling bowls, forks and all the bronze utensils used in the service. (19) The captain of the guard took away the small bowls, the firepans, basins, the pots, lampstands, the incense bowls, the libation bowls—both the ones that were of gold and the ones of silver. (20) As for the two pillars, the one sea, the twelve oxen of bronze which were under the bases, which king Solomon had made for the house of the LORD—the bronze of all these vessels could not be measured. (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). (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. (23) And there were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides. In all there were a hundred pomegranates upon the latticework.

COMMENTS

The description of the fate of the Temple furniture is much fuller here than in the parallel passage in II Kings 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 (v. 17). 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 I Kings 7:13-22. Just 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 (I Kings 7:27-37). The "brazen sea" was a huge laver at

which the priests washed their hands and feet before offering sacrifice (I Kings 7:23-26).

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 verse 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 (cf. Exodus 27:3; 38:3; Numbers 4:14). The "spoons" were incense-cups (cf. Numbers 7:14). The word translated "snuffers" is of uncertain meaning. In verse 19 the vessels of gold and silver are enumerated. The pots, basins and spoons (incense cups) are mentioned a second time in this verse simply because such utensils were made of gold and silver as well as brass. Of the new items mentioned in verse 19 the function of the "cup" is unknown. The "firepan" was used for transporting hot coals. Ten candlesticks or lampstands illuminated the interior of the Temple (I Kings 7:49). The "bowls" of verse 19 were connected with the table of showbread and were probably used for libations (Exodus 25:29; 37:16; Numbers 4:7). Now a problem arises with regard to the golden vessels. According to II Kings 24:13 "all the vessels of gold" were carried off to Babylon in 597 B.C. 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 B.C. More likely, however, only the most valuable vessels were removed in 597 B.C. The golden vessels of less value were left in the Temple along with the silver utensils to await the plunder of 587 B.C.

The total amount of the brass carried away by the Chaldeans was so great that it seemed to merit the special emphasis given to it in verse 20. 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 (I Kings 7:25, 43). Furthermore, it is stated in II Kings 16:17 that Ahaz had already taken away the twelve bulls and sent them as tribute to Assyria more than a century earlier (II Kings 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 which reads: "the twelve bulls which 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.

Verses 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 verse 17. Each pillar was eighteen cubits (twenty-seven feet) high with a circumference of twelve cubits (eighteen feet). The pillars were hollow with the metal being about four inches ("fingers") thick (v. 21). These pillars were crowned with capitals of brass which were an additional five cubits high (v. 22). A lattice work ("network") surrounded the capital upon which were surmounted one hundred ornamental pomegranates, twenty-four on each side and one at each corner (v. 23). The account in I Kings 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.

II. EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 52:24-34

A. The Execution of the Princes 52:24-27

TRANSLATION

(24) And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold. (25) He also took from the city an officer who had charge of the men of war, seven men who were personal advisers of the king who were found in the city, the secretary of the captain of the host who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men from the people of the land who were found in the midst of the city. (26) And the king of Babylon smote them and had them killed at Riblah in the land of Hamath and deported Judah from upon his land.

COMMENTS

Verse 10 alludes to the execution of the princes of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah; verses 24-27 expands upon that allusion by naming the princes who were slain. The passage is almost identical with II Kings 25:18-21. Nebuzaradan selected those who were highest in authority and therefore most responsible for the prolonged resistance of Jerusalem. At the head of these officials is Seraiah "the chief of priests," who is not elsewhere mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah. Seraiah comes 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 Josiah; he was grandfather of Joshua who was high priest when the Temple was rebuilt after the Exile (cf. I Chronicles 6:13-15; Haggai 1:1). Ezra the scribe also descended from this Seraiah (Ezra 7:1). After Seraiah, the priest Zephaniah is mentioned. He is probably the same Zephaniah who is mentioned several other times in the Book of Jeremiah (see 21:1; 29:25, 29; 37:3). Zephaniah is called "the second priest" and it is not entirely clear whether this is an office or an order. Accord-

ing to II Kings 23:4 there were several second priests. 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 (I Chron. 23:5) whose duty it was to prevent any disturbance or desecration of the Temple (cf. II Kings 12:10; 22:4; 23:4; Jeremiah 35:4).

In the second category of those executed are certain officials of state. The first such official is not named but is designated as "the officer that was set over the men of war." Some commentators have suggested that this gentleman was the general who commanded the city garrison; others propose that he was a civilian official equivalent to minister of defense or the like. "Seven men who saw the king's face" i.e., who were part of the king's personal entourage were also among the executed. 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 Jeremiah 52 is giving totals. "The scribe of the captain of the host" is next listed among the officials who were slain. His job it was to "muster the people of the land." A "scribe" in the Old Testament is not merely one who knows how to write or a stenographer. "Scribe" is a title given to the highest officers of state.¹ This particular "scribe" was likely the head of the war department of Judah.²

In addition to the priests and civilian officials, some sixty of the "people of the land" were also executed by Nebuchadnezzar (v. 25). Frequently in the Old Testa-

1. Cf. II Samuel 8:7; 20:25; II Kings 12:11; I Chronicles 18:16; 27:32.

2. In II Chronicles 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.

ment the phrase "people of the land" has the meaning of landed gentry. However, since earlier in this verse "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. The group that was destined for death was taken to Riblah to stand trial before Nebuchadnezzar (v. 26). The king of Babylon "smote" them (perhaps had then flogged) and put them to death (v. 27).

B. Details About the Deportations 52:28-30

TRANSLATION

(28) These are the people whom Nebuchadnezzar took captive: In the seventh year 3,023 Jews; in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, from Jerusalem 832; in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took captive 745 Jews—in all 4,600 persons.

COMMENTS

Verses 28-30 have no parallel in the Book of Kings and the statistics given here are found nowhere else in Scripture. These verses speak of three deportations of Jews to Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. When one attempts to integrate the information contained in these verses 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.

1. *The chronological problem*

The basic chronological question is, How many times did Nebuchadnezzar deport Jewish captives to Babylon?

Two facts are very clear. The first deportation took place in 605-604 B.C., the third year of the reign of king Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1). This deportation in which Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon is not mentioned either in Kings or in Jeremiah 52. The last deportation took place in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar (582 B.C.), five years after the fall of Jerusalem. In this deportation, which is mentioned only in Jeremiah 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 and acknowledged by all believing scholars, a real problem exists as to the deportations between 605 and 582 B.C. 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 Jeremiah 52:28-29.

Jeremiah 52 speaks of deportations in the seventh and eighteenth years of Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 28, 29) while earlier in this same chapter (v. 12), in II Kings 24:12 and 25:8 the eighth and nineteenth years are given as the dates for the deportations. The question over which Bible believing scholars are in disagreement is whether these passages in Kings and Jeremiah speak of four, three or only two deportations.

The view that only two deportations are mentioned in these verses 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 which 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 which 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 Jeremiah 52:28-29 the writer is using the accession year method of dating and in II Kings the writer is using the non-accession year method then the seventh and eighteenth year of Jeremiah 52 would be equivalent to the eighth and nineteenth years of II Kings. According to this view the second deportation occurred in 597 B.C. and the third in 587 B.C. As appealing as this explanation may be, a serious problem exists for those who advocate it. If II Kings and Jeremiah 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 B.C.), his eighth year (597 B.C.), his eighteenth year (588 B.C.), and his nineteenth year (587 B.C.). This explanation has the difficulty of trying to fit a Chaldean campaign and deportation into the known events of 598 B.C. The Babylonian Chronicle which gives a year by year account of the activities of Nebuchadnezzar makes no mention of a campaign in Syria-Palestine in 598 B.C. The Scriptures do not so much as 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 would make 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 believing scholars. Keil and Streane suggest that originally verse 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 on, 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 B.C., one in 597 B.C., one in 588 B.C., one in 587 and one in 582 B.C. The possibility that the word "ten" has dropped out of the text cannot be denied. This is exactly what happened in II Chronicle 36:9 (cf. II Kings 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 verse 28.

Of the three approaches to 52:28-29 the first, it seems to this writer, is superior. But this raises the second major problem, the numerical one.

2. *The numerical problem*

The deportation account in II Kings states more than 10,000 people were hauled off to Babylon in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24:11-16); Jeremiah 52 states that 3,023 persons were carried away captive in the seventh year of that king (v. 28). If these two passages are referring to the same deportation how can the difference in the number of captives be explained? Several different proposals have been made by believing scholars.

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 cap-

tive 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 II Kings.

It is then possible at least three different ways to reconcile Jeremiah 52:28 and II Kings 24:11-16. However the figures are harmonized, the believing scholar must press for the accuracy of both Kings and Jeremiah 52 in regard to those taken captive in 597 B.C. The Babylonians, like the Assyrians, kept a tally of their captives and some such numerical record probably underlies the figures here in Jeremiah.

As regards the number taken captive in 587 B.C. 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 Jeremiah 52:29 numbers the deportees as 832. Even if this number represents only males of fighting age it still remains a rather 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.¹

A final numerical problem remains: How is the rather small total figure of 4,600 in Jeremiah 52:30 to be reconciled with the much larger number who returned with Zerubbabel in 537-36 B.C.? Three things must be kept in mind. (1) The figure in 52:30 does not include the deportation of 605-604 B.C. (2) It is not impossible

1. Bright, *op. cit.*, pp. L, LIII, notes 14 and 18.

that a constant emigration of Jews to Babylon took place in the later reign of Nebuchadnezzar. (3) A lapse of about two generations exists between the deportations and return thus allowing for the multiplication of the captives while in Babylon.

C. The Release of Jehoiachin 52:31-34

TRANSLATION

(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. (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. (34) 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.

COMMENTS

The account of the release of Jehoiachin occurs with only slight variations in II Kings 25:27-30. King Jehoiachin, along with members of his family and court, had been carried away to Babylon in 597 B.C. 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 B.C.) 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 (v. 31). It may be that Daniel and the other highly esteemed Jews at the Babylonian court 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). As long as he lived Jehoiachin received a daily allowance of all that he needed for himself and his family besides the food which he enjoyed at the royal table (v. 34). 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. 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 prisoners Jehoiachin and his sons fared very well indeed.

One footnote needs to be added to the discussion of Jehoiachin's release. When the date given here for the release of Jehoiachin is compared with the date given in the Book of Kings a difficulty arises. Both accounts have the king released in the thirty-seventh year of his captivity during the twelfth month but the two accounts differ as to the day of the release. Kings states that Jehoiachin gained his freedom on the twenty-seventh day of the month; Jeremiah 52, the twenty-fifth day. Not being in possession of all the details concerning the matter it is most difficult to reconcile these two statements. Perhaps the one account speaks of the day when the official decree was issued which

laid the legal foundation for the release; the other account would then refer to the actual day that king Jehoiachin left the prison.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY

I. Facts to Master

1. The age of Zedekiah when he began to reign in Judah (52:1).
2. The length of the final siege of Jerusalem (52:4-6).
3. Place where Zedekiah was captured by the Chaldeans (52:8).
4. Place where Zedekiah came face to face with Nebuchadnezzar (52:9).
5. The fate of Zedekiah (52:11).
6. The officer who actually carried out the orders to destroy Jerusalem (52:12).
7. The various deportations listed in Jeremiah 52:28-30.
8. The total number of captives taken according to Jeremiah 52:30.
9. The name of the Chaldean king who released Jehoiachin from prison (52:31).

II. Questions to Ponder

1. Was Jeremiah 52 written by Jeremiah himself or by someone else?
2. Why was this historical appendix placed at the end of the Book of Jeremiah?
3. How many deportations of Jews to Babylon took place?
4. Can you offer any suggestion as to why Nebuchadnezzar dealt so harshly with Zedekiah?
5. On what day did Nebuzaradan burn the Temple? (52:12; cf. II Kings 25:8).

HISTORICAL APPENDIX

6. Why does Jeremiah 52 go into so much detail about the fate of the Temple furnishings?
7. What archaeological discovery has shed light on Jehoiachin's imprisonment?

JEREMIAH, THE RELUCTANT PREACHER¹

By ROGER CHAMBERS

Did you read about the time Jeremiah quit the ministry? He did not quit like Paul's associate minister Demas did. Whatever reason Demas gave to Paul when he left, Paul knew the real cause of the defection. It was because "... he loved this present world."

Jeremiah did not quit like those pure spirits who find the local church beneath their rarefied natures and who righteously burn their collection of sermon books, file their ordination certificates under "old business" and go sell tombstones or teach English. (And become experts on the local ministry!)

"Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in His name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain." (Jeremiah 20:9).

Jeremiah quit the ministry in the way a genuine preacher might resign on Monday morning. (One preacher observed that he was glad that salvation does not depend on one's feelings, because if it did and the Lord returned on Monday, half the preachers in town would be lost.)

Jeremiah tried to quit on God, but could not, and so he continued his prophetic ministry reluctantly. His was the reluctance of Moses who tried to quit before he began because he stuttered. His was the reluctance of Amos who admitted that he had not been born to nor trained for the office of the prophet. He was born to pinch fruit and chase sheep. But he allowed that since he was in this work, he would have to preach it straight and preach it true. His was the reluctance of Paul who confessed to

1. A sermon preached in the chapel of the Cincinnati Bible Seminary, November 24, 1970.

the Corinthians that when he had been in their pulpit it had been with " . . . weakness, fear, and much trembling."

"Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the gospel . . . if I do this willingly I have a reward, but if against my will (reluctantly), I have a stewardship entrusted to me." (I Corinthians 9:16, 17).

The ministry is spiritual work. Reluctance is a proper attitude. The alternative is to become a smooth, polished, confident, professional which is the shame of heaven and the joy of hell.

I. JEREMIAH WAS RELUCTANT BECAUSE OF THE PRESUMPTION OF PREACHING

"Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. . . . Then the LORD put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." (Jeremiah 1:4ff).

That is exactly what we are, Jeremiah, children! The sheer presumption, the unmitigated gall of a man who stands up to speak for God! How dare we casually saunter into such a ministry! We ought not reproduce the foolishness of the well-intentioned but careless Uzzah who grasped the Ark of the Covenant as it was being transported to Jerusalem. It is an awesome thing to preach the Word of God. We ought to handle the Word with

JEREMIAH

the same reluctance with which an engineer handles dynamite.

And if we accept the ministry of preaching, we ought to have enough fear to stick to that divine task. "Preach the Word," said Paul to Timothy. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." How dare we continually bless the congregation with our opinions and thereby cease to be preachers in favor of being commentators. "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (I Corinthians 2:4).

The professors here at the Seminary have waged holy war against the practice of preaching without proper grammar and vocabulary. This is good and needful. It is a real possibility that people can be turned away from the gospel and be lost because of dangling participles and double negatives. But we have raised up a generation of preachers who are so articulate that the people cannot find out if they are saved or lost because the preacher is wandering around in *Webster's Unabridged*. We have got so many three-dollar words that there is no issue so clear that it is not thoroughly clouded by the time we get through talking about it. We baptize our doubts in pseudo-sanctified jargon and then labor under the impression that we have changed something when at best we have only redefined it. (For example, many prefer the term "unchurched" to "lost." What in the world does "unchurched" mean?) There is no situation so bad but what we can make it respectable by a storm of words. Our doubletalk is like that inscribed on a tombstone in a western frontier cemetery:

TO LEM S. FRAME

Who during his life shot 89 Indians,
Whom the Lord delivered into his hands,
And who was looking forward to making up

JEREMIAH THE RELUCTANT PREACHER

His hundred before the end of the year,
When he fell asleep in Jesus at his house
At Hawk's Ferry

March 27, 1843.

We need more than conversation, we need conversion!

God promised Jeremiah that He would put His own words in the prophet's mouth. Have you read lately the burning, direct, clinical, scathing language of Jeremiah? He was preaching desolation and misery and judgement while the certified prophets of his day were shouting "peace, peace, peace." I can picture the professional clergy remonstrating with the prophet for his cutting oratory and devastating condemnations:

Enter the President of the SHALOM LEAGUE OF PROPHETS (S.L.O.P.).

President: "Brother Jeremiah, should not the clergy be more careful in using the term, 'Thus saith the Lord?'"

Jeremiah: "What do you think I am preaching, *The Farmer's Almanac*?"

President: "But to suggest that God would say that everyone neighed after his neighbor's wife like corn-fed horses seems to malign the dignity of God."

Jeremiah: "I see you got the message!"

President: "But the sight of a prophet running up and down the streets of Jerusalem saying that if he could find one honest man God would pardon the city looks bad to visitors from the outside."

Jeremiah: "By the way, if you see one, send him my way. My feet are killing me."

President: "But preacher, the people come to the temple for

JEREMIAH

a restful dignified worship experience, and you tell them of God's anger, they want a more positive message."

Jeremiah: "You can catch Rabbi Norman Vincent Peale at 3:00 P.M. on channel 7."

President: "Now Jeremiah, about this word 'repent.' I would be more comfortable using a phrase like: 'Restudy your value systems'."

Jeremiah: "Then you need to repent!"

President: "But Sir, to describe Judah as a nation pursuing idols as a camel in heat pursues a mate is language unbecoming a gentleman and a scholar."

Jeremiah: "Funny you should say that. I told God he ought to get a gentleman and a scholar for this job, but he wanted me."

"Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD: and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29).

"For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12).

The Word of God burns and shatters and exposes and meets man as he is in his most secret hideaway, *and nothing else will do that!* So let us preach the Word! Let us stop feeding our people warmed-over Baptist pulpit pablum!

Let us not depend on the power of "dynamics" and "Church factors" to get the job done. Every preacher ought to be aware of those principles which lend themselves to a growing program. But do we not know that if we use the methods which touch universal human nature we can program people into the local congregation while

we preach Mother Goose Rhymes? The sects are doing just that while preaching messages which make Old Mother Hubbard sound pretty good. If we do not preach the Word as it is, folk are not going to ask the right questions, face the real issues, and make the right kind of changes in their lives.

When Jeremiah got through with his sermons, he was not very popular, but everyone had a pretty good idea of what he was getting at. Let us have done with this babel which produces a climate in which we cannot tell the difference between denominations and the Lord's Church.

II. JEREMIAH WAS RELUCTANT BECAUSE OF THE PERIL OF PREACHING

What a scene as Jehoiakim sits in the winter palace cutting up Jeremiah's written prophecy piece by piece and throws it in the fire. And there is Jeremiah up to his knees in mud in that dungeon where one would not put a dog. Picture the prophet as he waits out the last days of Jerusalem in the local jail.

We have all thrown a few of our own sermons in the fire after we have preached them lest the Lord return and find us with the incriminating evidence. But in the main our preaching is pretty respectable. And that is just the peril of the preaching ministry, respectability! This is not to say that we ought not to be competent. Our preaching must be respectable in the sense of demonstrating the careful effort befitting a disciple of Jesus. I have preached some sermons so bad that it seems a miracle that the people could sit through them and come out the other side still believing in God. We all have our bad ones. But we do not have to be like the hen that swallowed the yo-yo and laid the same egg twenty times.

The truth is never respectable in a world dominated by lies, and Christ is never respectable in a world under

JEREMIAH

the influence of the spirit of anti-Christ. The people were divided over Jeremiah's preaching. Some hated his message, the rest hated him. The day of mercy is too far spent for us to be contented with anemic preaching from bloodless little Lord Fauntleroy who "mean well." If our preaching produces neither positive nor negative reaction, then we can be sure it is not God's Word that we are speaking. (The comment was heard from one pulpit, "If I preached this sermon in Russia, I would be shot for it. Still, it would be nice to get *some* reaction.")

God save us from the harmless respectability of much modern preaching!

III. JEREMIAH WAS RELUCTANT BECAUSE OF THE PASSION OF PREACHING

"My heart! My heart! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me. I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war." (Jeremiah 4:19).

The prophet's heart was broken by the scene of the destruction of Jerusalem which was to be so complete that it would be like creation in reverse.

In the last few months of its operation, an average of 6,000 Jews a day were gassed at Auschwitz. The crematoria were unable to keep pace in reducing this daily number of corpses to ashes, and so pyres of a thousand corpses each were ignited in the open. The flames and smoke were visible for eighteen miles. A pall of smoke with the smell of burning flesh hung heavily over Auschwitz and drew swarms of flies! A microcosm of hell!

How can we casually approach the task of preaching if we're really haunted by the prospect of uncounted millions being in hell for eternity?! We ought to approach

the preaching ministry reluctantly because the heart from which all true preaching comes is a broken one.

I am concerned about the rising sentiment that says that the gospel is a groovy thing. Christianity is fun. Jesus swings. Turn on with Christ. I am for enthusiasm and the joy that is in Christ. But let us not confuse the "smiling-through-tears" of Christianity with the painless giggle of the world. And what about the cross? And what about the lost? There is no greater contradiction under heaven than the preacher or the seminary student who is committed only to being "cool." It is all right for Bill Cosby, but it is wrong for a Christian. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost."

Jeremiah tried to quit that task which seems too great for any man. But despite the PRESUMPTION of preaching and the PERIL of preaching, the Word was still a fire shut up in his bones, and he went on because of the PASSION of preaching.

Preach the Word!

PART FOUR

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

INTRODUCTION TO LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations is one of those Old Testament writings which has yet to receive its full share of recognition and appreciation by the Christian world. The reason for the neglect of this little book is not difficult to discover. In the popular view Lamentations is a somber and gloomy record of unrelieved grief as Jeremiah weeps over the ruins of Jerusalem. When viewed in this manner there is little about Lamentations that would attract the Bible student. However, the book is much more than a cheerless protest of the inequities of life. It is more than "a cloudburst of grief, a river of tears, a sea of sobs" as one writer has called it. This five-fold poem is really an affirmation of faith in the justice and goodness of God. The author has tasted the bitter dregs of pain and sorrow, of cruelty and ignominy, of frustration and loneliness and yet he dares to cling to a faith undaunted, a faith which triumphs over circumstances. The book endeavors to explain history and place calamities in proper perspective. When the true purpose of Lamentations is recognized this amazing little book has a great deal to contribute to a Christian understanding of war and natural catastrophies.

I. TITLE AND POSITION

Like several other Old Testament books Lamentations originally took its title from the first Hebrew word of the book. The book is called *Ekaḥ* which is an exclamation expressing sorrow and sympathy. *Ekaḥ* in English may be translated "alas" or "how sad it is." The same Hebrew word also introduces the second and fourth chapters of the book. Later Jewish teachers referred to the book by another Hebrew title calling it *Qinoth* or "laments." It is still known by this title in the Babylonian

Talmud. The scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek during the intertestamental period entitled the book *Tbrenoi*, the Greek word meaning "lamentations." At still a later time in the Greek, Syriac and Latin versions of the Old Testament the longer title "The Lamentations of Jeremiah" was applied.

Though evidence is somewhat scanty it would seem that Lamentations was originally considered by the Jews as an appendix to the Book of Jeremiah. The Jewish historian Josephus at the end of the first Christian century stated that the Hebrew Bible consisted of twenty-two books—five books of law, thirteen books by prophets and four books of "songs and hymns."¹ According to the Jewish method of counting, I and II Samuel were one book as were I and II Kings and I and I Chronicles. The twelve minor prophets were counted as one book and Ezra-Nehemiah were counted as a single book as well. Taking all this into account one would still have a total of twenty-four books instead of the twenty-two mentioned by Josephus. The only method of arriving at the figure twenty-two is to count Jeremiah-Lamentations as one book and Judges-Ruth as one. It is interesting that several of the early Church Fathers also speak of the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Bible.²

At some point subsequent to the time that Josephus wrote (A.D. 90), several books were removed from the prophetic division of the canon and assigned to the third division which was called in the Hebrew the *Kethubim* ("Writings") and in the Greek the Hagiographa ("Holy Writings"). The Book of Lamentations was at that time removed from its position as an appendix to the Book of Jeremiah and was counted as part of the third division. Lamentations was placed alongside of Ruth, Esther,

1. Josephus, *Against Apion* I. 8

2. E.g., Melito of Sardis (A.D. 180), Origen (A.D. 250), Augustine (A.D. 420), and Jerome (A.D. 405).

Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Collectively these five little books became known as the *Megilloth*, the Five Rolls. Already as early as the writing of II Esdras (ca. A.D. 100) this switch in the position of Lamentations seems to have taken place. This is indicated by the fact that the author of II Esdras gave the total of books in the Hebrew Bible as twenty-four meaning that Ruth had been severed from Judges and Lamentations from Jeremiah.

II. BACKGROUND AND OCCASION

The destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. was without doubt the most significant event to transpire in the political and religious history of Israel since the Exodus from Egypt. Scarcely any room for doubt exists that it was this momentous event which, on the human side, precipitated the writing of the Book of Lamentations.

In retaliation against the rebellion of his vassal king Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege of Jerusalem for eighteen long months. Lamentations describes in the most vivid manner the terrible suffering to which the Jews were subjected during the siege. When the city finally was captured the Chaldean king ordered it completely demolished. To see their beloved sacred city go up in flames was a shocking—even stupefying—experience. In spite of the incessant preaching of the prophets who warned of this very thing, the Jews were totally unprepared for it. For over a hundred years since the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in the days of king Hezekiah the popular notion had been that Jerusalem was inviolable and secure. Events had demonstrated the basic premise of their theology to be false. Added to the tremendous burden of their grief over what had befallen their nation was their feeling of having been utterly rejected by God.

III. THEME AND CONTENT

Lamentations is a sad book. The basic theme of the

INTRODUCTION

book is a lament over the terrible woes which have befallen sinful Judah and the destruction of the Holy City and the Temple of God. The book consists of four dirges (chaps. 1-4) and one prayer (chap. 5) which were written in those agonizing days following the capture and destruction of Jerusalem. As one reads the book he can sense the depths of despondency into which the people had fallen. In these poems the poet has attempted to capture the mood of the people. This was not particularly difficult for him to do since he seems to have been personally involved in their suffering. For the most part the poems contain descriptions of the plight of the people, their land and their sacred city. Here and there are confessions of sin, declarations of penitence, and appeals for divine aid.

Outlining the Book of Lamentations is somewhat difficult because the theme does not show significant variation from one chapter to another. The outline used here has been adapted from that of C. Paul Gray.¹

- I. A Widowed City 1:1-22
- II. A Broken People 2:1-22
- III. A Suffering Prophet 3:1-66
- IV. A Ruined Kingdom 4:1-22
- V. A Penitent Nation 5:1-22

IV. FORM AND STRUCTURE

Lamentations is written entirely in poetic form. Hebrew poetry as a rule does not involve rhyme but rather is a poetry of thought. The second and third lines of each verse will repeat the thought of the first line in different words (synonymous parallelism) or develop further the thought of the first line (synthetic parallelism) or negate the thought of the first line (antithetic parallelism). The metrical structure used in the Book of Lamen-

1. "The Lamentations of Jeremiah," in vol. IV of *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966).

LAMENTATIONS

tations is known as the *Qinah* or lament rhythm. This is the meter most commonly used in the ancient Near East for chanting dirges over the dead or lamenting national calamities. In *Qinah* rhythm the second line of each verse is one stress shorter than the first line. As a rule in Lamentations the pattern is three stresses in the first line, two in the second, and three in the third line. This meter, practically obscured in English translation, becomes apparent as one reads the Hebrew text aloud.

The four dirges in the Book of Lamentations are in the form of alphabetic acrostics in which the author begins each verse with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 have twenty-two verses, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 contains sixty-six verses since three verses are assigned to each Hebrew letter. The following chart will illustrate more completely the structure of the book.

THE STRUCTURE OF LAMENTATIONS			
<i>Poem</i>	<i>Verses</i>	<i>Lines in Each Verse</i>	<i>Acrostic Pattern</i>
POEM I	22	Three lines in each verse; verse 7 has four lines.	Each verse begins with a new letter.
POEM II	22	Three lines in each verse; verse 19 has four lines.	Each verse begins with a new letter. The sixteenth and seventeenth letters are reversed.
POEM III	66	One line in each verse.	Each letter repeated at beginning of three successive lines or verses. Sixteenth and Seventeenth letters are reversed.
POEM IV	22	Two lines in each verse.	Each verse begins with a new letter. Sixteenth and Seventeenth letters reversed.
POEM V	22	Two lines in each verse.	No acrostic pattern.

INTRODUCTION

From the above chart it becomes obvious that the author of Lamentations was not a slave to form. He varied the number of lines in a verse and the number of verses which would be assigned to each Hebrew letter. In three of the poems he reversed the order of two Hebrew letters apparently in order to maintain his sequence of thought.

The author's reasons for utilizing the acrostic pattern in the first four poems is unclear. Some scholars feel that the acrostic served as a mnemonic device to aid the memory as these laments were publicly recited. It may be also that the author used this technique in order to give a sense of continuity and completeness to the expression of grief.¹ When one goes from *a* to *z* (or in the Hebrew, from *Aleph* to *Tav*) in expressing his grief he seems to have said all that can be said. The acrostic device is also used by other sacred writers.²

V. AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The book of Lamentations does not expressly identify the author and therefore one must avoid being dogmatic on this point. However, there does seem to be rather substantial external and internal evidence that Jeremiah the prophet is to be credited with having written this work. The *external* evidence is as follows.

1. That Jeremiah the prophet did compose laments on at least one occasion is clearly affirmed by II Chronicles 35:25. While this verse does not refer to the Book of Lamentations, it does connect Jeremiah with the lamentation-type of literature. The book of Jeremiah itself indicates that Jeremiah was familiar with the vocabulary and the techniques of writing laments.

1. Kuist, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

2. Psalms 25; 34; 35; 111; 112; 119; 145; Prov. 31:10-31.

LAMENTATIONS

2. The earliest written source to ascribe the book to Jeremiah is the Greek version of Lamentations. This translation of Lamentations probably completed around 200 B.C. contains an introductory note which reads: "And it came to pass after Israel was carried away captive and Jerusalem was made desolate that Jeremiah sat weeping, and he lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and he said . . ." The Latin Vulgate version of Lamentations carries essentially the same heading and the Aramaic version reproduces this introductory note exactly.

3. The Targum or Aramaic paraphrase of Jonathan which dates to ca. 100 B.C. opens the Book of Lamentations with this line: "Jeremiah the prophet and chief priest said."

4. The Talmud, that vast reservoir of Jewish law and tradition, states: "Jeremiah wrote his book, Kings and Lamentations."¹

5. All the ancient Church Fathers regarded Jeremiah as the author of Lamentations.

The internal evidence is equally strong in favor of the Jeremian authorship of Lamentations. Not even the most radical scholars can deny that the character and spirit of Jeremiah is the same as that of the author of Lamentations. Both books are full of sympathy for the people of Zion in their hour of judgment. Both books strongly emphasize the point that the destruction of Jerusalem was a punishment for sin. The author of Lamentations had precisely the same attitude toward false priests and prophets (4:13-16) as did Jeremiah. In addition to these general points of agreement between Jeremiah and Lamentations, a number of similarities of thought and expression have been pointed out. In the parallel columns below a few of the more striking examples are cited. The text is that of the American Standard Version.

1. *Baba Bathra* 15a.

INTRODUCTION

JEREMIAH

8:21

"For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I mourn; dismay has taken hold of me."

9:1, 18

"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."

"And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters."

30:14

"All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not."

49:12

"Behold they to whom it pertained not to drink the cup shall assuredly drink; and art thou he that shall altogether go unpunished? thou shalt not go unpunished."

30:14

"For I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one."

38:6

"Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah the king's son . . . and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire; and Jeremiah sank into the mire."

18:6

"Behold, as the clay in the Potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel."

4:13

"Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles."

LAMENTATIONS

1:15

"The Lord has trodden as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah."

1:16; 2:11

"For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water."

"Mine eyes do fail with tears, my heart is troubled."

1:2

"Among her lovers she hath none to comfort her: All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies."

4:21

"Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz: The cup shall pass through unto thee also."

2:4

"He hath bent his bow like an enemy, he hath stood with his right hand as an adversary, and hath slain all that were pleasant to the eye."

3:53, 54

"They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and have cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over my head; I said, I am cut off."

4:2

"The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter."

4:19

"Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens: They chased us upon the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness."

LAMENTATIONS

Modern Old Testament critics deny that Jeremiah penned the poems that make up the Book of Lamentations. They assign this material to various anonymous authors some of whom lived as much as two hundred years after the fall of Jerusalem. Usually the second and fourth poems are said to be the oldest while the third is generally regarded by the critics as the latest. Pfeiffer would date the third poem to as late as the third pre-Christian century. The arguments which have been advanced to deny the traditional view that Jeremiah is the author of the book may be summarized as follows:

1. Lamentations contains a number of words not found in Jeremiah or found there only in a different form. Answer: Does this prove difference of authorship? The vocabulary of an author may change from one work to another depending upon the time, form and subject matter of the new composition.

2. The acrostic pattern employed in Lamentations is foreign to Jeremiah. Answer: While this observation is true, does it really prove anything regarding authorship? The form which a composition assumes is determined by the objective of the author. A versatile writer may utilize several different forms of composition during his career. But it should be noted that in the Book of Jeremiah a predilection for alphabetical manipulation occurs in at least three passages. See comments on Jeremiah 25:26, 51:41 and 51:1.

3. The acrostic arrangements of the poems in the book vary; therefore the poems must be by different authors. Answer: Surely no one would demand that a modern poet never vary his form.

4. The author of Lamentations (4:17) expected help from Egypt; Jeremiah did not. Answer: Lamentations 4:17 makes no mention of Egypt. Furthermore the author

of Lamentations frequently speaks for the nation and reflects the attitudes which they might have had.

5. The author of Lamentations (3:59-66) pictures the Chaldeans as wicked enemies deserving of divine judgment; Jeremiah considered them as instruments used of God for the chastisement of Judah. Answer: Jeremiah did in fact predict the destruction of Babylon (Jer. 50-51). The ideas that the Chaldeans were at the same time an agent of God and an enemy which must ultimately be destroyed are not mutually exclusive. Since the author of Lamentations attributes the Chaldean destruction of Jerusalem to God, he too must have viewed these foreigners as the agents of God.

6. The author of Lamentations was bewildered and perplexed over the destruction of Jerusalem while Jeremiah had been expecting and predicting that destruction for years. Answer: One has only to reread the personal prayers of Jeremiah to realize that the prophet had his share of bewilderment. Furthermore it must always be kept in mind that the author of Lamentations speaks for the entire community, not just for himself when he expresses shock and lack of comprehension over the destruction.

7. The author of Lamentations had a much higher estimate of king Zedekiah than did Jeremiah (Lam. 4:19-22; Jer. 24:8-10). Answer: There is no indication that Jeremiah had anything but respect for Zedekiah in his capacity as the head of the nation. Furthermore Lamentations 4:19-22 reflects the thinking of the *people* not the *prophet* who wrote the book.

The arguments against the traditional view that Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations are singularly weak. Certainly the book seems to have been written by one who was an eyewitness of the destruction of Jerusalem. Who better than Jeremiah can be nominated as author of these

LAMENTATIONS

poems which Gottwald¹ has declared are "without peer" among the collective laments of the ancient Near East?

VI. PURPOSE AND USE

Why was the Book of Lamentations written? Why was it included in the sacred canon? The book served a useful purpose in at least three different ways. *Psychologically*, Lamentations served the purpose of giving expression to the agony of a distraught people. Suffering men must give vent to their emotions in some way. Even though their grief was too deep for words the poet felt compelled to make an attempt to express the agony of his people through these sad but beautiful poems. Verbalization of grief and suffering, both physical and spiritual, has therapeutic value. *Liturgically* the poems of Lamentations served as the means by which the congregation of Israel could express sorrow over their national loss. *Theologically* the book served the purpose of helping the people of Judah maintain their faith in God in the midst of overwhelming disaster. Lamentations expresses the conviction that God has dealt justly with His people. The author desires that his people recognize the righteousness of God's dealings with them and cast themselves upon the mercy of the Lord.

Lamentations is read in Jewish synagogues on the ninth of the month of Ab (which falls at the end of July or early August), a fast day which commemorates the destruction of the Temple. Roman Catholics read selections from the book during the last three days before Resurrection Sunday. Passages from Lamentations are also used in certain Protestant liturgies.

1. Norman Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, (Chicago: Allenson, 1954), p. 111.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1. The Book of Lamentations is known in Hebrew Bible by the name _____.
2. In the Septuagint (Greek Version) this book is called _____.
3. Lamentations seems to have originally been attached to _____.
4. In the modern Hebrew Bible Lamentations is found in the section called _____.
5. The event which precipitated the writing of Lamentations was _____ which occurred in _____.
6. Three types of Hebrew poetry are _____, _____, and _____.
7. Only _____ is not written in acrostic pattern.
8. What is the purpose of the Book of Lamentations?
9. Why do some critics deny that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations?
10. Why did the author write four of the poems in Lamentations in the acrostic pattern?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

A WIDOWED CITY

1:1-22

Chapter one of Lamentations has two major divisions. In verses 1-11 the prophet laments the present condition of Zion. Twice in this unit the prophet alludes to his own personal agony over the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. vv. 9, 11). In verses 12-22 the city itself laments over its condition. Both units end in prayers which call upon God to take note of the plight of Zion and to execute vengeance upon the enemies of Zion. The entire chapter is written in acrostic style, every fourth line beginning with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

I. A LAMENT OVER THE CITY 1:1-11

The prophet's lament over the condition of Jerusalem moves through three stages. Verses 1-7 contain a lengthy description of the present condition of Jerusalem and of her former inhabitants. This description is followed by an explanation of the present condition in verses 8-9b. The lament closes with a prayer which calls upon God to take note of the plight of His people.

A. Description of the Present Condition 1:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) How sad that the city, once filled with people, sits alone; that she who was great among the nations has become like a widow; that she who was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. (2) She weeps bitterly by night, tears on her cheek; she has no one to comfort her among all her lovers; all her friends have dealt treacherously against her, becoming her enemies. (3) Judah has gone captive out of affliction and great servitude; she dwells among the nations but finds no resting place; all

her pursuers have overtaken her in the straits. (4) The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the appointed feasts; all her gates are desolate, her priests sigh continually, her maidens are sorrowful and she herself is in bitterness. (5) Her foes have become her head, her enemies are happy because the LORD has made her suffer because of the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone into captivity before the foe. (6) From the daughter of Zion all beauty has departed. Her princes have become like harts that cannot find a pasture; they have fled without strength before the pursuer. (7) In the days of her affliction and wanderings Jerusalem remembers all the precious things which were hers from days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the foe and there was no one to help her; the foe watched, gloating over her demise.

COMMENTS

Jeremiah's lament over Jerusalem begins with the exclamation "how" or "how sad," a word frequently used to begin a funeral dirge.¹ Jerusalem is personified as a widowed princess who sits alone in the night weeping over the loss of her husband and children. The loneliness of widowhood is emphasized in this lament. The once populous city is now empty. That city which had once enjoyed no small degree of notoriety among the nations is now obscure. The proud princess of provinces has been reduced to the state of abject poverty and slavery (v. 1). Every night the widowed city weeps over her plight but she has no one to wipe the tears from her cheek. Her "lovers" (political allies) and her "friends" (neighboring nations) have deserted her. Those who had once courted her assistance and who had so willingly offered themselves

1. See Lamentations 2:1; 4:1; Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 48:17.

to her have now become her most bitter enemies (v. 2). The children of Zion have been carried away captive by the Chaldeans and now dwell on foreign soil. Even though this deportation was in a sense a relief from "affliction"—the miseries of war, famine and pestilence—and "servitude"—the bitter bondage to cruel oppressors like Necho (II Kings 23:33) and Nebuchadnezzar—still the children of Zion found no real rest. Living among Gentiles they find themselves plagued by worry and doubt, depressed by homesickness, surrounded by idolatry, tormented by the realization that their God has inflicted this great punishment upon them because of their spiritual rebellion. From this captivity there is no escape. This is the point of the figurative expression "all her pursuers have overtaken her in the straits." Narrow mountain passes make it almost impossible for a fugitive to escape from those who would pursue him. So also is escape only a remote possibility for those living in foreign exile (v. 3).

In verses 4-5 Jeremiah points to the fact that Zion exists in a widowed state spiritually. The roads leading to Zion are said to weep because pilgrims no longer travel them. The solemn festivals of the law of Moses were no longer observed for the city had been destroyed. The city gates, which formerly had busseled with business, now lie desolate. The priests mourn because they can no longer sing their beautiful hymns or play their instruments (Psalms 68:24, 25) in the Temple (v. 4). The enemies of Zion now have the upper hand. They mockingly rejoice over the misfortune which Jerusalem has experienced. Even little children have suffered at the hands of the cruel oppressor as they have been forced to walk that long, weary road to exile. Why does Zion suffer and her enemies prosper? Jerusalem's troubles are due to the multitude of her transgressions. Zion's God in righteous indignation has inflicted these penalties upon His people.

A WIDOWED CITY

The widowed daughter of Zion is ugly, weak and helpless. All her beauty—that which made her the envy of other nations—is gone. The princes of the nation are so destitute of strength that they are compared to wild harts which can find no pasture. Unable to withstand the pursuers the princes have fled (v. 6). The weakened and widowed condition of Jerusalem is aggravated by the bitter recollections of past privileges. She remembers the “precious things,” the gracious gifts which the Lord had bestowed upon her when she dwelt within her own land. Since Jerusalem had despised both the gifts and the Giver she was forced to enter into a period of affliction and wanderings. But no one commiserates with her in her agony. Her former friends, having become her foes, gloat over the demise and downfall of Zion (v. 7). One of the miseries of sin in this world and hell in the next will be the constant recollection of the days when one enjoyed the blessings and graces of God.

B. Explanation of the Present Condition of Zion 1:8-9a

TRANSLATION

(8) Jerusalem sinned grievously and therefore she has become filthy; all who once honored her now despise her, having seen her nakedness; even she herself sighs and turns away. (9) Her uncleanness was in her skirts! She did not remember her end and so her fall is terrible, she has no one to comfort her.

COMMENTS

Having hinted at the reason for Zion's present misery in verse 5, the poet now develops that theme. The root of Jerusalem's trouble lay in the fact that she had sinned grievously against her God. Those who once honored Zion

LAMENTATIONS

now have no respect for her. As God began to strip Zion of her splendor only filth could be seen, the filth of blatant sins and vices. An individual or nation that commits iniquity forfeits the respect of others. Sin results ultimately in contempt. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Even Zion herself moans and turns away in shame as her filthiness comes into public view (v. 8). When one begins to gain some insight into the true character of sin he is shocked and shamed. He cannot stand to face the gaze of others let alone the scrutiny of God. For a time Zion was able to conceal her filthiness beneath skirts of external prosperity. Her sin was an inward perversity. She was as morally unclean as a menstruous woman was ceremonially unclean under the law of Moses. Yet during the period of her prosperity she gave no thought to her latter end i.e., the ultimate consequences of her evil ways. She lived only for the present and deceived herself into believing that God's repeated threats of national destruction simply could not come to pass. This is what made her final fall so shocking, so inconceivable, so terrible. That plus the fact that she had no one to comfort her or extend sympathy to her (v. 9). How much more bitter one's grief and loss when no one else really cares!

C. A Prayer Concerning the Present Condition of Zion 1:9b-11

TRANSLATION

(9) Behold, O LORD, my affliction, for the enemy has exalted himself. (10) The foe has spread forth his hand over her precious things. She has even seen the Gentiles entering her sanctuary, those whom You have forbidden to enter Your congregation. (11) All of her people are sighing as they seek bread; they

trade their precious things for bread. Behold, O LORD, and observe! For I am dismayed.

COMMENTS

Keenly feeling Judah's affliction as his own Jeremiah cries out in desperation to God. In narrative prayer he summarizes the present plight of Zion. The enemy has become haughty and overbearing (v. 9). All of the "precious things," the gracious gifts that God had given Judah, had fallen into the hand of the enemy. Gentiles had even desecrated the sacred precincts of the Temple (v. 10). The people of Jerusalem groveled for enough food to keep alive. They were forced to trade their most valuable possessions for their daily bread. As the spokesman for his people Jeremiah calls upon God to take note of the misery of His people and the dismay of His prophet (v. 11).

II. A LAMENT BY THE CITY 1:12-22

In verses 12-22 the lonely, tearful widow takes up her lament. She appeals to passers-by to take note of the incomparable agony of Zion (vv. 12-16). She appeals to neighboring nations to help her in her hour of need (vv. 17-19). She then appeals to God to execute His vengeance upon the mocking enemies (vv. 20-22).

A. The Appeal to Passers-by 1:12-16

TRANSLATION

(12) Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there exists any sorrow comparable to that which has been brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted upon me in the day of his fierce anger. (13) From on high he has sent forth fire into my bones and it prevailed over them; He spread

LAMENTATIONS

a net for my feet making me turn back; He has made me astonished with sorrow all the day. (14) The yoke of my transgression was bound by His hand; they were fastened together, placed upon my neck. He caused my strength to fail! The Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot resist. (15) The Lord has despised all my mighty men in the midst of me; He convoked a solemn assembly against me to crush my young men. The Lord has trodden as a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah. (16) Because of these things I weep, my eye, my eye flows with tears; for a comforter who can refresh my soul is far from me! My children are astonished because the enemy has prevailed.

COMMENTS

Unable to bear any longer the weight of her misery Zion cries out in desperation to the caravaneers and travelers who walk the busy trade routes near Jerusalem, "Is it nothing to you?" Do you not care what has happened to me? Have you no sympathy to offer me? Zion challenges the passers-by to name one city which they have observed in their wide travels whose sufferings are comparable to that of Jerusalem. Zion apparently feels that her suffering is unique and unparalleled. After all it is the Lord, Zion's God, who has administered the painful and fatal stroke in the day of His fierce anger (v. 12). The Lord has sent the fiery bolts of His wrath upon them from heaven. The very bones of their body seem to burn within them. Perhaps the city's misery is here being compared to a burning fever. The Lord has also spread nets for the feet of Zion causing them to fall into the hands of her enemies. Her sorrow is so great that she is astonished i.e., has entered into a state of stupefaction (v. 13). God had taken all of their unforgiven sins and had woven

them together in a yoke which was so heavy that the strength of the nation was dissipated in trying to bear it. Weak and weary from trying to bear the yoke of accumulated sins Judah was easy prey for her enemies (v. 14). At the appointed time the Lord had convoked a solemn assembly of foreign powers for the purpose of fighting against and destroying Jerusalem. Zion's mighty men as well as the flower of her youth were cast into the winepress of God's wrath.

The once pure and undefiled virgin daughter who had been loved and treated so tenderly in the past now was trampled under foot by the Almighty (v. 15). Because of these terrible blows Zion weeps with unconsolable sorrow. No one would even attempt to comfort her. Zion's children, her inhabitants, have been thrown into a state of complete shock because the Chaldean enemy has prevailed over them (v. 16).

B. The Appeal to Neighboring Nations 1:17-19

TRANSLATION

(17) Zion spreads forth her hands, but there is none to comfort her. The LORD has given commandment concerning Jacob that his neighbors are to be his foes. Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them. (18) Righteous is the LORD, for I have rebelled against His word! Hear now, all you peoples and behold my sorrow. My maidens and young men have gone into exile! (19) I called unto my lovers, but they have deceived me. My priests and elders perished in the city while they sought food for themselves that they might preserve their life.

COMMENTS

In verse 17 Zion turns in desperation to the neighboring nations. She spreads forth her hands in a gesture that

LAMENTATIONS

is an appeal for help. But no aid is forthcoming from the neighboring peoples, the reason being that the Lord has commanded them to be hostile toward Jacob i.e., the nation of Judah. Jerusalem is now regarded by these neighbors as a filthy thing, literally, a menstruous woman (v. 17). Regaining some measure of composure Zion acknowledges that she has been justly punished for her sins against God. But the very thought that she has rebelled against the word of God causes Zion again to burst forth into uncontrollable sobbing. In prayer-like fashion she calls upon the neighboring peoples to hear her wail and behold her sorrow. For their benefit Zion reviews a few of the more agonizing details of her misery: The young people of Zion have been carried off into exile (v. 18). Zion's lovers—the foreign nations and gods to whom she had turned—had not lived up to expectations. Zion's priests and elders are perishing because they cannot find enough food for themselves (v. 19). Thus does Zion earnestly appeal to her neighbors for sympathy and help but there is no answer. Earthly friends often are unavailable just when they are needed most.

C. The Appeal to God 1:20-22

TRANSLATION

(20) Behold, O LORD, for I am in distress, my inward parts are troubled, my heart is turned within me because I have grievously rebelled. In the streets the sword has caused loss of life, in the house there is death. (21) They hear that I sigh, that I have no comforter. All of my foes have heard of my misfortune; they rejoice that You have done it, have brought the day You announced. But they shall be like me. (22) Let all of their evil come before You! Deal with them as you have dealt with me because

of all my transgressions! For my sorrow is great and my heart is sick.

COMMENTS

Finally the weeping widow turns her face heavenward and presents a petition before the Lord. In the hearing of God she reviews her predicament and acknowledges her sin. Zion turns to the Lord with a contrite heart because she now realizes that there is no one else to whom she can turn. She makes no attempt to excuse her sin. She accepts her punishment as just. The ruthless enemy had slain men in the streets and houses and then had rejoiced over the ruin which the Lord had sent upon Jerusalem. Yet Zion still has confidence in divine justice. One day that enemy will experience a fate similar to that of Jerusalem (v. 21). In a morally ordered universe no transgressor can go unpunished forever. The prayer "Let all their evil come before You" is a recognition of the fact that sin must be punished. Zion's prayer is in harmony with what God had previously stated He would do to the nations (Is. 10:12-21; Hab. 2:5-17; Jer. 25:12-14). The execution of God's wrath upon the enemies of Zion would in effect be an act of mercy on behalf of suffering Zion (v. 22). Thus the appeal to God is not so much vindictive imprecation as a plea for mercy.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

1. What are the two major divisions of the first poem?
2. What is the significance of the word "how" which begins chapter 1, 2 and 4?
3. How does memory play a part in the punishment for sin? See 1:7.
4. What verses in chapter 1 indicate the poet's awareness of the reason for Zion's suffering?

LAMENTATIONS

5. What eternal lesson concerning the consequences of sin is found in 1:8?
6. What was the crowning act of humiliation for Zion? 1:10.
7. To whom does Zion tearfully appeal for aid and comfort in verses 12-22?
8. Why is the yoke an appropriate symbol for sin? 1:4.
9. Did the poet feel that God had not dealt fairly with His people? Cite a verse which supports your answer.
10. Who are the "lovers" mentioned in this chapter and how had they deceived Zion?
11. What is the spirit in which verse 22 was written?

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A BROKEN PEOPLE

2:1-22

In content, form and theology chapter 2 is a continuation of chapter 1. Like chapter 1, the second chapter is also a national lament but the focus here is on the entire nation rather than just on the city of Jerusalem. The poem is in acrostic form which is almost identical to that used in the first chapter except that the sixteenth and seventeenth letters of the Hebrew alphabet are transposed. Since this transposition does not interrupt the train of thought it must be viewed as intentional rather than accidental as suggested by some commentators. The same phenomenon occurs again in chapters three and four. Theologically this chapter again emphasizes the fact that Judah's punishment came as a result of sin and that the punishment was entirely justified. In verses 1-10 the prophet describes the divine judgment upon his people. In verses 11-16 he expresses his sincere sympathy for his people in their sufferings. He exhorts them to present their case before God (vv. 17-19) and sets the example for them by offering a model prayer on their behalf (vv. 20-22).

I. THE PROPHET'S DESCRIPTION OF THE JUDGMENT UPON HIS PEOPLE 2:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) How sad that the Lord in His anger has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud! He has cast down from heaven to earth the glory of Israel! He did not remember His footstool in the day of His anger. (2) The Lord has swallowed up without mercy all the inhabitants of Jacob. He has cast down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter

of Judah, bringing them to the ground. He defiled the kingdom and her princes. (3) He has cut off in His burning wrath all the horn of Israel. He has withdrawn His right hand in the face of the enemy. He has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob consuming all around. (4) He has bent his bow like an enemy, standing with His right hand like a foe. He has slain all that were pleasant to the eye. In the tents of the daughter of Zion he has poured out his wrath like fire. (5) The Lord has become like an enemy, swallowing up Israel. He has swallowed up her palaces, destroyed his strongholds. He has caused mourning and lamentation to increase in the daughter of Judah. (6) He has torn down His tabernacle like that of a garden, destroying His meeting place. The LORD has caused solemn assembly and sabbath to be forgotten in Zion. In His fierce indignation He has repudiated both king and priest. (7) The LORD has scorned His altar, disowned His sanctuary. He has given into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces. They made noise in the house of the LORD as on the day of an appointed feast. (8) The LORD determined to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion. He stretched out the measuring line; He did not withdraw His hand from devouring. He has caused the rampart and wall to lament; they languish together. (9) Her gates have sunk into the earth; He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the nations where there is no law; even her prophets have not been able to find a vision from the LORD. (10) The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they cast dust upon their heads having put on sackcloth. The maidens of Jerusalem have brought their heads down to the ground.

COMMENTS

It is striking the way the prophet emphasizes in verses 1-10 that the destruction of his people was an act of divine judgment. In spite of the fact that God administered the stroke against Judah the prophet is not bitter. He knows that the judgment was proper and appropriate in view of the terrible sin of his countrymen. The detailed account of these verses points to the fact that the writer was an eyewitness to the catastrophe which he describes. The first ten verses of chapter two should be read with the warning of Hebrews 10:31 constantly before the reader: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Jeremiah almost exhausts the possibilities of human language in describing the burning wrath of a holy God against His apostate people. A great cloud of calamity settled down over the daughter of Zion in the day of His wrath. Like a star falling from the heavens so the glory of Israel fell to earth that day. God did not even spare His own footstool, the Temple or perhaps the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. It is possible that the phrases "daughter of Zion," "glory of Israel," and "His footstool" are to be regarded as progressive phrases designating the nation as a whole, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple or alternatively, Jerusalem, the Temple and the ark of the covenant. The Lord has consumed the dwelling places and destroyed the strongholds of His people. He has caused the princes of the land to be profaned i.e, captured, mutilated, and slain by ungodly forces (v. 2). He has cut off the horn (power) of Israel by withdrawing His powerful right hand of defense as the enemy approached. He has caused the territory of Jacob to be put to the torch (v. 3). After the capture of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. the city was burned to the ground (Jeremiah 52:13).

Judean resistance to the Chaldean onslaught of 587

LAMENTATIONS

B.C. was useless from the start because the real adversary was none other than God Himself. Through the instrumentality of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers the divine archer drew His bow against Jerusalem and slew "all that were pleasant to the eye" i.e., the finest young men of the Judean army. Even in the tent of the daughter of Zion (the Temple) He poured out His fiery wrath (v. 4). It is none other than the Lord who has caused all the destruction and death and resulting lamentation in the land (v. 5). He has not hesitated in destroying His tabernacle, His meeting place, any more than a gardener might destroy a watchman's booth when the harvest season was over. The mockery of Judah's festivals and sabbaths He has brought to an abrupt halt. Even the kings and priests, normally spared the indignities of war, have felt the blast of divine indignation and judgment (v. 6). How can the Lord allow the sacred city to be so humiliated? Because the Lord has scorned His altar and disowned His sanctuary. It takes more than outward ritual to prevent divine judgment. The Lord has turned the city over to the enemies of Judah. A shout has been heard in the precincts of the Temple—not the shout of joyous worshipers but of looting enemy soldiers (v. 7).

The destruction of Jerusalem was no afterthought; it had been predetermined by God. The Lord had marked off the city for destruction with a measuring line. The outer defenses of the city, the rampart and wall, had fallen to the enemy after incessant bombardment (v. 8). The heavy gates of the city and the powerful beams which secured them during siege have been battered to the ground. Zion's king and princes are in exile among the heathen who know not the law of God. The prophets are without vision (v. 9). The sagacious elders of Jerusalem have no advice or counsel to offer. They sit silently with sackcloth about their loins and dust upon their head

as a sign of bitter mourning. The bright young maidens of Judah hang their heads in remorse (v. 10).

II. THE PROPHET'S SINCERE SYMPATHY FOR HIS PEOPLE 2:11-16

TRANSLATION

(11) My eyes are spent with weeping, my inward parts are troubled, my heart is poured out to the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because infants and babies have fainted in the streets of the city. (12) To their mothers they said, Where is the grain and wine? as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out upon the bosom of their mothers. (13) What shall I testify to you? To what shall I liken you in order to comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For vast as the sea is your destruction! Who shall heal you? (14) Your prophets have seen for you falsehood and foolishness; they have not exposed your iniquity in order to reverse your fortunes but have seen for you false and misleading oracles. (15) All who pass by clap their hands at you. They hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying is this the city which was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth? (16) All your enemies rail against you, hissing and gnashing their teeth. They have said, We have swallowed her up! Ah, this is the day we longed for; we have found it! We have seen it!

COMMENTS

In verses 1-10 the prophet described what he saw when Jerusalem fell in 587 B.C. In verses 11-16 he describes what he felt as he looked upon the pathetic plight

of his kinsmen. His eyes shed tears till they could shed no more. His inward parts (lit., bowels) and heart (lit., liver) were overwhelmed by anguish. The tender-hearted prophet is particularly upset as he recalls the agonizing death of starvation to which the innocent babes and infants were subjected (v. 11). He hears their pitiful cry for food which had to remain unanswered. He sees them dying, some in the streets where they have been abandoned by their despairing mothers, others clutching to the breasts of their mothers who are helpless to do anything to preserve the young life (v. 12). The prophet tries desperately to think of a word of instruction, edification or comfort which he can bring to those people who had to live through the horrible days of Jerusalem's fall. He tries to think of some like catastrophe with which to compare the present plight of his people. Search as he may he cannot find any tragedy equaling the destruction of the daughter of Zion. Her ruin is as unlimited and unfathomable as the ocean itself.

The lament of the prophet reaches a climax with the question asked at the end of verse 13, "Who shall heal you?" Certainly Zion's wound, by human standards, is incurable. The prophets are certainly not able to help for they have never been able to correctly assess the situation in Zion. For a number of years they have actually encouraged the national hypocrisy and wickedness of their false and foolish visions. They have made no effort to expose iniquity, encourage repentance which would permit God to reverse the miserable condition of Zion. Their false and misleading oracles (lit., whitewash job) could not heal the wound of Zion (v. 14). Much less could the caravaneers and travelers who passed along the busy highways do anything to aid Zion. They have actually joined in the mockery of the fallen city by contemptuously clapping their hands, hissing and wagging their heads.

A BROKEN PEOPLE

Having looked upon the city which had been renown for its beauty they jeer, "Is this the city which was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?" (v. 15). Still less would neighboring nations be able to heal the broken nation of Judah. They had actually been looking forward to the day when Jerusalem would fall and they would be able to swallow up the territory she once possessed (v. 16). Who then can heal the wound of Zion?

III. THE PROPHET'S EXHORTATION TO HIS PEOPLE 2:17-19

TRANSLATION

(17) The LORD has done what He planned. He has fulfilled His word which He decreed in days of old. He has torn down without pity, made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the horn of your foes. (18) Their heart cried unto the Lord! O wall of the daughter of Zion! Let tears run down like a river both day and night! Give yourself not rest! Let not the pupils of your eyes cease! (19) Arise! Cry in the night at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord! Lift up your hands unto Him for the sake of your children who faint for hunger at the head of every street.

COMMENTS

In preparing to answer his own question, "Who can heal you," the prophet reminds the people of a basic fact. The destruction of Zion was not due to the power and cunning of Zion's enemies but was in fact the fulfillment of threats made centuries earlier (cf. Deut. 28:15ff.). By disobeying the commandments of God the people had

LAMENTATIONS

violated the terms of the covenant and thus had incurred the penalties for disobedience specified therein. This is the real reason Israel had been brought so low and the "horn" or strength of their enemies had been exalted (v. 17). Because the Lord is responsible for the destruction of Zion He alone can restore her fortunes. In bold personification the prophet calls upon the broken wall of Jerusalem to cry unto the Lord in supplication day and night. Without respite those walls should continue their pleadings with the Lord for reconstruction (v. 18). The people must continue to pray right on through the night. The beginning of the three night watches, sunset, should find them still pouring out their heart like water before the Lord and lifting up their hands toward heaven in expectation of receiving divine blessing. If they become weary in the work of prayer they should remember the little children who are suffering immeasurably on every street of the ruined city (v. 19).

Jeremiah makes no promises but his exhortation implies that God will hear the agonizing cry of His penitent people just as he heard their cry when they suffered during the Egyptian bondage (cf. Ex. 3:7).

IV. THE PROPHET'S PRAYER FOR HIS PEOPLE 2:20-22

TRANSLATION

(20) Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom You have done this! Shall women eat their offspring, babes who are carried in the arms? Shall priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord? (21) On the ground in the streets lie the young and old. My maidens and young men have fallen by the sword. You have slain them in the day of Your anger, slaughtering without mercy. (22) You called, as in the days of a solemn assembly, my terrors

round about. On the day of the anger of the LORD there was not one who escaped or survived. Those I carried in the arms and raised up my enemy has consumed.

COMMENTS

In verses 20-22 the prophet prays the prayer he has been urging the nation to pray and in so doing teaches them how to properly approach the throne of God. These verses remind one of Jeremiah 14:17-19. The prophet boldly presents all the cogent arguments of which he can think in his effort to influence God to aid the people of Judah. First, he asks God to consider that it is His own people who are suffering (cf. Ex. 32:11-13). Divine judgment has caused the people of Judah to sink into the lowest kind of human behavior, cannibalism. Surely God will intervene when men are driven to the point of consuming one another! Priests and prophets who have been anointed to the service of the Lord are being slain in the sacred precincts of the Temple (v. 20). Surely God will intervene when religious massacre is taking place! Young and old, male and female, lie dead on the streets of Jerusalem, slain by the sword of the divinely appointed enemy of Zion (v. 21). Surely God will intervene when outrage is committed in public without regard to sex or age. The terrors of war—famine, sword and pestilence—have been summoned by God against Judah just as He might summon His worshipers to a festival. In that day of the Lord's anger no one escaped or survived. The enemy has even consumed the babes in arms! (v. 22). So the prayer ends as it began, with a reference to the slaughter of the innocents. This rehearsal of Judah's tale of woe is an implied request for mercy and deliverance. The matter is left in the hands of the Lord in the firm belief that the Judge of all the earth will surely do what is right.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

1. Does this chapter reflect a bitterness toward God because He has allowed and permitted the destruction of Zion?
2. In what sense was God responsible for the calamity of 587 B.C.? 2:1-10.
3. What is meant by the phrases "daughter of Zion," "glory of Israel," and "his footstool?" 2:1.
4. From what sources would Zion *not* find healing? 2:13-16.
5. What is the poet encouraging his people to do in verses 17-19?
6. What arguments does the prophet present in verses 20-22 to influence God to aid His distressed people?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A SUFFERING PROPHET 3:1-66

Again in chapter three the poet has adopted the acrostic style but in a slightly different form from that of the previous chapters. In chapters 1 and 2 only the first line of each stanza of three lines began with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In chapter 3 all three lines of each stanza begin with the same Hebrew letter. Chapter 3 is actually the same length as chapters 1 and 2 though the verse numeration makes it appear longer. In the first two chapters three lines of Hebrew verse comprise one verse of English text; in chapter 3 each line of Hebrew text has been counted as one verse of English text. Thus the verses of chapter 3 are only one third as long as those of chapters 1 and 2 and there are three times as many of them.

The major exegetical problem arising in chapter 3 is whether this is an individual lament or whether the individual here is a personification of the nation. In favor of the individual interpretation of the chapter is the fact that the speaker is called a man (vv. 1, 27, 35, 39). Furthermore, some of the verses of this chapter have an intensely personal tone (e.g., vv. 14 and 53). On the other hand the shift from "I" to "we" in verses 22 and 40-47 would suggest that the first person singular is but a stylistic device which the poet has used to speak of the suffering of the entire nation. According to this view Jeremiah is here speaking as an individual member of the nation who has become identified with his people in the midst of their affliction. Their trouble, suffering and grief are his as well. In truth the chapter seems to contain both the individual "I" and the collective "I" and it is not always easy to ascertain which use of the first person is intended. In the comments which follow the shifts

in the usage of the first person will be noted where possible.

In relationship to the suffering prophet one can see in this chapter (1) his cry of desperation (vv. 1-18); (2) his confession of faith (vv. 19-39); (3) his appeal for repentance (vv. 40-47; (4) his personal suffering (vv. 48-54); and (5) his prayer for deliverance (vv. 55-66).

I. HIS CRY OF DESPERATION 3:1-18

TRANSLATION

(1) I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. (2) He has led and brought me into darkness and not light. (3) Surely against me He keeps on turning His hand all day long. (4) He has made my flesh and skin to waste away; He has broken my bones. (5) He has hemmed me in, surrounding me with bitterness and anguish. (6) He has made me dwell in dark places like those who are forever dead. (7) He has built a wall about me and I cannot get out. He has put heavy chains upon me. (8) Even when I keep on crying and calling for help He shuts out my prayer. (9) He has walled up my ways with hewn stone and my paths He has made crooked. (10) He is to me like a bear lying in wait, a lion in hiding. (11) He turned aside my ways, tore me in pieces and made me desolate. (12) He bent His bow and set me up as a target for His arrow. (13) He sent into my inward parts the shafts of His quiver. (14) I am an object of derision to all my people, their song all the day. (15) He has filled me to the brim with bitterness, caused me to drink wormwood. (16) He has ground my teeth with gravel and covered me over with ashes. (17) You have deprived my soul of peace; I have forgotten

what prosperity is. (18) And I said, My strength has perished and my expectation from the LORD.

COMMENTS

The opening verse sets the theme for chapter 3. The poet identifies himself as an individual who has experienced in his own life what the nation has experienced. "I am the man who has seen affliction" is a general statement of his misery. "By the rod of His wrath" can refer only to God although God is not specifically mentioned until verse 18. Having identified himself and set forth the basic thesis of the chapter the prophet begins to develop his theme in a series of brilliant similes and metaphors.

1. He compares his experience to a terrifying walk in Stygian darkness (v. 2). Darkness is probably symbolic here of the inability to comprehend the judgment which God has brought upon the nation.

2. He compares his affliction to being smitten by the hand of God (v. 3). The Old Testament refers frequently to the "hand of God" (e.g., Isaiah 5:25; 53:4). No matter what the poet tried to do it seemed that God's hand was against him. Surely the prophet here is speaking as a representative of his people.

3. He compares his trouble to old age with its wrinkled skin and fragile bones (v. 4). Broken bones are one of the curses of old age for they do not heal easily.

4. He compares his trials to the siege of a city (v. 5). He has been surrounded and bombarded by bitterness and anguish. There is no escape. It is a struggle to merely survive.

5. He compares his situation to that of a lost dead man (v. 6). Such a one is described as dwelling in dark places (cf. the outer darkness of Matthew 25:30). "Those that have been long dead (ASV) and "the dead of old" (KJV) is better rendered "those who are forever or eternally dead." Following physical death the wicked

experience the second death and hence can be spoken of as eternally dead. This verse is a duplicate of Psalms 143:3.

6. The figure changes in verses 7-8 to that of a prison. The poet feels hedged in by an insurmountable wall and weighted down by heavy and unbreakable chains of brass. Although he cries out in his anguish, there is no answer to his cry for God shuts out his prayers.

7. In a similar figure, the poet contends that a block has been thrown up across the path of his life (v. 9). God has placed a wall of carefully prepared and closely fitting hewn stone to blockade his way. Since the straight and easy road to his life's goals was blocked he had to look for alternative routes. Walking the uncharted by-paths, the poet found himself in a maze of crooked paths most of which turned out to be blind alleys. He felt he was walking aimlessly without knowing his ultimate destiny.

8. In still another figure the poet depicts God as a lion or bear lying in wait for prey. Suddenly, unexpectedly the Lord has seized him and torn him to pieces. Amos (5:19) and Hosea (13:8) use this same figure.

9. The poet feels that he has become the target for the divine archer (vv. 12-13). The arrow of tribulation and persecution has found its mark in the vital parts (lit., the kidneys) and thus the poet is doomed to suffer a slow and painful death. The arrow metaphor is not uncommon in the Old Testament (Psalms 38:1-2; Job 6:4; 16:12-14).

In verse 14 the prophet briefly drops the metaphors to complain as the representative of the believing individual that he is mocked and ridiculed by his people. All day long they made him the object of their taunt songs. Pleasure-mad throngs cannot stand those who rebuke and warn of judgment.

10. He compares his sorrow and anguish to food and drink in verses 15-16. His food was bitterness which he

was forced to eat until he was filled to the brim (lit., sated, nauseated); his drink was wormwood, a bitter substance usually associated with gall. As a sign of his disgrace and mourning the poet has heaped ashes upon himself and in so doing has gotten grit into his mouth.

The prophet was overwhelmed by the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem. In his great suffering he has lost all inner peace. He cannot even remember what it means to enjoy the blessings of life (v. 17). He is in the depths of despair. His strength, physical and spiritual, has perished. The confidence which he had previously placed in the Lord has been shaken and, in fact, has disappeared (v. 18). Yet all is not lost. The moment he announces that he has lost his confidence in the Lord he has done something very significant. He has pronounced the precious name of God. The mention of the name of the Lord in this moment of deepest misery and despair helps the poet to find solid footing for his faith. To this Lord he turns in confident prayer (vv. 19-39).

II. HIS CONFESSION OF FAITH 3:19-39

Since the poet's outlook was bleak he tries the uplook. He calls upon God to remember his predicament (v. 19) because he himself is not able to forget about it (v. 20). Mental and physical miseries are not easily forgotten especially when they continue to press in upon an individual. But while the poet could not for a moment forget his sufferings he did not allow himself to be done in by them. By turning his thoughts to God (vv. 21-25) and by reflecting upon the nature of suffering (vv. 26-39) the prophet is able to gain a great personal victory.

A. Reflections About God 3:19-25

TRANSLATION

(19) Remember my affliction and my wanderings,

the wormwood and the gall. (20) My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. (21) This I will call to mind; therefore, I still have hope. (22) The lovingkindnesses of the LORD are the reason we have not been consumed; for His mercies never fail. (23) They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. (24) My portion is the LORD, says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him. (25) The LORD is good to the soul who waits for Him, to the soul that seeks Him.

COMMENTS

The mention of the name of the Lord in verse 18 served to jog the memory of a grief-stricken prophet. His thoughts are turned from self to the Savior. Bert Hall sees in verses 21-25 three pillars upon which the prophet reconstructed his faith: the nature, the person and the gifts of God.¹ The poet first brings to mind the boundless mercy and compassion of God. If it were not for His lovingkindness all men would be instantly consumed (v. 22). The Hebrew word used here is difficult to render by a single English word. The word is akin to the New Testament word for grace. The plural form of the word indicates the magnitude and repeated manifestations of His lovingkindness. His mercies or compassions—sympathetic love especially toward the helpless and suffering—never fail (v. 22). The expressions of God's love and mercy are new every morning. Life, breath, opportunities, food, raiment—how often they are taken for granted; how seldom is thanks offered for them. As the prophet meditates upon the ceaselessness of God's mercy he breaks forth in a triumphant strain: Great is Your faithfulness! (v. 23). This verse and the one which preceded it furnished the inspiration for Thomas Chisholm's

1. Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

A SUFFERING PROPHET

magnificent hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness." This great affirmation of faith came from the lips of a man who had recently suffered what few others before or since have suffered. It was a time when men had only the most meager provisions. Every morsel of bread, every cup of water, every tattered garment was regarded as an evidence of the mercies of God. Even though the poet had nothing of this world's goods to make him happy and secure, still he was satisfied for the Lord was his portion. The knowledge that he possessed God and God possessed him was the foundation for the hope of the prophet (v. 24). To those souls who put their trust in Him God is good (v. 25). God never forsakes His own!

B. Reflections About Suffering 3:26-39

TRANSLATION

(26) It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. (27) It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. (28) Let him sit alone and remain silent for He has laid it on him. (29) Let him put his mouth in the dust, perhaps there is hope. (30) Let him give his cheek to the one who smites him; let him be filled with reproach. (31) For the Lord will not reject forever. (32) For though He may afflict, yet He will have compassion according to the multitude of His lovingkindness; (33) for He does not desire to grieve and afflict the children of men. (34) To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth, (35) to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, (36) to subvert a man in his cause, the LORD does not approve. (37) Who is it that speaks and it comes to pass if the Lord has not commanded it? (38) Do not pronouncements of misfortunes and prosperity proceed from the mouth of the Most High? (39) For

what reason does a living man complain, each man because of the punishment for his sins?

COMMENTS

Growing out of his reflections about God the poet makes several observations, some practical and some philosophical, about human suffering.

1. Patience and hope open the channels of salvation and deliverance (v. 26). Boisterous complaint against the human predicament only tends to aggravate the situation. The believer should quietly wait in faith for the deliverance of the Lord.

2. Self-discipline during one's youth has positive benefits. If a young person can learn to bear the yoke of suffering he will not easily despair when he is old (v. 27). Suffering teaches one patience and hope (Romans 5:3-5) and helps one bring forth the fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). Such a one however must learn to suffer in solitude and silence. He should not grumble against the God who sent the tribulation nor should he yield to the temptation to appeal for the sympathy of others by discussing with them his aches and pains (v. 28). He must bite the dust in self-abasement humbly to hope that there is hope (v. 29). He should willingly submit himself to whatever injustices life has to offer. Even though he may be filled with reproach he should not pour it forth upon his antagonist (v. 30 cf. Matthew 5:38, 39).

3. Affliction sent by God is measured and purposeful. Present affliction does not mean that God has ultimately rejected His people for the Lord does not reject forever (v. 31). Even in periods of chastisement He remains the God of mercy (v. 32). He does not permit one trial or temptation beyond what a man can endure. God takes no delight in seeing men suffer (v. 33). Nevertheless, He permits men to suffer and sometimes administers the

A SUFFERING PROPHET

stroke against them in order to accomplish His own sovereign purposes in their lives.

4. God does not approve of punishment which is not just or purposeful. Political atrocities (v. 34), injustice in legal proceedings (v. 35) or, in fact, any social inequities (v. 36) arouse His displeasure and demand His punishment. The phrase "before the face of the Most High" points to the fact that human judges are viewed as representatives of God.

5. Nothing is done in this world without God's permission. No one is able to make plans about the future and carry out those plans without the permission of the Lord (v. 37). God has clearly set forth in His word the conditions of blessing and the consequences of disobedience (v. 38). A man is not forced to choose wrong with its resultant punishment. On what basis then does a man complain when he is punished for his sin? (v. 39).

III. HIS APPEAL FOR REPENTANCE 30:40-47 TRANSLATION

(40) Let us search and examine our ways and return to the LORD. (41) Let us lift up our hearts and hands unto God in heaven: (42) We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not forgiven. (43) You surrounded yourself with wrath and pursued us; You have slain without pity. (44) You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through. (45) You have made us as dung and refuse in the midst of the peoples. (46) All our enemies rail against us. (47) Panic and the pit have come upon us, devastation and destruction.

COMMENTS

Rather than complain about their suffering the prophet urges the people to repent of the sins which have

brought about the suffering. Repentance begins with self-examination and honest analysis of their situation. Every individual must "search" (lit., dig into) and "examine" (lit., test or try) his heart. The objective of this rigorous self-examination is to discover and remove any impediments which may be preventing them from returning to the Lord. The Hebrew preposition translated "to" has the idea of actually arriving at the goal. The poet is urging upon his hearers a complete and whole-hearted return to God.

Self-examination should be followed by sincere prayer. The hands uplifted towards heaven seems to have been one of the popular postures for prayer in Old Testament times. But Jeremiah urges his hearers to lift up their heart as well as their hands to the Lord (v. 41). Proper posture does not always mean proper prayer! In genuine prayer inward submission always accompanies outward acts of supplication. Perhaps they had heretofore prayed in the mechanical and formal sense. The prophet now urges them to put their heart into the exercise.

In verses 42-47 the prophet speaks the words which the people ought to use in their prayer of repentance. The prayer begins with a confession of sin: "We have transgressed and rebelled!" The pronoun "we" is emphatic. There is no effort here to cover up or minimize the enormity of the sin. From this forthright confession of sin the prayer moves to description of the consequences of sin. (1) Sin cuts off the mercies of God. God had not pardoned nor could He pardon until the nation manifested some sign of genuine repentance (v. 42). (2) Sin stirs up divine wrath. The punishment against sin is swift, thorough, and relentless (v. 43). (3) Sin cuts the communication lines to heaven. God wraps Himself in a cloud through which no prayer can pass (v. 44). Only when men turn from sin can God hear their prayers (Psalms

66:18). (4) Sin ultimately brings humiliation. Judah became like dung and refuse among the nations of the world because of sin (v. 45). Judah's enemies railed against her with impunity (v. 46). (5) Sin results in panic and ruin. In the day of judgment one calamity after another befalls the sinner until he is finally destroyed (v. 47).

IV. HIS PERSONAL SUFFERING 3:48-54

TRANSLATION

(48) With streams of water my eyes flow because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. (49) My eyes flow without ceasing, without any pause. (50) Until the LORD sees and looks down from heaven. (51) My eyes afflict my soul because of all the daughters of my city. (52) Those who had no reason to be my enemies have hunted me down like a bird. (53) They have cut off my life in the pit and have cast a stone on me. (54) Waters flowed over my head. I said, I am cut off.

COMMENTS

As the weeping prophet contemplates the judgment which has befallen his people he bursts into tears anew (v. 48). Without a moment's pause he continues his sorrowful intercession (v. 49). He is determined to pray until the Lord looks in tender compassion upon the affliction of His people (v. 50). The poet continues to be disturbed by the sight of the shameful defilement of the young maidens of Jerusalem (v. 51).

A problem arises with regard to the interpretation of verses 52-54. Many commentators feel that Jeremiah speaks here as a representative of the people of Judah and that he here is describing in figurative terms the experience

of the nation. Others feel that Jeremiah is alluding here to his own experiences in the empty cistern before the fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 38:6-13) or to some more recent similar experience. If allowance is made for poetic imagery there is no reason why verses 52-54 could not refer to the actual experience of the prophet. Without justification the national leaders considered Jeremiah as a traitor to his nation. They hunted him down like a fowler hunts his prey (v. 52). They planned to get rid of the prophetic pest permanently by casting him into a dungeon and then covering the mouth of that pit with a stone (v. 53). Jeremiah sank into the mire of that empty cistern and the waters of death, as it were, flowed over his head. In the midst of his despair he cried out unto the Lord: "I am cut off" i.e., "I am as good as dead" (v. 54).

V. HIS PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE 3:55-66

TRANSLATION

(55) I called on Your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. (56) You have heard my voice! Do not close Your ear to my sighing, to my cry for help! (57) You have drawn near in the day I called upon You. You said; Do not be afraid. (58) You have pleaded the causes of my soul, O Lord; You have redeemed my life. (59) You have seen, O LORD, the wrong done unto me. Judge my cause. (60) You have seen all of their vengeance, all of their plots against me, (62) the lips of those who rise up against me and their murmurings against me all the day. (63) Observe their sitting down and rising up. I am their song. (64) Repay them, O LORD, according to the deeds of their hands. (65) Give them blindness of heart! Let Your curse be on them! (66) Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the LORD.

COMMENTS

The closing section of chapter 3 is a prayer for deliverance which is filled with expressions of confidence that the prayer will be answered. As the prophet recalls the cistern experience and how God delivered him from that certain death his faith begins to grow. Just as God heard his cry from the dark dungeon of death (v. 55) so he asks God not to ignore his present pleas for help (v. 56). In the past God had answered his prayers by drawing near and whispering "Be not afraid!" (v. 57). God had intervened on behalf of His servant, had taken up his cause, and had redeemed his very life (v. 58). On the basis of God's past response to his petition Jeremiah again calls upon God to hear and answer his prayer.

In verses 59-66 the actual petition is presented before the Lord. The prophet here prays in the first person singular. But the "me" of these verses is in reality "us." Jeremiah is praying as an intercessor. He is praying for his nation and as part of his nation. The enemies for whose destruction he prays must then be the Chaldean conquerors of Jerusalem. The petitioner realizes that God already knows the desperate plight of Judah, the wrongs which have been suffered (v. 59), the vicious and vengeful plots (v. 60), the taunting and ridicule of the enemy (vv. 61-62). All day long the Jews are the subject of Chaldean taunt-songs (v. 63). Therefore, Jeremiah calls upon the Lord to judge his cause i.e., judge those who have committed wrongs against the Jews (v. 59). He asks God to repay these enemies in accordance with the deeds they have done (v. 64). He prays that these opponents might experience blindness of heart i.e., intellectual confusion, and that God's curse might rest upon them (v. 65). He asks God to destroy these enemies from off the face of the earth (v. 66). Verses 64-66 reflect that imprecatory mood which is so difficult for Christians to

comprehend. However, these verses are best regarded not as a prayer for vengeance, but as a plea for justice. If a holy and just God rules this world then wrong must be punished and inequities must be eliminated. The petitioner was confident that God was just and therefore did not hesitate to call for God to act in accordance with His justice. There is no personal animosity in these words. The prophet prays as a representative of his people. In praying for the destruction of the Babylonians he prays that God will fulfill the threats already made against the conquerors of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10; chaps. 50-51).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

1. How does the acrostic pattern in this chapter differ from that of the first two chapters of Lamentations?
2. Is the third chapter of Lamentations an individual or a collective lament?
3. What is the meaning of the expression "those forever dead"? 3:6.
4. Does God always hear and answer prayer? 3:8.
5. What is "the wormwood and gall"? 3:19.
6. What thought about God became the foundation upon which the poet was able to reconstruct his hope?
7. In what sense are the mercies of God new every morning? 3:23.
8. What is the "yoke" which a man should bear in his youth? 3:27.
9. In what posture did people in Old Testament times often pray? 3:41.
10. Does Jeremiah refer to his own personal experience in the cistern in 3:53-54?
11. Is it right for a Christian to pray for the destruction of his enemies? 3:64.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

A RUINED KINGDOM

4:1-22

The fourth poem is an alphabetic acrostic like that found in chapters 1 and 2 with the exception that the stanzas here have two lines instead of three. Here also the sixteenth and seventeenth letters of the Hebrew alphabet are reversed, but without any interruption in the thought sequence. No satisfactory explanation of this reversal of letters has yet been suggested. The chapter emphasizes the suffering of the people of Jerusalem during and following the Chaldean siege. The poet uses the technique of contrast as he compares the former glory of the kingdom of Judah to the present wretched condition of the land. The poem falls into three parts. (1) The poet first gives an eyewitness account of the horrors which accompanied and followed the siege of Jerusalem (vv. 1-10). (2) Then the prophet offers an explanation for this overwhelming calamity (vv. 11-20). (3) Finally, the poet offers a ray of hope for his people, placing in contrast the future of Edom and the future of Israel (vv. 21, 22).

I. A DESCRIPTION OF THE JUDGMENT

4:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) How sad that the gold has become dim, the best gold changed! Holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street. (2) The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how sad that they are regarded as clay vessels, the work of the potter's hands. (3) Even the jackals draw out the breast to give suck to their young. The daughter of my people has become cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness. (4)

LAMENTATIONS

The tongue of the suckling child clings to the roof of his mouth for thirst; young children ask for bread but no man breaks it for them. (5) They who were accustomed to eating delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple resort to the dunghill. (6) For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom which was overturned suddenly, untouched by any hand. (7) Her princes were purer than snow, whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than coral, as sapphire was their form. (8) Blacker than soot has their appearance become, they are not recognized on the streets. Their skin hugs their bones having become dry like a stick. (9) Those who were slain by the sword were better off than those who were slain by the famine, for these pine away, stricken through for want of the products of the field. (10) The hands of tenderhearted women have boiled their own children; they became their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

COMMENTS

The poet begins his lament by contrasting the former brightness of Judah with the present dark days. The golden Temple ornamentation which formerly glistened in the sunlight now is blackened and tarnished. The stones of the Temple lie scattered about at the head of every street leading from the Temple area (v. 1). The youth of Zion, the most valuable asset of the nation, lie dead and scattered about like broken bits of pottery (v. 2). The remaining portion of the poet's description of the judgment on Jerusalem focuses on the famine which the city experienced while under Babylonian siege. He vividly describes the effects of hunger on four classes of the populace. (1) The children have suffered above all.

The tortured and tormented mothers of Judah treat their babies worse than the wild animals treat their young. Wild and roving jackals (not sea monsters as in KJV) do not forget their offspring. But the famine has made the mothers of Jerusalem cruel like the ostrich (v. 3). The ostrich was regarded by the ancients as the symbol of maternal neglect and cruelty (Job 39:13-17). The babes of Jerusalem have no breasts to suckle and hence die from lack of nourishment. Young children ask for bread but no one takes note of their need (v. 4). (2) The wealthy also suffer in the famine. What a pitiful sight it must have been to see those who were accustomed to the finest foods and garments perishing in the streets with the poor or scavenging in the city garbage dumps (v. 5). The lingering agony of the starving city causes the poet to make a painful comparison. Jerusalem has experienced a more severe fate than ancient Sodom. Sodom's fall was sudden but Jerusalem's agony and suffering was prolonged over a period of several months (v. 6). (3) The nobles of the land (or perhaps the Nazarites) also suffered greatly from the famine. Once they were the picture of health—rosy cheeks, fair complexion, stately appearance (v. 7). But as a result of the pangs of hunger these nobles have been reduced to skin and bones. Their fair skin is now black and leathery. No one can even recognize these once famous personages on the streets of the city (v. 8). How much better off were those who had died suddenly by the sword in battle than those who wasted away day by day (v. 9). (4) Most pitiful of all are the women of Judah. Once tender-hearted and loving mothers, these women have been so crazed by hunger that they have forgotten their maternal affection. In order to preserve their own lives they were boiling and eating their own children! (v. 10).

LAMENTATIONS

II. AN EXPLANATION OF THE JUDGMENT

4:11-20

TRANSLATION

(11) The LORD has given vent to His wrath. He has poured out His fierce anger. He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has consumed her foundations. (12) Neither the kings of the earth nor the inhabitants of the world believed that the adversary and the enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem. (13) It was because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests who shed the blood of innocent persons in the midst of her. (14) They staggered like blind men in the streets. They were polluted with blood so that none could touch their garments. (15) Turn back! Unclean! men cried to them; Turn back! Turn back! Do not touch! When they fled away and wandered, men said among the nations, They shall no more sojourn there. (16) The face of the LORD has scattered them, He will no more regard them. They do not respect priests nor do they favor elders. (17) Our eyes failed continuing to look for our help in vain; in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save. (18) They hunted our steps preventing us from walking in our streets. Our end drew near, our days were filled up because our end had come. (19) More swift were our pursuers than the eagles of the heavens. Upon the hills they chased us, in the wilderness they laid in wait for us. (20) The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was captured in their pits, the one of whom we had said, Under his shadow we shall live among the nations.

COMMENTS

In verses 11-20 the poet begins to explain the horren-

dous calamity which has befallen Judah. The ultimate cause of Zion's downfall was the burning wrath of the Lord (v. 11). The leaders of the city, and in fact all the inhabitants of the world, believed that Jerusalem was invulnerable (v. 12). The idea that the Lord would not destroy His special abode probably was based upon the miraculous last-minute deliverance of Jerusalem from the armies of the Assyrian Sennacherib in the days of king Hezekiah (Isaiah 37).

In verses 13-20 the prophet points out two of the reasons God's anger was stirred up against the inhabitants of Judah. First he mentions the sins of the prophets and priests (vv. 13-16). Not only were these leaders guilty of perverting the word of the Lord, they were also guilty of murder, perhaps not directly, but indirectly (v. 13). Because of their counsel and encouragement many innocent people had been executed by the government. When Jerusalem came under the Chaldean siege and the city eventually fell these leaders who had confidently predicted divine deliverance were thrown into confusion. They were so defiled by blood that men could not touch them (v. 14). Their countrymen treated them as though they were unclean lepers. People who met them in the way applied to them the warning cry which lepers were to use if anyone approached them. Shunned by their own countrymen these discredited religious leaders fled to foreign lands. But even there these priests and prophets were not wanted. They were forced to become vagabonds wandering from one land to another (v. 15). It is the "face of the Lord" i.e., His anger, which has scattered these worthless leaders. Because they are not worthy of their office the Lord no longer regards them as prophets, priests, and elders nor do the people show to these leaders the respect and favor which the dignity of their office would normally evoke (v. 16).

The poet points to the stubborn and stupid resistance of the inhabitants of Jerusalem as the second explanation of the severity of Jerusalem's judgment. Having committed the fundamental error of disobedience to the word of God the people of Judah stumbled on through those last years trusting confidently in false theological premises and human ingenuity. The poet points out four specific ways in which the nation had been deluded and deceived. (1) To the bitter end they had put their trust in foreign allies, particularly Egypt (v. 17). On one occasion Pharaoh had made an attempt to come to the aid of Jerusalem but his forces were driven off by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem's hope that Pharaoh Hophra could defeat the Babylonians proved vain. The troops of Nebuchadnezzar returned to the siege. (2) The nation had been led to believe that they could successfully resist the might of Babylon. But with each passing day it became ever more obvious that the end had come. Missiles hurled into the city from Chaldean siege towers made any public assembly within the city hazardous. It was stupid to continue to resist (v. 18). (3) The inhabitants of Jerusalem also mistakenly thought they could flee the falling city. But flight was in vain. The enemy like eagles swooping down upon the prey pounced upon any who tried to escape the siege (v. 19). (4) The inhabitants of Jerusalem were deceived in believing that they could find protection by adhering to Zedekiah the king of Judah. Because the life of a kingdom depends upon having a king, Zedekiah is called by the poet "the breath of our nostrils." Zedekiah was the anointed of the Lord and the current representative of the house of David. The people were supremely confident that God would never allow the house of David to be completely overthrown. But Zedekiah was captured by the Chaldeans and deported to Babylon, a blind and broken man (v.

20). The people had been misled by their leaders into thinking that Jerusalem was inviolable and the dynasty of David unconquerable. They had placed their trust in man and had persistently refused to heed the word of God. They have no one but themselves to blame for the severity of Jerusalem's sufferings.

III. AN EXPECTATION REGARDING THE JUDGMENT 4:21-22

TRANSLATION

(21) Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz! But to you also shall the cup pass. You shall become drunk and make yourself naked. (22) The punishment of your iniquity is complete, O daughter of Zion! He will no more cause you to go into captivity! But your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, He will punish, He will uncover your sins.

COMMENTS

The nations of Edom and Judah were traditional enemies. During the western rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar in 589 B.C. Edom had remained loyal to the Chaldean king. When Jerusalem was going through her death throes Edom had acted in a most hostile and haughty way. Edom's sin began with indifference. She showed no concern over what was befalling her neighbor. From indifference Edom went on to rejoice over the destruction of the people of God. At some point the Edomites actually entered the weakened and helpless city of Jerusalem. They had reveled and caroused in the Temple mount. They had even helped the Chaldeans capture the poor fugitives who tried to escape the calamity of their nation (Obadiah 10-16). Ezekiel mentions that Edom tried to annex some

of Judah's territory at this time (Ezekiel 35:10-12). This ancient enemy, Edom, is ironically urged to rejoice and sing i.e., to enjoy their moment of triumph. But their joy will be short-lived! The cup of divine wrath is about to pass to Edom. Jeremiah had prophesied that Edom along with most of the other nations of Syria-Palestine would have to taste of the cup of God's wrath through the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 25:15-28). Edom is reminded that she must drink that dreaded cup till she becomes intoxicated and experiences shame, confusion, sorrow, and destruction. She will be stripped of all her power and glory (v. 21).

Judah has been severely punished but her punishment is over. A ray of hope illuminates the darkness of Judah's present situation. For her a better day is dawning. Once she has returned from exile she will never again be carried away captive as a nation. The deliverance here predicted finds its fulfillment in the Messianic age when God granted salvation to His people, the New Israel, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Edom's future, on the other hand, is not so bright. Her sin is about to be punished (v. 22). The last remnant of Edom perished during the revolt against Rome in the early years of the Christian era, A.D. 70-71.¹

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1. Judged according to form, to what other chapter in Lamentations does chapter 4 most nearly correspond?
2. Why did Jeremiah compare his people to an ostrich? 4:3.
3. In what respect was the punishment of Zion greater than that of Sodom? 4:6.
4. What is the evidence of the severity of the famine in Jerusalem?

1. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* IV. 5; V. 6. 1.

A RUINED KINGDOM

5. What was the attitude of the poet toward priests and prophets? 4:13.
6. What was the nation to which Zion looked for help in her desperate hour? 4:17.
7. To whom is the poet referring in 4:20?
8. Why is Edom told to rejoice over the fate of Zion? 4:21.
9. What is the contrast between the future of Zion and the future of Edom? 4:22.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A PENITENT NATION

5:1-22

The form of the fifth poem differs in at least two respects from the four which precede it. First, this poem is not in the acrostic form. But like chapters 1, 2 and 4 it does have twenty-two verses which indicates that these five poems belong together. Secondly, chapter 5 is a prayer and not a dirge. While the poem does contain a recital of the miseries recently suffered by the people, the purpose of the poet here is to appeal to the compassion of God so as to gain His help. The poem consists of two unequal parts. (1) In verses 1-18 the poet describes the present reproach of Zion, and (2) in verses 19-22 he requests the restoration or renewal of Zion.

I. THE REPROACH OF ZION DESCRIBED

5:1-18

TRANSLATION

(1) Remember, O LORD, what has come upon us! Take note and observe our reproach. (2) Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our houses to foreigners. (3) We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows. (4) We drink our water with silver, our wood comes to us for a price. (5) Our pursuers are upon our necks; we are weary, but we have no rest. (6) We have given the hand to Egypt, and to Assyria, in order to get bread. (7) Our fathers sinned but they are dead. We have borne their iniquities. (8) Slaves rule over us! There is no one to deliver us from their hand. (9) At the risk of our lives we bring our bread because of the sword of the wilderness. (10) Our skin is hot like an oven because of the fever of hunger:

(11) Women were ravished in Zion, maidens in the streets of Judah. (12) Princes were hanged by their hands; elders were not respected. (13) Young men carried the mill and youths staggered with wood. (14) Elders have left the gate, young men their songs. (15) The joy of our heart has ceased, our dance has changed to mourning. (16) The crown of our head has fallen! Woe now to us, for we have sinned. (17) For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are darkened; (18) because of Mt. Zion which is desolate, jackals walk on it.

COMMENTS

That chapter 5 is a prayer is indicated by the language of verse 1: "Remember, O LORD, what has come upon us!" There is a sense of desperation and urgency in these words. Of course God has not forgotten His people. He is not oblivious of their suffering. But when God hesitates to deliver one from reproach and difficulty it often seems to the sufferer that He has forgotten. The words of verse 1 also reflect the hope and faith of the poet. He stands as a petitioner before a judge to present his case. He is sure that if he can present a convincing picture of the desperation and repentance of Israel that the Judge of all the earth will intervene on their behalf. The prophet is pleading with God to demonstrate by divine intervention that He is aware of what has happened to His people.

The condition of Israel was truly pitiable. Their reproach was great. They had lost everything. Their "inheritance" (land) and their houses had been given to strangers probably as payment for aiding in the Chaldean conquest of Jerusalem (v. 2). With the male population practically decimated, those who remained were virtually widows and orphans (v. 3). Such essential items as water and wood were so scarce that they had to be purchased

from the captors (v. 4). They were cruelly oppressed. The Chaldean troops which occupied the land gave the people no rest. They were "breathing down their neck" all the time. The Jewish remnant was constantly forced to labor for the enemy and were given no time to rest (v. 5). In order to obtain food they had been forced to give their hand in solemn pledge of surrender and servitude to Egyptian and Assyrian traders who passed through the land (v. 6).

Verse 7 is not a complaint but a confession. The poet is not claiming that his generation has been punished unjustly for the people confess their guilt in verse 16. Verse 7 is an acknowledgement of the principle that sin often has consequences which extend from one generation to another. Of course the Old Testament clearly teaches that every individual sinner is punished for his own sin (Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:1ff.); but if children continue to walk in the footsteps of their wicked fathers and even surpass their fathers in wickedness they may expect to be punished with ever increasing severity (see Jeremiah 16:11-12). The consequences of sin are cumulative. The passing of time gives more opportunity for hearing and obeying the word of God. Therefore, the generation of Jeremiah was even more guilty than previous generations because they had neglected more opportunities, more warnings, and ignored more judgments than their fathers. Verse 7, then, is not an excuse for the people but an explanation of the severity of their suffering.

In verses 8-18 the prophet continues to picture the severity of God's judgment on Judah. Babylonian mercenaries, some of whom had been former slaves of the Jews, now ruled over the land (v. 8). With no stable government to restrain them, marauding Bedouin tribes who lived on the fringes of the desert raided the valley farms. Only at great risk of life could the harvest be brought in (v.

9). A virtual famine continued to exist in the land and the people suffered greatly because of it (v. 10).

All sections of the population had suffered immeasurably. The women of Judah had been raped. It was unsafe for a maiden to walk the streets of Jerusalem (v. 11). The princes of the land had been impaled and left to die a slow and shameful death. The cruel enemy had no respect for the older people of the land (v. 12). What few young men survived the siege and capture of Jerusalem were forced to grind grain which was usually the work of women or slaves. Even the younger boys were compelled to serve the enemy by carrying huge loads of fire wood (v. 13). Elders no longer assembled to conduct their business in the gates of the city. Young men could no longer get together to make merry (v. 14). The once joyous people were now experiencing only bitter sorrow (v. 15).

In verses 16-18 the passage reaches its climax as the poet acknowledges the justice of the present sufferings. Like a crown toppling from the head of a deposed monarch, so the glory of Judah has suddenly and completely been removed. The nation experiences misery and woe because "we have sinned" against God (v. 16). The heart of the people is sick with sorrow, their eyes darkened by tears because of the national loss (v. 17). The sacred hill of Mt. Zion where once proudly stood the Temple of Solomon is now desolate. Jackals have made their home in the ruins of God's Temple (v. 18). Sin always pays off in wages of death and destruction.

II. THE RESTORATION OF ZION REQUESTED 5:19-22

TRANSLATION

(19) You, O LORD, are enthroned forever! Your

LAMENTATIONS

throne is from generation to generation. (20) Why have You forgotten us forever, forsaken us for so many days? (21) Turn us, O LORD, unto You that we may return! Renew our days as of old. (22) Unless You have utterly rejected us, are angry with us exceedingly.

COMMENTS

Having presented his case before the divine Judge Jeremiah enters his appeal. The appeal is first anchored securely in a basic theological truth: "you, O LORD, are enthroned forever" (v. 19). The emphatic position of the pronoun suggests a contrast. The poet has described at length in verses 1-18 the destruction and loss of all the temporal blessings which God had given His people. Earthly things may pass away but God remains. Though conditions of earth may seem to deteriorate, the Eternal is still on His throne. His Temple on earth may be destroyed but His heavenly throne cannot be overthrown. When the disillusioned and down-trodden recapture this basic truth they have laid the foundation upon which hope can be reconstructed and petition presented before God.

The appeal to God takes the form of a question: "Why have You forgotten us forever?" (v. 20). To those who had recently come through the siege of Jerusalem the prospects of fifty more years of servitude to Babylon (Jeremiah 25:12) seemed like an eternity. It seemed to them that God had forgotten and forsaken them forever. In desperation and complete submission they call upon God to help and aid them to properly repent. The people realize that restoration and renewal are dependent upon complete return to God and they are most anxious that their repentance meet with divine approval. They ask God to restore Judah to its former state (v. 21). Unless He has utterly rejected them (v. 22). An utter and

complete rejection would not be in harmony with the promises which God had already made about the future of Israel (Jeremiah 27:19ff.; 29:10ff.). If God still rules, if the people are willing to submit to Him, if He has not utterly rejected them, then God must intervene on behalf of His people. Thus the sad book of Lamentations closes with a fervent appeal for God's aid and a confident expectation that He would indeed intervene on behalf of His people.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

1. In what respect is the fifth chapter of Lamentations different from the previous four chapters?
2. What did the inhabitants of Zion have to do in order to secure the necessities of life? 5:4-6.
3. Is verse 7 a complaint against the injustice of Zion's punishment?
4. What is meant by "the sword of the wilderness"? 5:9.
5. For what is the prophet praying in 5:21?

GLOSSARY

This glossary is divided into two parts. In part one all the important persons who are named in the Book of Jeremiah and identified. The second part is devoted to places and peoples mentioned by Jeremiah. All references are to the Book of Jeremiah unless otherwise indicated.

I. PERSONAL NAMES

- ABRAHAM** Most famous of the patriarchs and progenitor of the Hebrews. Cited by Jeremiah as one with whom God previously had been faithful in keeping a covenant (33:26).
- AHAB** Immoral and lying prophet in Babylon, Jeremiah predicted Nebuchadnezzar would roast him in the fire (29:21-23).
- AHIKAM** The son of Shaphan the scribe who protected Jeremiah when priests and false prophets wanted his death (26:24).
- AMON** Sun god, and for many centuries the chief god, of the Egyptians. The greatest Egyptian temple was constructed for Amon at No (Thebes). Jeremiah predicted Amon would be discredited by Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Egypt (46:25).
- APIS** The sacred bull, one of the high gods of Egypt. The word is translated "valiant men" in KJV and "strong ones" in ASV.
- ASHERAH** A Canaanite mother-goddess associated with Baal. The term also applies to the wooden images which represented this goddess (17:2).
- ASA** King of Judah three hundred years before the time of Jeremiah. He was the builder of a cistern into which Ishmael threw the corpses of the men he had slain (41:9).
- AZARIAH** Probably the brother of Jezaniah (42:1). Acted as spokesman for the remnant of Jews who rejected the word of God given through Jeremiah that they should not flee to Egypt (43:1).
- BAAL** The Hebrew word means "master" or "possessor"; the name of the Canaanite fertility deity which the Jews began to worship in Palestine. It was this apostasy toward which Jeremiah aimed much of his prophecy. There are twelve references to Baal in Jeremiah.

BAALIS	King of the Ammonites who plotted the death of Gedaliah, governor of Judah (40:14).
BARUCH	Friend and scribe to whom Jeremiah dictated his prophecies in 605-604 B.C. (36:4; 36:32; 45:1). Baruch was placed in charge of the prophet's purchase of a field at Anathoth (32:13). Considered by some to have been Jeremiah's biographer and editor.
BEL	Bel-Merodach (Marduk), chief god of Babylon (50:2).
CHEMOSH	National god of the Moabites who would be carried off into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar (48:7).
CONIAH	(22:24, 28; 37:1) See JEHOIACHIN.
DAVID	Second king of Israel whose dynasty still ruled in Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day. The terminology "throne or David" occurs seven times in the book. The Messiah would come from the house of David (23:5; 30:9; 33:15). Jeremiah emphasizes the eternality of the covenant made with David (33:17, 21, 22, 26).
DELAIAH	One of the princes who urged Jehoiakim not to burn the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies (36:12, 25).
EBED-MELECH	An Ethiopian eunuch in the court of Zedekiah who rescued Jeremiah from a pit in which he had been left to die (38:7-13). Because of this act of faith and courage, Jeremiah directed a favorable oracle to him (39:15-18).
ELASHA	A member of king Zedekiah's embassy to Babylon who carried Jeremiah's letter to the exiled Jews (29:3).
ELISHAMA	A prince and scribe in the reign of king Jehoiakim in whose office Jeremiah's scroll was placed for safekeeping (36:12, 20, 21).
ELNATHAN	A prince sent by king Jehoiakim to Egypt in pursuit of Uriah the prophet (26:22). Later, one of the princes who urged the king not to burn Jeremiah's scroll (36:12, 25).
EPHAI	Inhabitant of Netophah near Bethlehem whose sons recognized Gedaliah as governor and accepted his protection (40:8).
ESAU	Ancestor of the Edomites, and hence a name applied to the country of Edom (49:8, 10).

EVIL-MERODACH	Biblical name of Amel-Marduk, son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar who released Jehoiachin from prison in 561 B.C. (52:31).
GEDALIAH (1)	The son of Ahikam who was appointed governor of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C., Jeremiah was committed to his care (39:14). After a brief governorship, Gedaliah was murdered by Ishmael (chaps. 40-41).
GEDALIAH (2)	The son of Pashur. One of four princes who received Zedekiah's permission to cast Jeremiah into a cistern to die (38:1).
GEMARIAH (1)	The son of Hilkiah. A member of king Zedekiah's embassy to Babylon who carried Jeremiah's letter to the Jews exiled there (29:3).
GEMARIAH (2)	The son of Shaphan who occupied a chamber in the Temple where he and other officials heard Baruch read Jeremiah's prophecies. He joined others in urging king Jehoiakim not to burn the prophet's writings (36:10, 12, 25).
HAMUTAL	Wife of king Josiah and mother of kings Jehoahaz (II Kings 23:31) and Zedekiah (52:1).
HANAMEL	Cousin of Jeremiah who sold him a field in Anathoth (32:7-12).
HANAN	The "man of God" whose sons (or disciples) had a chamber in the Temple (35:4).
HANANIAH	A false prophet from Gibeon who contradicted and insulted Jeremiah on the matter of Babylonian domination. For these sins he died two months later (chapter 28).
HEZEKIAH	Good king of Judah (715-686 B.C.) who heeded the prophet Micah's warnings and instituted reforms (26:18).
HOPHRA	Pharaoh of Egypt who Jeremiah predicted would be killed by his enemies (44:39; 44:30). The succeeding Pharaoh had him strangled in 560 B.C.
IRIJAH	(37:13): A captain of the guard who arrested Jeremiah as he attempted to go to Benjamin during the lull in the siege of Jerusalem. He falsely charged him with desertion to the enemy (37:13).
ISHMAEL	Member of the royal family who murdered Gedaliah, governor of Judah, and escaped with eight men to the king of Ammon, taking several hostages with him (chapters 40-41).

ISSAC	Ancestor of the Jews (33:26).
JAAZANIAH	A Rechabite whose obedience to his ancestor, who had lived two hundred years before, was contrasted with Israel's disobedience to God (chapter 35).
JACOB	Ancestor of the Jews (33:26). Fifteen times in Jeremiah "Jacob" becomes a designation for the descendants of Jacob i.e., the Israelites.
JECONIAH	The son of Jehoiakim (24:1). See JEHOIACHIN.
JEHOAHAZ	The throne name of Shallum, the son and successor of Josiah. After a reign of three months, he was deposed by Pharaoh Necho and deported to Egypt where he died (22:11).
JEHOIACHIN	Throne name of Coniah or Jeconiah (22:24, 28; 37:1). He reigned for three months after the death of his father Jehoiakim, before he was carried off to Babylon with his family and 10,000 Jews in 597 B.C. (24:1). After thirty-seven years of captivity, he was released by Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil-Merodach (52:31).
JEHOIADA	A chief priest in Jerusalem during the early part of Jeremiah's ministry who was displaced by Zephaniah (29:26).
JEHOIAKIM	The son of Josiah who was placed on the throne of Judah by Pharaoh Necho to replace his brother Jehoahaz. During his eleven year reign (609-598 B.C.) the reforms of Josiah were forgotten and replaced by personal luxury, extortion, and idolatry. After Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt in 605 B.C., he became a Babylonian vassal. He destroyed the first edition of the Book of Jeremiah (chapter 36). Jeremiah predicted he would die in disgrace (22:13-23).
JEHUCAL	A prince of Judah who conveyed Zedekiah's request that Jeremiah pray for him. Later one of the group that had Jeremiah thrown into a pit to die (37:3; 38:1-6). The name is also spelled JUCAL.
JEHUDI (1)	The son of Nethaniah who was sent by the princes to summon Baruch to read Jeremiah's scroll (36:14).
JEHUDI (2)	Possibly the same person mentioned above. He was dispatched by king Jehoiakim to fetch Jeremiah's scroll and then was ordered to read it in the presence of the king (36:21).

JERAHMEEL	The officer sent by king Jehoiakim to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. He was probably of royal blood (36:26).
JEREMIAH	He was born in Anathoth into a priestly family, and consecrated before his birth to be a prophet. He prophesied under kings Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, and even after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. His message was of God's judgment on an apostate people and a new covenant for the future.
JEZANIAH	A commander of Judean forces who paid respects to Gedaliah the governor of Judah. After Gedaliah's death he joined others in leading the remnant of Jews to Egypt. He appears to have been the brother of Azariah. (40:8; 442:1).
JOHANAN	A commander of forces who respected Gedaliah as governor of Judah and warned him of impending assassination. After Gedaliah was slain he led forces against the murderer, Ishmael. Johanan then joined others in leading the remnant of Jews into Egypt against Jeremiah's advice (chapters 40-43).
JONADAB	The ancestor of the Rechabites who required his clan never to build houses, farm, nor drink wine (35:6-19).
JONATHAN (1)	The scribe whose house served as prison for Jeremiah (37:15).
JONATHAN (2)	The son of Kareah and the brother of Johanan. He is listed among those who submitted to Gedaliah's government and protection (40:8).
JOSIAH	King of Judah when Jeremiah began his ministry. Initiated reforms early in his reign which reached a climax after a law book was discovered during his eighteenth year. This led to widespread external cleansing of the land from idolatry. He was killed in battle against Pharaoh Necho in 609 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz (1:2; 3:6).
JUCAL MAASEIAH	See JEHUCAL. A doorkeeper of one of the three gates to the Temple (35:4).
MAGOR- MISSABIB	This ominous name meaning "terror around about" was given to the priest Pashur by Jeremiah after the prophet had been released from the stocks (20:3). See Pashur (1).

MANASSEH	His reign was the longest (695-642 B.C.) and most wicked of any king of Judah. He defiled the Temple and promoted Baal worship. But after a captivity in Babylon he repented and tried to undo the evil he had done. However, Jeremiah said that the judgment was inevitable because of the sins of Manasseh (15:4).
MERODACH	Biblical name of Marduk, chief god of Babylon (50:2).
MICAH	The prophet from the town of Moresheth-gath who lived a hundred years before Jeremiah. His negative prophecy against Jerusalem was cited as part of Jeremiah's defense when he was on trial for his life (26:18).
MICAHIAH	The man who heard Baruch reading from Jeremiah's scroll and who reported to the council of princes the contents of that scroll (36:11-13).
MOLECH	The national deity of the Ammonites who was worshipped by means of child sacrifice (32:35). Jeremiah sternly condemned this practice (7:29-34). The name is also spelled Milcom or Malcom.
MOSES	Referred to by Jeremiah as one of the greatest intercessors in the history of the nation (15:1).
NEBO-SARSECHIM	One of the Babylonian officers of the provisional government in Jerusalem. Rab-saris was the title of his office (39:3).
NEBUCHADNEZZAR	(Nebuchadrezzar): Ruler of the Babylonian empire from 605 B.C. to 562 B.C. He destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and four times carried Jewish people captive to Babylon. He is called "My servant" in Jeremiah's prophecies because God used him as an instrument of punishment for the apostate Jews.
NEBUZARADAN	The captain of Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard who was in charge of the final destruction of Jerusalem. He freed Jeremiah and treated him kindly (39:9-13; 52:12-30).
NECHO	The Egyptian Pharaoh defeated by Nebuchadnezzar in the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. (46:2). Four years earlier Necho had slain Josiah at the pass of Megiddo.
NERGAL-SHAREZER	An official of the provisional government of Jerusalem after the destruction of 587 B.C. Rab-mag is the title of his high office. Possibly he was the same Nergal-sharezer who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar's son on the throne of Babylon in 560 B.C. (39:3).

- PASHUR (1)** The son of Immer. A chief officer in the temple who had Jeremiah scourged and imprisoned. Later Jeremiah prophesied that Pashur would die in captivity because he prophesied falsely, and changed his name to Magor-missabib (20:1-6).
- PASHUR (2)** The son of Malchiah who was sent by king Zedekiah to Jeremiah to seek a word from God when Nebuchadnezzar's forces began their attack on Judah (21:1). Later he joined other princes in seeking Jeremiah's death (38:1-3).
- QUEEN OF HEAVEN** Probably to be identified with the goddess Astarte or Ashtoreth. She was worshiped by the Jews both in Judah (7:18) and in Egypt (44:17-19, 25).
- RACHEL** Wife of the patriarch Jacob who was regarded as the mother of Israel. She is represented as weeping over those who are going into captivity (31:15).
- SAMGAR-NEBO** A name found in KJV of 39:3. Most modern scholars divide this word, attaching "samgar" to the preceding name and "nebo" to the following name.
- SAMUEL** Referred to as one of the greatest intercessors in the history of Israel (15:1).
- SAR-SECHIM** A name found in the KJV of 39:3. See Nebosarsechim.
- SERAIAH (1)** The chief priest at the time of Jerusalem's capture, killed by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (52:24).
- SERAIAH (2)** The son of Azriel who was ordered by king Jehoiakim to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch (36:23).
- SERAIAH (3)** The son of Neriah who was chief chamberlain for Zedekiah's trip to meet Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah gave him a scroll to read aloud in Babylon and then sink in the Euphrates (51:59).
- SERAIAH (4)** The son of Tanhumeth who is listed among those who came to Gedaliah recognizing him as governor and accepting his protection (40:8).

SHALLUM SHAPHAN	The son of Josiah (22:11). See JEHOAHAZ. The scribe who read the book of the law to Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-14). Also father of Ahikam, Gemariah, Jaazaniah, and grandfather of Gedaliah (26:24; 36:10; 40:5). His family befriended Jeremiah on several occasions.
SHEMAIAH	A false prophet in Babylon who promised captive Jews that their exile would be short. Jeremiah prophesied he would die before the return and leave no posterity (29:24-32).
SIHON	An Amorite king who had conquered Moab sometime before the Israelites emerged from their wilderness wanderings. Jeremiah alludes to this conquest in his oracle against Moab (48:45).
SOLOMON	Third king of Israel in whose reign the Temple was built. Nebuchadnezzar carried off the bronze which Solomon had used in constructing various parts of the Temple furnishings (52:20).
URIAH	Prophet who prophesied against Judah as did Jeremiah, and who was executed by king Jehoiakim (26:20-24). He was from the village of Kireath-jearim.
ZEDEKIAH (1)	The son of Josiah who ruled as last king of Judah (597-587 B.C.). Because of his rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. Zedekiah was taken captive, blinded and deported to Babylon. During the last days before the fall of Jerusalem, Zedekiah had several interviews with Jeremiah (21:1-14; 34:2-7; 37:3-10; 37:16-21; 38:14-28).
ZEDEKIAH (2)	The son of Maaseiah. Jeremiah threatened that Nebuchadnezzar would roast this immoral and lying prophet in a fire (29:21-23).
ZEDEKIAH (3)	The son of Hananiah. A prince in the reign of king Jehoiakim who was present at Baruch's reading of Jeremiah's scroll in the chamber of Elisha the scribe (36:12).
ZEPHANIAH	The second priest, under the high priest Seraiah, who was sent by king Zedekiah to inquire of Jeremiah (21:1; 37:3). This priest, who seems to have been somewhat favorably inclined toward Jeremiah (29:25, 29), was killed by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (52:24).

II. PLACE NAMES

ABARIM	The mountain range SE of the Dead Sea in which Mt. Nebo was one of the prominent peaks. People in this region would lament when the Babylonians attacked (22:20).
AI	A city of Ammon (location unknown) which was to be laid waste by Nebuchadnezzar (49:3).
AMMON	A country NE of Moab and E of the tribe of Reuben, between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers. See map page 144a. The children of Ammon are among those God will judge by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (9:26; 25:21) but in the Messianic Age they would be converted to true faith (49:6).
ANATHOTH	A village three miles NE of Jerusalem. The home town of Jeremiah (1:1; 29:27). The doom of certain men of Anathoth is announced because they plotted against Jeremiah (11:21, 23). During the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah purchased a field in Anathoth as a sign that lands would again be bought and sold (32:7-9).
ARABAH	The valley of the Jordan river toward which king Zedekiah fled when Jerusalem was under attack (39:4).
ARABIA	A general name for the region between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The kings of Arabia will be forced to drink the cup of God's wrath (25:24).
ARAM, ARAMEANS	The region N of Canaan of which Damascus was a leading city. Nebuchadnezzar sent Arameans (Syrians) to harass the Judean countryside until he could arrive with the army to destroy Jerusalem (35:11).
ARARAT	A district in Armenia, between the Araxes river and lakes Van and Urumia. One of the areas from which God would summon peoples to attack, Babylon (51:27).
ARNON	The deep river gorge which was the southern boundary of Reuben but which in Jeremiah's day was within the territory of Moab. It is possible there was a Moabite town of this name (48:20).
AROER	A Moabite city just N of the Arnon river whose inhabitants will interrogate the fugitives from the N as they flee from the destroyer (48:19).

- ARPAD** A fortified city about 95 miles N of Hamath in Aram (Syria) which is said to melt in fear at the reported advances of Nebuchadnezzar (49:23).
- ASHDOD** One of the five chief Philistine cities. See map page 144a. In Jeremiah's day only a remnant survived in this town and the prophet predicts that they must further drink the cup of God's wrath (25:20).
- ASHKELON** Philistine city (25:20) which Jeremiah predicted would be attacked by the enemy from the north. For location, see map page 144a.
- ASHKENAZ** A tribe located in the neighborhood of Armenia, along with the kingdom of Ararat and Minni. They are summoned to attack Babylon (51:27).
- ASSYRIA** A narrow country in the upper Tigris valley which ruled the world from about 745-605 B.C. In the days of Ahaz, Judah turned to Assyria for aid (2:18), but was bitterly disappointed (2:36). Assyria "devoured" Judah for a number of years (50:17) but was finally punished by God (50:18).
- AZEKAH** A village of Judah ten miles SW of Jerusalem. One of the last outposts to fall to Nebuchadnezzar before he attacked Jerusalem (34:7).
- BABYLON** The great world power of the sixth century before Christ and the capital of that empire. See map page vi. The Judean captives were taken to Babylon (20:4). Jeremiah also predicts the eventual fall of this empire (chapters 50-51). There are 168 direct references to Babylon in Jeremiah.
- BASHAN** A region E of Jordan extending from Gilead on the S to Mt. Hermon on the N. Bashan is bidden to weep because of the approach of Nebuchadnezzar (22:20). Following exile Israel would again possess this region (50:19).
- BENJAMIN** The territory just N of Jerusalem. Jeremiah lived in this region (1:1) and purchased a field here from a relative (32:8). He was arrested trying to go to the land of Benjamin during the lull in the siege of Jerusalem (37:12). He addresses the children of Benjamin in one oracle (6:1) and alludes to the land of Benjamin in two others (17:26; 33:13).

BETH-DIBLATHAIM	A city of Moab the location of which is uncertain (48:22).
BETHEL	Twelve miles N of Jerusalem. A seat of one of the golden calves. In the day of judgment the inhabitants of Moab will be ashamed of their god Chemosh just as Israel was ashamed of the illegitimate worship at Bethel when that nation was being judged (48:13).
BETH-GAMUL	A city of Moab about ten miles W of Dibon (48:23).
BETH-HAKKEREM	Spelled Beth-haccerem in KJV. Thought to be a hill east of Bethlehem. Jeremiah urged the Judean fugitives to set up a signpost there to guide others in their flight to the wilderness (6:1).
BETHLEHEM	Near this famous town six miles S of Jerusalem the remnant camped on their flight to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah (41:17).
BETH-MEON	A Moabite city the location of which is uncertain (48:23).
BETH-SHEMESH	The name literally means "the house of the sun." An Egyptian city called On by the Egyptians and Heliopolis by the Greeks. Located about ten miles NE of modern Cairo and a few miles S of ancient Tahpanhes. Jeremiah predicts that the obelisks of the sun temple there would be broken down (43:13).
BOZRAH (1)	Chief city of northern Edom over which Nebuchadnezzar would spread his wings (49:22) making the place a desolation (44:13).
BOZRAH (2)	A city in the plains of Moab which was destined to fall to Nebuchadnezzar (44:24).
BUZ	A tribe in northern Arabia descended from Nahor, Abraham's brother, which must drink the cup of God's wrath (25:23).
CARMEL	The prominent mountain on the W coast of Canaan which stands as a wall between the maritime plain of Sharon on the S and the more inland plain of Esdraelon on the W. Carmel is used by Jeremiah as a symbol of that which is beautiful (2:7) and lofty (46:18). In the restoration Carmel will again be possessed by Israel (50:19).
CHALDEA, CHALDEANS	In Jeremiah's day Chaldea was synonymous with Babylonia. Forty-six references are made to this land and people in Jeremiah.

CUSH	The Hebrew name for Ethiopia. Ebed-melech the Ethiopian once rescued Jeremiah (38:7-13). The prophet referred to Ethiopians in a sermon illustration (13:23). Some of Pharaoh's mercenary troops came from Cush (46:9).
CYPRUS	See KITTIM
DAMASCUS	Capitol of the kingdom of Aram (Syria) the destruction of which Jeremiah predicts (49:23, 24, 27). See map pages vi and 144a.
DAN	The northern-most city of Canaan. Indications of the invasion from the north would first come from Dan (4:15, 8:16).
DEDAN	One of the Arab tribes which must drink of the divine cup of wrath (25:23). The Dedanites inhabited the region S of Edom. Jeremiah urges them to withdraw further into the desert so that they might not have to experience the fate of Edom (49:8).
DIBON	A Moabite city located about four miles N of the Arnon river. The important King's Highway passed through this place. Dibon will experience disgrace in the day of Moab's judgment (48:18, 22).
EDOM	A mountainous region between Moab and the Red Sea. See Map page 144a. In addition to several allusions to the impending destruction of Edom, Jeremiah composed a lengthy oracle against this land (49:7-22). The prophet directed the Edomite ambassador to take a symbolic yoke to his king (27:3). Many Jews fled to Edom when the Chaldeans attacked Judah in 588-87 B.C. (40:11).
EGLATH-SHELISHIAM	A Moabite city the location of which is unknown (48:34). The name means "a heifer of three years old" and is so translated in KJV.
EGYPT	The great power on the NW corner of the continent of Africa. See maps vi and 696a. There are fifty-three references to Egypt in Jeremiah. Several passages refer to the Exodus from Egypt (11:7; 16:14; 23:7; etc.). After the assassination of Gedaliah the Judean fugitives fled to Egypt (chapters 41-44). Jeremiah predicts the defeat of Egypt at Carchemish (46:1-6) as well as an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar (46:13).
EKRON	One of the chief Philistine cities. See map page 144a. Ekron will have to drink the cup of divine wrath (25:20).

ELAM	For location see map page vi. In addition to the brief allusion to the destruction of Elam in 25:25, Jeremiah wrote an oracle against this land (49:34-39). Nebuchadnezzar campaigned against Elam in 596 B.C.
ELEALEH	A Moabite city located about a mile N of Heshbon (48:34).
EPHRAIM	In Jeremiah. Ephraim is the name of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The prophet alludes to the captivity of Ephraim (7:15) and the restoration of Ephraim (31:9, 18, 20).
ETHIOPIA, ETHIOPIANS	See CUSH.
EUPHRATES	The most prominent river of the Near East which flows from the mountains of Armenia to the Persian Gulf. See map page vi. Often called in the Bible <i>the</i> river or simple <i>River</i> (2:18). Jeremiah buried and subsequently retrieved a linen girdle from the banks of the river (chapter 13). The battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates is alluded to both historically (46:2) and prophetically (46:6, 10). A scroll containing an oracle against Babylon was ordered sunk by Jeremiah in the Euphrates (57:63).
GAREB	A hill near Jerusalem listed as marking the boundaries of the new Jerusalem (31:39).
GAZA	A Philistine city. See map page 144a. Jeremiah mentions an otherwise unrecorded Egyptian attack on Gaza (47:1) and also predicts that this city will suffer at the hands of the enemy from the north (47:5).
GERUT-CHIMHAM	"Inn of Chimham" in KJV. A rest area for travelers near Bethlehem. The remnant camped here as they flew to Egypt following the assassination of Gedaliah (41:17).
GIBEON	A city of Judah six miles NW of Jerusalem. The home of the false prophet Hananiah (28:1). At Gibeon Johanan caught up with Ishmael and effected the rescue of the captives which the latter had taken from Mizpah (41:12, 16).
GILEAD	A mountainous region E of Jordan famous for its trees (22:6) and the medicines produced by those trees (8:22, 46:11). Jeremiah predicts that Jews will return from captivity to occupy the mountains of Gilead (50:19).

GOATH	A place on the E of Jerusalem near the hill Gareb. One of the boundary marks of the new Jerusalem (31:39).
GOMORRAH HAMATH	See SODOM. A city and region in upper Syria in the valley of the Orontes river. The city is said to melt in fear at the news of the Chaldean advance (49:23). The town of Riblah in the region of Hamath was the military headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar (39:5; 52:9, 27).
HAZOR	An Arabian city, region, or tribe smitten by Nebuchadnezzar. (49:28, 30, 33).
HESHBON	Formerly a Levitical city belonging to the tribe of Reuben. Heshbon was the major city N of the Arnon river in Jeremiah's day (49:3). The city is mentioned four times in the Moab oracle (48:2, 34, 45) as being the spot from which the destroyer of Moab would launch his attack.
HINNOM, VALLEY OF	A valley on the W side of Jerusalem where child sacrifice was practiced in worship of the god Molech (7:31; 32:35). Jeremiah changed its name to Valley of Slaughter (7:32; 19:6) because of the corpses which would fall there. Overlooking this valley Jeremiah once preached and performed a symbolic act (19:2).
HOLON	A Moabite city the location of which is unknown (48:21).
HORONAIM	A Moabite village just S of the Arnon river which Jeremiah predicts will be sacked and destroyed by the enemy (48:3, 5, 34).
ISRAEL	There are 105 references to Israel in Jeremiah and three references in Lamentations. "Israel" sometimes refers to the entire theocratic nation which the Lord brought out of Egypt. In other passages "Israel" is the Northern Kingdom which ceased to exist in 722 B.C. Frequently in the book, God is called "the God of Israel."
JAHAZAH	A Moabite city about eight miles SE of Heshbon (48:21, 34). Also spelled Jahazah.
JAZER	An Ammonite city fifteen miles N of Heshbon. The bitter lament of this city is mentioned by Jeremiah (48:32).

JERUSALEM	The capital of Judah and site of the Temple. The city is mentioned 108 times in Jeremiah and seven times in Lamentations. The main thrust in these books is on the destruction of Jerusalem, although Jeremiah does mention the restoration of the city (31:38-40).
JORDAN	The major river of Canaan flowing from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. In three passages Jeremiah speaks of the "Pride" (KJV "swelling") of the Jordan which refers to the thick jungle-like vegetation which grows along the river (12:5; 49:19; 50:44). 50:44).
JUDAH	See map page 144a. There are 176 references to Judah in Jeremiah and five in Lamentations. The tiny nation in S Canaan to which Jeremiah preached.
KEDAR	Sometimes used of Arabia in general (2:10) and sometimes of a particular tribe living in Arabia (49:28). The tribe of Kedar was to be attacked by Nebuchadnezzar.
KERIOTH	A Moabite city eleven miles SE of Dibon which Jeremiah predicts will be taken by Nebuchadnezzar (48:24, 41).
KIDRON	A brook running through the valley between Jerusalem and the Mt. of Olives. Mentioned by Jeremiah as one of the boundaries of the restored city of Jerusalem (31:40).
KIR-HERES	The chief fortress of southern Moab the fall of which indicates the completion of Moab's destruction. Jeremiah wept over the fall of this city (48:31, 36). Also spelled Kir-hareseth.
KIRIATHAIM	A Moabite city about eight miles NW of Dibon (48:1, 23).
KIRJATH-JEARIM	A village eight miles W of Jerusalem. The home of the faithful prophet Uriah (26:20).
KITTIM	The isles of the Mediterranean and perhaps the coastlands of Italy and Greece. Jeremiah challenged his audience to see if they could discover in Kittim an example of unfaithfulness which would parallel the apostasy of Judah (2:10).
LACHLISH	A Judean city about twenty-eight miles SW of Jerusalem. One of the last outposts to fall to Nebuchadnezzar before he began the siege of Jerusalem (34:7).

LEBANON	The mountain range which, commencing near Tyre, runs NE through Syria, nearly parallel to the seacoast, sometimes as high as 9000 feet above sea level. Jeremiah mentions the snows of Lebanon as an illustration of constancy (18:14). The palace of the king of Judah is called Lebanon (22:6) as is the city of Jerusalem (22:23). Lebanon is the first region to suffer from the Babylonian invasion (22:20).
LEB-KAMAI	A cryptic designation for Babylon which when decoded spells "Chaldeans" in Hebrew. Leb-kamai literally means "the heart of those who rise up against me." (51:1).
LIBYANS	See PUT.
LUHITH	A village of Moab between Ar and Zoar at the S extremity of the Dead Sea (48:5).
MADMEN	A village in Moab nine miles N of Kir-hareseth whose destruction was foretold by Jeremiah (48:2).
MEDIA, MEDES	For location of Media see map page vi. The kings of Media are named among those who must drink the cup of God's wrath (25:25). Jeremiah predicted it would be the Medes that would attack and destroy Babylon (51:11, 28).
MEMPHIS	<i>Moph</i> or <i>Noph</i> in Hebrew. A city in central Egypt on the W of the Nile and a royal residence in days of Jeremiah. Called Noph in KJV. A major city (2:16; 46:14) where the Jewish remnant settled (44:1). Jeremiah predicted the city would be waste and desolate (46:19). See map page 696a.
MEPHAATH	An uncertain location in Moab (48:21).
MERATHAIM	A symbolic name for Babylon meaning "double rebellion" (50:21).
MIGDOL	A fortress on the NE border of Egypt where some of the Jewish remnant settled (44:1; 46:14).
MINNI	A district near Ararat in the region later known as Armenia from which God would summon troops to attack Babylon (51:27).
MISGAB	The name means "high fortress" and this spot seems to have been located in the vicinity of Nebo (48:1).
MIZPAH	A city of Judah about nine miles NE of Jerusalem where Gedaliah set up the seat of government after the destruction of Jerusalem (chapters 40-41).

MOAB	Generally in Old Testament times Moab occupied the region E of the Dead Sea between the Brook Zered in the S and the Arnon River in the N. In Jeremiah's day the Moabites seem to have expanded beyond the Arnon. Jeremiah makes a point of the fact that the Moabites practice circumcision (9:26). Moab must drink the cup of wrath (25:21) and submit to the yoke of Babylon (27:3). Jews fled to Moab in the war of 587 B.C. (40:11). In a lengthy oracle Jeremiah predicts the overthrow of Moab (chapter 48).
NEBO	A Moabite city about five miles SW of Heshbon (48:1, 22).
NEGEV	A barren steppe S of the valley of Beer-sheba. Sometimes the word is simply rendered "south." Jeremiah predicts the siege of the cities of this region (13:19) and ultimate restoration of them following the captivity (32:44; 33:13). See also 17:26.
NILE	The mighty river whose annual flooding brought prosperity to the land of Egypt. Jeremiah compared the advance of the Egyptian army to the swelling of the Nile (46:7, 8).
NIMRIM, WATER OF	A small brook in Moab which flows into the southern end of the Dead Sea (48:34).
NO	The Biblical name of Thebes located in southern or Upper Egypt. Also called No-Amon. The greatest collection of monuments and ruins in all the world is to be found there. Jeremiah predicted God's wrath would be poured out on Amon the god of No. (46:25).
NOPH	See MEMPHIS.
PATHROS	The entire region of Upper (southern) Egypt where some of the Jewish remnant settled (44:1, 15).
PEKOD	A symbolic name for Babylon meaning "punishment" (50:21).
PHILISTIA, PHILISTINES	The coastal region about forty miles long W of Judah. See map page 144a. Jeremiah names the kings of the Philistines among those who will be forced to drink the cup of God's wrath (25:20). A brief oracle against the Philistines is found in chapter 47.
PUT	The Hebrew name for the Libyan region W of Egypt. The Libyans were mercenaries in the army of Pharaoh (46:9).

RABBAH	Also spelled Rabbath. See map page 144a. The major city of Ammon which today is called Ammon and is the capital of Jordan. This city fell, as predicted by Jeremiah (49:2, 3), to Nebuchadnezzar in 582-81 B.C.
RAMAH	A city of Benjamin about five miles N of Jerusalem. Rachel's weeping over her sons was heard as far as Ramah (31:15). Jeremiah was taken in chains by the Babylonians to Ramah (40:1).
RED SEA	For location see map page vi. The sound of the cry of Edom is heard as far as the Red Sea, southern border of that land (49:21).
RIBLAH	A city of Aram (Syria) on the Orontes river. The headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar on his 587 B.C. campaign against the Jews. Here Zedekiah was brought after his capture (39:5-6; 52:9 and here the leaders of Judah were executed (52:10, 26-27).
SAMARIA	Capital of the Northern Kingdom which was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Some pilgrims from the vicinity of Samaria were massacred by Ishmael as they made their way to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice (41:5). Jeremiah also points out a contrast between the prophets of Samaria and those of Jerusalem (23:13).
SHEBA	A region in SW Arabia about 1500 miles S of Jerusalem from which the Jews secured the ingredients for incense and anointing oil (6:20).
SHEPHELAH	The rolling hills which separates the mountains of Judah from the coastal plains. This region of Judah is mentioned three times by the prophet (17:26; 32:44; 33:13). Translated "lowland" in KJV.
SHESHACH	A cryptic name for Babylon used in 25:26 and 51:41.
SHILOH	A city of Ephraim N of Bethel where the tabernacle was located during the period of the Judges. Jeremiah used the destruction of Shiloh as an illustration of what God would do to Jerusalem (7:12, 14; 26:6, 9). Some pilgrims who lived in the vicinity of the ruins of Shiloh were massacred by Ishmael (41:5).

SIBHAM	A village about three miles SW of Heshbon famous for its vineyards (48:32).
SIDON	A Phoenician city about twenty-seven miles N of Tyre. Sidon must drink the cup of God's wrath (25:22) and submit to the yoke of Babylon (27:3). In the day of national judgment Sidon will be without foreign help (47:4).
SODOM	One of four cities—Gomorraah, Admah, and Zeboim being the others—located on the S shores of the Dead Sea which was destroyed in the days of Abraham. Jeremiah used the infamous wickedness of these cities as a basis of comparison for the wickedness of Judah (23:14) and the permanent overthrow of these cities to illustrate the permanent desolation of Edom (49:18) and Babylon (50:40).
SYRIA, SYRIANS	See ARAM.
TABOR	An isolated mountain in the midst of the plains of Jezreel. Used by Jeremiah as a symbol of loftiness (46:18).
TAHPANHES	A city in Egypt on the Nile near Pelusium, on the S extremity of Palestine. Called by the classical writers Daphne. A royal residence was located here in Jeremiah's day (43:9) and hence the city can symbolically stand for the entire land of Egypt (2:16). Jeremiah preached to those of the remnant who settled in the city (43:7-9; 44:1; 46:14).
TARSHISH	Generally thought to be located on the SW coast of Spain. A source of silver used to manufacture idols (10:9).
TEKOA	A village six miles SE of Bethlehem. Jeremiah urges that a trumpet be blown in Tekoa to assemble the refugees on their flight to the wilderness (6:1).
TEMA	An Arab tribe living S of Edom named among those that must partake of the cup of wrath (25:23).
TEMAN	A region in or at the NE of Edom. The Temanites were famous for their wisdom (49:7), but this wisdom will not avert the impending destruction of Edom (49:20).

TOPHETH	The word is used eight times in Jeremiah. Topheth is thought to be the pit in which human victims were burned in the valley of Hinnom (7:31). Topheth would be defiled by the slaughter which will befall Judah and corpses would be buried there (7:32; 19:6, 11). The entire city of Jerusalem also be defiled like Topheth (19:12-14).
TYRE	The most prominent city of Phoenicia. See map page 144a. Tyre must drink the cup of divine wrath (25:22) and submit to the yoke of Babylon (27:3). In the day of judgment all helpers of Tyre would be cut off (47:4).
UPHAZ	A distant land from which the idolaters of Judah secured gold to be used in the manufacture of idols (10:9). The location is uncertain but is thought to be E of Canaan. Some identify Uphaz with Ophir.
UZ	A region in close proximity to Edom (Lam. 4:21) whose kings must drink the cup of divine wrath (25:20).
ZIDON	See SIDON.
ZIMRI	A people whose location is unknown. They are mentioned among those who must drink the cup of divine wrath (25:25).
ZION	In Jeremiah, Zion is synonymous with Jerusalem. In prophetic passages, Zion becomes a designation for the church of Christ. (31:6, 12). The term is used seventeen times in Jeremiah and sixteen times in Lamentations.
ZOAR	The city at the SE corner of the Dead Sea into which Lot and his daughters fled. In the days of Jeremiah Zoar was the southernmost city of Moab (48:34).

