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BOOK ONE

(Chapters 1-20)

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I. INTRODUCTION (1:1-19)

NO MORE FITTING INTRODUCTION to the prophecy of Jeremiah could be given in the opening words of the prophecy than by stating where God “found” Jeremiah (among the priests), and what He made of him (a prophet unto the nations).

A. Jeremiah, Priest of Anathoth (1:1-3)

Anathoth, a town about three miles northeast of Jerusalem, was assigned to and inhabited by priests (Joshua 21:13-19; I Chron. 6:57-60). Here Jeremiah was born, son of the priest Hilkiyah. The name his parents gave him literally meant “Jah is high,” or “whom Jah appoints.” Jeremiah was evidently a very young man when, in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign (627 B.C.), he was called to be a prophetic word-bearer for God. That ministry was to continue during the reigns of the two major kings succeeding Josiah, namely, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, “unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive” (1:3).

B. Jeremiah, Prophet unto the Nations (1:4-19)

The formal introduction has been given. (Most of the chapters in the book are introduced in the style of a reporter's writing, with the formal third person, in phrases such as "The word that came to Jeremiah from Jehovah," 7:1.) Now Jeremiah begins to write in the testimonial first person, "Now the word of Jehovah came unto *me*" (1:4). Here, at the time of his appointment, when God has called him from the priesthood and has commissioned him to be a prophet, Jeremiah's autobiographical style points up the emotional experience of a critical day in his life.

1. *Sovereign Appointment* (1:4-10)

Far more important than learning what task he must accomplish, Jeremiah needed to know with assurance the person who was commissioning him. God identified Himself to be sovereign over Jeremiah in that He (1) foreknew Jeremiah before he was born, (2) had caused him to be born, and (3) had separated him for a holy service. On this basis, He also had the sovereign prerogative to appoint Jeremiah to be a prophet. Could Jeremiah avoid this moment of truth upon which his future career depended?

Jeremiah did try to shrink from the appointment, not because of a selfish motive but because he felt incompetent. His record relates that he heaved a deep sigh to God, "Ah!" expressing his feeling that he did not have the know-how. His "I am a child" perhaps revealed his brief experience as well as his comparatively young age.¹ But God

¹The Hebrew word for child, *na'ar*, could refer to any age up to about forty-five. (Joshua was a *na'ar* at forty-five: Exodus 33:11.) It is generally believed that Jeremiah was between twenty and twenty-five when this call came to him.

objected that he was looking at himself and taking his eyes off his sovereign Master. "Say not, *I* [Jeremiah] . . . ," God rebuked Jeremiah. "*I* [God] shall send thee . . . *I* shall command thee . . . *I* am with thee . . . *I* have put *my* words in thy mouth . . . *I* have this day set thee over. . . ." (1:7-10). God's words in Jeremiah's mouth were to be mostly words of doom and death ("pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow"), but they would also be words of hope, and life ("build, plant"), such as the consolation messages of chapters 31 through 33. 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. Such were the involvements of Jeremiah's sovereign appointment.

2. *Sovereign Word* (1:11-16)

Next it was necessary for Jeremiah to get a true perspective of words, to distinguish between God's words and man's words. God has just spoken to Jeremiah of "*my* words in *thy* mouth" (1:9). Jeremiah was to be the mere channel; God's words were the product to be delivered. To illustrate to Jeremiah the sovereign nature of the words or the will of God, Jeremiah was given his first two prophetic visions at this time. The vision experience, which would be rather frequent during his prophetic ministry, was given by God for durable impression.

The Almond (Awake) Tree (1:11-12). Jeremiah saw in the first vision a shoot or twig of an almond tree. "Almond tree" is the translation of the Hebrew word *shaged* which literally means "awake." "Thou hast seen well," said God, "for I *watch over* [Hebrew word for 'watch' is *shaged*] my word to perform it." The connection of the vision and the application may be seen in the fact

that the almond tree, blossoming around January, was the first tree to awaken from the long winter's night, its blossoms appearing before the leaves. The symbol of awakensness befitted God's Word, for though His people had settled into a dark, cold sleep of spiritual dearth, His Word was ever awake, watched over by Him, bringing about its daily unalterable fulfillment of sovereign design.

The Boiling Caldron (1:13-16). This vision was given Jeremiah to reveal the main forthcoming event of the performance (awakeness) of God's Word, in the life of Israel. One specific of that Word was the inevitable judgment for sin. The sin of God's people is described here as desertion and idolatry (1:16). For this wickedness the seething, scorching judgment of God would be poured out on the people, "out of the north." At the time of this vision Assyria, not Babylon, was the great world empire, but God was prophetically referring to the Babylonians, as can be seen from (1) Jeremiah's specific reference to Babylon and the North as recorded in 25:9, and (2) the actual fulfillment of the prophecy in the taking of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, in 586 (chap. 39). Although Babylon was located geographically due east of Judah, her invading armies would have to come upon Jerusalem from the North, because of the impassable Arabian Desert.

3. *Sovereign Protection* (1:17-19)

Compared to Jeremiah's original fears when God earlier commissioned him to be a prophet, his apprehensions by now must have grown intense. Scalding, boiling judgment from the North! And this is the word Jeremiah must speak to his people. "Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them" (1:17). Jeremiah doesn't record his feelings at this point, but they are implied by God's antici-

patory “be not dismayed at them” (1:17). On what basis could Jeremiah dispel his fears? On this, that even as he could anchor his life to the design of God’s *sovereign appointment* and the inevitable fulfillment of God’s *sovereign Word*, so now he may rest in the assurance of God’s *sovereign protection*. “As of now,” said God, “I have made you a fortified city — impregnable, unassailable — against the onslaughts of kings, princes, priests, and people. They shall fight but not prevail, ‘for I am with thee, to deliver thee’ ” (1:18-19). Jeremiah would be famous but not popular, for who loves a pessimist! However, his triumph was to be “not his fame, but his faithfulness.”²

* * *

Thus Jeremiah was thrust into the role of word-bearer for God, to be unpopular and hated by men, but loved and protected by his sovereign Lord. Who of us would tread that path?

II. DISCOURSES (2:1—20:18)

A. Public Sermons (2:1—10:25)

Jeremiah, appointed to the mixed task of declaring denunciation, visitation, invitation, and consolation, reported for active duty. The first order of the day was to preach public sermons to the populace: “Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem” (2:2). Chapters 2 through 10 record those sermons. Some were delivered in the temple, others, apparently, on the street corner.

1. *Backsliding Israel* (2:1-37)³

²Fred M. Wood, *Fire in My Bones* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), p. 24.

³It is recommended that in the study of each of the sermons of Jeremiah the *paragraph divisions* be recognized as identifying units of thought within each segment of the sermon. A suggested set of paragraph divisions for each of the segments of Book I is given

There is a just reason for every judgment of God. Before the first wall of the holy city would totter from the ceaseless batterings of the enemy, its people (*God's* people! 2:11,32) would be told every reason for the oncoming woeful tragedy; their sins would be spelled out very clearly, from the God-touched lips of Jeremiah. This, Jeremiah's first recorded public sermon, did just that for the people. Its theme: "Thy backslidings [literally, 'turnings back'] shall reprove thee" (2:19).

The message had three parts. The first (2:1-8) compared Israel's past and the present. In the middle section (2:9-25), God asked, in effect, "Why have my people chosen the bad?" The last section (2:26-37) foretold the future.

a. *An Unfaithful Wife* (God's remorse over rejected love, 2:1-8). Using the intimate figure of love and marriage, God recalls Israel's⁴ first tender love toward Him, the kindness of her youth, and how she followed after Him as His own in the wilderness (2:2). Those were days when the people were a holy witness unto the Lord and manifested to others His quickening power in their lives to produce the most precious fruit, eternal fruit (2:3a).

But now! It is tragic that Jeremiah's generation had not gone the way of their fathers; they who had once

the reader in the footnotes. For this sermon, make paragraph divisions at verses 1, 4, 9, 14, 20, 26, 29. For practical suggestions on a paragraphical method of Bible study, see Irving L. Jensen, *Independent Bible Study* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), pages 116 ff.

⁴The terms "Judah" and "Israel" are used for the most part interchangeably in Jeremiah, Judah appearing almost twice as often. In Jeremiah's time the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been taken captive, so the term "Israel" is usually used in the broader sense of God's people still living in Canaan, the exceptions being references to the past before Israel's captivity (e.g., 3:8).

followed after God and reveled in His love and fellowship now had gone far from Him (2:5). And not only were the laity guilty of breaking the love ties, but also the leaders: priests, teachers of the law, rulers, and prophets (2:8).

b. *A Degenerate Vine* (God's "Why?" to evil choices, 2:9-25). The import of these verses of many interrogations (ten in the American Standard Version) may be summarized by one question, which actually implies exclamation, "Why have my people left the good and gone after the bad!" What corrupted mentality is here! According to the first paragraph (2:9-13) of this section, Israel had given up her glory for *that which did not profit* (2:11). How astonishing and horrifying that she should forsake a continuous fountain of living waters for broken cisterns that could hold no water (2:13).

In the second paragraph (2:14-19) another corrupt choice of Israel is scored. God sees His people as servants, slaves, and prey of other nations (2:14-16). But they were not that originally. They were once a people who were enjoying freedom and liberty. But they had chosen servitude to man, getting politically involved with either Egypt to the south,⁵ or Assyria to the north (2:18). Israel had asked for trouble ("Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?" 2:17). God's big question is "Why does a people choose the bad?"

Still another example is given in the third paragraph (2:20-25). God, on His part, had planted Israel a noble vine, "a choice vine of completely reliable stock" (2:21, Berkeley Version). How then did they turn into degenerate branches ("bastard shoots," Berkeley) of an alien

⁵Memphis and Tahpanhes (2:16) were famous towns in northern and southern Egypt, respectively.

vine, bearing poisonous berries (2:21)? Concerning their iniquity, (1) their sins were deeper than surface dirt, unwashable by lye or soap (2:22); (2) they could not deny their sin (2:23); and (3) their lust for pleasure and flirting with strangers had blinded their eyes to the judgments for sin—pictured here in the bareness of foot and dryness of throat of a wild desert donkey (2:25, Berkeley).

c. *A Caught Thief* (God's judgment for persistent sin, 2:26-37). Now God spoke of the future. Tomorrow always catches up with the sinner. When Israel would be found as a thief in her shame (2:26), and when the time of trouble would come, then she would cry to God, "Arise, and save us" (2:27). God's answer was to be a cutting indictment for her former adulterous ways: "Where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee" (2:28).

In that future day of recompense for sins, the sins were to be identified. Among them would be (1) refusal to receive correction (2:30), (2) forgetting God "days without number" (2:32), and (3) gadding about to court the favor of men and nations (2:36).

The future judgments were inevitable as Judah persisted in the sins about which she had been warned. That there was a possibility of returning to Jehovah before the judgment which was to come, is the main thrust of the next of Jehovah's oracles delivered by Jeremiah.

2. *A Call to Return unto God* (3:1—4:4)⁶

Jeremiah had just exposed the people of God; they had gone far from their God and had kept their backs turned to Him. This was one of Jeremiah's "pluck up" warnings, addressed to the people's conscience. Now he had the

⁶Paragraphs at 3:1,6,11,19,22b; 4:1.

brighter though no less difficult task of delivering a “build and plant” message, addressed to the people’s will. Its note of hope lies in God’s invitation to return. The key phrase connecting both messages is in 3:12: “Return, thou backsliding Israel.” The word *return* appears ten times in this oracle.

The first verse introduces the theme. God’s law (Deut. 24:1-4) forbade a wife, divorced by her first husband and married to another, to return to her first love. Though Israel was in the same position as such a woman, for she had “played the harlot with many lovers,” yet she was offered one last opportunity to return to her “husband.” This is the sun of God’s grace outshining the searchlight of God’s law.

a. Return unto Me Wholeheartedly, Not Feignedly (3: 2-10). Judah had *appeared* to return to God in the past, but it had not been with a whole heart; rather, the act had been feigned (3:10). God through Jeremiah cited an example. Judah had polluted the land with her wickedness, and God had sent judgment by withholding the crop-producing rains (3:2-3). Bowed by judgment, Judah had repented, outwardly at least: “Have you not just now cried to Me, ‘My Father, Thou art a friend from my youth?’” (3:4, Berkeley Version). But these were mere words disguising evil deeds: “See, you have spoken [thus], but you have done all the evil you could do” (3:5, Berkeley).

It is very likely that Jeremiah was referring to Josiah’s early reforms when he marked the sham of Judah’s intentions (cf. 3:6a). On the surface the people had made good resolutions to fear God and to walk in His ways, but deep down in the heart they wanted to live in their old paths of sin. So the help of national decree or corporate action did

not avail. Nor had the example of the judgment of the northern tribes of Israel profited them.⁷ Israel had sinned (3:6), had refused to return to God (3:7), and had been put away in bondage (3:8), and faithless Judah had seen it all happen to her sister, “but she also went and played the harlot” (3:8). If she ever spoke of returning, it was only pretention, surely not of the heart (3:10).

b. Return unto Me for Future Restoration (3:11-18). Now Jeremiah projects on the screen God’s future plans of blessing for His chosen people. However, the blessing was conditioned on the returning. “You return in heart, ‘and I will bring you to Zion,’ corporately,” is the intent of 3:14. This promise was given to both houses, Israel and Judah (cf. 3:18). But when Jeremiah spoke these words, Israel had already been taken captive into the northern land of Assyria. Was there hope for her? Yes: “Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel,” by acknowledging iniquity and disobedience (3:12-13). A return of heart was called for to bring blessings that would culminate in the inheritance of the next life. The near future, in the foreknowledge of God, was to be very dark for Judah and Israel. True, there would be a time of restoration and rebuilding the temple, with revivals of heart. But on the whole, the generations of God’s people would be generations of stony hearts (cf. Malachi), eventually rejecting the Messiah, Christ. Beyond this, however, in the far, far future, there was a bright picture. God through Jeremiah portrays a touching scene of returners-in-heart when Judah and Israel, led by God (3:14), would walk together out of foreign lands

⁷In this paragraph (6-10) “Israel” refers to the Northern Kingdom, while “Judah” refers to the Southern Kingdom.

back to the land of inheritance (3:18). The things of the old covenant would give way to glories of the new (3:16), proceeding from the throne of Jehovah in Jerusalem, to which even Gentiles would gather and around which there would be found no evil (3:17).

Six centuries after Jeremiah delivered this promise of God to Judah and Israel, Paul was inspired to expand the truth in Romans 11, and practically two millennia later the prophecy of the regathering to Palestine has begun its fulfillment.

c. Return unto Me in Contrition (3:10-25). True returning had earlier been identified negatively as being unfeigned (3:5,10). Now its positive character of heart contrition is shown. A moving dramatic dialogue runs through the verses thus:

1) God asks, in effect, "How shall I give you this wonderful heritage, seeing that you have rejected Me?" (3:19a).⁸

2) God answers His own question, "I can do it if you will call Me 'my Father,' and not turn away from Me" (3:19b).

3) God turns to His people and says, "You have dealt faithlessly with Me. Return, and I will heal your backslidings" (3:20-22a).

4) The people respond by confessing their sin, "Behold, we come to You. You are our God. We vainly sought help elsewhere; salvation only comes from You. We have sinned against You, we have not obeyed Your voice" (3:22b-25).

d. Return unto Me for Present Deliverance (4:1-4). If Israel had acknowledged her sin as the dialogue above dramatized, then the command of 3:13 would have been

⁸American Standard and Berkeley Versions represent 19a as an exclamation.

fulfilled, and God could have spared the people the impending woe about to break over them. They would not have been removed (4:1), nor would God's wrath have gone forth like fire (4:4). But the condition was as God said, "If thou wilt return unto me!"

3. *Woes of the Judgment from the North* (4:5-31)⁹

Jeremiah's first sermon was one of denunciation of backsliding Israel. The second gave an invitation, "Return unto me." The third is one of visitation, describing the forthcoming visitation of God's wrath upon His people for their sin. The sermon is introduced by nine ominous commands compacted into two verses, anticipating the conqueror from the North. The exclamatory expressions are: declare, publish, say, blow, cry aloud, assemble, set up, flee, and stay not.

a. *The Woes Are Seen in the Invaders' Assignments* (4:5-18). Three emblems symbolized the assignments of the coming Babylonian invaders: *lion*, *hot wind*, and *watchers*. The lion (4:7-9) was to come from his thicket to tear apart the people as a nation. He was a "destroyer of nations" (4:7) coming to lay waste cities (4:7), to disrupt all leadership—kings, princes, prophets (4:9), and to take away all national peace (4:10).

The hot wind (4:11-13) was to come from the bare heights to lay bare, ruin, and antagonize the people's life and livelihood. The hot wind is the fearful sirocco east wind of the spring or fall season, associated with an air mass which descends on Palestine from the upper atmosphere and remains for three to seven days. The unwelcome winds bring abnormally hot, dry, and dust-laden air. The effects on the people are severe, causing irritability

⁹Paragraphs at 5, 11, 14, 19, 27.

of temper and physical pain and discomfort for many. The early spring crops are destroyed, and possessions are damaged by the dryness and dust.¹⁰ By the emblem of the sirocco wind the invasion by the Chaldeans was prophesied to be destructive to the life and livelihood of the people (a wind “not to winnow, nor to cleanse,” 4:11, “we are ruined,” 4:13). The hordes of invaders were to come down swiftly and in clouds of dust (“his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles,” 4:13).

Watchers (“besiegers,” Berkeley) were to come from a far country, staking out the holy city and watching movements within its walls, waiting for the strategic moment to strike. The watchers symbolize the eyes of the divine Judge who sees the thoughts, desires, and motives of the heart, and determines the moment of execution of judgment. Evil thoughts and a people with wicked and rebellious hearts (4:17-18) were lodging in Jerusalem (4:14), and if she were to be saved from the eyes of the watchers, Jeremiah warned, she had to wash her heart from wickedness (4:14).

b. The Woes Are Seen in Jeremiah's Anguish (4:19-26). Deep pangs of pain pierce Jeremiah's heart as he ponders the impending woes. “My anguish, my anguish! I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I cannot hold my peace” (4:19). Jeremiah's anguish was caused by (1) the inevitable fact of total and sudden destruction (4:20; see also the four visions “I beheld” in

¹⁰Compare Isaiah 27:8; 40:6-8; Ezekiel 17:10; Hosea 13:5; Luke 12:55; and James 1:11 for other references to this strange and destructive wind. Also see Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 67-70, for further description of the sirocco wind.

verses 23-26) and (2) the inexcusable folly of his people: "They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (4:22).

c. *The Woes Are Seen in the Unalterable Purposes of God* (4:27-31). The divine decree was first stated: "The whole land shall be a desolation" (4-27a). The qualifying parenthetical statement that followed ("yet will I not make a full end") was intended to show that the coming destruction and captivity were not to mark the end of the long history of the city (Jerusalem) or of the people (Judah). Having pronounced the content of the decree, Jeremiah then stated the unalterable character of the decree: "I have purposed it . . . neither will I turn back from it" (4:28). Two vain attempts of the people to persuade God to change His mind are then cited: (1) the lure of external prettiness (4:30), e.g., pretty words but not a sincere heart; and (2) the lure of a pitiable cry for help (4:31) which God will hear but ignore, for it will come after the day of options has passed.

The sermon had opened with the warning, "Flee for safety!" It closed with the cry of death: "Woe is me now! for my soul fainteth before the murderers."

4. *Exposure of the Enemies from Within* (5:1-31)¹¹

Jerusalem was to fall at the hands of the political enemy from without because of the spiritual enemies of God working from within.¹² God had Jeremiah scouring the streets of the city to see if he could find one man who lived justly and sought truth (5:1). The report of the prophet's search is the theme of this sermon.

¹¹Paragraphs at 1,5,7,10,14,20,30.

¹²The section 4:5—6:30 alternates in its description of these enemies: without, 4:5-31; within, 5:1-14; without, 5:15-19; within, 5:20-31; without, 6:1-8; within, 6:9-21; without, 6:22-30.

a. The Untaught Laity and the Taught Leaders (5:1-6). Jeremiah first sought out the common masses. Surely here he should have found a righteous people, unspoiled by the pride and self-sufficiency of power, wealth, and wisdom. But he found that “they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock” (5:3). Concluding that it was because they had not been instructed in the law of God, Jeremiah decided, “I will get me unto the great men,” the leaders and teachers who had been taught the way and law of God (5:5). “But these” as well had severed their relationship with God (5:5) and had increased in their backslidings (5:6).

b. The Covenant Signers and Covenant Preachers (5:7-19.) What about those who had once sincerely entered into a covenant with God, to swear by it to keep it? From time to time, renewals of the original Sinaitic covenant were made individually or in groups. If the words of this chapter were spoken after the discovery of the Book of Law in the temple, then the covenant consecration of II Kings 23:3 under Josiah could be Jeremiah’s reference. Whatever the case, people who had once entered into a covenant¹³ were now found swearing “by them that are no gods” (5:7*a*).

The covenant preachers, the prophets, were found to be just as guilty. Representing both houses, Israel and Judah, the prophets had denied God (“It is not he”) and the judgment (“Neither shall evil come upon us,” 5:12). They were prophets of wind, deniers of the true Word, and influential enemies of whatever godly remnant dwelt within Judah (5:13). Contrast them with the true prophet,

¹³The alternate reading of 5:7*b* in the American Standard Version is “when I had made them swear.”

Jeremiah, who spoke God's words of fire (5:14), warning of the mighty, ancient nation, Chaldea, coming to devour the fields and the cities (5:15-18) and to take the people captive to serve strangers in a foreign land, even as they were serving foreign gods in their own land (5:19).

c. *Breakers of God's Boundaries and Overpassers in Wickedness* (5:20-31). The sea does not—yea, cannot—break the general boundaries of shoreline¹⁴ set by God in perpetual decree (5:22). But God's people had revolted and “gone over” the boundaries placed around them by God's Word (5:23-25). Likewise, the “big-time operators”—that host of the great, rich, deceitful, and self-indulgent—had overpassed in deeds of wickedness, pouncing upon even the innocent fatherless (5:26-31).

The leaven of unrighteousness had so utterly pervaded the entire kingdom of God's people that in reporting his findings, Jeremiah made this pungent summation:

Astonishing and horrible is the state of our nation:
The PROPHETS prophesy falsely;
The PRIESTS rule presumptuously,¹⁵
And the PEOPLE *love to have it so!*

5. *A City to Be Visited* (6:1-30)¹⁶

“Cast up a mound against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited” (6:6). Again and again, Jeremiah had to declare the words of impending doom. This message was no exception. The source of the decree was always Jehovah: “Thus saith Jehovah of hosts” (6:9). The precise agent

¹⁴This illustration is stated by the prophet from the standpoint of appearance to the observer, in what may be called “phenomenal language.” See Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), pp. 191-92.

¹⁵“According to their own hands,” Berkeley Version.

¹⁶Paragraphs at 1,9,16,22,27.

of execution of the decree was Chaldea,¹⁷ the evil nation from the North (6:1,22). The object of the decree was invariably Judah and Jerusalem. The intimately involved messenger of the decree was God's chosen prophet, Jeremiah. Early in this discourse the searchlight of attention was aimed at the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. "This is the city," God said, "that must be visited with great destruction."

a. *A Forewarned City* (6:1-8). Jerusalem was not without forewarning. "Flee for safety" are the first three words of the discourse. Life could have been spared thereby though bondage to the foe was inevitable. Zealous and intent were the coming invaders, whom even the shades of evening would not daunt (6:3-5). Verse 8 is the bright note of this paragraph. The "lest" holds out hope of reversing the divine decree of destruction (6:6): "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, LEST my soul be alienated from thee; LEST I make thee a desolation, a land not inhabited" (6:8).

b. *An Abominable City* (6:9-21). The prophet first questioned why he should be speaking to people who *would not* hear, to whom the word of God had absolutely no attraction (6:10). Then he acknowledged why he must speak: he had been made to be full of God's wrath; he could not hold back the words any longer; they had to be poured out upon the people, even as the judgment itself would be poured out (6:11). The wrath was for sins of covetousness (6:13), false leadership (6:13-14), abomination (6:15), stubbornness and rejection of the law (6:16-19), and false sacrifices (6:20). Then, like a pure

¹⁷The exact identification of the enemy from the North is not made in the early chapters of this prophecy. The Babylonians are first mentioned in 20:4, and the Chaldeans in 21:4.

spring of water rising into a muddy pool, God's appeal of 6:16 and 17 stands in the midst of the list of sins. The appeal is for the people to ask for the "old paths"—the good ways walked in by righteous men of old—and to walk therein to find soul rest. It was a tender appeal from a long-suffering God, but the people's response was a tragic shout of defiance: "We will not!"

c. *A Mourning City* (6:22-26). In a pattern of alternation, Jeremiah's words revert again to the "great nation" from the North. The invaders were cruel and merciless (6:23), formidable and fearful (6:23-25). "For this," cried the prophet, "gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation" (6:26). The first paragraph of this discourse ended with an invitation of hope. This paragraph denotes anticipation that the invitation was to be rejected; hence its last verse is one of mourning for the irreversible judgment.

d. *A Tried City* (6:27-30). The discourse ends with the graphic, figurative truth of God's attempts to purge His people of their sinful ways. Three pictures are given, each related to metals. In the first, God told Jeremiah one of his tasks: "I have made you an assayer and examiner among my peoples, so that you may test and analyze their actions" (6:27, Berkeley Version). In the second, the people were likened to brass and iron, representing impudence and obstinacy, respectively (6:28).¹⁸ In the third and most important picture, the people were likened to contaminated silver which has been subjected to the refining process to carry away the impurities, but which at the end of the unsuccessful process is still impure. The

¹⁸Berkeley Version, footnote o, in location.

Berkeley Version gives this pertinent background: "In refining, the goldsmith mixes lead with the alloy containing the gold or silver, fused in a furnace on a vessel of earth or bone ash; a current of air is turned upon the molten mass [not upon the fire]; the lead then oxidizes and, acting as a flux, carries away the alloy, leaving the pure gold or silver."¹⁹

"*Refuse silver they are called, because the Lord has refused them*" (6:30, Berkeley).²⁰

6. *False Trusts That Cannot Profit* (7:1—8:3)²¹
(First Charge of Temple Discourse)

Most, if not all, of chapters 7 to 20 relate to the days of the reign of Jehoiakim.²² This cruel and selfish despot²³ was a vassal of Egypt until Egyptian power in Syria and Palestine was crushed at the Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.), and Jehoiakim became subject to Babylon. Jeremiah's faith, courage, patience, and vision were utterly tried during these years because of the people and their king. The messages recorded in these chapters reveal much of those trials.

During Jehoiakim's reign the prophet delivered a message (or series of messages) centered on temple worship, which has been called "The Temple Discourse" (7:1—10:25). Chapter 26, if taken to refer to the same discourse because of its similarities, records the reactions and sequels which the discourse brought about, when Jeremiah was put on trial for his life.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, footnote p.

²⁰The italicized words are of identical roots in the Hebrew text.

²¹Paragraphs at 1,12,16,21,29; 8:1.

²²Chapters 11 and 12 may be dated in Josiah's reign, chapter 13 in Jehoiachin's reign. See Howard T. Kuist, "The Book of Jeremiah," *Interpretation*, July, 1950, pp. 329-30.

²³Refer to II Kings 23:31—24:7; II Chronicles 36:1-8 for historical references to the reign of Jehoiakim.

Jeremiah's frequent references to the temple building (e.g., "temple of Jehovah," 7:4; "this house which is called by my name," 7:10), made as he stood "in the gate of Jehovah's house" proclaiming the word, give reason for the title of the discourse. The charges which the prophet made therein against the people show how ineffective or temporary were the recent reforms of King Josiah. The first charge (7:1—8:3) was against false trusts that "cannot profit" (7:8). In chapter 7, three such false trusts are exposed (7:1-28), and the awful judgments which they were to bring are described (7:29—8:3).

a. *Trusting in Religion* (7:1-15). Trusting in religion cannot profit. The temple building itself had become the people's object of worship, replacing the *Person* of the building. The people, taught by the false prophets, regarded the temple as an automatic visible seal of invincibility, for could a foreign nation destroy the house belonging to *God*? Hence, born to this religion of externals was the first religious chant:

"The temple of Jehovah,
The temple of Jehovah,
The temple of Jehovah" (7:4).

But this chant originated with false prophets who lied, hence the "lying words that cannot profit" (7:8).

The second empty religious chant was, "We are delivered" (7:10), words which were also described as "lying words" (7:8). In everyday life the people freely sinned—they stole, murdered, committed adultery, swore falsely, and worshiped other gods (7:9)—and then, at the "religious" hour of the day and week, they came to stand before God in the house which was called by His name,

and in a religious ritual of lip-worship they chanted in a “religious” monotone, “We are delivered,” expecting thereby to receive automatic indulgence for their abominations (7:10-11). In reality, they had turned God’s house of worship into a hangout of criminals, the very situation which was to confront Jesus centuries later (cf. Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46).

b. Trusting in Heathen Gods (7:16-20) This is another false trust that could not profit. The scene of the sin of false trust changed from the temple to the streets (7:17), more specifically to each house of the Israelite families. If God had ever been worshiped in the home before, He had now been replaced by heroes and idols. In enthusiastic family spirit, everyone showed his devotion to the “Queen of heaven” (an ancient Semitic deity, the Babylonian Ishtar²⁴): the children gathered wood, the fathers kindled the fire, and the women kneaded dough to make cakes for the Queen (7:18). Added to this worship were the drink offerings poured out to other gods (7:18). So abominable was the heart of the people at this stage that it was as though the judgment had already come, and therefore intercession for them was interdicted (7:16).

c. Trusting in Self (7:21-28). In trusting in burnt offerings and sacrifices, the people were guilty of ritual by rote, devoid of heart worship. Down through generations of their forefathers, God had consistently appealed to heart-trust, which was the way of salvation for all ages, whether before (e.g., the exodus, 7:22), during (in Canaan), or after the times of Old Testament offerings. In His long-suffering and mercy, God daily took the initiative and, “rising up early,” sent His prophets to His people with

²⁴Cf. 44:17-19,25.

this message, “Hearken unto me” (7:23-25). Jeremiah was one whom He so sent (7:27-28). The people’s response was almost to a man: “We will not hearken unto You; we will go our way, in our own counsels” (7:24). And with unbent ears, stiff necks, and reversed steps (7:24,26) they rejected God to trust in themselves.

d. *The Judgments* (7:29—8:3). The penalty for false trust (7:30-31) was terrible judgment, which mourning and lamentation could only acknowledge, surely not soothe (7:29). Jeremiah shows that the judgments would reflect the sin of idolatry:

1) As Topheth was the place of idolatrous child sacrifice, so it would become the valley of slaughter in the day of judgment, lacking burial space for the hosts of corpses (7:31-33).

2) As the people worshiped and adored the celestial bodies, the day of judgment would see the people’s bones disinterred and spread out on the earth, under the skies of their gods, but in vain (8:1-2).

For those spared death, the judgments would spoil the very experience of living: mirth and gladness would vanish away (7:34), and life itself would be despaired of (8:3). *The fruit of false trusts is bitter.*

7. *Rejection of God’s Word* (8:4-17)²⁵ (Second Charge of Temple Discourse)

The temple and the law were inseparable in Israel’s worship. It was therefore inevitable that Jeremiah would deliver a charge about the law, God’s written Word to His people, in the temple messages.

a. *The People Reject the Word* (8:4-7). When Jeremiah lamented, “My people know not the law of Jehovah”

²⁵Paragraphs at 4,8,13.

(8:7), he used the word *know* in the sense of “live by” or “obey.” This is borne out by the context: (1) the migratory birds (stork, turtledove, swallow, crane) know their “appointed times,” that is, they live by and obey the instincts of migratory times of departures and arrivals; (2) the people were described as having disobedient hearts, refusing to return (8:5), when they should have been rising up again out of their fallen condition (8:4).

b. God's Ministers Do Not Teach the Word (8:8-12). Dark is the day when people reject God's Word. Darker it is when the ministers of the Word betray their holy commission. The people could not boast wisdom for having the law of God when they were being taught a false interpretation of it. Those guilty of transmitting this false interpretation were the scribes, who wrote falsely (8:8), and the prophets and priests, who spoke falsely (e.g., preaching, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace,” 8:10-11).

c. Doom Is Inevitable (8:13-17). God's pronouncements of judgment were brief: “I will utterly consume” (8:13), and “I will send serpents” (8:17). Between those words are the futile moans of a people resigned to destruction, who would flee to the best man-made shelter, a fortress, to avoid a measure of ignominy, and to perish with “pride”: “Why do we sit still? . . . let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us *perish* there” (8:14, italicized word found in the margin, A.S.V.).

8. *The Prophet's Lament: We Are Not Saved!* (8:18—9:26)²⁶ (Third Charge of Temple Discourse)

At this point in his temple message Jeremiah breaks out into heartrending lamentation and crying for his

²⁶Paragraphs at 8:18; 9:1,7,10,12,17,23,25.

doomed people, uttering such pitiful words as “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” Throughout this charge the themes of lamentation and the answers of Jehovah alternate, especially with regard to judgment, in the following pattern: lamentation (8:18—9:6), reason for judgment (9:7-9); lamentation (9:10-11), reason for judgment (9:12-16); lamentation (9:17-22), final words of Jehovah (saving glory, 9:23-24, and ultimate judgment, 9:25-26).

a. First Lamentation (8:18—9:6). Two things crushed the heart of the prophet. First was the fact that his people’s lost state was unnecessary because grace from heaven was at their disposal: Jehovah their King was in Zion, and there was more than ample spiritual balm and the Physician to apply it for Israel’s healing (8:19, 22). Second was the utter degradation of the heart of his people, so abominable that the prophet longed to be separated from them, shepherd though he was (9:2). (See vv. 2-6 for the description of their evil hearts.)

God’s answer to Jeremiah’s lamentation reveals the righteous aspect of the divine judgment (9:7-9). For deceit there must be judgment. No alternative exists. “How else should I do?” is God’s emphatic response (9:7).

b. Second Lamentation (9:10-11). Now the prophet lamented the desolation of the land and everything in it: the mountains and pastures, the cattle, birds, and beasts, the holy city Jerusalem, and all the cities round about.

God’s answer to the question (implied in the lament of 9:10-11 and now stated explicitly) “*Why* is the land perished and burned up?” is very comprehensive. The judgment was for forsaking His law, disobedience, stubbornness, and idolatry, or Baalim worship (9:13-14).

c. *Third Lamentation* (9:17-22). The third and last lamentation is the death dirge. An urgent call is sent out for the skillful professional women wailers (9:17-18), for “death is come up into our windows” (9:21). “How are we ruined!” is the wailing chant of the living bereaved (9:19).

Jehovah’s answer to this lamentation was also a climactic summary to the entire charge, identifying two universal truths. The first of these is that salvation is for all who *know* God (9:23-24). He whose greatest passion is merely wisdom, or might, or riches, is lost. But he whose greatest passion (and therefore glory) is to know God intimately and experientially, is saved.

The second universal truth is that judgment is for all who are unbelievers *in heart* (9:25-26). Not only Judah but also Egypt, Edom, Ammon, and Moab would be judged (9:26). In fact, all nations with unbelieving hearts (which is the intent of the phrase “uncircumcised in heart”) must be so punished.

The utter despair of the prophet is understandable in view of the fact that though he must and would preach repentance to his people, he knew that they had reached the point of no return as far as their salvation was concerned. Earlier in his preaching he had exhorted his people to return to God. Those were days of the season of hope. Jeremiah would continue to plead for repentance,²⁷ but with prophetic foresight he views the spiritual harvest period as being past, the time of the gathering of summer fruits as being ended, neither season having

²⁷Toward the end of his ministry, just before the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah emphasized the *sureness* of the coming judgment, but pleaded with the people to obey the Word of God in order to ameliorate the judgment.

yielded spiritual fruit. Spiritual famine was the future of Judah. "We are not saved!" is the sad lament.

9. *None Like Jehovah* (10:1-25)²⁸ (Final Charge of Temple Discourse)

At this point the temple discourse closes with a majestic note, exalting Jehovah as God of all. He is called the "King of the nations" (10:7), the "true God . . . the living God . . . everlasting King" (10:10), "Jehovah of hosts" (10:16); and twice Jeremiah says of Him, "There is none like unto thee" (10:6-7). The broad scope of God's relationships is also emphasized here. He is shown in His relationships to nations (10:1-11), to nature (10:12-13), and to mankind (10:14-25).

a. There Is No Other God (10:1-5). The heathen nations, in their fear of potentially destructive elements of nature (e.g., the bolt of lightning), and in their dependency on favoring elements (e.g., rain for the crops), manufactured hosts of gods accordingly, fashioning them out of the trees of the forest (10:3), and decking them with silver and gold (10:4). But such gods were speechless, immobile, and impotent (10:5), and Jehovah warned that the vanity of the nations making the gods must not be embraced by Israel (10:2).

b. There Is No Greater Power on Earth (10:6-11). Jeremiah continued his proclamation: God is King over all nations; He is great in might (10:6-7). Among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their royal estate, there is none like Jehovah (10:7). The greatest earthly nation was Lilliputian when measured by the lifeless and impotent idols which its people worshiped as their superiors. To such nations Jeremiah delivered this divine message of

²⁸Paragraphs at 1,6,12,17,19,23.

highest diplomatic importance (hence the fact that 10:11 is recorded in Aramaic, the language of international diplomacy in Jeremiah's day): "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth . . . shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens" (10:11). But Jehovah is the true God, the living One, the everlasting King.

c. There Is No Other Cause Behind the Universe (10:12-16). God made the earth by His power, the world by His wisdom, and the heavens by His understanding (10:12). Graven images, by the very fact of their being made by brutish men without knowledge, could not compete with Him (10:14-15).

d. There is No Like Sovereign Judge (10:17-25). No voice could thwart God's sovereign execution of judgment. Those spared destruction would have to obey divine orders (10:17). The wails of unrepentant hearts would not move Him to reverse His judgment (10:19-22). Justifiable petitions could be made to Him (10:24-25), but in the last analysis, "it is not in man . . . to direct his steps" (10:23). This is the absolute prerogative of the sovereign Lord.

Thus Jeremiah's last public discourse of this series ended on a high note. As the prophet saw the divine judgments in the light of the exalted Person as Judge, he was able to rise to this height of exalting spirit from the depths of despair of his previous messages.

* * *

The nine public messages of the foregoing series had brought to the people the words of denunciation (messages 1, 4, 6, 7), invitation (2), visitation (3,5), lamentation (8), and exaltation (9). Jeremiah's lips had not

been closed yet, however. God continued to give him words to speak, especially as they were born in the prophet's personal experiences.

B. Personal Experiences (11:1—20:18)

The preceding chapters (2-10) record the messages delivered by the prophet on the street and in the temple, without any particular reference to his own personal experiences. Now in chapters 11 through 20 his personal trials and problems are brought to light as they arose out of his faithfulness to the prophetic message. Most of these events transpired during Jehoiakim's reign, some ten to twenty years before Jerusalem was to be destroyed. It will be observed in the course of these chapters that often one personal experience introduced many associated truths in Jeremiah's prophetic message.

*1. Covenant and Conspiracy: Jeremiah and the Men of Anathoth (11:1—12:17)*²⁹

Jeremiah was preaching the covenant of Jehovah, but he had to contend with conspiracies designed to break that very covenant, whether directly or indirectly. Chapters 11 and 12 together tell this story. The first two paragraphs of chapter 11 introduce the theme of the covenant; the paragraphs between speak of the conspiracies involved, and the last two paragraphs of chapter 12 give the final outcome.

a. The Covenant Stated (11:1-8). Jeremiah was told by God that his basic message to Judah was to be simply this: "Hear ye the words of this covenant" (notice the repetition in these verses). The covenant itself involved four facts: (1) God gave the Word, (2) Israel was to obey

²⁹Paragraphs at 11:1,6,9,14,18; 12:1,5,7,14.

the Word, (3) Israel would then be God's people, and (4) Jehovah would be Israel's God (11:4). The first paragraph (11:1-5) contains a warning (a curse for not hearing 11:3) followed by the original historical setting of the command (11:4-5). The second paragraph (11:6-8) contains the positive command ("Hear ye," 11:6) followed by a warning taken from the same historical setting (11:7-8).

b. The Covenant Broken (11:9-13). This was the first of three conspiracies. "A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah" (11:9), that of turning from God to iniquity and therefore breaking the covenant (11:10). It was a national conspiracy against God, the judgment for which is described in the next paragraph (11:14-17).

c. The Covenant Preacher Threatened (11:18-23). When people reject God, they will also reject His messengers. Thus Jeremiah, the preacher of the covenant, was the object of the second conspiracy, instigated by men of Jeremiah's hometown, Anathoth. Seeking the life of the prophet because he prophesied in the name of Jehovah (11:21), they said, "Let us destroy the tree . . . and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered" (11:19). Jeremiah's reaction was that of a "gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter" (11:19), for he knew that God Himself would judge the men (11:20). God reassured Jeremiah's confidence in Him by revealing His pronouncement of judgment: the men would die by the sword, their children would die by famine, and they would leave no remnant (11:22-23).

d. The Covenant Preacher's Question (12:1-6). The third conspiracy is revealed in the course of the dialogue between God and Jeremiah after the prophet, whose eye

had not overlooked the fact of the present temporal prosperity of wicked men among whom must have been his own townspeople of Anathoth, had asked God the age-old question, "Why do the wicked prosper?" (12:1-2). The record of Jeremiah's expostulation with God reveals a measure of his human impatience. The Berkeley Version translates verse 1 thus: "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I complain to Thee; yet will I argue with Thee about justice." Jeremiah in effect asked God to compare him with the wicked: "Thou knowest me . . . pull them out like sheep for the slaughter" (12:3). It is in God's reply (12:5-6) that the third conspiracy is revealed, that of the prophet's own family. "For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father . . . have dealt treacherously with thee" (12:6). No greater hurt could have come to the heart of the prophet.

e. The Covenant Applied (12:7-17). The covenant's application brought one of two possible results: cursing for breaking it (11:3), or blessing for obeying it (11:4-5). This section of chapter 12 describes these two results. Since the covenant had been broken, Jehovah (through His spokesman Jeremiah) spoke the word which the broken covenant demanded: judgment. Jehovah was compelled to forsake His house and heritage and give them to the hand of their enemies (12:7). The executors of this judgment on Israel, namely the evil foreign nations, were responsible for their own personal evil, and so would also be punished (12:14). But after those nations had been "plucked up," God in His compassion would bring them back to their land, where they would share the blessing of God with the faithful remnant of Israel, if they learned the ways of that remnant, to swear by the name, "As Jehovah

liveth” (12:16). The casting away of Israel thus would become the reconciling of the world (see Rom. 11:15). God’s covenant with Israel was destined by divine design to bless the whole world!

The world today needs more Jeremiahs who, in the midst of opposition, are true to the standards of the Bible, patient in the proclamation of the gospel, gentle in the hands of persecutors, committed to the protective care of the Chief Shepherd, and burdened for the souls of lost men and women. Satan and the world may conspire against a servant of God, but the conspiracy is really against God, and *God is invincible!*

2. *Pride of Judah: Jeremiah and the Linen Girdle* (13:1-27).³⁰

The subject of the haughty “pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem” (13:9) now comes into special focus in Jeremiah’s prophecy, introduced by things the prophet was ordered of God to do in connection with a linen girdle.

The chapter has three sections: (1) the pride exposed, under the symbols of the girdle and the bottles (1-14), (2) the surrender of pride exhorted (15-17), and (3) the pride punished (18-27). The first section emphasizes the prophecy of the *fact* of judgment that was to come, while the last section places emphasis on *description* of the judgment.

a. *The Pride Exposed* (13:1-14). In the girdle episode, God was primarily speaking to Jeremiah of Judah’s pride, though the prophet undoubtedly would relate this clear and unequivocal symbolic experience to his people in

³⁰Paragraphs at 1,8,12,15,18,20.

the course of his preaching. Jeremiah was commanded to do three things to a linen girdle:

1) Buy and wear it (13:1-2). It was not to be put in water, probably meaning that it was to be dirty when the next disposition of it was to be made.

2) Hide it (13:3-5). Jeremiah was to hide it in a cleft of a rock, by the Euphrates.³¹

3) Recover it (13:6-7). After many days Jeremiah, commanded to recover the girdle, found it “marred . . . [and] profitable for nothing.”

God very clearly interpreted the symbols for Jeremiah (13:9-11). As the girdle cleaves close to the body of a man, so God wanted Judah and Israel to cleave to Him “for a people . . . a name . . . a praise . . . a glory; but *they would not*” (13:11), because of their pride (13:9). Their rejection of this intimate relationship was to bring on their being hidden away until they would become marred and unprofitable in worship and service. The coming captivity was the intended meaning of the symbol.

The symbol of the bottles (or jars) prophesied a further aspect of judgment of the people’s pride: beyond becoming unprofitable, they faced violent destruction (13:14). The jars were filled with the wine of God’s indignation (cf. 25:15), bringing on a spiritual and mental drunkenness (13:

³¹If the Hebrew word *Perath* means Euphrates, then the two very long journeys to this distant valley must have impressed the prophet as to the importance of the lesson being taught. Also, the geographical location would then have been a symbol of the location of the captivity to come (Babylon in the Euphrates Valley). The other more probable translation of *Perath* is represented thus in the footnote of the Berkeley Version: “Here it probably refers to ‘Parah,’ a town about three miles northeast of Anathoth [Josh. 18:23], located in a wild and rocky valley watered by a copious spring, Wady Fara, which runs into the Wady Kelt flowing down past Jericho into the Jordan.”

13) and bewilderment in the face of sudden judgment, such as is described in 25:16: “They shall drink and stagger and be frantic, because of the sword which I am sending among them.”

b. *Surrender of Pride Exhorted* (13:15-17). The exhortation is brief and succinct: Be willing to listen, don’t be proud, give glory to God (13:15). If the people would fail to respond thus, gross darkness and death were to be their doom, and sore weeping was Jeremiah’s burden (13:16-17).

c. *Pride Punished* (13:18-27). Detailed description of the impending judgment is now given in the context of the sin of pride already exposed. National punishment, involving the heads of the state (king and queen-mother, 13:18) is described first. “Humble yourselves, sit down; for your headtires are come down, even the crown of your glory” (13:18). This was to be fulfilled in the shutting up of the Negev cities of the South and the carrying away of all Judah (13:19). “*Lift up your eyes*” is the pride-judging phrase introducing the description of the onrushing judgment from the North (13:20-27).

The concluding word of the chapter is a fitting wail over a nation that was found guilty of pride, unwilling to let the Sun of righteousness melt its obstinate heart: “Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! Thou wilt not . . .” (13:27).

3. *The Drought: Jeremiah as the Interceding Priest* (14:1-22)³²

This “drought chapter” shows the most intense intercessory character of Jeremiah. The land was in the throes of severe drought (1-6); he confessed the sin of his people and pleaded mercy for them (7-9); he heard God’s pro-

³²Paragraphs at 1,7,10,13,19.

nouncement of rejection of the people and false prophets (10-18); and he again pleaded mercy on the basis of confession (19-22).

The drought which Jeremiah lamented in this chapter may have been knowledge of a future event, such as the drought which later brought on the famine of the siege of Jerusalem (II Kings 25:3). The more natural interpretation, however, is that the drought had already plagued the people, while the famine referred to in verses 12, 13, 15, 16 and 18 was to be the future judgment.

a. Present Drought (14:1-6). The drought brought languish and mourning to all levels of life of Judah from the highest to the lowest (14:2): to the nobles, who could not locate the priceless commodity of water; to the common masses, represented by the plowman who could not till the hard cracked earth; to the domestic flock, represented by the tender, motherly hind, who was compelled to forsake her young for want of grass; and to the wild animal kingdom, represented by the wild ass, whose eyes failed to the point of exhaustion for want of herbage (14:3-6).

b. First Intercession (14:7-9). Jeremiah, identifying himself with the people in a priestly role, interceded for God's help on the bases of: (1) admission of sin (14:7), (2) an interested God (not a disinterested traveler, 14:8), (3) an able God (not an affrighted man, 14:9), and (4) the presence of God—for the Israelites were still called by His name (14:9).

c. Future Famine (14:10-18). God acknowledged the prophet's intercession, but reminded him that the people were individually responsible for persistently loving to wander from Him (14:10), and that the fasting and

sacrifices of the people (14:12) were not from the heart. Therefore, Jeremiah was told not to pray that God would give “good” to the people (14:11); the sentence of sword, famine, and pestilence had already been imposed for their sin (14:12).

d. Second Intercession (14:13-18). Jeremiah could not cease from praying for his people. He entreated God to spare Judah since the people had been deceived by prophets promising peace (14:13). God’s reply was strong. Those prophets were false prophets, lying in His name, and for this they were to be consumed by the sword and famine (14:15). But this in no way absolved the people who received their false teaching. They were likewise to be consumed (14:16).

e. Third Intercession (14:19-22). Jeremiah’s continued intercession then reached a high pitch of emotion as well as a strong level of claim. His appeals were directed to: (1) *a tender physician*—“Hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why. . . is no healing for us?” (14:19); (2) *a forgiving God*—“We have sinned against thee” (14:20); (3) *an honor-preserving throne*—“Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us” (14:21); (4) *an omnipotent Creator*—“We will wait for thee” to bring rain and showers, “for thou hast made all these things” (14:22).

And Jeremiah would have waited for God to send the rain, persevering and long-suffering prophet that he was. If only time had been the sole obstacle!

4. *From Despondency to Hope: Jeremiah As the Rejected Intercessor* (15:1-21).³³

In the final intercessory prayer (14:19-22), Jeremiah

³³Paragraphs at 1,5,10,11,15,19.

had reached a pitch of almost desperate intensity. Chapter 15 records the sequel to this priestly appeal to God, showing a despondent servant and the hopeful words of his Master.

a. Despondency (15:1-10). Like poured water on glowing ashes, God's response to Jeremiah's plea fell with abrupt finality: No amount of intercession would be heard for the people—not even if the great intercessors Moses and Samuel should speak (15:1)—for it was not now the hour of intercession; rather, the day of doom had arrived. The prophet's unpopular task was to preach death, sword, famine, and captivity (15:2), in accordance with the designed appointments of God (15:3). The sins of Manasseh, multiplied manifold in the second and third generations thereafter, were beginning to take their toll.

The prophet, forced to step out of the role of intercessor for the time being, looked on his people in compassion and bemoaned the fact that they had none to pity them (15:5).³⁴ But God's words to them tell why they should not have had pity: they had rejected Him, and therefore had begun to reap judgment already (15:6-9; notice the repetition of "I have"). This brought the prophet to one of the lowest points of his prophetic career. He despaired of life itself: "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me. . ." (15:10). He was a friendless, discouraged, and frustrated man, but God had not forsaken him.

b. Hope (15:11-21). Lifting Jeremiah out of the slough of despond, God promised him that good would eventual-

³⁴Some expositors take 15:5 to be the words of Jehovah. The context would allow this, but the more natural reading would assign the words to Jeremiah, with God beginning to speak again at 15:6-9.

ly come out of the seemingly hopeless situation of ever-present enemies, trials, tribulation (15:11) and a doomed nation, Judah (15:12-14). Jeremiah began to revive his spirit again (15:15-16), although he had not yet fully found an answer to the perpetual pain which he experienced as a prophet to his people (15:18).

God then made hope shine in all its splendor for the prophet (15:19-21). If the prophet would return in heart to the place of trusting God's wisdom and love (15:19), victory and blessing would be his reward. The antidote for the prophet's earlier "Woe is me" was the Lord's "I am with thee" (15:20). No better word could ever be given by God to one of His servants, anywhere or anytime! The words of the prophecy that followed show more of the blessed efficacy of the divine promises.

Are there intercessors like Jeremiah in the world today? Are there Christian men and women who intimately *feel* the desperate plight of lost souls, who must unceasingly cry to God on their behalf for His mercy and forgiveness, who are assured that nothing is impossible with God, and who rest their own souls in the blessed confidence of the eternal Saviour who redeemed them? Vacant places of intercession plead today for occupation.

5. *In This Place: Jeremiah Alone in a Punished Place* (16:1-18).³⁵

Jeremiah could not have felt the gnawing pain of utter loneliness more intensely than when he heard God speak these words to him. In deep despair, he had wished he had never been born into this unpopular plight of a hated prophet (15:10). Then the loneliness of it all was etched

³⁵Paragraphs at 1,5,10,14,16.

across his already bleeding heart. Of all the places in the vast universe, why had God put him *in this place*?

a. *Grievous Family Deaths* (16:1-4). In this place, said God, would come grievous deaths of entire families with no burials because of the mass of corpses. Jeremiah was commanded not to marry here,³⁶ and therefore not to have children, in order to be spared the future sorrow of a bereaved husband and father. Nevertheless he could not escape the hurt of the solitary life demanded thereby.

b. *No Mourning or Mirth* (16:5-9). The soul-satisfaction that comes to the spiritual shepherd of a flock in ministering to their grief was denied the prophet in this case, not because God would withhold blessing from His faithful servant but because the judgment to come would be sudden, short, total, and without opportunity for a shepherd's service. When that judgment was to come, tender mercies would have been taken away (16:5), with no hour for mourning (16:6-7) or mirth (16:8-9). In that day, Jeremiah was to stand aloof, not able to serve.

c. *Worse Evil* (16:10-13). Jehovah revealed to Jeremiah that when the foregoing message of judgment was delivered to the people, their reaction would be, "Why? . . . What crime have we done?" (16:10). Jeremiah was then to answer for God, "Because your fathers have forsaken me. . . and ye have done evil more than your fathers" (16:11-12). Here the prophet had to stand as a lone voice, spokesman for the Great Judge.

d. *Surrender to Bondage* (16:14-15). The Babylonian captivity would be so critical an experience in the history of Judah that it would alter for the centuries to come

³⁶There was no prohibition to marry after the judgment days were over, however.

the Jews' testimony concerning God's deliverance. The land of Canaan, until the time of this judgment, had been known as the place to which God brought the Israelites from Egypt (16:14); whereas, in the post-captivity days, it would be known as the place to which God regathered His people *from the North* "and from *all the countries* whither He had driven them" (16:15). This geographical reference suggests an application with reference to the final regathering of Israel in the last days. The implied tone of the paragraph is that of judgment, although the prospect of eventual restoration or return is clearly stated. Anathoth, Jerusalem, the hills and valleys of Judea, all the sentimental places of Jeremiah's lifetime, were to be surrendered, and the prophet would be compelled to take on the lonely role of a prophet without a country.

e. No Escapees (16:16-18). Trying to hide from God by seeking hiding places in mountains and hills, in clefts of rocks, and in rivers and seas, would be futile for the people of Judah, for God was to send, as it were, fishermen and hunters to search out all the guilty from their hiding places to bring them to their double recompense. The place of sin is the place of judgment, never a place of hiding. "For mine eyes are upon all their ways. . . neither is their iniquity concealed from mine eyes" (16:17).

The picture of the lonely prophet is now complete, for the people had gone into judgment, and the prophet walked alone.

6. *The Heart: Jeremiah Remains True in Heart* (16:19—17:18)³⁷

The central core of teaching in this segment of

³⁷Paragraphs at 16:19; 17:1,5,9,12.

Jeremiah's prophecy is found in 17:5-11, the two paragraphs of which stand out in the context because of (1) the omission of local, provincial truths, such as specific sins and judgments of the specific nation, Judah, and (2) the presence of universal truths about the heart of man. This commentary commences at this central core, and then analyzes the surrounding paragraphs.

a. *What the Heart Is by Nature* (17:9-11). Very succinctly the doctrine is stated that the heart is exceedingly deceitful and corrupt, is known fully only by God, and is the source and determinant of the spiritual fruits of a man's life (17:9-10). This latter law of recompense is illustrated by the man who obtains riches wrongfully, and ends up as a fool (17:11).

b. *What the Heart May Choose* (17:5-8). Man was created not as a mechanical robot but as a person with a will, with the power of choice. Two basic options always face him: the good and the evil. The evil choice is that of self-confidence and therefore self-righteousness, in which the heart departs from God and is therefore cursed in parched desert living (17:5-6). The good choice is trusting in God, for which there is blessed, fruitful, and healthy spiritual living (17:7-8).

c. *Examples of the Good and Evil Choices*. The surrounding context cites examples of both choices made by nations and individuals:

1) *Heathen Nations* (16:19-21). At some future time unspecified by the prophet there would be a day when non-Israelite nations would come to God and confess their idolatry (16:19-20). For this act of repentance God would give them knowledge of Himself—both of His power (“my hand and my might”) and of His person

("and they shall know that my name is Jehovah," 16:21).
2) Judah (17:1-4). In contrast to the righteous option to be chosen by Gentile nations, Judah had preferred the evil way. Her sin was written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond" (17:1). For her idolatry, a fire in God's anger had been kindled to burn forever, and Judah was to serve her enemies in a strange land (17:2-4).

3) Jeremiah and his persecutors (17:12-18). Even as the bright paragraph of 16:19-21 was introduced with an ascription of trust ("O Jehovah, my strength, and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of affliction. . .," 16:19), so this predominantly bright paragraph is introduced with a similar ascription: "A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary" (17:12). Jeremiah asked for deliverance for himself (17:14, 17a, 18). He also declared his trust in Jehovah: "Thou art my refuge in the day of evil" (17:17b). His persecutors, on the other hand, had chosen the evil path, their persecution of him being traceable back to their forsaking Jehovah, and their future being destined for double destruction (17:13, 18).

Thus the prophet had risen from the slough of despondency to the height of personal, tried trust in Jehovah, his warm intercessory heart reconciled to the punitive judgments of a God who cannot dwell with shame!

7. *The Law of the Sabbath: Jeremiah Preaches at the City's Gates (17:19-27)*³⁸

This Sabbath-day sermon was preached at some time during Jehoiakim's reign, though not necessarily in connection with the message of the preceding section, 16:19—

³⁸Paragraphs at 19,24.

17:18. Its teaching, however, is pertinent to the heart emphasis of that message, and its location at this point in the book is therefore appropriate.

The real test of the heart's relation to God is *obedience to His Word*. One of the laws for Israel was the hallowing of the Sabbath by not working on that day (17:21-22). The constant pressure of materialism upon the lives of all, including the people of God, made the keeping of such a commandment difficult, and for this reason this one commandment of the ten was a real test of the priority of the temporal or the eternal in the heart. Was the keeping of the Sabbath law that crucial to Judah? The symbolic action of Jeremiah and the explicit words he was told to speak gave an affirmative answer:

a. The action. Jeremiah was to "stand in the gate . . . whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by which they go out" (17:19), denoting that his message related to the very peace of the city and the prosperity of its throne.

b. The words. If the people hallowed the Sabbath, "then shall there enter in by the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David. . . and this city shall remain for ever" (17:25). For disobeying, the gates and palaces would be devoured (17:27).

God had reasons for instituting a day of rest (Sabbath) for Israel, even as the same principles today underlie the day of rest (Lord's Day) for the Church. The Sabbath was for physical and spiritual refreshment and recharging (Deut. 5:14), remembrance of divine redemption (Deut. 5:15), and magnification of the Lord as consecrator (Exodus 31:13). The Christian today is to observe the Lord's Day in the same spirit, recognizing it as a memorial

of the glorious event of Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week.

8. *Lessons from Pottery: Jeremiah Learns and Preaches from Pottery* (18:1—20:18)³⁹

These three chapters form a fitting conclusion to the Discourses (Book I) of Jeremiah's prophecy. Very impressively they summarize the thrust of the previous chapters and bring to a climax the published messages and experiences of the prophet during the reign of Jehoiakim.

God spoke to Jeremiah and the people by way of two symbols of pottery. The account of the first symbol reiterates the long-suffering of God (chap. 18); the second describes the judgment of God (19:1—20:6). The following sequence of description is given each symbol: the symbol, the message, the response, and the prophet's involvement and plea.

a. *The Symbol of Long-suffering* (18:1-23). The symbol was not a single item but a total picture seen by the prophet in the potter's house.⁴⁰ As the potter was making a vessel on the wheels,⁴¹ it became marred or misformed in his hand, but he did not throw it away. Instead, while it was still in a moldable stage, "he made it again another vessel," a good one (18:1-4).

The symbol was clear enough. God's interpretation of it left no doubt as to its message: (1) He was sovereign over Israel—"as clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand" (18:6). This sovereignty extended to judgment

³⁹Paragraphs at 18:1,5,13,18,19; 19:1,10,14; 20:1,7,14.

⁴⁰The potter's house was probably located in the "potter's field," which was just beyond the Valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem.

⁴¹The wheels were two circular stones connected by a vertical shaft. The lower wheel was turned by the feet, engaging the upper wheel to its circular motion, where the potter, with two free hands, formed the vessel from a lump of clay.

("pluck up," 18:7) or blessing ("build," 18:9). (2) His sovereignty did not preclude the free will of man to choose righteousness ("turn from their evil," 18:8) or sin ("obey not my voice," 18:10). Judgment or blessing pronounced by God at the beginning could be reversed or confirmed before being sealed, depending on Israel's heart choice in the day of extended grace.⁴² (3) Israel, though judgment had been pronounced, still lived in the day of extended grace, for she was invited to "*return. . . and amend*" her ways (18:11).

But the symbol of the marred vessel was not given to leave the invitation to return as a last word to the Israelites. They had already been given that invitation (cf. 3:1—4:4), and they had refused it. The symbol begins with the idea of invitation in order to present the sequels: (1) the declination of the invitation ("But they say. . . we will walk after our own devices," 18:12), (2) the horribleness of the sin (18:13-16), and (3) the already pronounced judgment, "I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy" (18:17).

We are to assume that Jeremiah preached to the people the lessons of the marred vessel, for the account tells us of their heated conspiracy against the prophet. They would "smite him with the tongue," castigating him as an unnecessary and undesirable member of their order and society (18:18), dig a pit for his soul (18:19,22), hide snares for his feet (18:22), and slay him (18:23). The prophet, however, rested his case with God in an impreca-

⁴²Notice the similarity of God's relation to Israel and His relation to the human race today. Every individual is born a guilty sinner, already under condemnation. However, the judgment of condemnation can be reversed in this lifetime, depending on the individual's heart choice to believe on Christ.

tory prayer for *His* vengeance upon his enemies for their contentions (18:19-23).

b. *The Symbol of Judgment* (19:1—20:6). The second symbol of the potter's earthen bottle was given to extend the message of the marred vessel. The first symbol taught the sovereignty and long-suffering of God, the invitation of a second chance, and its rejection and consequence. The earthen bottle episode taught the awfulness and irreversibility of the impending judgment.

The prophet was commanded to buy a potter's earthen bottle and go to the Valley of Hinnom with elders of the people and elders of the priests and preach a message directed to the kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem (19:1-3). The earthen bottle itself would be used as an object lesson after Jeremiah had finished speaking of Israel's idolatrous sin (introduced by "because," 19:4-5) and the catastrophic consequences (introduced by "therefore," 19:6-9). At this point Jeremiah was to break the bottle in the sight of the men with him, and deliver the message of the symbol: "Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, *that cannot be made whole again*" (19:11). There is no message of remolding a marred vessel here. The earthen vessel was irrevocably destroyed. The application to Judah was all too obvious.

Going from Topheth to the court of the temple, Jeremiah repeated the message of imminent doom for Jerusalem and all its environs (19:14-15). Pashhur, the chief officer of the temple, heard Jeremiah prophesy, and struck him and imprisoned him (20:1-2). Released the next morning, Jeremiah pronounced two very explicit divine judgments (20:3-6). The first was against the man Pash-

hur—one of the relatively few judgments against individual persons recorded in the book. Pashhur's name was changed to Magor-missabib ("Terror on every side"), for he would be a terror to himself and to all his friends, to whom he had prophesied falsely (20:4,6). The second prophecy of judgment was against the nation Judah. Here, for the first time in the prophecy, the king of Babylon is explicitly identified as the conqueror of Judah (20:4-5). Up to this time the conqueror had been identified as the enemy from the North. Now, inspired to speak the explicit prophecy uttered by Isaiah a century before,⁴³ Jeremiah exposed the enemy by name. And for those who lightly passed off the threat of Babylon, there would come the shameful day of death in that very land. Pashhur was such a person (20:6).

The confessions and reflections of Jeremiah as recorded in 20:7-18 may be read as the conclusion of the earthen bottle story alone, or as the conclusion to the section as a whole (18:1—20:18). In the first paragraph (18:7-13) all shades of the prophet's emotions, intellect, and will are seen. He traced his prophetic ministry back to the overpowering⁴⁴ voice of God (20:7). True to that voice, he had shouted the message, "Violence and destruction!" But for this he had been made a laughingstock, a reproach,

⁴³Isaiah 39:6-7.

⁴⁴The Hebrew word for "persuade" does not have in it the idea of befooling or enticing, as suggested by the marginal note of the American Standard Version. Carl F. Keil says the word "does not mean befool, but persuade, induce by words to do a thing." Carl F. Keil, and Franz J. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), I, 316. However, the word is translated "deceived" by the AV and RSV, "enticed" by the Jewish Publications Society translation (*The Holy Scriptures: According to the Masoretic Text* [Cleveland: World Publishing Co., n.d.], for the Jewish Publications Society).

and a derision continually. Whenever he had rationalized that it would be more pleasant for him not to speak of Jehovah, there was as it were a "burning fire shut up" in his "bones" (20:9). He *had* to speak the message of God. And, thus speaking, he also had to be willing to see all his familiar friends turn against him, seeking revenge (20:10). But the fact that *God was with him* more than compensated for separation from friends (20:11). Recognizing that he was thus associated with One so mighty and terrible, just and righteous, the prophet rises at the end of his reflections to the acme of praise: "Sing unto Jehovah, praise ye Jehovah . . ." (20:13).

Jeremiah's wail of despair recorded in the paragraph that follows (20:14-18) is in bold contrast to the song of praise in the foregoing paragraph. By its very nature it could not have been spoken by the prophet immediately after the reflections of 20:7-13. Its position in the scroll of the prophet, however, may be accepted as authentic for the simple reason that the song of 20:13 had not driven away, once and for all, the tempter of despair. Jeremiah had yet to experience more of the dark hours. In one sense they would be darker hours, climaxed eventually in the hour of his beloved city's destruction. Somewhere, he gave in to the darkness for a time, and cursed the day of his birth (20:14-18). But this was only temporary. When Jerusalem finally fell, the prophet did not fall with her. For the years of trials had molded this lonely, forsaken servant of God to be stronger, more courageous, and more compassionate. The most extreme test was no match for his complete trust in God. May the same be true of God's servants today!