

# Jeremiah Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

"Jeremiah on the Ruins of Jerusalem"  
(Horace Vernet, 1844)

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## Jeremiah Devotionals

### Today in the Word

Moody Bible Institute

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Devotionals with Illustrations useful for teaching and preaching. These are conservative and adhere to a literal interpretation.

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# JEREMIAH 1

## Jeremiah 1:1–19 THE PROPHET'S CALL

I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled. Jeremiah 1:12

Psychologists tell us that we can determine a lot about someone on our first encounter—if we know how to read the signs. Body language, facial expressions, and first words can communicate an abundance of information to those looking for it.

The first words of the book of Jeremiah are revealing as well. We are introduced to the prophet Jeremiah, whose ministry runs from "the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah . . . down to the . . . eleventh year of Zedekiah" (Jeremiah 1:2–3). Why are we given this background reference? A quick look at 2 Chronicles 34-36 reveals the history of Judah's downward spiral from Josiah's religious reforms to Judah's exile at the hand of Babylon. And it is precisely during the history of Judah's fall into wickedness that God proves His faithfulness by calling Jeremiah as prophet. God does not give up on His people, even in their disobedience. He was prepared for this moment long before Jeremiah was born (Jeremiah 1:5).

Out of this call, we discover two important themes of the book. First, there is the prominent theme of judgment that is coming upon Judah. They have forsaken the Lord and turned to worship other gods. Like a boiling pot, destruction will come from the north. This is the message Jeremiah must deliver, and one of the recurring motifs of the book.

Second, however, we see the promise of God to Jeremiah. Despite the harsh message the prophet must deliver, God promises to give him the words to say and His presence as protection. Not only is God's word against Judah trustworthy, but His promise to Jeremiah is sure as well. The Lord is "watching to see that my word is fulfilled" (Jeremiah 1:12). This is the character of our God.

**APPLY THE WORD** As you embark on your own encounter with the book of Jeremiah, pray that God would open your heart to see and receive what He wants to teach you. Despite the unpopular themes of destruction and judgment throughout the book, we can learn much about the character of our God in this study. Pray for the Spirit's guidance as you go forth.

## Jeremiah 1:4-19

They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you. Jeremiah 1:19

In August 2006, Japan's Chrysanthemum Throne celebrated the birth of its first male heir in forty years. This young boy is the designated heir to the imperial throne, only third in line after his uncle and father.

Even before his birth, God had designated Jeremiah for a purpose (Jeremiah 1:5). He was commissioned as God's spokesman to His people during a time of crisis. Because of their idolatry, God's people were threatened by invasion from the Babylonians. Jeremiah was also called to be a prophet to the nations, a reminder that God is sovereign over the whole world. Feelings of inadequacy colored Jeremiah's initial response to the Lord (Jeremiah 1:6). He felt inexperienced and unprepared, but God resounded with reassurance. He qualified and equipped Jeremiah for this task. God promised His presence (Jeremiah 1:8, 19); He gave Jeremiah words to say (Jeremiah 1:9); and He strengthened him like a fortified city (Jeremiah 1:18).

Jeremiah was God's mouthpiece to preach the message of judgment and restoration. Through visions, God clarified two things: first, like the almond tree, which blooms first and watches spring's arrival, so God would watch over His word to bring it to fruition (Jeremiah 1:11–12); second, like the tilting boiling pot, there was disaster brewing for God's people in Judah because they had forsaken the Lord, and Jeremiah was to warn them (Jeremiah 1:13–16). The Lord warned Jeremiah that he would face great resistance, but also bolstered his confidence with promise of His deliverance (v. 19).

God made a decisive call on Jeremiah's life, and he responded in great faith. He followed the Lord in a very dangerous environment with a very offensive message. He was able to keep the faith, because God remained faithful to him to prepare, equip, and protect him. God's character does not change—the judgments against the seven churches in Revelation echo Jeremiah's message (Rev. 2:4, 14, 20). Keeping the faith is first and foremost about maintaining uncompromising loyalty to God alone.

**APPLY THE WORD** Perhaps you can relate to Jeremiah's sense of inadequacy, or you feel guilty for falling short of expectations. God encouraged Jeremiah to look beyond his personal capacity to His abundant resources. The Lord has given us everything we need to serve Him faithfully. Prayerfully consider this verse today: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). We will not be perfect, but we can be faithful!

## Jeremiah 1:1-10

### Feelings Of Inadequacy

Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you. —Jeremiah 1:8

“I can’t.” With those words, we often dismiss our responsibility to do something God wants us to do.

I distinctly remember my feelings of inadequacy as I stood in front of classes during my student-teaching days in college. I would rather have been nibbled to death by ducks than to stand in front of a bunch of reluctant 17-year-olds just daring me to teach them grammar.

As frightening as those kinds of feelings are, we must never mistake them for reasons to avoid the direction God has for us in life.

Look at Jeremiah. God had prepared him to be “a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5). Yet when he heard of God’s plans, he immediately objected, “I cannot speak, for I am a youth” (v.6). It is not clear how old Jeremiah was, but it didn’t matter to God. He didn’t accept his objections. Instead, the Lord provided what Jeremiah would need to succeed: His enablement (v.7), His presence (v.8), and the words to speak (v.9).

Listen to God. What is He calling you to do for Him? Does it sound too hard? That’s impossible! If God has a job for you, it’s not you who will be doing it—He will be working through you. That should take care of those feelings of inadequacy.

God has a plan for each of us

He wants us to fulfill;

And He’ll provide the strength we need

To carry out His will. —Sper

God’s strength always accompanies God’s call.

#### **Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139**

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. - Jeremiah 1:5

Today it’s common for expectant parents to proudly show family and friends the sonogram images of their unborn child. Although the grainy images can sometimes be hard to decipher, there’s rarely any problem decoding the excitement on the faces of the parents! It wasn’t all that long ago, however, that the idea of obtaining images of a living fetus was unthinkable. In about the 1950s, however, scientists began to learn that it would be possible to use the echo of high-frequency sound waves to “see” inside the human body. This data can then be represented visually, much to the delight of many expectant parents. As medical technology advances, we’re able both to know and to see so much more of the human body. All this gives added depth to the profound truths contained in today’s psalm. Ironically, the one thing that was quite clear to David is often missed in our modern understanding of human anatomy, and that is how fantastically and lovingly God has made us. David’s intimate relationship with his Lord God gave him insights that didn’t require a sonogram or an X-ray.

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#### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [How Can I Know What God Wants Me To Do?](#)
- [Jeremiah 1:1-10 Feelings Of Inadequacy](#)

#### **Jeremiah 1:1-10 Feelings Of Inadequacy** August 18, 1998

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God has a plan for each of us  
He wants us to fulfill;  
And He'll provide the strength we need  
To carry out His will. —Sper

God's strength always accompanies God's call.

## JEREMIAH 2

### **Jeremiah 2:1–22 ISRAEL'S BETRAYAL**

They have forsaken me, the spring of living water. Jeremiah 2:13

Dale Carnegie, the author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, would likely have given a failing grade to Jeremiah. His first message was harsh, accusing Judah of idolatry and unfaithfulness toward God. Jeremiah 2:14 through Jeremiah 2:22 summarize the state of things: Israel has broken their yoke, torn off their bonds, and rejected serving the Lord. They are described with a variety of word pictures: as prostitutes, an intractable vineyard, and dirty bathers unable to be cleansed. In the face of inevitable consequences, God reminds them "how evil and bitter it is" to forsake the Lord (Jeremiah 2:19).

Along with the summary of Israel's betrayal, today's reading also paints a portrait of the characteristics of sin. First, sin is a perversion. Like a youthful bride once devoted to her husband, Israel has perverted all that was good and holy, and defiled it (Jeremiah 2:2–3). Although there was no fault in God, Israel chose "worthless idols and became worthless themselves" (Jeremiah 2:5). Perhaps worst of all, the leaders of Israel (priests, rulers, and prophets), led the people into unfaithfulness (Jeremiah 2:8). Sin takes good and perverts it into something else.

Second, we see the ingratitude of sin. Despite God's generous gifts of a fertile land and abundant provisions, Israel repaid such kindness with the defilement of idolatry. Sin so often stems from such ingratitude toward God.

Finally, we are shown the sheer lunacy of sin. Astonishingly, Israel had taken its glorious God, who bestows living waters, and exchanged Him for worthless idols and "broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). Who in their right mind would choose stale, contaminated water over fresh springs? Yet this is precisely the lunacy of sin.

**APPLY THE WORD** Today's reading calls us to take a hard look into our own lives. How might we, too, be guilty of forsaking God? How is the perversion, ingratitude, and lunacy of sin taking root and leading us to forsake the One who first loved us? Ask God for the courage to make an honest examination of your life and seek repentance where needed.

### **Jeremiah 2:1-13 Where Has Love Gone?**

What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me? —Jeremiah 2:5

New love is exciting! We've all seen it in newly married couples. It doesn't matter if they're 20 or 70, love makes their faces beautiful and their feet bounce.

It's not only true of marriages. We've seen people who lovingly wash and wax their new sports car—and then do it all over again.

Whether it's a new car or a new relationship, at first we respond with wholehearted devotion. But with the passing of time, excitement often fades. Unrealistic hopes can blind us to the flaws in the object of our affection. When we expect too much from a person or a possession, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

A car, a house, or a spouse may turn out to be less than ideal. But if our relationship with God cools, it's because our communication has broken down and disinterest has set in. It's then that intimacy is lost. It happened with Israel (Jer. 2:5-8); it happens with us. But we can't blame God. He never changes. His love for us is unfailing!

If your relationship with the Lord has grown cold, take time to think about who He is and what He has done. Draw near to Him in prayer. Then you won't be left wondering where your love has gone.

What hinders thy first love, pray tell?

Canst thou not now recall

The day when thou didst give to Christ

Thy heart, thy life, thy all? —Adams

To renew your love for Christ, review Christ's love for you.

### **Jeremiah 2:1-13 Thirst-Quencher**

My people . . . have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters. —Jeremiah 2:13

Many people throughout the world are turning to Jesus Christ for salvation. Others, though, are rejecting Him and looking elsewhere for spiritual peace and fulfillment.

While doing some research, I read an issue of the New Age Journal. I noticed that the writers endorse a variety of pantheistic religions. They state their belief in reincarnation, encourage mystical psychic activities, and even strongly recommend the worship of pagan goddesses. Some articles mention the Bible and Jesus, but not one writer views the Scriptures as God's Word or Jesus as the only Savior.

Many Israelites of Jeremiah's day had turned away from the only living and true God to religious beliefs very similar to those being advocated by New Age writers today. Jeremiah likened them to people who turned from a fresh-flowing spring to broken cisterns that could hold no water (2:13).

The gods of New Age theology are worthless. They can't satisfy the thirst of our souls to know the one true God. They can't forgive our sins or assure us of heaven. Only Jesus can do that.

So drink of the Living Water, and lead others to Him too. Jesus is the only one who can quench your thirst.

If we turn from God who made us,

He who loves us as His own,

We will go on longing, thirsting—

We were made for Him alone. —D. De Haan

Only Jesus, the living water, can satisfy our thirst for God.

### **Jeremiah 2:1-19**

My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns. - Jeremiah 2:13

"If we have learned anything else," writes Norman Cousins in his book, *Human Options*, "it is that the ideas of poets and artists penetrate where everything else has failed." Cousins advances the notion that ideas are communicated most powerfully through pictures.

The Exodus story is so crucial to the whole of the Old Testament because it is the central picture by which the people of Israel were to understand God and their relationship to Him. The Old Testament writers, like Jeremiah from our text today, return again to the Exodus as a critical point of reference.

The Exodus story depicts a God who is not impersonal or abstract. He is no divine recluse. He longs to connect intimately with the people that He has made. And He'll go to extraordinary lengths to win them to Himself.

Because the Exodus story illuminates God's love and grace, the Old Testament writers find themselves returning to it when the people of Israel abandon faith. They seem to ask, "How can it be that we, the nation of Israel, who saw the parting of the Red Sea, who ate the manna, could abandon our Savior?" The question is put by God Himself in Jeremiah 2:5: "What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me?"

This text seems to despair of the people of Israel. If miraculous rescue from slavery and deliverance into the Promised Land aren't sufficient grounds for trusting and following the Lord, what will it take? They seemed insistent on choosing anything lesser than God.

Jeremiah 2 is an important gospel text because it reveals the weakness of the Old Covenant and the necessity of the New. Until there is genuine spiritual change in human hearts, even the most compelling of miracles, such as those witnessed during the Exodus, will not ultimately establish lasting faith in God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Jeremiah 2:19 in today's passage speaks an important word about the destructive nature of sin. It may feel fun momentarily. We can rationalize certain behaviors as "no big deal." And our deception is cemented further when our struggle is with seemingly "invisible" sins. What motivation do we have for repentance? Perhaps it means starting to recognize, "how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God."

### **Jeremiah 2:4-19 Caught Red-Handed**

The prophets . . . walked after things that do not profit. —Jeremiah 2:8

A small plane loaded with cocaine valued at \$20 million was intercepted by federal agents as it flew over the Florida coast. Suddenly, bales of cocaine began falling out of the sky. One dropped in a church parking lot. Another hit a housetop. Several others came down in the Everglades.

When the plane landed at a small airstrip near Homestead Air Force Base, four bundles of cocaine were still on board. Two men were arrested and charged with offenses that could put them behind bars for the rest of their lives. What irony! Something they thought was so profitable suddenly became so condemning.

The Israelites and their leaders also went after what they thought would be profitable for them—they followed foreign gods (Jeremiah 2:5). But the Lord told them they were going after "things that do not profit" (v.8), and their own sin was condemning them (v.19). When intercepted by God, they stood accused not only by Him but also by their own actions. They could not elude the eyes of the Lord nor escape His justice.

We all stand guilty before the Lord and in need of His forgiveness (Romans 3:23). But because He loved us enough to send His Son to die in our place, we can find—before it is too late—the mercy no human court can offer.

Sin-laden soul with your shame and disgrace,

Jesus stands ready your sin to erase;

Gladly He suffered and died in your place—

Why not receive His forgiveness and grace? —D. De Haan

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. —Romans 6:23

### **Jeremiah 2:4-13 A Poor Substitute**

My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. —Jeremiah 2:11

What happens when a person abandons his faith in God? Cases differ, to be sure, but most faith-renouncers confess to sensing a void inside. They have an emptiness that must be filled. Inevitably, they turn to a God-substitute.

Almost anything can serve as a God-substitute—sports, art, sex, music, work, gambling, drugs, alcohol, TV—even another person.

Joseph Goebbels scorned his religious upbringing that taught him about Christ. He later remarked, "It is almost immaterial what we believe so long as we believe in something." For Goebbels that something was really someone. None other than the murderous Adolf Hitler became Goebbels' God-substitute. When Hitler was finally trapped and defeated, Goebbels killed himself and his family.

God spoke to the people of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "My people have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and [have made] broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). They had turned from the one true God to worthless God-substitutes.

To abandon God means we risk being made "desolate" (v.12). But obedience to Christ brings complete fulfillment that gives life, peace, and hope.

The one who tries to abandon God may find that God will let him.

### **Jeremiah 2:4-13 Living Water**

Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." —John 7:37

Lee Atwater was a well-known figure in US politics. He engineered the successful 1988 presidential campaign of George H. W. Bush and was the head of the Republican National Committee (1988-1991). But in the midst of all his activities he developed an inoperable brain tumor and died at the age of 40.

During his illness, Atwater came to realize that wealth, honor, and power are not life's supreme values. Admitting to a deep emptiness within himself, he urged people to work at filling up the "spiritual vacuum in American society." In an insightful comment, he confessed, "My illness helped me to see that what was missing in society is what is missing in me—a little heart, a lot of brotherhood."

In his day, Jeremiah perceived that same kind of vacuum in many of his fellow Israelites. He warned them against the danger of personal and national emptiness. They were digging cisterns, he said, "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

What about your own life? Is it spiritually dried up? Ask Jesus, the fountain of living water (John 7:37), to fill you with His presence. Then joy and peace will begin to bubble up and even overflow.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,

"Behold, I freely give the living water,

Thirsty one, stoop down

And drink and live." —Bonar

The only real thirst quencher is Jesus—the living water.

### **Jeremiah 2:4-13**

They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. Jeremiah 2:13

Commenting on today's reading, pastor and theologian John Piper wrote: "God pictures himself as a mountain spring of clean, cool, life-giving water. The way to glorify a fountain like this is to enjoy the water, and praise the water, and keep coming back to the water, and point other people to the water, and get strength for love from the water, and never, never, never prefer any drink in the world over this water. That makes the spring look valuable. That is how we glorify God, the fountain of living water. But in Jeremiah's day people tasted the fountain of God's grace and did not like it. So they gave their energies to finding better water, more satisfying water. Not only did God call this effort futile . . . he called it evil."

In Jeremiah 2, God faulted the Israelites for foolishly exchanging "their Glory [that is, Him] for worthless idols" (Jeremiah 2:11). They had "forgotten" the power the Lord displayed in bringing them out of slavery in Egypt, and the love He showed them during their wilderness wanderings. They had no reason to turn away from their faithful covenant God. The priests and other leaders especially should have known better and were most to blame (Jeremiah 2:8).

The two basic sins were two sides of the same coin (Jeremiah 2:13). First, the people had forsaken God, "the spring of living water," and second, they had dug their own "broken cisterns." That is, they'd been trying to find meaning and truth based on their own resources rather than God's. It's not simply that one way is better than the other, it's that comparisons are impossible. One way is real, the other is utterly useless!

To be found faithful, we as stewards must "draw our water" from the Source—this is another foundational principle of stewardship. The ability and wisdom to steward well come from Him, and if we try to do it in our own strength we will fail.

APPLY THE WORD Jeremiah condemned the Israelites for chasing "worthless idols." What about you—what are you chasing? Are you seeking purpose and meaning in life from "broken cisterns"? If so, Jesus invites you to trade them in for "living water" (John 4:10). Believing in Him for salvation is the only road to eternal life. He has redeemed us from sin and offers us life, truth, and meaning in place of death, deceit, and emptiness. Accept His invitation without delay!

### **Jeremiah 2:5-13 We Don't Need You**

What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters? — Jeremiah 2:5

There's a story about a group of scientists who decided that humans could do without God. So one of them looked up to God and said, "We've decided that we no longer need You. We have enough wisdom to clone people and do many miraculous things."

God listened patiently and then said, "Very well, let's have a man-making contest. We'll do it just like I did back in the old days with Adam." The scientists agreed, and one of them bent down and picked up a handful of dirt. God looked at him and said, "No! You have to make your own dirt!"

In Jeremiah's day, the Israelites were living as if they no longer needed the Lord. They had entrusted themselves to other gods,

even though their gods could not respond to their needs. Jeremiah confronted them about their rebellion, for they had forsaken the true God and shown disrespect for Him (Jeremiah 2:13,19).

Are we guilty of living as if we don't need God? We may know Him as our Savior but be worshiping the idol of our own wisdom or self-sufficiency. Could the Lord be saying of us, "They have gone far from Me"? (2:5).

Living far from God dishonors and displeases Him, and it will never meet our deepest needs. But we can return to Him today (3:7)

Unless we worship only God

Our lives cannot be truly free;

For we were made for Him alone—

All else is but idolatry. —D. De Haan

The idol of self is a sorry substitute for God.

### **Jeremiah 2:9-13 Winners Of Nothing**

My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. —Jeremiah 2:11

I've often thought how exciting it would be to win a shopping spree in a grocery store. In such a contest the prizewinner is given a few minutes to accumulate as much merchandise as possible. When the time is up, the items are sorted and the prices are totaled. But it's all free!

I watched one of these events, and it was obvious that the participants knew exactly what they wanted. They had carefully worked out a strategy. When the clock started, they headed right for the high-priced items.

Now suppose a contestant had filled his cart with empty boxes and cartons. We would say, "He's foolish. Why doesn't he take the valuable items?"

That's the picture I see in the prophet Jeremiah's description of the people of Israel in their relationship to God. They spent their days piling up things that were useless and empty. They exchanged "their Glory for what does not profit" (2:11). They turned from God, the source of all good things, and instead trusted objects that were worthless.

What about us? As Christians, do we realize that life is a great prize, giving us unlimited opportunity to store up valuable treasures in heaven? Let's not waste our time running around being winners of nothing.

The wealth of the world and all that it brings,

Possessions and comfort and ease,

Are tempting to all, but our hearts surely know

There's no satisfaction in these. —Anon.

We must never be satisfied with a saved soul and a wasted life.

### **Jeremiah 2:13 Broken Cisterns**

They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water. —

Picture yourself swinging a pick, digging from dawn to dusk, chiseling a cistern out of the hard, unyielding stone. You stay on the job, working through the biting cold of winter and the blazing heat of summer.

After years of strenuous effort you finally complete the task. Then you step back and wait for your cistern to fill—and it leaks. You discover—too late—that all cisterns, no matter how well constructed, will leak.

The story is a picture of the futility of our attempts to find satisfaction in life. It's an age-old problem.

God told the prophet Jeremiah that His people "have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters." Instead, they had expended their efforts on "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

Are you driven by soul-thirst, yearning for satisfaction? There is a spring of living water, rising from hidden depths, pouring into our hearts, satisfying us even as it makes us thirst for more. Stoop down and drink.



Only God can satisfy your heart. Everything else will deceive and disappoint. “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst,” said Jesus. “But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

Only Living Water can quench the driving thirst of the soul.

### **Jeremiah 2:26-37 God Help Me!**

Where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble.. — Jeremiah 2:28

Ever notice how people react to tragedy? Even the nonreligious try to get the attention of God, whom they have previously ignored. Accounts of plane crashes, floods, tornadoes, or hurricanes often tell of someone who calls on the Lord for help.

It would be nice to think that the heavenly Father is just waiting for such times of panic so He can send all the emergency equipment of heaven to the rescue. But the Bible indicates otherwise. Through Jeremiah, the Lord challenged His people who were in trouble to get help in the hour of death from the idols they had worshiped. He wanted them to see the futility of trusting false gods.

The Lord may ask the same question of us. In an hour of distress, He may say, “Why do you cry for Me now? Where are your sports heroes and movie stars? Why not seek help from the TV, appeal to your paycheck, take comfort in your possessions, or rely on your credit cards? Let these gods whom you’ve served so faithfully now serve you!”

God doesn’t want us to think we can go on trusting false gods and still expect Him to protect us from trouble. He graciously grants forgiveness to us if we are truly repentant. And He offers hope and help to those who have learned to depend on Him all the time.

The gods of this world are empty and vain,

They cannot give peace to one's heart;

The Living and True One deserves all our love—

From Him may we never depart. —DJD

Those who walk with God always find Him close at hand.

### **Jeremiah 2:29-37 Get Smart**

In vain I have chastened your children; they received no correction. —Jeremiah 2:30

The Israelites repeatedly ignored God’s discipline (Jer. 2:30). The Lord was grieved that they were unwilling to admit their wrongdoing and change their ways.

I have encountered heartbroken parents with similar feelings about their children. So it was refreshing to hear a young minister at his father’s funeral speak gratefully of his parents’ corrective measures.

He said that when he was a boy, he was picked up by a policeman for throwing stones in a place where he could have caused great damage. The officer told his father that if he disciplined his son it would not be necessary to turn him over to the juvenile authorities. The minister recalled that the look on his father’s face made him wish he could have chosen the juvenile authorities. Yet he knew that his father truly loved him. As he grew up, he continued to need discipline, but because he respected his father and was quick to admit his wrong, he became a responsible adult.

Whether the correction comes from God, a good parent, or some other authority, its effectiveness will be determined by our response. Remember, “He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding” (Prov. 15:32).

For Personal Reflection

Think about the last time someone corrected you.

How did you respond?

How has that correction helped you?

Accept correction, and you’ll need less of it.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 2:1-13 Thirst-Quencher](#)

Jeremiah 2:1-13

My people . . . have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters. —Jeremiah 2:13

Many people throughout the world are turning to Jesus Christ for salvation. Others, though, are rejecting Him and looking elsewhere for spiritual peace and fulfillment.

While doing some research, I read an issue of the New Age Journal. I noticed that the writers endorse a variety of pantheistic religions. They state their belief in reincarnation, encourage mystical psychic activities, and even strongly recommend the worship of pagan goddesses. Some articles mention the Bible and Jesus, but not one writer views the Scriptures as God's Word or Jesus as the only Savior.

Many Israelites of Jeremiah's day had turned away from the only living and true God to religious beliefs very similar to those being advocated by New Age writers today. Jeremiah likened them to people who turned from a fresh-flowing spring to broken cisterns that could hold no water (2:13).

The gods of New Age theology are worthless. They can't satisfy the thirst of our souls to know the one true God. They can't forgive our sins or assure us of heaven. Only Jesus can do that.

So drink of the Living Water, and lead others to Him too. Jesus is the only one who can quench your thirst.

If we turn from God who made us,  
He who loves us as His own,  
We will go on longing, thirsting—  
We were made for Him alone. —D. De Haan

Only Jesus, the living water, can satisfy our thirst for God.

By Herbert VanderLugt

- [Jeremiah 2:1-13 Where Has Love Gone?](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:4-19 Caught Red-Handed](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:4-13 A Poor Substitute](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:4-13 Living Water](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:4-19 Caught Red-Handed](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:5-13 We Don't Need You](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:9-13 Winners Of Nothing](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:13 Broken Cisterns](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:26-37 God Help Me!](#)
- [Jeremiah 2:29-37 Get Smart](#)

## JEREMIAH 3

### Jeremiah 3:4-10 Only Pretending

"Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the Lord. —Jeremiah 3:10

Have you heard the story about a driver who put a note under the windshield wiper of a parked car? The note read, "I have just smashed into your car. The people who saw the accident are watching me. They think I'm writing down my name and address. I'm not."

This story reminds me of another bit of devious pretense. In Jeremiah 3, the people of Judah were described as willing to call God their Father and friend while still doing all the evil they could (vv.4-5). They only pretended to return to the Lord; their hearts were far from Him.

Putting on a false front is a very old practice, but it hasn't gone out of fashion. I can't think of a problem I'm more concerned about in myself than a failure to respond from my heart to the Lord, who has made Himself so real and so knowable in Christ. It's easy to say,

“Yes, yes, He is our Lord and Savior. He has died for our sins and deserves our worship and service.” But do we remember our commitment to Him when no one is around to observe how we live?

We may say the right things about God when it's in our best interest to do so. But what about our heart relationship with the Lord? Can we come before Him without shame? Looking good in the eyes of others is not enough.

Arm me with jealous care,

As in Thy sight to live;

And oh, Thy servant, Lord, prepare

A strict account to give! —Wesley

The harder you work at what you should be, the less you'll try to hide what you are.

### **Jeremiah 3:11-15 Cover-up**

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. —Proverbs 28:13

After bearing the burden of a guilty conscience for more than four decades, an elderly man decided he couldn't go on any longer without confessing his crime.

When he was brought to trial, he told the judge, “After living with this thing hanging over my head for 40 some years, it got heavier and heavier until I just couldn't stand it any longer.” What a clear illustration that guilt is inescapable!

The judge decided to show mercy. “Criminal charges are not warranted in this case,” he said, as the old man, now hard of hearing, strained to catch his words.

Confession is the key to the problem of guilt. The Lord pleaded with His people through the prophet Jeremiah, trying to get them to see where they had been unfaithful. Over and over again He warned that He would judge them for denying that they had done wrong, and for refusing to come back to Him for mercy (2:35). He urged them to stop running from what they had done and to admit their sin (3:13).

What about you today? Is there something in your life that you are covering up? It won't work. You can't fool God. Confess it to the Lord and experience His mercy, love, and grace.

Jesus died to pay sin's debt,

Forgiveness to bestow;

But all who try to cover sin

His grace will never know. —DJD

Confession is the key that opens the door to forgiveness.

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 3:4-10 Only Pretending](#)
- [Jeremiah 3:11-15 Cover-up](#)

Cover-up August 19, 1998

Read: Jeremiah 3:11-15

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Confession is the key that opens the door to forgiveness.

By Mart DeHaan

## JEREMIAH 4

### Jeremiah 4:5–31 JUDGMENT FROM THE NORTH

Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. Jeremiah 4:14

Except for Egypt on its southern border, any nation wishing to attack Israel would have come from the north. Even nations in the east would have moved north to avoid the trek across the eastern wilderness. It is no surprise that Jeremiah's word warns of the coming destruction from the north. What do Jeremiah's oracles tell us about this impending disaster?

Although there is a human agent, the real source of the coming destruction is God. The Lord's anger over Israel's idolatry had not been turned away. Like a scorching desert wind, God was sending His judgment against His rebellious people. The reason for such devastation is clear: Israel's own wicked conduct had brought this punishment upon them (Jeremiah 4:18).

The bulk of the chapter, however, details a vivid and horrific imagery of God's punishment. The battle cry warns of "terrible destruction" (Jeremiah 4:6). Like a lion, the northern invader will wreak havoc and leave Israel's leaders appalled and terrified. In imagery suggestive of a reversal of the Genesis creation account, Jeremiah depicts a barren wasteland: "I looked at the earth and it was formless and empty" (Jeremiah 4:23). Jeremiah 4:19 epitomizes the coming torment as a voice cries out, "Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain."

The scene in today's reading is truly dreadful, something akin to nuclear fallout where all life is decimated. And yet, even in the horrific face of impending judgment, don't miss the glimmers of hope offered. With the right response there may be mercy. God calls them to "wash the evil from your heart and be saved" (Jeremiah 4:14). Later, God declares His mercy again, saying, "I will not destroy it completely" (Jeremiah 4:27). Even here the mercy of God peeks through.

**APPLY THE WORD** Today's pictures of God's wrath and mercy both reflect His commitment to His people. His wrath demonstrates the seriousness of His relationship with us and how sin severs it. His mercy indicates His commitment to grace even in the face of foolish disobedience. Give thanks today that God considers His relationship with us something worth taking seriously.

### Jeremiah 4:1-19 Full-Grown Trouble

Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. —James 1:15

While it was still young and manageable, a tree planted in the middle of our small backyard provided just enough shade. But then its branches began to spread. Eventually the tree was shutting out the sunlight. The grass started to get thin and the garden became unproductive. By the time I realized that the tree had to come down, I had a backbreaking job on my hands. If only I had dealt with the problem when it was small instead of when it was full-grown!

That's the way it is with sin. At first, it may seem so harmless, even good. But, like a leafy tree when it is mature, sin shuts out the light.

The children of Israel learned this lesson the hard way. Their own conduct brought judgment on them (Jer. 4:7,18). They found to their pain and regret that sin can start out looking so manageable and so safe—until it gets out of hand. Then it's a different story.

Israel's predicament caused the prophet Jeremiah to cry out in anguish over his wayward people, "Oh, my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart!" (v.19).

See sin for what it is—a spreading menace that always ends in death (Jas. 1:15). Deal with the "little" sin in your life now. Don't wait till it's full-grown.

The little choices we must make

Will chart the course of life we take;

We either choose the path of right

Or wander off without God's light. —DJD

A little sin never stays little.

#### **Jeremiah 4:1–8 LAMENT OVER LACK OF REPENTANCE**

Unless you repent, you too will all perish. Luke 13:3

Sam looked at his son Will, age 4, who was surrounded by dozens of candy bar wrappers and had chocolate smeared across the bottom of his face. "Will, did you get into the candy Mommy bought for the party?" "No!" Will replied, despite all evidence to the contrary. "Will, you need to tell the truth. Did you eat the candy bars?" "No!" Will insisted. "Your punishment is going to be much worse when you tell lies about what you did, Will," Sam sighed. "Did you eat the candy?" "No!" Will declared defiantly.

The prophet Jeremiah has often been called the "weeping prophet": God used him to convey His own deep emotion about the rebellion of Judah against Him, and Jeremiah also grieves throughout this book about the fate of his people (see Jer. 9:1 for just one example). Jeremiah also wrote the book of Lamentations, an extended meditation on the sorrow of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people to Babylon.

Our passage today includes God's plea for His people to repent. And as we learned from Psalm 51, sin is always a matter of the heart, not just actions (Jeremiah 4:1–4). But like young Will surrounded by empty candy wrappers, they refuse, and destruction is coming. The prophet urges this unrepentant people on the brink of disaster to "put on sackcloth, lament and wail" (Jeremiah 4:8).

Notice what is at stake in their response: the blessing of the nations and the glory of God (Jeremiah 4:2). Repentance is about more than just the restoration of the relationship between an individual and God, though it includes that. Repentance sets before the entire world God's great love and His power to forgive. Repentance is a way that God's people bring glory to God.

**APPLY THE WORD** Often we are like Will, refusing to admit our sin even though we have its residue smeared across our faces. Other times we are like Sam, recognizing that our loved ones have sinned and face terrible consequences but will not turn from their sins and repent. In your time of prayer today, confess your own sins and pray for your loved ones. Pray that God will be glorified in your lives.

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#### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 4:1-19 Full-Grown Trouble](#)

Full-GrownTrouble

May 23, 1998

Read: Jeremiah 4:1-19 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 19-21; John 8:1-27

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story. Israel's predicament caused the prophet Jeremiah to cry out in anguish over his wayward people, "Oh, my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart!" (v.19).

See sin for what it is—a spreading menace that always ends in death (Jas. 1:15). Deal with the "little" sin in your life now. Don't wait till it's full-grown.

The little choices we must make  
Will chart the course of life we take;  
We either choose the path of right  
Or wander off without God's light. —DJJ

A little sin never stays little.

By Mart DeHaan

## JEREMIAH 5

### Jeremiah 5:1-31 PROPHETIC JUDGMENT: WHEN FEAR FAILS

Former Vice President Dick Cheney released his memoir, *In My Time*, last fall. In it, he recounts how in June 2007, he had urged President Bush to authorize the bombing of a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor. The President polled the other advisors around the table: "Does anyone here agree with the vice president?" Not a single hand went up around the room.

In the forty years preceding Judah's exile to Babylon, Jeremiah was a lone voice in the administrations of five kings. Judah's religious and political leaders were all corrupt. The prophets no longer proclaimed the words of God. The political leaders of the day no longer defended the cause of justice. Jeremiah was not at all certain that if he walked Jerusalem's streets, he'd find even one righteous, God-fearing person.

Israel had completely abandoned her allegiance to God and no longer walked in the fear of the Lord. On a practical level, this meant that people felt a license to sin. Fear of God's judgment, which had once been a restraining force, was discarded. They no longer believed that God would involve Himself in any kind of meaningful way in their lives, and certainly not to judge their sin. Dishonesty, adultery, rebellion, greed, injustice: these had all become commonplace in the lives and culture of Israelites of that time. And perhaps worst of all, no one showed remorse. No one had any sense of having offended God and the requirements of His Law. Instead, the culture they had created, both political and religious, affirmed all of their wrong choices. They had completely rejected God's authority.

This is what it looks like to refuse to fear the Lord, and God promises judgment on such a people. Is it not sobering to consider how much our culture resembles theirs? In our day, people feel freedom to sin. The thought of a divine being judging our sin seems out-of-date, medieval almost. And sadly, even churches and entire denominations no longer preach the authority of God's Word.

### APPLY THE WORD

Digging deeper into today's passage, we see that when we abandon the fear of the Lord, it often happens gradually. First, we forget to see God as the provider of all good things. Our hearts aren't grateful for all that we've been given. Second, we think we are self-reliant. Our blessings become the very things that have turned our hearts from God, convincing us that we don't really need Him. Third, we lose sensitivity to sin. We no longer hate it.

### Jeremiah 5:20-31 A Good Question

What will you do in the end? —Jeremiah 5:31

At the highest levels of government, military leaders carefully monitor events in their region and around the world. As they evaluate troop movements, missile placements, and possible responses, they try to answer the question, "Where is this going to lead us?"

About 600 BC, Jeremiah the prophet asked his countrymen to consider where their action was taking them. The biggest threat to their well-being, however, wasn't an enemy army but their own spiritual and moral decay. People who professed to believe in God were sexually immoral, godless, and cruel (5:7-28).

Even more troubling was the people's preference for religious leaders who said politically correct things rather than the truth (5:30-31). The prophet, knowing that their way of life would ultimately bring down God's judgment, asked them to think realistically, "What

will you do in the end?" (v.31).

It was a good question then, and it's a good question today. We need to evaluate carefully our relationship with God. Do we stop long enough in our busy lives to ask, "Where is my life headed?" We must measure our attitudes and actions by God's Word if we want God's blessing on our lives.

For Further Thought

How can I make God's Word more important in my life?

What sinful attitudes or actions do I need to confess?

How can I show Christ's love and compassion today?

Take time to think where you're going, or you may not like where you end up.

### **Jeremiah 5:20-31 Out Of Our Minds**

"Do you not fear Me?" says the Lord. —Jeremiah 5:22

Why would a prison inmate escape from prison the day before his scheduled release? That's what a Rhode Island prison spokesman wondered as he answered questions from reporters. He said, "For the life of me, I don't know what possessed him to leave with only one day of his sentence left to serve." Once captured, the escapee would be arraigned on charges that could land him back in prison for up to 20 years.

Most of us probably would wonder about the shortsightedness of this inmate. But we might not be as conscious of our own nearsighted approach to sin. We might not see the absolute mindlessness of pursuing a few moments of selfish pleasure in exchange for lasting regret.

Jeremiah pointed out the folly of such actions. In the 5th chapter of his prophecy, he reminded us of how much we should respect God's power (v.22), and that short-term pleasures will bring long-term losses (vv.28-29). Sin thrives on self-deception and doesn't look ahead to the result (v.31).

Father, forgive us for being so stubborn and blind. Thank You for making a provision for our forgiveness. We realize that without Jesus we would have no hope. Help us to do what makes sense—for today, and for tomorrow.

We can't afford to play with fire

Nor tempt a serpent's bite;

We can't afford to think that sin

Brings any true delight. —Anon.

Sin sees the bait but is blind to the hook.

### **Jeremiah 5:20-29 Boundaries**

[God has] placed the sand as the bound of the sea. —Jeremiah 5:22

Not a year goes by without a natural disaster causing chaos somewhere in the world. Floods, hurricanes, and tsunamis destroy lives, homes, and livelihoods.

No one would argue that the seas have a "right" to violate their established boundaries and crash across the coastline. In fact, people agree that disaster occurs whenever the sea breaches the shoreline. God Himself has "placed the sand as the bound of the sea" (Jer. 5:22).

God also established boundaries for human behavior. Yet not a day goes by without countless violations of His commands, resulting in disastrous physical and spiritual consequences. Amazingly, we often argue that we have the "right" to violate these boundaries.

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, God's people had stepped out of bounds, using deceit to become rich and refusing to defend the needy (5:27-28). The result was disaster. God said, "Your sins have withheld good from you" (v.25).

Within creation there is inherent order. Violating it has inherent consequences. God in His kindness simply and lovingly communicated to us the order of things so that we can avoid those consequences. We are wise to know and to stay within His prescribed boundaries.

Lord, keep us on the narrow way,  
Where no corruption, woe, nor evil can destroy,  
Where Your right hand defeats the worldly fray  
To lead us into Your eternal joy. —Mollon  
Disregarding God's order leads to disorder!

### **Jeremiah 5:20-25 Tuned In**

Hear this now, O foolish people, . . . who have ears and hear not. —Jeremiah 5:21

One of my sons was a master at tuning out what he didn't want to hear. In church, his mind was a million miles away. He could tell you the number of panels in the ceiling and how many seats were in the choir loft. Many times I heard my wife say to him in the midst of a scolding, "Are you listening to me?"

We too are often guilty of tuning out what we don't want to hear, even messages from God. In his book *Christian Reflections*, C. S. Lewis says that a person who is determined to ignore God's voice will follow this advice: "Avoid silence, avoid solitude, avoid any train of thought that leads off the beaten track. Concentrate on money, sex, status, health, and (above all) your own grievances. Keep the radio on. Live in a crowd."

When we do something wrong, that's one time when we especially need to listen to God's voice. But often, in our stubbornness, we make sure we don't. The prophet Jeremiah spoke to those kinds of individuals, saying, "O foolish people, . . . who have ears and hear not . . . This people has a defiant and rebellious heart" (Jeremiah 5:21,23).

Instead of closing your ears to God, read the Bible and pray to Him regularly. Take time to think about God and His many blessings. That's how to stay tuned in!

Thinking It Over

How good is your relationship with the Lord?

Are you listening to Him?

Are there sins you need to confess?

What can you do to draw closer to Him?

God speaks to those who take time to listen.

### **Jeremiah 5:21-31 O. B. Markers**

I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. —Psalm 119:75

In the game of golf, out-of-bounds or O. B. markers designate when a ball has gone out of play. If a player's ball goes out-of-bounds, a one-stroke penalty is imposed.

The prophet Jeremiah warned the southern kingdom of Judah about their persistent rejection of God's boundaries for them. He said that even the sea knows that the sand on the seashore is its O. B. marker, "an everlasting barrier it cannot cross" (Jer. 5:22 NIV). Yet, the Lord's people had defiant and rebellious hearts (v.23). There was no fear of God, who gave them rain for their crops (v.24). They grew rich on deceit (v.27) and ignored the pleas of the disadvantaged (v.28).

God has given moral boundaries in His Word for us to live within. He gave them not to frustrate us but so that by keeping within them we may enjoy His blessings. David wrote: "I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right" (Ps. 119:75). God told Israel through Moses, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life" (Deut. 30:19).

Don't test God's boundaries and invite His correction. Make wise choices to live within His O. B. markers in His Word.

The Lord has given us commands,

And told us to obey;

Our own designs are sure to fail,

If we neglect His way! —Bosch



A small step of obedience is a giant step to blessing.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 5:20-31 A Good Question](#)
- [Jeremiah 5:20-31 Out Of Our Minds](#)
- [Jeremiah 5:20-29 Boundaries](#)
- [Jeremiah 5:20-25 Tuned In](#)
- [Jeremiah 5:21-31 O. B. Markers](#)

### O. B. Markers

July 15, 2011

Read: Jeremiah 5:21-31 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 13-15; Acts 19:21-41

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By C. P. Hia

## JEREMIAH 6

### Jeremiah 6:16–20; 33:1–11

If you will return, O Israel, return to me...then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory. Jeremiah 4:1–2

Cindy Howard was raised in a Christian home and made a personal commitment to Christ in high school. But when she went away to college, she quickly got caught up in the campus party lifestyle. She always intended to find a good church and a Bible study, but somehow it never happened. By the end of her freshman year, Cindy had the reputation of a party girl who could drink a lot of alcohol. By the time she graduated from college, few, if any, of her college friends even knew that she was a Christian.

Sadly, Cindy Howard's example isn't an isolated one. As believers in Jesus Christ, our lives will bear a witness—but our witness can be either positive or negative.

Jeremiah ministered just prior to the Babylonian exile (627–580 B.C.). Like many other prophets, he urged the people to return to God's ways (Jer. 6:16). But they refused to do so! Even though God had sent previous prophets (the "watchmen" in Jer 6:17), the people persisted in their sin. Rather than destroy all false idols, the Israelites had adopted many perverse pagan practices. Rather than trust the Lord to protect them, the Israelites had entered into dangerous foreign alliances.

The consequences of their sin were far-reaching. Instead of being a witness to the nations, we find that the nations were called upon to testify against Israel in the courtroom of God's justice and to hear His sentence against his people (Jer 6:18). This is indeed a sad point in the nation's history.

Fortunately, Jeremiah prophesied of God's wonderful restoration. Jeremiah 33 contains some of the most glorious promises of restoration, although the gruesome horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem and exile are not excluded (Jer 33:4–5, 10). Yet after the Exile, God promised to reunite Judah and Israel and to rebuild Jerusalem in such a way as to display His glory to the surrounding nations (Jer 33:9). The very nations that had been called upon to testify against Israel would at some point rejoice because of what God has done in and for Israel.

**APPLY THE WORD** It can be easy to think of witnessing for Christ in terms of what we say to other people, but it is often what we actually do that has the greatest impact.

To be sure, we are called to witness in both word and deed. Still, it's always a good idea to take some time to ask if our behavior lines up with our words. In other words, do we walk the talk? We read in 1 Peter 3:13–16 that even our accusers should give glory to God because of our good deeds.

### **Jeremiah 6:1-20 The Old Paths**

Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it. —Jeremiah 6:16

I seldom yearn for "the good old days." The quality of today's cars, for example, far exceeds that of my first one, a 1935 model with only a manifold heater and a short lifespan. When somebody says, "They don't make them like they used to," I reply, "I'm sure glad they don't."

I do long, however, for a return to the "old paths, where the good way is" (Jer. 6:16). There was a time when schoolchildren were taught kindness, purity, loyalty, obedience to authority, and reverence for God. Back then, newspaper and magazine articles reflected the belief that we are moral beings who should exercise self-restraint and seek the good of others.

Today, this idea has largely been scrapped and replaced with the concept that we can be happy only when we have freedom to fulfill our every selfish desire. Rejecting the old paths is not new. In Jeremiah's day, people weren't ashamed of their sins (v.15). And when the prophet pleaded for them to return to the "good way," they responded, "We will not walk in it" (v.16).

We need not be discouraged, however. God is still in control. We can show the way by loving people and praying for them. History records many revivals when multitudes returned to the old paths. It can happen again!

Send a revival, O Christ, my Lord,

Let it go over the land and sea;

Send it according to Thy dear Word,

And let it begin in me. —McKinney

Our purpose on earth is not to get used to the dark but to walk in the light.

### **Jeremiah 6:10-17 False Claims**

From the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. —Jeremiah 6:13

Years ago, a group of scientists concluded that people once dependent on alcohol could resume drinking without falling back into addiction. Investigative reporters, however, uncovered contrary evidence from patients who had been involved in the study. Those "cured" alcoholics who started drinking again were having extremely difficult problems. Some had even committed suicide. Apparently those scientists, whom you would expect to be trustworthy, were not reliable after all.

Religious leaders, like scientists, should always be above false claims. But Jeremiah reported evidence to the contrary. He showed that the priests, prophets, and preachers of his day were not speaking the truth (6:13). They told the people what they wanted to hear (v.14). The people didn't want to learn about judgment, repentance, and their own lack of godliness. They eagerly accepted the message of hope and peace even though it was a pack of lies.

What about us? Do we listen only to those voices that tell us what we want to hear? Do we assume that all preachers tell the truth? Let's make sure that we judge their message by the truths of the Bible. The Holy Spirit and the Word will alert us to false claims.

If "blind lead the blind," they shall both go astray

And land in the pit of despair;

So don't be deceived as you travel life's road—

False teachers abound everywhere. —DJD

If you know the truth, you can discern what's false.

### **Jeremiah 6:10-19 Inadequate Treatment**

They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, "Peace, peace!" when there is no peace. —Jeremiah 6:14

A sprained ankle, so common during summer activities, can cause lingering problems if not properly treated. Minor sprains respond well to RICE: rest, ice, compression, and elevation. But people who ignore a serious sprain and keep going in spite of the pain run the risk of a greater injury.

A podiatric surgeon says we often get used to sprains and put up with them, but "even minor sprains should be rehabilitated so they don't happen again." And, of course, a major injury always requires proper treatment.

When Jeremiah spoke the Lord's message against the corrupt spiritual leaders of Judah, he said: "They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). He repeated the accusation of inadequate treatment for serious spiritual injury in 8:11, then asked, "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there . . . for the health of the daughter of my people?" (v.22).

Jeremiah's searching question inspired an old spiritual that proclaims the message of hope and forgiveness we still need today: "There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul."

That balm is the healing power of Jesus for our deep wound of sin. Have you applied His balm?

Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,

But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;

There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul. —Trad.

The Great Physician always has the right remedy.

### **Jeremiah 6:10-16 Where the Good Way Is**

Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. —Jeremiah 6:16

We who believe that God has absolute moral standards are viewed by some segments of society as intolerant simpletons. We are cautioned not to express our disapproval over certain immoral behavior.

Television commentator Andy Rooney once announced his revulsion at the perverse sexual conduct increasingly evident in our culture. But pressure from special interest groups that promote immoral lifestyles coerced him to apologize.

Our circumstances are amazingly similar to those Jeremiah confronted 2,600 years ago. The people had no shame. No perversion made them blush. Even the religious leaders were part of this deplorable situation!

Jeremiah, however, proclaimed God's anger and warned of imminent divine judgment. The prophet pleaded for a return to the "old paths, where the good way is" (v.16), the paths of renunciation of sin and obedience to God.

Jesus showed us the good way when He invited all who "labor and are heavy laden" to come to Him (Matt. 11:28). And He gave us the assurance that His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light" (v.30).

Lord, thank You for showing us the way that brings real happiness. Help us to walk in the good way.

Onward and upward your course plan today,

Seeking new heights as you walk Jesus' way;

Heed not past failures, but strive for the prize,

Aiming for goals fit for His holy eyes. —Brandt

You can't go crooked as long as you stay on the straight and narrow way.

### **Jeremiah 6:13-20 Not A Hitching Post**

Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. —Jeremiah 6:16

You may have heard the saying, “The past is supposed to be a guidepost, not a hitching post.” It’s easy to become tied to memories of “the good old days” instead of using our experiences to find direction for the road ahead. We are all susceptible to the paralyzing effects of nostalgia—a longing for what used to be.

Jeremiah was a priest from a small town near Jerusalem when God called him to be “a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5). He was given the very difficult job of pronouncing God’s judgment primarily on the people of Judah, who had turned away from the Lord. Jeremiah made it clear that he was delivering God’s message, not his own (7:1-2).

The Lord said, “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (6:16).

God urged His people to look back so they could move ahead. The purpose of considering the ancient paths was to find “the good way” marked by God’s faithfulness, His forgiveness, and His forward call.

God can teach us from our past that the best road is the one we walk with Him.

Though I know not what awaits me—

What the future has in store,

Yet I know that God is faithful,

For I’ve proved Him oft before. —Anon.

God’s guidance in the past gives courage for the future.

### **Jeremiah 6:14-20 Expert Repair**

Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. —Jeremiah 6:16

If you’ve ever tried to fix something and failed, you’ll appreciate the sign I saw outside an automotive repair shop: We Will Fix What Your Husband Fixed. Whether the problem is the car, the plumbing, or an appliance, it’s usually better off in the hands of someone who is skilled and trustworthy.

So it is with the sin and the struggles within us that resist our efforts to mend them.

Jeremiah denounced the greedy prophets and priests of his day who “healed the hurt of [God’s] people slightly, saying ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). They could neither change themselves nor lead the people to spiritual transformation. So the Lord called the people to follow His way: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls” (v.16).

Centuries later, Jesus, the Son of God, said: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

The parts of our lives that we have tried and failed to repair can be restored by the hand of God. Through faith in Christ, we can be made whole.

Life’s fractures can be mended

By faith in Christ the Lord—

At first the pain but then the gain

And usefulness restored. —Hess

When God forgives, He removes the sin and restores the soul.

### **Jeremiah 6:16-21 Horsepower**

Ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. —Jeremiah 6:16

On a cold winter day in Michigan, a woman in labor was being rushed to the hospital when the unthinkable happened. The ambulance slid off an icy road into a ditch. A passing four-wheel drive truck stopped and tried to haul the emergency vehicle out but

couldn't get a grip.

That's when help arrived. An Amish man driving a two-horse team stopped to offer help. He told the ambulance service that the horses' shoes had been sharpened so they would bite into the ice. Once he hooked up the horses to the ambulance, they walked it right out of the ditch.

By today's standards, this young mother received help from a source of strength that was old-fashioned and outmoded. But on that day, old ways helped to ensure the safe arrival of new life into the world.

Most of us wouldn't want to return to the old-fashioned ways. But more than 2,500 years ago, Jeremiah reminded us that there is nothing more relevant than the truth of the past. Even though he was regarded as a relic of his time, he urged his neighbors to walk in the old paths of truth so that they would find peace and rest for their souls (Jer. 6:16). Today, we can still find rest and peace in Jesus, our eternal source of truth (Matt. 11:28).

Upon Thy Word I rest, so strong, so sure;

So full of comfort blest, so sweet, so pure,

Thy Word that changest not, that faileth never!

My King, I rest upon Thy Word forever. —Havergal

The old truth of God's Word is ever new.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 6:1-20 The Old Paths](#)
- [Jeremiah 6:10-17 False Claims](#)
- [Jeremiah 6:10-19 Inadequate Treatment](#)
- [Jeremiah 6:10-16 Where the Good Way Is](#)
- [Jeremiah 6:13-20 Not A Hitching Post](#)
- [Jeremiah 6:14-20 Expert Repair](#)
- [Jeremiah 6:16-21 Horsepower](#)

### **Horsepower**

May 9, 2008

Read: Jeremiah 6:16-21 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 7-9; John 1:1-28

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## JEREMIAH 7

### Jeremiah 7:1–29 JEREMIAH'S TEMPLE SERMON

Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame? Jeremiah 7:19

Numerous polls and surveys indicate that for the majority of people, public speaking ranks as our greatest fear, even higher than death. If public speaking produces such anxiety, imagine being called to deliver a harsh spiritual message to a crowd of people at a religious center. That was precisely the task to which God called Jeremiah, to stand in the temple and deliver a message about Israel's sin.

One aspect of Jeremiah's temple sermon highlights the hypocrisy and self-delusion of Israel. Though engaged in all variety of sin, the people continued to return to the place of worship as if nothing was wrong. Indeed, they ran to the temple as a "den of robbers" (Jeremiah 7:11), deluding themselves into thinking that God would never destroy the very place of His presence. As hypocrites and self-deceived, they chanted their mantra, "the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD" (Jeremiah 7:4). Jeremiah's history lesson about Shiloh reminded Israel that the place of God's presence was no protection for those who remain in their sin.

Jeremiah likewise identified the sin of God's people in specific terms. They had failed to bring justice to the alien and innocent and violated the explicit commandments of God. Most central to their failings, however, was their idolatry and lack of repentance. Notice that the sin of idolatry, in particular, does not just provoke God, but harms themselves as well. As God says, "They are harming themselves, to their own shame" (Jeremiah 7:19). Likewise, God had given His commands, "that it may go well with you" (Jeremiah 7:23). Serving and obeying the Lord is not at all like serving a cruel tyrant. Rather, God's commands are for our own good, and our obedience brings blessing and true satisfaction in our lives.

**APPLY THE WORD** Consider today Scripture's way of looking at sin. Our disobedience is a fundamental denial of God's blessing intended for us. Without a properly obedient relationship with Him, we miss the best that God has for us. Identify one thing in your life that is falling short of the best God intends for you; then do what Israel did not—repent and seek God's forgiveness.

### Jeremiah 7:1-11 Is God Obligated?

Amend your ways and your doings. —Jeremiah 7:3

A friend sent me photographs of 20 beautiful churches in the world. Located as far apart as Iceland and India, each of them is architecturally unique.

The most beautiful place of worship in Jeremiah's day was the temple in Jerusalem, which King Josiah had recently repaired and restored (2 Chron. 34–35). The people were fixated on the magnificent building (Jer. 7:4), and they foolishly thought that having the temple there meant that God would protect them from their enemies.

Instead, Jeremiah pointed out the sin in their lives (vv.3,9-10). God is not impressed by beautiful buildings constructed in His name if there is no inward beauty in the hearts of those who go there. He is not interested in an outward legalistic worship that is not matched by inward holiness. And it is wrong to think that God protects people just because of the religious things they do.

Just because we're reading the Bible, praying, and fellowshiping with other believers doesn't mean that God is somehow then obligated to do something for us. He cannot be manipulated. The purpose of those external activities is to develop our relationship with the Lord and to help us live differently than those in the world around us.

Lord, help me to remember that You are most  
interested in an obedient heart. Change me when I think  
You're obligated to me because of my religious acts of  
worship or service. Give me a pure heart. Amen.

Remember—God cannot and will not be manipulated.

### Jeremiah 7:1-16 WHY GOD FORSOOK THE TEMPLE

Some people carry a rabbit's foot for good luck. Others hang a horseshoe over the door or look for a four-leaf clover. They rely on an inanimate object as a talisman against trouble to protect them from harm. This was also the mentality of many toward the temple in Jerusalem. They believed that the temple's presence in Jerusalem would shield the city from the enemy. Nebuchadnezzar might lay siege to Jerusalem but they did not believe he would succeed.

This misconception was the result of false assumptions and selective memory. The temple was the dwelling place of the Ark of the Covenant. During their wandering in the wilderness the ark led the way, representing God's powerful presence. Each time the ark set out Moses declared, "Rise up, LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you" (Nu 10:35). During the battle of Jericho the ark preceded the army (Joshua 6). In more recent history, the Lord had miraculously spared Jerusalem in Hezekiah's day after the Assyrians surrounded the city (2 Kings 18:17-19:36).

During the period of the judges, however, the Lord had demonstrated that the ark could not be handled like a weapon or treated as if it were a lucky charm. In Samuel's day after the Philistines defeated Israel at Ebenezer, soldiers brought the ark from the city of Shiloh in Ephraim hoping that it would give them a military advantage. Instead, the Philistines defeated Israel again and captured the ark (1Sa. 4:1-11). Shiloh was subsequently destroyed by the Philistines. Jeremiah refers to this defeat in verse 14 of today's passage.

In his commentary on this passage, Philip Graham Ryken observes, "The people of Judah operated on the assumption that God neither saw nor cared what they did during the week." Religious formalism will never please God and true repentance involves more than mere words. The only real remedy for their situation was reform. The demand that God's people reform their ways was the shock treatment needed to make them aware of the depth of their spiritual hypocrisy. Repentance was the first step to real righteousness.

APPLY THE WORD - Jeremiah's reproof provides important insight into the spiritual disease of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a result of spiritual compartmentalization. Whenever we separate our ordinary life from our religious life we make ourselves vulnerable to hypocrisy. God is interested in our behavior in the home, on the job, or in the neighborhood just as He is in our behavior in the place of worship. He doesn't want us to go through the motions; He desires transformed lives that reflect His grace.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 7:1-11 Is God Obligated](#)

### Is God Obligated?

August 14, 2011

Read: Jeremiah 7:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 89-90; Romans 14

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Lord, help me to remember that You are most interested in an obedient heart. Change me when I think You're obligated to me because of my religious acts of worship or service. Give me a pure heart. Amen.

Remember—God cannot and will not be manipulated.

By C. P. Hia

## JEREMIAH 8

### Jeremiah 8:4–17; 10:1–16 IMPENITENCE AND IDOLATRY

Whoever remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed. Proverbs 29:1

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 8:4–10:25]

Our key verse today speaks of the folly of refusing correction. The first part of today's reading echoes this same idea as God described the stiff-necked behavior of Israel. They "refuse to return" (Jeremiah 8:5) and "none of them repent of their wickedness" (Jeremiah 8:6). In fact, they show no remorse or hesitation about sin at all. Even the birds have enough sense to know when to migrate, but the people of Judah lack all knowledge of God.

The scribes of the law and the leaders of Israel claimed wisdom, but God revealed their folly. Where things were serious, Israel's leaders treated the matter lightly. Where there was coming judgment, their false prophets proclaimed peace. God's opinion was clear: "Since they have rejected the word of the Lord, what kind of wisdom do they have?" (Jeremiah 8:9). True wisdom means knowing God's word and following it.

The second part of today's reading focuses on the sin of idolatry. The contrast between idols and God is clear. In a very real sense, there is an absurdity about idolatry. Idols are inanimate objects, carved from wood or stone, adorned by craftsmen, and carried about. Not only can they not speak or walk, they are utterly useless: "they can do no harm, nor can they do any good" (Jeremiah 10:5).

The Lord, on the other hand, as the only true God, is uniquely superior. No one is like Him. He is "mighty in power" (Jeremiah 10:6), the "living God, the eternal King" (Jeremiah 10:10). And unlike the worthless idols, He is the creator and Lord of all things. The worship of idols, then, is not only sinful, but absurd. And yet, Israel persisted in their sin.

**APPLY THE WORD** We might laugh at Jeremiah's depiction of idols until we recognize that modern-day idolatry is alive and well. Our idols may include Hollywood's ideas about beauty, time wasted on the Internet, our job, or anything that turns us from God. What things in your life might be idols? Confess, and ask God to become the center of your attention again.

### Jeremiah 8:4-17 Good Fear

They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall. —Jeremiah 8:12

The prophet Jeremiah warned the Israelites that those who live wickedly and refuse to repent will one day experience God's wrath. This truth is restated throughout the Bible. God uses fear as a means of bringing people to salvation and encouraging obedience. Fear has certainly been a major factor in my life.

Two current misconceptions have weakened the moral influence of this fear. The first fallacy is that Bible standards for conduct have no authority today. I know of a public school teacher who expressed no shame for behavior that the Bible calls immoral, and he saw no need to repent.

The second fallacy is that if there is a God, He is so tolerant toward sin that He automatically forgives everyone (except maybe mass murderers and child molesters). A woman expressed this view in her letter to the editor of a local newspaper when she wrote of the unrepentant teacher, "God has forgiven him, and so should we."

In sharp contrast to these misconceptions is the truth that comes from God. His standards are absolute, and He punishes those who do not repent of violating them. Therefore, let's take seriously the fear of sin's consequences and make it an incentive for repentance and godly living.

Thinking It Over

Define in positive terms what it means to fear God.

According to Proverbs 9:10,

what is one benefit of fearing the Lord?

The right kind of fear prompts us to do right.

### Jeremiah 8:4-12 Tree Vs. Bear



Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times . . . . But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord. —Jeremiah 8:7

It's not often that police must break up a brawl between a bear and a tree. The fight began with a playful insult and an accidental bump. Suddenly the bear talked! Then the tree talked back! Soon a guy in a bear suit was mixing it up with someone dressed as a tree. Police had to pull the two apart. The two mascots for Stanford and University of California had stopped entertaining and started fighting.

Bears and trees weren't made to fight. Neither were we. Yet, throughout history people who were created to love and serve each other have often added insult to injury.

The amazing thing, according to the prophet Jeremiah, is that even those who know God's law can hurt one another without regret. "No man repented of his wickedness," he reported (8:6). "They were not at all ashamed" (v.12). Jeremiah also expressed God's astonishment that even creatures of the wild reflect more wisdom than those who say "peace, peace" while doing harm (vv.7,11).

The One who designed birds to migrate at His command (v.7) does not merely call attention to our wrongs. He offers to fill our emptiness with the fullness of Himself. The alternatives are good: grace for bitterness, wisdom for foolishness, peace for conflict.

Heavenly Father, forgive us for our reluctance

to recognize and confess our sins. Replace our

eagerness to vindicate ourselves with a willingness

to see things Your way. Help us to repent. Amen.

Repentance not only says "I'm sorry," it also says "I turn from my sin."

#### **Jeremiah 8:4-7 Even Animals Come Home**

Why has this people slidden back? . . . They refuse to return. —Jeremiah 8:5

A homeowner in Wisconsin said he heard a cat meowing on the front porch. When he opened the door, a big long-haired, gray male cat walked in, checked things out, began purring, and then jumped up on a chair as if he belonged there. Family members couldn't believe their eyes. But when they compared the cat to pictures taken years earlier, they could only conclude that it was their long-lost pet. Clem the cat had come home after 8 years of being who knows where.

What remarkable homing instincts God has given to some animals! On a spiritual level, why is it that the backslidden child of God seems to have less? Why do we in our rebellion show less sense than the animals? We've been designed by a loving Creator, who has given us every reason to want to come home. In His presence there is hope, love, lasting protection, and fullness of joy. Away from Him there is temporary pleasure, but eternal loss and despair.

Jeremiah reminded us that even the birds live according to the times and places and ways that the Lord has built into them (Jeremiah 8:7). Only man seems determined to run to his own self-destruction.

Father, forgive us for running away from You. Lead us back to You today.

Savior, lead me, lest I stray,

Gently lead me all the way;

I am safe when by Thy side,

I would in Thy love abide. —Davis

It's never too soon to come back to God.

#### **Jeremiah 8:18–9:11 LAMENT FOR CORPORATE SIN**

"You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me," declares the LORD. Jeremiah 9:6

Throughout the twentieth century, the U.S. government sanctioned discrimination against African Americans who sought to become homeowners. The appraisal manuals from the Federal Housing Administration instructed banks to avoid areas with "inharmonious racial groups" and recommended that local governments implement racially restrictive property covenants and zoning ordinances that would prohibit blacks from owning property.

No part of our world has been left untouched by the Fall. Sin infects all individuals, permeates all relationships, and saturates all of

our institutions, organizations, and societies. Our identity as citizens or members of an organization means that we have a reason to grieve over corporate sin, even if we individually have not participated in the wrongdoing.

In our reading, the prophet Jeremiah laments over the sin of his people. The text is a conversation between Jeremiah and God in which the Lord describes the sin of Israel and Judah. They are guilty of idolatry (Jeremiah 8:19), deceit (Jeremiah 9:4–5), and manipulation (Jeremiah 9:8). Even Jeremiah admits that they are morally and spiritually unfaithful (Jeremiah 9:2). God sums up the attitude and action of the people: “They go from one sin to another,” and “they weary themselves with sinning” (Jeremiah 9:3, 5).

There’s no suggestion that Jeremiah himself was adulterous, deceitful, or idolatrous. Yet he grieved the sin and judgment of his people. “I mourn, and horror grips me” (Jeremiah 8:21). Even though he might wish to pick a new group, a new people, a new identity, Jeremiah knew that wasn’t really an option (Jeremiah 9:2). We do not get to choose the families or groups that we are born into. Jeremiah shows us how to respond when we are confronted with corporate sin. Rather than denying involvement or making excuses, he lamented over this sin before God.

**APPLY THE WORD** It doesn’t require much time to make a list of corporate sins: sexual abuse in the church, institutionalized racism in the nation, predatory practices of businesses, gossip in neighborhoods. Spend time grieving over these sins and their destructive effects on the lives of others. Pour out your heart to God in lament in behalf of your country, church, or family, acknowledging and mourning corporate sin.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 8:4-17 Good Fear](#)
- [Jeremiah 8:4-12 Tree Vs. Bear](#)
- [Jeremiah 8:4-7 Even Animals Come Home](#)

### Even Animals Come Home

September 14, 2001

Read: Jeremiah 8:4-7 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 19-21; 2 Corinthians 7

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I am safe when by Thy side,  
I would in Thy love abide. —Davis

It’s never too soon to come back to God.

By Mart DeHaan

## JEREMIAH 9

Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me. —Jeremiah 9:24

My wife and I have been married 38 years, so you would think we would know each other pretty well. But I am still finding out things about her I never knew. Just the other day, for example, I learned that she really likes musicals. That was new to me!

It takes a lifetime to get to know someone well. The same is true in getting to know God. In today's Bible reading, Jeremiah said that if we are to "glory" or boast in anything, it should be that we know God (Jer. 9:24). And Paul prayed that believers would "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

We cannot learn all there is to know about the Lord in a few weeks, months, or even years. It's an ongoing process that involves reading and studying His Word, praying, and learning from other believers. Growing in our knowledge of Him can be as thrilling 50 years from now as it is today. In fact, I believe that throughout eternity we will still be learning new things about our God (Eph. 2:7).

Begin spending time with the Lord now. Make Him a priority in your daily schedule. And He will make Himself known to you in new and exciting ways.

To walk close by Your side, my dear Savior,

To be led by You, doing each task,

To feast richly on grace at Your table,

And to know You is all that I ask. —Somerville

Time spent with God is time well spent.

### **Jeremiah 9:23-26 Who Gets The Credit?**

Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me. —Jeremiah 9:24

Chris Langan has an IQ higher than Albert Einstein's. Moustafa Ismail has 31-inch biceps and can lift 600 pounds. Bill Gates is estimated to be worth billions. Those who have extraordinary abilities or possessions might be tempted to think more highly of themselves than they should. But we don't have to be wildly smart, strong, or wealthy to want to take credit for our achievements. Any size of accomplishment carries with it this question: Who will get the credit?

During a time of judgment, God spoke to the Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah. He said: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches" (Jer. 9:23). Rather, "Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me" (v.24). God wanted His people to prize Him and His excellence above anything else.

If we allow praise to inflate our self-image, we're forgetting that "every good gift . . . comes down from the Father" (James 1:17). It's better to give God the glory—not only because it protects our hearts from pride but also because He rightfully deserves it. He is God, the One "who does great things . . . marvelous things without number" (Job 5:9).

Not I, but Christ, be honored, loved, exalted;

Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard;

Not I, but Christ, in every look and action;

Not I, but Christ, in every thought and word. —Whiddington

We were created to give God the glory.

### **Jeremiah 9:24 The First Step**

Read: Isaiah 57:14-21

Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord. —Jeremiah 9:24

I'm distressed that so many sermons and books today are exclusively devoted to techniques on how to help people cope successfully with life's pains, problems, and struggles. There is a place, of course, for preaching on everyday subjects and for "how-to" books. But without teaching people the great biblical truths of God, His power, His sovereignty, His grace, and His salvation through Christ, they get no help in building a solid spiritual foundation for their lives.

When we accept the reality of these great theological truths, we have a sound basis for a godly life. Once we come to know and

understand the Lord, whom Isaiah called “the High and Lofty One” (57:15), we gain a stability in life that is essential for any difficulty we may encounter.

But what is usually suggested first when a marriage is falling apart? See a marriage counselor. Get into group therapy. Read a popular book on success in marriage. These approaches have some merit, but the first step in solving any problem is to make sure we have a right relationship with God, and then seek His wisdom.

Lord, help us to look to You and Your Word as the first step in solving our problems.

Give me the Bible when my heart is broken,

When sin and grief have filled my soul with fear—

Give me the precious words by Jesus spoken,

Hold up faith's lamp to show my Savior near. —Owen

Many books can inform, but only the Bible can transform.

### **Jeremiah 9:24 Knowing God**

Read: Psalm 96:1-13

Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord. —Jeremiah 9:24

It's one thing to know about God, but it's quite another to know Him personally. Let's see how this distinction applies when considering some of God's attributes.

The thought that God is present everywhere is staggering. But to be aware of His presence in times of need brings comfort and hope.

The thought that God knows everything is mind-boggling. But to have the confidence that no detail of our lives escapes His attention is to enjoy a peace that endures through every trial.

The thought that the Lord is all-powerful makes us marvel at His greatness. But to have Him actually work in, through, and for us encourages us to relax in His mighty arms.

The thought that God never changes is a reassuring truth. But to commit ourselves to the care of this never-changing One is to know the stability of His faithfulness.

The thought that God is love is wonderful to contemplate. But to know Him as a loving Redeemer through personal faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, brings the joy of sins forgiven.

The writer of Psalm 96 knew God, and that relationship was reflected in his words. His heart poured out praise, and he longed for others to know the Lord and worship Him as well.

Do you know God personally? Does it show?

Sing praise to God who reigns above,

The God of all creation,

The God of power, the God of love,

The God of our salvation. —Schutz

Knowing about God is fascinating; knowing God personally is life-changing.

### **Jeremiah 9:24 Knowing God**

Read: Genesis 6:1-9

Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me. —Jeremiah 9:24

According to Genesis 6, Noah lived in a time of terrible wickedness, yet he kept himself from all the evil around him. He must have known the Lord in a close, personal way, for he was described as a man who “walked with God” (v.9).

This raises an important question. How do we really get to know someone? Let me illustrate: Many years have passed since that

wonderful day my wife and I were married, and I realize how little I knew her at that time. Only after living with her and growing together, through both the sweet and the bitter experiences of life, have I come to appreciate her for who and what she is. I know her better and love her more than ever before.

In a similar manner, it takes time to get to know God. We hear what the Bible says about God the Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit. But to really get to know God, we must receive Jesus as our personal Savior. Then we must learn all we can about Him through studying God's Word and fellowshiping with Him each day. Getting acquainted with God means talking with our heavenly Father in prayer, trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus, and daily relying on the power and guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

That's what it takes to know God.

Life's journey is to know the Lord,

To trust Him every day,

To read His Word, to learn His will,

To love Him, and to pray. —Sper

To know the Bible is good; to know its Author is better.

### **Jeremiah 9:23-24 Getting To Know Him**

Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me. —Jeremiah 9:24

My wife and I have been married 38 years, so you would think we would know each other pretty well. But I am still finding out things about her I never knew. Just the other day, for example, I learned that she really likes musicals. That was new to me!

It takes a lifetime to get to know someone well. The same is true in getting to know God. In today's Bible reading, Jeremiah said that if we are to "glory" or boast in anything, it should be that we know God (Jer. 9:24). And Paul prayed that believers would "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

We cannot learn all there is to know about the Lord in a few weeks, months, or even years. It's an ongoing process that involves reading and studying His Word, praying, and learning from other believers. Growing in our knowledge of Him can be as thrilling 50 years from now as it is today. In fact, I believe that throughout eternity we will still be learning new things about our God (Eph. 2:7).

Begin spending time with the Lord now. Make Him a priority in your daily schedule. And He will make Himself known to you in new and exciting ways.

To walk close by Your side, my dear Savior,

To be led by You, doing each task,

To feast richly on grace at Your table,

And to know You is all that I ask. —Somerville

Time spent with God is time well spent.

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 9:23-26 Who Gets The Credit](#)
- [Jeremiah 9:24 The First Step](#)
- [Jeremiah 9:24 Knowing God](#)
- [Jeremiah 9:24 Knowing God \(2\)](#)
- [Jeremiah 9:23-24 Getting To Know Him](#)

#### **Getting To Know Him**

August 5, 1999

Read: Jeremiah 9:23-24 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 68-69; Romans 8:1-21

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Time spent with God is time well spent.

By David Egener

## JEREMIAH 10

### **Jeremiah 10:6-13 The Eternal God**

The Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. —Jeremiah 10:10

If we stand on a street corner to watch a parade, our limited vision permits us to see the various floats and bands only as they come into view and pass by in succession. But if we were to hover high above in a helicopter, we would see the entire parade route with everybody and everything in it.

This helps us understand the way it is with God, the timeless One. He sees human events from a perspective that is so much broader than ours. He has an all-encompassing view and sees everything from start to finish.

The fact that God exists "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 90:2) is not only a profound theological statement but a comforting and reassuring truth as well. Because "He is the living God and the everlasting King" (Jeremiah 10:10), without beginning or ending, we have the confidence that He can be relied upon to keep His promises and complete all His plans for us.

Nothing in our lives, whether big or small, takes God by surprise. The eternal, all-knowing One is fully aware of everything that has already occurred, that is now taking place, and that will yet happen.

I'm glad we serve an eternal, all-knowing God, aren't you?

Our earthly sight is limited,

The future we can't see;

Let come what may, one thing we know:

Our God will faithful be. —Hess

In a changing world, God's changeless character gives us confidence.

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### **Jeremiah 10:23 God's Diverse Ways**

Read: Hebrews 11:30-40

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. —Jeremiah 10:23

A woman testified, “I was diagnosed as having inoperable cancer, but I trusted God to heal me and He did.” Yet many others in the same situation and with just as much faith have fervently prayed, but they died.

I'm in my middle seventies, feel strong, and am as active as ever. But I know of Christian men my age who are coping with severe physical problems. Does God heal only those with a strong faith? Is good health a sign that God loves one person more than another who isn't well?

Hebrews 11 answers these questions with a resounding “No!” It tells of devout believers who were persecuted. Some were miraculously delivered, while others were imprisoned, tortured, and slain. But all of them are cited equally for their faith. The issue then and now is not God's love or the strength of one's faith but God's sovereignty and wisdom.

My friend Archie walks with difficulty and can't use his arms very well, but he believes he knows God better than if he had been healed. He testifies of having grace for each day, and he anticipates the day when he will be given his resurrection body.

Yes, God's ways are diverse. Accepting this is the first step to a stronger faith in Him.

God has a purpose in our heartaches;

The Savior always knows what's best;

We learn so many precious lessons

In each sorrow, trial, and test. —Jarvis

God tries our faith so that we may try His faithfulness.

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 10:6-13 The Eternal God](#)
- [Jeremiah 10:23 God's Diverse Ways](#)

#### **God's Diverse Ways**

June 28, 1994

Read: Hebrews 11:30-40 | Bible in a Year: Job 11-13; Acts 9:1-21

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God tries our faith so that we may try His faithfulness.

By Herbert VanderLugt

## JEREMIAH 11

### Jeremiah 11:1–23 BROKEN COVENANT

Obey me . . . and you will be my people, and I will be your God. Jeremiah 11:4

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 11:1–12:17]

In the ancient Near East, powerful kings would often form treaties with their subjects by making covenants with them. Both king and vassal would swear an oath whereby the king promised his protection and blessing and the vassal promised his service and obedience. Breaking the covenant oath was a serious violation resulting in curses specified in the treaty.

The theme of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel, and Israel’s violation of their end of the covenant, lies at the heart of the book of Jeremiah. God had graciously rescued Israel from the oppression of Egyptian slavery and formed a binding covenant. The terms were simple: “Obey me . . . and you will be my people, and I will be your God” (Jeremiah 11:4). Unfortunately, God’s people refused to uphold their end of the covenant: “they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts” (Jeremiah 11:8). The people worshiped other gods; the covenant had been broken.

As a result God reminded them of the curses specified in the original covenant. The people’s sin was so egregious that God gave them over to their false gods. When disaster would come, Israel could turn to them for help—help that would never arrive. The Lord even instructed Jeremiah not to pray for the people, underscoring God’s judgment on their covenantal violation.

One might think that in response to divine rebuke and warning, the people would turn to God in repentance. Instead, the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown, plotted to kill the prophet who delivered God’s message. In the end, God’s last word highlights the hardness of their hearts and seals their judgment for covenant unfaithfulness.

**APPLY THE WORD** When someone points out our failings and disobedience, we often become angry instead of heeding the admonition that can restore our relationship with God. Think of someone in your life who, perhaps like Jeremiah, helped you see your own sin. Thank God for His grace in sending that person to you. Then take time also to thank the person whom God used.

## JEREMIAH 12



## **Jeremiah 12:1-17 When Things Get Worse**

If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses. —Jeremiah 12:5

A woman was experiencing several complications from a serious illness. “As a nurse,” she said, “I know what to expect. Things will only get worse.” After listing the problems that would come as her disease progressed, she expressed her confidence that the Lord would be with her all the way. Then she quipped, “I just wish it wouldn’t take Him so long to take me to heaven.”

In Jeremiah 12, we find that the prophet was despondent. Then the Lord told him that what he was currently experiencing was like running with the infantry. But what lay ahead for him would be like trying to keep up with the cavalry (v.5).

Treachery on the part of his own countrymen, as well as famine, natural disasters, and invasion by ruthless enemies were in store for him and his people. But a ray of light penetrated the darkness of the scene. If the Israelites (and even the cruel pagan invaders) would repent and put their trust in God, they would be restored and be able to bask in the sunlight of God’s favor.

Is your health deteriorating? Are your family and work situations getting worse? Do you worry about national disaster? If you are a believer, don’t be discouraged. The final outcome will be glorious for all who trust in God!

O Lord, we bring our troubled hearts

To You in fervent prayer;

Now help us wait expectantly

While resting in Your care. —Sper

Troubles seem smaller when you remember the greatness of God.

## **Jeremiah 12:1-17 Truth And Tenderness**

I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back. —Jeremiah 12:15

Bobby was feeling down. He had just been cut from the school basketball team. To make matters worse, his dad had found out that he had stolen some items from a store.

When his father talked to Bobby, he let his son explain what had happened at school and at the store. The father tenderly told him that God can use disappointments early in life, like being cut from the team, to prepare us for bigger ones that are sure to come.

Then he firmly told his son that he would not tolerate shoplifting. Bobby quickly promised he would never steal again. Even though his dad felt sorry for him, he made Bobby face the consequences of his actions by returning the stolen goods to the store manager and confessing what he had done.

God is gentle with His children too—tender but never compromising the truth. He told the discouraged prophet Jeremiah that learning to face small problems would help him tackle the big ones later (Jer. 12:5). And though God made His rebellious people face the consequences of their sin, He showed His tenderness when He called them “the dearly beloved of My soul” (v.7).

Whether we are facing hardships or the results of our own sin, God treats us with truth and tenderness.

What tenderness the Father shows

To sinners in their pain!

He grants to them His strength to bear

The hurt that brings them gain. —DJD

God’s love is both tough and tender.

## **Jeremiah 12:5 Run With Horses**

If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? —Jeremiah 12:5

In the Olympic Games, the greatest runners of the world compete for gold medals and laurel wreaths. Long before the final race, competitions are held in countries throughout the world to weed out those who are not fast enough to compete. At the Games, the fastest of the fast qualify for the final competition.

The prophet Jeremiah was also involved in a fierce competition—but it was with idolaters and wicked priests. He was responding to the Lord’s call to condemn Judah and to predict her downfall. He became so discouraged that he asked the Lord, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are [they] happy?” (12:1).

That’s when God said to Jeremiah, in essence, “The competition has just begun. So far you’ve been dealing with minor issues (running with footmen). How will you handle it when the really tough stuff comes (contending with horses)?”

Perhaps you’ve run into some difficulties recently: your boss, an illness, conflicts in your church. You’ve pleaded with the Lord for relief. But He may have said in response, “Toughen up. Dig in. It may get worse.” When He asks you to “run with horses,” He will be with you to strengthen and sustain you. That’s what God does.

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 3:14

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 12 When Things Get Worse](#)
- [Jeremiah 12 Truth And Tenderness](#)
- [Jeremiah 12 Run With Horses](#)

Run With Horses

August 5, 2006

Read: Jeremiah 12 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 68-69; Romans 8:1-21

If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? —Jeremiah 12:5

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By David Egener

## JEREMIAH 13

### Jeremiah 13:1–27 PROSPECT OF EXILE

“Why has this happened to me?’—it is because of your many sins.” Jeremiah 13:22

We’ve all heard the adage that actions speak louder than words, or a picture is worth a thousand words. Sometimes words alone do not convince as well as actions. In the case of Jeremiah, God chose a similar course by having Jeremiah enact a kind of living parable.

God instructed Jeremiah to buy a new linen cloth, a kind of undergarment worn close to the skin, waist to knees. Over a long period of unspecified days, Jeremiah was to wear it without washing, then hide it in a rocky crevice, and then dig it up again. By the end, the linen cloth had become dirty, ruined, and useless. All of this was to symbolize God’s intimate relationship with Judah that over time had become sullied and ruined. As a result, the Lord evoked another image, this time of wineskins and drunkenness, to depict the ruin and destruction coming upon His people. Sin has the effect of ruining our relationship with God.

Even so, Jeremiah offered yet again a call to do what was right—to pay attention to the word of the Lord, and to give Him the glory due His name. Time was running out, and if their pride and arrogance continued to prevent their repentance, captivity and exile were the coming judgment. Royalty would lose their thrones and crowns, supposed allies would betray them, and “all Judah will be carried into exile” (Jeremiah 13:19).

In the face of such coming disaster, a natural question might be: why is this happening? The answer is clear: it was because of Judah’s stubbornness in sin. So accustomed were they to their sinful habits that they were as likely to repent and do good as an Ethiopian or a leopard would be able to change their skin. This is the dark danger of habitual sin.

**APPLY THE WORD** So much in the early chapters in Jeremiah revolves around God’s call to repentance over sin. Is there someone in your life who needs a firm, but gentle, exhortation to turn from sin before an intractable habit sets in? Ask God today for the wisdom and courage to speak in love to this person that they might turn to God and live.

### **Jeremiah 13:20-27 Impossible To Change?**

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil. —Jeremiah 13:23

Would God be unfair to punish people who violated His rules? Should He be more tolerant of sin?

A man who is in jail for robbery told me he has been stealing since boyhood. He says he can’t stop and he knows he will be in trouble again. He doesn’t think God has a right to punish him.

Liars have wept in my presence, saying they can’t stop lying. Alcohol abusers say they aren’t to blame for their addiction. A spokesman says that telling a homosexual to repent is “like telling a person to change the color of his skin.”

The prophet Jeremiah would agree that it is sometimes impossible for people to change their conduct—but for a different reason. It’s not that they cannot change; it’s because they do not want to change (Jer. 13:23-25). And because of that, God is completely just in His judgment.

If you are enslaved to sinful practices or destructive habits, you can be delivered. Admit your sinfulness and helplessness to God. Accept His offer of complete forgiveness through Jesus, who died in your place. Rely on the Holy Spirit, who can enable you to resist temptation (1 Cor. 6:19; 10:13). God can transform your heart and enable you to change, making possible what seems impossible.

The Savior is waiting to help you,

And cleanse every sin-stain away;

By faith you can know full forgiveness

And find true fulfillment today. —HGB

To break sin’s grip, put yourself in God’s hands.

---

### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 13:20-27 Impossible To Change?](#)

#### **Impossible To Change?**

August 22, 1996

Read: Jeremiah 13:20-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 110-112; 1 Corinthians 5

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By Herbert VanderLugt

## JEREMIAH 14

### Jeremiah 14:1–12; 16:10–21 DROUGHT, FAMINE, DISASTER

Do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves. Hebrews 12:5–6

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 14:1–17:4]

Most teachers would agree with the old Latin saying, *Repetitio est mater studiorum*, which means, “Repetition is the mother of learning.” It usually takes repetition before a lesson will stick.

God did the same for His people through Jeremiah. Once again in today’s passages, we are met with the familiar theme of rebuke over sin and warning of judgment. Like their forefathers, Judah had forsaken God, followed other gods, and remained in stubborn disobedience. Even the prophet’s plea for God’s mercy fell on deaf ears (Jer 14:7–9). Jeremiah recognized Israel’s covenant faithlessness, but nevertheless turned to God, the “hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress” (Jer 14:8). Yet in response, God reminded them of their unrestrained sin and their coming judgment. In Jer 16, God handed them over to what they wanted: to worship false gods all day long, this time in a foreign land. It would seem that Judah’s sin had reached a climactic point of no return. God’s mercy was exhausted.

Or was it? Just when it seemed all hope was gone, we find within this dark message a new theme: grace. Briefly, but clearly, God hinted that after the imminent punishment, there would be a day of restoration to their land (Jer 16:14–15). Just as God once brought Israel out of Egypt, so again He would bring them out of the hands of the northern oppressors.

God’s grace is even bigger than that. Not just would Israel be restored, but all nations “from the ends of the earth” (Jer 16:19) would one day stream to the Lord, confess their idolatry, and be taught to know the living God. How marvelous that such dark warnings of coming judgment could also contain such glimmering promises of abundant grace!

**APPLY THE WORD** Praise God that we worship One who, even in His discipline, does not abandon His grace to us! The author of Hebrews also reminds us of this lesson: “Do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves” (Heb 12:5–6). Try committing these verses to memory or write them down, to be reminded of God’s grace.

## JEREMIAH 15

### Jeremiah 15:15-21 Food For The Year

Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. —Jeremiah 15:16

It’s a good thing I grew up liking black-eyed peas, because my mother served them every New Year’s Day. She didn’t think this

tradition would bring good luck, as some people believe, but the practice persisted at our house.

Many Americans welcome the new year with cabbage, herring, honey, sardines, or salt. The Japanese eat long noodles. The Greeks bake a special bread. In Spain, the custom is to eat 12 individual grapes in the seconds leading up to the new year. Anthropologists say that eating certain foods to change one's fortune dates back to ancient Babylonia.

The prophet Jeremiah wasn't looking for good luck. As God's spokesman during a difficult time in Israel's history, he suffered rejection and persecution. Yet God's Word produced deep joy in his heart. In a vivid statement, he said to God, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16).

Eating black-eyed peas won't influence the year ahead of me one bit. But if I'll make God's Word a part of my life each day through reading, study, and memorization, that will make a difference. The Bible is food for thought and nourishment for the new year.

Then let me love my Bible more

And take a fresh delight

By day to read these wonders o'er

And meditate by night. —Watts

The Bible is bread for daily use, not cake for special occasions.

### **Jeremiah 15:15-21 Digesting The Word**

Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. —Jeremiah 15:16

King James is famous for the Bible translation that bears his name. Around the same time as the printing of the Bible, he also made revisions to The Book of Common Prayer. Still used today, this guide to intercession and worship contains a marvelous prayer for internalizing the Bible: "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may . . . hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of [Your] holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life."

Many centuries earlier, Jeremiah the prophet expressed a similar way of letting the Scriptures nourish our hearts: "Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). We internalize the Word as we "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" a passage of Scripture through prayerful meditation.

Ask the Lord to help you apply the Bible to your heart today. Take time to ponder the meat and milk of the Word (Heb. 5:12). As you quiet your heart, God will teach you about Himself through His Book.

Lord, I meditate on Your precepts and contemplate

Your ways. I delight myself in Your statutes;

I will not forget Your Word. Open my eyes that

I may see wondrous things from Your law.

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. —Bacon

### **Jeremiah 15:15-21 Heart Food**

Your words were found, and I ate them. —Jeremiah 15:16

I love food! I love to see it beautifully presented, and I love to savor the taste. If it were up to me, I would eat more often than I should—although it wouldn't help my waistline! So, it's a good thing my wife, Martie, knows when to lovingly remind me to eat healthful foods in the right amount.

Reading Jeremiah's interesting thought—that when he found the words of God (even the words of God's judgment) he "ate them" (Jer. 15:16)—makes me wonder if I ingest God's Word as eagerly, as lovingly, and as often.

Clearly, Jeremiah did not actually eat God's Word. It was his way of saying that he read and savored it in his innermost being. And that's exactly where God's Word is intended to go. The Word is heart food! When we ingest it, the Holy Spirit provides the power to help us grow to be more like Jesus. His Word transforms how we think about God, money, enemies, careers, and family. In other words, it's really good for us.

So, “eat” God’s Word to your heart’s content! No doubt you will find yourself agreeing with the prophet Jeremiah when he said: “Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (15:16).

Lord, cultivate in me an appetite for Your Word.

Thank You that the Bible is food for my soul. Lead

me to read it, to savor it, to ingest it, and to know

the strength that Your words can give to my often-failing heart.

The more you feast on God’s Word, the healthier you will become.

### **Jeremiah 15:16 Take As Directed**

August 1, 2005

Take As Directed

Read: Psalm 119:33-48

Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. —Jeremiah 15:16

Dr. Smiley Blanton was a busy New York City psychiatrist who kept a Bible on his desk. Somewhat surprised to see this, a client asked, “Do you, a psychiatrist, read the Bible?”

“I not only read it, I study it,” said Dr. Blanton, a devout Christian. Then he added, “If people would absorb its message, a lot of psychiatrists would go out of business.”

To clarify his point, Dr. Blanton said that if clients who are plagued by guilt would read the parable of the prodigal son and his forgiving father (Luke 15:11-32), they could find the key to healing.

Do we look for healing in God’s powerful Word? We may read the Bible, but do we really believe it, study it, and put its teachings into practice? The saving truth of Scripture is God’s potent medicine for delivering us from the disease of sin.

The prophet Jeremiah, despite difficulties and hardships, found joy in the words of the Lord (Jeremiah 15:16). And the psalmist loved the commandments of God (Psalm 119:48) and said to Him, “I will delight myself in Your commandments . . . . I will meditate on Your statutes” (vv.47-48).

Like medicine, God’s Word must be taken as directed. Are you internalizing its truth?

God’s Word brings health and healing

To every sin-sick soul,

But we must take and heed it

Before we can be whole. —D. De Haan

The Bible contains the vitamins for soul health.

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 15:15-21 Food For The Year](#)
- [Jeremiah 15:15-21 Digesting The Word](#)
- [Jeremiah 15:15-21 Heart Food](#)
- [Jeremiah 15:16 Take As Directed](#)

#### **Take As Directed**

August 1, 2005

Read: Psalm 119:33-48 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 57-59; Romans 4

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Dr. Smiley Blanton was a busy New York City psychiatrist who kept a Bible on his desk. Somewhat surprised to see this, a client asked, “Do you, a psychiatrist, read the Bible?”

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God’s Word brings health and healing  
To every sin-sick soul,  
But we must take and heed it  
Before we can be whole. —D. De Haan

The Bible contains the vitamins for soul health.

By Vernon C. Grounds

## JEREMIAH 16

## JEREMIAH 17

### **Jeremiah 17:5–18 A NEEDED PICTURE OF BLESSING**

Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. Jeremiah 17:7

Often in a hurricane, those who have endured the gusting winds and fierce rains will enjoy a respite from the storm when the eye of the hurricane arrives. More wind and rain may be coming, but for now there is a change of pace. The same is true in our reading today where we move from harsh rebuke and warning to a new tone: a description of blessing in relationship with God.

Perhaps in response to Jeremiah’s earlier complaints about the difficult and unrewarding task of preaching God’s word to a stubborn audience (see Jeremiah 15), God here offered Jeremiah new insight. Echoing Psalm 1, Scripture contrasts the one who trusts only in human strength to one who trusts in the Lord. Both are like plants. One is likened to a “bush in the wastelands” (Jeremiah 17:6) that knows no abundance. The other is like a tree planted by waters, verdant and growing even during drought. Both may experience difficulty, but only the one who trusts in God will thrive.

Jeremiah 17:9 and Jeremiah 17:10 continue the theme of God’s blessing by using a proverb expressing the idea that the human heart is “deceitful” (literally sick or weak) and hard to understand. Nevertheless, God searches and knows the human heart and mind, and He rewards accordingly. Linked to the previous verses, Scripture assures us that God sees and knows the one who turns to Him in confidence, and there is blessing and reward in such trust.

The speaker of the text now shifts, offering Jeremiah’s climactic confession that the Lord is the “hope of Israel” (Jeremiah 17:13) for those who trust in Him. Despite the opposition Jeremiah faced as God’s preacher, he now confidently affirmed that true healing and salvation will only be found in God, “for you are the one I praise” (Jeremiah 17:14).

**APPLY THE WORD** Like many who are called to preach God’s Word, Jeremiah faced the challenge of opposition and needed the reminder of God’s blessing. This Sunday, pray for all those who preach God’s Word, especially those in your church, that they would be faithful to the truth of Scripture, and also find comfort and solace in the blessing of relationship with God.

### **Jeremiah 17:5-10**

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky said, “Nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer; nothing is more difficult than to understand him.” That will be our challenge this month as we study the “bad boys” of the Bible. The simple part is identifying the most infamous sinners in Scripture and pointing out what they did wrong; the difficult but crucial task will be relating to their weaknesses and recognizing how we can and do commit similar acts.

What makes this humble caution so daunting is our tendency to imagine a division between ourselves and the really bad sinners. We use words like they and them instead of we and us to describe people like Goliath and Ahab who blatantly opposed God, or like the Pharisees and angry crowds who rejected Jesus. But their sins are not as easy to avoid as we think.

Today’s passage tears down the walls of classification built up to distinguish levels of sinfulness in humanity. Verse 9 paints humanity with a broad brush. Some people believe that deep down, we’re all basically good people. But Jeremiah teaches here that deep down we are all helplessly depraved. The phrase “beyond cure” in the NIV is elsewhere translated “desperately sick,” “desperately wicked,” “hopelessly dark,” and “exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick!” It’s hard to put a positive spin on that.

But God does. He holds the cure for our sin. Jeremiah sets up the great division of sin, not between the terrible sinners and the not-so-bad sinners, but between the sinners who rely on their own power and those who put their trust in God to save them.

Dostoevsky claimed nothing was more difficult than to understand an evildoer, and Jeremiah supports that idea completely. Indeed, we can’t (Jeremiah 17:9)! We must not depend on an innate sense of morality to save us from evil. Our basic sin nature leads us down the same roads that consumed the worst evildoers. But God understands the heart (Jeremiah 17:10). His Word will reveal our sin, and point us to the cure.

**APPLY THE WORD** Why focus on bad boys? In their extremes, they reveal the darkness we think we can cover up. This month we’ll look at three main groups: those who chronically rebelled against God, those whose lives were destroyed by one critical bad decision, and those whom God redeemed from the depths of badness. Prepare your heart to see what Scripture wants us to learn from these men. It is by His grace alone that we can avoid such colossal failure.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 17:1-8 Hope Beyond Hope](#)

### Hope Beyond Hope

December 19, 1996

Read: Jeremiah 17:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Jonah 1-4; Revelation 10

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. —Jeremiah 17:7

The English poet Alexander Pope wrote, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast: Man never is, but always to be blest.” But where does man turn when hope dries up?

The director of a medical clinic told of a terminally ill young man who came in for his usual treatment. A new doctor who was on duty said to him casually and cruelly, “You know, don’t you, that you won’t live out the year?”

As the young man left, he stopped by the director’s desk and wept. “That man took away my hope,” he blurted out.

“I guess he did,” replied the director. “Maybe it’s time to find a new one.”

Commenting on this incident, Lewis Smedes wrote, “Is there a hope when hope is taken away? Is there hope when the situation is hopeless? That question leads us to Christian hope, for in the Bible, hope is no longer a passion for the possible. It becomes a passion for the promise.”

When our expectation is rooted in God and in His Son Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin and death, the blessing that Alexander Pope says we are always looking for becomes a present reality. Because God is the God of hope (Rom. 15:13), He alone keeps hope flowing when its springs dry up in the human breast.

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name. —Mote



The secret of coping is hoping in God.

By Dennis J. De Haan

■ [Jeremiah 17:1-10 The Pine Looper](#)

**The Pine Looper**

November 1, 2004

Read: Jeremiah 17:1-10 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 24-26; Titus 2

He shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river. —Jeremiah 17:8

In the summer of 1992, a fire blackened 4,500 acres of forest about 35 miles north of Atlantic City. One homeowner saw a fireball with 60-foot flames come roaring up across the street from his house, before veering away. The Associated Press quoted him as saying, “I’ve worked 25 years of my life here. The thought of having it gone in 10 minutes makes you want to stay for the last possible minute.”

The fire was difficult to contain because of dry conditions. The forest was dry despite rainfall, partly because of an insect called the pine looper, which defoliates trees.

The dry-tree condition behind this New Jersey fire has a parallel in the history of Israel. Jeremiah said that his countrymen had become like dry shrubs in a desert rather than green trees by a river (17:6-8). Even more alarming, he said they had aroused the fire of God’s anger (v.4) by trusting in man and departing from the Lord (v.5). For Christians today, it’s life’s fiery trials that threaten to scorch our souls if we’re trusting in our own strength.

Father, forgive us for making ourselves dry and leafless. Without Your mercy, we would be consumed when the heat comes. Teach us to root ourselves in the river of Your sufficiency.

The person who relies upon  
The Lord’s sufficiency  
Is like a tree that’s planted by  
Deep waters flowing free. —Sper

The fires of life will not destroy you if you’re watered by the River of Life.

By Mart DeHaan

■ [Jeremiah 17:1-8 The Well-Watered Life](#)

**The Well-Watered Life**

February 12, 2015

Read: Jeremiah 17:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 13; Matthew 26:26-50

He shall be like a tree planted by the waters . . . ; its leaf will be green. —Jeremiah 17:8

I have a friend who lives on a ranch in the wide-open spaces of Montana. The road to his home is a long trail that winds through the parched and barren landscape of the wilderness. As you drive toward his home, you can’t help but notice the contrasting strip of green trees and vibrant vegetation meandering through the ranch. One of the finest trout rivers in North America cuts through the property, and anything that grows near its banks gets the benefit of an unending source of vital water.

This is the picture Jeremiah paints when he says that those who trust in the Lord are “like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river” (Jer. 17:8). Many may choose the wilting heat and choking drought of life apart from God, but those who trust in God will be vibrant and fruitful. Depending on Him is like putting our roots into the refreshing water of His goodness. We are strengthened with the confidence that His steadfast love for us will never fail.

God will ultimately make all things right. Trusting that He will turn our pain to gain and use suffering to mature us empowers us to become fruit-bearers in a dry and thirsty land.

Lord, thank You for not leaving me alone  
in the withering heat of life. I will put the  
roots of my trust into the river of Your

unfailing promises and steadfast love!

Put your roots down by the river of God's goodness.

INSIGHT: The words of Jeremiah 17:7-8 echo those of Psalm 1:2-3: Blessed are those who "delight in the law of the Lord . . . . They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do" (nlt).

By Joe Stowell

- [Jeremiah 17:5-11 No Regrets](#)
- [Jeremiah 17:5-10 Living Bridges](#)
- [Jeremiah 17:5-10 Where Is Your Trust?](#)

### **Where Is Your Trust?**

April 5, 2005

Read: Jeremiah 17:5-10 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 1-3; Luke 8:26-56

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. —Jeremiah 17:7

Let's be honest. Are we always able to trust ourselves in everything? Even the apostle Paul said emphatically about himself, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). He wouldn't trust himself to do the right thing unless he kept his body under strict discipline.

Today's Bible reading reminds us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9.) It is not possible for any of us to fathom the extent of the deceptions of our heart. How then can we ever trust ourselves or anyone else completely?

Jeremiah warned the last Judean kings against placing their trust in earthly kings (vv.5-6). But they continually sought help from Egypt. How foolish they were! They should have repented of their wickedness and returned to Almighty God for His help.

Where can we put our trust for help in difficult and uncertain times? God's Word tells us that those who place their trust in God are like trees planted by the waters. Even in drought they will not cease to bear fruit (vv.7-8).

Let's trust God to produce fruit in our lives.

We find it easier to trust  
In what our eyes can see,  
But God asks us to trust in Him  
For our security. —Sper

Don't let self-confidence replace your trust in God.

By Albert Lee

- [Jeremiah 17:5-10 Titanic II](#)
- [Jeremiah 17:5-11 Counterfeits Of The Heart](#)
- [Jeremiah 17:7-13 Help From The Outside](#)
- [Jeremiah 17:5-10 Mirror Of The Heart](#)

### **Mirror Of The Heart**

April 12, 1996

Read: Jeremiah 17:5-10 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 19-21; Luke 11:29-54

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? —Jeremiah 17:9

Have you ever looked into a mirror of curved glass that was designed to distort the image it reflects? Perhaps you are short and stocky, but in the glass you look tall and lean.

These "distortion mirrors" illustrate the human heart, which is totally unreliable in reflecting our spiritual condition. Our "heart mirror" is clouded with evil and completely awry with the serpentine twistings of the fall. It is wicked and deceitful above all things.

That being the case, our text then inquires, “Who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). Certainly not man himself, for “he who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26). There is only One who can tell us anything about our true spiritual reflection, and that is God who searches our hearts (Jer. 17:10).

God, who knows, says we deceive no one but ourselves if we think we have no sin (1 Jn. 1:8). His Word clarifies the picture, for it is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Only as we measure ourselves by God’s standard will we see that we fall short of the glory of God. Only then will we realize the urgent necessity of salvation and accept His gracious offer of cleansing.

Your heart and conscience cannot safely guide,  
For they are darkened by the sin inside;  
But if you want to have a picture true,  
The Word of God will mirror what is you. —Hess

The Bible will tell you what is wrong before you have done it! —D.L. Moody

By Henry G. Bosch

## JEREMIAH 18

### Jeremiah 18:1–17 A POTTERY PARABLE

Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. Jeremiah 18:6

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 18:1–20:18]

To form a clay pot, the potter takes a lump of clay, places it on a rotating wheel, and uses a hand to shape the clay into the desired vessel. If the clay is not soft and pliable, and things don’t go as planned, the potter smashes down the clay and starts over.

Today’s reading draws upon this activity, as Jeremiah was sent to observe a potter at work. As Jeremiah watched, the clay “became marred” (Jer. 18:4), likely because of some defect in the clay. As a result, the potter then formed the clay into a different kind of pot. Of course, the point was not to learn pottery, but to illustrate something about the way God works with His people.

The Lord is like the potter; we are like the clay. God may have one intention for His people, but depending on how they respond (how yielding or intractable they are), God may rework the clay into something else. God illustrated this with two specific examples. If He had planned disaster for them, but they repented, then God would relent. If, however, He had planned blessing for them, but they persisted in evil, then God “will reconsider the good I had intended” (Jer. 18:10). How we respond to God’s work in our life affects our experience of God’s blessing or curse. But either way, God is still the potter in control, and we are simply the clay.

Jeremiah was sent again to rebuke Israel for their remarkable infidelity to the Lord, and to remind them once more of the coming judgment (Jer. 18:13–17). Yet don’t miss the underlying mercy available: even as marred clay, if they would repent, the Potter would relent.

**APPLY THE WORD** Find a local craft store and buy some modeling clay. Leave half of the clay out for a day and keep the other half wrapped tight. Then try to form each lump into a small vessel, noticing what it’s like to work with these two lumps of clay. Now ask yourself: which lump are you like, the stiff, dry clay or the soft pliable one?

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### SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 18:1-10 God's Pottery](#)

#### God’s Pottery

January 27, 1999

Read: Jeremiah 18:1-10 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 16-18; Matthew 18:1-20

As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand. —Jeremiah 18:6

The prophet Jeremiah learned something about God in a potter’s shop (Jer. 18:1-10). The craftsman was working at his wheel, shaping a pot from the clay that swirled through his hands. Then something went wrong. Perhaps there was some impurity in

the clay. But the potter did not fling the clay aside; instead, he started forming another pot with a new design.

That's a picture of how our Lord works. He is continually shaping His people. He takes our flawed material and turns it into a new creation.

Notice something else about the potter and his wheel. A potter must be willing to get his hands into the clay. God is involved with His creation—and God is involved with you. He does not stand at arm's length from His work. He gets His fingers and hands into it. He saw that we needed a Savior to rescue us from our sin, so He sent His Son Jesus Christ to give His life in our place (Jn. 3:16; Ti. 2:14).

When we believe in Christ, we become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), which God then molds and shapes to make us like His Son (Rom. 8:29). God is the master craftsman, and when we are submissive to His fingers we reflect His creative touch.

Let God have your life—He can do more with it than you can.

By Haddon Robinson

- [Jeremiah 18:1-6 Broken But Beautiful](#)
- [Jeremiah 18:1-11 More Good News](#)
- [Jeremiah 18:1-6 The Potter's Purpose](#)
- [Jeremiah 18:1-6 The Great Potter](#)

### **The Great Potter**

January 6, 2004

Read: Jeremiah 18:1-6 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 16-17; Matthew 5:27-48

As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand. —Jeremiah 18:6

One definition of the word attitude is “the angle of approach” that an aircraft takes when landing. Author Chris Spicer writes: “Attitudes are to life as the angle of approach is to flying.” He adds, “Attitude is the way we choose to think about things; attitudes will cause us to react and behave in a certain way.” He also says that attitudes are not inborn or accidental. They are learned and absorbed reactions; therefore they can be changed.

During my thirties, the Lord began convicting me of my wrong thinking toward myself, others, and life—negative, self-pitying, and bitter thinking. With the help of God's Word, I recognized my need for change in three main areas: my attitudes, actions, and reactions. But I feared I couldn't change. One day I read in Jeremiah 18 how the potter refashioned some marred clay (which is what I felt like) into a different vessel, as it pleased the potter. What I couldn't do, my great Potter could! I only needed to be cooperative clay.

Today this vessel is far from finished. But as I put myself in the Potter's hands, He keeps working on me and shaping my attitudes and actions. I call them Christ-attitudes, Christ-actions, and Christ-reactions.

The great Potter can do the same for you.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay;  
Mold me and make me after Thy will,  
While I am waiting, yielded and still. —Pollard  
© 1935 Hope Publishing Co.

A change in the heart brings a change in behavior.

By Joanie Yoder

- [Jeremiah 18:1-12 Don't Touch The Fence!](#)
- [Jeremiah 18:1-10 God Knows Best](#)
- [Jeremiah 18:1-10 Master Craftsman](#)

## Jeremiah 20:1–13 WHEN YOU FEEL CHEATED BY GOD

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 1 Corinthians 9:16

In Bill Watterson's cartoon strip Calvin and Hobbes, the little boy Calvin likes to play a game with his stuffed tiger Hobbes called CalvinBall. Its main feature is that Calvin gets to make up the rules as he goes along.

Jeremiah might have felt as if God was playing a similar game with his life. In today's passage he complains that God has dealt unfairly with him. Jeremiah uses surprisingly strong language to describe his disappointment with God in these verses. The Hebrew term that is translated "deceived" in verse 7 is a word used to describe seduction in 1 Kings 22:16. It is the same word used to speak of Delilah's act of luring Samson into telling her the secret of his strength (Judges 16:5). Jeremiah initially felt qualms about serving as God's prophet (Jer. 1:6). After much opposition and hardship Jeremiah felt as if God had bullied him into his calling.

When Jeremiah tried to walk away from his prophetic vocation, he found he could not. The Holy Spirit compelled him to speak (v. 9). In his commentary, Philip Graham Ryken notes that Jeremiah wasn't talking about the pleasure he gets from speaking on God's behalf. "He was not eager to preach but reluctant," Ryken explains, "for he knew that judgment would pour out as soon as he opened his mouth."

No wonder Jeremiah was reluctant to speak. His message was so unwelcome that even his friends were waiting for him to slip, perhaps so they could denounce him as a false prophet and silence him (v. 10). If this was how Jeremiah's "friends" thought about him, what kind of treatment he must have received from his enemies! Even in this dark hour, Jeremiah still could see that God had not removed His hand from his life. On the threshold of despair, Jeremiah was still able to worship God (v. 13).

### APPLY THE WORD

Be careful about assumptions you make about God's plan for your life. These assumptions often lead to unrealistic expectations. When we discover that God has a different plan or timetable for us, we feel like we have been cheated. God does not lie. He is not a bully. But He is in charge.

## Jeremiah 20:14–18 WHEN LIFE SEEMS POINTLESS

I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. Ecclesiastes 4:2

William Cowper was the poet responsible for the hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way." He was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ who struggled with depression most of his adult life. He attempted to take his own life on three occasions and at one point was even placed in an asylum.

We have already seen that God's servants are sometimes so disappointed that they can wish they had never been born. Job felt this way. Elijah did, too. In today's passage Jeremiah curses the day he was born (Jeremiah 20:14). It is striking to note that in the biblical text, Jeremiah expresses this disturbing sentiment immediately after an outburst of praise in Jeremiah 20:13.

These are not the words of a backslider or someone with a shallow faith. Jeremiah was a man of deep faith who had an intimate relationship with God. He knew how to communicate with God as with a friend. It is significant that these words appear in a context of worship. Jeremiah's painful lament is a reminder that true worship is not a matter of putting on our best clothes and our Sunday smiles as we mouth pious words that we do not really mean. True worship is a matter of fearlessly approaching the throne of grace and bringing with us all our doubts, distress, and hard questions.

At the same time, it is important to note how God responds to Jeremiah's cry of anguish. Jeremiah concludes his prayer with the bitter question of verse 18: "Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?" But God does not provide an answer. How are we to understand this silence of God? We should interpret it as the patient response of a loving Father who knows that there are times when the best thing to do is simply to listen.

APPLY THE WORD Do you identify with the wish of Job, Elijah, and Jeremiah? Do not keep it a secret. Call somebody today to talk about it. Your pastor or a Christian friend that you trust is a good place to start. If you can think of no one to contact, you can call the National Hopeline Network at 1-800-784-2433. Someone will be happy to listen.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 20:7-13 Stuck in the Mire](#)

### Stuck In The Mire

October 24, 2011

Read: Jeremiah 20:7-13 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 3-5; 1 Timothy 4

His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back. —Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah has been called “the weeping prophet.” He may have had a sensitive and melancholic disposition that was compounded by his heartbreak over God’s judgment on disobedient Israel. His capacity for sorrow is amazing: “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night!” (Jer. 9:1).

As if sorrow for his nation were not enough, Jeremiah was persecuted for his prophetic message of judgment. In one instance, Jeremiah was imprisoned in a cistern filled with mire (Jer. 38:6). Opposition to his ministry had gotten the great prophet stuck in a place of despair.

Sometimes in our attempts to serve the Lord, we can feel stuck in painful circumstances and surprising heartache. But the prophet’s resilience should inspire us to persevere. Jeremiah’s sense of divine call was so strong that he could not be deterred from serving the Lord. “But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not” (Jer. 20:9).

Have the results of your service for the Lord been disappointing? Ask Him to renew your heart by His Spirit, and continue to serve God despite your setbacks.

Be not weary in your serving; Do your best for those in need; Kindnesses will be rewarded By the Lord who prompts the deed. —Anon.

No service for Christ is insignificant.

By Dennis Fisher

- [Jeremiah 20:7-13 A Faithful Helper](#)

## JEREMIAH 21

### Jeremiah 21:11–22:9; 23:1–8 JUDGMENT ON EVIL LEADERS

I will raise up . . . a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right. Jeremiah 23:5

[Optional reading: Jer. 21:1–23:40]

Within the last six months, some companies have experienced problems with leadership. From the Yahoo! CEO’s résumé scandal to J.P. Morgan’s lack of foresight in investing, poor leadership has consequences. The same is true with the leadership of God’s people.

Close to God’s heart were the poor, the fatherless, and the oppressed. Indeed, Israel’s leaders were responsible to care for such people. Whether the king himself or the unspecified “shepherds,” God reminded them of their duty to “administer justice” (21:12), rescue the oppressed, “do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow,” nor to “shed innocent blood” (22:3). Yet this is exactly where Israel’s leaders failed. Rather than protecting the flock of God’s people, Israel’s leaders were “destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture” (23:1). In turn, God chastised them for their failure and promised that they would be held accountable.

God would not “punish you as your deeds deserve” (21:14), however, allowing His wrath to break out upon Jerusalem, leaving it in ruins. He specified His tender care for His people by promising one day to gather a remnant together and to bring them back to the land. He would give them new, better shepherds who would care for them dutifully. Most importantly, there would be a leader to come, “a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land” (23:5). When this “righteous Branch” of David arrived, God’s people would be saved and live in safety.

God promised that in the face of failed leadership, He would send a perfect leader, Jesus Christ, the only true King and Shepherd of His people. Only then would they know full salvation.

APPLY THE WORD - The hymn, “The King of Love My Shepherd Is,” offers a powerful picture of Christ the Shepherd and King as declared in today’s reading. Try searching for the words and tune to this hymn online or in a hymnal, and spend some time reading or singing the stanzas as an act of praise and thanksgiving in response to God’s gracious gift in His Son.

## JEREMIAH 22

### Jeremiah 22:1–17

"Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD. Jeremiah 22:16

In 1993, Baptist missionary Keith Grimes visited Kalingalinga, Zambia. He recruited their singing boys to tour the United States, naming them the Zambian Acappella Boys Choir and promising them salaries, health care, and education in return. The Choir toured churches and generated millions of dollars in donations—but it was a scam. Not one penny was given to any of the boys, and they were held in restrictive conditions under threat of deportation. Several local church members who attended concerts in Texas and Louisiana grew suspicious and requested criminal investigations. Finally in 2000, a judgment for nearly \$1 million was handed down against the Grimes family for unpaid wages for 67 Zambian boys.

In today's text, benefitting from exploited labor clearly does not please God, and there are consequences for people who practice oppression. We have learned that God entrusted Israel's kings with maintaining His justice and righteousness, yet both Israel and her kings were better known for injustice and idolatry.

Today's passage records a direct message from the Lord to Jehoiakim, one of Judah's kings. Like his brother Shallum before him, he had disregarded the reforms of his father, Josiah (2 Kings 23:31–37). Jeremiah begins with a reminder: the one who sits on David's throne is to enact justice and righteousness; he is to rescue the maltreated and defend the innocent (Jeremiah 22:2–3). Then he states a promise and a warning. If you are not the kind of king God desires, your palace—symbolic for your whole reign—will be destroyed (Jeremiah 22:4–8). This is the consequence of ignoring the covenant made with their compassionate God (Jeremiah 22:9).

Jeremiah 22:13 through Jeremiah 22:17 contrast two kinds of kings. One king pads his pockets through unjust means. He uses his countrymen like slaves (Jeremiah 22:13–14). His eyes and heart are corrupt and greedy; he disregards the rights and health of his employees (Jeremiah 22:17). This is God's description of Jehoiakim. Josiah, on the other hand, understood that God is the provider who cares for those who obey Him. Josiah regarded the concerns of the poor and needy (Jeremiah 22:15–16).

**APPLY THE WORD** The power of the ancient king is now distributed into the hands of everyday people. The Zambian boys were released only after intervention from regular people sitting in church pews. Concerned Women for America encourages women across the country to advocate for just enforcement of laws to protect the thousands of women and children who are sexually trafficked in the United States every year. Our decisions and actions matter and can impact the lives of those held in bondage.

## JEREMIAH 23

### Jeremiah 23:1-40 FALSE TEACHERS CANNOT BE TRUSTED

They fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. Jeremiah 23:16

Florida pastor Charles Lawrence Kennedy had a wonderful message: God had led him to an investment opportunity that would turn \$1,000 into \$1,000,000 in just 90 days. He wanted to invite others to join him in the investment. Just think of all the money they could give to charity with their earnings! It turned out that this was just a Ponzi scheme, and most of the money went to Kennedy's

own pockets. In October 2013 Kennedy pled guilty to wire fraud; prosecutors estimate his fraudulent profits at \$5 million.

Our reading for today is an extended discourse of God's anger directed toward false prophets. Notice the variety of ways that these religious leaders have deceived God's people. Their own lives are characterized by adultery and sinfulness (Jeremiah 23:11, 14); they pollute the teaching of God with the false worship of Baal (Jeremiah 23:13). They proclaim a message of complacency toward sin instead of a right relationship with God (Jeremiah 23:17); they claim that their own opinions are really messages from God (Jeremiah 23:31–32).

God takes seriously the deception of these false prophets. Repeatedly throughout this chapter He reminds them of the judgment they will face for their arrogance and sin. At the end of the discourse God declares, "I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence" (Jeremiah 23:39).

But in the middle of this angry denunciation of the false prophets, God also makes the promise of One in whom we can trust completely. The King was coming who "will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5). When we are

surrounded by false prophets who make false promises and live immoral lives, we can remember that we can trust King Jesus. He is always true and always faithful.

APPLY THE WORD It can be disheartening to hear stories of corrupt preachers and false teachers. Sadly, they are nothing new. But we can rejoice that we know the One who is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). When we place our hope in Jesus, we have access to the truth about God and we have eternal life with Him. Praise Jesus today for His perfect righteousness in which we can trust!

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 23:16, 30-40 Speaking out for God](#)
- [Jeremiah 23:16-23 How To Be Unpopular](#)
- [Jeremiah 23:21-32 Speaking The Truth](#)
- [Jeremiah 23:24 Under Surveillance](#)
- [Jeremiah 23:25-32 Theology is For Everyone](#)
- [Jeremiah 23:25-40 The Right Tool](#)
- [Jeremiah 23:29 A Constant Companion](#)

A Constant Companion

January 19, 2010

Read: Psalm 119:129-136 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 46-48; Matthew 13:1-30

Direct my steps by Your Word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me. —Psalm 119:133

When my wife and I are preparing for a trip, one of the first things we do is get out the road atlas. We study it intensely to learn the best routes, determine the number of miles we'll have to travel, pick out interesting places to visit, decide how far we can get in a day, and estimate expenses. On the journey, the atlas is our constant companion, and we consult it many times a day. We couldn't get along without it.

For Christians, the Bible is an atlas for their spiritual journey, but it is much more. It is described as:

sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10; 119:103)

a lamp (Psalm 119:105)

rain and snow (Isaiah 55:10,11)

a fire (Jeremiah 23:29)

a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29)

water (Ephesians 5:26)

a sword (Ephesians 6:17)

solid food (Hebrews 5:12)

a mirror (James 1:23)

milk (1 Peter 2:2)

Like the highway traveler, we as Christians are on a long and sometimes hazardous journey. We face many decisions and will have many needs on our pilgrimage to paradise. The Bible has been given to us to help us make those decisions and to meet those needs. It should be our constant companion—studied diligently and consulted often along the way. We can't do without it.

I have a companion, a dear, faithful friend, A union of blessing that never shall end; Till Jesus returns with His saints from on high We'll travel together, my Bible and I. —Anon

The Bible is like a compass—it always points the believer in the right direction.

By David Egner



## JEREMIAH 24

### Jeremiah 24:1–10 THE MEANING OF CAPTIVITY

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. Jeremiah 24:7

[Optional reading: Jer. 24:1–25:38]

The Babylonian exile of Judah occurred in waves. The first wave started in 597 B.C. with Jehoiachin and some leading officials of Judah going into captivity, while others remained behind until a later exile in 587 B.C.

Today's reading marks the beginning of the exile. But what does it mean? Perhaps the opposite of what was thought. Jeremiah was given a vision of two baskets of figs. One basket contains very high-quality figs and represents those first exiles who would find God's favor. God's promises to them are summarized in our key verse today, which concludes: "They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart." They might experience the pain of God's discipline, but God would not forget His covenant relationship, and He would give them a heart to return to God and to know Him. The poor figs, so rotten they cannot be eaten, represent (somewhat ironically) those who were not taken into exile in that first wave. They might have been tempted to think they were safe because they were spared exile, but Jeremiah's vision explained otherwise. They were the bad figs. They would be "a reproach and a byword, a curse and an object of ridicule,

wherever I banish them" (Jer. 24:9).

Here is an important lesson about God's discipline. On the one hand, just because we don't experience any immediate consequences because of our sin does not mean that God takes no notice or that we have gotten away with something. On the other hand, even when God does discipline us, His discipline does not mean abandonment.

Even in discipline, He has in mind our good and our restoration.

**APPLY THE WORD** You can create your own object lesson about the idea that God disciplines us for our good. Gather a small bowl of ripe, healthy-looking fruit and place it in a prominent place this week as a visual reminder that even when we sin, God can make us whole and well if we will only respond to His Spirit in us and return to Him.

## JEREMIAH 25

### Jeremiah 25:1-14 Daniel 1:1-2;

During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land. 2 Kings 24:1

New Year's Eve, 1999, saw the Y2K worriers stocking up on bottled water and canned goods; the turn-of-the-millennium enthusiasts planning extravagant celebrations to usher in the year 2000; and the history purists insisting there was no reason to get excited. These mathematically precise folks argued that the third millennium wouldn't begin until the two-thousandth year had ended and 2001 had begun. In other words, the year 2000 could be the turn of the millennium only if there had been a year zero.

A look at the accounts in Daniel 1 and Jeremiah 25 presents a similar conundrum. Did Nebuchadnezzar lay siege to Jerusalem in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign (Jer. 25:1) or the third (Dan. 1:1)? Some scholars believe that the Babylonians didn't begin numbering a king's reign until the year after he took the throne. The ascension year would essentially be that king's "year zero," while Hebrew writers would have referred to it as year number one. Other reasonable explanations exist, but it does make sense that Daniel was trained to use a Babylonian numbering style.

Daniel didn't blindly accept everything about the Babylonian culture, most notably their pagan religion. He was caught in a peculiar situation, as the prophecy of Jeremiah describes. After the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, Daniel's native nation of Judah had been unwilling to listen to the Word of the Lord—and judgment for their sins was sure. Daniel was taken to Babylon after the first of three major attacks on Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's forces. He had been forcibly taken to live in exile.

For Daniel, the hope of returning to his homeland wasn't good. Jeremiah foretold that the Babylonian exile would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:11). God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take the people of Israel, the articles of the temple (Dan. 1:2), and something even more surprising: the role of God's servant (Jer. 25:9).

**APPLY THE WORD**

The authenticity of Daniel is disputed by people who refuse to accept the possibility of the supernatural elements of the book: miraculous rescue, inspired wisdom, and predictive prophecy. Although we may say with our mouths that we accept those truths, believers are sometimes reluctant to open our hearts to God's supernatural intervention. As you study this month, make room for the possibility that God will use you each day as He did Daniel, miraculously and boldly in a land of doubt.

## JEREMIAH 26

### Jeremiah 26:1–24 A SECOND TEMPLE SERMON

Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. Then I will relent. Jeremiah 26:3

Many erroneous views of God exist today. People may perceive God as simply a feeble grandfather. An equally misinformed view of God sees Him as a cruel tyrant. Jeremiah's message corrects these views.

Moving backward in time, we see Jeremiah again instructed to deliver a sermon at the temple (see Jeremiah 7). Here, we see similar themes to Jeremiah's earlier messages, but also a strong emphasis on the call to repentance and the conditionality of the coming disaster. Though God recognized Israel's history of repeated rejection of God's prophets, the true desire of God was not to punish but to relent and restore. God is not an ogre looking for ways to inflict pain on His people; instead, He desires a proper relationship with them.

The reaction by the religious leadership was, of course, not positive. They seized Jeremiah, held an official trial, and were ready to put him to death. The brief story about the prophet Uriah underscores the seriousness of Jeremiah's situation. In response, Jeremiah offered a simple defense. God gave him this message, and if they obeyed, He would relent. If they killed the prophet, they would be signing their own death warrant. In other words, we may not like the message God has for us, but our dislike makes it no less true or urgent.

In the end, the earlier example of Hezekiah's positive response to the prophet Micah was used in support of Jeremiah, and they refrained from killing him. Although there is no indication that the leaders or people moved toward repentance, for now the prophet was allowed to remain alive. And for now, the opportunity to continue to hear God's word was the only hope Judah would have for salvation.

**APPLY THE WORD** The call of repentance and relationship with God is genuine, urgent, and for the whole world. Without it, there can be no salvation. Consider supporting church and parachurch efforts to spread the gospel around the world. Ask God in prayer how you can contribute to making Christ's salvation known in your community and beyond.

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### SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 26:1-16 Danger Ahead!](#)

Danger Ahead!

January 11, 1998

Read: Jeremiah 26:1-16 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 27-28; Matthew 8:18-34

He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death. —James 5:20

Messages of judgment in an age of tolerance are about as welcome as a thunderstorm at a picnic.

That was just as true in Jeremiah's day as it is today. Back then, the Lord told the prophet to stand in the court of the temple and speak boldly to the people about their sin. Jeremiah warned the people of Jerusalem that destruction was headed their way if they didn't follow God's laws.

How did they react? The people seized him and said, "You will surely die!" (Jer. 26:8). Jeremiah's life was in danger because he had dared to speak the truth.

In spite of the threats, Jeremiah repeated his warning. After reconsidering, the officials and people said to the priests and false prophets, "This man does not deserve to die. For he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God" (v.16).

Jeremiah's dilemma points out two important truths. First, a message of warning will not be eagerly received by those who

need to be warned. Second, we must give the warnings and then trust God to protect us.

See any danger signs on the horizon for people you know? Perhaps you need to do the hard thing: With God's guidance, lovingly give them the warning they need.

Thinking It Over

Do you need to give a loving warning to someone?

What do James 5:19-20 and Jude 22-23 say about that?

What should be our attitude in this process? (Gal. 6:1).

Sometimes love must hurt before it can help.

By Dave Branon

## JEREMIAH 27

### Jeremiah 27:1–22 GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL

I made the earth and its people . . . and I give it to anyone I please. Jeremiah 27:5

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 27:1–28:17]

Most leaders of a conquered nation would want to resist an invading power. This describes Zedekiah, king of Judah, and even false prophets were placating the people with promises of deliverance from invading Babylon. Jeremiah preached a very different message. Obeying the Lord's command to construct and publicly wear a yoke, Jeremiah proclaimed God's command to submit to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians.

The message was given not just to Judah but to the surrounding nations as well. Those who resisted Babylonian rule would face disaster, but those who yielded to Nebuchadnezzar's reign would be blessed to remain in their lands. Why would God give such a message about a brutal enemy of God's people?

The answer lies in understanding the sovereignty of God presented in today's passage. Nothing is beyond God's knowledge or control. God created all things, and He will "give it to anyone I please" (Jeremiah 27:5). Even Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was not a freelance ruler moving about on his own, but is described as "my servant" (Jeremiah 27:6). At God's bidding Babylon would retain power for generations, but then it too would be subjugated to other powers. Everything that was happening to Judah, no matter how difficult, was still within the control of God.

Submitting to Babylon was also submitting to God who had orchestrated Babylon's rise, its conquering of Judah, and its eventual demise. The message through Jeremiah encouraged a deep trust in God's plan and control, even in the face of great difficulty.

**APPLY THE WORD** We may be tempted to think that the rulers of nations today are masters of their own fate, beyond God's hand. Today's passage reminds us that even presidents, kings, and dictators are under God's ultimate control. Let this truth be the catalyst for your prayers today: that God would use even global leaders to bring about His purposes in the world.

## JEREMIAH 28

## JEREMIAH 29

### Jeremiah 29:1–32 LETTER TO THE CAPTIVES

I know the plans I have for you . . . to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

In 594 B.C., due to internal unrest within the nation of Babylon, vassal states would have been required to report to Nebuchadnezzar and reaffirm their loyalty. The same would have been true for Zedekiah, acting king of Judah, and along with that official correspondence, Jeremiah sent his own divine message to the exiles in Babylon.

The message from Jeremiah, of course, is really a message from "the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel" (Jeremiah 29:4) to those who had been taken captive in the first wave of exile. Scripture tells us that at that time a variety of false prophets were in Babylon predicting a very short exile. It was a message the people themselves wanted to hear. Yet it was not the message God had for

them. Perhaps shocking to the exiles, Jeremiah's letter instructed them to "Build houses and settle down . . . Marry and have sons and daughters . . . Increase in number there . . . Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile" (Jeremiah 29:5–7). Instead of cursing the Babylonians, they were to pray for their peace and prosperity. In other words, their exile would extend over several generations, so they should settle in.

Even so, the second part of Jeremiah's letter offered profound encouragement. After a specified period of time, their fate would change. Upon their repentance and whole-hearted seeking of the Lord, God would fulfill His promise to return them to the land. Although their current situation may have felt bleak and hopeless, God would not forget His long-term plans for them: "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

**APPLY THE WORD** Today's reading offers a powerful reminder that despite the difficulty of our life circumstances, we can still trust that God is in control and has not forgotten His abundant, gracious, and hope-filled plans for us. Perhaps you know someone in your life who needs to be reminded of these promises. Take that message to them today.

### **Jeremiah 29:4–14 GOD'S PLANS FOR OUR FUTURE**

I know the plans I have for you . . . to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

A group of graduate students discussed how their parents felt about their academic plans. "My parents said they would support me for two years, but then I better get a job," said one. "Mine think a graduate degree in history is a waste of time, but they just want me to be happy," said another. A third student spoke up: "Happy? I don't think my parents ever considered my happiness. They want me to be a successful physicist, so here I am."

Parents have hopes and dreams for their children, but they can't control all the events in the world and can't see the future. Our heavenly Father, however, is both sovereign and loving. He does have plans for our future, and He can also bring that future into existence. What a wonderful foundation for our hope.

This is our third encounter this month with the prophet Jeremiah. The golden strands of hope that thread throughout his story of weeping and doom should remind us that our hope in God can remain constant through any circumstance. In fact, our hope might shine brightest against the backdrop of the darkest times.

In our passage today, Jeremiah is writing to the exiles who are already in Babylon. False prophets told them to resist the Babylonians—they would be going home any day now! God reassured them that He was still watching over His people, but they should settle down and build lives in Babylon. Their exile would end and He would bring them back to Jerusalem—but not for another seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10).

Then God reminds them of His wonderful promise to give them a future and hope. He wanted them to love Him with all their hearts (Jeremiah 29:13). And He would bring this glorious promise into reality.

**APPLY THE WORD** Are you worried about the future? Are you frustrated by your present circumstances? Do you think everything depends on your own plans? This passage reminds us that our hope lies in God's plans for our future. Commit your worry and frustration and control to Him and ask Him to guide you. This is an example of trusting Him with all your heart and life.

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 29:4-14 Be All There](#)
- [Jeremiah 29:1-14 Searching And Finding](#)
- [Jeremiah 29:4-14 The Challenge Of Confinement](#)
- [Jeremiah 29:11 A New Purpose](#)

## **JEREMIAH 30**

### **Jeremiah 30:1–24 MESSAGE OF HOPE (PART 1)**

So you will be my people, and I will be your God. Jeremiah 30:22

Scholars and commentators on the book of Jeremiah typically identify Jeremiah 30 through Jeremiah 33 as "Jeremiah 30:" because of its dominant themes of hope and comfort after prolonged messages of judgment. Jeremiah 30 contains explicit promises of restoration from the Lord, and Jeremiah was instructed to write these words down for posterity.

What would this time of restoration be like? All of the numerous themes involve both reversal and renewal. First, the yoke of their oppression would be broken. Judah would no longer be enslaved, and the oppressors themselves would be punished by God. Naturally, there would also be a return to the land first promised to Abraham. With that return, God promised to replace pain and fear with peace and security. The people would rebuild their land and restore their cities. What seemed like an incurable wound would in fact be healed by God Himself. In turn, there would be “songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing” (Jeremiah 30:19). Their dark situation of exile, loss, defeat, and devastation would be reversed in dramatic ways.

God’s promises in chapter 30 also entailed renewal, particularly the people’s renewed relationship with God Himself. God’s very presence made it all possible: “I am with you and will save you” (Jeremiah 30:11). Likewise, Jeremiah’s message declared that instead of serving a foreign ruler, God’s people would “serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them” (Jeremiah 30:9). And their leader would have an intimate relationship with God so that in the end it would be said of them all: “So you will be my people, and I will be your God” (Jeremiah 30:22). At the heart of God’s renewal was God’s own presence and a restoration of true relationship with Him.

**APPLY THE WORD** God instructed Jeremiah to write His message down, probably so His people could return to it for assurance of God’s consolation. We can do the same to remind ourselves of God’s faithfulness. Choose a verse from today’s reading or some other passage of Scripture on this topic. Dwell on these verses and let God minister to you through His eternal Word.

## JEREMIAH 31

### **Jeremiah 31:1–40 MESSAGE OF HOPE (PART 2)**

I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. Jeremiah 31:31

At the heart of God’s relationship with Israel was the covenant, begun with Abraham and renewed through Moses and David. The story of the Old Testament reveals that Israel’s history was plagued with covenant disobedience. That theme of God’s covenant, and Israel’s inability to keep it, dominates today’s reading, one of the most important in all of Jeremiah.

Central to the covenant was God’s character, particularly His grace, which is highlighted today. Because of God’s “everlasting love” and “unfailing kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3), God would act to restore and renew His people and His covenant with them. That would include a restoration of joyous worship, prayer, repentance over sin, and an outpouring of God’s grace. Consider who was included in God’s restoration in Jeremiah 31:8! Notice also the tender, protective language God used with his people. Like a caring shepherd, He would lead them by streams of water, “because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son” (Jeremiah 31:9).

The crux of today’s reading, however, and of the book of Jeremiah, comes in Jeremiah 31:31–34. This promise is found nowhere else in the Old Testament: a “new covenant.” The need for a new covenant lay not in any defect in the old, but rather in the people’s inability to keep it. But now, declared God, He would address that internal problem by writing His law on their hearts and minds. Through this covenant, there would be a new, intimate relationship between God and people. Looking ahead we find that Jesus Himself evoked “new covenant” language during the Last Supper (Luke 22:20). The new covenant and its internally powerful dimensions, promised through Jeremiah, has now been fulfilled in Christ. Praise God that He does not forsake His covenant with us!

**APPLY THE WORD** Jeremiah recorded the response of God’s people as one of joyous singing and worship. Let that be your response today. Sing a favorite hymn or song of praise in grateful response to God for His covenant faithfulness. Or even write your own psalm of praise to our “new covenant” God as an expression of thanksgiving for His love for us in Christ.

### **Jeremiah 31:1-34**

I have loved you with an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3

“There is no want of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment. Men’s hands cannot be strong when God rises up. The strongest have no power to resist him, nor can any deliver out of his hands.” Jonathan Edwards’ sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” would shock many contemporary audiences. We’ve grown accustomed to preaching that emphasizes themes of God’s love, not His just punishment of sin.

Like Jonathan Edwards, Jeremiah’s preaching ministry also emphasized the violent judgment of God. He suffered terribly for his “gloom-and-doom” preaching, almost losing his life.

How strange the words from Jeremiah 31 must have sounded, then, to the listening crowd. Among vociferous warnings of God’s impending judgment, suddenly Jeremiah’s tone changed. Instead of wrath, he spoke of love. He predicted a future time when God’s

blessings, physical and spiritual, will be restored to His people. It seemed incomprehensible among the warnings that Judah would soon be overthrown and taken into captivity.

Jeremiah foretold the coming of a New Covenant, unlike the Old. Formerly, God had led His people by the hand, but His people were unruly children, always tugging and twisting to break free. They had a pattern of disobedience and rebellion. Through the New Covenant, God would bring a people back to Himself who would be faithful. They would not depend on spiritual handholding for their obedience, having instead an internal locus of love and devotion to God. The Word of God would be imprinted on their hearts and their minds.

The New Covenant assures God's people of His forgiveness and His invitation to return to Him. It declares God's deliberate act of "remember[ing] their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).

God initiates the New Covenant because of who He is: eternally faithful (Jeremiah 31:3), a loving Father (Jeremiah 31:9), a gracious God (Jeremiah 31:4), and a Promise Keeper (Jeremiah 31:37).

**APPLY THE WORD** The gospel announces to us God's gracious and deliberate choice to "forgive [our] wickedness and remember [our] sins no more." What God chooses to forget, however, we sometimes insist on remembering. Calling to mind past sins which we've confessed and for which we received forgiveness is a temptation to which we cannot give in. Christ's sacrifice has secured for us the privilege of a clean conscience. Read Hebrews 10 to learn more about our freedom from guilt.

### **Jeremiah 31:1–14**

I have love you with an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3

In the classic movie *Love Affair*, a man and a woman fall in love while onboard a ship. They make an appointment to meet six months later atop the Empire State Building. In the meantime, tragedy strikes. The woman, Terry McKay, is struck by a car and told she might be crippled. The man, a French painter named Michel Marnet, goes to meet her, but she does not show up. While the two are separated, they never forget their love for one another. Finally, they meet by accident and Michel learns the real reason Terry did not keep their appointment. He assures her that their love is meant to be, and that he will stay with her whatever the diagnosis may be. The story struck such a chord that it has been remade several times, most notably as *An Affair to Remember*.

Most of us yearn for this type of never-ending, romantic love. We see in our today's passage in Jeremiah that God loves us exactly like that. The only difference is that unlike Michel, God already knows exactly who we are and what we are struggling with; nothing is hidden from Him.

The third verse is worth memorizing: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness." Here God speaks to His people who have been plagued with problems and doubt and disobedience. They have worshiped other gods. Yet, despite their sins, God makes this astounding pledge. He loves them. And He will "build them up again" (Jeremiah 31:4).

He describes the joy and life they will know again with "tambourines" and "vineyards" and "joy." He is their redeemer (Jeremiah 31:11). He will pay the price to buy them back from their oppressors and to restore them.

"Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well" (v. 13). This is a passage of hope for us. Ultimately due to His own redemptive work, God promises to restore us. The story does not end with times of trouble. His everlasting love will keep us to the end.

**APPLY THE WORD** The wedding ring is often used to symbolize everlasting love. Do you realize that married or not, you have been promised a love like this? Write out the third verse and put it somewhere you will read it often this week. Remember that whether or not you wear a physical token of love, you have been promised God's eternal love. You have been bought with a price. You have been guaranteed a hopeful future. Your life is in the hands of One much greater than you. You are not alone.

### **Jeremiah 31:1–9 A DEPENDABLE LOVE: HIS LOVE IS EVERLASTING**

I have loved you with an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3

Inspired by the movie *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, a Chicago candy manufacturer developed a treat in 1976 called the *Everlasting Gobstopper*. In the *Willie Wonka* story, the hard candy would last forever, with layer after layer of changing flavors. While the actual candy did take some time to dissolve, unlike its fictional counterpart it was definitely not everlasting.

As we continue to consider the dependable nature of God's love, we focus on this unique quality: God and His love are everlasting. God Himself has no beginning and no end (Rev. 1:8). His love for us is also called "everlasting" (Jer. 31:3). We can completely depend on His love because it will not stop and start.

The prophet Jeremiah addressed the people of Judah to remind them of God's care for them in the past (Jer. 31:3). God had promised to build them up, to prosper them, and to care for them (Jer. 31:4–6). Despite their current circumstances, the Lord promised to restore their joy. "You will take up your timbrels" (Jer. 31:4), musical instruments similar to tambourines used to praise God. They would dance, "plant vineyards," and "enjoy their fruit" (Jer. 31:5). While the nation now faced despair, Jeremiah assured them that God would once again bring them into prosperity and peace.

God loves and helps those in need. Here, we see a "great throng" returning (Jer. 31:8). Among them are the blind, lame, expectant mothers, and mothers in labor. Each of these depends on the care and love of God—and God promises to lead and guide them. His promise in Jer. 31:9 is reminiscent of Psalm 23, which depicts the Lord as a shepherd, leading us beside the still waters. God loves us with a dependable, everlasting love.

**APPLY THE WORD** We get frustrated when the people we love disappoint us or fail to love us in return. As human beings we are wired to love and to be loved, but human love often fails to fill that need. God alone can love us with an unexpected and everlasting love. His love is dependable in all of life's circumstances. Thank Him for this love today.

### **Jeremiah 31:31–40 DIVINE HEALING FOR DISORDERED DESIRE**

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. Jeremiah 31:3

Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger* opens at the funeral of the protagonist's mother. Meursault does not cry and is carelessly indifferent to his mother's death. Later, he murders a man without motive or remorse, a crime for which is sentenced to death. But murder is not Meursault's only crime, the prosecutor insists. He is also guilty of the crime of indifference. And because his heart is calloused, they reckon he cannot be rehabilitated.

Our hearts and their intentions and motives, reactions and remorse must be rehabilitated. Our spiritual transformation depends on the renovation of our heart's desires, and this is exactly what God intends through the new covenant.

Notice the differences between the old covenant (established by Mosaic Law) and the promise of the new covenant (to be established by Jesus' sacrifice; see Hebrews 8). The old covenant was externally imposed: God the Father is pictured as a human father, taking His child by the hand and leading him (Jeremiah 31:32). But how often children follow unwillingly, howling in protest and trying to wriggle free! This was the effect of the old covenant, and it never made Israel faithful to God. Their hearts' desires were not devoted to God. The book of Jeremiah, in fact, was written during a time of dramatic divine judgment against their rebellion. The new covenant, by contrast, is not established by external laws. Its rules are internal, binding on the heart first rather than behavior. In fact, the new covenant transforms at the level of desire, making God's people those who want to know and walk with Him.

The reliability of this new covenant is ensured by the reliability of God Himself. He who wakes the sun will awaken His compassion and steadfast love. He will forgive and redeem His people because this is His desire.

**APPLY THE WORD** The new covenant promises that our obedience will align with our heart's desires. We will begin to obey willingly and joyfully. Legalists, however, keep the rules without heart change. Outwardly, they conform to God's law, though inwardly, they are full of bitterness, resentment, and hypocrisy.

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 31:3 Human Love Isn't Enough](#)
- [Jeremiah 31:3 Where Love Comes From](#)
- [Jeremiah 31:31-34 Road Construction](#)
- [Jeremiah 31:31-34n Open Book](#)
- [Jeremiah 31:34 Leave It Buried](#)

## **JEREMIAH 32**

### **Jeremiah 32:1–44 ACTIONS OF HOPE**

I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me? Jeremiah 32:27

It is one thing for a child to say she trusts her father, but another to jump into his arms from the side of the pool! Likewise, Jeremiah previously had been declaring a message of hope, but now he was told to perform an action illustrating trust in God's word.

The chapter begins on the brink of Jerusalem's fall. The Babylonian armies had arrived, Jerusalem was surrounded, and the siege had begun. Defeat was imminent and inevitable, just as the Lord had predicted. And yet, God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field back in his hometown. Jeremiah fully obeyed, but everything about the circumstances would suggest that this was a preposterous idea—a complete waste of money. We see something of that sentiment in Jeremiah's prayer to God. He confessed everything he knew about God—His power, His character, His knowledge, His faithfulness—yet the end of the prayer indicates Jeremiah's own doubt. Why would the Lord ask him to buy a field in a nation soon to be overtaken and destroyed by the enemy?

God's response to Jeremiah gives the answer (Jeremiah 32:36–44). It may have appeared that the end was near and all was lost, but God had additional plans—to return the people, restore their prosperity, and renew an “everlasting covenant” with them (Jeremiah 32:40). On the surface, things may have looked bleak, but as Jeremiah confessed earlier (and God repeated later), nothing was too hard for the Lord (Jeremiah 32:17, 27). Sometimes God's word may appear like an impossibility in the face of external circumstances, but for our God nothing is impossible—and we can trust His word, and live in accordance with His promises. Jeremiah's real estate actions, as absurd as they may have seemed at the time, demonstrate this important truth.

**APPLY THE WORD** In various ways, each of us is called to live out our faith in God's promises to us, even in the face of seemingly contradictory circumstances. Ask God for the courage to live out that faith in your life in real and tangible ways, whether by giving generously to others, sacrificing things you enjoy, or simply remaining steadfast in the face of illness.

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#### SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 32:16-25 Duff Stuff](#)
- [Jeremiah 32:1-2,16-30 Are Good Times Bad?](#)
- [Jeremiah 32:37 All the Facts](#)

## JEREMIAH 33

### Jeremiah 33:1–26 MESSAGE OF HOPE (PART 3)

I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me. Jeremiah 33:8

Jeremiah's so-called “Book of Consolation” ends with today's reading. Previously, God had declared a reversal of Judah's plight, a renewal of relationship with God, and a new covenant with His people. Today, in chapter 33, God emphasized the comforting promise of restoration in two parts.

The first part of Jeremiah 33 focuses on the restoration of the people. Despite the grim scene of destruction in the face of Babylon's siege, God promised that it would one day change. Jeremiah 33:6 through Jeremiah 33:13 present multiple images of a restored people. The devastated nation would be healed. There would be abundance, peace, and security. A once-desolate land would someday echo with sounds of joy and gladness, marriages, and godly worship. Central to these promises, however, was God's declaration that He would deal with the underlying problem in His people: “I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me” (Jeremiah 33:8). Without cleansing from sin, there can be no true restoration. All of this, proclaimed the Lord, would bring Him “renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth” (Jeremiah 33:9). God too receives glory and joy at His people's restoration.

The second part of today's reading focuses on the restoration of leadership. Given the failure of leadership among Judah's kings, prophets, and priests, these words were especially important to hear. God would not just restore the people to the land; He would raise up new and godly leadership as well. In particular, God promised a king from the line of David, a “righteous Branch” (Jeremiah 33:15) who would usher in salvation for God's people. This promise was then underscored with a comparison to the unbroken rhythm of day and night—that's how certain God's promises are to His people.

**APPLY THE WORD** The New Testament says Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises for godly leadership among His people. Through our King who leads us and our High Priest and Sacrifice who cleanses us from sin, we experience God's forgiving restoration. Confess your sins to God, and then thank Him for providing cleansing and restoration in Christ.

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#### SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 33:1-9 Recovery](#)
- [Jeremiah 33:3 Impossible Answers](#)



## JEREMIAH 34

## JEREMIAH 35

### Jeremiah 35:1–19 PROMISES BROKEN, PROMISES KEPT

Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words? Jeremiah 35:13

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 34:1–35:19]

Every culture has had countercultural groups. Hasidic Jews retain a lifestyle distinct from other Jews; the Amish maintain an agricultural, nonmodern, way of living; and monks take vows of poverty and chastity for life. In a flashback to the beginning of the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah 35 presents a similar group in Judah: the Rekabites.

We don't know much about the Rekabites. Their clan would not drink wine, build houses, or settle in the land. They led a nomadic lifestyle because their forefather had commanded them to do so. Many commentators understand these self-imposed vows as their own religious expression about God, connecting a settled, agricultural lifestyle with Canaanite Baal worship. At least from 2 Kings 10:15–17 we know that their ancestor Jonadab was staunchly opposed to Baal worship.

The importance of the Rekabite illustration had to do with their generational faithfulness to the vows. Even when Jeremiah invited them to the temple and offered them large bowls of wine, they refused to drink, citing their longstanding tradition and the command from Jonadab. Their spokesman explained that since that time, none of them had violated their way of life, and the only reason they were in Jerusalem was to escape the invading armies of Babylon.

God used this group as an indictment of Judah's lack of obedience. The argument moved from the lesser to the greater. If the Rekabites had obeyed a smaller, human command faithfully for generations, why had Judah not obeyed far more important commands from God Himself, even after the repeated reminders from the prophets? As a result, God promised punishment for Judah's generational faithlessness and blessing for the steadfast Rekabites.

**APPLY THE WORD** We can be more faithful to self-imposed rules than to God's commands. Are you more "religious" about watching that television show, getting your morning coffee, or keeping the lawn pristine, than you are about the more important practices of reading Scripture and prayer? Make a renewed commitment to relationship with God, not just religious habit.

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### SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 35:12-19 Examples Of Obedience](#)

## JEREMIAH 36

### Jeremiah 36:1–32 A BURNING OF A BOOK

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. Isaiah 40:8

In 2000, Li Guangqiang, a Hong Kong businessman, was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison for smuggling Bibles into China for underground Christians. Such attempts to stop the spread of God's Word are not unusual, yet Christian churches in places like China continue to grow by millions.

The importance and power of God's Word is seen in today's reading as well. Before the Babylonian invasion had even begun, God instructed Jeremiah to "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you" (Jeremiah 36:2). Jeremiah then dictated those words to his scribe Baruch, who recorded them in a scroll. Baruch took that scroll, went to the temple, and read aloud the words. The goal of all of this was clear: to give the people a chance to hear their sin, to be warned about their coming judgment, and to repent. It was both God's hope and Jeremiah's (Jeremiah 36:3, 7).

Two reactions are recorded in Jeremiah 36. At first, a group of officials heard Baruch's words and were struck with fear and alarm. They seemed to recognize the severity of the situation, so much so that they thought the king needed to hear about it as well. Even so, they realized that Jeremiah's message may not be very popular, and so instructed Baruch and Jeremiah to stay hidden.

Unfortunately, the king's reaction was not nearly as sympathetic. Upon hearing just part of Jeremiah's message, the king cut up the scroll and threw it into the fire. He then ordered the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah. Yet, the end of chapter 36 is important. God once

again commanded Jeremiah to copy His words onto a scroll a second time. Despite its rejection, God's word would remain; human opinion could not change it.

**APPLY THE WORD** God's Word remains true today. Consider supporting the distribution of Bibles in parts of the world where they may not be readily available. Ask your local pastor for a list of ministries, or visit Bibles Unbound, a ministry dedicated to getting Bibles to Christians desperate for God's Word in their own language.

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## SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS

- [Jeremiah 36:1-8,21-26 Read A Banned Book](#)
- [Jeremiah 36:20-26 No Alteration Needed](#)

## JEREMIAH 37

### Jeremiah 37:11–38:13 CONTINUED OPPOSITION

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Hebrews 13:7

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 37:1–38:28]

In 589 B.C. the Babylonian invasion of Judah was interrupted when the Pharaoh of Egypt marched north against Nebuchadnezzar's armies, drawing the Babylonians away from Jerusalem. Against God's warnings, many in Judah looked to Egypt as their salvation. Many opposed Jeremiah's message instructing Judah to submit to the Babylonians.

Taking advantage of the Babylonian lull, Jeremiah set out for his home in Benjamin. Before making it out of Jerusalem, however, he met an accusation of treason: "You are deserting to the Babylonians!" (Jer. 37:13). Despite Jeremiah's protest, he was arrested, beaten, and imprisoned in a vaulted cell in a dungeon. He remained there for a long time until King Zedekiah called for him, perhaps hoping for a favorable word from God. Instead, Jeremiah reasserted his earlier message against Zedekiah and Judah. In other words, the Babylonian withdrawal was only temporary. This was not what the king wanted to hear, so he threw Jeremiah back into prison with a meager ration of bread.

If that was not enough, another group of pro-Egyptian officials were also not pleased with Jeremiah's message. To them, Jeremiah was demoralizing Judah's soldiers. Securing the king's permission, they seized Jeremiah and threw him into a cistern full of mud.

And that was where Jeremiah would have remained if it were not for a kind act of support and encouragement. Ebed-Melek, a royal official sympathetic to Jeremiah's word, and a true worshiper of God (see Jer. 39:15–18), saw the wrong that was done to Jeremiah and did something about it. With the help of thirty men, he rescued Jeremiah from the muddy pit. Not everyone in Judah was opposed to God's prophet!

**APPLY THE WORD** Faithful, godly leadership in the church is so important, yet not always appreciated. Use this week to be an encouragement to the spiritual leaders in your church. Write a note expressing your appreciation of their work, send a small gift of thanks, or make a personal visit to offer genuine words of encouragement. Even God's servants need such support.

### Jeremiah 37:11-17; 38; Hebrews 11:35-36;

If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. - 1 Peter 4:16

An unusual story of people who learned to thank God for their pain comes out of Mozambique, the African nation ravaged by floods last year (see yesterday's study). As people climbed trees to escape the rising waters, a pastor and sixteen other people found themselves clinging to a tree for life. The exhausted people asked the pastor to preach to help them stay awake. He was tired too, but mosquitoes began biting him, keeping him awake. The group was rescued after almost two days, and the pastor said, "I thank God for the mosquitoes because they stopped me from falling asleep. If we had fallen asleep, we would have been carried away by the water."

Most of the time, we don't see such an immediate and obvious reason for suffering. There is certainly no promise in Scripture that those who live by faith will live trouble-free. Peter knew something about the Christian life and suffering.

After absorbing a cruel beating for preaching Christ, Peter and the other apostles went away rejoicing that Jesus considered them worthy of suffering for His name. And they went right on preaching the gospel (Acts 5:40-42).

The role call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 included those who were “put in prison” (v. 36). The prophet Jeremiah is a good representative of these suffering saints. He had perhaps the hardest assignment of any Old Testament prophet, announcing to Judah that God was handing His sinful people over to the Babylonians for judgment. Jerusalem would be plundered, and the people would be carried into exile (Jer. 37:15).

Jeremiah’s message was very unpopular in Jerusalem. No surprise there. Soon the messenger became so identified with his message that Jeremiah began to undergo severe persecution. He was beaten and put in stocks (Jer. 20:1-2), arrested and beaten again, then arrested again and lowered into an empty well where he sank in the mud (Jer. 38:6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY If everything was clear and the answers all made sense, we wouldn’t need to live by faith.

## JEREMIAH 38

## JEREMIAH 39

### Jeremiah 39:1–18 THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

And now the Lord has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. Jeremiah 40:3

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 39:1–40:6]

In the ancient near east, warring parties frequently used siege tactics. Armies would surround the city, cutting off all supplies of food and water while simultaneously working to breach the wall. Over time, the inhabitants were starved, weakened, and easily overcome. The Babylonians did this to Jerusalem over a period of eighteen months, when they finally breached the wall and took the city. The end had come.

Scripture also describes the fate of three individuals: Zedekiah, Jeremiah, and Ebed-Melek. Their fates, good and bad, reflect their obedience or disobedience to God’s word. Zedekiah tried to flee into the wilderness. He was caught, however, and suffered a truly horrific fate. Taken to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah witnessed the execution of his sons and then had his eyes put out. He was shackled and then taken to Babylon. We never hear about Zedekiah again.

Jeremiah and Ebed-Melek received different treatment. Through Nebuchadnezzar’s command, Jeremiah was released from his imprisonment and given his freedom to remain in the land. Unlike the fate of so many in Judah, no harm was done to Jeremiah. Likewise, our reading ends with a declaration of the safety and protection of Ebed-Melek (the supporter of Jeremiah in the previous chapter). God had a specific word for this man: he would be rescued and spared the fate of the rest of Judah; he would escape with his life, specifically because he trusted in the Lord. And so this devastating fall of Jerusalem underscores both the blessing of obedience and trust in God, and the curse of refusing to listen to His word. There is no surprise here. God had done just what He promised.

APPLY THE WORD Sometimes Scripture reminds us of something we might know but have forgotten, like the importance of heeding God’s word. Reflect on what things God might be trying to remind you about in your life, and then make a list of those lessons or spiritual goals. Consider sharing these with a close friend or mentor who can help keep you accountable.

## JEREMIAH 40

### Jeremiah 40:7–41:15 GEDALIAH’S ASSASSINATION

Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you. Jeremiah 40:9

Whenever we hear of a natural disaster that leaves inhabitants homeless, wounded, and in distress, we are concerned about the fate of people in the aftermath of the disaster. The same is true for the destruction of Judah, and our reading today gives us insight into the post-exilic situation for the Jews in the land.

The start seems promising. Gedaliah (who came from a pro-Jeremiah family) had been appointed as the new governor in Judah. Initially, Gedaliah rallied together those in the land and began the process of rebuilding. Army officers and soldiers who had escaped the Babylonians came to Gedaliah and received assurances about the Babylonian officials. His advice echoed Jeremiah’s earlier words—“Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians,” he said. ‘Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go

well with you” (Jer 40: 9; see Jer. 27:11). Likewise, other Jews who had been scattered during the Babylonian invasion also came to Gedaliah and began settling in the land. All appeared to be going well. The remnant in the land had a godly leader, familiar with Jeremiah’s earlier message, ready to rebuild lives.

That status did not remain for long, however. Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, disrupted that peace in irreversible ways. Whatever his reasons (Scripture does not say), his plan was to kill Gedaliah. Not only did he do that (in a particularly deceptive way), he also killed the other Jews in Mizpah, and the Babylonian soldiers. The slaughter continued when he (again, deceptively) killed a group of mourning men coming to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice over its destruction. Peace was now gone, and even though most would rally around Johanan to resist Ishmael, the damage, as we will see later, was already done.

**APPLY THE WORD** Many resist God’s word and work in the world. But Gedaliah’s response is instructive—rather than order his opponent’s death, he sought peace and his well-being. Pray today for all those in the world who fight against God, that they would know true peace that comes in submitting to God’s will.

## JEREMIAH 41

## JEREMIAH 42

### **Jeremiah 42:1–18; 43:1–7 FLIGHT TO EGYPT**

If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down. Jeremiah 42:10

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 41:16–43:13]

According to Mary Poppins, some promises are really “pie crust promises . . . easily made, easily broken.” That’s what we have in today’s reading. The remnant in Judah faced a dilemma. They had to choose whether to remain in the land and face potential Babylonian retribution, or to flee for safety to Egypt. To Johanan and others, Egypt looked like the best option, but on their way, they stopped to ask Jeremiah for God’s direction.

Notice the apparently godly tenor of their request. They asked Jeremiah to pray for them that “the Lord your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do” (Jeremiah 42:3). They seemed truly to desire God’s direction, and even offered a vow demonstrating their commitment: “Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the Lord our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the Lord our God” (Jeremiah 42:6). Everything about their request seemed good and right. They sought God’s help when needed, and promised to do whatever He told them to do.

In turn, Jeremiah prayed then presented the people with God’s word: stay in the land and “I will build you up and not tear you down” (Jeremiah 42:10); flee to Egypt and you will “die by the sword, famine and plague” (Jeremiah 42:17). Given such a clear choice, and their earlier promises, the people’s response is surprising. They accused Jeremiah of lying, and declared him a false prophet! Johanan then gathered the people together and headed for Egypt, “in disobedience to the Lord” (Jeremiah 43:7). Apparently their earlier promises were not genuine. Not getting the word they wanted, they broke their promise and went their own way.

**APPLY THE WORD** How often do we pray to God for guidance, saying we are open to whatever He wants, but when the time comes we just do whatever we wanted to do anyway? Maybe you have difficult decisions you need to make in your life. Will you take those to the Lord in prayer, genuinely seeking His wisdom, prepared to act in obedience when He reveals His will?

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 42:1-12 Shadowed](#)

## JEREMIAH 43

## JEREMIAH 44

### **Jeremiah 44:1–30 DISASTROUS IDOLATRY**

Then the whole remnant of Judah . . . will know whose word will stand —mine or theirs. Jeremiah 44:28

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 44:1–45:5]

Pop singer Sheryl Crow epitomizes today's sentiments about right and wrong when she croons: "If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad." Apparently the ancient Judean remnant that fled to Egypt shared those ideas, and today's reading explains their coming fate.

Jeremiah delivered a word from God, explaining the consequences of their choice. All who fled to Egypt would die by sword and famine. None would return to the land of Judah except for a few fugitives. Just as God punished those in Judah, including the leadership, so now God would punish those living in Egypt, along with the Egyptian leadership.

God does not leave us guessing about why they would experience such a fate. The same idolatry that got them into trouble in Judah had been brought with them into Egypt. They may have had new homes, new neighbors, and a new life, but they were the same people as before. They continued to burn incense to the "Queen of Heaven" and worship other gods. Not only did they persist in these practices, they did so willingly and stubbornly, even making vows to continue their idolatry. In their skewed reasoning, they argued that when they worshiped false gods in Judah, they were well off, and that the reason for the fall of Jerusalem was not their idolatry, but their failure to worship the Queen of Heaven.

One might expect that the events of the recent past would soften their hearts toward God's call to repentance, but nothing had changed. Their persistence in idolatry sealed their fate, leaving God to declare: "Then the whole remnant of Judah . . . will know whose word will stand—mine or theirs" (Jeremiah 44:28).

**APPLY THE WORD** How often do we look for a better life in a change of context, rather than a change in ourselves? Reflect on Jeremiah 44:7 through Jeremiah 44:10 as a reminder of God's genuine offer of relationship, if only we will remove our idols and turn to Him. Ask God today to show you those "idols," and ask for His empowering strength of the Holy Spirit to choose Him over them.

## JEREMIAH 45

## JEREMIAH 46

### **Jeremiah 46:1–28 ORACLE AGAINST EGYPT**

Though I completely destroy all the nations . . . I will not completely destroy you. Jeremiah 46:28

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 46:1–47:7]

Since technology allows us to record television shows, many people now simply skip the commercials or slow scenes and get on to the "good" parts. That's how we might feel about Jeremiah 46 through Jeremiah 51 and God's "Oracles against the Nations." But we will miss important truths by fast forwarding past these chapters.

It's important to recall that when God commissioned Jeremiah, He called him "as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5), not just to Judah. We now see God's message to the surrounding nations as well, the first being to Egypt. In a series of three different oracles, God declared Egyptian defeat, retreat, and destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. Despite their great preparations for war, their powerful kings, and their fierce mercenary armies, Egypt would be put to shame.

God was clear about why and how this would come about. The reason for Egypt's fall was their pride. Jer. 46:6 through Jer. 46:8 describe their arrogance like a swelling river, desiring to overflow into all the world. That pride would ultimately lead to defeat, but God was also clear about who would bring about Egypt's destruction. It may appear that the Babylonians were in charge, but God declared that "that day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty" (Jer. 46:10). Egypt would fall because "the Lord will push them down" (Jer. 46:15). God would bring about the fall of Egypt.

Finally, our reading ends with a shift to words of comfort for Judah. Even if the nations to which they had been exiled should suffer defeat and destruction, God promised that His people would not completely be destroyed. Their trust should be in God, not in any nation or its leaders, for protection.

**APPLY THE WORD** Today's reading teaches us that no nation is beyond God's control (or punishment) no matter how great or important they think they are, or have been in the past; and that salvation lies with God, not with earthly leaders. As the presidential elections come soon, pray for godly leaders, but let today's Scripture remind us that our final hope is in God, not humans.

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### **SEE ALSO OUR DAILY BREAD DEVOTIONALS**

- [Jeremiah 45:5 Selfish Ambition](#)

## JEREMIAH 47

## JEREMIAH 48

### Jeremiah 48:1–9, 26–47 ORACLE AGAINST MOAB

[God] wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:4

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 48:1–49:39]

Moab was a longstanding enemy of Israel. A review of Israel's history reveals numerous conflicts with the Moabites who tried to subdue Israel or seduce them into worshiping false gods (see Numbers 21–25). In fact, Deuteronomy 23:3–6 forbade ten generations of Moabites from entering the sacred assembly.

This background helps us understand what lies behind God's oracle against them. Their fate would be similar to that of Egypt: destruction, devastation, and shame. Yet the numerous citations of Moabite cities, along with their god Chemosh, suggest a total and complete destruction. Likewise the mention of salt (v9) symbolized their utter devastation.

Like the oracle against Egypt, today's reading also underscores the reason for Moab's downfall. In particular, Moab was a proud nation trusting in their "deeds and riches" (Jer. 48:7). Later in the oracle, Moab's pride is referenced eight times in two verses (Jer. 48:29–30). But pride was not the only problem. Moab was also rebuked for defying the Lord (Jer. 48:26, 42), likely a reference to Moab's conflict with Israel, and for her false worship of other gods (Jer. 48:35). God was concerned about idolatry for other nations, not just Judah.

Despite this scathing, harsh oracle against a deserving Moab, notice also the glimmers of concern God demonstrated over Moab. In the face of devastation, God wails, cries out, and weeps for them (Jer. 48:31–32). God told them that "my heart laments for Moab like the music of a pipe" (Jer. 48:36). And then there is the final word of restoration: "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come" (Jer. 48:47). What a glimpse at the wonderfully tender heart of God!

**APPLY THE WORD** Do we share God's heart for the restoration of all nations back to Him? Or do we only feel anger toward godless nations? Make a conscientious effort in your prayers this week to pray for nations that persecute Christians (like China, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia), that they too would be "saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1Ti 2:4).

### Jeremiah 48:1-47 JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION FOR MOAB

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12:15

Author Jerry Bridges observes, "Our worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace." Often the only thing that is harder than accepting God's grace for ourselves is extending it to others. We tend to keep a list in our minds of who is worthy of being in our good graces and who doesn't deserve our kindness.

Our reading today is an expanded description of the judgment against Moab, this time announced through the prophet Jeremiah. We are given much greater detail in this text about Moab's sins: they trusted in their own riches rather than God (Jeremiah 48:7); they defied the Lord and were proud and arrogant (Jeremiah 48:26, 29, 42).

The judgment on Moab is also described in more detail. Jeremiah 48:44 poetically sums up the extent of woe that the people will experience: "Whoever flees from the terror will fall into a pit, whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare." There will be no escape from God's judgment.

And yet God laments the suffering of Moab and instructs others to mourn with them as well (Jeremiah 48:17). God derives no pleasure from this scene of calamity; instead, He wails and moans and weeps over Moab (Jeremiah 48:31–32). The intensity of these verbs underscores the intensity of God's passion for the Moabites and His compassion for their plight, even though they have brought this misery on themselves. This chapter ends with grace.

This is not cheap grace; God does not ignore the sin and rebellion of Moab. But He promises nevertheless to "restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come," an indication of His overwhelming mercy and love.

**APPLY THE WORD** Romans 12:15 instructs us to mourn with those who mourn. It is not easy to lament with those who are suffering from their own sinful choices. But it is a way that we follow God's example and offer His grace to others. One way you can practice this is through prison ministry; ask your church leaders if your church serves in any prisons and how you can be involved.

## JEREMIAH 49

## JEREMIAH 50

### Jeremiah 50:1–7, 18–38; 51:1–26 ORACLE AGAINST BABYLON

They will come and bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant. Jeremiah 50:5

[Optional longer reading: Jer. 50:1–51:64]

We've heard the expression, "Save the best for last." In the case of God's oracles against the nations, He has certainly saved the longest and most important oracle for last. Running 110 verses long over two chapters, Babylon's destruction and desolation was proclaimed with a thoroughness no other nations received.

Like the oracles against Egypt and Moab, arrogance and idolatry are reasons for Babylon's destruction. But there was more. Babylon would also face punishment for their treatment of God's people. Yes, they had been a tool in God's disciplinary hand, but that did not exonerate their cruel treatment of Judah. God described Babylon as a devouring enemy all too happy to crush Judah. They oppressed God's people and held them captive. In the end, God declared to the remnant: "Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion" (Jeremiah 51:24). The oracle against Babylon was not just a verdict of guilt, but a proclamation of God's protection and zeal for His people. He was their Redeemer, and He would "vigorously defend their cause" (Jeremiah 50:34). Even in difficulty, God's protective watch does not relent.

Embedded in this oracle against Babylon is an important message about God's covenant faithfulness. Another reason for Babylon's fall would be for the restoration of God's people. In those days, the remnant would "go in tears to seek the Lord their God" and "bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant" (Jeremiah 50:4–5). In turn, God would forgive them and cleanse them from all sin (Jeremiah 50:20). The chastisement of God was real, but temporary; it was painful, but necessary for a restored relationship with God.

**APPLY THE WORD** Can you see this principle of restorative discipline in your own life? Create a brief scrapbook, journal, or collage detailing some of the ways God has used difficult circumstances in your past to bring you closer to Him. Consider including meaningful verses from this month's study as a reminder of the current lessons God may be teaching you now.

## JEREMIAH 51

## JEREMIAH 52

### Jeremiah 52:1–34 GOD'S WORD STANDS FOREVER

Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Psalm 119:89

For many American filmgoers, a happy ending is the best ending—all problems resolved, all relationships mended. The ending of the book of Jeremiah, however, doesn't classify as a warm and fuzzy finale. What lessons should we take away from this reiteration of the fall of Jerusalem under Babylon?

The ending of Jeremiah underscores the truthfulness of God's Word. From the beginning, God told Jeremiah to preach a message warning the people of Judah to expect disaster from the north because of their sin and disobedience. Just as God predicted, so it happened, and Jeremiah 52 recounts the details of that fulfillment. Babylon came, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled thousands of inhabitants. Jeremiah 52:3 offers a reminder of why: "It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence."

The loss of God's presence is another important theme in Jeremiah 52. Notice the amount of time spent describing the destruction of the temple, the divinely appointed place of God's presence (Jeremiah 52:17–23). The explicit description of the details of the temple articles reminds us of the previous glory of the temple under Solomon. Now, the glory of God's presence has been replaced with desolation.

That's not the only message in today's reading. It may not be a Hollywood ending, but it hints at an aspect of God's word through Jeremiah—the promise of restoration. The last four verses in Jeremiah recall the favorable circumstances enjoyed by Jehoiachin. Though a wicked king, he experienced grace and blessing, a visible reminder to Judah that God's presence and blessing wouldn't be withheld forever. Restoration hadn't yet arrived, but that day would come because God's word is true.

APPLY THE WORD Jeremiah is a long and sometimes difficult book. Yet we know that all of Scripture can teach us important truths. Take time this Sunday afternoon to reflect on your study of Jeremiah, and then make a list of the top two or three lessons God has shown you in the past month. Thank God for His Word, and keep your list for future reference!

### **Jeremiah 52:31-34; 2 Chronicles 36:22-2**

I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. - Zechariah 1:16a

The story is told of a European village who had long prized the stunning stained-glass windows in its cathedral. During World War II, however, air raids threatened to destroy these municipal treasures. So the people dismantled the centuries-old masterpieces and hid them, section by section, in their homes. Throughout the war, the cathedral silently awaited the return of its former glory. Finally, after the war, artisans painstakingly reassembled the beautiful windows, which had suffered no damage or loss.

After Jerusalem's destruction, thoughts of restoration must have seemed inconceivable. Lamentations ends with no indication that Jerusalem would ever be restored. Yet an apparent historical footnote tucked away at the end of Jeremiah 52 quietly attests to God's loyal love.

Recall that Jehoiachin was the third of Judah's last four kings, all of whom were evil. Unlike the other three kings, Jehoiachin's life was spared even though he spent thirty-seven years in a Babylonian prison (Jeremiah 52:31). We are not told why the new Babylonian king, Evil-Merodach, treated Jehoiachin so well (Jeremiah 52:32-34), but "behind the scenes" God had a greater plan.

Even though Jehoiachin was an evil king, he was still part of the Davidic line. In 2 Samuel 7:16, the Lord promised David, "Your throne will be established forever." Jeremiah may have wondered when he wrote Lamentations how God could keep His promise. But God faithfully spared Jehoiachin to preserve this Davidic line, which eventually led to our Lord Jesus Christ (see Matt. 1:11-12).

Matthew's genealogy also shows that Jehoiachin had a grandson named Zerubbabel, who turned out to be instrumental in rebuilding the temple when the exiles returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C. (see Ezra 3:7-13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Ezra 3:11 records this joyous song: "With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.' And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

## **JEREMIAH 29:11**

**Rob Morgan**

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

This must be one of our favorite verses, because I keep hearing it at various functions. Recently we had a dinner honoring all our high school graduates, and one of the parents stood with a microphone and quoted this verse to the seniors. At a wedding here the other night, this verse was used during the ceremony.

I read an article in the newspaper recently about an Ohio woman who is facing her fifth major surgery to correct a severe curvature of the spine. A reporter asked her about her infectious optimism and good spirits, and she quoted this verse.

Another newspaper last week carried the story of a woman in Alabama who was raised in an abusive home and ended up in an abusive relationship. While living in a halfway home she found Jeremiah 29:11, and that verse gave her the power to begin breaking some lifelong, self-destructive patterns.

It's a verse with unique reassurances and it's worth memorizing by all of us; it's one of the 100 Bible verses that everyone on earth should know by heart: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

That's a great verse for us, because it tells us:

- God has a specific plan for each of our lives; He has a plan for your life.
- This plan is designed to prosper us.
- It isn't designed to harm us.



- When we realize this, it gives us a sense of hope and a future.

But when you read this verse in its context, you realize that this is really a verse for people who are not, for the moment, where they want to be. If you are not exactly where you want to be in life right now, maybe this verse will have a special meaning to you.

Background (Jeremiah 29:1-3)

Now, the best methodology for studying a verse like this in the Bible is looking at it within the setting of the chapter where it occurs. So I want to describe for you the background of Jeremiah 29:11. This is given to us in the first three verses of the chapter. Look at Jeremiah 29:1ff.:

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.

The author of this letter is the prophet Jeremiah, who is sometimes called “The Weeping Prophet” because he preached and ministered with great pathos in the most heartbreaking of times. All around him was suffering. All around him was the collapse of his country. The nation of Judah was being systematically disassembled and destroyed by the Babylonians. Large numbers of people—including members of the royal family of Judah—were being rounded up and killed or hauled away to refugee camps in Babylon. The nation was teetering on the brink of famine. Many Judeans were already in Babylon, but Jeremiah was among the remaining souls still trapped in the encircled city of Jerusalem. He knew that every passing day took him deeper into the disaster and closer to the utter defeat and dissolution of his nation, and he knew that judgment was inevitable.

But there were some Pollyanna-ish prophets and diviners in both Judah and among the refugee camps in Babylon who were saying something like this: “It may look bad, but the Lord is going to come through for us. You refugees will soon be back in Judah, and we Judeans are going to be delivered. Somehow a miracle is going to occur. God has delivered our nation in the past and He will do so again, now, any day. Expect a miracle!”

But Jeremiah’s message was the exact opposite: “No, the Lord will not save us from the Babylonians. We are out of miracles. Our sins have so alienated us from God that only judgment is left. And yet, even here the judgment of God is tinged with mercy and it leads to mercy. It may take 70 years, but God will re-establish our nation and His ultimate plans are undeterred. His purposes are stubborn things and will win out in the end.”

That’s the message that Jeremiah was preaching to the huddled, frightened survivors in Jerusalem. But he also wanted to communicate that same message to the refugees who had already been deported hundreds of miles away in Babylon. That’s what this letter is all about. Jeremiah 29 is a remarkable document, the record of an actual, ancient letter Jeremiah sent to the refugees who had already been deported by the Empire of Babylon.

So there we have the background as I’ve just described it. Now let’s look at the text of the letter, and I’d like to point out some instructions that Jeremiah gives. It’s actually a very relevant document. We, too, are living in a decadent and dangerous society. We’re living in the Last Days. We inhabit a land that is poised for judgment. When we see how thoroughly and adamantly our United States has turned away from God and from godliness and has rejected the Judeo-Christian heritage that gave our nation its birth and its greatness, then all of us are witnesses to the righteousness of the judgment of God.

So as Christians in an apostate land, what can we learn from this passage about living in these crucial and critical times?

#### 1. Make the Best of Things (vv. 4-6)

First, make the best of things. That sounds like cliché for positive thinkers, but it’s really solid, biblical advice. It’s exactly what Jeremiah said. Let’s continue reading with verse 4.

It (the letter) said:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.”

Jeremiah’s point is this: There isn’t going to be a last-minute miracle or any sudden solutions to the problem. Things aren’t going to get better, but worse. There are not any quick fixes or short-cuts. There may be hope for our long-term prospects, but in the meantime things are not going to be as we would wish.

So all you can do is to make the best of it. I like that phrase in verse 5: "Settle down." Sometimes we just have to settle down, to decide we're in it for the long haul, to go on with life, and to make the best of all that comes. Build your house. Plant your garden. Accept the fact that you're never going to see the City of Zion again in this life, but make the most of it where you are. Get married. Have children. Be hopeful. Increase in number. Don't decrease. Don't give up. You may not be where you want to be and you may never be where you want to be, at least in this life—but make the most of it where you are. Bloom where you are planted. Make the best of a bad situation, and you may find that it's not such a bad situation after all.

The other day I read a quotation from Martha Washington, our nation's first First Lady. She said: "I am still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have . . . learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances."

Sometimes there is nothing you can do to change your circumstances. Maybe at some point they'll change, but only in time. For now, all you can do is to make the most of it, to do the best you can, to rejoice in the Lord and to keep on going. Do the best you can where you are right now. Don't give up. Don't spend years wishing that something had or had not have happened. Don't be consumed by things you cannot change. Just settle down and do the best you possibly can where you are.

## 2. Pray Where You Are (v. 7)

Second, pray for peace and prosperity wherever you are right now. Look at verse 7:

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

In other words, Jeremiah was telling the people to pray for their enemies, for the nation where they had been exiled, for the Babylonians, and to pray for the peace and prosperity of that nation. Now, the words peace and prosperity are not actually in the original Hebrew wording. The Hebrew word that is used is shalom. Pray for the shalom of the nation where you are located. But the Hebrew word shalom means welfare, or peace and prosperity; and so that's why it's worded in this way.

This gives us a clue as to how we should pray today. Let's pray for the peace and prosperity of the United States. Let's pray for the peace and prosperity of the world. Let's pray for the peace and prosperity of our city and our church and our homes. After all, those are the things we're worried about right now. We're worried about issues relating to peace and war and terrorism and nuclear weapons and dangerous enemies and warfare. And we're concerned about the global economy. How do we pray in times like these? We pray for peace and prosperity. You can put those two words in your prayer book.

## 3. Beware the Wrong Voices (vv. 8-9)

Third, beware the wrong voices. After Jeremiah had told the people to settle down and make the best of things where they were, and after he had told them to pray for the peace and prosperity of the nation where they were, he then warned them not to listen to the wrong voices. Look at verses 8-9:

Yes, this is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in My name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.

I don't believe there has ever been such a time in the history, when so much deviant propaganda is being directed at so many unthinking souls through so many mesmerizing media, and it's resulting in a thoroughly desensitized and morally deprogrammed culture.

The wrong dresses itself up in costumes of self-righteousness, while the right and the good and the holy are tarred and feathered as though they were wrong.

The easiest, simplest way we can begin to think on a higher level and learn how to listen to the right voices is to begin the simple practice of reading our Bibles every single day.

## 4. Take the Long View (v.10)

Fourth, take the long view. Remember that your long-term prospects are better than your immediate circumstances. Look at verse 10:

This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill My gracious promise to bring you back to this place."

Now, this is an extraordinarily important prophecy. The deportation associated with the removal of King Jehoiachin occurred in 597

B.C. The complete collapse and fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem happened eleven years later in 586 B.C. On several specific occasions, Jeremiah predicted that the nation of Judah would be destroyed, its capital city burned, its people deported, and the entire nation would be wiped off the face of the earth; but that within 70 years, Judah would be back. The nation would be reestablished.

Let me show you some Scriptures about this:

- Here in Jeremiah 29:10, Jeremiah wrote: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.
- Compare what Jeremiah wrote to the captives with a sermon he had preached in downtown Jerusalem in Jeremiah 25:8ff: Therefore the Lord Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to My words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians...."

To get the full picture, I want you to imagine that I was preaching something similar today. Suppose I said, "Within ten to fifteen years, the United States of America is going to be defeated and destroyed by the People's Republic of China. The Chinese will develop a secret military weapon that will bring the United States to its knees. Its major cities will be destroyed, its people wiped out, and the survivors will be deported to overseas refugee camps. But exactly 70 years later—at the very end of the 21st century—the United States of America will be reestablished as a prominent player once again among the family of nations on this planet."

That is exactly what Jeremiah was saying regarding his own nation.

What happened?

The nation of Judah was defeated and destroyed in 586 B.C. Seventy years passed, and in the faraway capital of Babylon, an old Jewish statesman named Daniel was studying it over:

- Daniel 9:1ff says: In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting and in sackcloth and ashes....

Daniel claimed the promise of God regarding the restoration of Israel after seventy years of exile, and he prayed earnestly for the fulfillment of this promise. And now let's turn to the book of Ezra and see how it all ends up:

- In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing....

I'll not take time to read the proclamation that follows, but the essence of it is that the new Persian Empire, which had defeated and replaced the Babylonian Empire as the greatest political force in the world, issued a decree for the repopulating of Israel, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the restoration of national life in Judea. This took place in 530 B.C., long after Jeremiah was dead and gone.

Now the point of it all is that our long-term prospects are always better than our immediate conditions. We live in a day in which everyone wants immediate gratification, but Christians are looking forward to God's faithfulness to His earthly promises to us and to His immutable assurance of our heavenly home.

- In 2 Corinthians 4, the Apostle Paul said: Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

If you're overwhelmed by the struggles of life right now, just close your eyes and visualize how faithfully God is going to work on your behalf for the rest of your earthly pilgrimage, and how wonderful you're going to have it 100 years from now, and 1000, and 1,000,000 years from now.

When we've been there ten thousand years,

Bright shining as the sun,

We've no less days to sing God's grace,

Then when we first begun.

#### 5. Get Hopeful about God's Plans (v. 11)

Fifth, take hope in God's plans and purposes for your life. That brings us to our verse 11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Remember that these words were spoken to a displaced, defeated, depressed group of exiles. They had hung their harps on the willow trees and had lost their song. "How can we sing the songs of Zion in this strange land," they said. But with the Lord, things are never hopeless. He says to you: For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

#### 6. Seek the Lord Above All (vv. 13-14)

Finally, the next couple of verses remind us that since God has plans to prosper us and to give us hope and a future, we must seek Him with all our hearts.

"Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

This passage is so very similar to the one we looked at last week in Matthew 6:33: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you.

There once lived a woman named Adelaide Pollard who dearly wanted to travel to Africa. She wanted to be a missionary there, but she was unable to raise the necessary funds and had to cancel her trip. She nearly sank into disappointment and despondency, but she attended a prayer meeting and heard an elderly woman praying. The older woman said, "It's all right Lord. It doesn't matter what You bring into our lives, just as You have Your own way with us."

That very night, Adelaide Pollard wrote out her own prayer along those lines, and it became a great hymn of invitation.

Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way,

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still.

So if you are not exactly where you want to be today:

- Make the best of things.
- Pray where you are.
- Beware the wrong voices
- Take the long view
- Get hopeful about God's plans
- Seek Him with all your heart

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."