

Preliminary Thoughts on Jeremiah 2008 November 9th for December 10th

Jeremiah is the second of the major prophets who we will study. He lived and worked a long time, his writings spanning five kings of Judah, from Josiah to Zedekiah. He dictated everything to a faithful scribe Baruch.

A cranky old man, Jeremiah was in place to repeatedly predict, then personally witness the fall of Judah to the Babylonians. He preached that Judah was doing wrong and was not repentant and that God would not protect or preserve them under those circumstances, but would send them off into captivity which would only end in a future generation.

This message was not popular and Jeremiah was not usually popular. Some of his writings were destroyed by the various kings under whom he lived. His own introspective despair and self-criticism are prominent. Nonetheless, even though in his own writings, God is telling him not to bother praying for or exhorting his brethren, he prays for them anyway.

According to the introductory notes, the writings of Jeremiah come down to us in two (or more) different forms. This seems to be in agreement with the nation dispersing into exile towards the end of his life and work. Different copies might have gone off in different hands and taken on lives of their own going forward.

Now prepare yourself for some preaching.

Jeremiah 1

2008 November 16th for December 11th

The word of God came to Jeremiah in the 13th year of Josiah and remained with him until the people went into exile in the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah. This is his formal calling:

“The word of the Lord came to me, saying,
‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’

‘Ah, Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’

But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am only a child.” You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord.

God declared that Jeremiah would be over nations and kingdoms “to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

God gave Jeremiah visions, the first of an almond tree symbolizing that God would fulfill his word. In a second vision, Jeremiah saw a boiling pot from the north. This symbolized that God would call kings and nations from the north to bring judgment on his people.

“Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land – against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah would be the mouthpiece of God to the people of Judah of all classes.

Jeremiah 2:1 – 12

2008 November 16th for December 12th

The theme of God’s message through Jeremiah is declared immediately: Unfaithfulness.

“I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.”

Israel was holy and belonged to God. So what was the matter with the later people that they strayed away? Did they find fault with God? Did they not like the fruitful land to which he brought them? Does a nation ever change its gods? No, but Israel did. They changed their real God for gods that were hand made.

God says, “Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror.”

Jeremiah 2:13 – 22

2008 November 16th for December 15th

Israel had committed two sins: They forsook their God and they had made their own gods to worship. This made them slaves although God had freed them and put them firmly and securely in their land. Now due to their denial and backsliding, they were bitterly conquered by men of Memphis and Tahpanhes.

Israel threw off the yoke of God, broke bonds with him, and prostituted themselves under every tree and on every hill. “‘Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,’ declares the Sovereign Lord.”

Jeremiah 2:23 – 30

2008 November 17th for December 16th

Continuing on the theme of infidelity to God:

“How can you say, ‘I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals’?
See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done.
You are a swift she-camel running here and there,
A wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving – in her heat
who can restrain her?
Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her.
Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry.
But you said, ‘It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.’”

This is a disgrace, like a thief caught in the act. The political and religious leaders are all guilty.

“They say to wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to stone, ‘You gave me birth.’”

Judah has more gods than towns. Every town has its own set of little gods.

But then when they are in trouble they turn to their wood and stone and it doesn’t help them. They turn to their real God, against whom they have rebelled, to whom they have not responded, and he will not help them either, and he says so.

Jeremiah 2:31 – 37

2008 November 17th for December 17th

What has God done to Israel that they have abandoned him this way? Has he been like the desert or like a great darkness? The people roam freely. How is this possible? “Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments?”

The people are so skilled at “pursuing love” of idols that even the “worst women” could learn from them. They have killed people with whom they were not even angry, who had done nothing to them.

If you liked Assyria, you’ll love Egypt but God will not support you through them, rather, you will be their captives.

Jeremiah 3:1 – 13

2008 November 17th for December 18th

Jeremiah continues his lengthy description of the unfaithfulness of Judah using the sexual metaphor.

“If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled?
But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers – would you now return to me?”

There was not any high place where they had not sinned, not any spreading tree under which they had not been adulterous.

“Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen.”

They acted like prostitutes, waiting by the road for the next lover. The land was completely defiled.

“Have you not just called to me; ‘My Father, my friend from my youth, will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue forever?’”

But while they talked this way, they continued doing all possible evil.

Israel, the northern kingdom, did this too, the same as her “unfaithful sister.” “[S]he defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.”

Judah returned to God only on pretense. This is worse than doing nothing. Jeremiah then called to the north, to Israel, offering reconciliation before Judah if they would just repent for real.

Jeremiah 3:14 – 25

2008 November 19th for December 19th

If Israel would return to God, he would take a few from each community and send them to Jerusalem and put shepherds (leaders) over them who are kind and would take good care of them. No one would care about the Ark any more; the city Jerusalem would be the seat of God.

God himself said he would treat this people as his children and give them the best land but they were unfaithful to him like an unfaithful wife. The people cried out; they had forgotten God; they had backslidden. There is “idolatrous commotion on the hills.”

“From our youth shameful gods have consumed the fruits of our fathers’ labor – their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters.”

They were sinful and shamed from their earliest days.

Jeremiah 4:1 – 9

2008 November 19th for December 22nd

God again invites Israel, the northern kingdom, to return to him, to put away their idols, and to swear sincerely. God would then bless the nations through them. As for Judah, he advises them not to even bother to plant crops. What Judah has done is so detestable that God will burn it up with no appeal.

God announces a disaster from the north. A great kingdom, a lion, is leaving its place to come down and destroy Israel. Everyone should flee to Zion for safety, abandon their towns and villages immediately without delay. They will soon be uninhabited whether anyone was there to start with or not.

In that day everyone will lose heart, even the kings and priests.

Jeremiah 4:10 – 21

2008 November 19th for December 23rd

“Then I said, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, “You will have peace,” when the sword is at our throats.’”

The enemy will come like a scorching wind, not to cleanse, but much more powerful than that. He comes like a whirlwind out of the sky. The people are ruined; they are overthrown; they are in despair.

“Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain.
Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent.”

Those about to be conquered cannot stand the sound of the battle trumpet any longer.

Jeremiah 4:22 – 31

2008 December 3rd for 26th

God has decided to let his children and their towns fall to their enemies. They will flee at any sound of horses or archers, some into the bushes, others into the hills. No one will be left in town.

They are foolish, “skilled in doing evil.” The earth was empty, the sky void, and the mountains shaking. The people were gone, not totally destroyed, but mostly so. God had decided to do this and not to relent.

Why do the people dress up for their lovers? They are destroyed. They are in anguish.

Jeremiah 5:1 – 17

2008 December 3rd for 29th

Just see if you can find one honest person in Jerusalem. If you can, God promises to spare the city, but he knows that such a person cannot be found. They all refuse truth and correction. They have torn off all of their connections to God. They will be eaten by a lion from the forest.

“I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes.

They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man’s wife.”

They have also lied about God, saying that he will do nothing, that his prophets say only worthless things.

“Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your [the prophet’s] mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.”

A nation from a long way away, whose language is strange, will be brought to destroy Israel. Most will be killed. All of their possessions will be lost or consumed by the enemy.

Jeremiah 5:18 – 31

2008 December 3rd for 30th

Because of all this, God promises to destroy Israel, but not all of them. When they ask why he has done this, it is because they have worshipped other, non-gods.

Shouldn’t the people tremble at the real God? He is the one who made the sand on the seashore that, even though the sea roars and breaks against it, does not overcome it. He sends the rains in season, bringing the harvest. How can he be ignored?

Rather, the people are evil. They lay in wait for each other ensnare their innocent neighbors. They grow fat and sleek this way. “Their evil deeds have no limits.” Why shouldn’t they be punished? Why shouldn’t God avenge his name?

The prophets lie and the priests rule by their own authority. This will not stand.

Jeremiah 6:1 - 15

2008 December 5th for 2009 January 5th

Everyone in Benjamin (Israel) and Judah flee to the hills for safety! The land is being overrun! The attack comes at mid-day and lasts into the night. There is no mercy. The city’s sickness and wounds are in front of God always. He is cleaning it up. No one will be able to live in the land.

It will be like picking grapes off a vine and going over it again to make sure none are missed. He would give warning but no one was listening. Everyone would be caught up, the old and decrepit, husbands and wives. Everyone’s property, their houses, their fields, their wives, would become the property of others.

All God’s servants are deceitful, dressing the wounds of Israel but not taking them very seriously.

“‘Peace, peace,’ they say; when there is no peace.”

(This was one of dad's favorite verses.)

They have no shame. They will be brought down.

Jeremiah 6:16 – 30

2008 December 5th for 2009 January 6th

Because the people did not live under God's protection, using his paths and his watchmen, and because they have rejected his laws, they will now experience disaster. Their offerings are no longer acceptable. Now they will experience only obstacles.

A cruel and merciless army is coming from the north. They are on horses. The earth is stirred up. The people have heard reports. They are in anguish. They do not go out in their fields. They wail and mourn as if for the loss of an only son.

The people are tested like metal, and they fail.

Jeremiah 7:1 – 29

2008 December 5th for 2009 January 7th

God told Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the temple and say this:

“Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!’”

(Sounds like reciting the rosary....)

“Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’ – safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! Declares the Lord.”

(Sounds like Jesus....)

Although God spoke again and again to the people, all the way back to the time of Moses in the desert, they never listened. Now he will thrust them away from himself.

The children are gathering wood for a fire. The women are making bread for the “Queen of Heaven” a false god. “But am I the one they are provoking declares the Lord. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?”

Here's the deal, says God. When I gave you all those rules in the desert, it wasn't just about the sacrifices and the form of worship. It was about being obedient to the laws of God. Doing one without the other doesn't get you off the hook. God sent in servant after servant with this message and they were all ignored or worse. Therefore, "Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips. Cut off your hair and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the Lord has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath."

Jeremiah 7:30 – 8:12

2008 December 19th for 2009 January 8th

The people in Judah have done evil things that God did not command, things that did not even occur to God, like building altars to sacrifice their very children in the fire. Because of this, when they are destroyed they won't even be buried. Their bones will lie all over the valley like refuse. In fact, those who were buried would be exhumed and their bones would lie out in the sunlight to dry and decay also. Survivors would prefer death to life. There would be no joy.

Men fall and stay down. Animals in the wilderness know what they are supposed to do and follow their nature through the seasons of their lives, but the children of Israel, who have God's Word written down, ignore it and do not do as they were told. This is not wise.

God would give the men's wives and fields to their conquerors.

They were not ashamed; they were not even able to blush.

Jeremiah 8:13 – 22

2008 December 19th for 2009 January 9th

God will punish the people by taking away their harvest. They will have poisoned water. They will flee to the cities and perish together there. The horses of the enemy would be heard all over the land. Venomous snakes would be everywhere.

God had gone from Zion. The people cried. They provoked him with images and worthless foreign idols. They were crushed. The prophet mourned. His heart was faint. There was no healing, only woundedness.

Jeremiah 9:1 – 16

2008 December 19th for 2009 January 12th

The prophet speaks:

"Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears!
I would weep day and night for the slain of my people."

They are all unfaithful. They are all deceitful. Brothers cannot trust one another. The prophet wishes he could just move out into the desert and be away from all this.

God would test and refine the people. The paid mourners would mourn not at funerals, but for everyone. There would be no sound of animals in the fields and pastures. Everything would be dead, silent. The city would be a heap of ruins.

A traveler might wonder why the land was so wasted, so destroyed.

“The Lord said, ‘It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law. Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them.’”

They would therefore eat bitter food and drink poisoned water until they were pursued with the sword and destroyed.

Jeremiah 9:17 – 25

2008 December 22nd for 2009 January 13th

Quickly call for the mourners. Have them wail over the entire country. All must leave their houses and lands. The bodies of the dead men will litter the streets.

No one should boast of wisdom, strength, or riches. They should only boast in what they know of God and that they know God. God is, “the Lord, who exercised kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.”

All those who are Jews in race and circumcision only will be punished, because the whole nation is “uncircumcised in heart.”

Jeremiah 10:1 – 10

2008 December 22nd for 2009 January 14th

Now Jeremiah goes after idols in the same way that Isaiah did.

“Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky; though the nations are terrified by them.

For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel.

They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter.

Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk.

Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.”

Jeremiah then tells the same story for idols made of metal after which he concludes:

“But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King.
When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.”

Jeremiah 10:11 – 25

2008 December 22nd for 2009 January 15th

Jeremiah continues his diatribe about idols:

“Tell them this: “These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.””

God *did* make the heavens and the earth. He lights up the clouds and brings the rain. Idols made of gold are a fraud, they do not breathe but God breathes and when he does the heavens and earth roar.

Destruction is coming. Gather your things and flee. Distress will come without relief. Everything will be destroyed. No injury will be cured. No one will be left to work. The commotion comes from the north and Judah will be “desolate, a haunt of jackals.”

Jeremiah prays:

“I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. Correct me, Lord, but only with justice – not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.
Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the people who do not call on your name.
For they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him completely and destroyed his homeland.”

Jeremiah 11

2008 December 26th for 2009 January 16th

Jeremiah brought the Word of God to the people and proclaimed his covenant for them. From the time God brought them out of the “iron-smelting furnace” of Egypt, he has had the same orders.

Instead of following and obeying the real God, however, they did what their fathers had done and followed the local non-gods instead. There were as many of these non-gods as there were towns in Judah and the people were burning incense to them everywhere, not just in the prescribed place, the temple in Jerusalem. God considered this a conspiracy. In fact, they were even worshipping these non-gods *in* the temple in Jerusalem!

God directs Jeremiah not to even pray for them.

“What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many?
Can consecrated meat avert your punishment?
When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice.

“The Lord called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form.
But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken.”

God had decreed disaster.

Further, God revealed to Jeremiah a plot against his life by the men of Anathoth. They were tired of hearing his message from God and wanted to silence him. Jeremiah escaped and prophesied against them, however. They would all die by the sword and their sons of the famine (same as the rest of Israel in the upcoming conquest). There would, however, be a remnant of Israel, but not of these men.

Jeremiah 12

2008 December 26th for 2009 January 19th

Jeremiah has Job’s conversation with God, asking the question of the ages and receiving an answer:

“You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you.
Yet I would speak with you about your justice: why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all the faithless live at ease?
You have planted them and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit.
You are always on their lips but far from their hears.
Yet you know me, O Lord; you see me and test my thoughts about you.
Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter!
How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered?
Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished.
Moreover, the people are saying, ‘He will not see what happens to us.’”

“God’s Answer”

“If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?
If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?
Your brothers, your own family – even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you.
Do not trust them, though they speak well of you.

“I will forsake my house, abandon my inheritance;
I will give the one I love into the hands of her enemies.
My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest.

She roars at me; therefore I hate her.
Has not my inheritance become to me like a speckled bird of prey that any other birds of prey surround and attack?
Go and gather all the wild beasts; bring them to devour.
Many shepherds will ruin my vineyard and trample down my field;
they will turn my pleasant field into a desolate wasteland.
It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me;
The whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares.
Over all the barren heights in the desert destroyers will swarm,
For the sword of the Lord will devour from one end of the land to the other; no one will be safe.
They will sow wheat but reap thorns; they will wear themselves out but gain nothing.
So bear the shame of your harvest because of the Lord's fierce anger."

All the wicked who have led the country astray will be uprooted. If, on the return of a remnant, they become solely devoted to God instead of having any relationship with Baal, then he will prosper them. If not, he will "completely uproot and destroy."

This doesn't seem like a direct answer, beyond saying that God will in fact be just but only in his own time. Beyond that it seems like an extension of the ongoing prophecies about the upcoming conquest and exile.

I suppose God can give whatever answer he wants to a question.

Jeremiah 13

2008 December 26th for 2009 January 20th

God devised an object lesson for Jeremiah. He instructed the prophet to buy a silk belt and wear it. Jeremiah did this. God then told him to go to a town called Pereth and hide the belt in a rock. Jeremiah did this too. Later, God told him to go to Pereth and retrieve the belt. Jeremiah did this and discovered that the belt had been ruined by the elements and was useless.

God then proclaimed:

"In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt – completely useless! For as a belt is bound around a man's waist, so I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to me,' declares the Lord, 'to be my people for my renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened.'"

He then gave another metaphor, this one about wineskins. God would make the whole nation drunk, then "I will smash them one against the other, fathers and sons alike,

declares the Lord. I will allow no pity or mercy or compassion to keep me from destroying them.”

The remainder of the chapter is another threat of captivity, warning the people of what will happen to all of them, from the king and queen down to the lowest peasants, if they do not repent and stop being arrogant about their habits of worshipping non-gods. All their crops would be wasted. All of their clothes would be torn off.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?
Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

“I will scatter you like chaff driven by the desert wind.
This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you,’

“...because you have forgotten me and trusted in false gods.
I will pull up your skirts over your face that your shame may be seen –
Your adulteries and lustful neighings, your shameless prostitution!
I have seen your detestable acts on the hills and in the fields.
Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you be unclean?”

God seems to have hope although he has essentially declared the condition hopeless.

Jeremiah 14:1 – 9

2009 January 1st for 21st

There was a drought in Judah. Jeremiah put words to the distress. Cries, wails, and mourning for the land went up everywhere. People went for water but all the cisterns were empty. The ground was cracked; the farmers were in despair for lack of rain.

“Even the doe in the field deserts her newborn fawn because there is no grass.”

Wild and domesticated animals failed for lack of pasture.

“Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save?
You are among us O Lord, and we bear your name; do not forsake us!”

Jeremiah 14:10 – 22

2009 January 1st for 22nd

God addresses the people concerning their drought. He tells Jeremiah that they are only good at wandering away from him. He tells Jeremiah not to bother praying for them because he will not listen, nor will he acknowledge or accept any sacrifices they make to him. He will not do anything about their despair.

“But I [Jeremiah] said, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord, the prophets keep telling them, “You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed I will give you lasting peace in this place.”’”

Those prophets are liars, says God. He has not sent them; he did not tell them what to say; their visions are false, their inspiration is idolatry. “And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them or their wives; their sons or their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve.”

Jeremiah is given a prophesy of horror. Every place he goes he sees the dead, starved, killed by the sword, even the prophets and priests. They cry for healing, for God’s goodness and peace, but it does not come. They acknowledge their wickedness and their sin against God and plead with him for relief for his own name’s sake.

“Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers?”

No, these only come from God.

Jeremiah 15:1 – 10

2009 January 1st for 23rd

God continues on the subject of the present drought.

“Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!”

If they ask where to go, God says: to the sword, to starvation, to captivity, and to death.

“‘I will send four kinds of destroyers against them,’ declares the Lord, ‘the sword to kill and the dogs to drag away and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.’”

No one will have pity or mourn. God will not have compassion. “I will make their widows more numerous than the sand of the sea.” Suddenly destruction will come. Survivors will be put to the sword. People will wish they had never been born. People who had done nothing wrong were cursed with all the rest.

Jeremiah 15:11 – 21

2009 January 3rd for 24th

This is a mixed session. God first says:

“Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress.”

This makes us believe that God is planning to save us but then he says:

“Can a man break iron – iron from the north – or bronze?
Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without charge,
because of all your sins throughout your country.
I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know,
for my anger will kindle a fire that will burn against you.”

The writer pleads that he has not been part of the problem, “I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them;” but rather ate up God’s word whenever it came. He pleads to be protected from persecution.

God replies, “If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me.” God will save, protect, and fight for the repentant person and their enemies will not prevail.

“I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.”

Jeremiah 16

2009 January 3rd for 27th

God instructed that no one should marry and have children in this land because all who live here would be slaughtered. There would be no one to bury the bodies; they would just lie around like refuse regardless of social status. He instructs that no one is to go to a funeral wake. No one will be mourned. The mourner will not be given even a drink of water in compassion.

Neither should anyone go to a feast because there is no reason to feast.

Why, the people ask, does God punish them?

God says that it was because of their fathers who worshipped idols and things that they had made with their own hands, and worse than that, because the people now, their children, had committed even worse sins.

Because of this God will send in fishermen and hunters. Enemies with keen eyes will kill them as they flee into the rocks on the hills. No one will escape; no one will be able to hide. The conqueror will be thorough and exhaustive.

This will prove that God is God. The people will understand who the Creator is.

Jeremiah 17:1 – 18

2009 January 3rd for 28th

Judah's sin is engraved on their hearts and those of their children. Because of this they will be enslaved to foreigners.

Here are some famous verses:

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.

He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

“But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

A profound psychoanalysis on the human condition:

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

“I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind,

to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”

Don't become rich unjustly. It is foolish.

God is in a glorious place. Hear me. Heal me. Shepherd me.

“Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame;

let them be terrified, but keep me from terror.

Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction.”

... with *double* destruction.

Jeremiah 17:19 – 18:12

2009 January 6th for 29th

God told Jeremiah to go to the city gates of Jerusalem and announce to everyone who passed by that they should observe the Sabbath, specifically, to be careful not to carry a heavy load (that is, to work) on the Sabbath. If they did this, God would provide security and wealth. Kings in the line of David would always sit on the throne there and would ride in and out in chariots and on horses. Worshippers from all over the country would come to offer proper sacrifices in Jerusalem.

The people did not listen to the prophet, however. They carried their Sabbath loads right past him while he preached this discipline to them. As a result, God directed him to call

down judgment on them, judgment of the form and in the words that we have seen many times previously in this prophet's book.

God sent Jeremiah down to the potter's house where the prophet witnessed a jar being made. But then there was a flaw and the potter messed it up with his own hands and then proceeded to form another type of pot out of it.

Similarly, God can change his mind about the work he is doing. If he has decreed destruction on a country or a city but they relent, repent, and become obedient, he will change his mind and save and prosper them.

Similarly, if God has decreed blessing and wealth on a city or a country and they turn into disobedience, he will change his mind, reconsider, and have them destroyed.

Jeremiah 18:13 – 23

2009 January 6th for 30th

Ask the question, who has ever heard of a nation behaving like this? Never in a million years! Because they worship idols, God will make them all stumble and slip. They will be scorned and wasted and "all who pass by will be appalled and will shake their heads."

Some made plans against Jeremiah to attack him verbally and ignore his warnings. Jeremiah calls on the Lord to bring about their ruin, and that of their children too. He asks that their crimes not be forgiven but for God to deal with them in his anger.

Jeremiah 19

2009 January 6th for February 2nd

God sent Jeremiah to the potter to buy a pot, then to the Valley of Ben Hinnom with some of the leaders. There he put on a demonstration: he prophesied disaster.

Because the people had worshipped Baal and sacrificed their own children in fire, God would wipe them out in this very valley. "[P]eople will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter."

The carcasses of the dead would be eaten by birds and wild animals. "I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives."

Then Jeremiah dramatically broke the jar, as God directed, and proclaimed that Judah would be smashed just like that. The dead would be buried until there was no more room left for burials.

Jeremiah then went home to Jerusalem and proclaimed in the temple courts that they were all doomed, that all the disasters would come true, and that it would all happen because the people had not listened to his words and obeyed God.

Jeremiah 20

2009 January 7th for February 3rd

After Jeremiah gave his loud and disturbing prophecy on the temple grounds, the chief priest had him beaten and put in stocks. After he was released, Jeremiah prophesied to this official that he himself would be a horror in the destruction. When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, all of his friends would be killed as he watched. The wealth of the city would be taken. All in his house would go into exile.

Jeremiah then complains poetically that no one likes him. The people ridicule him all day long and wait for him to slip up so they can disgrace and dishonor him. God has deceived and overpowered him. But then he says that God is with him and that those who oppose him are the ones who will be dishonored. God takes care of the needy and rescues them from the wicked. Nonetheless, Jeremiah laments the day he was born, the fact that he came alive out of his mother into this world of strife and distress. He even curses the man who brought his father the news of his birth. “A child is born to you – a son!”

Jeremiah 21

2009 January 7th for February 4th

King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah in order to inquire of the Lord. The city was under siege by the Babylonians and the king and his officials were looking for miraculous wonders like God had performed in the past to save them.

This was God’s answer:

“I am about to turn against you the weapons of war that are in your hands, which you are using to fight the king of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside the wall besieging you. And I will gather them inside this city. I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in anger and fury and great wrath. I will strike down those who live in this city – both men and animals – and they will die of a terrible plague. After that, declares the Lord, I will hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to their enemies who seek their lives. He will put them to the sword; he will show them no mercy or pity or compassion.

“Furthermore, tell the people, ‘This is what the Lord says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; he will escape with his life. I have determined to do this city

harm and not good, declares the Lord. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.’

“Moreover, say to the royal house of Judah, ‘Hear the word of the Lord; O house of David, this is what the Lord says:

“Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed,
or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done – burn with no one to quench it.

I am against you, Jerusalem, you who live above this valley on the rocky plateau,

“you who say, “Who can come against us? Who can enter our refuge?”
I will punish you as your deeds deserve,

“I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you.”””

Jeremiah 22:1 – 17

2009 January 7th for February 5th

God spoke to the king of Judah through Jeremiah. This is what the king was supposed to do:

“Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.”

Do this and kings in the line of David will be established here with wealth and security in the land.

Don’t do these things and the country will be made into a desert. The king will be killed and his son taken into exile never to see their country again. Specific sins are: worshipping other gods, building for yourself on injustice to others, not paying wages, glorifying yourself, and ignoring the poor and needy, among other things.

“But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion.”

Jeremiah 22:18 – 30

2009 January 10th for February 6th

God said this about Jehoiakim, son of Josiah king of Judah. No one would mourn for him in any fashion. “He will have the burial of a donkey – dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem.”

The anguish of the people under siege, under conquest, in exile, would be like that of a woman giving birth.

“As surely as I live,” declares the Lord, “even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear – to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians. I will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die. You will never come back to the land you long to return to.”

This king would be considered childless, un-prosperous in his own lifetime. None of his children would sit on the throne of Judah.

Jeremiah 23:1 – 15

2009 January 10th for February 9th

The prophet now spends some pages condemning the other, false, prophets.

Prophets are like shepherds to the people but these have led the people astray. They have lived a lie. God will punish them directly. God will shepherd the people directly. A day is coming when they will no longer speak of God who brought the people out of Egypt, but they will call him the One who brought them out of the land of the north, to which they are about to go into exile.

Jeremiah describes himself as a drunken man in his anguish over the land full of evil adulterers. The prophets live a lie themselves, committing adultery themselves and saying things that are not true, claiming that they have come from God.

“They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.”

Jeremiah 23:16 – 40

2009 January 10th for February 10th

“Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds not from the mouth of the Lord.”

They predict peace when war is coming. They have not “stood in the council of the Lord.” These prophecies are not good for these people, despite what the false prophets say. Real prophets give words that tell people to turn from their evil ways. These prophets have said no such things.

Furthermore:

“‘Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the Lord, ‘and not a God far away?’

Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ Declares the Lord. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’”

Some prophets lie in God’s name saying, “I had a dream!” They think telling these dreams to one another will make them forget the true God. Well, go ahead and tell your dreams, Jeremiah tells them, but God’s word is like grain to straw. God’s word is like the hammer that smashes the rock. God’s word is real and all this other blabbering is the temporal.

These prophets were not sent or appointed by God. They stole words from each other and gave them in God’s name, but the dreams they tell are lies also. God would punish these people and their families. “I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your fathers. I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace – everlasting shame that will not be forgotten.”

Jeremiah 24

2009 January 14th for February 11th

Jehoiachin was carried into exile with some of his craftsmen and artisans to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar.

God had Jeremiah bring two baskets of figs to the temple and place them out front. One basket contained fine figs “like those that ripen early” and the other basket contained figs that were so poor they could not be eaten.

God asked Jeremiah what he saw. His reply, “Figs. The good ones are very good, but the poor ones are so bad they cannot be eaten.”

This was the word of the Lord about the illustration of the figs. The good figs represented the good people who had been taken into exile. God would watch over them and keep them safe and restore them (eventually) to their land. The bad figs represented Zedekiah, king of Judah, and his officials. They would become an offense in all the earth. They would be destroyed by famine and plague.

Jeremiah 25:1 – 14

2009 January 14th for February 12th

Jeremiah spoke God’s word in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah.

For 23 years, Jeremiah had told the people what they needed to do to avoid God’s wrath through exile. They needed to turn from their evil ways and practices and stop worshipping things they had made with their own hands and stop harming themselves by so doing.

They had not listened, however, so God would bring a conqueror, who he calls his “servant Nebuchadnezzar” from the north to take them into captivity for 70 years. After that, however, he would also punish the conquering country for their guilt as promised and enslave them themselves.

Seventy years was a long time from the present, however.

Jeremiah 25:15 – 38

2009 January 14th for February 13th

God had Jeremiah take the “cup filled with the wine of my wrath” to many nations to drink it. If they refused, God said they were required to drink it. Among the nations listed are Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, Dedan, Tema, Buz, Arabia, and many others in all directions from Israel. God told them to get drunk and vomit.

“The Lord will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land.”

All the wicked would be put to the sword. The storm of disaster would encompass the earth. The slain would pile up everywhere like refuse. They would be shattered like pottery, slaughtered like sheep. Their pasture would be destroyed as if by a roaring, raging lion. God’s fierce anger would bring desolation.

Jeremiah 26

2009 January 19th for February 16th

God gave Jeremiah an exact prophecy to give to the people. He went to the temple and stood in the courtyard and gave it. God said, “Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.”

When Jeremiah did this, the priests and officials seized him and said, “You must die!” He had once again prophesied against the temple and the city.

Jeremiah was taken to trial. All of the priests, prophets, and officials were there at the gate in addition to the common people. When the evidence was given, the common people cried out that Jeremiah was right and should not be put to death. Jeremiah himself said that they could do whatever they wanted with him, but if they killed him they would have innocent blood on their hands because he had prophesied directly from God.

Some of the elders stepped up and cited the case of Micah who had prophesied against the city similarly. Hezekiah, king at the time, had not put him to death.

There had been another prophet, Uriah son of Shemaiah, (not Uriah husband of Bathsheba) who Jehoiakim had put to death. Even though Uriah fled to Egypt, the king sent for him and had him brought back and had “his body thrown into the burial place of the common people.”

Also, Ahikam supported Jeremiah, so he was not put to death.

Jeremiah 27

2009 January 20th for February 17th

Jeremiah brought a message from God to Judah and to all their neighbors, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, through their envoys. They would all serve Babylon. If they did, they might be allowed to stay in their land and work there, under Nebuchadnezzar. Those who were taken into exile would one day return, after a few generations.

Those who listened to the false prophets, those who said that they would not be enslaved to Babylon, that the furnishings of the temple and the palace would not be taken as spoils to that country, they would perish as would their false prophets. God would restore the treasures of Judah and Jerusalem one day when he was ready, but they would be taken away now and they would not come back anytime soon.

So much for positive spin being self-fulfilling.

Jeremiah 28

2009 January 21st for February 18th

In the fourth year of Zedekiah (593 B.C.) a prophet named Hananiah prophesied publicly that within two years God would break Babylon and all the articles taken from the temple and the palace would be restored to their places.

Jeremiah, also publicly, responded, “Amen! May the Lord do so.” But he also said that many prophets prophesied war, but the ones who prophesied peace were only true prophets if peace actually occurred. Peace would not occur in this case, Jeremiah said.

Hananiah then took the wooden yoke from Jeremiah’s neck and broke it and used it as an illustration while repeating his prophecy. Jeremiah, now free, went his own way, but shortly the Word of the Lord came to him and he went back to Hananiah and told him that although he had broken a yoke of wood, Babylon would be like a yoke of iron, not so easily broken. He also said, “This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord.”

Hananiah died within two months.

Jeremiah 29

2009 January 23rd for February 19th

Jeremiah sent a letter to those who had gone into exile in Babylon. In it he told them to settle down there, build houses, plant gardens, get married and have families and grow rather than diminishing. God had declared that they would spend seventy years in Babylon before he would fulfill his promise to bring them back to Jerusalem.

This context, a letter from the prophet back home to the exiles in exile, is the context for this famous verse:

“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.” They would be gathered back from all their places of banishment.

The people in Babylon claimed that God had given them prophets there but Jeremiah gave them God’s word about king Zedekiah and those who had stayed behind in Jerusalem. They would be destroyed by the sword, famine, and plague. They would be like bad figs that were too bad to be eaten. Those false prophets, they would be handed over and put to death by Nebuchadnezzar while the people watched. God had not missed the adulteries and lies committed by the people.

Jeremiah had a special message for Shemaiah who had sent letters of prophecy to Jerusalem, including a demand that Jeremiah be reprimanded for telling them to settle down in Babylon and preparing to stay there for seventy years. Jeremiah sent a message back, God’s Word, that because of this preaching of rebellion, Shemaiah and all of his descendants would be punished. They would all perish before the return from Babylon.

Jeremiah 30:1 – 11

2009 January 23rd for February 20th

God’s Word came to Jeremiah about the return from the exile. God instructed Jeremiah to write it all down in a book.

“Cries of fear are heard – terror, not peace,
Ask and see: Can a man bear children?
Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor, every face turned deathly pale?
How awful that day will be! None will be like it.
It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.”

God would break the yoke of bondage off of their neck and return them from exile, but not without punishment. While the nations who were their enemies, their captors, would be destroyed *completely*, Israel would be only partly destroyed and disciplined with justice.

Jeremiah 30:12 – 24

2009 January 26th for February 23rd

“This is what the Lord says:

“Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing.
There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you.
All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you.
I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel,
because your guilt is so great and your sins so many....”

“Because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.”

But then,

“This is what the Lord says:

“I will restore the fortunes of Jacob’s tents and have compassion on his dwellings;
the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place.”

The communities will be established, the people will increase, and it will be for the children like it used to be in the good old days. The oppressors will be punished and the leaders will care about and stay close to God.

“So you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

“See, the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath,
a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked.
The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes
of his heart.
In days to come you will understand this.”

Jeremiah 31:1 – 14

2009 January 29th for February 24th

After the conquest, after the exile begins, things will be much better.

“At that time,’ declares the Lord, ‘I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they
will be my people.’

“This is what the Lord says:

“The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest
to Israel.’

“The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.
I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.
Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.
Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria;
the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit.
There will be a day when watchmen cry out on the hills of Ephraim.
“Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.””

“This is what the Lord says:

“Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations.
Make your praises heard, and say, “O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.”
See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth.
Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return.
They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back.
I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

“Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands:
“He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.”
For the Lord will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.
They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—
the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds.
They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.
Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well.
I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.
I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty.””

Jeremiah 31:15 – 22

2009 January 29th for February 25th

But now, the chapter we were reading yesterday turns dark. It begins with a quotation that we associate with the Christmas story.

“This is what the Lord says:

“A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping,

Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.”

(This happened to the children in Israel when Jesus’ parents took him and fled to Egypt.)

“This is what the Lord says:

“‘Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,’ declares the Lord. ‘They will return from the land of the enemy.

So there is hope for your future,’ declares the Lord. ‘Your children will return to their own land.’

“‘I have surely heard Ephraim’s moaning; “You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined.

Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God.

After I strayed, I repented;

after I came to understand, I beat my breast.

I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.”

Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight?

Though I often speak against him, I still remember him.

Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him,’ declares the Lord.

‘Set up road signs; put up guideposts.

Take note of the highway, the road that you take.

Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns.

How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter?

The Lord will create a new thing on earth – a woman will surround a man.”

Jeremiah 31:23 – 40

2009 January 29th for February 26th

When the people come back from captivity things will be better. “A day is coming when...” the text says. This is part of the foundation of Christianity, the “New Covenant,” though it is not certain that Jeremiah wasn’t just talking about life in Israel after the return from Babylon.

“In those days people will no longer say,

“‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’”

(And we have seen plenty of this language in Isaiah and Jeremiah so far, not to mention Moses.)

“Instead, everyone will die for his own sin, whoever eats sour grapes – his own teeth will be set on edge.

“‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord.

“‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord.

‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” Because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord.

“‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”

God says that, in the same way that he appoints the sun and moon to shine by day and night, so long as all that is still happening, Israel will not fail to be a nation under him. They will not disappear. Only when the heavens and the earth can be measured would he reject them again.

(Hmmm... Measuring the heavens and the earth is what I do for a living....)

The towers will be rebuilt and the valleys of slaughter in and around Jerusalem will become sacred to God. “The city will never again be uprooted or demolished.”

Jeremiah 32:1 – 25

2009 January 30th for February 27th

In the tenth year of Zedekiah, king of Judah, he had Jeremiah confined to the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace (the jail) because of the way he had prophesied that Jerusalem would be besieged and conquered and that Zedekiah would be led off as a prisoner to meet Nebuchadnezzar face to face.

Jerusalem was at that moment under siege.

Jeremiah answered that God had told him to expect his cousin Hanamel to come try to sell him a piece of family property, as it was Jeremiah’s right and duty to redeem it and keep it in the family if he could. Hanamel did in fact show up with this offer and, because the prediction and the direction were from God, Jeremiah did buy the land and had the deed sealed in a jar that would last for a long time.

“For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.”

Incidentally, we also meet Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe, in this transaction. It is Baruch who files the deed with the authorities. It was Baruch to whom Jeremiah dictated this book, and anything else he wrote. Baruch, like Jeremiah, was punished because the message was unpopular. Even after the conquest was over, Jeremiah told those who had survived in Jerusalem not to flee to Egypt. This too was unpopular.

(According to a sidebar, there are seals from Baruch himself, including a fingerprint, in antiquities collections today!)

Jeremiah then prayed to God, remembering God’s power through which he created and ordained everything and the love he had shown for his people all the way back before Egypt, from which he had powerfully removed them although they had then rebelled and hadn’t followed him as he instructed when they were transplanted into the Promised Land. And now the city was under siege and in famine as Jeremiah had prophesied. Jeremiah had said only what God had told him to say.

This was a long answer. When one is on trial before the king, perhaps a long answer is prudent.

The prayer concludes.

“And though the city will be handed over to the Babylonians, you, O Sovereign Lord, say to me, ‘Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed.’”

That is, carry on your business as usual. One day things will return to “normal.”

Jeremiah 32:26 – 44

2009 February 2nd for March 2nd

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ‘I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me? Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am about to hand this city over to the Babylonians and to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who will capture it. The Babylonians who are attacking this city will come in and set it on fire; they will burn it down, along with the houses where the people provoked me to anger by burning incense on the roofs to Baal and by pouring out drink offerings to other gods.’”

These people had done nothing but evil from their youth. God declared that he must remove the city from his sight. Their kings and officials and all the men had turned their backs on God. They did not do what they were told time after time even though they were instructed many times. They set up idols to Baal in the valleys and sacrificed their

children to Molech, something that God never commanded and which was a detestable sin.

Even so, even given the loss of Jerusalem through the sword and plague and famine, God would ultimately restore them. He would gather all the exiles from wherever they were and bring them back and re-establish this city and he would do good for them and restore their fortunes and cause them to flourish and they would fear God for their own good and do right.

I don't know what caused God to think this would happen.

Jeremiah 33

2009 February 4th for March 3rd

While still in Jail, Jeremiah delivered another prophesy from God on the theme of destruction followed by restoration.

God would hide his face from the people. During this siege, even the houses that were torn down would be full of dead bodies.

But later, God would restore the city and his relationship with the people. Happy sounds of families and animals and weddings would be heard again. A king in the line of David would sit on the throne forever and the number of Levites in the service of God would be uncountably large. But, the situation depended on the people's obedience. The situation could still go up or down in the future.

To those who thought that God had revoked his covenant with his chosen people, he had no more done that, he would no more do that, than he would revoke his covenant with the day and the night that he had created. When God rejected the fixed laws of the earth that he had established, then he would reject the descendants of Jacob.

Jeremiah 34

2009 February 4th for March 4th

Jeremiah delivered God's Word to Zedekiah that the battle he was fighting with the Babylonians would be lost. He, the king, would see his conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, face to face, and Zedekiah would go to Babylon. Zedekiah would not, however, die violently, but would die peacefully, and there would be a funeral fire in his honor as there had been for his fathers.

There is a law of Moses that all slaves be freed every seven years in the sabbath year, that their contracts of slavery ended at that time. This law was being ignored so Jeremiah saw to it that it was understood and followed. All the Hebrews freed their fellow Hebrew slaves.

Soon, however, they changed their minds, took their slaves back, and carried on as before. God, speaking through Jeremiah, was enraged. They had broken their oath, the type of oath that was ratified by cutting an animal in half and passing between the parts in a ceremonial purification ritual (as, for example, Abraham had done). God said that these people would become like their sacrifices for breaking their oaths. They would be handed over to their enemies and their dead, desecrated bodies would become food for birds.

Jeremiah 35

2009 February 6th for March 5th

During king Jehoiakim, Jeremiah was directed by God to entertain members of the family of Recabite in one of the side rooms of the temple and to give them some wine.

Jeremiah did this, and he set bowls of wine and cups in front of them and invited them to drink. They declined, however, saying that their ancestor Jonadab had ordered that no one in the family was ever to drink wine. Also, they were never to build houses or sow or reap or plant vineyards, but that they were always to live in tents as their ancestors had, and that in this way they would live a long time in the land. The only reason they were in Jerusalem now was because of the siege, but they were still living there only in tents.

Jeremiah then prophesied. He proclaimed that this family had kept the word of their forefather for generations and that this had been a good thing, but that the people of Judah and Jerusalem had not obeyed God himself for any length of time. As a result, disaster would come on Judah. As for the family of the Recabites, they would always have a man in the service of God.

Jeremiah 36

2009 February 6th for March 6th

This is another, and rather entertaining episode from the reign of Jehoiakim, save the potentially catastrophic outcome. God directed Jeremiah to prophesy death and destruction on the nation as usual. Baruch took dictation and when the scroll was done, went off to the temple where he read it to all the people who had come to town for one of the festivals. The people called a fast and tore their clothes.

An official of the king also heard about this and requested that the scroll be brought up to the palace. Baruch brought it up and delivered it to secretary's room where several of the king's officials were sitting, including Elishama the secretary. Baruch was invited to sit and read the scroll to them, which he did.

The officials were terrified and decided that this information should come to the attention of the king. Beforehand, they inquired as to whether Jeremiah was the source and when this was affirmed, they sent Baruch off with instructions that he and Jeremiah should hide and tell no one where they were.

The scroll was then taken up to the king who was in one of his winter rooms where a fire was burning in a fire pot. As the scroll was read, not only did the king and his officials show no fear or concern about its content, but the king would cut off sections after they were completed and throw them into the fire until it was all burned up.

Rude as this was by today's standards, this was also expensively wasteful in that day, when paper (papyrus) and writing instruments, and the education to use them, were very valuable.

The order was given to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch but they could not be found, "the Lord had hidden them."

Later, God's word came to Jeremiah again. He was instructed to make another scroll like the first but with some additional information on it. In addition to the death and destruction of the nation, the following specifics were added about the king himself:

"He will have no one to sit on the throne of David, his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness; I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened."

"So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them."

Jeremiah was indeed a man of many words.

Jeremiah 37

2009 February 10th for March 9th

As Jerusalem was being conquered by Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah king in place of Jehoiachin. No one had paid any attention to God or his Word brought through Jeremiah.

Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah to inquire if there was a word from God. There was hope because an army had marched out of Egypt in support, they thought, of Jerusalem. Jeremiah relieved them of this hope:

"Do not deceive yourselves, thinking, 'The Babylonians will surely leave us.' They will not! Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down."

But the Babylonian army did withdraw temporarily on the approach of the Egyptian army and during the relative calm, Jeremiah was going to go up to Benjamin to take possession of his property there. He was stopped at the gate, however, accused of being a deserter, and was beaten and thrown in prison, into a dark, vaulted cell.

After a long time Zedekiah sent for him and inquired if there was any word from God.

“‘Yes,’ Jeremiah replied, ‘you will be handed over to the king of Babylon.’”

(This would be a great scene in the movie. The prophet leans over and says, calmly, “‘Yes, you will be handed over to the king of Babylon.’”)

Jeremiah then pleaded his own innocence, claiming that if he went back to that dungeon he would die.

“King Zedekiah then gave orders for Jeremiah to be placed in the courtyard of the guard and given bread from the street of the bakers each day until all the bread in the city was gone.” And so it was done.

Jeremiah 38

2009 February 10th for March 10th

Jeremiah prophesied to all the people that they should surrender to the Babylonians and thereby save their own lives. Those who did not surrender would be killed in the imminent battle.

Officers heard this and accused Jeremiah of treason. The king did not oppose them, so they took Jeremiah and threw him into a deep cistern. There was no water in the cistern, just mud, so he sank into the mud and waited.

Later, the king ordered that Jeremiah be rescued from the cistern before he died. Some men brought old clothes and rags from the palace and let them down by ropes, then Jeremiah put the cloth under his arms and they lifted him out with the ropes.

Jeremiah was brought to the king who questioned him again. Jeremiah gave the same message to Zedekiah as he had given to the people. Surrender and live or resist and lose the city and his wives and children and die in the process. Zedekiah was worried that he would be mistreated if he surrendered, but Jeremiah assured him that he would not be mistreated and that there was only one way to go. The king then sent the prophet away, warning him not to tell anyone about the conversation. “[T]ell them, ‘I was pleading with the king not to send me back to Jonathan’s house to die there.’”

(Jonathan’s house had been his vaulted prison cell in the last chapter.)

Jeremiah was in fact interrogated, did in fact tell this story, and remained in custody in the courtyard until the city fell.

Jeremiah 39

2009 February 11th for March 11th

Jeremiah had a word from God while he was in custody that the city would fall as he watched. The siege under Nebuchadnezzar started in the ninth year and tenth month of Zedekiah. Six months later on the ninth day of the fourth month of the eleventh year, the wall was breached and the officials of Babylon set up court in the gate.

Zedekiah and some other officials fled in the night towards Arabah, but the army pursued them and brought them back for judgment under Nebuchadnezzar. The sentence was that Zedekiah's sons and nobles were to be killed while he watched, then his eyes would be put out and he would be taken to Babylon in shackles.

Most of the people in Jerusalem were also taken into captivity in Babylon but some of the poor people were left behind in Jerusalem and were given vineyards and fields by Nebuchadnezzar.

As for Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to his military commander to respect Jeremiah and treat him well and do whatever he asked. Jeremiah opted to remain in Jerusalem with the new governor, Gedeliah.

Jeremiah 40

2009 February 12th for March 12th

Nebuzaradan, commander of the imperial guard of Babylon, had found Jeremiah in chains among the captives and had him released. Jeremiah prophesied that the disaster foretold by God had now come true in that place. The commander freed Jeremiah and told him he could go anywhere he wanted. He suggested that he go live with Gedeliah, an official of Judah who had been appointed governor over the poor people left in the country, the "remnant," but Jeremiah, he said, was free to come and go as he pleased.

Jeremiah did go live with Gedeliah in Mizpah, his capital. Gedeliah told the remnant to settle the land and harvest the vineyards and summer fruits and to do the best they could, that things would go well with them. When the Judean refugees in nearby countries heard that Gedeliah was in charge, they returned also.

An advisor to Gedeliah, Johanan, brought him a rumor that an assassination attempt would be made against him by a man named Ishmael. Johanan suggested that he be sent off to dispatch this Ishmael quietly and secretly and eliminate this danger, but Gedeliah would not hear of it. It was not the sort of thing that was done in Israel.

Jeremiah 41

2009 February 13th for March 13th

Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, was of royal blood and had been one of the king's officers before the nation was conquered. He and his men came to Mizpah and were dining with Gedeliah and the other officials when they got up and killed them all with swords. They also killed all the Babylonian soldiers who were present. (Machiavelli had nothing on these people!)

The next day, a group of eighty men in mourning were coming to offer offerings at God's house. They did not know of the assassination of Gedeliah. Ishmael went out and met them and invited them to come back to Mizpah to see Gedeliah. They agreed and when they arrived, Ishmael killed them all and threw them in a cistern. All, that is, but a few who claimed they had food hidden in a field, which might be valuable.

"Ishmael made captives of all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah -- the king's daughters along with all the others who were left there, over whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had appointed Gedeliah son of Ahikam, Ishmael son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites."

When Johanan heard about this, he brought his army down and chased Ishmael and his men, catching them near the "great pool in Gibeon."

"When all the people Ishmael had with him saw Johanan son of Kareah and the army officers who were with him, they were glad. All the people Ishmael had taken captive at Mizpah turned and went over to Johanan and fled to the Ammonites. Ishmael was captured and turned over to Johanan at Mizpah.

Johanan then led the entire group, all the people he had rescued and his captives, in a flight to Egypt. They were afraid of the Babylonians because of the assassination of Gedeliah.

Jeremiah 42

2009 February 23rd for March 16th

Johanan and his officers came to Jeremiah to ask him to ask God what they should do. Jeremiah promised that when he had a word from God on this he would share it fully.

Ten days later, the word came from God to Jeremiah. If these people, the remnant, would stay in Israel, God would show compassion and deliver them within the land. They should stay and plant and harvest. God was grieved by the disaster he had brought on his people through the Babylonians.

For those considering going to Egypt -- Don't do it! Anyone who went to Egypt would die by the sword or plague or famine. It would be a fatal mistake for anyone to flee to Egypt and it would be disobedience to God. This warning was repeated twice.

Jeremiah 43

2009 February 23rd for March 17th

Although the people had said that they would do whatever God, through Jeremiah, had instructed, many of the leaders called him a liar after he told them not to go to Egypt. They accused him of being in the pocket of Baruch who wanted them all to stay there and, they said, be slaughtered by the Babylonians.

So, Johanan and his officers led the people off to Egypt, “all the men, women and children and the king’s daughters whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had left with Gedeliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah.” They went to Egypt in disobedience to God and went to Tahpanhes.

Makes you wonder why they asked.

God instructed Jeremiah to take some large stones and bury them at the Pharaoh’s palace at Tahpanhes, right there in the clay. He was then to give a pronouncement that God would bring the king of Babylon down to Egypt and bury everyone there. He would set up his own throne under his own canopy right there over the stones. Death, captivity, and the sword would be inflicted on those to whom it was destined. He would burn all the temples “and take their gods captive.”

Jeremiah 44

2009 February 23rd for March 18th

Jeremiah prophesied that all the remnant in Egypt would be destroyed because they worshipped other gods, something detestable that God hated. He asked them why they did this, why did they invite God to make them a reproach to all the nations, something that everyone talked about because of their disaster? It even says that he was speaking to the women as well as the men because the women were burning incense in their homes to the Queen of Heaven and making cakes in sacrifice to other gods.

The men and the women answered Jeremiah saying that they would continue to follow their other gods and to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven. When they did this in Judah, everything had been fine. When they stopped, they were conquered by the Babylonians. Now they were going to keep it up.

There is a clear conflict of interpretation of events going on here.

“Go ahead then, do what you promised! Keep your vows!” Jeremiah replied, “But hear the word of the Lord, all Jews living in Egypt: ‘I swear by my great name,’ says the Lord, ‘that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, ‘As surely as the Sovereign Lord lives.’” For I am watching over them for

harm, not for good; the Jews in Egypt will perish by sword and famine until they are all destroyed. Those who escape the sword and return to the land of Judah from Egypt will be very few. Then the whole remnant of Judah who came to live in Egypt will know whose word will stand -- mine or theirs.”

Further, God would hand Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt over to Nebuchadnezzar just as he had Zedekiah, king of Judah.

Jeremiah 45

2009 February 24th for March 19th

This chapter is a message to Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe.

“This is what Jeremiah the prophet told Baruch son of Neriah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, after Baruch had written on a scroll the words Jeremiah was then dictating: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: You said, “Woe to me! The Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.”’”

“The Lord said, ‘Say this to him: This is what the Lord says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the land. Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. For I will bring disaster on all people, declares the Lord, but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life.’””

Perhaps Baruch was thinking of investing in local real estate or improving his status and needed corrective direction from the prophet.

Jeremiah 46:1 – 12

2009 February 24th for March 20th

Jeremiah had a message for Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt: Get ready with your armaments, horses, and armor.

“What do I see? They are terrified,
they are retreating, their warriors are defeated.
They flee in haste without looking back, and there is terror on every side.”

No one can escape, whether they are fast or strong. “Egypt rises like the Nile.” They churn and drive furiously like the great, flooded river.

“Charge, O horses! Drive furiously, O charioteers!
March on, O warriors -- men of Cush and Put who carry shields, men of Lydia who draw the bow.”

God will deliver vengeance to his enemies that day. “The sword will devour till it is satisfied.”

“The nations will hear of your shame; your cries will fill the earth.
One warrior will stumble over another; both will fall down together.”

Sounds like Gettysburg.

Jeremiah 46:13 – 28

2009 February 24th for March 23rd

Jeremiah delivered a message from God about Nebuchadnezzar attacking Egypt. It was to be announced everywhere. Those on guard would be pushed back, stumble and fall down. They would return to their homes and exclaim, “Pharaoh king of Egypt is only a loud noise; he has missed his opportunity.”

God is like a mountain but those who live in Egypt need to pack their bags because they’re going into exile.

“Egypt will hiss like a fleeing serpent as the enemy advances in force;
they will come against her with axes, like men who cut down trees.”

God will punish all the gods of Egypt and all who rely on Pharaoh.

Jacob (Israel) should not fear. God will save them from the distant place. The nations among whom they are scattered will be completely destroyed. Israel will not be completely destroyed. Israel will be disciplined, Israel will not go without punishment, but Israel will not be totally destroyed.

Jeremiah 47

2009 February 25th for March 24th

“This is the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza:

“This is what the Lord says:

““See how the waters are rising in the north; they will become an overflowing torrent. They will overflow the land and everything in it, the towns and those who live in them. The people will cry out; all who dwell in the land will wail at the sound of the hoofs of galloping steeds, at the noise of enemy chariots and the rumble of their wheels.

Fathers will not turn to help their children; their hands will hang limp.

For the day has come to destroy all the Philistines

and to cut off all survivors who could help Tyre and Sidon.

The Lord is about to destroy the Philistines, the remnant from the coasts of Caphtor.
Gaza will shave her head in mourning; Ashkelon will be silenced.
O remnant on the plain, how long will you cut yourselves?

““Ah, sword of the Lord,” you cry, “how long till you rest?
Return to your scabbard; cease and be still.
But how can it rest when the Lord has commanded it,
when he has ordered it to attack Ashkelon and the coast?””

Jeremiah 48:1 – 13

2009 February 25th for March 25th

Now a word for Moab.

Moab will be ruined and disgraced in havoc and destruction.

“Moab will be broken; her little ones will cry out.”

They will flee in anguish, running for their lives into the desert.

“The valley will be ruined and the plateau destroyed, because the Lord has spoken.
Put salt on Moab, for she will be laid waste;
her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them.”

Moab hasn't gone into exile in a long time, but this is about to change.

“Moab has been at rest from youth, like wine left on its dregs,
not poured from one jar to another -- she has not gone into exile.”

But that is about to change. The jars will be empty and smashed. They will be ashamed
of their god Chemosh in whom they unwisely trusted.

Jeremiah 48:14 – 28

2009 February 25th for March 26th

How can the men of Moab say they are warriors? The country is completely destroyed.
All the young men are slaughtered quickly. All neighboring countries mourn.

“Stand by the road and watch, you who live in Aroer;
Ask the man fleeing and the woman escaping, ask them, ‘What has happened?’
Moab is disgraced, for she is shattered, Wail and cry out!”

Judgment has come. The strength of Moab is gone, broken.

“Make her drunk, for she has defied the Lord.

Let Moab wallow in her vomit; let her be an object of ridicule.”

“Abandon your towns and dwell among the rocks, you who live in Moab.
Be like a dove that makes its nest at the mouth of a cave.”

Jeremiah 48:29 – 39

2009 February 27th for March 27th

Moab was proud and conceited, insolent and haughty, but this was futile “and her boasts accomplish[ed] nothing.” The prophet wails for Moab. There are shouts in the winepress, but not from the joy of produce. The flow has stopped. Their cry is heard all over the region. Their wealth is gone.

“Every head is shaved and every beard cut off;
every hand is slashed and every waist is covered with sackcloth.
On all the roofs in Moab and in the public squares
there is nothing but mourning, for I have broken Moab like a jar that no one wants,’
declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah 48:40 – 47

2009 February 27th for March 30th

The lengthy tome on Moab concludes.

“Look! An eagle is swooping down, spreading its wings over Moab.” (The eagle here is clearly Babylon, though are those who read every reference to an eagle in the Bible as an end-times prophesy concerning the United States.)

All the strongholds will fall. All the warriors’ hearts will be “like the heart of a woman in labor.”

(Clearly written by a man.)

“Moab will be destroyed as a nation because she defied the Lord.”

One of dad’s favorite verses:

“Whoever flees from the terror will fall into a pit,
whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare;
for I will bring upon Moab the year of her punishment.”

The fire has gone out. Those who aren’t burned and destroyed are taken into exile.

“Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come,’ declares the Lord.

“Here ends the judgment on Moab.”

(I can hear dad saying that too.)

Jeremiah 49:1 – 6

2009 February 27th for March 31st

Now that we’re done with Moab, Jeremiah takes on Ammon.

“This is what the Lord says:

“Has Israel no sons? Has she no heirs?
Why then has Molech taken possession of Gad? Why do his people live in its towns?”

God will deal with this. The towns and villages of Ammon will become ruins, they will be burned. Israel will drive them out as they were once driven out by them.

Molech will go into exile. The cities will be destroyed. The fruitful valleys, the riches in which they trusted, will be gone. God “will bring terror on you from all those around you.” No one will collect the fugitives.

“Yet afterward, I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites,” declares the Lord.”

This utter destruction followed some day by restoration is a common theme in Jeremiah. He never sees anyone being destroyed and disappearing completely, though this is what has happened in the intervening millennia in the cases of many other cultures.

Jeremiah 49:7 – 22

2009 March 6th for April 1st

Now a prophecy about Edom.

“Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom decayed?”

Flee to the caves. There would be disaster and punishment. It would be like thieves. “I will strip Edom bare; I will uncover his hiding places, so that he cannot conceal himself.” Everyone would die, but God told them to leave their orphans and widows to him, he would take care of them.

God swore by his own self that the towns and cities of Edom will become “ruins forever.”

God would bring Edom down. It would be horrible to behold, like Sodom and Gomorrah. No one would be able to stand up to God, not a shepherd, not a lion. The

pastures would be destroyed; the cries of distress would be heard to the Red Sea. The hearts of the warriors would fail.

Jeremiah 49:23 – 33

2009 March 6th for April 2nd

Words of gloom for Damascus.

The news would be bad. Damascus would be feeble. They would be gripped by fear and panic, “pain like that of a woman in labor.” (Jeremiah uses the “woman in labor” image frequently.)

“Why has the city of renown not been abandoned, the town in which I delight? Surely, her young men will fall in the streets; all her soldiers will be silenced in that day.”

Bad news for Kedar and Hazor.

“Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked:

“This is what the Lord says:

“Arise, and attack Kedar and destroy the people of the East. Their tents and their flocks will be taken; their shelters will be carried off with all their goods and camels. Men will shout to them, “Terror on every side!”

“Flee quickly away! Stay in deep caves, you who live in Hazor,’ declares the Lord.

“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has plotted against you; he has devised a plan against you.

“Arise and attack a nation at ease, which lives in confidence,’ declares the Lord,

“a nation that has neither gates nor bars; its people live alone. Their camels will become plunder, and their large herds will be booty. I will scatter to the winds those who are in distant places and will bring disaster on them from every side.’ declares the Lord.

“Hazor will become a haunt of jackals, a desolate place forever. No one will live there; no man will dwell in it.”

Jeremiah paints a picture of the horrors of conquest as one who had experienced it firsthand, or had a vision.

Jeremiah 49:34 – 39

2009 March 6th for April 3rd

Jeremiah gives another oracle of horror, this one for Elam.

“This is the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah:

“This is what the Lord Almighty says:

“See, I will break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might.
I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens;
I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam’s exiles do not go.

I will shatter Elam before their foes, before those who seek their lives;
I will bring disaster upon them, even my fierce anger,’ declares the Lord.

“I will pursue them with the sword until I have made an end of them.
I will set my throne in Elam and destroy her king and officials,’ declares the Lord.

“Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come,’ declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah 50:1 – 17

2009 March 9th for April 6th

Now there is a judgment on Babylon itself. As they did to Israel, so would be done to them. They would be put to shame. Their idols would be terrified, Marduk and Bel.

Note the sarcasm, that the idols, the gods themselves, would be terrified.

The people of Israel would seek their God, in tears. Like lost sheep they would wander and be eaten up by whoever found them.

But as for Babylon:

“Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians, and be like the goats that lead the flock.

For I will stir up and bring against Babylon an alliance of great nations from the land of the north.

They will take up their positions against her, and from the north she will be captured.

Their arrows will be like skilled warriors who do not return empty-handed.

So Babylonia will be plundered; all who plunder her will have their fill,’ declares the Lord.”

In past references to conquests *by* Babylon, they have been referred to *as* the power from the north. Now a power from their north conquers them. Or perhaps the enemy always is thought of as being from the north.

“Because you rejoice and are glad, you who pillage my inheritance,
because you frolic like a heifer threshing grain and neigh like stallions,
your mother will be greatly ashamed; she who gave you birth will be disgraced.
She will be the least of the nations -- a wilderness, a dry land, a desert.
Because of the Lord’s anger she will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate.
All who pass Babylon will be horrified and scoff because of all her wounds.”

Because of their offense against Israel, all of Babylon’s enemies are given the go-ahead to attack.

“Israel is a scattered flock that lions have chased away.
The first to devour him was the king of Assyria;
the last to crush his bones was Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”

Jeremiah 50:18 – 32

2009 March 10th for April 7th

Jeremiah’s description of the coming punishment of Babylon continues.

Israel’s guilt would be erased, forgotten, the remnant spared. The lands of Babylon would be attacked and completely destroyed.

“The noise of battle is in the land, the noise of great destruction!”

The earth would be shattered. Babylon would be desolate. A trap would be set and they would be caught.

“The Lord has opened his arsenal and brought out the weapons of his wrath,
for the Sovereign Lord Almighty has work to do in the land of the Babylonians.”

All the food would be destroyed, the grains and the animals. There would be no remnant of the people. This is how God would avenge his temple. There would be archers all around the city. No one could escape.

“‘See, I am against you, O arrogant one,’ declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty,
‘for your day has come, the time for you to be punished,
The arrogant one will stumble and fall and no one will help her up;
I will kindle a fire in her towns that will consume all who are around her.’”

Jeremiah 50:33 – 46

2009 March 27th for April 8th

“The people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah as well.
All their captors hold them fast, refusing to let them go.
Yet their Redeemer is strong; the Lord Almighty is his name.
He will vigorously defend their cause so that he may bring rest to their land, but unrest to those who live in Babylon.”

God declared a sword against all in Babylon, against their false prophets, against the accoutrements of their military strength.

“A sword against her horses and chariots and all the foreigners in her ranks! They will become women.”

Everything will be plundered. The idols will “go mad with terror.”

It will not be inhabited. The creatures of the desert will move in: Owls and hyenas.

“As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah along with their neighboring towns.,’
declares the Lord,
‘so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it.’”

The army from the north will be like the sea. They will have no mercy. Anguish will grip the attacked. They will fall like shepherds before an army. God has planned devastation of Babylon. The flocks will be gone. The earth itself will shake, “its cry will resound among the nations.”

Jeremiah 51:1 – 11

2009 March 27th for April 9th

God was going to “stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon.” Everything would be destroyed. The conquerors would come from all sides. The army would be completely destroyed, and all the young men lost.

“Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.
Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her!
Get balm for her pain; perhaps she can be healed.”

This judgment would reach to the sky.

“Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields
The Lord has stirred up the kings of the Medes, because his purpose is to destroy
Babylon.
The Lord will take vengeance, vengeance for his temple.”

Jeremiah 51:12 – 24

2009 March 27th for April 10th

God has ordered an ambush against Babylon to carry out his decree. Their end had come. God exulted in his victory. God made everything by his own power. He thundered, he made clouds, he made lightening and rain and wind.

Men are without sense or knowledge. Goldsmiths who make idols are shamed by them. They are a fraud. They do not breath. “They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish.”

But God made everything, including the “tribe of his inheritance.”

“You are my war club, my weapon for battle --
with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms,
with you I shatter horse and rider, with you I shatter chariot and driver,
with you I shatter man and woman, with you I shatter old man and youth, with you I shatter young man and maiden,
with you I shatter shepherd and flock, with you I shatter farmer and oxen, with you I shatter governors and officials.”

God would repay Babylon and all who lived there for the wrongs they had done Zion.

Jeremiah 51:25 – 35

2009 April 15th for April 13th

God was against Babylon, the destroyer of the earth.

“I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain.

No rock will be taken from you for a cornerstone, nor any stone for a foundation, for you will be desolate forever.’ declares the Lord.”

All the surrounding nations would be summoned up against Babylon like a swarm of locusts. The warriors would be exhausted, staying back in their fortresses.

“Their strength is exhausted, they have become like women.”

The city, the river crossings, the marshes, everyplace was seized, the warriors routed. The couriers with bad news came in one after another.

God says:

“The Daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time it is trampled; the time to harvest her will soon come.”

Jerusalem had been devoured by the king of Babylon, but he would vomit, spew them out. The violence on the city, the blood of Jerusalem, was on Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:36 – 48

2009 April 15th for April 14th

God defended the cause of Jerusalem against Babylon. Babylon would become a “heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives.”

They would be slaughtered.

It would be like Babylon was covered by the roaring sea. The walls would fall. The land would be a desert. No one would travel through.

“Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the Lord.”

The idols of Babylon would be punished, disgraced.

“Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for out of the north destroyers will attack her,” declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah 51:49 – 64

2009 April 15th for April 15th

Because of Jerusalem’s fall and Israel’s disgrace, Babylon would fall. It was an insult that these foreigners had entered God’s house in his city. It didn’t matter how strong Babylon was, God would destroy it. All the noise of Babylon would be silenced. All the fortifications would be useless, the army destroyed. They would be gone forever. Retribution for Israel would be complete.

Jeremiah rolled this all up into a scroll, the words of the disasters God would bring on Babylon and sent them off by Seraiah to Babylon with these instructions, “When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud. Then say, ‘O Lord, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever.’ When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, ‘So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.’”

“The words of Jeremiah end here.”

Jeremiah 52

2009 April 21st for April 16th

This chapter is an epilogue to Jeremiah's book, a chapter not written by Jeremiah. It recounts the fall of Jerusalem in some detail and also gives some detail about the exile.

It was in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, who was evil, that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem and overran the walls. Zedekiah fled but was captured in the field. He watched while all of his family and officials were killed, then his eyes were put out and he was kept in prison in Babylon for the rest of his life.

The conquerors from Babylon destroyed and ransacked the temple that Solomon had built. All of the precious articles kept there, the bronze sea and the bronze instruments and tools, even the pots, shovels, and sprinkling bowls, were carried off to Babylon. Everything of value, all of the gold and silver and bronze accoutrements were taken out of Jerusalem. Also, 4600 people were taken captive in three groups.

After thirty-seven years of exile there was a new ruler in Babylon, Evil-Merodach. He had Jehoiachin, king of Judah released from prison, gave him an allowance for the rest of his life, and allowed him to eat at the king's table with the other rulers who had been conquered by Babylon for the rest of his life. Evil-Marodach "spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon."

"Evil-Merodach" was this ruler's name. I don't think it is a translation of the word for "evil."

Concluding Thoughts on Jeremiah

2009 April 21st for April 17th

It is easy to predict doom on a place, or blessing, if you don't have to give a specific time, or if you give a specific time, not to be specific about other details of the prediction. This is how Jehovah's Witnesses got a foothold in modern culture, by predicting something bad would happen in 1914. Part of me wonders if that isn't what all prophesy is. Indeed, the Bible, indeed, Jesus says, "no one knows the day or the hour." But if you were to predict international cataclysm, pain and suffering, conquest and subjugation, famine and economic hardship on any people to come at some time in the future, you would never be wrong. When it did happen, if you interpreted this as the punishment from God for imperfection and sin, you could never be wrong. All sin. All suffer. Not in fair proportion, true enough, but sin and pain and suffering are universal. (Much of our religion is built around explaining things that don't seem fair.)

Part of me thinks that there is a certain degree of inevitability to cataclysm.

So Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch in Israel saw the sin and evil rampant there, as it was and is everywhere and in every time, and he predicted for God's people the inevitable,

that they would be conquered and taken into captivity. You have to give him credit for steadfastly delivering an unpopular message, one that the wishful thinkers did not wish to hear. God's prophet always has that problem. God's prophet, as we continue to see, often manages to be isolated from and above his own culture.

Jeremiah spent a lot of time pounding on the one thing that God can stand least, something we've already seen in the first Commandment, infidelity of faith.

People clearly need religion. They cannot grasp much less control all aspects of the universe they inhabit, not even the important, visceral, deadly ones that are in their immediate lives all the time. People try many things to attempt to achieve the illusion of safety and control. They perform superstitious acts, they buy insurance, they sue those who harm them, they invoke deities, they set up consumer product safety commissions, they vote Democrat, they invest in IRAs, they keep a parachute under their desk, they carry two way radios wherever they go.... It is no wonder that the world has been full of religions since before the dawn of recorded time, or that written records have greatly strengthened their influence. Of course, religions cannot be compatible with each other since they profess to accurately explain and maybe give some leverage of control on everything, and they all do so differently. The supreme God of the universe who cannot, for good reasons, explicitly show himself to mortals very often, is not therefore immune from destructive competition. The greatest sin against God is to believe something else, non-spiritual senses notwithstanding. God's prophet must speak for God in these instances and must interpret the world to his people whether they believe or not, no matter how they act before, or act as a result.

One thing religion is good at: interpreting whatever happens as fulfillment of its own world view. For Christians, for example, see Romans 8:28 and the immense unpacking of it over the centuries. For Christians it is all good, no matter how good... or bad. It is an all-powerful, loving God, after all. This is not exactly the way Jeremiah represented him, however. That was "before God was a Christian," as we say.

Jeremiah was there for one of the biggest events in history, at least from a Jewish point of view. The conquest by Babylon and beginning of the exile ranks up with the call of Abraham, the Exodus and the rules of David and Solomon as Hebrew touchstones. He lectured and lectured the people about the inevitability of their ultimate defeat by their pagan Babylonian neighbors due primarily to their sin of infidelity to God. He was there to say he told them so copiously and to try to lead the survivors, the "remnant" through the immediate post-conquest period, with very mixed results.

Memorable were Jeremiah's near fatal trip to the deep cistern and, by contrast, the esteem with which the conquering Babylonians later held and treated him. My favorite story was the one where the king took Jeremiah's scroll and, as he was reading it, would tear off sections and throw it in the fire. (Not that I approve of this, but it is great stagecraft. One

can see Peter Ustinov in the role of king.) The king was no believer in Jeremiah, we're certain of that. Jeremiah rewrote his scroll and then some, and we get to see it even now. The prophet was not above one-upsmanship, not beyond the need to have the last word.

The story of going to Egypt against God's word and somehow returning without being annihilated after all is also fascinating.

We've spent months in Jeremiah and going through page after page of this preaching I often wonder if those who wave Bibles around claiming that this is the perfect rule for, well, life, the universe, and everything, have any idea what is in there.

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