



Read Jeremiah 1

In being called to a prophetic mission, Jeremiah pleads youth and inexperience. God assures him that he will be with him. Jeremiah's mission will entail pain and distress, but all will be directed by God.

Reflect: How many times in my life have I backed away from a difficult challenge on the basis of my own inadequacy? Was I unwilling to leave the outcome in God's hands?

Pray: Ask for the grace to remain open to God's will. Faith should supersede our deficiencies.

Act: How can I respond to the spiritual challenges that I face in life?

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ² to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³ It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷ But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,

says the LORD."

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

11 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see a branch of an almond tree.”^a 12 Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching^b over my word to perform it.” 13 The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a boiling pot, tilted away from the north.”

14 Then the LORD said to me: Out of the north disaster shall break out on all the inhabitants of the land. 15 For now I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says the LORD; and they shall come and all of them shall set their thrones at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its surrounding walls

and against all the cities of Judah. 16 And I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have made offerings to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands. 17 But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. 18 And I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. 19 They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.

Read Jeremiah 2

God’s indignation centers on an ungrateful people who, despite his favor, have wandered far from him to engage in sacred prostitution, fertility cults, the worship of pagan gods—all acts of spiritual treason. Divine punishment is more than justified.

Reflect: Am I grateful for God’s mercy, which has touched me in spite of my failings? Repentance and gratitude go hand in hand.

Pray: Ask for the grace to be delivered from evil and to walk resolutely in the way of the Lord.

Act: How can my faith be strengthened? In reading Jeremiah, can I see features of my own life in the evils he decries?

God Pleads with Israel to Repent

2 The word of the LORD came to me, saying: ² Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD:

I remember the devotion of your youth,
your love as a bride,
how you followed me in the wilderness,
in a land not sown.

³ Israel was holy to the LORD,
the first fruits of his harvest.
All who ate of it were held guilty;
disaster came upon them,

says the LORD.

⁴ Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the LORD:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me
that they went far from me,
and went after worthless things, and became
worthless themselves?

⁶ They did not say, “Where is the LORD
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,
who led us in the wilderness,
in a land of deserts and pits,
in a land of drought and deep darkness,
in a land that no one passes through,
where no one lives?”

⁷ I brought you into a plentiful land
to eat its fruits and its good things.
But when you entered you defiled my land,
and made my heritage an abomination.

⁸ The priests did not say, “Where is the LORD?”

^a Heb *shaqed*

^b Heb *shoqed*

- Those who handle the law did not know me;
 the rulers^a transgressed against me;
 the prophets prophesied by Baal,
 and went after things that do not profit.
- 9 Therefore once more I accuse you,
 says the LORD,
 and I accuse your children's
 children.
- 10 Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and
 look,
 send to Kedar and examine with
 care;
 see if there has ever been such a
 thing.
- 11 Has a nation changed its gods,
 even though they are no gods?
 But my people have changed their
 glory
 for something that does not profit.
- 12 Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
 be shocked, be utterly desolate,
 says the LORD,
- 13 for my people have committed two
 evils:
 they have forsaken me,
 the fountain of living water,
 and dug out cisterns for themselves,
 cracked cisterns
 that can hold no water.
- 14 Is Israel a slave? Is he a homeborn
 servant?
 Why then has he become plunder?
 15 The lions have roared against him,
 they have roared loudly.
 They have made his land a waste;
 his cities are in ruins, without
 inhabitant.
- 16 Moreover, the people of Memphis
 and Tahpanhes
 have broken the crown of your
 head.
- 17 Have you not brought this upon
 yourself
 by forsaking the LORD your God,
 while he led you in the way?
- 18 What then do you gain by going to
 Egypt,
 to drink the waters of the Nile?
 Or what do you gain by going to
 Assyria,
 to drink the waters of the
 Euphrates?
- 19 Your wickedness will punish you,
 and your apostasies will convict you.
 Know and see that it is evil and bitter
 for you to forsake the LORD your
 God;
 the fear of me is not in you,
 says the Lord GOD of hosts.
- 20 For long ago you broke your yoke
 and burst your bonds,
 and you said, "I will not serve!"
 On every high hill
 and under every green tree
 you sprawled and played the whore.
- 21 Yet I planted you as a choice vine,
 from the purest stock.
 How then did you turn degenerate
 and become a wild vine?
- 22 Though you wash yourself with lye
 and use much soap,
 the stain of your guilt is still
 before me,
 says the Lord GOD.
- 23 How can you say, "I am not defiled,
 I have not gone after the Baals"?
 Look at your way in the valley;
 know what you have done—
 a restive young camel interlacing
 her tracks,
 24 a wild ass at home in the
 wilderness,
 in her heat sniffing the wind!
 Who can restrain her lust?
 None who seek her need weary
 themselves;
 in her month they will find her.
- 25 Keep your feet from going unshod
 and your throat from thirst.
 But you said, "It is hopeless,
 for I have loved strangers,
 and after them I will go."

^a Heb *shepherds*

- 26 As a thief is shamed when caught,
so the house of Israel shall be
shamed—
they, their kings, their officials,
their priests, and their prophets,
27 who say to a tree, “You are my father,”
and to a stone, “You gave me birth.”
For they have turned their backs to me,
and not their faces.
But in the time of their trouble they
say,
“Come and save us!”
- 28 But where are your gods
that you made for yourself?
Let them come, if they can save you,
in your time of trouble;
for you have as many gods
as you have towns, O Judah.
- 29 Why do you complain against me?
You have all rebelled against me,
says the LORD.
- 30 In vain I have struck down your
children;
they accepted no correction.
Your own sword devoured your
prophets
like a ravening lion.
- 31 And you, O generation, behold the
word of the LORD!^a
Have I been a wilderness to Israel,
or a land of thick darkness?
- Why then do my people say, “We
are free,
we will come to you no more”?
32 Can a girl forget her ornaments,
or a bride her attire?
Yet my people have forgotten me,
days without number.
- 33 How well you direct your course
to seek lovers!
So that even to wicked women
you have taught your ways.
- 34 Also on your skirts is found
the lifeblood of the innocent poor,
though you did not catch them
breaking in.
Yet in spite of all these things^a
- 35 you say, “I am innocent;
surely his anger has turned from me.”
Now I am bringing you to judgment
for saying, “I have not sinned.”
- 36 How lightly you gad about,
changing your ways!
You shall be put to shame by Egypt
as you were put to shame by
Assyria.
- 37 From there also you will come away
with your hands on your head;
for the LORD has rejected those in
whom you trust,
and you will not prosper through
them.

Unfaithful Israel

3 If^b a man divorces his wife
and she goes from him
and becomes another man’s wife,
will he return to her?
Would not such a land be greatly polluted?
You have played the whore with many lovers;
and would you return to me?
says the LORD.

- 2 Look up to the bare heights,^c and see!
Where have you not been lain with?
By the waysides you have sat waiting for
lovers,
like a nomad in the wilderness.
You have polluted the land
with your whoring and wickedness.

- 3 Therefore the showers have been withheld,
and the spring rain has not come;

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Q Ms Gk Syr: MT *Saying, If*

^c Or *the trails*

Read Jeremiah 3

Rebellious Israel is less guilty than traitorous Judah. The rebel, whether through anger or weakness, walks away from a commitment and may be more easily reconciled. The traitor has not only fallen but has transferred his commitment to another. He has not only faltered and walked away but turned his life over to another. Israel may find its way home to God more easily than Judah.

Reflect: Perhaps I have never walked away from my faith, but rebellion has probably appeared more than once. The Lord forgives and restores us where there is genuine sorrow and a willingness to begin anew.

Pray: Ask that you be delivered from spiritual dryness and that coldness of heart that can lead to betrayal. The Lord is never far away; be mindful of his closeness.

Act: Where does my weakness appear? Bad reading? The Internet? Take steps today to rid yourself of spiritual poison.

yet you have the forehead of a whore,
you refuse to be ashamed.

- 4 Have you not just now called to me,
“My Father, you are the friend of my youth—
5 will he be angry forever,
will he be indignant to the end?”

This is how you have spoken,
but you have done all the evil that you could.

A Call to Repentance

6 The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? ⁷ And I thought, “After she has done all this she will return to me”; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it. ⁸ She^a saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. ⁹ Because she took her whoredom so lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. ¹⁰ Yet for all this her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but only in pretense, says the LORD.

11 Then the LORD said to me: Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah. ¹² Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say:

Return, faithless Israel,

says the LORD.

I will not look on you in anger,
for I am merciful,

says the LORD;

I will not be angry forever.

- 13 Only acknowledge your guilt,
that you have rebelled against the LORD your God,
and scattered your favors among strangers
under every green tree,
and have not obeyed my voice,

says the LORD.

- 14 Return, O faithless children,

says the LORD,

for I am your master;
I will take you, one from a city and two from a
family,
and I will bring you to Zion.

15 I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. ¹⁶ And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the LORD, they shall no longer say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come

to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. ¹⁷ At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will. ¹⁸ In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your ancestors for a heritage.

¹⁹ I thought
 how I would set you among my
 children,
 and give you a pleasant land,
 the most beautiful heritage of all
 the nations.
 And I thought you would call me, My
 Father,
 and would not turn from following
 me.

²⁰ Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her
 husband,
 so you have been faithless to me,
 O house of Israel,
 says the LORD.

²¹ A voice on the bare heights^a is
 heard,
 the plaintive weeping of Israel's
 children,
 because they have perverted their
 way,
 they have forgotten the LORD their
 God:

²² Return, O faithless children,
 I will heal your faithlessness.

“Here we come to you;
 for you are the LORD our God.

²³ Truly the hills are^b a delusion,
 the orgies on the mountains.
 Truly in the LORD our God
 is the salvation of Israel.

²⁴ “But from our youth the shameful
 thing has devoured all for which our ances-
 tors had labored, their flocks and their
 herds, their sons and their daughters. ²⁵ Let
 us lie down in our shame, and let our dis-
 honor cover us; for we have sinned against
 the LORD our God, we and our ancestors,
 from our youth even to this day; and we
 have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our
 God.”

4 If you return, O Israel, says the LORD,

if you return to me,
 if you remove your abominations from my
 presence,
 and do not waver,

² and if you swear, “As the LORD lives!”
 in truth, in justice, and in uprightness,
 then nations shall be blessed^c by him,
 and by him they shall boast.

³ For thus says the LORD to the people of Judah and
 to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

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

⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
 remove the foreskin of your hearts,
 O people of Judah and inhabitants of
 Jerusalem,

or else my wrath will go forth like fire,
 and burn with no one to quench it,
 because of the evil of your doings.

^a Or the trails

^b Gk Syr Vg: Heb Truly from the hills is

^c Or shall bless themselves

Read Jeremiah 4

Natural calamity today is seldom seen as divine punishment. In biblical times it almost always was. In Jeremiah's time, the threat from Babylon was real and it eventually exacted a dear price. God is always compassionate and forgiving, but, as Paul reminds us, "God is not mocked." Jerusalem was destroyed because of its waywardness.

Reflect: Society will improve when its citizens see things differently. Evil prevails when good people do nothing.

Pray: Ask God to give us the strength to live our convictions. Pray that evildoers may have a change of heart, and that we may have the strength to speak the word of truth.

Act: What is my response to social issues that have a moral dimension? Is my voice heard? Silence is not always golden.

Invasion and Desolation of Judah Threatened

5 Declare in Judah, and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say:

Blow the trumpet through the land;
shout aloud^a and say,
"Gather together, and let us go
into the fortified cities!"

6 Raise a standard toward Zion,
flee for safety, do not delay,
for I am bringing evil from the north,
and a great destruction.

7 A lion has gone up from its thicket,
a destroyer of nations has set out;
he has gone out from his place
to make your land a waste;
your cities will be ruins
without inhabitant.

8 Because of this put on sackcloth,
lament and wail:
"The fierce anger of the LORD
has not turned away from us."

9 On that day, says the LORD, courage shall fail the king and the officials; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded. 10 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'It shall be well with you,' even while the sword is at the throat!"

11 At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights^b in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse—¹² a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.

13 Look! He comes up like clouds,
his chariots like the whirlwind;
his horses are swifter than eagles—
woe to us, for we are ruined!

14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness
so that you may be saved.
How long shall your evil schemes
lodge within you?

15 For a voice declares from Dan
and proclaims disaster from Mount Ephraim.

16 Tell the nations, "Here they are!"
Proclaim against Jerusalem,
"Besiegers come from a distant land;
they shout against the cities of Judah.

17 They have closed in around her like watchers of
a field,
because she has rebelled against me,
says the LORD.

^a Or shout, take your weapons: Heb shout, fill (your hand)

^b Or the trails

- 18 Your ways and your doings
have brought this upon you.
This is your doom; how bitter it is!
It has reached your very heart.”

Sorrow for a Doomed Nation

- 19 My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in
pain!
Oh, the walls of my heart!
My heart is beating wildly;
I cannot keep silent;
for I^a hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war.
- 20 Disaster overtakes disaster,
the whole land is laid waste.
Suddenly my tents are destroyed,
my curtains in a moment.
- 21 How long must I see the standard,
and hear the sound of the trumpet?
- 22 “For my people are foolish,
they do not know me;
they are stupid children,
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil,
but do not know how to do good.”
- 23 I looked on the earth, and lo, it was
waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had
no light.
- 24 I looked on the mountains, and lo,
they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
- 25 I looked, and lo, there was no one at
all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
- 26 I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was
a desert,

and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the LORD, before his fierce
anger.

27 For thus says the LORD: The whole
land shall be a desolation; yet I will not
make a full end.

28 Because of this the earth shall
mourn,
and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed;
I have not relented nor will I turn
back.

29 At the noise of horseman and archer
every town takes to flight;
they enter thickets; they climb
among rocks;
all the towns are forsaken,
and no one lives in them.

30 And you, O desolate one,
what do you mean that you dress in
crimson,
that you deck yourself with
ornaments of gold,
that you enlarge your eyes with
paint?

In vain you beautify yourself.
Your lovers despise you;
they seek your life.

31 For I heard a cry as of a woman in
labor,
anguish as of one bringing forth
her first child,
the cry of daughter Zion gasping for
breath,
stretching out her hands,
“Woe is me! I am fainting before
killers!”

The Utter Corruption of God’s People

5 Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
look around and take note!
Search its squares and see
if you can find one person
who acts justly
and seeks truth—

so that I may pardon Jerusalem.^b

2 Although they say, “As the LORD lives,”
yet they swear falsely.

3 O LORD, do your eyes not look for truth?

^a Another reading is *for you, O my soul*,

^b Heb *it*

Read Jeremiah 5

The chosen people had fallen to incredible depths. The mighty and the powerful have been among the most wicked. They have flaunted God and paraded their arrogance. "No evil will come upon us." They will be overrun by a country from afar. Not all will die; some will be deported. Prophets speak false words; priests do not teach. The end is near.

Reflect: How different are our times from those of Israel and Judah? We have countless features of a sinful culture. Am I influenced by godless thinking?

Pray: Only closeness to God can preserve our faith. Let us pray that we may never betray our spiritual birthright.

Act: Do I see daily prayer as indispensable in my fidelity to God? How can the quality of my prayer be improved?

You have struck them,
but they felt no anguish;
you have consumed them,
but they refused to take correction.
They have made their faces harder than rock;
they have refused to turn back.

- 4 Then I said, "These are only the poor,
they have no sense;
for they do not know the way of the LORD,
the law of their God.
- 5 Let me go to the rich^a
and speak to them;
surely they know the way of the LORD,
the law of their God."
But they all alike had broken the yoke,
they had burst the bonds.
- 6 Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill them,
a wolf from the desert shall destroy them.
A leopard is watching against their cities;
everyone who goes out of them shall be torn
in pieces—
because their transgressions are many,
their apostasies are great.
- 7 How can I pardon you?
Your children have forsaken me,
and have sworn by those who are no gods.
When I fed them to the full,
they committed adultery
and trooped to the houses of prostitutes.
- 8 They were well-fed lusty stallions,
each neighing for his neighbor's wife.
- 9 Shall I not punish them for these things?
says the LORD;
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this?
- 10 Go up through her vine-rows and destroy,
but do not make a full end;
strip away her branches,
for they are not the LORD's.
- 11 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah
have been utterly faithless to me,
says the LORD.
- 12 They have spoken falsely of the LORD,
and have said, "He will do nothing.
No evil will come upon us,
and we shall not see sword or famine."
- 13 The prophets are nothing but wind,
for the word is not in them.
Thus shall it be done to them!

^a Or the great

- 14 Therefore thus says the LORD, the
 God of hosts:
 Because they^a have spoken this word,
 I am now making my words in your
 mouth a fire,
 and this people wood, and the fire
 shall devour them.
- 15 I am going to bring upon you
 a nation from far away, O house of
 Israel,
 says the LORD.
 It is an enduring nation,
 it is an ancient nation,
 a nation whose language you do not
 know,
 nor can you understand what they
 say.
- 16 Their quiver is like an open tomb;
 all of them are mighty warriors.
- 17 They shall eat up your harvest and
 your food;
 they shall eat up your sons and
 your daughters;
 they shall eat up your flocks and
 your herds;
 they shall eat up your vines and
 your fig trees;
 they shall destroy with the sword
 your fortified cities in which you trust.
- 18 But even in those days, says the
 LORD, I will not make a full end of you.
- 19 And when your people say, "Why has the
 LORD our God done all these things to us?"
 you shall say to them, "As you have forsaken
 me and served foreign gods in your
 land, so you shall serve strangers in a land
 that is not yours."
- 20 Declare this in the house of Jacob,
 proclaim it in Judah:
- 21 Hear this, O foolish and senseless
 people,
 who have eyes, but do not see,
 who have ears, but do not hear.
- 22 Do you not fear me? says the LORD;
 Do you not tremble before me?
 I placed the sand as a boundary for
 the sea,
 a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;
 though the waves toss, they cannot
 prevail,
 though they roar, they cannot
 pass over it.
- 23 But this people has a stubborn and
 rebellious heart;
 they have turned aside and gone
 away.
- 24 They do not say in their hearts,
 "Let us fear the LORD our God,
 who gives the rain in its season,
 the autumn rain and the spring rain,
 and keeps for us
 the weeks appointed for the harvest."
- 25 Your iniquities have turned these away,
 and your sins have deprived you
 of good.
- 26 For scoundrels are found among my
 people;
 they take over the goods of others.
 Like fowlers they set a trap;^b
 they catch human beings.
- 27 Like a cage full of birds,
 their houses are full of treachery;
 therefore they have become great
 and rich,
- 28 they have grown fat and sleek.
 They know no limits in deeds of
 wickedness;
 they do not judge with justice
 the cause of the orphan, to make it
 prosper,
 and they do not defend the rights
 of the needy.
- 29 Shall I not punish them for these things?
 says the LORD,
 and shall I not bring retribution
 on a nation such as this?
- 30 An appalling and horrible thing
 has happened in the land:
- 31 the prophets prophesy falsely,
 and the priests rule as the
 prophets direct;^c
 my people love to have it so,
 but what will you do when the end
 comes?

^a Heb you^b Meaning of Heb uncertain^c Or rule by their own authority

Read Jeremiah 6

The destruction of Jerusalem was more than a great human tragedy. There is no locale in Christianity that can equal the sacredness of Jerusalem. In a unique way it was the locus of God's presence among his people. For pagan hordes to overrun and destroy it was an indescribable horror. And yet that is precisely what occurred.

Reflect: Do I appreciate my own tradition's "sacred space"? Every church is sacred to the Lord. Do I prize the time I can spend in the Lord's presence there?

Pray: Ask that our church may remain safe and protected and always holy before the Lord.

Act: Even if it is not possible for me to attend daily Mass, how can I make a regular church visit part of my life?

The Imminence and Horror of the Invasion

- 6** Flee for safety, O children of Benjamin,
from the midst of Jerusalem!
Blow the trumpet in Tekoa,
and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem;
for evil looms out of the north,
and great destruction.
- 2** I have likened daughter Zion
to the loveliest pasture.^a
- 3** Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her.
They shall pitch their tents around her;
they shall pasture, all in their places.
- 4** "Prepare war against her;
up, and let us attack at noon!"
"Woe to us, for the day declines,
the shadows of evening lengthen!"
- 5** "Up, and let us attack by night,
and destroy her palaces!"
- 6** For thus says the LORD of hosts:
Cut down her trees;
cast up a siege ramp against Jerusalem.
This is the city that must be punished;^b
there is nothing but oppression within her.
- 7** As a well keeps its water fresh,
so she keeps fresh her wickedness;
violence and destruction are heard within her;
sickness and wounds are ever before me.
- 8** Take warning, O Jerusalem,
or I shall turn from you in disgust,
and make you a desolation,
an uninhabited land.
- 9** Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Glean^c thoroughly as a vine
the remnant of Israel;
like a grape-gatherer, pass your hand again
over its branches.
- 10** To whom shall I speak and give warning,
that they may hear?
See, their ears are closed,^d
they cannot listen.
The word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn;
they take no pleasure in it.
- 11** But I am full of the wrath of the LORD;
I am weary of holding it in.
- Pour it out on the children in the street,
and on the gatherings of young men as well;
both husband and wife shall be taken,
the old folk and the very aged.
- 12** Their houses shall be turned over to others,

^a Or I will destroy daughter Zion, the loveliest pasture

^b Or the city of license

^c Cn: Heb They shall glean

^d Heb are uncircumcised

- their fields and wives together;
for I will stretch out my hand
against the inhabitants of the land,
says the LORD.
- 13 For from the least to the greatest of
them,
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
and from prophet to priest,
everyone deals falsely.
- 14 They have treated the wound of my
people carelessly,
saying, "Peace, peace,"
when there is no peace.
- 15 They acted shamefully, they
committed abomination;
yet they were not ashamed,
they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among
those who fall;
at the time that I punish them,
they shall be overthrown,
says the LORD.
- 16 Thus says the LORD:
Stand at the crossroads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way lies; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls.
But they said, "We will not walk in it."
- 17 Also I raised up sentinels for you:
"Give heed to the sound of the
trumpet!"
But they said, "We will not give heed."
- 18 Therefore hear, O nations,
and know, O congregation, what
will happen to them.
- 19 Hear, O earth; I am going to bring
disaster on this people,
the fruit of their schemes,
because they have not given heed to
my words;
and as for my teaching, they have
rejected it.
- 20 Of what use to me is frankincense
that comes from Sheba,
or sweet cane from a distant land?
Your burnt offerings are not acceptable,
nor are your sacrifices pleasing to me.
- 21 Therefore thus says the LORD:
See, I am laying before this people
stumbling blocks against which
they shall stumble;
parents and children together,
neighbor and friend shall perish.
- 22 Thus says the LORD:
See, a people is coming from the
land of the north,
a great nation is stirring from the
farthest parts of the earth.
- 23 They grasp the bow and the javelin,
they are cruel and have no mercy,
their sound is like the roaring sea;
they ride on horses,
equipped like a warrior for battle,
against you, O daughter Zion!
- 24 "We have heard news of them,
our hands fall helpless;
anguish has taken hold of us,
pain as of a woman in labor.
- 25 Do not go out into the field,
or walk on the road;
for the enemy has a sword,
terror is on every side."
- 26 O my poor people, put on sackcloth,
and roll in ashes;
make mourning as for an only child,
most bitter lamentation:
for suddenly the destroyer
will come upon us.
- 27 I have made you a tester and a
refiner^a among my people
so that you may know and test
their ways.
- 28 They are all stubbornly rebellious,
going about with slanders;
they are bronze and iron,
all of them act corruptly.
- 29 The bellows blow fiercely,
the lead is consumed by the fire;
in vain the refining goes on,
for the wicked are not removed.
- 30 They are called "rejected silver,"
for the LORD has rejected them.

^a Or a fortress

Read Jeremiah 7

Mantras serve a purpose but they do not save. Despite the Hebrews' sinful conduct, many of them felt that the presence of the temple in Jerusalem gave assurance of salvation. But the repetition of the phrase "the temple of the LORD" meant little for a lot of people who were given to adultery, perjury, and false worship. Sacrifice offered with no internal spirit counted for nothing. The end was now inevitable.

Reflect: What are the secondary features of my faith? The medal in my wallet or the chain around my neck? These can easily become good-luck charms unless connected to a personal relationship with the Lord.

Pray: Ask that your love and knowledge of God may remain always deeply personal.

Act: Examine your prayer life in terms of its content and your closeness to the person of Christ.

Jeremiah Proclaims God's Judgment on the Nation

7 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. ³Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you^a in this place. ⁴Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is^b the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD."

⁵For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, ⁶if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, ⁷then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

⁸Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!"—only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the LORD. ¹²Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. ¹³And now, because you have done all these things, says the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, ¹⁴therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim.

The People's Disobedience

¹⁶As for you, do not pray for this people, do not raise a cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. ¹⁷Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. ¹⁹Is it I whom they provoke? says the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own hurt? ²⁰Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: My anger and my wrath shall be poured

^a Or and I will let you dwell

^b Heb They are

out on this place, on human beings and animals, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.

21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. 22 For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. 23 But this command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." 24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. 25 From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; 26 yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did.

27 So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. 28 You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept disci-

pline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

29 Cut off your hair and throw it away; raise a lamentation on the bare heights,^a for the LORD has rejected and forsaken the generation that provoked his wrath.

30 For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the LORD; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it. 31 And they go on building the high place^b of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. 32 Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in Topheth until there is no more room. 33 The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. 34 And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste.

8 At that time, says the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs; ² and they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have followed, and which they have inquired of and worshiped; and they shall not be gathered or buried; they shall be like dung on the surface of the ground. ³ Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, says the LORD of hosts.

The Blind Perversity of the Whole Nation

⁴ You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: When people fall, do they not get up again? If they go astray, do they not turn back?

^a Or the trails

^b Gk Tg: Heb high places

Read Jeremiah 8

The prophet is disconsolate over the lot of his people. Their corpses are left exposed in the heat of the sun. Why is there no conversion? Even animals change course in the face of obstacles or climate change. Why does this people remain so obstinate? The prophet can only weep.

Reflect: The prophet reminds us that it is never too late to turn to God. We all know people who pray for years for the conversion of dear ones. This is always praiseworthy. God's way of seeing things is often different from ours.

Pray: Pray tirelessly that grace may touch the hearts of those who are indifferent to God.

Act: How can I extend myself more generously toward those who have no religious belief? Am I convinced that God can accomplish the seemingly impossible?

- 5 Why then has this people^a turned away
in perpetual backsliding?
They have held fast to deceit,
they have refused to return.
- 6 I have given heed and listened,
but they do not speak honestly;
no one repents of wickedness,
saying, "What have I done!"
All of them turn to their own course,
like a horse plunging headlong into battle.
- 7 Even the stork in the heavens
knows its times;
and the turtledove, swallow, and crane^b
observe the time of their coming;
but my people do not know
the ordinance of the LORD.
- 8 How can you say, "We are wise,
and the law of the LORD is with us,"
when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie?
- 9 The wise shall be put to shame,
they shall be dismayed and taken;
since they have rejected the word of the LORD,
what wisdom is in them?
- 10 Therefore I will give their wives to others
and their fields to conquerors,
because from the least to the greatest
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
from prophet to priest
everyone deals falsely.
- 11 They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,
saying, "Peace, peace,"
when there is no peace.
- 12 They acted shamefully, they committed
abomination;
yet they were not at all ashamed,
they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;
at the time when I punish them, they shall be
overthrown,
says the LORD.
- 13 When I wanted to gather them, says the LORD,
there are^c no grapes on the vine,
nor figs on the fig tree;
even the leaves are withered,
and what I gave them has passed away from
them.^b
- 14 Why do we sit still?
Gather together, let us go into the fortified cities
and perish there;

^a One Ms Gk: MT *this people, Jerusalem,*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Or *I will make an end of them, says the LORD. There are*

- for the LORD our God has doomed us
to perish,
and has given us poisoned water
to drink,
because we have sinned against
the LORD.
- 15 We look for peace, but find no good,
for a time of healing, but there is
terror instead.
- 16 The snorting of their horses is heard
from Dan;
at the sound of the neighing of
their stallions
the whole land quakes.
They come and devour the land and
all that fills it,
the city and those who live in it.
- 17 See, I am letting snakes loose
among you,
adders that cannot be charmed,
and they shall bite you,
says the LORD.

The Prophet Mourns for the People

- 18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me,
my heart is sick.
- 19 Hark, the cry of my poor people
from far and wide in the land:
“Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?”
 (“Why have they provoked me to
anger with their images,
with their foreign idols?”)
- 20 “The harvest is past, the summer is
ended,
and we are not saved.”
- 21 For the hurt of my poor people I am
hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken
hold of me.
- 22 Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor
people
not been restored?

9^a O that my head were a spring of water,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people!

^{2b} O that I had in the desert
a traveler’s lodging place,
that I might leave my people
and go away from them!
For they are all adulterers,
a band of traitors.

³ They bend their tongues like bows;
they have grown strong in the land for
falsehood, and not for truth;
for they proceed from evil to evil,
and they do not know me, says the LORD.

⁴ Beware of your neighbors,
and put no trust in any of your kin;^c
for all your kin^d are supplanters,
and every neighbor goes around like a slanderer.

⁵ They all deceive their neighbors,
and no one speaks the truth;
they have taught their tongues to speak lies;
they commit iniquity and are too weary to
repent.^e

⁶ Oppression upon oppression, deceit^f upon deceit!
They refuse to know me, says the LORD.

^a Ch 8.23 in Heb

^b Ch 9.1 in Heb

^c Heb in a brother

^d Heb for every brother

^e Cn Compare Gk: Heb they weary
themselves with iniquity. ⁶ Your dwelling

^f Cn: Heb Your dwelling in the midst of
deceit

Read Jeremiah 9

Circumcision was Israel's badge of honor, the sign of its election. Today's chapter speaks of others who practiced it as well: Edomites, Egyptians, and Moabites. But it all counted for nothing, since hearts were not attuned to God.

Reflect: Human waywardness can thwart God's plan. Do I reflect on the broader implications of my actions?

Pray: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." Scripture shows me the path. Do I walk that path willingly?

Act: In what ways could I extend myself in the interests of God's reign?

- 7 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts:
I will now refine and test them,
for what else can I do with my sinful people?^a
- 8 Their tongue is a deadly arrow;
it speaks deceit through the mouth.
They all speak friendly words to their neighbors,
but inwardly are planning to lay an ambush.
- 9 Shall I not punish them for these things? says
the LORD;
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this?
- 10 Take up^b weeping and wailing for the mountains,
and a lamentation for the pastures of the
wilderness,
because they are laid waste so that no one
passes through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;
both the birds of the air and the animals
have fled and are gone.
- 11 I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins,
a lair of jackals;
and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation,
without inhabitant.

12 Who is wise enough to understand this? To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, so that they may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? ¹³ And the LORD says: Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accordance with it, ¹⁴ but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their ancestors taught them. ¹⁵ Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am feeding this people with wormwood, and giving them poisonous water to drink. ¹⁶ I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their ancestors have known; and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them.

The People Mourn in Judgment

- 17 Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Consider, and call for the mourning women to come;
send for the skilled women to come;
- 18 let them quickly raise a dirge over us,
so that our eyes may run down with tears,
and our eyelids flow with water.
- 19 For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion:
"How we are ruined!
We are utterly shamed,
because we have left the land,
because they have cast down our dwellings."

^a Or my poor people

^b Gk Syr: Heb I will take up

- 20 Hear, O women, the word of the LORD,
and let your ears receive the word
of his mouth;
teach to your daughters a dirge,
and each to her neighbor a lament.
- 21 “Death has come up into our
windows,
it has entered our palaces,
to cut off the children from the
streets
and the young men from the
squares.”
- 22 Speak! Thus says the LORD:
“Human corpses shall fall
like dung upon the open field,
like sheaves behind the reaper,
and no one shall gather them.”

23 Thus says the LORD: Do not let the
wise boast in their wisdom, do not let
the mighty boast in their might, do not let
the wealthy boast in their wealth; ²⁴ but
let those who boast boast in this, that they
understand and know me, that I am the
LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice, and
righteousness in the earth, for in these
things I delight, says the LORD.

²⁵ The days are surely coming, says
the LORD, when I will attend to all those
who are circumcised only in the foreskin:
²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites,
Moab, and all those with shaven temples
who live in the desert. For all these nations
are uncircumcised, and all the house of Is-
rael is uncircumcised in heart.

Read Jeremiah 10

The destruction of Judah is total. The “great commotion from the land of the north” has swept away its prey. Wooden idols as gods have not saved Israel or Judah; they are as nothing in comparison with the living God.

Reflect: And what of my idols, those comforts that I cannot do without? How attached am I to that which is passing away?

Pray: Pray for the grace to be satisfied with the necessities of life, to remain focused on the one who is the center of my life.

Act: I will take a specific step to put one of my idols aside. Where my treasure is, there will my heart be.

Idolatry Has Brought Ruin on Israel

- 10** Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. ² Thus says the LORD:
Do not learn the way of the nations,
or be dismayed at the signs of the heavens;
for the nations are dismayed at them.
- ³ For the customs of the peoples are false:
a tree from the forest is cut down,
and worked with an ax by the hands of an artisan;
- ⁴ people deck it with silver and gold;
they fasten it with hammer and nails
so that it cannot move.
- ⁵ Their idols^a are like scarecrows in a cucumber
field,
and they cannot speak;
they have to be carried,
for they cannot walk.
Do not be afraid of them,
for they cannot do evil,
nor is it in them to do good.
- ⁶ There is none like you, O LORD;
you are great, and your name is great in might.
- ⁷ Who would not fear you, O King of the nations?
For that is your due;
among all the wise ones of the nations
and in all their kingdoms
there is no one like you.
- ⁸ They are both stupid and foolish;
the instruction given by idols
is no better than wood!^b
- ⁹ Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish,
and gold from Uphaz.

^a Heb *They*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

They are the work of the artisan and
of the hands of the goldsmith;
their clothing is blue and purple;
they are all the product of skilled
workers.

- 10 But the LORD is the true God;
he is the living God and the
everlasting King.
At his wrath the earth quakes,
and the nations cannot endure his
indignation.

11 Thus shall you say to them: The
gods who did not make the heavens and
the earth shall perish from the earth and
from under the heavens.^a

- 12 It is he who made the earth by his
power,
who established the world by his
wisdom,
and by his understanding
stretched out the heavens.
- 13 When he utters his voice, there is a
tumult of waters in the heavens,
and he makes the mist rise from
the ends of the earth.
He makes lightnings for the rain,
and he brings out the wind from
his storehouses.
- 14 Everyone is stupid and without
knowledge;
goldsmiths are all put to shame
by their idols;
for their images are false,
and there is no breath in them.
- 15 They are worthless, a work of delusion;
at the time of their punishment
they shall perish.
- 16 Not like these is the LORD,^b the
portion of Jacob,
for he is the one who formed all
things,
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;
the LORD of hosts is his name.

The Coming Exile

- 17 Gather up your bundle from the ground,
O you who live under siege!

- 18 For thus says the LORD:
I am going to sling out the
inhabitants of the land
at this time,
and I will bring distress on them,
so that they shall feel it.
- 19 Woe is me because of my hurt!
My wound is severe.
But I said, "Truly this is my
punishment,
and I must bear it."
- 20 My tent is destroyed,
and all my cords are broken;
my children have gone from me,
and they are no more;
there is no one to spread my tent
again,
and to set up my curtains.
- 21 For the shepherds are stupid,
and do not inquire of the LORD;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.
- 22 Hear, a noise! Listen, it is coming—
a great commotion from the land
of the north
to make the cities of Judah a
desolation,
a lair of jackals.
- 23 I know, O LORD, that the way of
human beings is not in their
control,
that mortals as they walk cannot
direct their steps.
- 24 Correct me, O LORD, but in just
measure;
not in your anger, or you will bring
me to nothing.
- 25 Pour out your wrath on the nations
that do not know you,
and on the peoples that do not
call on your name;
for they have devoured Jacob;
they have devoured him and
consumed him,
and have laid waste his
habitation.

^a This verse is in Aramaic

^b Heb lacks *the LORD*

Read Jeremiah 11

Judah had as many gods as it had cities. Am I also guilty because of my gods? How often do I find myself catering to them? The continuation of pious practices does not mean I am on the right path.

Reflect: I may feel that I am a master at carrying water on two shoulders, but I really can't have it both ways. "The one who is not with me is against me," says the Lord.

Pray: To forego idolatry in my life is to forego sin. As part of a covenanted people, I have a responsibility to the God who has entered into a covenant with me.

Act: What step should I take to bring my life into line with my covenanted status?

Israel and Judah Have Broken the Covenant

11 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ³You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, ⁴which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, ⁵that I may perform the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then I answered, "So be it, LORD."

⁶And the LORD said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. ⁷For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. ⁸Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.

⁹And the LORD said to me: Conspiracy exists among the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors of old, who refused to heed my words; they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant that I made with their ancestors. ¹¹Therefore, thus says the LORD, assuredly I am going to bring disaster upon them that they cannot escape; though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them. ¹²Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they will never save them in the time of their trouble. ¹³For your gods have become as many as your towns, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars to shame you have set up, altars to make offerings to Baal.

¹⁴As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. ¹⁵What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done vile deeds? Can vows^a and sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult? ¹⁶The LORD once called you, "A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit"; but with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed. ¹⁷The LORD of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, be-

^a Gk: Heb Can many

cause of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.

Jeremiah's Life Threatened

¹⁸ It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew;
then you showed me their evil deeds.

¹⁹ But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.
And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!"

²⁰ But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously,
who try the heart and the mind,
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

²¹ Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the people of Anathoth, who seek your life, and say, "You shall not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand"—²² therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: I am going to punish them; the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; ²³ and not even a remnant shall be left of them. For I will bring disaster upon the people of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.

Jeremiah Complains to God

12 You will be in the right, O LORD,
when I lay charges against you;
but let me put my case to you.
Why does the way of the guilty prosper?
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?

² You plant them, and they take root;
they grow and bring forth fruit;
you are near in their mouths
yet far from their hearts.

³ But you, O LORD, know me;
You see me and test me—my heart is with you.
Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,
and set them apart for the day of slaughter.

⁴ How long will the land mourn,
and the grass of every field wither?
For the wickedness of those who live in it
the animals and the birds are swept away,
and because people said, "He is blind to our ways."^a

God Replies to Jeremiah

⁵ If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you,
how will you compete with horses?
And if in a safe land you fall down,
how will you fare in the thickets of the Jordan?
⁶ For even your kinsfolk and your own family,
even they have dealt treacherously with you;
they are in full cry after you;

^a Gk: Heb to our future

Read Jeremiah 12

The prophet considers the prosperity of the wicked, which seems to increase constantly. Their lips may be with the Lord but their hearts are far from him. They are anxious to rid themselves of Jeremiah and thus be rid of his prophesying. The land of Judah is desolate; the evildoers have deported the population. The Lord recognizes the loss. But it will not be final. He will restore his people, if they have a changed heart. Even those who were their persecutors, if they convert from Baal to the living Lord, they too shall be saved.

Reflect: Conversion is always possible. In the midst of hardship and persecution, we may think this is not the case. But God sees the heart, and we should never give up. Judah did indeed suffer much, but its conduct merited punishment—and God clearly placed a bright light on the horizon.

Pray: Pray for those who make life difficult for us. Pray that hatred in the world may be turned into love, or at least into peaceful coexistence.

Act: Remember in prayer today those people who actively seek peace in the world.

do not believe them,
though they speak friendly words to you.

- 7 I have forsaken my house,
I have abandoned my heritage;
I have given the beloved of my heart
into the hands of her enemies.
- 8 My heritage has become to me
like a lion in the forest;
she has lifted up her voice against me—
therefore I hate her.
- 9 Is the hyena greedy^a for my heritage at my
command?
Are the birds of prey all around her?
Go, assemble all the wild animals;
bring them to devour her.
- 10 Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard,
they have trampled down my portion,
they have made my pleasant portion
a desolate wilderness.
- 11 They have made it a desolation;
desolate, it mourns to me.
The whole land is made desolate,
but no one lays it to heart.
- 12 Upon all the bare heights^b in the desert
spoilings have come;
for the sword of the LORD devours
from one end of the land to the other;
no one shall be safe.
- 13 They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns,
they have tired themselves out but profit
nothing.
They shall be ashamed of their^c harvests
because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

14 Thus says the LORD concerning all my evil neighbors who touch the heritage that I have given my people Israel to inherit: I am about to pluck them up from their land, and I will pluck up the house of Judah from among them. ¹⁵ And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them again to their heritage and to their land, every one of them. ¹⁶ And then, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, “As the LORD lives,” as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people. ¹⁷ But if any nation will not listen, then I will completely uproot it and destroy it, says the LORD.

^a Cn: Heb *Is the hyena, the bird of prey*

^b Or *the trails*

^c Heb *your*

Read Jeremiah 13

Why do evil people prosper? Jeremiah is betrayed and maligned; he is shunned for speaking God's word. Only God can write straight with crooked lines, and the prophet remains confident.

Reflect: How do I deal with my depression, with the feeling that even God has abandoned me?

Pray: Pray for the ability to remain firm in faith, especially when things seem to be at their worst.

Act: I will extend forgiveness to someone who has hurt me.

The Linen Loincloth

13 Thus said the LORD to me, “Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth, and put it on your loins, but do not dip it in water.” ² So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and put it on my loins. ³ And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, ⁴ “Take the loincloth that you bought and are wearing, and go now to the Euphrates,^a and hide it there in a cleft of the rock.” ⁵ So I went, and hid it by the Euphrates,^b as the LORD commanded me. ⁶ And after many days the LORD said to me, “Go now to the Euphrates,^a and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there.” ⁷ Then I went to the Euphrates,^a and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. But now the loincloth was ruined; it was good for nothing.

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹ Thus says the LORD: Just so I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. ¹¹ For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. But they would not listen.

Symbol of the Wine-Jars

¹² You shall speak to them this word: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Every wine-jar should be filled with wine. And they will say to you, “Do you think we do not know that every wine-jar should be filled with wine?” ¹³ Then you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land—the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—with drunkenness. ¹⁴ And I will dash them one against another, parents and children together, says the LORD. I will not pity or spare or have compassion when I destroy them.

Exile Threatened

- ¹⁵ Hear and give ear; do not be haughty,
for the LORD has spoken.
- ¹⁶ Give glory to the LORD your God
before he brings darkness,
and before your feet stumble
on the mountains at twilight;
while you look for light,
he turns it into gloom
and makes it deep darkness.

^a Or to Parah; Heb perath

^b Or by Parah; Heb perath

- 17 But if you will not listen,
 my soul will weep in secret for
 your pride;
 my eyes will weep bitterly and run
 down with tears,
 because the LORD's flock has been
 taken captive.
- 18 Say to the king and the queen mother:
 "Take a lowly seat,
 for your beautiful crown
 has come down from your head."^a
- 19 The towns of the Negeb are shut up
 with no one to open them;
 all Judah is taken into exile,
 wholly taken into exile.
- 20 Lift up your eyes and see
 those who come from the north.
 Where is the flock that was given you,
 your beautiful flock?
- 21 What will you say when they set as
 head over you
 those whom you have trained
 to be your allies?
 Will not pangs take hold of you,
 like those of a woman in labor?
- 22 And if you say in your heart,
 "Why have these things come
 upon me?"
 it is for the greatness of your iniquity
 that your skirts are lifted up,
 and you are violated.
- 23 Can Ethiopians^b change their skin
 or leopards their spots?
 Then also you can do good
 who are accustomed to do evil.
- 24 I will scatter you^c like chaff
 driven by the wind from the
 desert.
- 25 This is your lot,
 the portion I have measured out
 to you, says the LORD,
 because you have forgotten me
 and trusted in lies.
- 26 I myself will lift up your skirts over
 your face,
 and your shame will be seen.
- 27 I have seen your abominations,
 your adulteries and neighings,
 your shameless prostitutions
 on the hills of the countryside.
 Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
 How long will it be
 before you are made clean?

The Great Drought

14 The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought:

- ² Judah mourns
 and her gates languish;
 they lie in gloom on the ground,
 and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.
- ³ Her nobles send their servants for water;
 they come to the cisterns,
 they find no water,
 they return with their vessels empty.
 They are ashamed and dismayed
 and cover their heads,
- ⁴ because the ground is cracked.
 Because there has been no rain on the land
 the farmers are dismayed;
 they cover their heads.
- ⁵ Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn
 because there is no grass.
- ⁶ The wild asses stand on the bare heights,^d
 they pant for air like jackals;
 their eyes fail
 because there is no herbage.

^a Gk Syr Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Or Nubians; Heb Cushites

^c Heb them

^d Or the trails

Read Jeremiah 14

How does an authentic prophet deal with prophets who preach not the word of God but their own word? And what if their message is diametrically opposed to that of the true prophet? In Jeremiah's eyes, such things are all part of a crumbling society.

Reflect: True hope is God-given; false hope is as insubstantial as a feather and groundless. Beware of people who claim to have an inner track with God. Our times may not be the best but they are certainly not the worst.

Pray: Pray that we may have the grace to recognize and heed those voices that truly reflect Christian values.

Act: Work for one truly Christian cause. Weigh well predictions that you hear.

- 7 Although our iniquities testify against us,
act, O LORD, for your name's sake;
our apostasies indeed are many,
and we have sinned against you.
- 8 O hope of Israel,
its savior in time of trouble,
why should you be like a stranger in the land,
like a traveler turning aside for the night?
- 9 Why should you be like someone confused,
like a mighty warrior who cannot give help?
Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us,
and we are called by your name;
do not forsake us!
- 10 Thus says the LORD concerning this people:
Truly they have loved to wander,
they have not restrained their feet;
therefore the LORD does not accept them,
now he will remember their iniquity
and punish their sins.

11 The LORD said to me: Do not pray for the welfare of this people. ¹² Although they fast, I do not hear their cry, and although they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I do not accept them; but by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence I consume them.

Denunciation of Lying Prophets

13 Then I said: "Ah, Lord GOD! Here are the prophets saying to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you true peace in this place.'" ¹⁴ And the LORD said to me: The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. ¹⁵ Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name though I did not send them, and who say, "Sword and famine shall not come on this land": By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. ¹⁶ And the people to whom they prophesy shall be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword. There shall be no one to bury them—their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their wickedness upon them.

- 17 You shall say to them this word:
Let my eyes run down with tears night and day,
and let them not cease,
for the virgin daughter—my people—is struck
down with a crushing blow,
with a very grievous wound.

18 If I go out into the field,
 look—those killed by the sword!
 And if I enter the city,
 look—those sick with^a famine!
 For both prophet and priest ply their
 trade throughout the land,
 and have no knowledge.

The People Plead for Mercy

19 Have you completely rejected Judah?
 Does your heart loathe Zion?
 Why have you struck us down
 so that there is no healing for us?
 We look for peace, but find no good;
 for a time of healing, but there is
 terror instead.

20 We acknowledge our wickedness,
 O LORD,
 the iniquity of our ancestors,
 for we have sinned against you.
 21 Do not spurn us, for your name's
 sake;
 do not dishonor your glorious
 throne;
 remember and do not break your
 covenant with us.
 22 Can any idols of the nations bring
 rain?
 Or can the heavens give showers?
 Is it not you, O LORD our God?
 We set our hope on you,
 for it is you who do all this.

Read Jeremiah 15

The prophet's lot has been such an unhappy one that he regrets even the day of his birth. So sad has the plight of God's people become that even if Moses were to intercede for them (as was once the case), his request would not be heard. Is there no peace or let-up for the prophet? For his word of woe, he is bitterly assailed. But God will make him like a "fortified wall of bronze"; he will be invincible.

Reflect: Have you ever felt rejected because you stood up in the cause of right? It is difficult to stand alone; it may be easier to collapse in the face of evil. The important thing to remember, however, is that you are never really alone.

Pray: Ask for the grace to remain faithful to your principles. Keep in mind the Lord's words: "I am with you to save you and deliver you."

Act: Make an effort to clearly stand up for a just cause.

Punishment Is Inevitable

15 Then the LORD said to me: Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go! ² And when they say to you, "Where shall we go?" you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD:

Those destined for pestilence, to pestilence,
 and those destined for the sword, to the
 sword;

those destined for famine, to famine,
 and those destined for captivity, to captivity.

³ And I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, says the LORD: the sword to kill, the dogs to drag away, and the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth to devour and destroy. ⁴ I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what King Manasseh son of Hezekiah of Judah did in Jerusalem.

⁵ Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem,
 or who will bemoan you?

Who will turn aside
 to ask about your welfare?

⁶ You have rejected me, says the LORD,
 you are going backward;
 so I have stretched out my hand against you and
 destroyed you—

I am weary of relenting.

⁷ I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork
 in the gates of the land;

I have bereaved them, I have destroyed my
 people;
 they did not turn from their ways.

⁸ Their widows became more numerous
 than the sand of the seas;

^a Heb look—the sicknesses of

I have brought against the mothers
of youths
a destroyer at noonday;
I have made anguish and terror
fall upon her suddenly.
⁹ She who bore seven has languished;
she has swooned away;
her sun went down while it was yet day;
she has been shamed and
disgraced.
And the rest of them I will give to
the sword
before their enemies,
says the LORD.

Jeremiah Complains Again and Is Reassured

¹⁰ Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. ¹¹ The LORD said: Surely I have intervened in your life^a for good, surely I have imposed enemies on you in a time of trouble and in a time of distress.^b ¹² Can iron and bronze break iron from the north?

¹³ Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory. ¹⁴ I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.

¹⁵ O LORD, you know;
remember me and visit me,
and bring down retribution for me
on my persecutors.

In your forbearance do not take me
away;
know that on your account I suffer
insult.

¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate
them,
and your words became to me a
joy
and the delight of my heart;
for I am called by your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.

¹⁷ I did not sit in the company of
merrymakers,
nor did I rejoice;
under the weight of your hand I sat
alone,
for you had filled me with
indignation.

¹⁸ Why is my pain unceasing,
my wound incurable,
refusing to be healed?
Truly, you are to me like a deceitful
brook,
like waters that fail.

¹⁹ Therefore thus says the LORD:
If you turn back, I will take you back,
and you shall stand before me.
If you utter what is precious, and not
what is worthless,
you shall serve as my mouth.
It is they who will turn to you,
not you who will turn to them.

²⁰ And I will make you to this people
a fortified wall of bronze;
they will fight against you,
but they shall not prevail over you,
for I am with you
to save you and deliver you,
says the LORD.

²¹ I will deliver you out of the hand of
the wicked,
and redeem you from the grasp of
the ruthless.

Jeremiah's Celibacy and Message

16 The word of the LORD came to me: ² You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. ³ For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bear them and the fathers who beget them in this land: ⁴ They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall become like dung on the

^a Heb *intervened with you*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

Read Jeremiah 16

In the midst of the woes and grief of this chapter, there is a bright ray of light. God will ultimately end Israel's grief and bring his people back from exile, just as he brought them out of the bondage of Egypt. There is much sadness in the prophets, especially Jeremiah, but there is always the promise of a better future. God may be thwarted in his plans, but he is never vanquished.

Reflect: Even in the midst of the greatest trials, we have our moments of hope. God's final objective is peace and harmony. This is something we must never lose sight of.

Pray: Pray that we may never lose sight of God's silver lining in our life. We are never forsaken.

Act: Today I will be a bright ray of light in someone's life.

surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall become food for the birds of the air and for the wild animals of the earth.

5 For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament, or bemoan them; for I have taken away my peace from this people, says the LORD, my steadfast love and mercy. 6 Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them; there shall be no gashing, no shaving of the head for them. 7 No one shall break bread^a for the mourner, to offer comfort for the dead; nor shall anyone give them the cup of consolation to drink for their fathers or their mothers. 8 You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink. 9 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to banish from this place, in your days and before your eyes, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.

10 And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, "Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?" 11 then you shall say to them: It is because your ancestors have forsaken me, says the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law; 12 and because you have behaved worse than your ancestors, for here you are, every one of you, following your stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me. 13 Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.

God Will Restore Israel

14 Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," 15 but "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them." For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors.

16 I am now sending for many fishermen, says the LORD, and they shall catch them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks. 17 For my eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from my presence, nor is their iniquity concealed from my sight. 18 And^b I will doubly repay their

^a Two Mss Gk: MT *break for them*

^b Gk: Heb *And first*

iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations.

19 O LORD, my strength and my stronghold,
my refuge in the day of trouble,
to you shall the nations come
from the ends of the earth and
say:

Our ancestors have inherited nothing
but lies,
worthless things in which there is
no profit.

20 Can mortals make for themselves gods?
Such are no gods!

21 “Therefore I am surely going to teach them, this time I am going to teach them my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the LORD.”

Read Jeremiah 17

The sabbath rest was a sacred precept in Israel’s religious life. Jeremiah laments the casual disregard of the Sabbath. Heavy burdens are transported through the city gates, and the work of daily life is carried on with mindless abandon. If this continues, the palaces of Jerusalem will end up in flames.

Reflect: Sunday is a day to be given to God and to be spent with family and friends. In most of our Western culture today, there is little or no regard for the opportunity offered for reflection and relaxation. In all too many cases, Sunday means business as usual.

Pray: Let us ask that our lives be more oriented toward calm and family concerns on the sabbath.

Act: Can we bring our family together for dinner and extended conversation on this one day of the week?

Judah’s Sin and Punishment

17 The sin of Judah is written with an iron pen; with a diamond point it is engraved on the tablet of their hearts, and on the horns of their altars, ² while their children remember their altars and their sacred poles,^a beside every green tree, and on the high hills, ³ on the mountains in the open country. Your wealth and all your treasures I will give for spoil as the price of your sin^b throughout all your territory. ⁴ By your own act you shall lose the heritage that I gave you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled^c that shall burn forever.

- ⁵ Thus says the LORD:
Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.
- ⁶ They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.
They shall live in the parched places of the
wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.
- ⁷ Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
- ⁸ They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.
- ⁹ The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—
who can understand it?
- ¹⁰ I the LORD test the mind
and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

^a Heb *Asherim*

^b Cn: Heb *spoil your high places for sin*

^c Two Mss Theodotion: *you kindled*

- 11 Like the partridge hatching what it did not lay,
so are all who amass wealth unjustly;
in mid-life it will leave them,
and at their end they will prove to be fools.
- 12 O glorious throne, exalted from the beginning,
shrine of our sanctuary!
- 13 O hope of Israel! O LORD!
All who forsake you shall be put to shame;
those who turn away from you^a shall be recorded in the underworld,^b
for they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the LORD.

Jeremiah Prays for Vindication

- 14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed;
save me, and I shall be saved;
for you are my praise.
- 15 See how they say to me,
“Where is the word of the LORD?
Let it come!”
- 16 But I have not run away from being a shepherd^c in your service,
nor have I desired the fatal day.
You know what came from my lips;
it was before your face.
- 17 Do not become a terror to me;
you are my refuge in the day of disaster;
- 18 Let my persecutors be shamed,
but do not let me be shamed;
let them be dismayed,
but do not let me be dismayed;
bring on them the day of disaster;
destroy them with double destruction!

Hallow the Sabbath Day

19 Thus said the LORD to me: Go and stand in the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, ²⁰and say to them: Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. ²¹Thus says the LORD: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. ²²And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the sabbath or do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. ²³Yet they did not listen or incline their ear; they stiffened their necks and would not hear or receive instruction.

24 But if you listen to me, says the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but keep the sabbath day holy and do no work on it, ²⁵then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings^d who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhabited forever. ²⁶And people shall come from the towns of Judah and the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. ²⁷But if you do not listen to me, to keep the sabbath day holy, and to carry in no burden through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.

^a Heb me

^b Or in the earth

^c Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Cn: Heb kings and officials

Read Jeremiah 18

“Enough of Jeremiah” is the spoken death wish, as the prophet’s contemporaries plot to kill him. They claim that they will lose nothing, only be rid of a troubling voice. There is a symbolic action in the visit to the potter. Just as the potter can refashion his pot if it does not conform to his design, so too the Lord can remake his human creature.

Reflect: Regardless of how poorly we have done, we can always be refashioned. If any person or nation recognizes its evil ways and returns to the Lord, deliverance is attainable.

Pray: Pray today for someone so entrapped in evil that the situation seems hopeless.

Act: Do I have any godchildren or people who look to me for advice? What are my responsibilities?

The Potter and the Clay

18 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” ³ So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. ⁴ The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶ Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸ but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. ⁹ And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, ¹⁰ but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. ¹¹ Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

Israel’s Stubborn Idolatry

¹² But they say, “It is no use! We will follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our evil will.”

¹³ Therefore thus says the LORD:

Ask among the nations:

Who has heard the like of this?

The virgin Israel has done

a most horrible thing.

¹⁴ Does the snow of Lebanon leave the crags of Sirion?^a

Do the mountain^b waters run dry,^c
the cold flowing streams?

¹⁵ But my people have forgotten me,
they burn offerings to a delusion;
they have stumbled^d in their ways,
in the ancient roads,
and have gone into bypaths,
not the highway,

¹⁶ making their land a horror,
a thing to be hissed at forever.
All who pass by it are horrified
and shake their heads.

^a Cn: Heb of the field

^b Cn: Heb foreign

^c Cn: Heb Are...plucked up?

^d Gk Syr Vg: Heb they made them stumble

17 Like the wind from the east,
I will scatter them before the enemy.
I will show them my back, not my
face,
in the day of their calamity.

A Plot against Jeremiah

18 Then they said, “Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah—for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him,^a and let us not heed any of his words.”

19 Give heed to me, O LORD,
and listen to what my adversaries
say!

20 Is evil a recompense for good?
Yet they have dug a pit for my life.
Remember how I stood before you
to speak good for them,
to turn away your wrath from them.

21 Therefore give their children over to
famine;
hurl them out to the power of the
sword,
let their wives become childless and
widowed.
May their men meet death by
pestilence,
their youths be slain by the sword
in battle.

22 May a cry be heard from their houses,
when you bring the marauder
suddenly upon them!
For they have dug a pit to catch me,
and laid snares for my feet.

23 Yet you, O LORD, know
all their plotting to kill me.
Do not forgive their iniquity,
do not blot out their sin from your
sight.
Let them be tripped up before you;
deal with them while you are angry.

The Broken Earthenware Jug

19 Thus said the LORD: Go and buy a potter’s earthenware jug. Take with you^b some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests, ² and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. ³ You shall say: Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ⁴ Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, ⁵ and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind; ⁶ therefore the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter. ⁷ And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth. ⁸ And I will make this city a horror,

^a Heb *strike him with the tongue*

^b Syr Tg Compare Gk: Heb *lacks take with you*

Read Jeremiah 19

An earthenware flask is carried by the prophet to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the Potsherd Gate. There it will be smashed and the place renamed the “valley of Slaughter.” The picture of devastation is one of the most graphic in the Bible: strewn corpses, left as vultures’ prey; people eating the flesh of sons and daughters. It is a dreadful scene of human suffering.

Reflect: Today television brings the havoc of war into our living rooms. The cost of war in terms of human life is terrible. In the Bible, war is connected to sin and betrayal. Is there such a connection in our own day?

Pray: Pray for an end to the human violence that creates sinful havoc. Whether on the battlefield or on city streets, such violence stands as the very antithesis of what God wants.

Act: Take a single step to end violence in your city or neighborhood.

a thing to be hissed at; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters. ⁹And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and all shall eat the flesh of their neighbors in the siege, and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them.

¹⁰ Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you, ¹¹ and shall say to them: Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, so that it can never be mended. In Topheth they shall bury until there is no more room to bury. ¹² Thus will I do to this place, says the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. ¹³ And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Topheth—all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven, and libations have been poured out to other gods.

¹⁴ When Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, he stood in the court of the LORD’s house and said to all the people: ¹⁵ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am now bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks, refusing to hear my words.

Jeremiah Persecuted by Pashhur

20 Now the priest Pashhur son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. ² Then Pashhur struck the prophet Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the LORD. ³ The next morning when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, The LORD has named you not Pashhur but “Terror-all-around.” ⁴ For thus says the LORD: I am making you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall kill them with the sword. ⁵ I will give all the wealth of this city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them, and seize them, and carry them to Babylon. ⁶ And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house, shall go into captivity, and to Babylon you shall go; there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.

Read Jeremiah 20

So painful has been the life of the prophet that he regrets the day of his birth. In strong language, he claims to have been “enticed” by the Lord. Were he able to keep silent, he would, but God’s word burns within him. Pashhur’s new name is apt: “Terror-all-around.” It is the sad lot of Judah.

Reflect: Has the weight of conscience ever seemed too much for me? Does the cause of right seem more than can be endured? Jeremiah bore all of that and more, and he never doubted that God was with him. “But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior.”

Pray: Pray that the cause of justice may be vindicated in our world, that the day of evil may be brought to an end, that we may always see and appreciate the good that is present.

Act: Rather than curse the darkness, let me today light one candle of goodness.

Jeremiah Denounces His Persecutors

- 7 O LORD, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
everyone mocks me.
- 8 For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, “Violence and destruction!”
For the word of the LORD has become for me
a reproach and derision all day long.
- 9 If I say, “I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,”
then within me there is something like a burning
fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.
- 10 For I hear many whispering:
“Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!”
All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble.
“Perhaps he can be enticed,
and we can prevail against him,
and take our revenge on him.”
- 11 But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
and they will not prevail.
They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.
- 12 O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous,
you see the heart and the mind;
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.
- 13 Sing to the LORD;
praise the LORD!
For he has delivered the life of the needy
from the hands of evildoers.
- 14 Cursed be the day
on which I was born!
The day when my mother bore me,
let it not be blessed!
- 15 Cursed be the man
who brought the news to my father, saying,
“A child is born to you, a son,”
making him very glad.

16 Let that man be like the cities
that the LORD overthrew without
pity;
let him hear a cry in the morning
and an alarm at noon,
17 because he did not kill me in the
womb;

so my mother would have been
my grave,
and her womb forever great.
18 Why did I come forth from the
womb
to see toil and sorrow,
and spend my days in shame?

Read Jeremiah 21

“Capitulate or die.” The time for appeasement and reconciliation is past. Judah’s king Zedekiah’s plea for deliverance goes unanswered. Rebellion has its limits. God’s punishment is near. Life will be saved only through surrender to the Babylonians. The time for talking is over.

Reflect: War is never a positive. However, there have been wars as a result of which evil was vanquished and good prevailed. In the sometimes puzzling world in which we live, we must never despair of the power of good. Punishment can be a cleansing process.

Pray: Evil forces continue to inveigh against God, even calling his existence into question. Ask the Lord earnestly that his “will be done.”

Act: Evil gains when good people are non-resistant to it. What is one thing that is good which I can do today?

Jerusalem Will Fall to Nebuchadrezzar

21 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malchiah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maa-seiah, saying, ² “Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon is making war against us; perhaps the LORD will perform a wonderful deed for us, as he has often done, and will make him withdraw from us.”

³ Then Jeremiah said to them: ⁴ Thus you shall say to Zedekiah: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I am going to turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls; and I will bring them together into the center of this city. ⁵ I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and mighty arm, in anger, in fury, and in great wrath. ⁶ And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both human beings and animals; they shall die of a great pestilence. ⁷ Afterward, says the LORD, I will give King Zedekiah of Judah, and his servants, and the people in this city—those who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine—into the hands of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, into the hands of their enemies, into the hands of those who seek their lives. He shall strike them down with the edge of the sword; he shall not pity them, or spare them, or have compassion.

⁸ And to this people you shall say: Thus says the LORD: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. ⁹ Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out and surrender to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have their lives as a prize of war. ¹⁰ For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good, says the LORD: it shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

Message to the House of David

¹¹ To the house of the king of Judah say: Hear the word of the LORD, ¹² O house of David! Thus says the LORD:

Execute justice in the morning,
and deliver from the hand of the
oppressor
anyone who has been robbed,
or else my wrath will go forth like
fire,
and burn, with no one to
quench it,
because of your evil doings.

¹³ See, I am against you, O inhabitant
of the valley,

O rock of the plain,
says the LORD;
you who say, “Who can come down
against us,
or who can enter our places of
refuge?”

¹⁴ I will punish you according to the
fruit of your doings,
says the LORD;
I will kindle a fire in its forest,
and it shall devour all that is
around it.

Read Jeremiah 22

Royalty has no privileges. In the main, the conduct of the kings has been but a reflection of that of the people as a whole. One after another, the descendants of Josiah are discarded. This is because their conduct has not matched that of Josiah himself. He did what was right and just, dispensed justice to the weak and the poor. Josiah's reign was among the most honorable in Israelite history.

Reflect: Are all my dealings with others honest and just? Or am I inclined to see slight injustices as irrelevant?

Pray: May God direct all my dealings in honesty and uprightness. The person who is honest in matters of little account will be honest also in greater things.

Act: Today I will strive to be conscious of all actions, whether great or small.

Exhortation to Repent

22 Thus says the LORD: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, ² and say: Hear the word of the LORD, O King of Judah sitting on the throne of David—you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. ³ Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. ⁴ For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. ⁵ But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. ⁶ For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah:

You are like Gilead to me,
like the summit of Lebanon;
but I swear that I will make you a desert,
an uninhabited city.^a

⁷ I will prepare destroyers against you,
all with their weapons;
they shall cut down your choicest cedars
and cast them into the fire.

⁸ And many nations will pass by this city, and all of them will say one to another, “Why has the LORD dealt in this way with that great city?” ⁹ And they will answer, “Because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.”

¹⁰ Do not weep for him who is dead,
nor bemoan him;
weep rather for him who goes away,
for he shall return no more
to see his native land.

^a Cn: Heb *uninhabited cities*

Message to the Sons of Josiah

11 For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum son of King Josiah of Judah, who succeeded his father Josiah, and who went away from this place: He shall return here no more, ¹² but in the place where they have carried him captive he shall die, and he shall never see this land again.

13 Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbors work for nothing,
and does not give them their wages;

14 who says, "I will build myself a spacious house
with large upper rooms,"
and who cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion.

15 Are you a king
because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and
righteousness?
Then it was well with him.

16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.

Is not this to know me?
says the LORD.

17 But your eyes and heart
are only on your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood,
and for practicing oppression and violence.

18 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah:

They shall not lament for him,
saying,
"Alas, my brother!" or "Alas,
sister!"

They shall not lament for him,
saying,

"Alas, lord!" or "Alas, his
majesty!"

19 With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried—
dragged off and thrown out
beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry out,
and lift up your voice in Bashan;
cry out from Abarim,
for all your lovers are crushed.

21 I spoke to you in your prosperity,
but you said, "I will not listen."
This has been your way from your youth,
for you have not obeyed my voice.

22 The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds,
and your lovers shall go into captivity;
then you will be ashamed and dismayed
because of all your wickedness.

23 O inhabitant of Lebanon,
nested among the cedars,
how you will groan^a when pangs
come upon you,
pain as of a woman in labor!

Judgment on Coniah (Jehoiachin)

24 As I live, says the LORD, even if King Coniah son of Jehoiakim of Judah were the signet ring on my right hand, even from there I would tear you off ²⁵ and give you into the hands of those who seek your life, into the hands of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hands of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and into the hands of the Chaldeans. ²⁶ I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another country, where you were not born, and there you shall die. ²⁷ But they shall not return to the land to which they long to return.

²⁸ Is this man Coniah a despised broken pot,
a vessel no one wants?

^a Gk Vg Syr: Heb will be pitied

Why are he and his offspring hurled
out
and cast away in a land that they
do not know?
29 O land, land, land,
hear the word of the LORD!
30 Thus says the LORD:

Record this man as childless,
a man who shall not succeed in
his days;
for none of his offspring shall
succeed
in sitting on the throne of David,
and ruling again in Judah.

Read Jeremiah 23

Nothing is more lamentable than the failure of religious leadership. This chapter speaks of the spiritual shepherds who have simply misled their people. Prophets prophesy by the god Baal and are totally lacking in integrity. If anyone asks the true prophet, “What is the burden of the LORD?” there is only one answer. This idolatrous and sinful people is truly the burden of the Lord—but there is a ray of hope. A descendant of David will arise, one who will rule and govern wisely, and he will save both Judah and Israel. His name? “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Reflect: The number of priests involved in sexual abuse is no more than 10 percent. But it is still tragic, especially when one thinks of the young who have been scarred for life. For any damage caused by a consecrated person, prayers of repentance are in order.

Pray: Ask that our priests and religious leaders may lead an ever deeper spiritual life.

Act: Pray today for our clergy and religious, that they may stand faithful and firm in their calling.

Restoration after Exile

23 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. ² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³ Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

The Righteous Branch of David

⁵ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

⁷ Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, “As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,” ⁸ but “As the LORD lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he^a had driven them.” Then they shall live in their own land.

False Prophets of Hope Denounced

⁹ Concerning the prophets:
My heart is crushed within me,
all my bones shake;
I have become like a drunkard,
like one overcome by wine,
because of the LORD
and because of his holy words.

^a Gk: Heb /

- 10 For the land is full of adulterers;
because of the curse the land
mourns,
and the pastures of the wilderness
are dried up.
Their course has been evil,
and their might is not right.
- 11 Both prophet and priest are ungodly;
even in my house I have found
their wickedness,
says the LORD.
- 12 Therefore their way shall be to them
like slippery paths in the darkness,
into which they shall be driven
and fall;
for I will bring disaster upon them
in the year of their punishment,
says the LORD.
- 13 In the prophets of Samaria
I saw a disgusting thing:
they prophesied by Baal
and led my people Israel astray.
- 14 But in the prophets of Jerusalem
I have seen a more shocking thing:
they commit adultery and walk in
lies;
they strengthen the hands of
evildoers,
so that no one turns from
wickedness;
all of them have become like Sodom
to me,
and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.
- 15 Therefore thus says the LORD of
hosts concerning the prophets:
“I am going to make them eat
wormwood,
and give them poisoned water to
drink;
for from the prophets of Jerusalem
ungodliness has spread
throughout the land.”

16 Thus says the LORD of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. 17 They keep saying to those who despise the word of the LORD, “It shall be well with you”; and to all who stubbornly follow their own stubborn

hearts, they say, “No calamity shall come upon you.”

- 18 For who has stood in the council of the LORD
so as to see and to hear his word?
Who has given heed to his word
so as to proclaim it?
- 19 Look, the storm of the LORD!
Wrath has gone forth,
a whirling tempest;
it will burst upon the head of the wicked.
- 20 The anger of the LORD will not turn back
until he has executed and
accomplished
the intents of his mind.
In the latter days you will understand it clearly.
- 21 I did not send the prophets,
yet they ran;
I did not speak to them,
yet they prophesied.
- 22 But if they had stood in my council,
then they would have proclaimed
my words to my people,
and they would have turned them
from their evil way,
and from the evil of their doings.

23 Am I a God near by, says the LORD, and not a God far off? 24 Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. 25 I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, “I have dreamed, I have dreamed!” 26 How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? 27 They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. 28 Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the LORD. 29 Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? 30 See, therefore, I am against

the prophets, says the LORD, who steal my words from one another. ³¹ See, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their own tongues and say, “Says the LORD.” ³² See, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the LORD, and who tell them, and who lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or appoint them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the LORD.

³³ When this people, or a prophet, or a priest asks you, “What is the burden of the LORD?” you shall say to them, “You are the burden,^a and I will cast you off, says the LORD.” ³⁴ And as for the prophet, priest, or the people who say, “The burden of the LORD,” I will punish them and their households. ³⁵ Thus shall you say to one another,

among yourselves, “What has the LORD answered?” or “What has the LORD spoken?” ³⁶ But “the burden of the LORD” you shall mention no more, for the burden is everyone’s own word, and so you pervert the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God. ³⁷ Thus you shall ask the prophet, “What has the LORD answered you?” or “What has the LORD spoken?” ³⁸ But if you say, “the burden of the LORD,” thus says the LORD: Because you have said these words, “the burden of the LORD,” when I sent to you, saying, You shall not say, “the burden of the LORD,” ³⁹ therefore, I will surely lift you up^b and cast you away from my presence, you and the city that I gave to you and your ancestors. ⁴⁰ And I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace and perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

Read Jeremiah 24

Good figs, bad figs! Another one of Jeremiah’s symbolic actions. The basket of good figs is the people who have endured the hardships of exile but are now favored in God’s eyes. The bad are those who have followed their own desires, remaining settled where they were or relocating to a place of their choice.

Reflect: Purification is not pleasant, but it produces good. As displeased as God may be with his people, there is always room for a brighter future. The same is true in the life of any one of us. Tragedy need not be terminal.

Pray: Ask that we may learn from our mistakes, that our friends may emerge from their hardships as better people.

Act: Make plans to receive the sacrament of reconciliation with a deep sense of sorrow and gratitude.

The Good and the Bad Figs

24 The LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. This was after King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the artisans, and the smiths, and had brought them to Babylon. ² One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. ³ And the LORD said to me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” I said, “Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten.”

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁵ Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. ⁶ I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. ⁷ I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

⁸ But thus says the LORD: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who live in the land of Egypt. ⁹ I will make them a horror, an evil thing, to all the kingdoms of the earth—a disgrace, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive

^a Gk Vg: Heb *What burden*

^b Heb Mss Gk Vg: MT *forget you*

them. ¹⁰ And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them, until they are utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their ancestors.

Read Jeremiah 25:1–14

The exile of God's people is to last seventy years. Then the people will be restored to their land and Babylon will pay the price for its deportation and enslavement of people. The chastisement of God's people is in proportion to their sin. Restoration is a clear indication that God's plan will not be thwarted.

Reflect: God's patience in the face of human insurrection is indeed impressive. "Lord, what is man that you are mindful of him?" In my life, short or long, how often have I turned my back on God? If now restored, how grateful am I?

Pray: May I never lose my sense of gratitude to God for salvation. In my moments of distress, may I be always aware of God's saving hand.

Act: At an opportune time today I will stop and prayerfully express sorrow for my sins and gratitude to the Lord for his love.

The Babylonian Captivity Foretold

25 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah (that was the first year of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon), ² which the prophet Jeremiah spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: ³ For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. ⁴ And though the LORD persistently sent you all his servants the prophets, you have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear ⁵ when they said, "Turn now, every one of you, from your evil way and wicked doings, and you will remain upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your ancestors from of old and forever; ⁶ do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, and do not provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm." ⁷ Yet you did not listen to me, says the LORD, and so you have provoked me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.

⁸ Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹ I am going to send for all the tribes of the north, says the LORD, even for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; I will utterly destroy them, and make them an object of horror and of hissing, and an everlasting disgrace.^a ¹⁰ And I will banish from them the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. ¹³ I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. ¹⁴ For many nations and great kings shall make slaves of them also; and I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.

The Cup of God's Wrath

15 For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me:

^a Gk Compare Syr: Heb and everlasting desolations

Read Jeremiah 25:15–38

The sinfulness of the nations will not be overlooked. The Philistines, Moab, Edom, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon will all in turn be brought to ruin. The calamity will be all embracing; the shepherds will be left with no grazing land.

Reflect: It is the evil that lurks in the human heart that gives rise to sin.

Pray: Pray that the sin of terrorism, so common today, may be eradicated from the human heart.

Act: Recall one act of terror in modern times and ask the Lord for mercy for its perpetrators.

Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. ¹⁶They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them.

¹⁷So I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it: ¹⁸Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, an object of hissing and of cursing, as they are today; ¹⁹Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, and all his people; ²⁰all the mixed people;^a all the kings of the land of Uz; all the kings of the land of the Philistines—Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod; ²¹Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites; ²²all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland across the sea; ²³Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples; ²⁴all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples^a that live in the desert; ²⁵all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media; ²⁶all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth. And after them the king of Sheshach^b shall drink.

²⁷Then you shall say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Drink, get drunk and vomit, fall and rise no more, because of the sword that I am sending among you.

²⁸And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them: Thus says the LORD of hosts: You must drink! ²⁹See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that is called by my name, and how can you possibly avoid punishment? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, says the LORD of hosts.

³⁰You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them:

The LORD will roar from on high,
and from his holy habitation utter his voice;
he will roar mightily against his fold,
and shout, like those who tread grapes,
against all the inhabitants of the earth.

³¹The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against the
nations;
he is entering into judgment with all flesh,
and the guilty he will put to the sword,
says the LORD.

³²Thus says the LORD of hosts:
See, disaster is spreading

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b *Sheshach* is a cryptogram for *Babel*, Babylon

from nation to nation,
and a great tempest is stirring
from the farthest parts of the earth!

33 Those slain by the LORD on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become dung on the surface of the ground.

34 Wail, you shepherds, and cry out; roll in ashes, you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter have come—and your dispersions,^a and you shall fall like a choice vessel.

35 Flight shall fail the shepherds, and there shall be no escape for the lords of the flock.
36 Hark! the cry of the shepherds, and the wail of the lords of the flock! For the LORD is despoiling their pasture,
37 and the peaceful folds are devastated, because of the fierce anger of the LORD.
38 Like a lion he has left his covert; for their land has become a waste because of the cruel sword, and because of his fierce anger.

Read Jeremiah 26

There were those who would have had Jeremiah killed rather than listen to his prophetic diatribes. They were led by priests and prophets. But the princes of the people come to Jeremiah's aid. They recognize his authenticity. Uriah, whose oracles of destruction are the same as those of Jeremiah, serves as a scapegoat and is put to death.

Reflect: It serves no useful purpose to kill the messenger because we dislike the message. Medicine is no less health-restoring because it may be distasteful. It takes courage to accept fraternal correction. The key in accepting and giving correction is charity.

Pray: Ask for the grace to accept correction with serenity. Pray for the grace to offer correction where it may be helpful.

Act: Is there someone I know and love who may need a word of help from me, even though it may be painful? I need to make sure my motive is pure and not tainted with vindictiveness.

Jeremiah's Prophecies in the Temple

26 At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came from the LORD: ²Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word. ³It may be that they will listen, all of them, and will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings. ⁴You shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, ⁵and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently—though you have not heeded—⁶then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.

⁷The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. ⁸And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die!" ⁹Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?" And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

¹⁰When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the LORD. ¹¹Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

12 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "It is the LORD who sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. ¹³ Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ But as for me, here I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. ¹⁵ Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."

16 Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God." ¹⁷ And some of the elders of the land arose and said to all the assembled people, ¹⁸ "Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, said to all the people of Judah: 'Thus says the LORD of hosts,

Zion shall be plowed as a field;
Jerusalem shall become a heap of
ruins,

and the mountain of the house a wooded height.'

¹⁹ Did King Hezekiah of Judah and all Judah actually put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD change his mind about the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster on ourselves!"

²⁰ There was another man prophesying in the name of the LORD, Uriah son of She-maiah from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against this city and against this land in words exactly like those of Jeremiah. ²¹ And when King Jehoiakim, with all his warriors and all the officials, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard of it, he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. ²² Then King Jehoiakim sent^a Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt, ²³ and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and threw his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

²⁴ But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over into the hands of the people to be put to death.

The Sign of the Yoke

27 In the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah^b son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD. ² Thus the LORD said to me: Make yourself a yoke of straps and bars, and put them on your neck. ³ Send word^c to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the Ammonites, the king of Tyre, and the king of Sidon by the hand of the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to King Zedekiah of Judah. ⁴ Give them this charge for their masters: Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: This is what you shall say to your masters: ⁵ It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the people and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever I please. ⁶ Now I have given all these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him even the wild animals of the field to serve him. ⁷ All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave.

^a Heb adds *men to Egypt*

^b Another reading is *Jehoiakim*

^c Cn: Heb *send them*

Read Jeremiah 27

Babylon's rule was to be total, an empire the likes of which the Near Eastern world had never seen. Deportation included Judah and its neighbors and even the sacred temple vessels. It was as complete a desolation as God's elect had ever experienced. It would one day come to an end, but not before purification was complete.

Reflect: Some families have to endure monumental tragedy: sickness, death, abandonment, and poverty. We do not look at this in terms of divine punishment. Rather, we recognize that God hears the cry of the poor and the suffering and that we must do so also.

Pray: May people who are carrying difficult crosses be strengthened by God and assisted by their neighbors.

Act: Today be of assistance to someone suffering hardship.

8 But if any nation or kingdom will not serve this king, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, then I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, says the LORD, until I have completed its^a destruction by his hand. ⁹ You, therefore, must not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers,^b your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." ¹⁰ For they are prophesying a lie to you, with the result that you will be removed far from your land; I will drive you out, and you will perish. ¹¹ But any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says the LORD, to till it and live there.

12 I spoke to King Zedekiah of Judah in the same way: Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. ¹³ Why should you and your people die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, as the LORD has spoken concerning any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? ¹⁴ Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are telling you not to serve the king of Babylon, for they are prophesying a lie to you. ¹⁵ I have not sent them, says the LORD, but they are prophesying falsely in my name, with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you.

16 Then I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, Thus says the LORD: Do not listen to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you, saying, "The vessels of the LORD's house will soon be brought back from Babylon," for they are prophesying a lie to you. ¹⁷ Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a desolation? ¹⁸ If indeed they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, then let them intercede with the LORD of hosts, that the vessels left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon. ¹⁹ For thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the pillars, the sea, the stands, and the rest of the vessels that are left in this city, ²⁰ which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon did not take away when he took into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem—²¹ thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem: ²² They shall be carried to Babylon, and there they shall stay, until the day when I give attention to them, says the LORD. Then I will bring them up and restore them to this place.

^a Heb *their*

^b Gk Syr Vg: Heb *dreams*

Read Jeremiah 28

The punishment must run its course. Hananiah prophesies falsely that Babylonian rule is approaching its end. He assertively breaks the yoke of wood from around Jeremiah's neck. Yahweh substitutes a yoke of iron to indicate that punishment is not at an end.

Reflect: Am I inclined to “short-change” God? In seeing God’s mercy and compassion, do I realize that his justice must be served as well? Are my debts to others fully and punctually paid?

Pray: I will pray that honesty may be a keynote of my dealings with others.

Act: I will take the steps necessary to correct any lack of honesty I may have been guilty of.

Hananiah Opposes Jeremiah and Dies

28 In that same year, at the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, ² “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³ Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD’s house, which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. ⁴ I will also bring back to this place King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, says the LORD, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

⁵ Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD; ⁶ and the prophet Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. ⁷ But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸ The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹ As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.”

¹⁰ Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, and broke it. ¹¹ And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, “Thus says the LORD: This is how I will break the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years.” At this, the prophet Jeremiah went his way.

¹² Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ¹³ Go, tell Hananiah, Thus says the LORD: You have broken wooden bars only to forge iron bars in place of them! ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have put an iron yoke on the neck of all these nations so that they may serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and they shall indeed serve him; I have even given him the wild animals. ¹⁵ And the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah, “Listen, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you made this people trust in a lie. ¹⁶ Therefore thus says the LORD: I am going to send you off the face of the earth. Within this year you will be dead, because you have spoken rebellion against the LORD.”

¹⁷ In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died.

Read Jeremiah 29

This extraordinary letter sent from Jeremiah to the Babylonian exiles presents another face of the life of the deportees. They are not ill-treated. They are encouraged to settle down, marry, raise families, and pray for the city where they dwell. In being good citizens, they help their own cause. And in due time they will be brought back home. It is a remarkable message, full of hope and the assurance of well-being. As for the people who refused exile, they will be persecuted and rejected.

Reflect: Is it not possible for us to see misfortune in life in a positive light? If we look at our life as a whole, there is hardly a circumstance that does not contain some measure of good. We need to look at the positive in life's circumstances.

Pray: Ask for the grace to bring good things to light, to see the positive side of life.

Act: Commend one person for good that has been done, even without religious motivation.

Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles in Babylon

29 These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. ³ The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: ⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ⁸ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ^a ⁹ for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD.

¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴ I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

¹⁵ Because you have said, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,"—¹⁶ Thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who live in this city, your kinsfolk who did not go out with you into exile: ¹⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts, I am going to let loose on them sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like rotten figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. ¹⁸ I will pursue them with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, and will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of cursing, and hor-

^a Cn: Heb your dreams that you cause to dream

ror, and hissing, and a derision among all the nations where I have driven them,¹⁹ because they did not heed my words, says the LORD, when I persistently sent to you my servants the prophets, but they^a would not listen, says the LORD.²⁰ But now, all you exiles whom I sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon, hear the word of the LORD:²¹ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab son of Koliaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying a lie to you in my name: I am going to deliver them into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he shall kill them before your eyes.²² And on account of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: "The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire,"²³ because they have perpetrated outrage in Israel and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and have spoken in my name lying words that I did not command them; I am the one who knows and bears witness, says the LORD.

The Letter of Shemaiah

24 To Shemaiah of Nehelam you shall say:²⁵ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the

God of Israel: In your own name you sent a letter to all the people who are in Jerusalem, and to the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah, and to all the priests, saying,²⁶ The LORD himself has made you priest instead of the priest Jehoiada, so that there may be officers in the house of the LORD to control any madman who plays the prophet, to put him in the stocks and the collar.²⁷ So now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who plays the prophet for you?²⁸ For he has actually sent to us in Babylon, saying, "It will be a long time; build houses and live in them, and plant gardens and eat what they produce."

29 The priest Zephaniah read this letter in the hearing of the prophet Jeremiah.³⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:³¹ Send to all the exiles, saying, Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, though I did not send him, and has led you to trust in a lie,³² therefore thus says the LORD: I am going to punish Shemaiah of Nehelam and his descendants; he shall not have anyone living among this people to see^b the good that I am going to do to my people, says the LORD, for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD.

Restoration Promised for Israel and Judah

30 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:² Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you.³ For the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their ancestors and they shall take possession of it.

4 These are the words that the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah:

⁵ Thus says the LORD:

We have heard a cry of panic,
of terror, and no peace.

⁶ Ask now, and see,

can a man bear a child?

Why then do I see every man

with his hands on his loins like a woman in
labor?

Why has every face turned pale?

^a Syr: Heb you

^b Gk: Heb and he shall not see

Read Jeremiah 30

The pain of Israel will come to an end. Its sin will be expiated, and then restoration will take place. Punishment is restorative. But those countries that have been the predators and destroyers will themselves be destroyed. Chastisement for Israel was certainly in order, but those who arrogantly destroyed God's land and people will have a price to pay.

Reflect: Punishment for abandonment of God is understandable. But must not the instruments of punishment also be doomed? We have seen many examples of dictators and sponsors of evil who led thousands, even millions, of people to death. But, in the end, they themselves paid a price for their evildoing.

Pray: Remember in prayer all those who suffer for the cause of justice. Pray as well for the conversion of evildoers who bring harm to others, that they may see the evil of their ways.

Act: Perform an act of kindness for someone who is intolerant of the faith.

- 7 Alas! that day is so great
there is none like it;
it is a time of distress for Jacob;
yet he shall be rescued from it.
- 8 On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will break the yoke from off his^a neck, and I will burst his^a bonds, and strangers shall no more make a servant of him. ⁹ But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.
- 10 But as for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob, says the LORD,
and do not be dismayed, O Israel;
for I am going to save you from far away,
and your offspring from the land of their captivity.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,
and no one shall make him afraid.
- 11 For I am with you, says the LORD, to save you;
I will make an end of all the nations
among which I scattered you,
but of you I will not make an end.
I will chastise you in just measure,
and I will by no means leave you unpunished.
- 12 For thus says the LORD:
Your hurt is incurable,
your wound is grievous.
- 13 There is no one to uphold your cause,
no medicine for your wound,
no healing for you.
- 14 All your lovers have forgotten you;
they care nothing for you;
for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy,
the punishment of a merciless foe,
because your guilt is great,
because your sins are so numerous.
- 15 Why do you cry out over your hurt?
Your pain is incurable.
Because your guilt is great,
because your sins are so numerous,
I have done these things to you.
- 16 Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured,
and all your foes, every one of them, shall go
into captivity;
those who plunder you shall be plundered,
and all who prey on you I will make a prey.
- 17 For I will restore health to you,
and your wounds I will heal,
- says the LORD,
because they have called you an outcast:
"It is Zion; no one cares for her!"

^a Cn: Heb your

- 18 Thus says the LORD:
I am going to restore the fortunes of
the tents of Jacob,
and have compassion on his
dwellings;
the city shall be rebuilt upon its
mound,
and the citadel set on its rightful
site.
- 19 Out of them shall come
thanksgiving,
and the sound of merrymakers.
I will make them many, and they
shall not be few;
I will make them honored, and
they shall not be disdained.
- 20 Their children shall be as of old,
their congregation shall be
established before me;
and I will punish all who oppress
them.
- 21 Their prince shall be one of their own,
their ruler shall come from their
midst;
I will bring him near, and he shall
approach me,
for who would otherwise dare to
approach me?
says the LORD.
- 22 And you shall be my people,
and I will be your God.
- 23 Look, the storm of the LORD!
Wrath has gone forth,
a whirling^a tempest;
it will burst upon the head of the
wicked.
- 24 The fierce anger of the LORD will not
turn back
until he has executed and
accomplished
the intents of his mind.
In the latter days you will understand
this.

The Joyful Return of the Exiles

31 At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of
all the families of Israel, and they shall be my
people.

- 2 Thus says the LORD:
The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,
3 the LORD appeared to him^b from far away.^c
I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to
you.
- 4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built,
O virgin Israel!
Again you shall take^d your tambourines,
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.
- 5 Again you shall plant vineyards
on the mountains of Samaria;
the planters shall plant,
and shall enjoy the fruit.
- 6 For there shall be a day when sentinels will call
in the hill country of Ephraim:
“Come, let us go up to Zion,
to the LORD our God.”

- 7 For thus says the LORD:
Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;

^a One Ms: Meaning of MT uncertain

^b Gk: Heb *me*

^c Or *to him long ago*

^d Or *adorn yourself with*

Read Jeremiah 31:1–22

In one of his great lyric passages Jeremiah lauds the joyful restoration of Israel, with a major emphasis falling on Ephraim, the major tribe of the northern kingdom. The city of Jerusalem and the palaces will be rebuilt, as God leads his people back; there will be merry-making, laughter, and dancing. The ancestress of Ephraim, Rachel, mourns the loss of those who have died in exile. Chastised and repentant, the joyful Ephraim returns home.

Reflect: When a major burden falls from my shoulders, is the Lord the first or the last to whom I give thanks? Do I see genuine mirth as a gift of God?

Pray: May I give God thanks for the joys in my life, and may happiness may be a dominant part of the lives of others.

Act: Open your door for an evening of joy for someone in need of cheerful companionship.

- proclaim, give praise, and say,
 “Save, O LORD, your people,
 the remnant of Israel.”
- 8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of
 the north,
 and gather them from the farthest parts of the
 earth,
 among them the blind and the lame,
 those with child and those in labor, together;
 a great company, they shall return here.
- 9 With weeping they shall come,
 and with consolations^a I will lead them back,
 I will let them walk by brooks of water,
 in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
 for I have become a father to Israel,
 and Ephraim is my firstborn.
- 10 Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
 and declare it in the coastlands far away;
 say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,
 and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.”
- 11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
 and has redeemed him from hands too strong
 for him.
- 12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of
 Zion,
 and they shall be radiant over the goodness of
 the LORD,
 over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
 and over the young of the flock and the herd;
 their life shall become like a watered garden,
 and they shall never languish again.
- 13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
 and the young men and the old shall be merry.
 I will turn their mourning into joy,
 I will comfort them, and give them gladness
 for sorrow.
- 14 I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
 and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
 says the LORD.
- 15 Thus says the LORD:
 A voice is heard in Ramah,
 lamentation and bitter weeping.
 Rachel is weeping for her children;
 she refuses to be comforted for her children,
 because they are no more.
- 16 Thus says the LORD:
 Keep your voice from weeping,
 and your eyes from tears;
 for there is a reward for your work,
 says the LORD:

^a Gk Compare Vg Tg: Heb *supplications*

Read Jeremiah 31:23–40

From a Christian perspective, this is one of the most important passages in the Old Testament. The prophets have frequently spoken of a new age, a restoration of former blessedness. But here Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant. Quite different from the covenant made at the time of Moses, this will be a covenant with a law written in the heart. It will be a new and deeply internal relationship with God.

Reflect: A covenant is a unique relationship with another. As Christians we believe that the promise of Jeremiah has been realized in Christ, the author of a new and everlasting covenant with God. “This is the new covenant in my blood.” Christ is the mediator of this new and eternal covenant, he whose death out of love reaches the depths of our hearts and evokes a deep and personal response that binds us to God.

Pray: We ask for forgiveness for our own faults and for a deeper relationship with God.

Act: What can I do to help others preparing for baptism share my joy?

they shall come back from the land of the enemy;

17 there is hope for your future,
says the LORD:
your children shall come back to their own country.

18 Indeed I heard Ephraim pleading:
“You disciplined me, and I took the discipline;
I was like a calf untrained.
Bring me back, let me come back,
for you are the LORD my God.

19 For after I had turned away I repented;
and after I was discovered, I struck my thigh;
I was ashamed, and I was dismayed
because I bore the disgrace of my youth.”

20 Is Ephraim my dear son?
Is he the child I delight in?
As often as I speak against him,
I still remember him.
Therefore I am deeply moved for him;
I will surely have mercy on him,
says the LORD.

21 Set up road markers for yourself,
make yourself signposts;
consider well the highway,
the road by which you went.
Return, O virgin Israel,
return to these your cities.

22 How long will you waver,
O faithless daughter?
For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth:
a woman encompasses^a a man.

23 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel:
Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah
and in its towns when I restore their fortunes:

“The LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness,
O holy hill!”

24 And Judah and all its towns shall live there together,
and the farmers and those who wander^b with their flocks.

25 I will satisfy the weary,
and all who are faint I will replenish.

26 Thereupon I awoke and looked, and my sleep
was pleasant to me.

Individual Retribution

27 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when
I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah
with the seed of humans and the seed of animals.

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Cn Compare Syr Vg Tg: Heb *and they shall wander*

²⁸ And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD.

²⁹ In those days they shall no longer say: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

³⁰ But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

A New Covenant

³¹ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,^a says the LORD.

³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

³⁵ Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day

and the fixed order of the moon
and the stars for light by night,
who stirs up the sea so that its
waves roar—

the LORD of hosts is his name:

³⁶ If this fixed order were ever to cease from my presence, says the LORD, then also the offspring of Israel would cease to be a nation before me forever.

³⁷ Thus says the LORD:

If the heavens above can be measured,
and the foundations of the earth below can be explored,
then I will reject all the offspring of Israel
because of all they have done,
says the LORD.

Jerusalem to Be Enlarged

³⁸ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹ And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. ⁴⁰ The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Wadi Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall never again be uprooted or overthrown.

Jeremiah Buys a Field During the Siege

32 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. ² At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, ³ where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; ⁴ King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; ⁵ and he

^a Or master

Read Jeremiah 32

As Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonians, Jeremiah receives a request from his cousin Hanamel to buy a piece of family property so that it not be lost as part of the family's estate. The prophet purchases the land and gives the deed to Baruch for safekeeping—and this in the midst of a devastating siege of the city. The chapter is then a summary of what God has done for his people, ending with the assurance that the present calamity is medicinal in character and the people will once again settle in their land.

Reflect: It often happens in life that we feel we have come to the end of the road. But if we stop and remember other times in life when we were discouraged and we recall how God was there for us, we realize that what we think of as the end may be only the beginning.

Pray: Pray for someone who is very discouraged and in need of spiritual strength. Pray that we may never lose sight of God's presence in our life.

Act: Recall one time in your life when you keenly experienced the presence of God.

shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the LORD; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?"

6 Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: 7 Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." 8 Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

9 And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10 I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. 11 Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; 12 and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. 13 In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, 14 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. 15 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

Jeremiah Prays for Understanding

16 After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying: 17 Ah Lord GOD! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. 18 You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation,^a but repay the guilt of parents into the laps of their children after them, O great and mighty God whose name is the LORD of hosts, 19 great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of mortals, rewarding all according to their ways and according to the fruit of their doings. 20 You showed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all humankind, and have made yourself a name that continues to this very day. 21 You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror; 22 and you gave them this land, which you swore to their ancestors to

^a Or to thousands

give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; ²³ and they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or follow your law; of all you commanded them to do, they did nothing. Therefore you have made all these disasters come upon them. ²⁴ See, the siege ramps have been cast up against the city to take it, and the city, faced with sword, famine, and pestilence, has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has happened, as you yourself can see. ²⁵ Yet you, O Lord GOD, have said to me, “Buy the field for money and get witnesses”—though the city has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

God’s Assurance of the People’s Return

²⁶ The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁷ See, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me? ²⁸ Therefore, thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans and into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he shall take it. ²⁹ The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come, set it on fire, and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to Baal and libations have been poured out to other gods, to provoke me to anger. ³⁰ For the people of Israel and the people of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the work of their hands, says the LORD. ³¹ This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built until this day, so that I will remove it from my sight ³² because of all the evil of the people of Israel and the people of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger—they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets, the citizens of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ³³ They have turned their backs to me, not their faces;

though I have taught them persistently, they would not listen and accept correction. ³⁴ They set up their abominations in the house that bears my name, and defiled it. ³⁵ They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination, causing Judah to sin.

³⁶ Now therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, “It is being given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence”: ³⁷ See, I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will settle them in safety. ³⁸ They shall be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹ I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰ I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹ I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

⁴² For thus says the LORD: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good fortune that I now promise them. ⁴³ Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, It is a desolation, without human beings or animals; it has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans. ⁴⁴ Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, says the LORD.

Read Jeremiah 33

The prophet, here imprisoned, is reminded of the sad lot that is to befall his countrymen and their property. But joy will come—with the voice of bride and bridegroom, the presence of shepherds and sheepfolds, and a king like David presiding over God’s people. The end of the chapter reflects a time after the exile when there was no Davidic monarch, and the people seemed rejected once again. But this is not a permanent situation. The ideal Davidic descendant is yet to come.

Reflect: Not every future hope was fulfilled as the people expected or exactly as a prophet foresaw. For the Christian, the line of David is continued in Christ, in a way that no prophet ever envisioned. Is the hope fulfilled? Indeed, and in a way that more than exceeds all expectations.

Pray: Pray for a better understanding of the scriptures and the richness of the way in which God’s promise is fulfilled.

Act: Make an effort to deepen your study of and appreciation for the Bible.

Healing after Punishment

33 The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard: ² Thus says the LORD who made the earth,^a the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is his name: ³ Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. ⁴ For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege ramps and before the sword:^b ⁵ The Chaldeans are coming in to fight^c and to fill them with the dead bodies of those whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness. ⁶ I am going to bring it recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance^b of prosperity and security. ⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. ⁹ And this city^d shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.

¹⁰ Thus says the LORD: In this place of which you say, “It is a waste without human beings or animals,” in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants, human or animal, there shall once more be heard ¹¹ the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD:

“Give thanks to the LORD of hosts,
for the LORD is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!”

For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD.

¹² Thus says the LORD of hosts: In this place that is waste, without human beings or animals, and in all its towns there shall again be pasture for shepherds resting their flocks. ¹³ In the towns of the hill country, of the Shephelah, and of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places around Jerusalem, and in the towns of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the LORD.

The Righteous Branch and the Covenant with David

¹⁴ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and

^a Gk: Heb *it*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Cn: Heb *They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans*

^d Heb *And it*

the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

¹⁷ For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, ¹⁸ and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time.

¹⁹ The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁰ Thus says the LORD: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, ²¹ only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken, so that

he would not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with my ministers the Levites. ²² Just as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will increase the offspring of my servant David, and the Levites who minister to me.

²³ The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁴ Have you not observed how these people say, "The two families that the LORD chose have been rejected by him," and how they hold my people in such contempt that they no longer regard them as a nation? ²⁵ Thus says the LORD: Only if I had not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, ²⁶ would I reject the offspring of Jacob and of my servant David and not choose any of his descendants as rulers over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them.

Death in Captivity Predicted for Zedekiah

34 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of the earth and all the peoples under his dominion were fighting against Jerusalem and all its cities: ² Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Go and speak to King Zedekiah of Judah and say to him: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. ³ And you yourself shall not escape from his hand, but shall surely be captured and handed over to him; you shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face; and you shall go to Babylon. ⁴ Yet hear the word of the LORD, O King Zedekiah of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you: You shall not die by the sword; ⁵ you shall die in peace. And as spices were burned^a for your ancestors, the earlier kings who preceded you, so they shall burn spices^b for you and lament for you, saying, "Alas, lord!" For I have spoken the word, says the LORD.

⁶ Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah, in Jerusalem, ⁷ when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah; for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained.

^a Heb as there was burning

^b Heb shall burn

Read Jeremiah 34

Maybe yes...maybe no. During a reprieve in the sack of Jerusalem, the king, Zedekiah, and the Hebrew populace promise to release all their Hebrew slaves in exchange for deliverance. This was in keeping with the spirit of the law, which permitted indentureship for no more than six years. But the Hebrews soon went back on their promise. Hence, final destruction was now unavoidable.

Reflect: Repeatedly falling back into the same sin is recidivism. We cannot say that we will never sin again, but repetitious falls weaken our whole moral fiber. To say that there is nothing we can do is to underestimate the force of God's grace. To return to sin repeatedly is to be immersed in the mud of our own misdoing.

Pray: May we remain true to our purpose of amendment and avoid those situations which occasion our sin.

Act: I will take a single step to remove one thing in my life that leads me to repeated sin.

Treacherous Treatment of Slaves

8 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them—⁹ that all should set free their Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no one should hold another Judean in slavery. ¹⁰ And they obeyed, all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant that all would set free their slaves, male or female, so that they would not be enslaved again; they obeyed and set them free. ¹¹ But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them again into subjection as slaves. ¹² The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ¹³ Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I myself made a covenant with your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, saying, ¹⁴ “Every seventh year each of you must set free any Hebrews who have been sold to you and have served you six years; you must set them free from your service.” But your ancestors did not listen to me or incline their ears to me. ¹⁵ You yourselves recently repented and did what was right in my sight by proclaiming liberty to one another, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name; ¹⁶ but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back your male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them again into subjection to be your slaves. ¹⁷ Therefore, thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed me by granting a release to your neighbors and friends; I am going to grant a release to you, says the LORD—a release to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ¹⁸ And those who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make like^a the calf when they cut it in two and passed between its parts: ¹⁹ the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf ²⁰ shall be handed over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives. Their corpses shall become food for the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth. ²¹ And as for King Zedekiah of Judah and his officials, I will hand them over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives, to the army of the king of Babylon, which has withdrawn from you. ²² I am going to command, says the LORD, and will bring them back to this city; and they will fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire. The towns of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.

^a Cn: Heb lacks *like*

Read Jeremiah 35

The abstinence of Rechabites from wine is commended by the Lord; their consistency in this matter is rewarded by a permanent place of honor in the Lord's service. It is encouraging to find this example of fidelity in the midst of so much lack of the same in the course of the prophet's career.

Reflect: We should never fail to esteem those pockets of good that are found in our midst. We can all too easily become discouraged by the presence of sin and corruption.

Pray: Pray that good may be effusive and visible.

Act: Today express your appreciation for someone who is doing good.

The Rechabites Commended

35 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah: ² Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak with them, and bring them to the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers; then offer them wine to drink. ³ So I took Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah son of Habazziniah, and his brothers, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites. ⁴ I brought them to the house of the LORD into the chamber of the sons of Hanan son of Ig-daliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, above the chamber of Maaseiah son of Shallum, keeper of the threshold. ⁵ Then I set before the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups; and I said to them, "Have some wine." ⁶ But they answered, "We will drink no wine, for our ancestor Jonadab son of Rechab commanded us, 'You shall never drink wine, neither you nor your children; ⁷ nor shall you ever build a house, or sow seed; nor shall you plant a vineyard, or even own one; but you shall live in tents all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you reside.' ⁸ We have obeyed the charge of our ancestor Jonadab son of Rechab in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, ⁹ and not to build houses to live in. We have no vineyard or field or seed; ¹⁰ but we have lived in tents, and have obeyed and done all that our ancestor Jonadab commanded us. ¹¹ But when King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon came up against the land, we said, 'Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Arameans.' That is why we are living in Jerusalem."

¹² Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ¹³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Can you not learn a lesson and obey my words? says the LORD. ¹⁴ The command has been carried out that Jonadab son of Rechab gave to his descendants to drink no wine; and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their ancestor's command. But I myself have spoken to you persistently, and you have not obeyed me. ¹⁵ I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, "Turn now every one of you from your evil way, and amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall live in the land that I gave to you and your ancestors." But you did not incline your ear or obey me. ¹⁶ The descendants of Jonadab son of Rechab have carried out the command that their ancestor gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. ¹⁷ Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel:

I am going to bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem every disaster that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered.

18 But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said: Thus says the LORD of

hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of your ancestor Jonadab, and kept all his precepts, and done all that he commanded you, ¹⁹ therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab son of Rechab shall not lack a descendant to stand before me for all time.

Read Jeremiah 36

The king and his courtiers' final act of disregard for Jeremiah followed the prophet's oracles' consignment to writing by Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary. At determined points as the oracles were read, they were cut out and burned as an act of utter contempt. The wrath of God is directed at the king and his retinue, final destruction is assured, and the oracles are once again consigned to writing.

Reflect: Is not the present day's disregard for human life in all its stages akin to the rejection of God's word given through Jeremiah? Can we think that they were greater sinners than we are? The war in Iraq brought death to thousands, the genocide in Darfur to hundreds of thousands, and abortion legalizes killing. In some way and at some time, evil will reap its due.

Pray: Let us pray for an end to hostility and war, the senseless killing of the innocent at any stage of life.

Act: Determine to take one step in the promotion of respect for human life.

The Scroll Read in the Temple

36 In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. ³ It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

⁴ Then Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the LORD that he had spoken to him. ⁵ And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, "I am prevented from entering the house of the LORD; ⁶ so you go yourself, and on a fast day in the hearing of the people in the LORD's house you shall read the words of the LORD from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the people of Judah who come up from their towns. ⁷ It may be that their plea will come before the LORD, and that all of them will turn from their evil ways, for great is the anger and wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people." ⁸ And Baruch son of Neriah did all that the prophet Jeremiah ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the LORD in the LORD's house.

⁹ In the fifth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the towns of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD. ¹⁰ Then, in the hearing of all the people, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll, in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the LORD's house.

The Scroll Read in the Palace

¹¹ When Micaiah son of Gemariah son of Shaphan heard all the words of the LORD from the scroll, ¹² he went down to the king's house, into the secretary's chamber; and all the officials were sitting there: Elishama the sec-

retary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Achbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the officials. ¹³ And Micaiah told them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the scroll in the hearing of the people. ¹⁴ Then all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah son of Shelemiah son of Cushi to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll that you read in the hearing of the people, and come." So Baruch son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and came to them. ¹⁵ And they said to him, "Sit down and read it to us." So Baruch read it to them. ¹⁶ When they heard all the words, they turned to one another in alarm, and said to Baruch, "We certainly must report all these words to the king." ¹⁷ Then they questioned Baruch, "Tell us now, how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?" ¹⁸ Baruch answered them, "He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink on the scroll." ¹⁹ Then the officials said to Baruch, "Go and hide, you and Jeremiah, and let no one know where you are."

Jehoiakim Burns the Scroll

²⁰ Leaving the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the secretary, they went to the court of the king; and they reported all the words to the king. ²¹ Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of Elishama the secretary; and Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials who stood beside the king. ²² Now the king was sitting in his winter apartment (it was the ninth month), and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him. ²³ As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king^a would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. ²⁴ Yet neither the

king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words, was alarmed, nor did they tear their garments. ²⁵ Even when Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. ²⁶ And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son and Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest the secretary Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah. But the LORD hid them.

Jeremiah Dictates Another

²⁷ Now, after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁸ Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which King Jehoiakim of Judah has burned. ²⁹ And concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah you shall say: Thus says the LORD, You have dared to burn this scroll, saying, Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it human beings and animals? ³⁰ Therefore thus says the LORD concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He shall have no one to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. ³¹ And I will punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity; I will bring on them, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the people of Judah, all the disasters with which I have threatened them—but they would not listen.

³² Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the secretary Baruch son of Neriah, who wrote on it at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them.

Zedekiah's Vain Hope

37 Zedekiah son of Josiah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made king in the land of Judah, succeeded Coniah son of Jehoiakim. ² But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the LORD that he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah.

^a Heb *he*

Read Jeremiah 37

Prison is only one step short of death. But it is worth the effort to count the number of biblical personalities who spent time there. Jeremiah, certainly, and many New Testament people—John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and the other apostles, and Jesus himself prior to his death. Caught between Egyptian and Babylonian forces, Jeremiah is not a partisan but a messenger of the Lord in his proclamation of doom.

Reflect: We seldom think of the countless people in our prisons. Most of them are paying their debt to society. Recent times have given ample proof, however, that some people have been condemned unjustly.

Pray: Let us pray for those imprisoned in our state or city. They may have been forgotten by society, but they have not been forgotten by God.

Act: In every diocese there are people doing prison ministry. I might ask if there is something I also can do.

3 King Zedekiah sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to the prophet Jeremiah saying, “Please pray for us to the LORD our God.”⁴ Now Jeremiah was still going in and out among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison.⁵ Meanwhile, the army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

6 Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah:⁷ Thus says the LORD, God of Israel: This is what the two of you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to me to inquire of me: Pharaoh’s army, which set out to help you, is going to return to its own land, to Egypt.⁸ And the Chaldeans shall return and fight against this city; they shall take it and burn it with fire.⁹ Thus says the LORD: Do not deceive yourselves, saying, “The Chaldeans will surely go away from us,” for they will not go away.¹⁰ Even if you defeated the whole army of Chaldeans who are fighting against you, and there remained of them only wounded men in their tents, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.

Jeremiah Is Imprisoned

11 Now when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of Pharaoh’s army,¹² Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his share of property^a among the people there.¹³ When he reached the Benjamin Gate, a sentinel there named Irijah son of Shelemiah son of Hananiah arrested the prophet Jeremiah saying, “You are deserting to the Chaldeans.”¹⁴ And Jeremiah said, “That is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans.” But Irijah would not listen to him, and arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.¹⁵ The officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of the secretary Jonathan, for it had been made a prison.¹⁶ Thus Jeremiah was put in the cistern house, in the cells, and remained there many days.

17 Then King Zedekiah sent for him, and received him. The king questioned him secretly in his house, and said, “Is there any word from the LORD?” Jeremiah said, “There is!” Then he said, “You shall be handed over to the king of Babylon.”¹⁸ Jeremiah also said to King Zedekiah, “What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison?¹⁹ Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, ‘The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land’?”²⁰ Now please hear me, my lord king: be good enough to listen to my plea, and do not send

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

me back to the house of the secretary Jonathan to die there.”²¹ So King Zedekiah gave orders, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard; and a loaf of

bread was given him daily from the bakers’ street, until all the bread of the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

Read Jeremiah 38

King Zedekiah had ambivalent feelings in relation to Jeremiah. When the prophet was thrown into the muddy cistern, the king ordered him saved from certain starvation. Jeremiah urged capitulation to the Babylonians in order to save the city, but his counsel was rejected.

Reflect: How often does it happen that I know what the better path is but fail to follow it because of human considerations? How often do I surrender to “peer pressure” instead of having the courage to do what is right?

Pray: Pray for the grace to know God’s will in your decision making. Pray too for those who must make hard decisions in moments of great difficulty.

Act: Make the difficult decision today rather than look for the easy way out.

Jeremiah in the Cistern

38 Now Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah was saying to all the people,² Thus says the LORD, Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out to the Chaldeans shall live; they shall have their lives as a prize of war, and live.³ Thus says the LORD, This city shall surely be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon and be taken.⁴ Then the officials said to the king, “This man ought to be put to death, because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.”⁵ King Zedekiah said, “Here he is; he is in your hands; for the king is powerless against you.”⁶ So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king’s son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. Now there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

Jeremiah Is Rescued by Ebed-melech

⁷ Ebed-melech the Ethiopian,^a a eunuch in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. The king happened to be sitting at the Benjamin Gate,⁸ So Ebed-melech left the king’s house and spoke to the king,⁹ “My lord king, these men have acted wickedly in all they did to the prophet Jeremiah by throwing him into the cistern to die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.”¹⁰ Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian,^a “Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies.”¹¹ So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe of^b the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes.¹² Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian^a said to Jeremiah, “Just put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes.” Jeremiah did so.¹³ Then they drew Jeremiah up by the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

^a Or Nubian; Heb Cushite

^b Cn: Heb to under

Zedekiah Consults Jeremiah Again

14 King Zedekiah sent for the prophet Jeremiah and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, "I have something to ask you; do not hide anything from me."¹⁵ Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, you will put me to death, will you not? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me."¹⁶ So King Zedekiah swore an oath in secret to Jeremiah, "As the LORD lives, who gave us our lives, I will not put you to death or hand you over to these men who seek your life."

17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will only surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live."¹⁸ But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be handed over to the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand."¹⁹ King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, for I might be handed over to them and they would abuse me."²⁰ Jeremiah said, "That will not happen. Just obey the voice of the LORD in what I say to you, and it shall go well with you, and your life shall be spared."²¹ But if you are determined not to surrender, this is

what the LORD has shown me—²² a vision of all the women remaining in the house of the king of Judah being led out to the officials of the king of Babylon and saying,

"Your trusted friends have seduced
you
and have overcome you;
Now that your feet are stuck in the
mud,
they desert you."

²³ All your wives and your children shall be led out to the Chaldeans, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand, but shall be seized by the king of Babylon; and this city shall be burned with fire."

24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Do not let anyone else know of this conversation, or you will die."²⁵ If the officials should hear that I have spoken with you, and they should come and say to you, 'Just tell us what you said to the king; do not conceal it from us, or we will put you to death. What did the king say to you?'²⁶ then you shall say to them, 'I was presenting my plea to the king not to send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there.'" ²⁷ All the officials did come to Jeremiah and questioned him; and he answered them in the very words the king had commanded. So they stopped questioning him, for the conversation had not been overheard. ²⁸ And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.

The Fall of Jerusalem

39 In the ninth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, in the tenth month, King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and besieged it; ² in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city. ³ When Jerusalem was taken,^a all the officials of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate: Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, with all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon. ⁴ When King Zedekiah of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled, going out of the city at night by way of the king's garden through the gate between the two walls; and they went toward the Arabah. ⁵ But the army of the

^a This clause has been transposed from 38.28

Read Jeremiah 39

Jerusalem is destroyed, but Jeremiah is spared. Word is brought to Nebuchadnezzar about the prophet's plight. He is ordered released and given into the care of Gedaliah. Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, is also rewarded for his concern for the prophet. Jeremiah remains in Judah and is favored for his steadfast fidelity. Jerusalem had invited punishment and received it. In everything the prophet has remained true to his vocation.

Reflect: Am I faithful to God in my calling? How common it is to-day to cut corners in business. How easy it can be to make a profit on a sale. Humanly speaking, deception is an easy pursuit. Only conviction and fidelity to truth will keep us on the right track.

Pray: Pray that integrity and honesty may always characterize your dealings and that you will always seek the well-being of the underprivileged.

Act: Whom do I know who has been treated unfairly? What can I do to help?

Chaldeans pursued them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and when they had taken him, they brought him up to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, at Riblah, in the land of Hamath; and he passed sentence on him. ⁶ The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; also the king of Babylon slaughtered all the nobles of Judah. ⁷ He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon. ⁸ The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. ⁹ Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard exiled to Babylon the rest of the people who were left in the city, those who had deserted to him, and the people who remained. ¹⁰ Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left in the land of Judah some of the poor people who owned nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

Jeremiah, Set Free, Remembers Ebed-melech

11 King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon gave command concerning Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, saying, ¹² "Take him, look after him well and do him no harm, but deal with him as he may ask you." ¹³ So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, Nebushazban the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon sent ¹⁴ and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard. They entrusted him to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan to be brought home. So he stayed with his own people.

15 The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah while he was confined in the court of the guard: ¹⁶ Go and say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian:^a Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to fulfill my words against this city for evil and not for good, and they shall be accomplished in your presence on that day. ¹⁷ But I will save you on that day, says the LORD, and you shall not be handed over to those whom you dread. ¹⁸ For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have trusted in me, says the LORD.

Jeremiah with Gedaliah the Governor

40 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in fetters along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. ² The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, "The LORD your God threatened this place with this disaster; ³ and now the LORD has brought it about, and has done as he said,

^a Or Nubian; Heb Cushite

Read Jeremiah 40

It is under very precarious conditions that Jeremiah is told to remain in Judah. Gedaliah is to be his protector, a man whose own position is in danger. Intrigue preempts candor, and it becomes somewhat hard to separate villain from victim. If villains and murderers are present in times of peace, they abound in times of war.

Reflect: Today it is sad to see how people are duped into assassination attempts, and, when apprehended, serve life sentences for their misdeeds. These are often young people who remain in prison for life.

Pray: Ask that the children entrusted by God to our care may mature with a sense of honesty and respect for others.

Act: How can I be certain that my children are well schooled in the teachings of their faith?

because all of you sinned against the LORD and did not obey his voice. Therefore this thing has come upon you. ⁴ Now look, I have just released you today from the fetters on your hands. If you wish to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will take good care of you; but if you do not wish to come with me to Babylon, you need not come. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go. ⁵ If you remain,^a then return to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the towns of Judah, and stay with him among the people; or go wherever you think it right to go.” So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. ⁶ Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah, and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.

⁷ When all the leaders of the forces in the open country and their troops heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon, ⁸ they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jezaniah son of the Maacathite, they and their troops. ⁹ Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan swore to them and their troops, saying, “Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall go well with you. ¹⁰ As for me, I am staying at Mizpah to represent you before the Chaldeans who come to us; but as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and live in the towns that you have taken over.” ¹¹ Likewise, when all the Judeans who were in Moab and among the Ammonites and in Edom and in other lands heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor over them, ¹² then all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been scattered and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah; and they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance.

¹³ Now Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah ¹⁴ and said to him, “Are you at all aware that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to take your life?” But Gedaliah son of Ahikam would not believe them. ¹⁵ Then Johanan son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, “Please let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah, and no one else will know. Why should he take your life, so that all

^a Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

the Judeans who are gathered around you would be scattered, and the remnant of Judah would perish?"¹⁶ But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, "Do not do such a thing, for you are telling a lie about Ishmael."

Read Jeremiah 41

The wanton savagery of Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, results in the death of Gedaliah, the Chaldean king's legate, and a delegation that later comes into the region. He is later trapped by Johanan, son of Kareah, but manages to escape to Ammonite country. The fleeing population, now with Johanan, makes plans to flee to Egypt but still lives in fear of the Babylonians.

Reflect: Exile from one's homeland has become much a routine part of modern warfare. People find themselves in countries where they are not wanted, trying desperately to provide for their families in situations that are all but hopeless. Our lives are often largely undisturbed, but we must never lose sight of the thousands who suffer.

Pray: May goodness and justice triumph over ugliness and brutality. Every person desires a peaceful existence and the right to a decent livelihood. Pray that these goals may be attained.

Act: Where I see injustice, let me work to eliminate it, even in small ways.

Insurrection against Gedaliah

41 In the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. As they ate bread together there at Mizpah,² Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the ten men with him got up and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan with the sword and killed him, because the king of Babylon had appointed him governor in the land.³ Ishmael also killed all the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldean soldiers who happened to be there.

⁴ On the day after the murder of Gedaliah, before anyone knew of it,⁵ eighty men arrived from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria, with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, bringing grain offerings and incense to present at the temple of the LORD.⁶ And Ishmael son of Nethaniah came out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he came. As he met them, he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam."⁷ When they reached the middle of the city, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men with him slaughtered them, and threw them^a into a cistern.⁸ But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, "Do not kill us, for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey hidden in the fields." So he refrained, and did not kill them along with their companions.

⁹ Now the cistern into which Ishmael had thrown all the bodies of the men whom he had struck down was the large cistern^b that King Asa had made for defense against King Baasha of Israel; Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled that cistern with those whom he had killed.¹⁰ Then Ishmael took captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who were left at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, had committed to Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ishmael son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites.

¹¹ But when Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him heard of all the crimes that Ishmael son of Nethaniah had done,¹² they took all their men and went to fight against Ishmael son of Nethaniah. They came upon him at the great pool that is in Gibeon.¹³ And when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him, they were glad.¹⁴ So all the peo-

^a Syr: Heb lacks *and threw them*; compare verse 9

^b Gk: Heb *whom he had killed by the hand of Gedaliah*

ple whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan son of Kareah. ¹⁵ But Ishmael son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites. ¹⁶ Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the rest of the people whom Ishmael son of Nethaniah had carried away captive^a from Mizpah after he

had slain Gedaliah son of Ahikam—soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs, whom Johanan brought back from Gibeon.^b ¹⁷ And they set out, and stopped at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt ¹⁸ because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.

Read Jeremiah 42

The displaced population of Judah has its heart set on going to Egypt, where it is hoped there will be peace and security. Jeremiah is asked to consult the Lord about the issue. This he does, and the response is negative. If they remain in Judah, they will not be further afflicted by the king of Babylon. If they remain firm, they will be once again built up and resettled. If they go to Egypt, they are to expect the worst. The people wanted to hear the Lord's word, but it was not to their liking.

Reflect: How often in life what seems to us as good and even desirable is not the path to be followed. God often asks us to choose a more difficult option, with an end result that is better for us.

Pray: May we be open to making the better choices, which are not always the most attractive.

Act: When given a choice, opt to give preference to a more difficult undertaking.

Jeremiah Advises Survivors Not to Migrate

42 Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan son of Kareah and Azariah^c son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, approached ² the prophet Jeremiah and said, “Be good enough to listen to our plea, and pray to the LORD your God for us—for all this remnant. For there are only a few of us left out of many, as your eyes can see. ³ Let the LORD your God show us where we should go and what we should do.” ⁴ The prophet Jeremiah said to them, “Very well: I am going to pray to the LORD your God as you request, and whatever the LORD answers you I will tell you; I will keep nothing back from you.” ⁵ They in their turn said to Jeremiah, “May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to everything that the LORD your God sends us through you. ⁶ Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, in order that it may go well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.”

⁷ At the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. ⁸ Then he summoned Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, ⁹ and said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your plea before him: ¹⁰ If you will only remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I am sorry for the disaster that I have brought upon you. ¹¹ Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, as you have been; do not be afraid of him, says the LORD, for I am with you, to save you and to rescue you from his hand. ¹² I will grant you mercy, and he will have mercy on you and restore you to your native soil. ¹³ But if you continue to say, ‘We will not stay in this land,’ thus disobeying the voice of the LORD your God ¹⁴ and saying, ‘No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and there we will stay,’

^a Cn: Heb *whom he recovered from Ishmael son of Nethaniah*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Gk: Heb *Jezeniah*

¹⁵ then hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: If you are determined to enter Egypt and go to settle there, ¹⁶ then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine that you dread shall follow close after you into Egypt; and there you shall die. ¹⁷ All the people who have determined to go to Egypt to settle there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; they shall have no remnant or survivor from the disaster that I am bringing upon them.

¹⁸ “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Just as my anger and my wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so my wrath will be poured out

on you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an object of execration and horror, of cursing and ridicule. You shall see this place no more. ¹⁹ The LORD has said to you, O remnant of Judah, Do not go to Egypt. Be well aware that I have warned you today ²⁰ that you have made a fatal mistake. For you yourselves sent me to the LORD your God, saying, ‘Pray for us to the LORD our God, and whatever the LORD our God says, tell us and we will do it.’ ²¹ So I have told you today, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God in anything that he sent me to tell you. ²² Be well aware, then, that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go and settle.”

Read Jeremiah 43

As stiff-necked and self-willed as always, the Hebrews opted to go to Egypt in spite of the clear word of the prophet telling them to remain where they were. Did they really believe that God’s affliction could not follow them to Egypt? In Tahpanhes they are told that Nebuchadnezzar will soon be in power there. Like a shepherd delouses his cloak, he shall delouse the land of Egypt and depart victorious.

Reflect: Sadly enough we can see ourselves in the repeated misconduct of the Jews. We know full well what the will of God is in our regard, and yet still we defiantly go our own way. Do we show our gratitude for the patience God has with us?

Pray: May our habits of sin, whatever they may be, come to an end, and may our lives be a consistent “Yes” to God.

Act: I will make a sincere act of sorrow today for all of my life’s failures.

Taken to Egypt, Jeremiah Warns of Judgment

43 When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the LORD their God, with which the LORD their God had sent him to them, ² Azariah son of Hoshaiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the other insolent men said to Jeremiah, ‘You are telling a lie. The LORD our God did not send you to say, “Do not go to Egypt to settle there”; ³ but Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us, to hand us over to the Chaldeans, in order that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon.” ⁴ So Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the LORD, to stay in the land of Judah. ⁵ But Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to settle in the land of Judah from all the nations to which they had been driven— ⁶ the men, the women, the children, the princesses, and everyone whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan; also the prophet Jeremiah and Baruch son of Neriah. ⁷ And they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the LORD. And they arrived at Tahpanhes.

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes: ⁹ Take some large stones in your hands, and bury them in the clay pavement^a that is at the entrance to Pharaoh’s palace in Tahpanhes. Let the Judeans see you do it, ¹⁰ and say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to send and take my servant King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and he^b will set his throne above these stones that I

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Gk Syr: Heb /

have buried, and he will spread his royal canopy over them. ¹¹ He shall come and ravage the land of Egypt, giving those who are destined for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are destined for captivity, to captivity, and those who are destined for the sword, to the sword.

¹² He^a shall kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them and carry them away captive; and he shall pick clean the land of Egypt, as a shepherd picks his cloak clean of vermin; and he shall depart from there safely. ¹³ He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt; and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.

Read Jeremiah 44

Stubborn and obstinate to the end. Had the Jews in Egypt repented and been faithful to God, they could have become the remnant to return to the homeland. What they do, however, is take God's word and formally reject it. They will not cease to offer incense to the Egyptian goddess and engage in false cults. In their rejection of the God who saved them, they invite the final disaster. The people are destroyed; Jerusalem is a shambles; and the Egyptian king is deposed.

Reflect: How many final chances to turn one's life around are rejected? If Peter's contrition was real and accepted, could not the same have been true of Judas?

Pray: Pray for people who seem to have rejected the Lord.

Act: Sin is not as great a tragedy as is persistence in sin. Today I will make a conscious act of turning to the Lord with all my heart.

Denunciation of Persistent Idolatry

44 The word that came to Jeremiah for all the Judeans living in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros, ² Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You yourselves have seen all the disaster that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. Look at them; today they are a desolation, without an inhabitant in them, ³ because of the wickedness that they committed, provoking me to anger, in that they went to make offerings and serve other gods that they had not known, neither they, nor you, nor your ancestors. ⁴ Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, "I beg you not to do this abominable thing that I hate!" ⁵ But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their wickedness and make no offerings to other gods. ⁶ So my wrath and my anger were poured out and kindled in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they became a waste and a desolation, as they still are today. ⁷ And now thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel: Why are you doing such great harm to yourselves, to cut off man and woman, child and infant, from the midst of Judah, leaving yourselves without a remnant? ⁸ Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to settle? Will you be cut off and become an object of cursing and ridicule among all the nations of the earth? ⁹ Have you forgotten the crimes of your ancestors, of the kings of Judah, of their^b wives, your own crimes and those of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁰ They have shown no contrition or fear to this day, nor have they walked in my law and my statutes that I set before you and before your ancestors.

¹¹ Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am determined to bring disaster on you, to bring all Judah to an end. ¹² I will take the remnant of Judah who are determined to come to the land of Egypt to settle, and they shall perish, everyone; in the land of Egypt

^a Gk Syr Vg: Heb /
^b Heb his

they shall fall; by the sword and by famine they shall perish; from the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine; and they shall become an object of execration and horror, of cursing and ridicule. ¹³ I will punish those who live in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, ¹⁴ so that none of the remnant of Judah who have come to settle in the land of Egypt shall escape or survive or return to the land of Judah. Although they long to go back to live there, they shall not go back, except some fugitives.

¹⁵ Then all the men who were aware that their wives had been making offerings to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, all the people who lived in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah: ¹⁶ "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not going to listen to you. ¹⁷ Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We used to have plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no misfortune. ¹⁸ But from the time we stopped making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine." ¹⁹ And the women said,^a "Indeed we will go on making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her; do you think that we made cakes for her, marked with her image, and poured out libations to her without our husbands' being involved?"

²⁰ Then Jeremiah said to all the people, men and women, all the people who were giving him this answer: ²¹ "As for the offerings that you made in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your ancestors, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them? Did it not come

into his mind? ²² The LORD could no longer bear the sight of your evil doings, the abominations that you committed; therefore your land became a desolation and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is to this day. ²³ It is because you burned offerings, and because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey the voice of the LORD or walk in his law and in his statutes and in his decrees, that this disaster has befallen you, as is still evident today."

²⁴ Jeremiah said to all the people and all the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all you Judeans who are in the land of Egypt, ²⁵ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have accomplished in deeds what you declared in words, saying, 'We are determined to perform the vows that we have made, to make offerings to the queen of heaven and to pour out libations to her.' By all means, keep your vows and make your libations! ²⁶ Therefore hear the word of the LORD, all you Judeans who live in the land of Egypt: Lo, I swear by my great name, says the LORD, that my name shall no longer be pronounced on the lips of any of the people of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, 'As the Lord GOD lives.' ²⁷ I am going to watch over them for harm and not for good; all the people of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall perish by the sword and by famine, until not one is left. ²⁸ And those who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who have come to the land of Egypt to settle, shall know whose words will stand, mine or theirs! ²⁹ This shall be the sign to you, says the LORD, that I am going to punish you in this place, in order that you may know that my words against you will surely be carried out: ³⁰ Thus says the LORD, I am going to give Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies, those who seek his life, just as I gave King Zedekiah of Judah into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life."

^a Compare Syr: Heb lacks *And the women said*

Read Jeremiah 45

Baruch faithfully consigns Jeremiah's prophecies to writing, but he is discouraged by all the pain and sorrow that he has predicted. The Lord reasserts the need for punishment but also indicates that Baruch's life will be spared.

Reflect: Do I realize that there are moments when correction from the pulpit is called for? Preaching is not simply a matter of saying soothing words.

Pray: May I have the courage to speak the truth in difficult moments.

Act: I will try to voice my convictions honestly but charitably.

A Word of Comfort to Baruch

45 The word that the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Baruch son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah: ² Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: ³ You said, "Woe is me! The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest." ⁴ Thus you shall say to him, "Thus says the LORD: I am going to break down what I have built, and pluck up what I have planted—that is, the whole land. ⁵ And you, do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for I am going to bring disaster upon all flesh, says the LORD; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in every place to which you may go."

Judgment on Egypt

46 The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning the nations.

² Concerning Egypt, about the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish and which King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah:

³ Prepare buckler and shield,
and advance for battle!

⁴ Harness the horses;
mount the steeds!

Take your stations with your helmets,
whet your lances,
put on your coats of mail!

⁵ Why do I see them terrified?
They have fallen back;
their warriors are beaten down,
and have fled in haste.
They do not look back—
terror is all around!

says the LORD.

⁶ The swift cannot flee away,
nor can the warrior escape;
in the north by the river Euphrates
they have stumbled and fallen.

⁷ Who is this, rising like the Nile,
like rivers whose waters surge?

⁸ Egypt rises like the Nile,
like rivers whose waters surge.

It said, Let me rise, let me cover the earth,
let me destroy cities and their inhabitants.

⁹ Advance, O horses,
and dash madly, O chariots!

Read Jeremiah 46

“Daughter Egypt shall be put to shame; she shall be handed over to a people from the north.” At one time, there was no more formidable power in the Middle East than Egypt. But now its time has come. Nebuchadnezzar is destined to decimate Egypt and it will be left a wasteland. Yet the Lord assures Israel that it will experience restoration. These oracles against the nations are gathered here in the Hebrew text of Jeremiah but are found elsewhere in the Greek text.

Reflect: The Soviet Union was once termed a superpower, a force that threatened to dominate much of the world. Today only relics remain, and the Soviet Union ended by crumbling under its own weight. In the Bible only one nation was given assurance of permanent status, and that, only if it remained faithful. We all have a certain allegiance to the land of our birth. But, there, after our death, we will be no more than a name on a tombstone. The scriptures remind us that here we have no lasting home. In faith we are destined for the house of the Father.

Pray: As we prepare for our place in the Father’s home, may we work to see that our earthly home show forth the justice and goodness of God.

Act: Bring before God today what you see as our most pressing social issue.

Let the warriors go forth:

Ethiopia^a and Put who carry the shield,
the Ludim, who draw^b the bow.

- 10 That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts,
a day of retribution,
to gain vindication from his foes.

The sword shall devour and be sated,
and drink its fill of their blood.

For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice
in the land of the north by the river Euphrates.

- 11 Go up to Gilead, and take balm,
O virgin daughter Egypt!
In vain you have used many medicines;
there is no healing for you.
- 12 The nations have heard of your shame,
and the earth is full of your cry;
for warrior has stumbled against warrior;
both have fallen together.

Babylonia Will Strike Egypt

13 The word that the LORD spoke to the prophet Jeremiah about the coming of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to attack the land of Egypt:

- 14 Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol;
proclaim in Memphis and Tahpanhes;
Say, “Take your stations and be ready,
for the sword shall devour those around you.”

- 15 Why has Apis fled?^c
Why did your bull not stand?
—because the LORD thrust him down.

- 16 Your multitude stumbled^d and fell,
and one said to another,^e
“Come, let us go back to our own people
and to the land of our birth,
because of the destroying sword.”

- 17 Give Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the name
“Braggart who missed his chance.”

- 18 As I live, says the King,
whose name is the LORD of hosts,
one is coming
like Tabor among the mountains,
and like Carmel by the sea.

- 19 Pack your bags for exile,
sheltered daughter Egypt!
For Memphis shall become a waste,
a ruin, without inhabitant.

- 20 A beautiful heifer is Egypt—
a gadfly from the north lights upon her.

- 21 Even her mercenaries in her midst
are like fatted calves;

^a Or Nubia; Heb Cush

^b Cn: Heb *who grasp, who draw*

^c Gk: Heb *Why was it swept away*

^d Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^e Gk: Heb *and fell one to another and they said*

they too have turned and fled together,
 they did not stand;
 for the day of their calamity has
 come upon them,
 the time of their punishment.

- 22 She makes a sound like a snake
 gliding away;
 for her enemies march in force,
 and come against her with axes,
 like those who fell trees.
- 23 They shall cut down her forest,
 says the LORD,
 though it is impenetrable,
 because they are more numerous
 than locusts;
 they are without number.
- 24 Daughter Egypt shall be put to
 shame;
 she shall be handed over to a
 people from the north.

25 The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,
 said: See, I am bringing punishment upon
 Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh, and Egypt
 and her gods and her kings, upon Pharaoh
 and those who trust in him. ²⁶ I will hand

them over to those who seek their life, to
 King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and his
 officers. Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited
 as in the days of old, says the LORD.

God Will Save Israel

- 27 But as for you, have no fear, my
 servant Jacob,
 and do not be dismayed, O Israel;
 for I am going to save you from far
 away,
 and your offspring from the land
 of their captivity.
 Jacob shall return and have quiet
 and ease,
 and no one shall make him afraid.
- 28 As for you, have no fear, my servant
 Jacob,
 says the LORD,
 for I am with you.
 I will make an end of all the nations
 among which I have banished you,
 but I will not make an end of you!
 I will chastise you in just measure,
 and I will by no means leave you
 unpunished.

Judgment on the Philistines

47 The word of the LORD that came to the prophet
 Jeremiah concerning the Philistines, before
 Pharaoh attacked Gaza:

- ² Thus says the LORD:
 See, waters are rising out of the north
 and shall become an overflowing torrent;
 they shall overflow the land and all that fills it,
 the city and those who live in it.
 People shall cry out,
 and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail.
- ³ At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his
 stallions,
 at the clatter of his chariots, at the rumbling of
 their wheels,
 parents do not turn back for children,
 so feeble are their hands,
- ⁴ because of the day that is coming
 to destroy all the Philistines,
 to cut off from Tyre and Sidon
 every helper that remains.
 For the LORD is destroying the Philistines,
 the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor.

Read Jeremiah 47

The coastal cities of the Philistines were never a major force opposing Israel but they were an unending thorn in the nation's side. Nebuchadnezzar was set on destroying the important Phoenician trading center of coastal Tyre and was only partially successful. This inevitably led to the destruction of the Philistine cities in the late seventh century.

Reflect: The Philistines—or Sea People, as they were called—emigrated to the Palestinian coast before the time of the exodus. They had their own cult and were marked by strong ambition, yet they suffered repeated defeats.

Pray: Pray that natural disasters may be averted and people may be spared the loss of life and property.

Act: Perform one act of kindness for a person of minority status.

- 5 Baldness has come upon Gaza,
Ashkelon is silenced.
O remnant of their power!^a
How long will you gash yourselves?
- 6 Ah, sword of the LORD!
How long until you are quiet?
Put yourself into your scabbard,
rest and be still!
- 7 How can it^b be quiet,
when the LORD has given it an order?
Against Ashkelon and against the seashore—
there he has appointed it.

Judgment on Moab

48 Concerning Moab.

- Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel:
Alas for Nebo, it is laid waste!
Kiriathaim is put to shame, it is taken;
the fortress is put to shame and broken down;
- 2 the renown of Moab is no more.
In Heshbon they planned evil against her:
“Come, let us cut her off from being a nation!”
You also, O Madmen, shall be brought to silence;^c
the sword shall pursue you.
- 3 Hark! a cry from Horonaim,
“Desolation and great destruction!”
- 4 “Moab is destroyed!”
her little ones cry out.
- 5 For at the ascent of Luhith
they go^d up weeping bitterly;
for at the descent of Horonaim
they have heard the distressing cry of anguish.
- 6 Flee! Save yourselves!
Be like a wild ass^e in the desert!
- 7 Surely, because you trusted in your strongholds^f
and your treasures,
you also shall be taken;
Chemosh shall go out into exile,
with his priests and his attendants.
- 8 The destroyer shall come upon every town,
and no town shall escape;
the valley shall perish,
and the plain shall be destroyed,
as the LORD has spoken.
- 9 Set aside salt for Moab,
for she will surely fall;
her towns shall become a desolation,
with no inhabitant in them.

^a Gk: Heb *their valley*

^b Gk Vg: Heb *you*

^c The place-name *Madmen* sounds like the Hebrew verb *to be silent*

^d Cn: Heb *he goes*

^e Gk Aquila: Heb *like Aroer*

^f Gk: Heb *works*

Read Jeremiah 48

“Moab is put to shame, for it is broken down; wail and cry! Tell it by the Arnon, that Moab is laid waste.” Moab was the place of Moses’ death and burial and for this reason held a respected place in the Israelite heart. It was also the homeland of Ruth, the noted and respected ancestor of David. Yet, Jeremiah predicts the country’s imminent demise.

Reflect: As negative as a situation may be, there are frequently positive features. When it comes to blanket condemnations, we are usually forced to make distinctions. There is good to be found everywhere, and it often serves as a source of inspiration.

Pray: Pray for good people who live in negative situations. Pray for someone who is subjected to abuse of any type, that this person may be freed from entrapment.

Act: Be present to a person suffering from alienation or abuse.

10 Accursed is the one who is slack in doing the work of the LORD; and accursed is the one who keeps back the sword from bloodshed.

11 Moab has been at ease from his youth, settled like wine^a on its dregs; he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into exile; therefore his flavor has remained and his aroma is unspoiled.

12 Therefore, the time is surely coming, says the LORD, when I shall send to him decanters to decant him, and empty his vessels, and break his^b jars in pieces. 13 Then Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.

14 How can you say, “We are heroes and mighty warriors”?

15 The destroyer of Moab and his towns has come up, and the choicest of his young men have gone down to slaughter, says the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.

16 The calamity of Moab is near at hand and his doom approaches swiftly.

17 Mourn over him, all you his neighbors, and all who know his name; say, “How the mighty scepter is broken, the glorious staff!”

18 Come down from glory, and sit on the parched ground, enthroned daughter Dibon!

For the destroyer of Moab has come up against you; he has destroyed your strongholds.

19 Stand by the road and watch, you inhabitant of Aroer!

Ask the man fleeing and the woman escaping; say, “What has happened?”

20 Moab is put to shame, for it is broken down; wail and cry!

Tell it by the Arnon, that Moab is laid waste.

21 Judgment has come upon the tableland, upon Holon, and Jahzah, and Mephaath, ²² and Dibon, and Nebo, and Beth-diblathaim, ²³ and Kiriathaim, and Beth-gamul, and Beth-meon, ²⁴ and Kerioth, and Bozrah, and all the towns of the land of Moab, far and near. ²⁵ The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, says the LORD.

26 Make him drunk, because he magnified himself against the LORD; let Moab wallow in his vomit; he too shall become a laughingstock. ²⁷ Israel was a laughing-

^a Heb lacks *like wine*

^b Gk Aquila: Heb *their*

stock for you, though he was not caught among thieves; but whenever you spoke of him you shook your head!

28 Leave the towns, and live on the rock,
O inhabitants of Moab!

Be like the dove that nests
on the sides of the mouth of a gorge.

29 We have heard of the pride of Moab—
he is very proud—
of his loftiness, his pride, and his
arrogance,
and the haughtiness of his heart.

30 I myself know his insolence, says
the LORD;
his boasts are false,
his deeds are false.

31 Therefore I wail for Moab;
I cry out for all Moab;
for the people of Kir-heres I mourn.

32 More than for Jazer I weep for you,
O vine of Sibmah!
Your branches crossed over the sea,
reached as far as Jazer;^a
upon your summer fruits and your
vintage
the destroyer has fallen.

33 Gladness and joy have been taken away
from the fruitful land of Moab;
I have stopped the wine from the
wine presses;
no one treads them with shouts of
joy;
the shouting is not the shout of joy.

34 Heshbon and Elealeh cry out;^b as far
as Jahaz they utter their voice, from Zoar to
Horonaim and Eglath-shelishiyah. For
even the waters of Nimrim have become
desolate. ³⁵ And I will bring to an end in
Moab, says the LORD, those who offer sac-
rifice at a high place and make offerings to
their gods. ³⁶ Therefore my heart moans for
Moab like a flute, and my heart moans like
a flute for the people of Kir-heres; for the
riches they gained have perished.

37 For every head is shaved and every
beard cut off; on all the hands there are

gashes, and on the loins sackcloth. ³⁸ On
all the housetops of Moab and in the
squares there is nothing but lamentation;
for I have broken Moab like a vessel that no
one wants, says the LORD. ³⁹ How it is bro-
ken! How they wail! How Moab has turned
his back in shame! So Moab has become a
derision and a horror to all his neighbors.

⁴⁰ For thus says the LORD:

Look, he shall swoop down like an
eagle,
and spread his wings against Moab;

⁴¹ the towns^c shall be taken
and the strongholds seized.

The hearts of the warriors of Moab,
on that day,
shall be like the heart of a woman
in labor.

⁴² Moab shall be destroyed as a people,
because he magnified himself
against the LORD.

⁴³ Terror, pit, and trap
are before you, O inhabitants of Moab!
says the LORD.

⁴⁴ Everyone who flees from the terror
shall fall into the pit,
and everyone who climbs out of the pit
shall be caught in the trap.

For I will bring these things^d upon Moab
in the year of their punishment,
says the LORD.

⁴⁵ In the shadow of Heshbon
fugitives stop exhausted;
for a fire has gone out from Heshbon,
a flame from the house of Sihon;
it has destroyed the forehead of Moab,
the scalp of the people of tumult.^e

⁴⁶ Woe to you, O Moab!
The people of Chemosh have
perished,
for your sons have been taken
captive,
and your daughters into captivity.

⁴⁷ Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab
in the latter days, says the LORD.
Thus far is the judgment on Moab.

^a Two Mss and Isa 16.8: MT *the sea of Jazer*

^b Cn: Heb *From the cry of Heshbon to Elealeh*

^c Or *Kerioth*

^d Gk Syr: Heb *bring upon it*

^e Or of *Shaon*

Read Jeremiah 49

The road to extinction is spelled out for one ancient kingdom after another—Ammon, Edom, Damascus. Most of these kingdoms would not even be recognized today except by Near Eastern scholars or biblical historians. The truth is that they were all formidable foes in the days of Jeremiah. But they were destined to perish. We don't want to glory in the destruction of any people; but we do believe in the triumph of faith.

Reflect: Our faith has endured many severe trials. It has had its foes, both within and without. But the truth of the matter is that we are still here. Many dictators over the centuries have sought to obliterate the faith, but this has not happened. In today's reflection, we can at least give thanks to God for our faith.

Pray: Ask for the grace to persevere and to be thankful for what God has given us in Christ.

Act: Let us show our faith in one concrete way today.

Judgment on the Ammonites

49 Concerning the Ammonites.

Thus says the LORD:

Has Israel no sons?

Has he no heir?

Why then has Milcom dispossessed Gad,
and his people settled in its towns?

² Therefore, the time is surely coming,
says the LORD,
when I will sound the battle alarm
against Rabbah of the Ammonites;
it shall become a desolate mound,
and its villages shall be burned with fire;
then Israel shall dispossess those who
dispossessed him,
says the LORD.

³ Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste!
Cry out, O daughters^a of Rabbah!
Put on sackcloth,
lament, and slash yourselves with whips!^b
For Milcom shall go into exile,
with his priests and his attendants.

⁴ Why do you boast in your strength?
Your strength is ebbing,
O faithless daughter.
You trusted in your treasures, saying,
"Who will attack me?"

⁵ I am going to bring terror upon you,
says the Lord GOD of hosts,
from all your neighbors,
and you will be scattered, each headlong,
with no one to gather the fugitives.

⁶ But afterward I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites, says the LORD.

Judgment on Edom

7 Concerning Edom.

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

Is there no longer wisdom in Teman?
Has counsel perished from the prudent?
Has their wisdom vanished?

⁸ Flee, turn back, get down low,
inhabitants of Dedan!

For I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him,
the time when I punish him.

⁹ If grape-gatherers came to you,
would they not leave gleanings?

If thieves came by night,
even they would pillage only what they wanted.

^a Or villages

^b Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

10 But as for me, I have stripped Esau bare,
I have uncovered his hiding places,
and he is not able to conceal himself.
His offspring are destroyed, his kinsfolk
and his neighbors; and he is no more.

11 Leave your orphans, I will keep them alive;
and let your widows trust in me.

12 For thus says the LORD: If those who do not deserve to drink the cup still have to drink it, shall you be the one to go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished; you must drink it. 13 For by myself I have sworn, says the LORD, that Bozrah shall become an object of horror and ridicule, a waste, and an object of cursing; and all her towns shall be perpetual wastes.

14 I have heard tidings from the LORD,
and a messenger has been sent among the nations:

“Gather yourselves together and come against her,
and rise up for battle!”

15 For I will make you least among the nations,
despised by humankind.

16 The terror you inspire
and the pride of your heart have deceived you,
you who live in the clefts of the rock,^a
who hold the height of the hill.
Although you make your nest as high as the eagle’s,
from there I will bring you down,
says the LORD.

17 Edom shall become an object of horror; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters. 18 As when Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors were overthrown, says the LORD, no one shall live there, nor shall anyone settle in it. 19 Like a lion com-

ing up from the thickets of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly chase Edom^b away from it; and I will appoint over it whomever I choose.^c For who is like me? Who can summon me? Who is the shepherd who can stand before me? 20 Therefore hear the plan that the LORD has made against Edom and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away; surely their fold shall be appalled at their fate. 21 At the sound of their fall the earth shall tremble; the sound of their cry shall be heard at the Red Sea.^d 22 Look, he shall mount up and swoop down like an eagle, and spread his wings against Bozrah, and the heart of the warriors of Edom in that day shall be like the heart of a woman in labor.

Judgment on Damascus

23 Concerning Damascus.

Hamath and Arpad are confounded,
for they have heard bad news;
they melt in fear, they are troubled
like the sea^e
that cannot be quiet.

24 Damascus has become feeble, she
turned to flee,
and panic seized her;
anguish and sorrows have taken
hold of her,
as of a woman in labor.

25 How the famous city is forsaken,^f
the joyful town!^g

26 Therefore her young men shall fall in
her squares,
and all her soldiers shall be
destroyed in that day,
says the LORD of hosts.

27 And I will kindle a fire at the wall of
Damascus,
and it shall devour the strongholds
of Ben-hadad.

^a Or of Sela

^b Heb him

^c Or and I will single out the choicest of his rams: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Or Sea of Reeds

^e Cn: Heb there is trouble in the sea

^f Vg: Heb is not forsaken

^g Syr Vg Tg: Heb the town of my joy

Judgment on Kedar and Hazor

28 Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor that King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon defeated.

Thus says the LORD:

Rise up, advance against Kedar!

Destroy the people of the east!

29 Take their tents and their flocks, their curtains and all their goods; carry off their camels for yourselves, and a cry shall go up: "Terror is all around!"

30 Flee, wander far away, hide in deep places,
O inhabitants of Hazor!

says the LORD.

For King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon has made a plan against you and formed a purpose against you.

31 Rise up, advance against a nation at ease,
that lives secure,

says the LORD,

that has no gates or bars,
that lives alone.

32 Their camels shall become booty,
their herds of cattle a spoil.

I will scatter to every wind
those who have shaven temples,

and I will bring calamity
against them from every side,
says the LORD.

33 Hazor shall become a lair of jackals,
an everlasting waste;
no one shall live there,
nor shall anyone settle in it.

Judgment on Elam

34 The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah.

35 Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am going to break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might; ³⁶ and I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven; and I will scatter them to all these winds, and there shall be no nation to which the exiles from Elam shall not come. ³⁷ I will terrify Elam before their enemies, and before those who seek their life; I will bring disaster upon them, my fierce anger, says the LORD. I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them; ³⁸ and I will set my throne in Elam, and destroy their king and officials, says the LORD.

39 But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says the LORD.

Judgment on Babylon

50 The word that the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by the prophet Jeremiah:

² Declare among the nations and proclaim,
set up a banner and proclaim,
do not conceal it, say:

Babylon is taken,
Bel is put to shame,
Merodach is dismayed.

Her images are put to shame,
her idols are dismayed.

3 For out of the north a nation has come up against her; it shall make her land a desolation, and no one shall live in it; both human beings and animals shall flee away.

4 In those days and in that time, says the LORD, the people of Israel shall come, they and the people of Ju-

Read Jeremiah 50

At the cry “Babylon is taken,” the earth quakes, and the outcry is heard among the nations. It does not seem possible. The great power of Babylon, which served as God’s instrument in the destruction of Judah, has served its purpose and now pays the debt for its own idolatry and immorality. In fact, Babylon falls to the next great power, the Persians, in 538 BC. Its destruction is another one of the ironies of human history.

Reflect: In the Bible we saw the end of Assyria and now we see Babylon destroyed. It is to be followed by the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. “*Sic transit gloria mundi*” (so passes the glory of the world). We easily settle into a mindset which sees the world around us as remaining largely unchanged. But radical change can take place swiftly and unexpectedly.

Pray: Pray that countries that have lost much of their Christian heritage may experience a spiritual awakening.

Act: Strive to maintain your appreciation for Catholic home practices, such as grace before meals.

dah together; they shall come weeping as they seek the LORD their God. ⁵ They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, and they shall come and join^a themselves to the LORD by an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.

⁶ My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains; from mountain to hill they have gone, they have forgotten their fold. ⁷ All who found them have devoured them, and their enemies have said, “We are not guilty, because they have sinned against the LORD, the true pasture, the LORD, the hope of their ancestors.”

⁸ Flee from Babylon, and go out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be like male goats leading the flock. ⁹ For I am going to stir up and bring against Babylon a company of great nations from the land of the north; and they shall array themselves against her; from there she shall be taken. Their arrows are like the arrows of a skilled warrior who does not return empty-handed. ¹⁰ Chaldea shall be plundered; all who plunder her shall be sated, says the LORD.

- ¹¹ Though you rejoice, though you exult,
O plunderers of my heritage,
though you frisk about like a heifer on the grass,
and neigh like stallions,
¹² your mother shall be utterly shamed,
and she who bore you shall be disgraced.
Lo, she shall be the last of the nations,
a wilderness, dry land, and a desert.
¹³ Because of the wrath of the LORD she shall not
be inhabited,
but shall be an utter desolation;
everyone who passes by Babylon shall be appalled
and hiss because of all her wounds.
¹⁴ Take up your positions around Babylon,
all you that bend the bow;
shoot at her, spare no arrows,
for she has sinned against the LORD.
¹⁵ Raise a shout against her from all sides,
“She has surrendered;
her bulwarks have fallen,
her walls are thrown down.”
For this is the vengeance of the LORD:
take vengeance on her,
do to her as she has done.
¹⁶ Cut off from Babylon the sower,
and the wielder of the sickle in time of harvest;
because of the destroying sword
all of them shall return to their own people,
and all of them shall flee to their own land.

^a Gk: Heb toward it. Come! They shall join

17 Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured it, and now at the end King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon has gnawed its bones. ¹⁸ Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria. ¹⁹ I will restore Israel to its pasture, and it shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead its hunger shall be satisfied. ²⁰ In those days and at that time, says the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon the remnant that I have spared.

- ²¹ Go up to the land of Merathaim;^a
 go up against her,
 and attack the inhabitants of Pekod^b
 and utterly destroy the last of them,^c
 says the LORD;
 do all that I have commanded you.
- ²² The noise of battle is in the land,
 and great destruction!
- ²³ How the hammer of the whole earth
 is cut down and broken!
 How Babylon has become
 a horror among the nations!
- ²⁴ You set a snare for yourself and you
 were caught, O Babylon,
 but you did not know it;
 you were discovered and seized,
 because you challenged the LORD.
- ²⁵ The LORD has opened his armory,
 and brought out the weapons of
 his wrath,
 for the Lord GOD of hosts has a task
 to do
 in the land of the Chaldeans.
- ²⁶ Come against her from every quarter;
 open her granaries;
 pile her up like heaps of grain, and
 destroy her utterly;
 let nothing be left of her.
- ²⁷ Kill all her bulls,
 let them go down to the slaughter.

Alas for them, their day has come,
 the time of their punishment!

²⁸ Listen! Fugitives and refugees from the land of Babylon are coming to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, vengeance for his temple.

²⁹ Summon archers against Babylon, all who bend the bow. Encamp all around her; let no one escape. Repay her according to her deeds; just as she has done, do to her—for she has arrogantly defied the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. ³⁰ Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares, and all her soldiers shall be destroyed on that day, says the LORD.

- ³¹ I am against you, O arrogant one,
 says the Lord GOD of hosts;
 for your day has come,
 the time when I will punish you.
- ³² The arrogant one shall stumble and fall,
 with no one to raise him up,
 and I will kindle a fire in his cities,
 and it will devour everything
 around him.

³³ Thus says the LORD of hosts: The people of Israel are oppressed, and so too are the people of Judah; all their captors have held them fast and refuse to let them go. ³⁴ Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name. He will surely plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon.

- ³⁵ A sword against the Chaldeans, says the LORD,
 and against the inhabitants of
 Babylon,
 and against her officials and her
 sages!
- ³⁶ A sword against the diviners,
 so that they may become fools!
 A sword against her warriors,
 so that they may be destroyed!
- ³⁷ A sword against her^d horses and
 against her^d chariots,

^a Or of Double Rebellion
^b Or of Punishment

^c Tg: Heb *destroy after them*
^d Cn: Heb *his*

and against all the foreign troops
in her midst,
so that they may become women!

A sword against all her treasures,
that they may be plundered!

³⁸ A drought^a against her waters,
that they may be dried up!

For it is a land of images,
and they go mad over idols.

³⁹ Therefore wild animals shall live with
hyenas in Babylon,^b and ostriches shall in-
habit her; she shall never again be peopled,
or inhabited for all generations. ⁴⁰ As when
God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and
their neighbors, says the LORD, so no one
shall live there, nor shall anyone settle in her.

⁴¹ Look, a people is coming from the
north;
a mighty nation and many kings
are stirring from the farthest parts
of the earth.

⁴² They wield bow and spear,
they are cruel and have no mercy.
The sound of them is like the roaring
sea;

they ride upon horses,
set in array as a warrior for battle,
against you, O daughter Babylon!

⁴³ The king of Babylon heard news of
them,
and his hands fell helpless;
anguish seized him,
pain like that of a woman in
labor.

⁴⁴ Like a lion coming up from the
thickets of the Jordan against a perennial
pasture, I will suddenly chase them away
from her; and I will appoint over her
whomever I choose.^c For who is like me?
Who can summon me? Who is the shep-
herd who can stand before me? ⁴⁵ There-
fore hear the plan that the LORD has made
against Babylon, and the purposes that he
has formed against the land of the Chal-
deans: Surely the little ones of the flock
shall be dragged away; surely their^d fold
shall be appalled at their fate. ⁴⁶ At the
sound of the capture of Babylon the earth
shall tremble, and her cry shall be heard
among the nations.

51 Thus says the LORD:
I am going to stir up a destructive wind^e
against Babylon
and against the inhabitants of Leb-qamai;^f
² and I will send winnowers to Babylon,
and they shall winnow her.
They shall empty her land
when they come against her from every side
on the day of trouble.
³ Let not the archer bend his bow,
and let him not array himself in his coat of mail.
Do not spare her young men;
utterly destroy her entire army.
⁴ They shall fall down slain in the land of the
Chaldeans,
and wounded in her streets.
⁵ Israel and Judah have not been forsaken
by their God, the LORD of hosts,
though their land is full of guilt
before the Holy One of Israel.
⁶ Flee from the midst of Babylon,
save your lives, each of you!
Do not perish because of her guilt,

^a Another reading is *A sword*

^b Heb lacks *in Babylon*

^c Or *and I will single out the choicest of her
rams*: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Syr Gk Tg Compare 49:20: Heb lacks *their*

^e Or *stir up the spirit of a destroyer*

^f *Leb-qamai* is a cryptogram for *Kasdim*,
Chaldea

Read Jeremiah 51

The prophecies that Jeremiah uttered against Babylon were taken to the foreign capital by one Seraiah, read aloud, and then thrown into the Euphrates as a symbol of Babylon's destruction. For this reason, scholars hold that the prophecies of chapters 50 and 51 were written by later prophets. At any rate, the demise of Babylon is sealed and determined. Its ruination is definitive.

Reflect: The major part of the prophet's writing centered on Judah's fate. It was sad, indeed, but served as a turning point in the country's history. The plan of God continues to wend its way through Near Eastern history. The brightest pages are yet to come and Jeremiah has pointed the way toward the fullness of God's plan which still stands on the horizon.

Pray: May we always read even the darkest pages of the sacred text with hope and confidence.

Act: In all that happens today, strive to see God's hand at work.

for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance;
he is repaying her what is due.

7 Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand,
making all the earth drunken;
the nations drank of her wine,
and so the nations went mad.

8 Suddenly Babylon has fallen and is shattered;
wail for her!

Bring balm for her wound;
perhaps she may be healed.

9 We tried to heal Babylon,
but she could not be healed.

Forsake her, and let each of us go
to our own country;

for her judgment has reached up to heaven
and has been lifted up even to the skies.

10 The LORD has brought forth our vindication;
come, let us declare in Zion
the work of the LORD our God.

11 Sharpen the arrows!
Fill the quivers!

The LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the LORD, vengeance for his temple.

12 Raise a standard against the walls of Babylon;
make the watch strong;

post sentinels;
prepare the ambushes;

for the LORD has both planned and done
what he spoke concerning the inhabitants of
Babylon.

13 You who live by mighty waters,
rich in treasures,

your end has come,
the thread of your life is cut.

14 The LORD of hosts has sworn by himself:

Surely I will fill you with troops like a swarm of
locusts,

and they shall raise a shout of victory over you.

15 It is he who made the earth by his power,
who established the world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding stretched out the
heavens.

16 When he utters his voice there is a tumult of
waters in the heavens,

and he makes the mist rise from the ends of
the earth.

He makes lightnings for the rain,

and he brings out the wind from his storehouses.

- 17 Everyone is stupid and without knowledge;
goldsmiths are all put to shame
by their idols;
for their images are false,
and there is no breath in them.
- 18 They are worthless, a work of delusion;
at the time of their punishment
they shall perish.
- 19 Not like these is the LORD,^a the portion of Jacob,
for he is the one who formed all things,
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;
the LORD of hosts is his name.

Israel the Creator's Instrument

- 20 You are my war club, my weapon of battle:
with you I smash nations;
with you I destroy kingdoms;
- 21 with you I smash the horse and its rider;
with you I smash the chariot and the charioteer;
- 22 with you I smash man and woman;
with you I smash the old man and the boy;
with you I smash the young man and the girl;
- 23 with you I smash shepherds and their flocks;
with you I smash farmers and their teams;
with you I smash governors and deputies.

The Doom of Babylon

24 I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the wrong that they have done in Zion, says the LORD.

- 25 I am against you, O destroying mountain,
says the LORD,
that destroys the whole earth;

- I will stretch out my hand against you,
and roll you down from the crags,
and make you a burned-out mountain.
- 26 No stone shall be taken from you for a corner
and no stone for a foundation,
but you shall be a perpetual waste,
says the LORD.
- 27 Raise a standard in the land,
blow the trumpet among the nations;
prepare the nations for war against her,
summon against her the kingdoms,
Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz;
appoint a marshal against her,
bring up horses like bristling locusts.
- 28 Prepare the nations for war against her,
the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies,
and every land under their dominion.
- 29 The land trembles and writhes,
for the LORD's purposes against Babylon stand,
to make the land of Babylon a desolation,
without inhabitant.
- 30 The warriors of Babylon have given up fighting,
they remain in their strongholds;
their strength has failed,
they have become women;
her buildings are set on fire,
her bars are broken.
- 31 One runner runs to meet another,
and one messenger to meet another,
to tell the king of Babylon
that his city is taken from end to end:
- 32 the fords have been seized,

^a Heb lacks *the LORD*

- the marshes have been burned
with fire,
and the soldiers are in panic.
- 33 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the
God of Israel:
Daughter Babylon is like a threshing
floor
at the time when it is trodden;
yet a little while
and the time of her harvest will
come.
- 34 “King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon
has devoured me,
he has crushed me;
he has made me an empty vessel,
he has swallowed me like a
monster;
he has filled his belly with my
delicacies,
he has spewed me out.
- 35 May my torn flesh be avenged on
Babylon,”
the inhabitants of Zion shall say.
“May my blood be avenged on the
inhabitants of Chaldea,”
Jerusalem shall say.
- 36 Therefore thus says the LORD:
I am going to defend your cause
and take vengeance for you.
I will dry up her sea
and make her fountain dry;
- 37 and Babylon shall become a heap of
ruins,
a den of jackals,
an object of horror and of hissing,
without inhabitant.
- 38 Like lions they shall roar together;
they shall growl like lions’ whelps.
- 39 When they are inflamed, I will set
out their drink
and make them drunk, until they
become merry
and then sleep a perpetual sleep
and never wake, says the LORD.
- 40 I will bring them down like lambs to
the slaughter,
like rams and goats.
- 41 How Sheshach^a is taken,
the pride of the whole earth seized!
How Babylon has become
an object of horror among the
nations!
- 42 The sea has risen over Babylon;
she has been covered by its
tumultuous waves.
- 43 Her cities have become an object of
horror,
a land of drought and a desert,
a land in which no one lives,
and through which no mortal
passes.
- 44 I will punish Bel in Babylon,
and make him disgorge what he
has swallowed.
The nations shall no longer stream
to him;
the wall of Babylon has fallen.
- 45 Come out of her, my people!
Save your lives, each of you,
from the fierce anger of the LORD!
- 46 Do not be fainthearted or fearful
at the rumors heard in the land—
one year one rumor comes,
the next year another,
rumors of violence in the land
and of ruler against ruler.
- 47 Assuredly, the days are coming
when I will punish the images of
Babylon;
her whole land shall be put to shame,
and all her slain shall fall in her
midst.
- 48 Then the heavens and the earth,
and all that is in them,
shall shout for joy over Babylon;
for the destroyers shall come
against them out of the north,
says the LORD.
- 49 Babylon must fall for the slain of
Israel,
as the slain of all the earth have
fallen because of Babylon.
- 50 You survivors of the sword,
go, do not linger!

^a *Sheshach* is a cryptogram for *Babel*, Babylon

- Remember the LORD in a distant land,
and let Jerusalem come into your
mind:
- 51 We are put to shame, for we have
heard insults;
dishonor has covered our face,
for aliens have come
into the holy places of the LORD's
house.
- 52 Therefore the time is surely coming,
says the LORD,
when I will punish her idols,
and through all her land
the wounded shall groan.
- 53 Though Babylon should mount up to
heaven,
and though she should fortify her
strong height,
from me destroyers would come
upon her,
says the LORD.
- 54 Listen!—a cry from Babylon!
A great crashing from the land of
the Chaldeans!
- 55 For the LORD is laying Babylon waste,
and stilling her loud clamor.
Their waves roar like mighty waters,
the sound of their clamor
resounds;
- 56 for a destroyer has come against her,
against Babylon;
her warriors are taken,
their bows are broken;
for the LORD is a God of recompense,
he will repay in full.
- 57 I will make her officials and her
sages drunk,

also her governors, her deputies,
and her warriors;
they shall sleep a perpetual sleep
and never wake,
says the King, whose name is the
LORD of hosts.

- 58 Thus says the LORD of hosts:
The broad wall of Babylon
shall be leveled to the ground,
and her high gates
shall be burned with fire.
The peoples exhaust themselves for
nothing,
and the nations weary themselves
only for fire.^a

Jeremiah's Command to Seraiah

59 The word that the prophet Jeremiah commanded Seraiah son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, when he went with King Zedekiah of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the quartermaster. ⁶⁰ Jeremiah wrote in a^b scroll all the disasters that would come on Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. ⁶¹ And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: "When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, ⁶² and say, 'O LORD, you yourself threatened to destroy this place so that neither human beings nor animals shall live in it, and it shall be desolate forever.' ⁶³ When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it, and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, ⁶⁴ and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disasters that I am bringing on her.'"^c
Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

The Destruction of Jerusalem Reviewed

52 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ² He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. ³ Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered the LORD that he expelled them from his presence.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. ⁴ And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadrezzar of Baby-

^a Gk Syr Compare Hab 2.13: Heb *and the nations for fire, and they are weary*

^b Or *one*

^c Gk: Heb *on her. And they shall weary themselves*

Read Jeremiah 52

This chapter presents a summary of what happened to Jerusalem and Judea when the Babylonians came back a second time to put down the revolt of Zedekiah. It tells of the total destruction of Jerusalem and serves as a conclusion to Jeremiah's warnings of what would happen if the people did not heed God's words.

Reflect: This text copies 2 Kings 25 but adds more details on how thorough was the punishment Jerusalem received for its refusal to listen to Jeremiah. It also holds out hope at the end for God's reversal of the punishment and his mercy. It reminds us that God allows us to suffer the bad effects of our sins but will forgive and allow a new start as well.

Pray: We need to pray regularly that our political interests will not violate God's ways and that our leaders may take seriously their responsibilities for the common good and the world's good, and not just for the power and wealth of our own nation.

Act: Speak out and work for the Christian values that must inform our voting and choice of elected officials. If we do not insist that our government reflect just decisions, who will?

lon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and they laid siege to it; they built siegeworks against it all around. ⁵ So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ⁶ On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. ⁷ Then a breach was made in the city wall;^a and all the soldiers fled and went out from the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah. ⁸ But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered, deserting him. ⁹ Then they captured the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him. ¹⁰ The king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and also killed all the officers of Judah at Riblah. ¹¹ He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and the king of Babylon took him to Babylon, and put him in prison until the day of his death.

¹² In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month—which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard who served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. ¹³ He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ¹⁴ All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. ¹⁵ Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile some of the poorest of the people and the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the artisans. ¹⁶ But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil.

¹⁷ The pillars of bronze that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried all the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁸ They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the ladles, and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service. ¹⁹ The captain of the guard took away the small bowls also, the firepans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the ladles, and the bowls for libation, both those of gold and those of silver. ²⁰ As for the two pillars, the one sea, the twelve bronze bulls that were under the sea, and the stands,^b which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weighing. ²¹ As for the pillars, the height of the one pil-

^a Heb lacks wall

^b Cn: Heb that were under the stands

lar was eighteen cubits, its circumference was twelve cubits; it was hollow and its thickness was four fingers. ²² Upon it was a capital of bronze; the height of the capital was five cubits; latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze, encircled the top of the capital. And the second pillar had the same, with pomegranates. ²³ There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; all the pomegranates encircling the latticework numbered one hundred.

²⁴ The captain of the guard took the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zephaniah, and the three guardians of the threshold; ²⁵ and from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the soldiers, and seven men of the king's council who were found in the city; the secretary of the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found inside the city. ²⁶ Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²⁷ And the king of Babylon struck them down, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

²⁸ This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadnezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand twenty-three Judeans; ²⁹ in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he took into exile from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty-two persons; ³⁰ in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took into exile of the Judeans seven hundred forty-five persons; all the persons were four thousand six hundred.

Jehoiachin Favored in Captivity

³¹ In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year he began to reign, showed favor to King Jehoiachin of Judah and brought him out of prison; ³² he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³ So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes, and every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table. ³⁴ For his allowance, a regular daily allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, as long as he lived, up to the day of his death.

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