

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JEREMIAH 11-12

In a Reader's Digest article, aimed at young career-oriented people, it was suggested that a person finds the highest chances of success in life... "by engaging in work you most enjoy doing, and which gives fullest expression to your abilities and personality..."

If Jeremiah had heeded that nugget of advice he would've never been a prophet - God's mouthpiece!

Jeremiah's work was anything but enjoyable!

He preached a message of repentance to an obstinate bunch! God gave him the task of presiding over the judgment of His backslidden people, Judah.

Jeremiah *tried and cried* to reach these people.

He sacrificed his freedoms, his position, his land, his possessions, his comforts. He even waived his right to marry and have a family. Yet his sacrifices won him nothing but hostility and hardship. "*Prophet*" was not exactly that job where he enjoyed expressing himself.

If Jeremiah had any sense of fulfillment it came not from *his work*, but from *God's Word*. In 15:16 He'll say, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart."

Jeremiah was a lone voice. He confronted and stood alone against both political and priestly establishments!

In his 40 years of ministry he never won a single convert. From a career-oriented perspective Jeremiah was an utter, miserable failure... Yet God appraises success differently than we do! Eternal success is measured not in terms of *fulfillment*, but *faithfulness*.

Keep that in mind as we study Jeremiah 11-12...

Chapter 11:1, "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,' that I may establish the oath which I have

sworn to your fathers, to give them ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ as it is this day.”” And I answered and said, “So be it, Lord.”

Remember the Old Covenant, the covenant God made with Moses and the nation when He brought them out of Egypt consisted on three components...

First was **the Law or commandments** - *moral, civil, and ceremonial*. **Second**, was **the sacrificial system**, for when they broke the law. There were *sacrifices*, and *priests* to offer them, and a *tabernacle* to house them.

And **third**, there were **the blessings and curses**. God would reward the nation’s obedience with great blessing, but He’d punish their rebellion with curses.

And God preferred the blessings! He wanted to establish them in a land flowing with milk and honey. It was the people of Judah that insisted on the curses...

Psalm 78:41 says the Jews “**limited the Holy One of Israel...**” Literally, there were blessings God intended for His people that He had to scratch off because of their unbelief. *His grace went to waste!* Rather than the milk and honey, Judah would taste the tart and bitter.

They had a choice, sweet or sour. Judah chose sour.

And Jeremiah’s response was, “**So be it, LORD.**”

Literally, “Amen.” He didn’t argue with God, or try to talk Him out of it, or even plead for God to stay the judgment of His people. He accepted it, “*So be it.*”

Years ago I was on my way to a Christmas parade in which my little girl was twirling her baton. I was late because I got a speeding ticket. A cop had a radar gun.

When he pulled me over I was so remorseful. I was guilty. “*I’m sorry. I’ll never speed again.*” All the while there was hope the officer might let me off, or mark the ticket down to a warning, I was humble and remorseful.

But when it was obvious I was getting a citation, I got mad. I was thinking, “*Here it is Christmas, and this ticket is going to take presents from my kids, and all I wanted to do was be a good dad and attend my daughter’s parade on time.*” I just about gave that officer a piece of my mind! I’m so glad I kept it shut!

Obviously, I wasn’t really sorry for violating the law. I was just sorry I got caught. If I’d been truly sorry I would’ve accepted the consequences of my actions, and paid my penalty without copping an attitude.

And this is what Jeremiah is doing - *he’s showing a true attitude of repentance.* I’m sure at first he plead for mercy, but when God issued the ticket, he accepted it and prepared to endure its punishment. “*So be it.*”

Jeremiah was an example of true repentance.

“Then the Lord said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: ‘Hear the words of this covenant and do them.

For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, “Obey My voice.”

Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done.” Their sin had unlocked the curses - not the blessings - contained in the Law.

Remember, in the early years of Jeremiah, the Law of Moses was lost. Yet a copy was rediscovered in the Temple. It was brought to King Josiah, a contemporary of Jeremiah's. He ordered it to be read publicly. Josiah even made the leaders of the land promise to obey.

We're told in 2 Chronicles 34:32, “And he (Josiah) made all who were in Jerusalem... take their stand for (the Law)... Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country... and made all who were present in Israel

diligently serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not depart from following the LORD.”

But there're two expressions here that shine a closer light. First, Josiah *“made”* the people serve the Lord. Apparently, their compliance wasn't voluntary - born from love. And they followed *“all his days”* - that is once Josiah died, they went right back to their wickedness.

It's been said, *“Covert an enemy against his will, and he will be an enemy still.”* This is true spiritually. A conversion that's coerced is not a true conversion.

It reminds me of the boy who was jumping up and down on his mom's new furniture. She ordered, *“Son sit down!”* He reluctantly complied. He sat there with a scowl on his face. Later she asked him what he was thinking. The little guy replied, *“I might be sitting down on the outside, but I'm still jumping on the inside.”*

You can't legislate or mandate a spiritual conversion.

Pressuring a person to make a decision won't stick. A person has to willingly come, they can't be pushed.

Verse 9, *“And the Lord said to me, “A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to*

the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.”

Therefore thus says the Lord: “Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them.” The Bible says “God is rich in mercy...” He is “abundant in mercy.” But His mercy is not limitless.

There is an invisible, spiritual line that once crossed, there’s no going back. God’s judgment becomes fixed. Though you cry out, He refuses to listen to your pleas.

“Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they offer incense, but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble.” When trouble strikes the Jews, like most people, they turn to God. *They haven’t given God the time of day for years*, but they ask for His help.

And when He refuses, rather than accept their trouble as punishment and submit to God’s judgment - they run to other gods, false gods, for relief and help.

Their loyalty is short-lived. Once they see that God has no interest in relieving their pain *they leave Him as fast as they turned to Him*. It’s hypocrisy. Their devotion isn’t genuine. It’s superficial and self-serving.

“For according to the number of your cities were your gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to that shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.” There was an idol for every city - even an idol for every street.

The people had given themselves over to false gods.

Alexander Hamilton once said, “Those who stand for nothing, fall for anything.” It’s true. Once Judah threw out the true God they were inundated with false gods.

Verse 14, “So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble.”

Three times in Jeremiah God tells the prophet not to pray for the people. “*Don’t even waste your breath!*”

The people’s fate was fixed. This is a scary thing to hear from the mouth of God - *to be beyond prayer.*

The good news is that God had NOT said that about you! Today is the day of salvation! The grace that’s in Christ abounds to sinners who will turn from their sin.

Romans 10 tells us that salvation is as near to each of us as the tip of our tongue. We don't have to climb to the heights to bring Christ down, or plunge the depths to bring Him up. He's as near as the tip of your tongue.

Romans 10:9 tells us, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Verse 15, "What has My beloved to do in My house, having done lewd deeds with many? And the holy flesh has passed from you. When you do evil, then you rejoice." God speaks as a broken-hearted lover, who's been betrayed by His "*beloved*." He aches. He watches His people rejoice in doing evil, even in His house.

The Lord called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit. With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken."

In Romans 11 Paul uses similar imagery to describe God's work in the world today. He compares Israel to the natural branch, which has been cut off the vine so the unnatural branch (or Gentiles) could be grafted in.

"For the Lord of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done

against themselves to provoke Me to anger in offering incense to Baal.” How sad to have to uproot what you’ve planted, and tear down what you’ve built.

Yet this was what God was up against in needing to judge the idol-worshipping Jews and Jerusalem.

Remember, Jeremiah was a priest from the town of Anathoth - a village 2.5 miles north of Jerusalem.

Anathoth was a Levitical city. The tribe of Levi was designated by God to serve in the Temple. The priests came from Levi. Thus, God gave this tribe certain cities scattered among the other eleven tribes, to inhabit.

Jeremiah grew up among the priests in Jerusalem.

Yet these were the men Jeremiah angered when he was called by God to “stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim... Amend your ways and your doings...” In their Temple precincts, he thundered blistering judgments against the religious hierarchy.

Jeremiah 7-10 - what we call *the Temple Discourses*, alienated the Jews he considered friends, even family.

That one day in the Temple made lifetime enemies.

And men from his own hometown, perhaps some of them relatives, plotted Jeremiah's assassination. It was some sort of ambush. At first, Jeremiah was oblivious to the danger, but God was faithful to uncover their plan.

Verse 18, "Now the Lord gave me knowledge of it, and I know it; for You showed me their doings."

But I was like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they had devised schemes against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be remembered no more."

Think about this for a moment, imagine your family and friends wanting to kill you for no other reason than speaking *the words of God in the house of God!*

Isn't this what happened to Jesus? When He returned to His hometown of Nazareth, certain Jews wanted to kill Him over the message that He spoke.

They pushed Jesus to the precipice, and wanted to throw Him off the cliff. The Jews from Nazareth were too proud to admit He was right and they were wrong - or that one of their own could actually be the Messiah.

We're told in John 7:5 even Jesus' half-brothers refused to believe in Him. How could the kid they played with in the sandbox, be the King of glory that made the

sand on the seashore? Why would God choose Him and not them? What made Him special?

In John 4:44 the Lord responded to the rejection of His family and friends, “Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in His own country.” In essence, it’s hard to get a hearing in your own hometown.

Have you noticed that some of the worse opposition still arises from people who know you best? Hometown harassment is still a problem for followers of Jesus.

Folks closest to you can be your fiercest enemies.

And this is the kind of persecution that catches us off guard. We expect this from strangers, but we hope our friends are going to rejoice with us - be happy for us.

When they don’t it’s disturbing and defeating.

We need to remember what Jesus told us in Matthew 10:34, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes will be those of his own household.” The Gospel of Jesus is the most unifying force on earth where it’s accepted.

But it's the most divisive wedge where it is rejected.

In Matthew 10 Jesus goes on to say, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds His life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." In essence, coming to Christ may involve saying good-bye to old friends and former associates.

Who do you love? Allegiances change when you come to Jesus. Family gets redefined. Friends are seen in a new light. In Luke 8:21 Jesus looked around at His followers, and said, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."

Does it hurt to have people you once trusted turn on you? Of course, it does! But Jesus told us this would happen. There's an old adage, "There'll be no crowns in heaven for those who had no scars on earth."

The hated on earth will be honored in heaven. The chided on earth will be cheered in heaven. More than anyone else Jesus felt the pain of hometown rejection.

This is why He tells us in Matthew 5:11-12 (TLB), "When you are reviled and persecuted and lied about because you are My followers - wonderful! Be happy

about it! Be very glad! For a tremendous reward awaits you up in heaven.” And the Prophet Jeremiah experienced this kind of persecution more than most!

Verse 20, “But, O Lord of hosts, You who judge righteously, testing the mind and the heart, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my cause.” Jeremiah appeals to God for his defense.

“Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life, saying, ‘Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, lest you die by our hand’ - therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; and there shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring catastrophe on the men of Anathoth, even the year of their punishment.’” God promises Jeremiah that there’ll be no survivors among his enemies. When the Babylonians invade, judgment will fall hard on Anathoth. The men of Anathoth will not be spared.

Chapter 12, “Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?”

You've got to giggle a little at Jeremiah's attempt at tact... He says, "God, I know you're righteous in all You do, but I've got questions... Some stuff you do, I don't understand. God, You don't always make sense?"

And He points immediately to the age-old question, that I'm sure you've asked, "If God is just, and fair, and good; then why do the wicked prosper and His people end up being treated unfairly? *Why the contradiction?*"

If God is in control why does He allow His followers to suffer and the wicked to get away with their crimes?

This is a reoccurring theme in the Old Testament. It's what the book of Job is about. Read Psalms 37 and 73, the psalmist asks the same question. This same subject gets brought up in the book of Habakuk.

Jeremiah continues his complaint. "You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth but far from their mind." Jeremiah is speaking of the leaders of his day.

And he's familiar with Psalm 75:7, "(God) puts down one, and exalts another." He knows promotion comes from God, so why are wicked men in power?

On the political landscape, Jeremiah had seen some dramatic changes. The godly king, Josiah, was dead. He died in battle with the Egyptians. Jeremiah and all Jerusalem had mourned together at his funeral.

His son, Jehoahaz, reigned just three months. He was deposed by the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho, and replaced by another son, Jehoiakim, a wicked king.

And the reign of Jehoiakim undermined everything his father had reformed. Idolatry returned with a vengeance. Evil ran rampant. Wicked men were placed in power. The new king hated Jeremiah. All the evil Josiah suppressed, resurfaced under Jehoiakim.

Obviously, this discouraged and confused Jeremiah.

“If God is on the throne why is He allowing one set back after another?” The people in power might pay lip service to God, but they have no real devotion to Him. God is **“near in their mouth but far from their mind.”**

Verse 3, **“But You, O Lord, know me; You have seen me, and You have tested my heart toward You.”**

Understand what’s going on with Jeremiah. For the first half of his ministry, probably 18 years, he’s had a godly friend on the throne. He’s served in a

favorable climate, under Josiah's protection. But suddenly that's all gone! His circumstances have completely changed.

Now there's a wicked king on the throne, who hates his guts. He stands in opposition to all that Jeremiah holds dear. The enemies that were always there, but suppressed by Josiah, are not allowed to raise their ugly head. The people who had plotted against him secretly have now been given government jobs!

All that Jeremiah has labored to build for 18 years has gone out the window. He now has nothing to show for his ministry but death-threats and persecution.

And now he prays, *"Lord, I trust you, but what are you doing? I don't understand."* He prays and asks God to remove the obstacles. Get rid of the wicked men who oppose him. *"Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter."*

How long will the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither? The beasts and birds are consumed, for the wickedness of those who dwell there, because they said, "He will not see our final end." His enemies have said they'll outlive Jeremiah. He'll die before they do.

And Jeremiah is crying out to God, *"Lord, they mock you! They don't care about your Laws! They refuse to take you seriously! God, how long will you spare their judgment? Why don't you pull them for the slaughter?"*

There're days when I read the news, and see what's happening in America - a country that once respected Christian values and encouraged their advancement - and I mourn over the evil that's now being promoted.

It seems like America has had the same total reversal of circumstance that Jeremiah experienced.

From Christian weddings to homosexual marriage - from biblical masculinity to feminism - from respect for life to abortion - from sobriety to legalized marijuana - from the sanctity of sex to the absence of morality...

Josiah has been replaced with Jehoiakim! And I, like Jeremiah, wonder why? Why has God allowed this?

Jeremiah felt a mixture of confusion and self-pity. The **confusion** was *why had God allowed this change of situation?* And the **self-pity**... it had been so easy for so long, why now the obstacles and hurtles?

Have you ever felt this way... You're trying to serve God and do what's right, and nothing seems to work out the way you'd hoped. You wanted to bring healing to people, but now you're the one who's being hurt!

You're frustrated, confused. This is not what you thought living for Jesus would be like. Why isn't doing the right thing easier? Why doesn't life go smoother?

How many times have you asked God to clear the runway so you can take off, but you stay grounded?

If you've ever felt this way, take notice of how God responds to Jeremiah. Verse 5, “If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan? For even your brothers, the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; yes, they have called a multitude after you. Do not believe them, even though they speak smooth words to you. “I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies.”

I'm certain this is not what Jeremiah wanted to hear, nor what we want to hear. This is tough pill to swallow!

God glosses right over Jeremiah's original question. He doesn't even address why the wicked have prospered - or when He'll judge them. What He does tell Jeremiah is that it won't be before tougher times arrive. In other words, if you think you're ministry is hard in the current climate, *you ain't seen nothing yet!*

Jeremiah needs to toughen up! Develop a *wartime* rather *peacetime* mentality. The battle is just beginning!

How can you run with the horsemen, if you can't keep up with the footmen? If you can't stay afloat in easy times - if petty problems tire you and threaten to sink your faith - then how will handle the floodwaters?

When the Jordan River was at normal levels wild animals stayed close to its banks and a steady water supply. But when the Jordan flooded, and water was more plentiful, the wild animals were able to roam into the neighborhoods. They were a danger to residents.

And God is asking Jeremiah, if you're afraid of the stray dog, how will you handle it when the lion and tiger suddenly appear prowling around in your backyard?

In other words, if you're sulking and licking your wounds *now* - if you aren't getting up and keeping on *now* - how will you make it when it really gets rough?

Rather than remove obstacles, God wants Jeremiah to learn to deal with them. Jeremiah is upset his family and friends turned on him, but soon the entire nation will be invaded by an angry army. It's time for Jeremiah to buck up - tighten his chinstrap. *Rather than easier, life is about to get harder, and he needs to be ready.*

It would be nice, if there was such a thing as hassle-free holiness and mess-less ministry, but there's not!

Serving God is a constant struggle. There's an enemy named Satan, and he has his cronies. Sometimes his allies are our own friends and family...

If you allow something as simple as an unkind word, or a squabble, or a little mockery to deflate your faith and intimidate you; then how will you handle it when the enemies of Christianity take your possessions, or throw you into jail. What if one day persecution against Christians secures some governmental muscle?

I don't care who's occupies 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the Bible predicts as we get closer to end of the age, the spiritual and moral climate will worsen.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 tells us, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power."

In other words, being a Christian isn't going to get easier, it's going to get harder. Temptation isn't going to weaken, it's going to ramp up. Resistance to the Gospel won't lessen, it'll intensify. Let's be ready!

You've heard the expression, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That's what God is telling Jeremiah. Stop being a spiritual wimp - and rise up in the power of the Holy Spirit - lay hold of our blessings in Christ - walk by faith - resist the devil - count not your life dear to yourself. Be a living sacrifice for Jesus.

Rather than remove the hassles Jeremiah is facing, God wants him to accept the fact there will always be hassles! Trials and difficulties are not going away.

If anything, it's going to get worse.

Life, as well as ministry, is getting over one set of problems, only to face another set of problems. Living the Christian life in a fallen world is a swim against the current. It's a uphill run. The one constant is not God removing the obstacles, but helping us deal with them.

In his fictional classic, *The Screwtape Letters*, CS Lewis records a conversation between Screwtape, an experienced demon, and his apprentice, Wormwood.

"Keep your subject (the Christian he's trying to tempt) thinking his trials will be over, so when there're not he'll be continually disappointed. Its okay if he learns a lesson or two through his trials, just as long as you keep him thinking that one day all his trials will be gone. Whatever you do never allow your subject to accept

his trials as a permanent part of discipleship and something he must learn to endure.” The Christian life is the greatest life possible - *to know God, to walk with God, to experience eternal pleasures, to have your life count for eternity* - but it’s not an easy life.

Lewis was a quotable fellow. In another place he wrote, “I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity.” The Christian life is strenuous and challenging. It’s fraught with persecution and pitfalls. But in my opinion, it is the only life worth living.

I can’t leave a passage like this one, without quoting my favorite poem. It’s by Amy Carmichael, “Hast thou no scar? No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand? I hear thee sung as mighty in the land, I hear then hail thy bright ascendant star: Hast thou no Scar?

Hast thou no wound? Yet, I was wounded by the archers, spent, leaned me against the tree to die, and rent, by ravening beasts that encompassed me, I swooned: Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar? Yes, as the master shall the servant be, and pierced are the feet that follow Me; but thine are whole. Can he have followed far - who has

no wound? No scar?" A Christian with no scars has been sitting on the sideline. It's time to get into the battle.

It's been said, "When we get to heaven God will look us over not for medals or degrees but for scars."

The Moravian Church once had a logo that pictured an ox with a plough on one side, and an altar on the other. Underneath the caption read, "Ready for either."

This should be every Christian's motto - service or sacrifice. God taught Jeremiah to be ready for both!

Verse 8, "My heritage is to Me like a lion in the forest; it cries out against Me; therefore I have hated it.

My heritage is to Me like a speckled vulture; the vultures all around are against her. Come, assemble all the beasts of the field, bring them to devour!"

A speckled bird was the misfit of the flock. It looked different from the rest. The other birds would turn on it.

Likewise the Babylonians will turn on the Jews as a flock turns on a speckled bird. They'll pick on God's people until they're devoured. It's God's judgment.

Jeremiah is moping and groaning over the situation he and his people face, *but how does God feel?*

Verse 10, “Many rulers have destroyed My vineyard, they have trodden My portion underfoot; they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.”

Notice, God says “*many rulers have destroyed My vineyard.*” History is full of generals and despots who took aim at Jerusalem, and persecuted the Jews...

Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh Necho, Antiochus Epiphanes, Titus Vespasian, Muhammed, the Turks.

Verse 11, “They have made it desolate; desolate, it mourns to Me; the whole land is made desolate, because no one takes it to heart.” The Jews heard God’s Word, but they never took it to heart. Thus, judgment came and the land was made desolate.

“The plunderers have come on all the desolate heights in the wilderness, for the sword of the Lord shall devour from one end of the land to the other end of the land; no flesh shall have peace.

They have sown wheat but reaped thorns; they have put themselves to pain but do not profit. But be ashamed of your harvest because of the fierce anger of the Lord.” Thus says the Lord: “Against all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit - behold, I will pluck

them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them.” Three of Judah’s regional neighbors - *Ammon, Moab, and Edom* - were also invaded by the Babylonians, and deported to Babylon.

“Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land.” The Babylonian captivity lasted for 70 years.

When Babylon was conquered by Persia in 536 BC, Cyrus the Persian’s first decree was to allow the Jews to return to their land. God brought them back! And apparently Judah’s neighbors returned too.

God says of them, “And it shall be, if they will learn carefully 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 established in the midst of My people. But if they do not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation,” says the Lord.” Ammon and Moab and Edom were the chief importers of idolatry into Judah. The evil Molech came from Moab.

But when these nations return, if they learn to trust in Yahweh, as the Jews learned to bow to their idols, God will save them and integrate them among His people.

It's an example for us Gentiles. It taught us *though the Jews were God's chosen people, they were not His only people*. God had room in His heart for all people.

Yet if they continue to follow their false gods, the true God will see to it that they are utterly destroyed.