

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JEREMIAH 1-2

When my son, Nick, was growing up he was grade A, rough and tumble, 100% little boy. *Ball in the backyard, wrestling on the rug...* he was always in on the action... *But Nick also had a soft, sensitive side.*

When he was four years old I made a comment that hurt his tender feelings. Nick lowered his little head.

He was about to cry. I asked, “*Son, what’s wrong?*” Nick whimpered, “*My tears are starting to drip.*”

And like Nick, Jeremiah also had a propensity for “*dripping tears.*” The prophet had *a man’s iron will*, but he had *a mother’s tender heart*. He stood for God, valiantly and courageously. Instructed to preach an unpopular message, he remained faithful to His calling.

Jeremiah was perhaps the greatest OT prophet, but ironically he was hated by his contemporaries. He was attacked personally. His message was rejected. He lived a sad, lonely life. At times he wanted to quit.

In Chapter 20 he turns in his resignation. Yet the reasons he gives for quitting end up being the same reasons he reenlisted. The people who frustrated him, where the same people he loved and wanted to reach.

Jeremiah is called “*The Weeping Prophet.*”

It’s interesting to compare his ministry with that of Jonah - the bigoted prophet. Jonah hated Ninevites.

Initially, he try to run from God’s calling. God fished him out of the sea, to make him a fisher of men. Yet when he preached, Nineveh repented. God saved his enemies and it upset Jonah. He wanted them judged.

Yet Jeremiah was the opposite. He loved the Jews. His heart broke for the people. *His passion was their salvation.* Yet the people rejected his message. Jeremiah wept over the sin and suffering of Judah.

The story is told of two men talking about their respective churches. One man mentioned that his church had fired its pastor and hired a new one.

His friend asked, “*Why was he fired?*” “*He spoke too much about hell.*” He asked again, “*Well, what does your new pastor speak on?*” “*He speaks on hell too.*”

The friend was puzzled, “*Well, are you going to fire this pastor too?*” The man answered, “*O no, when the old preacher spoke on hell he seemed to enjoy it, but when this new pastor speaks on hell, he weeps.*”

It was said of the great preacher, DL Moody, "Only Mr. Moody has the right to preach on hell, for when he does he preaches it with tears in his voice."

If you had a harsh message to send, what kind of spokesman would you choose to deliver it? A crusty, hard, uncaring fellow, or a compassionate, tender man with "dripping tears?" God chose the latter in Jeremiah.

With Jeremiah, *the most sensitive man* warned the people of Judah about *the most serious judgments*.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction, "The words of Jeremiah..." Contrast this with the opening words of other prophets... Joel 1:1 reads, "the word of the LORD that came to Joel..." Hosea 1:1 reads, "the word of the LORD that came to Hosea..." And Zephaniah, "the word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah..."

Those prophecies were introduced as "the word of the LORD" whereas verses 1-2 describe this book as "the words of Jeremiah... to whom the word of the LORD came..." It's a *subtle*, yet *significant* difference.

Apparently, these other prophets wrote only the words God gave them. Jeremiah also contains "the word of the Lord," but it's surrounded by his own words, and thoughts, and feelings. Obviously, God's Spirit oversaw what was written to make sure it was exactly what God intended, but Jeremiah is the most **autobiographical** of the prophets. We learn of not only *God's statements*, but of *the prophet's own struggles*.

His intro continues, “the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin...”

This Hilkiah is also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 34. He was the priest who found a copy of the Law of Moses.

At the time, Manasseh reigned in Judah. He ruled for 54 years, from 697-643 BC, and Manasseh was the most wicked of Judah’s monarchs. He encouraged idolatry. He even brought idols into the Temple itself.

During the time of Manasseh, the Law of Moses became a relic of past. It was lost. It was assumed that all the copies of the Law had been destroyed.

But one day Hilkiah was rummaging through the Temple storage, when he found a copy of the Law. He brought it to Manasseh’s grandson, King Josiah.

Josiah realized the severity of his grandfather's sin. He demolished the pagan shrines and instituted a program to teach the people obedience to God’s Law.

And Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, and a friend of Josiah, was profoundly effected by this discovery.

In 15:16 Jeremiah prays, “O LORD... Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart...” And this is the effect on every heart that discovers God’s Word. When you read it - digest it - take it to heart - it becomes your richest treasure. It brings joy and rejoicing!

Perhaps your Bible has been sitting on a shelf, collecting dust. You know its physical whereabouts, but spiritually it remains undiscovered. I challenge you to pick it up and read it with an eager, obedient heart.

You'll discover that it's God's love letter to you!

It will bring joy and rejoicing to your heart!

Verse 1 also tells us Jeremiah grew up in Anathoth, a Levitical city 2.5 miles northeast of Jerusalem. His peeps were priests and Levities - the tribe dedicated to God's service. These associations helped to mold him.

We know that Hilkiyah, the High Priest, was his father. Some believe Huldah, the prophetess, was his aunt.

The point is, Jeremiah needed a godly upbringing to prepare for the difficult assignment God will give him.

Verse 2 spots Jeremiah on the timeline, "to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign." Josiah was the boy king. He took the throne at 8 years old. Now he's 21. It could be the king and Jeremiah were a similar age. Thus, Jeremiah would be around 20 years old when God first spoke to him.

It's probable Jeremiah and Josiah close friends - like David and Jonathan. Jeremiah was one of the godly influences on King Josiah. 2 Chronicles 35:25 tells us Jeremiah was one of the mourners at Josiah's funeral.

And verse 3, **It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.**" This meant his ministry extended 41 years, from 627 BC to 586 BC. Jeremiah served God through the reigns of five kings. Here he mentions the three significant ones: **Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah.**

We'll be dealing with quite a bit of *history* over the course of Jeremiah's *prophecy*. The background reading is 2 Kings 21-25 and 2 Chronicles 33-36.

Jeremiah ended up representing God in a critical period - in the final throes of the nation of Judah. The timeframe was just before the nation's fall to Babylon.

Jeremiah saw all three Babylonian invasions - in 605, in 597, and the final destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 586 BC. When the Temple lay in ashes and the walls were rubble, and the people were being carted off into exile, Jeremiah sat in his grotto weeping over what could've been. He wrote of his remorse and the realities of judgment in the book of Lamentations.

In the rest of Chapter 1 Jeremiah remembers his initial calling into the ministry, verse 4, “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

I would imagine, Jeremiah had grown up hoping to be a priest like his father, Hilkiah, but God had other plans for him. Jeremiah was born a priest, but God called him and equipped him to be a prophet.

And understand what we mean by “**prophet.**” Often we think of a prophet as one who predicts the future; but instead of **foretelling**, it implies more **forth-telling**.

The prophet declared the word God spoke to him. At times he was predictive in nature, but more often he addressed issues at hand and called for repentance.

Here, in verse 4, God calls Jeremiah and speaks four truths about him. Before he was born, God **knew** him, **formed** him, **sanctified** him, and **ordained** him.

Before he was even conceived in his mother’s womb God had *his mind on Jeremiah*, he had *a personality in mind*, *a purpose was decided*, *a mission was ordered*.

It’s interesting that the Apostle Paul made a similar claim. In Galatians 1:15 he writes, “**But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb**

and called me through His grace...” God knew Paul and had a calling on his life, long before he was knew God.

And I believe you and I can say the same. Ephesians 1:4 speaks of all Christians, “God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.” Paul goes even further in Romans 8:30, “Whom (God) foreknew He predestined, and whom He predestined, these He also called: whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Like Jeremiah, God chose YOU from birth. Prepared for you a body and a personality. Set you aside for a special purpose, and even equipped you for a ministry.

But also *like Jeremiah*, you too may’ve shared his penchant for excuses... Verse 6, “Then said I: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.”

Don’t misunderstand, the Hebrew word translated “*youth*” doesn’t refer to a child, as much as to a young man. He could’ve been 20 years old and still a “*youth*.”

Realize, in Hebrew culture, age came with honor.

A few decades under your belt was a distinction of which you were proud. The older a man, *the wiser*.

In fact, a priest couldn't begin his life's calling until he was 30 years old... Perhaps this is why Jesus waited so long to start His ministry. If Jesus had begun in His 20s He might not have had certain people's respect.

I started my ministry at the ripe old age of 22. And I'm sure there were people who looked down on my youth. They weren't ready to trust a 22 year-old.

I'll never forget when I turned 30, a Cuban lady in our church, approach me. She was so happy, "Pastor, pastor, I'm so glad you're 30 years old, now we no longer have a young pastor." As if a *young pastor* was a burden she'd been carrying... *Perhaps it was.*

I once talked to a man who told me he'd never attend a church unless the pastor was older than him. He wasn't going to follow a man *still wet behind the ears.*

It seems a 20-something Jeremiah was intimidated by his older peers. He felt *too young* - inadequate.

But God tells Jeremiah not *to cow away* from his calling because of his youthfulness! That's no excuse.

Verse 7, "But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak."

I love how God deals with his excuses. *He just dismisses them.* He refuses to take “no” for an answer. *“You shall go...”* This is not a subject open for debate. Jeremiah will speak *“whatever God commands him.”*

And its true, history teaches us that youth is never an excuse for not embracing great and grand ventures...

Alexander Great conquered the world at age 23.

John Calvin joined the Reformation at 21 years old.

Joan of Arc completed her work at the age of 19.

Charles Spurgeon was called *“the boy preacher.”* At 19 he preached in London to crowds of 2000 people.

You don't have to wait until you're a fossil to serve Lord. At whatever age God calls - it's time to get going!

Verse 8, *“Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,” says the Lord.* Having formed him from the womb, God understand Jeremiah's sensitivity.

The prophet cared about people - their reactions to what he said - their opinions of him. He looked into their eyes and read the expressions on their faces.

But what was a strength was also a potential weakness. This made Jeremiah vulnerable to non-verbal forms of intimidation - *the wrinkled brow caused him to*

doubt... piercing stares scared him... scrunched eyebrows and frowning lips discouraged the prophet.

A person who speaks for God to people knows how faces can be intimidating. Twice a week I pour my heart out from this podium, and all I have to gauge my success is what I see on your faces, your expressions.

And these looks you return to me, effect me far more than you think... **Smile** and it stirs my heart... **Shake your head in agreement** and it enthuses me... **Laugh** at one of my corny jokes and I appreciate the pity...

But also know the effect negative expressions have... How do you feel in the midst of a conversation with a person who frowns, or rolls their eyes, or looks down their nose. Facial expressions have an impact.

This is why God tells Jeremiah to look beyond their faces! God's spokesman should be immune to facial expressions. God wants Jeremiah to learn to look past people's faces and straight into their hearts.

I'll never forgot one Sunday, a lady in the back of the sanctuary gave me a blank stare the whole service.

I thought for sure she was bored or uninterested.

Talk about a poker face! I was shocked when her sister called me the next day to tell me she'd given her life to Jesus that afternoon. *Who would've thunk it! Like Jeremiah, I'm learning, "do not be afraid of their faces."*

"Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth." Every man of God, every work for God always gets launched with a touch from God.

Jeremiah will be His spokesman, so God touches his mouth! He makes it His own. Jeremiah's lips and vocal cords will now be God's instrument. Here God tunes Jeremiah's mouth to *His will, His ways, His words.*

And notice, God says specifically, *"I have put My words in your mouth."* What Jeremiah wrote are not just God's ideas, or thoughts, but His very *"words."*

This is what we mean when we call the Bible *"verbally inspired."* God oversaw the compilation of the Bible so that every word written was what He desired.

In verse 10 God continues the calling of Jeremiah, *"See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."* Notice, the important post Jeremiah is given. He's over nations.

Jeremiah will pronounce the destinies of kingdoms and kings. He'll oversee the rise and fall of nations.

This makes the office of prophet higher in rank than that of *presidents* and *premieres* and *parliaments*.

And the content of Jeremiah's prophecies will be largely negative - *uprooting, pulling down, destroying*. This is what was so hard on him. His was a tough message. And God gives him two visions that help him understand what will be the emphasis of his ministry...

Verse 11, "Moreover 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." Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word." Almond trees in Israel bud in mid-January. This makes them an early producer. The blossoming of an almond tree was an indicator that spring had sprung.

Thus the almond tree was seen as a harbinger - it became a symbol of a precursor of things to come!

And this was the gist of Jeremiah's ministry. He was God's last warning to the nation of coming judgment.

"And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north."

Then the Lord said to me: "Out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land."

We know Jeremiah oversaw Babylon's invasion of Judah, but look at a map and Babel is due east. So *why does God picture this boiling calamity coming from the north?* Well, between Israel and Babylon is a vast expanse of barren desert. So any trip from east to west was always made by circling around the desert and coming into Israel down from Lebanon - from the north.

Thus, *the boiling pot of Babylonian brutality* was sitting on the top of the nation. Now that pot is about to tip over and scald the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

“For behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,” says the Lord; *“They shall come and each one set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah.”* The city of Jerusalem will be surrounded by enemy troops.

“I will utter My judgments against them concerning all their wickedness, because they have forsaken Me, burned incense to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.” God will judge His people because of their idolatry. They put other gods before Him. God takes it personally, when we prioritize other things over Him - *whether gods, or goals, or gismos.*

Verse 17 moves from the nation back to Jeremiah, *“Therefore prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them. For behold, I have made you this day*

a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you," says the Lord, "to deliver you."

What an amazing promise to a young man! God will make Jeremiah strong! Like city walls of stone and re-bar and bronze. These walls were strong and slick.

An invader couldn't go through fortified walls - they were too strong. Nor go over bronze walls - he would slide down. Fortified, bronze walls were invincible.

God's promise was comforting to Jeremiah, but I would imagine it was also just a little disconcerting.

*Why will he need so much protection? Opposed by kings, princes, priests, even the people of the land? **That's everybody!** "Everyone will fight against me?"*

Jeremiah will be called on to hold torch alone! No one else will stand with him. He'll need to stand alone.

You've heard, "**Laugh, and the world laughs with you. Weep, and you weep alone.**" That could've been said of Jeremiah's ministry. No one likes to be told of their sin and God's judgment. They'd rather laugh if off. Stick their head in the sand and pretend that nothing is wrong. Jeremiah was God's warning, His challenge to the people, and he will be opposed at every angle.

Chapter 2, “Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: “I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.” Here, as well as throughout the Bible, God compares His relationship with His people to marriage.

This is why the definition of marriage is so vital. God has given to marriage certain spiritual connotations.

Here, God thinks of His “newlywed years.” When He first brought the Jews out of Egypt, their love for him was new and fresh. Like newlyweds they were on their best behavior, trying to make a good first impression.

Have you ever watched newlyweds? They write notes, and each other’s name on the shower door...They do strange things to get each other’s attention.

They celebrate their first picnic together, or phone conversation - really important dates on the calendar.

They’re preoccupied with each other.

A newlywed’s love is passionate, but over time *the new* wears off. The devotion grows tired, and old, and boring... And this is what happened to God’s people.

At first the Jews neglected God. Then they substituted other gods for Him. Finally, they forgot God altogether. And this is how it works in a Christian’s life..

At first, God has your whole heart; then you let other stuff crowd Him out. Before long, you have no time for Him whatsoever - He's become a thing of the past.

In Chapter 2, God says to Judah, though you forgot me, I have not forgotten or forsaken you! *And He says the same to us!* He loves us and wants us to return.

Verse 3, "Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them," says the Lord."

Notice the key word, "*was.*" "*Israel was holiness*" - or set apart to and for the Lord - but what happened?

"Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: "What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters?" Like the initial cry of a spurned lover, God cries out, "*What have I done? What do I lack, that you've turned your back and heart from Me?*"

Notice this isn't the cry of a cold, aloof, impersonal God. These are a lover's tears. God is emotional! He cares deeply for His people. No wonder He wanted a sensitive man like Jeremiah to deliver this message.

Verse 6 continues, "Neither did they say, 'Where is the Lord, Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, through a land of

deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed and where no one dwelt?” During their wilderness wanderings, no one wondered, “*where is God?*” His presence was obvious - the fire by day, the cloud by night, the manna morning. *God had been faithful!*

God says, “I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.” God had been there for His people, it was their faithfulness that wavered. In the desert their dependance on God was evident, but after settling down in a prosperous land, they forgot how much they needed Him. Their need was no longer as apparent.

“The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ The priests didn’t realize they’d strayed from the Lord. They had drifted far from Him, yet they didn’t even know it.

“And those who handle the law did not know Me...” This is amazing, realize, you can “*handle God’s law*” - in essence, be a Bible scholar - a seminary professor - and not know God... still be dead and lost in your sins.

A person can know a lot about God, but that’s not the same as knowing Him personally. Not by a long shot!

He continues, “The rulers also transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.” Notice the play on words, false *prophets* who walk after stuff that does not *profit*.

Verse 9, “Therefore I will yet bring charges against you,” says the Lord, “And against your children’s children I will bring charges. For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, send to Kedar and consider diligently, and see if there has been such a thing.”

Cyprus was an island west of Israel. Kedar was on the eastern edge of Arabia. “*From Cyprus to Kedar*” was like saying from “California to Maine, from coast to coast.” *God is saying search from west to east...*

“Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their glory for what does not profit.” Not even pagan nations have changed their gods, *and their gods are inanimate chunks of stone.*

Why have the people of the one, true God rejected Him and His glory for worthless and impotent idols?

“Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate,” says the Lord. “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water.” First, realize “*cistern*” is not the female version of “brethren.”

For the record, he’s not speaking of female believers with small bladders... “*cisterns that can hold no water.*”

Go to Israel and visit the ancient Tels, and you'll see thousands of cisterns. A cistern was a man-dug hole in the rock, designed to collect and store rain water.

A fountain flowed from within - from an underground spring. But a cistern collected water from the outside.

Obviously, a fountain was more dependable. It was its own source. Whereas, a cistern needed it to rain.

At Masada and Megiddo you can see some cistern systems that were elaborate feats of engineering.

And yet here Jeremiah accuses Israel of two sins...

First, of forsaking their Lord, *“the fountain of living waters”* - and second, pursuing man-hewn cisterns. Which were cracked and leaky sources of pleasure.

And this is what people today have done. Jesus promised the woman at the well *“living water”* - spiritual satisfaction. He pledges to quench our deepest thirsts.

Yet we forsake Jesus, for man-made sources of pleasure... *sex, booze, drugs, video games, sports, whatever it might be*. The world provides a high, but it's a cracked cistern - the buzz subsides - the source dries up. The things of this world are cracked, leaky cisterns that ultimately fail to satisfy. When we drink from the fountain of living waters - then we'll never thirst again.

Verse 14, “Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he plundered?” There were Jews in the days of Jeremiah that were looking to Egypt for help.

They saw the rise of Babylon to the east, and they thought the answer was to ally themselves with Egypt.

But here Jeremiah asks are you “*homeborn slaves?*”

A slave born into slavery had no where else to go. His master’s house was his home. Does Israel have no one else to follow? And of course the answer was God!

Yet, “The young lions roared at him, and growled; they made his land waste; his cities are burned, without inhabitant. Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head.” Noph was another name for the Egyptian city of Memphis.

Men of Noph and Tahpanhes are Egyptians, who’ll break your skull and steal your glory if you trust them!

Verse 17, “Have you not brought this on yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord your God when He led you in the way? And now why take the road to Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River?” Why look south or east, to Egypt or to Assyria - why not look *up!*

At the time, two strong armies ruled the world. Egypt to the south of Jerusalem, and Babylon in the land of Assyria, on the Euphrates River, east of Jerusalem.

The Jews were divided over which nation to get behind and pledge their support. Jerusalem had a two party system. You were either *pro-Babylonian* or *pro-Egyptian*. But God had a different plan for His people.

He wanted them to trust not in Egypt or Babylon, but to put their trust and allegiance in Him and Him alone.

In fact, here is the theme that emerges in the book of Jeremiah... **“Political alliances are worthless. Only a loyalty to God can guarantee a nation’s security.”**

I wish America had ears to hear that truth!

We once had a rich, spiritual, *even Christian* heritage, but it’s gone now. We’re the secular society. We’ve forgotten God - taken credit for His blessings.

In our world today, if you stand for God, chances are you’ll have to do it alone. Following Jesus leads a person down paths of loneliness, and through times of discouragement. And this is why Jeremiah will be such a help to us. He’s been where we’re headed. We can draw tremendous help and support from Jeremiah.

Verse 19, **“Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the Lord your God, and the fear of Me is not in you,”** says the Lord

God of hosts.” Here’s a scary thought, **“your backsliding will rebuke you.”** It’s been said, **“You don’t feel life’s splinters until you backslide.”**

Shimmying up a pole is painless. But start sliding downward and you’ll feel the splinters. Life gets hard.

The same is true when we slide away from God.

“For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, ‘I will not transgress...’ God delivered His people from Egypt. He broke the pharaoh’s yoke, and Israel promised to follow God.

But look at her now, **“On every high hill and under every green tree you lay down, playing the harlot.”**

When Israel entered Canaan they discovered the Canaanites had multiple gods. They bowed on **“high hills”** hoping to get closer to them. They worshipped around groves of **“trees.”** Sometimes the trees were shaved into phallic symbols honoring the various fertility gods. Lustful acts were part of their worship.

And sadly, 800 years later, in the time of Jeremiah not much had changed. The high hills and green trees were still in operation. Despite all that God had done to deliver the Jews idols were still worshipped in Israel.

Verse 21, “Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?” God planted Israel with high hopes. She’d been kept pure.

But now she’s nothing but a weed - spiritual poa.

I was astonished to see at the hallowed grounds of Augusta National splotches of poa in the turf. Right there in the carpeted rye grass were patches of weeds.

This was how God saw His people. He wanted them to be hallowed turf, yet they were turning into weeds.

“For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me,” says the Lord God.” King Josiah had instituted reforms.

A superficial, cosmetic cleansing had taken place. But *religious reform* isn’t the same as *spiritual revival*. We need a transformed heart, not just altered conduct.

“How can you say, ‘I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Baals’? See your way in the valley; know what you have done: you are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways, a wild donkey used to the wilderness, that sniffs at the wind in her desire; in her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they will find her.” Israel is compared to a female donkey in heat. Her only interest is sexual - not moral or spiritual.

Sadly, God's people were quick to jump into bed with anyone who told them what they wanted to hear.

She wasn't thinking of her loyalty to God, and the vows she'd taken - all she was interested in was taking care of her immediate need for security and pleasure.

And the question becomes, *what about us?* Do we latch on to whatever provides the quickest and easiest answer to our problem, or do we hold out for God to work? Do we trust in His intervention and His supply?

Don't just jump into bed with the first solution to your problem. More important is your faithfulness to God.

Verse 25, "Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, 'There is no hope. No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go.' "As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets.."

"As the thief is ashamed..." It's not that he's sorry he sinned, and defrauded another person, and took what didn't belong to him. *He's embarrassed he got caught.*

This was Israel. They weren't sorry they'd broken God's law or heart. They were just sorry to be facing His judgment. **They were remorseful, but not repentant.**

Israel should've been far more ashamed than they were. Imagine, **"Saying to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave birth to me.'** They were ascribing life to inanimate objects like trees and stones.

Yet modern people do the same... We go to the zoo and say to the monkeys, **"You are my father."** Humans are the most complex and organized beings on Earth, yet we claim randomness and chance gave birth to us.

God concludes, **"For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they will say, 'Arise and save us.'"** Israel will return to God, but only when she needs Him. *How hypocritical.*

"But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble; for according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah." Judah had scores of small towns. Likewise, her idols were numerous.

"Why will you plead with Me? You all have transgressed against Me," says the Lord. **"In vain I have chastened your children; they received no correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion. "O generation, see the word of the Lord! Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of darkness? Why**

do My people say, ‘We are lords; we will come no more to You’? Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me **days without number.**” What bride forgets her wedding dress. She’s been preoccupied with it for months. Likewise, *how could Israel forget God?*

“**Why do you beautify your way to seek love? Therefore you have also taught the wicked women your ways.**” Israel is like a woman getting all dolled up.

She’s looking for a sugar daddy. Not a guy she can love and marry - all she wants are her needs met.

“**Also on your skirts is found the blood of the lives of the poor innocents.**” While seducing man after man after man - while looking to meet her own needs - babies get in the way. Pregnancies get aborted.

There’s now blood on her skirts. And God certainly sees the innocent blood on the skirts of America...

Sadly, the number is now 50 million and counting. Roughly, 24% of all US pregnancies end in abortion.

Verse 34, “**I have not found it by secret search, but plainly on all these things.**” In other words, I didn’t need a search warrant. Your sin was evident, blatant.

“Yet you say, ‘Because I am innocent, surely His anger shall turn from me.’ Behold, I will plead My case against you, because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’

How gullible. They were caught red-handed, yet they denied their guilt - and expected God to believe them.

“Why do you gad about so much to change your way?” “*Gadding about*” means “*vacillating*.” They were guilty of indecision. They refused to take a stand.

“Also you shall be ashamed of Egypt as you were ashamed of Assyria. Indeed you will go forth from him with your hands on your head; for the Lord has rejected your trusted allies, and you will not prosper by them.” They had gone back and forth in their loyalty to Egypt and Babylon, but neither ally will prosper them.

And there are believers who “*gad about*” in their commitment to God. One day their “*all in*” - next day they’re “*not so sure*.” **Stop gadding about!** God will bring to nothing anything you trust in, apart from Him!