

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JEREMIAH 3-5

Have you ever attended the bed-side vigil of a dying loved one? A person placed on life support... a heart that's old, and weak, and about to give out... lungs that can no longer breathe... an accident victim in a coma...

The doctor has sighed, *there's nothing left that he can do*. The family has gathered to wait for the inevitable.

Hushed whispers fill the room... Someone dabs their tears... One by one family members take their turns at the bed of the victim... There's a heaviness in the air.

This is a scene that describes the 41 year ministry of Jeremiah. He conducted a bed-side vigil for a dying loved one. *But the dying person was the nation Judah.*

Yet this was the role Jeremiah played in the waning days of Jerusalem's demise. At first, he encouraged the Jews to repent - get help - turn back to God. When it became apparent they wouldn't, *rather than wipe the dust off his feet and move on*, God required him to stay and pronounce judgment over the nation of Judah.

Jeremiah is often called "[The Eleventh Hour Prophet](#)," since he ministered to the people he cared about, in their final throes of death - *on their death bed*, so to speak.

This made his job gut-wrenching and tear-provoking.

We begin tonight in Chapter 3, “They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man’s, may he return to her again?’ Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me,” says the Lord.” Here’s an interesting and provocative verse.

Jesus said, “Because of the hardness of your hearts, (Moses) permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” The law was a concession to man’s sin, and a means of trying to promote marriage.

Prior to the Law to divorce your wife all a man had to do was send her on her way, but the Mosaic Law enacted a formal procedure - it even required a waiting period. It forced a person to reconsider a rash decision.

In fact, Deuteronomy 24:4 added another deterrent to divorce. If you divorced a spouse - regardless of the twists and turns life might later take - you were never allowed to remarry the person you had divorced.

Yet Jeremiah points out this was not the way God had treated His own wife over the years. He had made an exception for His people, Judah. Though she played the harlot and committed spiritual adultery by pursuing other gods... Though Yahweh divorced her, if she was sorry and repentant, in His mercy He would take her back.

He had done so in the past, and He’d do so again.

Under God's own Law there would've been no hope, but God treated His people with grace. **Law says it's over. Grace says let's start over.** Under the Law the people cut ties, but God was willing to forgive and mend.

Verse 2, **"Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness."** God compares his people to a hooker working a street corner. She'll sell herself to anybody...

Of course, here and in other places in the Bible, God compares *sexual sin* with *spiritual infidelity*. A prostitute traded her sexuality for money. In God's plan sex was never to be divorced from marital love and commitment. And in the same way, God wanted His people to stay faithful to Him in love and commitment - not give themselves to anyone who could provide a cheap thrill.

Even today, God expects us to be faithful to our husband, Jesus Christ... Yet how often do we jump in bed with what displeases Him, just because it offers us a moment of pleasure, or a reduction in our stress level, or a break from our pain, or loneliness? *Is it not adultery?*

"Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain." Drought was the result of Judah's unfaithfulness. God had withheld the rain.

“You have had a harlot’s forehead; you refuse to be ashamed.” In the ancient world prostitutes identified themselves with a mark on their forehead. It was a method of advertisement. It meant, “open for business.”

Jeremiah is saying God’s people are wearing a harlot’s tattoo. They’ve renounced their husband to work the street and seek for themselves immediate profits.

“Will you not from this time cry to Me, ‘My Father, You are the guide of my youth? Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?’ Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able.” In other words, will the people not remember God, and repent.

At one time, God was their Father. He guided them. But now they’ve rejected God and done evil things.

“The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: “Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done?

She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot.” We talked last week how Canaanite idolatry was practiced on **high hills** and under **green trees**... The idea of a high hill was simple enough. A hilltop got you closer to the gods.

And green trees were trimmed into phallic symbols. Most pagan idols were fertility gods. You prayed to them for harvest. Sexual rituals were conducted in their shade.

The Northern Kingdom, Israel, had fallen into this full scale idolatry. God sent prophets to her and called for her to repent, but she didn't. In 722 BC Israel fell to the Assyrians. God judged the wicked nation for her idolatry.

And *Israel in the north* should've been an example to *Judah in the south*. God says in verse 7, “And I said, after she had done all these things, ‘Return to Me.’ But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it.” The northern and southern Hebrew kingdoms were sisters. They should've learned from each other, but *no*.

“Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.” Despite the clear example of her sister - and a galaxy of prophets who warned her - Judah committed the same sin as Israel to the north.

Verse 9, “So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees.” Notice the phrase, “*her casual harlotry*.” Evidently, Judah thought her unfaithfulness to God was no big deal. She assumed she had an “open marriage.” She thought she could still be married to Him despite her multiple affairs and late night rendezvous.

She assumed God thought in *shades of gray*. But not so! He thinks in *black and white*. He cared about her betrayals. There was nothing casual about them to God. He expected His people to be fully committed to Him.

Don't think God laughs it off when you go on a *sin binge*, or sow your wild oats one weekend - *as if God doesn't mind if His wife takes a weekend off from her marital vows to go on a sexual excursion*. There is no such thing as "casual harlotry" - not for a husband who truly loves his spouse. God calls a backslider's trysts with this world "serious infidelity" not "*casual harlotry*."

Verse 10, "*And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,*" says the Lord." Read [2 Chronicles 34-35](#). In the days of Josiah a spiritual reformation took place.

The Law was found and read, and in response idols were removed, the Temple restored, and the Passover reestablished. But evidently these good works represented *outward reform* rather than *an inner revival*.

People were quick to jump on Josiah's bandwagon, not because they loved God, but because they thought the king was cool. It was just the "in thing." It was a "*pretense*" - a show. It wasn't a heart-felt devotion.

And remember this is important to God. He wants all our love, service, and devotion to come from our heart.

“Then the Lord said to me, “Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.”

Here was God’s conclusion. The nation he’d already judged was more righteous than the one he was pleading with to repent. *At least, Israel had been honest.*

They didn’t play the hypocrite, and pretend to love God when it was obvious they didn’t. Judah though went whoring while wearing her wedding ring. She sinned and pretended that God didn’t care. It was an insult to God.

Verse 12, “Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: ‘Return, backsliding Israel,’ says the Lord; ‘I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,’ says the Lord; ‘I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,’ says the Lord.

“Return, O backsliding children,” says the Lord; “for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” Here’s proof of a how loving and gracious is the God we serve.

Despite all the northern kingdom of Israel had done, and the ways she’d sinned, the Lord invites her home...

These next few verses speak of a day yet future when Israel will be reconciled to her Husband. When Jesus returns and establishes His Kingdom, the Hebrews will no longer be two kingdoms, but one - and come to Zion.

Verse 15, “**And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.**” Here’s a crucial verse all pastors should read. In fact, the word “**pastor**” means “**shepherd.**” And here we’re told how to be a pastor after God’s own heart.

A pastor who pleases God and rightly represents Him will feed His folks “**with knowledge and understanding.**”

Remember Jesus and Peter, after the resurrection, on the shores of the Galilee. Three times Jesus told him, “**If you love Me, feed My sheep.**” This should be a pastor’s top priority. A pastor wears a lot of hats, but His most important task is to feed *God’s people with God’s Word.*

Over the years, I’ve declined invitations to dinner from folks in the church - *and I’ve trusted you to understand.*

I’ve been home working on my sermons for Sunday.

I’ve just concluded, if we don’t go to dinner you’ll still eat. But if I don’t fix up a good meal from God’s Word and feed you well, I’ve missed my calling, and starved the flock of God... *of which I don’t want to be guilty.*

Verse 16, “Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days,” says the Lord, “that they will say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’ It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore.” Jerusalem was the heart of the nation Judah... The Temple was the heart of Jerusalem... But the Ark of the Covenant was the heart of the Temple.

It was God’s centerpiece. God’s presence and glory rested over the 2’ by 4’ gold-plated box known as the Ark. It was a replica model of God’s throne in heaven.

And because of the Ark’s importance, over the centuries this passage has been a puzzle to Jewish scholars. They can’t imagine a day when the Ark will be insignificant. When no one will visit it or even think of it.

Even today, serious speculation revolves around the Ark and its whereabouts. Folks hope for its rediscovery.

Some people believe the sudden appearance of the Ark will be the final impetus to rebuild the Temple.

Over the years, two distinguished Jerusalem rabbis, Yehuda Getz and Shlomo Goren, have gone on record claiming to have seen the Ark in the caverns under the Temple Mount. They believe it’s being kept until the time is right... *But theories about as to the Ark’s location...*

In the Apocryphal book, 2 Maccabees 2:1-8, there is a legend that prior to the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple's destruction, Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant in a cave on Mount Nebo, near the Dead Sea.

Jeremiah was protecting the Ark from enemy hands.

When his servants went to mark the spot, Jeremiah told them, *"No, the Lord will return it at the appropriate time."* It's because of this story, scores of discoverers have combed Mount Nebo in search of the missing Ark.

Other people have searched for the Ark in the caves of Qumran, where the Dead Sea scrolls were found. Still others believe the Ark is in a church in Ethiopia. If you're an Indiana Jones fan you might think the Ark is stuffed away on a shelf somewhere in the Smithsonian Institute.

But Jeremiah says that one day the Ark will become a forgotten thing, an insignificant relic, a trivial object...

Today, if the Ark appeared it would be revered - maybe even worshipped. *Which is why God may be keeping it hidden...* But what could reside in a future Temple that would be so glorious that it would overshadow and dwarf even the sacred Ark?

The answer is Jesus!

When Jesus returns He'll reign from Jerusalem. The symbol of God's presence - *the Ark* - will be replaced with God's actual presence - *His Son, Jesus Christ*.

Verse 17, “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.”

Zechariah 14:16 tells us that during the Kingdom Age, *Jesus’ thousand year reign on the Earth*, people will come to Jerusalem annually to worship the Messiah.

Everyone will make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

“In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers.” The once divided kingdom will be united. North and south will be one again.

“But I said: ‘How can I put you among the children and give you a pleasant land, a beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?’ God’s people are wondering how He can fix their problems! Possession of the land has been THE thorn in the Middle East for the last century.

Yet here God promises to put them in the pleasant land - and not only that, but make them the world’s prominent people, “*the host of nations.*” *And the solution is simple. What their own efforts had failed to do, God will do if...* “And I said: ‘You shall call Me, “My Father,” and not turn away from Me.’” If all Israel would do is return to their Father God, He would handle their issues.

“Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,” says the Lord. A voice was heard on the desolate heights, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; they have forgotten the Lord their God. “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.”

The word “*backsliding*” occurs sixteen times in the Bible - thirteen of those times in the book of Jeremiah. (*The other three times are in Hosea.*) And seven of the thirteen usages in Jeremiah appear here in Chapter 3.

Jeremiah wants God’s people to stop backsliding and race toward Him. Like a little child run into God’s arms.

Verse 22, “Indeed we do come to You, for You are the Lord our God. Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.” Israel vainly turned to the hills and hoped for help from other gods.

Here’s the big lesson God was trying to teach her, “A nation’s security is found in its faithfulness to God.”

Let’s hope our nation can re-embrace that truth!

Verse 24, “For shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth - their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us.” Sin is the great spoiler. It’s the robber of what could’ve been... if we’d only obeyed.

“For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.”

Chapter 4, “If you will return, O Israel,” says the Lord, “Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved.” Here’s the cure - put away your abominations - things that are an affront to God - and “*return*” to Him.

“And you shall swear, ‘The Lord lives,’ in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory.”

Verse 3 is an important verse, “For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.”

Throughout the Bible, “**seed**” is analogous to the Scriptures. The word of God, like a seed, contains life. And when planted in the heart of man it produces fruit.

But the seed is only as good as the soil in which it’s planted. God’s seed is potent, but your attitude (the soil of your heart) will either hinder or help it’s impact.

If the ground of your heart has been tilled. If you've been honest with yourself and have recognized your sin.

If you've humble your heart, and desire change in your life... then the seed will take root, and definitely grow.

But if the ground remains crusted over with self-denial, and pride, and complacency, and self-sufficiency... it's like throwing seed on the sidewalk expecting it to grow.

You're foolish. Even the best seed will never take root.

Verse 4, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."

Circumcision, the cutting away of the male foreskin, was symbolic of the cutting away of sin - a spiritual surgery performed by the Holy Spirit

Paul writes of this too in Romans 2:29 "Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter..." This is the sense in Jeremiah. God tells the people of Judah to pray for the Holy Spirit to do a surgery on their hearts.

They need to cut away the old, selfish, sinful desires.

Verse 5, “Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: “Blow the trumpet in the land; cry, ‘Gather together,’ and say, ‘Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities.’ Set up the standard toward Zion.

Take refuge! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, and great destruction.” Here Jeremiah begins to warn of an imminent invasion. In ancient times when an army attacked the people in the surrounding suburbs would move into the city, within the shelter of its walls.

Here the call is going out to do just that!

Jeremiah has become “a Jewish Paul Revere.” He’s racing through the streets warning the Jews, “The Babylonians are coming, the Babylonians are coming.”

“The lion has come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place to make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, without inhabitant.” In Daniel 7, around the same time, but 900 miles away, Daniel saw a vision of an invading nation. Babel was symbolized as a “*lion*.”

“For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail. For the fierce anger of the Lord has not turned back from us.” Jeremiah rightly saw the Babylonians as God’s instrument of judgment... “And it shall come to pass in that day,” says the Lord, “that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder.”

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ‘You shall have peace,’ whereas the sword reaches to the heart.”

Realize the Bible is the right record of what was said, *but sometimes what people say in the Bible is actually wrong*. And here’s an example... Jeremiah says God deceived the people. He promised them peace when war was on the horizon, but that’s not what God did.

False prophets had come spreading those lies. And God let the false prophets tell His people what they wanted to hear. They loved the lies, so God gave them the false prophets, but God Himself had told the truth!

Verse 11, “At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, “a dry wind of the desolate heights blows in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people - not to fan or to cleanse - a wind too strong for these will come for Me; now I will also speak judgment against them.” God is predicting a desert storm - an army is coming - not to cool or cleanse - but to destroy.

“Behold, he shall come up like clouds, and his chariots like a whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered!” The “*he*” in this verse is the Babylonian general. The future King Nebuchadnezzar.

“O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim: “make mention to the nations, yes, proclaim against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country and raise their voice against the cities of Judah. Like keepers of a field they are against her all around, because she has been rebellious against Me,” says the Lord.” Judah’s sin has found her out. Her sin is the cause for God’s judgments.

“Your ways and your doings have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reaches to your heart.” Because God’s people had broken His heart, now He will break theirs.

God loves us too much to allow us to prosper in our sin and continue in disobedience. Thus we’re told in Hebrews 12:6, “Whom the Lord loves, He chastens.”

Verse 19, “O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.” Jeremiah hears the battle sounds. The sobs, the bugles. He feels it in the air.

It grieves him that war is about to come to His people.

“Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered. Suddenly my tents are plundered, and my curtains in a moment. How long will I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?”

“For My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding.

They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.” In other words, they’ve taught themselves to do evil. They’re skilled in evil, but a stranger to good.

“I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; and the heavens, they had no light.” This is a flashback to the opening act of creation. Genesis 1:2, “The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep.” God is going to return the land of Judah to the same shapeless, sunless morass that He had in the beginning when He created the Earth.

This idiom is so pungent, so strong, some Bible commentaries consider these verses the most forceful and ominous in all of prophetic literature. Read properly, they make the hair stand up on the back of your neck.

There’s no doubt, the scope of this prophecy goes beyond the local judgment of Jeremiah’s day, and foreshadows what will occur at the end of the age.

Verse 24, “I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of

the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the Lord, by His fierce anger.”

Here is the creation in reverse. When God created the Earth in Genesis, He started with a world that had no form and void, and darkness was on the deep.

But then God added light, and dry ground, and plants, and birds, and beasts, and finally man. But here when God gets through with His judgments, “*there was no man*” - the birds had fled - the fruitful land was no more.

Everything is broken down. It’s a reverse creation!

“For thus says the Lord: “The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end.” At the end of the age much of the planet will be destroyed - *collateral damage in God’s judgments*. But the Earth’s judgment won’t be complete. God will begin a massive restoration.

Yet here Jeremiah says God will bring the Earth to the brink of its annihilation. “For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black, because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, nor will I turn back from it.” Again, it’s obvious the scope of Jeremiah’s prophecy has gone beyond the Babylonian invasion to events that will occur at the end of the age.

This is often what happens with Bible prophecy. The prophet starts with a local, immediate judgment, but his vision spills over and looks future to the end of time, when cataclysmic events will rock the whole Earth.

Verse 29, “The whole city shall flee from the noise of the horsemen and bowmen. They shall go into thickets and climb up on the rocks. Every city shall be forsaken, and not a man shall dwell in it. “And when you are plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life.” Babylon will invade Judah, because Judah had been worshipping Babylonian gods.

The Jews committed spiritual adultery with the idols of the east. And now Jeremiah is saying, “When the army comes upon you, it doesn’t matter how dressed up or flirtatious you look, you’ll be crushed by their judgment.”

Their adulteress lovers will turn on them!

“For I have heard a voice as of a woman in labor, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion bewailing herself; she spreads her hands, saying, ‘woe is me now, for my soul is weary because of murderers!’ Judah will weep loudly.

Like a mother in labor pains, this is the same idiom used throughout the Bible when it comes to the end times, and the Great Tribulation, and the second coming.

When judgment comes it’ll be sharp and sudden!

Chapter 5, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her.” This reminds us of Genesis 18 and Abraham’s conversation with God over the destiny of Sodom. Abe asked if he could find 50 righteous men, would God spare the city? God said that He would.

But that’s when Abraham’s chutzpah kicked in. He haggled with God. “Lord, what about 45 righteous men, or 40, or 30, or 20, or just 10?” Abraham stopped at ten.

Yet I’ve always wondered what if Abraham had tried to go lower... God is merciful... maybe all the way to one?

Here God says He’ll spare Jerusalem if Jeremiah can find just one righteous man. Realize, God doesn’t want to destroy His people. He gets no pleasure from judging His people. He would far prefer to bless and nourish.

And this verse reveals an interesting detail about Pastor Jeremiah’s 41 years of ministry. He didn’t have a single disciple to point to who was a success story!

Jeremiah is an extreme example of why a pastor should beware of a common trap. You can’t measure successful ministry by counting the buns in the seats!

Jeremiah was faithful to God’s calling - he was one of the most godly men in the Bible - yet he didn’t have a single convert he could point to as a diligent disciple. It can happen. Faithfulness doesn’t always attract a crowd.

Verse 2, “Though they say, ‘As the Lord lives,’ surely they swear falsely.” O Lord, are not Your eyes on the truth? You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return.”

Jeremiah had been sent to a stubborn bunch. You could see their obstinance etched in their faces.

This is why in Chapter 1 God told him not to be afraid of their faces - or intimidated by their body language.

“Therefore I said, “Surely these are poor. They are foolish; for they do not know the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God. I will go to the great men and speak to them, for they have known the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God.” When Jeremiah was rejected by the common people he went to the educated - men who knew the ways of the Lord - the theologians, the seminarians, the Bible College graduates.

“But these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds.” He found that the more educated men were they more rebellious they had become. When you bring spiritual truth into an academic setting it becomes susceptible to intellectualism, smugness, arrogance.

Pride comes in many forms, but none is more blinding and ultimately damning than spiritual pride and egotism.

“Therefore a lion from the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the deserts shall destroy them; a leopard will watch over their cities. Everyone who goes out from there shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many; their backslidings have increased.” When you back slide from God you expose yourself to dangers...

“How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods.

When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.” This is sad, but God is saying of His people, they were most rebellious when they were best fed. It wasn't in the heat of the trial, but it was when they were bustling with blessing that they committed adultery.

It's in the good times we take God's grace for granted.

Verse 8, “They were like well-fed lusty stallions; every one neighed after his neighbor's wife.” Here's a graphic description of Judah's immorality. Like a horse in heat - a lusty stallion - they tried to seduce their neighbor's wife.

All that concerned them were their base desires.

Morality, purity, holiness weren't a priority. They were ready to jump into bed with the next willing partner. This sounds like our world today. *If it feels good, just do it.*

“Shall I not punish them for these things?” says the Lord. “And shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this? “Go up on her walls and destroy, but do not make a complete end. Take away her branches, for they are not the Lord’s.” Jerusalem was called “the holy city.” But not at this time. Rather than *holy* it was a rebellious city.

“For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously with Me,” says the Lord.

They have lied about the Lord, and said, “It is not He. Neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine. And the prophets become wind, for the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them.” There were false prophets who had denied Jeremiah’s warnings.

They said, “Ah, that’s not the Lord. God promises us peace and safety, not coming judgment.” But here God says they’re full of hot air - they’re like the “*wind.*”

Verse 14, “Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: “Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.” Talk about choking on your words.

God is saying you’ll be burned by what you’ve said!

“Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,” says the Lord. “It is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say.” Recall, Babel was the first nation founded - by the notorious Nimrod. At the time God wanted man to spread out, not gather together. Nimrod founded Babel in disobedience.

“Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty men.” Here God is speaking of the Babylonian army.

Their arrows never miss. Whenever they’re shot they end up filling up the tombs. They’re all crack shots!

“And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; they shall destroy your fortified cities, in which you trust, with the sword.” Babylon’s victory will be extensive. They’ll take the blessings God intended for His people as booty back to Babylon.

“Nevertheless in those days,” says the Lord, “I will not make a complete end of you.” God keeps telling us, though His judgment will be severe, it won’t be complete.

God isn’t through with Israel. He had made promises to the Hebrews that are eternal, and He will fulfill them.

Verse 19, “And it will be when you say, ‘Why does the Lord our God do all these things to us?’ Then you shall answer them, ‘Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours.’ Since they loved foreign gods, God sees to it they spend some time in a foreign land!

“Declare this in the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah, saying, ‘Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not: do you not fear Me?’ says the Lord.” This was the bottomline. They no longer feared the Lord. They took God and His blessings for granted.

‘Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.’ God is showing the scope of His jurisdiction. What king establishes the boundaries of the sea? Yet this is what God has done!

But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; they have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, “Let us now fear the Lord our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season.” The former and latter rains come in the spring and autumn.

He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good from you.” Sin can create negative consequences. Here God delayed and withheld the rain. This was devastating to an agrarian society that depended on the former and latter rains.

“For among My people are found wicked men; they lie in wait as one who sets snares; they set a trap; they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they have become great and grown rich.” Rich off the backs of the poor. The false prophets deceive innocent people. They’re scam artists.

“They have grown fat, they are sleek; yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked...” Jeremiah is speaking of the false prophets - religious people who’s greedy, evil deeds surpassed those of the wicked.

“They do not plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless; yet they prosper, and the right of the needy they do not defend. Shall I not punish them for these things?” says the Lord. ‘Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?’” These are preachers who show pictures of themselves in far-away lands, helping the disadvantaged, *asking for your donation*. They use the needy, but *“the right of the needy they do not defend.”*

And God asks, *“Shall I not punish them...” He will!*

Verse 30, “An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?”

Here is a sobering verse. We get angry at the crooked preacher who scams for money, or the pastor who rules his church with an iron grip, and misuses God’s flock.

But who is it that allows these leaders to get away with their crimes? It’s the folks who sit under their leadership and give money at their behest. And these people aren’t always the ignorant and gullible... They’ve been promised a 100-fold return. Their own greed has blinded them to the pastor’s greed. They allow themselves to be abused because they’re in awe of the pastor’s celebrity and their involvement in his ministry feeds their own ego.

When corruption flourishes in the church it’s not only because of evil leaders. They have an accomplice... *“the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so...”*

It’s the carnality of Christians that allow heavy-handed pastors to get away with their abuse. It’s the star-struck Christian that excuses a leader’s sin. *A worldly Christian* wants his leader to have *the accruements of the world*.

It’s sad, to watch sincere, humble, legitimate men of God, who are careful not to ask for a dime, go without...

While church goers fill up the coffers of slick preachers who pride themselves on being able to work a crowd.

There's an old saying I'm sure you've heard, "People get the leadership they deserve." And it's true in the church. Manipulative and money-hungry pastors are only part of the problem. Sadly, there's a part of the church who likes the show and will tolerate it to a point.