

Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep In Leviticus

**13. The Divided Kingdoms
The Southern Kingdom – Judah – The
Prophets, Part 2 - Other Prophets
(Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk,
Obadiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Joel)**

**A Teaching Commentary
of the Old Testament**

Note – This piece has been segmented out of a larger document.

© Copyright 1996, 1999, 2007 by Tim Attaway
All Rights Reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without prior written permission from the author.

Unless otherwise stated, the Bible translation used in this commentary is taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society.

Table of Contents

1	MICAH	6
1.1	WOE TO SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM	6
1.2	THE EVIL AND THE REMNANT	7
1.3	THE LEADERS AND THE FALSE PROPHETS	7
1.4	THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD	7
1.5	A RULER FROM BETHLEHEM	8
1.6	REFINING	9
1.7	JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL	9
1.8	RESTORATION OF ISRAEL	10
2	NAHUM	11
3	ZEPHANIAH	12
3.1	WARNING TO JUDAH	12
3.2	WARNING TO PHILISTIA	12
3.3	WARNING TO THE MOABITES AND AMMONITES	12
3.4	WARNING TO CUSH	13
3.5	WARNING TO ASSYRIA	13
3.6	JERUSALEM	13
4	HABAKKUK	14
5	OBADIAH	16
6	JEREMIAH	17
6.1	THE CALL OF JEREMIAH	17
6.2	APOSTASY OF GOD'S PEOPLE	19
6.3	MESSAGE AT THE TEMPLE GATES	20
6.4	IDOLS VS. GOD	20
6.5	BROKEN COVENANT	21
6.6	THE PLOT AGAINST JEREMIAH	22
6.7	THE FATE OF THE WICKED	22
6.8	REPEATED JUDGMENTS	22
6.9	JEREMIAH'S PERSECUTION	24
6.10	JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE TO THE KING	25
6.11	THE GOOD SHEPHERD	27
6.12	FALSE PROPHETS	27
6.13	TWO BASKETS OF FIGS	27
6.14	SEVENTY YEARS	28
6.15	JEREMIAH'S NEAR EXECUTION	28
6.16	JEREMIAH'S YOKE	29
6.17	LETTER TO THE EXILES	30
6.18	RESTORATION FOR JUDAH	30
6.19	JEREMIAH UNDER ARREST	34
6.20	MESSAGE TO ZEDEKIAH	35
6.21	MESSAGE TO JEHOIAKIM	36
6.22	JEHOIAKIM AND THE SCROLL	37
6.23	MORE ARRESTS	37

6.24	THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.....	38
6.25	CIVIL UNREST AND THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT	39
6.26	MESSAGE TO THE JEWS IN EGYPT	40
6.27	BARUCH IS TIRED AND DEPRESSED.....	40
6.28	WOES TO NATIONS.....	41
6.28.1	<i>Egypt</i>	41
6.28.2	<i>Philistines</i>	41
6.28.3	<i>Moab</i>	41
6.28.4	<i>Ammonites</i>	42
6.28.5	<i>Edom</i>	42
6.28.6	<i>Damascus</i>	42
6.28.7	<i>Kedar and Hazor</i>	43
6.28.8	<i>Elam</i>	43
6.28.9	<i>Babylon</i>	43
6.29	RECALLING THE FALL OF JERUSALEM	44
7	LAMENTATIONS.....	46
8	JOEL.....	49
9	INDEX OF SCRIPTURE REFERENCES	52
10	TOPICAL INDEX.....	54

1 Micah

Very little is known about the prophet Micah. The first verse of his book gives us the only real biographical information that we have, and it is very limited. It tells us that he is from the town of Moresheth, which was a small Judean village. It tells us that he ministered during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, which would make him a contemporary of Isaiah in Judah and Hosea in Israel. The introduction to Isaiah describes the political and military events that transpired during this period. It was a turbulent time, which saw the fall of the Northern Kingdom and great reduction of the Southern Kingdom.

Micah and Isaiah ministered to the same people. Their messages were very similar. He may best be remembered for his prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Micah was known and respected by the people of his time. We have evidence of this, because a generation after his death, we see the elders of Israel quote Micah (in Jeremiah 26:18.)

Micah brought God's message to God's people. Anytime that happens, there is revelation of the nature of God and there is instruction concerning the manner in which we should relate to him. For that reason, we need to understand what the book says.

1.1 *Woe to Samaria and Jerusalem*

Micah 1

Chapter 1 of Micah pronounces God's displeasure on both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. 1:5 says:

What is Jacob's transgression?
Is it not Samaria?
What is Judah's high place?
Is it not Jerusalem?

Samaria and Jerusalem are the capitals of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. They are used to refer to the entire kingdoms. Samaria has become to God as a national transgression and Jerusalem as a high place (a high place was an altar to a pagan god). The chapter indicates that idolatry is the disease of the north and it has infected the south. The chapter, however, promises destruction to the north only. If the Northern Kingdom is viewed as the source of the sin, then perhaps cutting it off would remove the sin from the south as well.

Micah admonishes the people to mourn for what is about to happen. He foresees the fall of Israel to Assyria. He knows that the events that will take place will be terrible for those in the north and he encourages a proper attitude of sorrow. 1:8 says:

Because of this I will weep and wail.
I will go about barefoot and naked.
I will howl like a jackal
and moan like an owl.

This is reminiscent of Isaiah chapter 20, when Isaiah went about 3 years stripped and barefoot as a sign of the judgment that was coming upon Egypt. As we saw with Isaiah, Micah may not have been reduced to total nakedness, but he may have worn some sort of loincloth during this time.

The point is that Micah saw the tremendous pain that was coming, particularly to Samaria. The people needed to understand the magnitude of the trouble in which they found themselves. They needed to repent and turn to God for help.

1.2 *The Evil and the Remnant*

Micah 2

Chapter 2 contains three sections. Verses 1-5 speak out against dishonest men. These are men who lay awake at night planning how they will defraud their neighbors for material gain. God will pour out judgment upon them.

Verses 6-11 address those who shun true prophecy. We surmise that Micah's messages had met with some opposition. He talks about people who tell God's true prophets to "shut up" so that they do not have to listen to any bad news. They perceive that all is well and they are not interested in messages of doom. They set up false prophets who will give them "feel good" messages. These people will receive God's judgment as well.

Verses 12-13 contain a message of deliverance. Scattered among all of these evil people are those who have remained faithful to God. In verses 12 and 13, God promises to gather these together and protect them. They will be brought together like sheep and they will become God's flock. He will give them a righteous king. It is ironic that this section comes right after verses 6-11. God's "bad news" messages typically have "good news" at the end. Yes, God is coming in judgment, but he is "cleaning house" to make a home for the faithful. There is light at the end of the tunnel. Those who hold out and are faithful will be rewarded. If people would listen to Micah's entire message they would hear a message of hope. Instead, they could not get beyond the challenge for them to repent.

1.3 *The Leaders and the False Prophets*

Micah 3

Chapter 3 addresses the leaders who take advantage of the people and the false prophets who lead them astray. The people of the nation suffer because of the influence of both. The leaders use the people for their own material gain. The false prophets lead them into unrighteousness and out of favor with God. The day is coming when these will find themselves in darkness. When they cry out to God for help, he will turn his face from them. Individually they will be in despair.

They have also brought despair upon the nation corporately. Verse 12 indicates that destruction will be brought upon Judah because of the sin that they have brought upon the nation. Jerusalem and the temple will be turned into rubble. This was fulfilled when Babylon captured Judah in 586 BC.

A nation that wants to be destroyed needs only to pick evil men for national and spiritual leaders and then follow their example.

1.4 *The Mountain of the Lord*

Micah 4

As we saw when we looked at Isaiah, Micah 4:1-5 is repeated almost verbatim in Isaiah 2:1-5. See the commentary on that section.

The chapter in Micah goes on to give some very specific prophecy. Judah will find herself surrounded by enemies. Ultimately she will be conquered by Babylon and her people will be taken into captivity. From there, God will ultimately deliver her and restore her to her land. When the times get bad and the enemies surround them, they can take comfort in the hope that God will ultimately restore them as a people to the mountain of the Lord. They will return to Zion.

1.5 A Ruler from Bethlehem

Micah 5:1-5

Micah 5:2 contains one of the best-known prophecies in the Old Testament. This entire section reads as follows:

Marshal your troops,
O city of troops,
for a siege is laid against us.
They will strike Israel's ruler
on the cheek with a rod.
But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from old,
from ancient times.
Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor gives birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.
He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely,
for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be their peace.

Matthew Chapter 2 tells of the time when the wise men came looking for the newborn king of the Jews. They had seen a star that announced his birth and they came seeking him. They went to Herod and asked him if he knew where the child was. Herod summoned his advisors and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. They quoted him this Scripture. Herod sent troops to Bethlehem to kill all the baby boys.

The Jews understood that Micah was saying that their Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It says that this Messiah would have origins from ancient times. He would not be an ordinary man.

The section also indicates that there was going to be a time in which the Jews are abandoned by God, i.e. the exile. Then they would be regathered before the birth of their Messiah. This new leader will shepherd them in the majesty of God and give them security and peace.

1.6 Refining

Micah 5:5-15

The rest of chapter 5 promises three things. First of all, the people were going to experience harassment by the Assyrians, but God would deliver them from that. Second, the people were going to find themselves scattered out among other peoples (the exile). Third, from their captivity, God would rise up in their midst and bring judgment on those who were unfaithful to him. There would be destruction, and the end result of that destruction would be to tear down idols and Asherah poles. It would rid the land of witchcraft and other ungodly practices. This judgment was directed at "nations" which were unfaithful to him. This seems to include Judah. This was an act of refinement by God. Refining is the only way to bring about purity. Unfortunately it is a painful process.

1.7 Judgment on Israel

Micah 6

In Chapter 6, God states his case against Israel. In verses 1-5, he reminds them of the things that he has done for them. He has earned the right to expect things of them. He has been their deliverer and caretaker. In verses 6-8 he reminds them of the response the he requires from them. Even though he gave the sacrificial system in Leviticus, sacrifice is not at the heart of what he requires. That is only beneficial from someone who is already walking with God. Verse 8 gives the foundation of what God requires of a man:

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

In Matthew 22:34-40 we read:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.:

If you could take the entire Old Testament and distill it down into a critical set of truths, it would be these two. As we look at the history and the prophecies that we have seen, there are two recurring sins that cause God to bring judgment on nations. The first is idolatry. The second is man mistreating his fellow man. This is the same truth echoed in Micah 6:8. What does God require? First to act justly and to love mercy. If one acts justly and loves mercy, then he treats his fellow man in a manner consistent with the will of God. The second is to walk humbly with your God. If one does this, he is not distracted by idols.

Having stated what God requires, the next part of chapter 6 describes what God observes from his people. There are dishonest business dealings. The rich defraud the poor. People are dishonest and violent with one another. Furthermore, they "observe the statutes of Omri and the practices of Ahab," which means they practice idolatry. Because of this, God is going to destroy their wealth. He is going to ruin them and subject them to the scorn of other nations.

1.8 Restoration of Israel

Micah 7

The first 6 verses of Micah 7 continue the theme of judgment on Israel. The land is corrupt. People are driven by bribery. There is violence and evil. Neighbor cannot trust neighbor. The family structure is broken, with children rising up against parents. The conditions that prevail in Israel are exactly opposite what God has required. In the midst of all of this, in 7:7 Micah says:

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord,
I wait for God my Savior;
my God will hear me.

The rest of the chapter talks about the restoration of Israel. God will indeed come in judgment and refine the land, but out of the destruction she will be redeemed. The nation will be restored and her enemies (e.g. Egypt and Assyria) will treat her with favor. God will shepherd the people and lead them in peace. People from other nations will look to Israel's God in awe. 7:18-20 says:

Who is a God like you,
who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
of the remnant of his inheritance?
You do not stay angry forever
but delight to show mercy.
You will again have compassion on us;
you will tread our sins underfoot
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
You will be true to Jacob,
and show mercy to Abraham,
as you pledged on oath to our fathers
in days long ago.

What are the important themes that we learn from Micah?

- God forgives sin. God does not overlook sin.
 - Judgment has a redemptive purpose.
 - God refines. He separates the sinner from his sin.
 - His anger is at the sin and not the sinner. Once the sin is separated from the sinner, he delights to show us mercy and compassion and to restore us to relationship with him.
- God is not finished with the Jews. He will be true to the promises he made to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.
- Act justly and love mercy. Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Walk humbly with your God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
- The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem.

2 Nahum

Almost nothing is known about the prophet Nahum. Scholars generally date his ministry to be during the reign of Josiah. This would make him a contemporary of Zephaniah. The young Jeremiah may have begun his ministry during Nahum's time. Habakkuk may also have been a contemporary.

The book of Nahum is three chapters in length. It begins by declaring that God has no peers in the universe – that he is superior in majesty, power, and goodness. The rest of the book says that because of God's goodness, he is going to come down in power against Assyria, specifically Ninevah. He is going to bring great destruction upon that land. The book cites two main reasons (this should sound familiar):

- Idolatry and witchcraft – other gods. (Nahum 1:14, Nahum 3:4)
- Cruelty towards fellow man (the bulk of the book)

Assyria was a treacherous nation. They came in mighty military power and then tortured, mutilated, and killed many of their captives – particularly the leaders. Nahum probably lived after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, so he had fresh information about how Assyria had treated Israel. Judah had also felt the arm of Assyria. A prophecy of the fall of Assyria would have come as comfort to any who had felt the wrath of that nation. In fact, in Nahum 3:19, the book closes by saying:

Nothing can heal your wound;
your injury is fatal.
Everyone who hears the new about you
claps his hands at your fall,
for who has not felt your endless cruelty?

History records that Assyria did indeed meet its downfall during the time of Josiah. It was defeated soundly by Babylon. In fact, Egypt and Assyria formed an alliance against Babylon. Josiah tried to stop them and was killed in the process. Nahum probably saw his prophecy come true during his lifetime.

That is the essence of the book of Nahum. The book has a very narrow focus. It has no message directed at the Jews. One might wonder why it was included in the canon of Scripture. Nahum reemphasizes several truths:

- God does not put up with idolatry and witchcraft. He really meant it when he said, "you shall have no other gods before me." He deals strongly with this.
- God does not put up with man mistreating his fellow man. He really meant it when he said to act justly and love mercy. He deals strongly with this.
- God is God. He has no peers in the universe. He is the only one who can say that a certain nation will rise or fall and then make it happen. His word is true. Nahum had no empirical evidence that Assyria was going to fall when he spoke these words. He simply trusted the revelation that he received from God. God was faithful to bring it about.

3 Zephaniah

The opening of the book of Zephaniah gives biographical information about him. He ministered during the reign of Josiah. He was the great-great grandson of Hezekiah. Because of that, like Isaiah he probably had free access to royalty and to the leaders of the nation. Thus his words probably had an important impact on the direction of the nation. As is common in prophecy, Zephaniah's words consist of a series of warnings to specific nations about how God intends to deal with them. Zephaniah's prophecies are addressed to Judah, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, Assyria, and then specifically to Jerusalem.

3.1 Warning to Judah

Zephaniah 1:1-2:3

Verses 2-3 of chapter 1 tell of global judgment that is to come. 1:4-2:3 focus on judgment to Judah specifically. God is going to deal with Judah because of the sin of idolatry. He will specifically seek out those who have bowed to other gods and deal with them. He will look for those who have been complacent and have said that God will not deal with their sin. He will touch their wealth and demolish their houses. He will bring foreign enemies against them. They will be in great distress. Neither their money nor their gods will be able to rescue them. There is only one alternative offered to them. 2:3 says:

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land,
you who do what he commands.
Seek righteousness, seek humility;
perhaps you will be sheltered
on the day of the Lord's anger.

3.2 Warning to Philistia

Zephaniah 2:4-7

The next section is directed at the Philistines. The Philistines lived on the southern Mediterranean coast of Israel. 2 Kings 18:8 credits Hezekiah with ultimately defeating the Philistines. By the time this prophecy was given, they were no longer a major power or much of a threat to Judah. The prophecy says that the cities they have left will be taken from them and given to the remnant of Judah. It does not cite any particular offense for which they are being punished. We know, however, that for centuries they had been enemies of God's chosen people and they had also been idolaters.

3.3 Warning to the Moabites and Ammonites

Zephaniah 2:8-11

Verses 8-11 of chapter 2 are directed at the Moabites and Ammonites. The Moabites lived across the Dead Sea from Israel and the Ammonites were across the Jordan, just above Moab. Zephaniah says that these people have had hostile and threatening attitudes towards Judah and for this they are being judged. God promises to turn their homelands into wastelands.

3.4 Warning to Cush

Zephaniah 2:12

Verse 2:12 is directed at Cush. It is short and to the point:

You too, O Cushites,
will be slain by my sword.

There is no reason cited, but like the Philistines, the Cushites have been long-standing enemies of Israel.

3.5 Warning to Assyria

Zephaniah 2:13-15

2:13-15 promises that Ninevah will be laid waste and Assyria with her. The only specific sin that is cited is arrogance, but we know from other sources that the list of sins of Assyria is quite long.

3.6 Jerusalem

Zephaniah 3

The last section is directed at Jerusalem. God has been patient with Jerusalem. Unfortunately there are many in the city who are unrighteous and corrupt. This seems to include much of the leadership. God is going to clean house. He will get rid of those who are unfaithful but he will preserve the faithful remnant. Once this has happened, it will be a joyful place to be. Those who remain enjoy the favor of God. The other nations with whom he had dealt (Philistia, Moab, etc.) will look with favor to Jerusalem and her God.

This is Zephaniah in a nutshell. There are really no new messages, but his words reinforce truths that we have already seen. The key points:

- God is jealous for his people. He will punish those who mistreat his chosen people.
- When God purifies, he gets rid of the unfaithful but preserves his faithful remnant. The purpose of judgment is refining and then reconciliation. The end result is joy.

4 Habakkuk

Habakkuk's ministry is typically dated as occurring during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, and Jehoiakim. This might have made him a contemporary of Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Obadiah. It was a time when Assyrian power had begun to subside and Babylon had become the major world threat. It was also a time when Judah was experiencing harassment by Egypt.

The book of Habakkuk is written in dialogue format. Habakkuk is having a conversation with God. He raises a complaint to God and God answers. There is a second complaint and a second answer. Then the book closes with a prayer of Habakkuk.

The first complaint is found in Habakkuk 1:1-4. Habakkuk looks around and asks God why he allows so much evil to exist in Judah. There are evil men who seem to get away with their wickedness. God answers him in Habakkuk 1:5-11. He has a solution to the wickedness in Judah. He is sending Babylon to punish the nation. They will come bringing terrible judgment on the land.

This is not exactly what Habakkuk wanted to hear. He raises his second complaint in Habakkuk 1:12-2:1. The gist of his second complaint is that Babylon is worse than Judah. How can God use them to punish the Judahites if they are even more wicked? God replies in Habakkuk 2:2-20. He says that he will deal with those who are violent, who take advantage of their neighbors, who bow to idols, who are greedy, arrogant, etc. This statement is not targeted towards any specific group, so one assumes that it applies to the Jews and the Babylonians alike.

Habakkuk 3 is a prayer. Habakkuk recognizes the majesty of God. He recognizes the terror of God's wrath. He also has faith in the protection that God offers to his remnant. Habakkuk 3:16-18 says:

I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.
Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord.
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.

When bad times – even terrible times – face us, those who are in a right relationship with God have cause to hope. He is our protection. He can strengthen us in the worst of times if we look to him for salvation. As we have seen in the other prophetic writings, vengeance belongs to God. He will execute it as he sees fit. Through all of it, however, he takes care of those who are his own.

Before leaving the lesser-known book of Habakkuk, we should note that it contains a few very well known verses.

Habakkuk 2:4 says:

See, he is puffed up;
his desires are not upright –
but the righteous will live by his faith

Paul quotes this in Romans 1:17 and in Galatians 3:11. Tradition says that it was this verse ringing through the mind of Martin Luther that triggered the Protestant Reformation.

Habakkuk 2:19-20 says:

Woe to him who says to wood, "Come to life!"
Or to lifeless stone, "Wake up!"
Can it give guidance?
Is it covered with gold and silver;
there is no breath in it.
But the Lord is in his holy temple;
let all the earth be silent before him.

The last two lines of this passage have been turned into many an anthem and many choirs have sung them as a call to worship or a benediction. This book is their source.

5 Obadiah

Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament. It is short enough that it is only broken into verses and not chapters. Obadiah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and of Habakkuk. He lived at a time when Judah was threatened by both Egypt and Babylon. Assyria was no longer a real power.

This short book contains a message of judgment against the Edomites. The reasons that are given for the judgment include arrogance, violence against Judah, and failure to come to Judah's aid at her time of need. When enemies attacked Judah, Edom joined them and took advantage of her weakness. Edom should have come to her aid.

For this, God promises to overrun Edom and leave it desolate.

The lesson of Obadiah is nothing new:

- One should not think too highly of himself. God has a way of leveling the playing field.
- Do not end up on the opposite side of the Jews in a war. They are still God's chosen people. He still guards them jealously.

6 Jeremiah

Jeremiah is the author of the book that bears his name plus the book of Lamentations. More is known about the man Jeremiah than most of the other prophets because his writings reveal a great deal about him. He is somewhat more introspective than most of the other prophets and displays a great deal of emotion. Jeremiah is often called the "weeping prophet," because he displays so much pain in his writings. In fact, Jeremiah had a great deal to cause him pain.

His ministry probably began soon after that of Zephaniah closed. Habakkuk and Obadiah prophesied early in his ministry. Ezekiel probably began his ministry before Jeremiah's death. This places him at a very strategic time in the history of Judah and of the world. He began his ministry during the reign of Josiah. Josiah was the last good king that Judah had. Josiah was killed in a battle when he was trying to prevent Egypt from defending Assyria against Babylon. Four years later, Babylon returned to take on Egypt. In 605 BC at the battle of Carchemish, Babylon defeated Egypt. In that part of the world, there were no more powers to confront the Babylonians. Assyria had been wiped out. Israel was gone. Egypt was subdued. Babylon reigned. Judah was very much subject to Babylonian authority.

The period from 609 BC (when Josiah died) to 586 BC saw four different kings cycle through Judah. The last king was Zedekiah. The majority of Jeremiah's prophecies took place under Zedekiah. Jeremiah did not get along with this king and as a result Jeremiah spent much of his life in prison. In 589 BC, Zedekiah attempted to rebel against Babylon. The result was Babylonian invasion, which ended with the destruction of all of Jerusalem, including the temple. Many people fled for safety. A group of Jews headed for Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them. He died there after having seen his homeland conquered and destroyed.

Jeremiah did not have an easy life. His message is indeed full of gloom and doom, because that really was what was facing the nation. His writings will teach us much about the man, much about the history of the world at that time, and much about the nature of God.

6.1 *The Call of Jeremiah*

Jeremiah 1

The first three verses of Jeremiah introduce the prophet and identify him as having ministered during the reigns of Josiah through Zedekiah.

Beginning in verse four, there is a description of the call on Jeremiah's life. Verse five says that God called Jeremiah to be his prophet before he was conceived. This raises the question of predestination versus man's free will. Does God foreordain us to play certain roles in life? If he does, then do we really make our own choices? Do we merely plod through life, acting out the scenes that have been set before us, or do we have the option to determine our own destinies? This is a question that has divided the church throughout history. Embedded in this whole question is the issue of whether or not man has any responsibility for his own salvation. If one believes that his whole life is predestined, then there is nothing he can do to influence his standing before God. If he is predestined to be saved, then it will happen regardless of the way in which he lives his life. If he is predestined not to be saved, then there is no point in trying to draw close to God because the end result will be rejection. The byproduct of a belief in predestination can be a very fatalistic attitude about life.

Still, Scripture tells us that God chose Jeremiah to be his prophet long before he was even born. If that is not predestination, what is?

I believe that God does create each of us with a purpose and a role to play. God also creates each of us with a free will. Jeremiah could have rejected God's call on his life and done something else. Each of us can do the same. A man who is successful is one who finds his God-ordained purpose and fulfills it. Nothing else will bring complete satisfaction in life.

Jeremiah was foreordained to be a prophet. He was not predestined to be a prophet.

The fact that Jeremiah was called before his birth raises one other important issue. Jeremiah was not a chance byproduct of human sexual activity. Jeremiah was a creation of God, formed for a purpose. The same is true for each of us. We were handmade by a God who wanted us. We are not accidents that he merely tolerates.

There came a day in Jeremiah's life when God spoke to him and communicated his call to him. Jeremiah's response was one of fear. Much like Moses, he did not think that people would listen to him. Apparently Jeremiah was a young man when he received his call. Because of his youth, he did not think that people would take him seriously. God told him not to let his age be a stumbling block. He assured him that God had given him authority over nations and kingdoms. He had the power of God behind him and did not need to worry about anything else.

God then gave him two visions. The first is in Jeremiah 1:11-12:

The word of the Lord came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?"

"I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied.

The Lord said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."

The meaning of this is less than obvious in English. In Hebrew, it is a play on words. The Hebrew word for "almond tree" is "shaqed." The Hebrew for "watching" is "shoqed." The almond tree budded earlier than any other tree in Israel. It was said that the almond trees awoke early and kept watch over the other trees. God used these word pictures to describe the manner in which he kept watch over the nations and over Judah in particular. He kept watch over his word to ensure that it was fulfilled. This should have been a comfort to Jeremiah. He was being commissioned to be a messenger of God's word. He could have assurance that it would always be true.

The second vision given to Jeremiah was that of a boiling pot in the north that was about to spill in the land. The meaning of this is that the nation would be attacked from the north. God promised to protect Judah from this northern invasion. We are not positive about the identify of the enemy from the north in Jeremiah's vision. It could be Babylon since it was the major rising power (i.e. threat) of the day. Babylon would have attacked from the north. We know, however, that Babylon overthrew Judah. Judah did receive God's protection from them for a time, but ultimately fell to Babylon. If this prophecy was delivered early in Jeremiah's ministry then it would have been during the reign of Josiah. In Josiah's time, Babylon was putting an end to Assyria as a world power. Egypt tried to come to Assyria's aid. A battle took place, which entangled Judah and which transpired in Meggido – in northern Israel. Josiah was killed. This may have been the threat mentioned in Jeremiah's vision. In spite of the fact that the king was killed, Judah was not defeated by these enemies from the north. In fact, both Assyria and Egypt were ultimately put down by Babylon.

6.2 *Apostasy of God's People*

Jeremiah 2-6

Chapters 2-6 seem to be a single oracle, directed at the spiritual condition of God's elect. It expands on the theme of the threat from the north, which is happening as a result of the spiritual apostasy of the Jews.

The charges that are made against Judah are familiar ones (after having read the other prophets):

- The main one is idolatry. This charge is repeated over and over again in these five chapters. People have exchanged God for gods made of wood. The nation is repeatedly compared to a prostitute.
- The leaders of the nation lead the people into idolatry and falsehood (2:8, 5:5).
- People are dishonest. In 5:1, God tells Jeremiah to search the streets of Jerusalem. If he can find one honest person who seeks the truth, the entire city would be forgiven. None could be found.
- The people have refused correction and hardened themselves to God (5:3).
- They live immoral lives. 5:8 says that they are "well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife."
- They do not care for the fatherless or the poor (5:28).

In 3:6-13, Jeremiah reminds the people what has already happened to Israel. Because of the things in the list above, Israel was devastated and had ceased to exist. Rather than learning from Israel's lesson, Judah had become worse than Israel. Why would God leave her unpunished?

Because of all of this, God was going to send an army from the north to attack Judah. This may or may not refer to the same invasion mentioned in chapter 1. This one does seem to refer to Babylon and the results of the invasion would be devastating. Judah would see tremendous loss. Chapter 4 says that it would be like a lion roaming the country, laying waste to everything in its path. Cities would be left desolate and destroyed. God will deal harshly with the rebellion of his people.

God does promise, however, that the destruction will not be complete. He indicates in 5:18-19 that a remnant would survive and go into exile:

"Yet even in those days," declares the Lord, "I will not destroy you completely. And when the people ask, 'Why has the Lord our God done all this to us?' you will tell them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your own.'"

Jeremiah 3:14-18 looks at a time beyond the exile:

"Return, faithless people," declares the Lord. "For I am your husband. I will choose one of you from every town and two from every clan and bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance."

This prophecy has been fulfilled in part, but its complete fulfillment is still a future event. God did gather his remnant from the northern land (i.e. Babylon) and return them to Zion. Because of the hardness of their hearts – the rejection of their Messiah – we have not yet seen the day when all nations gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord. We have not yet seen the time when Jerusalem is called The Throne of the Lord. It will still come true.

6.3 Message at the Temple Gates

Jeremiah 7-9

Chapters 7-9 contain an oracle that Jeremiah delivered at the gates of the temple in Jerusalem. The message was not really different than that in chapters 2-6 but the location of the delivery was significant. Jeremiah again pointed out that the people are guilty of:

- mistreatment of fellow man, including the poor, fatherless, etc.
- idolatry
- sacrificing their children to idols
- pursuing every sort of immorality and sin

In spite of all of this, they still went into the temple to engage in religious activities. God found their presence in the temple to be repugnant. Their activities were an offense to him. The message is not new but it is still true; God does not want sacrifice from someone if he does not first have that person's obedience. 9:25 says that God will deal with those who are circumcised in the flesh only. These men may have physical circumcision, but their hearts have not been circumcised unto God. They are unclean and unacceptable to God.

Because of all of this, God promises a great outpouring of his discipline. A time of great pain and terror will come upon the land. Bodies will lie dead in the street because there will be no one to bury them. In 7:14-15, God says that he will allow the same sort of destruction to come upon the temple that he allowed to come upon the Northern Kingdom. If it has become a house of idolaters, then it is of no significance to him.

Thus Jeremiah stood at the gates of the temple and pronounced that the people's religious activities were a farce and unacceptable to God, that the temple itself would be destroyed, and that the nation would be devastated, all because of the people's sin. It was probably not a very popular message. Still Jeremiah was faithful to deliver it. It is interesting that in 7:11, Jeremiah refers to the temple as a "den of robbers." This is the same name that Jesus used for the temple when he cleared out the moneychangers in Luke 19:46.

6.4 Idols vs. God

Jeremiah 10

In chapter 10, Jeremiah gives a discourse on the foolishness of worshipping idols. How ridiculous it is to worship something crafted by one's own hands. These wooden images have to be carried from location to location. They have no power of their own; in fact, they are a burden. Worship and homage belongs to the creator of the universe, not to the created image. The point that Jeremiah makes is similar to that in Isaiah 44, although not as colorful or sarcastic. The truth is the same, however.

Chapter 10 closes with another warning of destruction coming from the north. Jeremiah then prays for his own safety. He invites the discipline of God, but prays that it is motivated out of God's justice rather than his anger.

6.5 Broken Covenant

Jeremiah 11:1-17

Shortly before Moses' death, he instructed the people to have a covenant renewal ceremony at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim once they entered the Promised Land. This was fulfilled in Joshua 8. In Deuteronomy 27, Moses laid out the blessings and curses that were to be spoken in this ceremony. Blessings were in store for the nation if they were faithful. If they remained true to God, then he would fulfill the promises made to their forefathers. There were rather strong promises given to them for unfaithfulness, however. In Deuteronomy 27:15-37 we read:

However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed.

The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.

The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything your put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. ...

The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. ...

You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit. ...

The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone. You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you.

God told Jeremiah to remind the people of the conditions of the covenant. In spite of the fact that he had reminded them over and over again to be obedient, they had chosen rebellion. The curses that had been promised were going to be brought upon them. Both Israel and Judah had been idolatrous. Israel had already seen her fate. Judah was next. God told Jeremiah not to pray for the people because their fate was sealed.

6.6 The Plot Against Jeremiah

Jeremiah 11:18-23

In the latter part of chapter 11, we get the first real glimpse at Jeremiah's popularity (or lack thereof) among his people. Men from the city of Anathoth threatened Jeremiah, saying that he must quit prophesying in the name of the Lord or else they would kill him. They were obviously tired of his gloom and doom predictions. More than likely they were leaders who benefited in some personal way from all of the sin denounced by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was aware of their plot and was able to avoid them. God told Jeremiah concerning these men (11:22-23):

I will punish them. Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine. Not even a remnant will be left to them, because I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth in the year of their punishment.

Jeremiah had to learn to rely upon God for protection. God was always there for him.

6.7 The Fate of the Wicked

Jeremiah 12

In chapter 12, Jeremiah raises a cry to God, asking why he allows the wicked to prosper. He wants to know when God is going to come down in judgment on those who practice evil. God replies that he is about to unleash his judgment. He will forsake those whom he used to call his own. He will hand them over to their enemies. Their land will be overrun and devastated. After a time, however, God will relent. He will welcome back those who have "learned their lesson" and have begun to call upon him again.

God longs to be in a right relationship with his people. He will do it on his terms, however. He is God.

6.8 Repeated Judgments

Jeremiah 13-19

Chapters 13-19 of Jeremiah contain a sequence of judgments that will come upon Judah. Included among them are:

- In the first part of chapter 13, God uses an object lesson to demonstrate how Judah went astray. He told Jeremiah to take a linen belt and to hide it for a period of time under a rock. After that time, he instructed Jeremiah to go back and retrieve the belt. It had rotted. God's response was that he had created Israel and Judah to cling to him like the belt was intended to cling to its owner. Because Israel and Judah had rejected God and hidden from his presence, they would rot just as the belt had done. (13:1ff)
- The people of Judah would face captivity. They would be conquered and carried off to another land and forced to dwell there. (13:15ff)
- God promises to bring great destruction upon the people. They will encounter natural disasters such as drought and famine. They will encounter military disasters as they are overrun by other peoples. (14:1ff)

- Jeremiah prays to God to turn back from his anger. God tells Jeremiah not to pray for these people because his will is set. (14:11ff)
- False prophets come and give the people messages of peace. They tell them that Jeremiah is lying to them. God assures Jeremiah that they are bringing false messages and that Jeremiah should go on sharing the revelation that he has. These false prophets will die by the same sword and famine that they are telling the people will not happen. (14:13ff)
- God says that even if Moses and Samuel came and pleaded for the people, he would not turn from his judgment. He also says that the people are being punished for the sin of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. Recall that Hezekiah was a very good king who led the nation in a number of reforms, but his son Manasseh was one of the most evil kings that Judah had. He led them heavily into various forms of idolatry, including child sacrifice. (15:1ff)
- God tells Jeremiah not to marry or have children (Jeremiah was probably still a young man). The day is coming soon when Judah will not be a place where anyone would want to raise children or try to nurture a family. It will be a place of death and wailing. The dead will be so numerous that there will be none to bury them. (16:1ff)
- The people are rebuked for failing to observe the Sabbath. This is so fundamental. If people do not have the discipline to set aside a day each week to consecrate to God, then nothing else in their lives will be in order. It is still true. (17:19ff)
- In Isaiah chapters 29, 45, and 64, he used the image of the potter and the clay. The potter is greater than the clay and the clay has no right to make demands of the potter. The analogy is clear; God is the potter and we are the clay. Jeremiah uses this same analogy in chapter 18. If God, as the potter, chooses wrath and judgment, then we, the clay, have no right to tell him otherwise. His will is going to be done and the people had better prepare themselves for it. (18:1ff)
- Jeremiah encounters hostile and open opposition to his message. He cries out to God for support. Faithful deliverance of God's word does not necessarily lead to popularity. Jeremiah was verbally attacked and it hurt him. He cried out to God for comfort and for vindication. (18:18ff)
- Jeremiah uses another object lesson to make a point. He takes a clay jar and smashes it and tells the people that God is going to smash Judah and Jerusalem just as the clay jar had been smashed. Nobody would be able to piece it back together. This would be done because of their idol worship and their child sacrifice. The destruction would be great and Judah would be made an object of scorn to other nations.

This is a long and bitter section of scripture. There is a reason. God is angry. He has felt the rejection of the people long enough. The clay has thumbed its nose at the potter and the potter is about to restore order to the workshop.

In spite of the terrible images portrayed above, the purpose of God's judgment is the same as it has always been. He wants reconciliation. He wants restored relationship. In 15:19-21 we read:

Therefore this is what the Lord says:

"If you repent, I will restore you
that you may serve me;
if you utter worthy, not worthless, words,
you will be my spokesman.

Let this people turn to you, (referring to the pagan enemies)
but you must not turn to them.
I will make you a wall to this people,
a fortified wall of bronze;
they will fight against you
but will not overcome you,
for I am with you
to rescue and save you,"
declares the Lord.
"I will save you from the hands of the wicked
and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel."

God wants his people back. He wants righteous men. 17:7-8 talks about the righteous man (and sounds very much like Psalm 1):

But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.
He will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.

God knows who is righteous and who is unfaithful. He alone tests the hearts of men. Unfortunately what he finds there is often bad. 17:9-10 says:

The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?
I the Lord search the heart
and examine the mind,
to reward a man according to his conduct,
according to what his deeds deserve.

It is easy to put on a facade for other people, but from God you cannot hide what is inside. The only recourse is to ensure that it is pure. It is beyond any of us to make that happen on our own. God stands ready and anxious to help. The key is submission and surrender. And that can be hard.

6.9 *Jeremiah's Persecution*

Jeremiah 20

Jeremiah was considered a troublemaker because of the nature of his message. A priest by the name of Pashhur had him arrested, beaten, and put into the stocks. He remained there for a day. The next day he was released. He was also upset.

He told Pashhur that God had changed his name to "Magor-missabib," which means "terror on every side." The name was chosen because that is what Pashhur would see. He would witness his friends and loved ones falling by the sword all around him. He himself would be taken into captivity in Babylon.

The fact that Jeremiah spoke these things to Pashhur upon his release indicates that he was not intimidated by his time in the stocks. He was personally distressed by the situation, however. When he finished with Pashhur, he cried out to God. 20:7-9 says:

O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived;
you overpowered me and prevailed.
I am ridiculed all day long;
everyone mocks me.
Whenever I speak, I cry out
proclaiming violence and destruction.
So the word of the Lord has brought me
insult and reproach all day long.
But if I say, "I will not mention him
or speak any more in his name,"
his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot.

Jeremiah felt somewhat betrayed and bewildered. He was faithful to deliver the message that God gave him but received nothing but reproach for doing so. He did not understand why this was so. The cry in his prayer is intense. He cursed the day he was born and wished that it had never taken place.

Many of us somehow look for a reward when we are faithful to God but we see negative things come our way instead. The fact is that the reward is there but it is not necessarily now. There are times when we have to make bricks without straw before we can enter the Promised Land. Notice that Jeremiah did not try to hide his feelings from God. He did not assume some sort of "Sunday School" posture when he prayed. He was honest and poured out his emotions. He could do this because he had a relationship with God. He knew God well enough to know that God would not be threatened by his honesty.

Jeremiah also knew what it would be like for him to do anything but be faithful to deliver the message that God gave him. He knew that if he tried to hold it back, it would burn inside him like a fire. A fire can bring warmth and comfort and safety, but if it is not handled properly it can bring destruction. Jeremiah knew which one he wanted.

6.10 Jeremiah's Message to the King

Jeremiah 21-22

In chapters 21 and 22, Jeremiah has a message specifically for the king. There are several individuals named in these chapters, however. They include King Zedekiah, Shallum son of Josiah, who succeeded his father as king of Judah, Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, and Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah. Shallum was also known as Jehoahaz. He succeeded Josiah, reigned for only 3 months, and was deposed by Neco of Egypt. Neco set up Jehoiakim as king and took Jehoahaz (Shallum) into captivity in Egypt, where he died. Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years. He was made subject to Babylon. He eventually rebelled against Babylon. This brought an attack from the Babylonians. Jehoiakim was captured in battle. He was taken in chains to Babylon and was killed there. His son, Jehoiachin, succeeded him as king. The battle with Babylon continued, and three months and ten days into his reign Jehoiachin surrendered to Babylon. He, too, was taken to Babylon in chains. He lived a peaceful life in captivity, however. When he was taken away, his uncle Zedekiah (another son of Josiah) was set up as king by the Babylonians. He reigned for eleven years. He eventually

rebelled against Babylonian authority and brought the final destruction upon Jerusalem. He was taken in chains to Babylon.

Josiah, father of Jehoahaz, Jehoakim, and Zedekiah, grandfather of Jehoaichin		
Shallum (Jehoahaz) – Three months into his reign, Pharaoh Neco deposed him and took him captive to Egypt. He died there.	Jehoakim – He reigned eleven years. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was taken captive to Babylon and killed there.	Zedekiah – He was set up as the prince of Judah after Jehoaichin was taken captive. After eleven years he rebelled against Babylon. He was captured. His sons were killed and he was blinded. He lived the rest of his life in captivity in Babylon.
	Jehoaichin – After three months and ten days, he surrendered to Babylon. He was taken captive and lived out his life comfortably in Babylon.	

This family had a rough time during these twenty-two and a half years. In chapters 21 and 22, Jeremiah tried to warn them what was ahead. Chapter 21 starts out with Zedekiah asking Jeremiah whether or not God will protect them from the Babylonian invasion. Jeremiah comes back with a resounding "NO!" In fact, God said that the people's only hope is to surrender to the Babylonians and be taken into captivity. The alternative is to die under the judgment that God himself will bring on Jerusalem. Even now, however, they have the option to turn back God's wrath. 21:12 says:

O house of David, this is what the Lord says:

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

Again, in 22:3-5 God says:

This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people. But if you do not obey these commands, declares the Lord, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.

Jeremiah delivers specific words about the various kings. In 22:11 he says that Shallum (Jehoahaz) will never return from captivity. In 22:18-19 he says that Jehoiakim will not be mourned and will have the burial of a donkey. 22:25 says that Jehoiachin will be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar. Likewise, 21:7 says that Zedekiah will be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar.

There is something curious about the order of events in chapters 21 and 22. Either chapter 22 was written somewhat before chapter 21 or else chapter 22 is retrospective. Zedekiah is the king in chapter 21. Chapter 22 talks about the fate of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin, who preceded Zedekiah. Either scenario is possible.

6.11 The Good Shepherd

Jeremiah 23:1-8

Jeremiah pronounces woe upon the bad shepherds – the leaders of the Jews who take advantage of them or lead them into unrighteousness. Punishment is in store for these. In 23:3, God promises to gather his scattered people from the lands where they have been driven back into their own land. Furthermore he promises to give them a righteous Branch from the house of David, a King who will reign over them wisely and will do what is right. Both Judah and Israel will live safely under his leadership. Verse 23:6 says that he will be called "The Lord our Righteousness."

This name is fairly significant. The word "Lord" is the word "Yahweh" in Hebrew. This is the name that God revealed for himself when he encountered Moses at the burning bush. This is the same name that is not to be taken in vain according to the Ten Commandments. Jews would not apply this name to a man. This king from the house of David is God. This is Messianic prophecy pure and simple.

Verses 23:7-8 says that the day will come when people will no longer look to deliverance from Egypt as the significant reference point in history, but they will begin to look at their deliverance from captivity from "the land of the north" as their major milestone.

6.12 False Prophets

Jeremiah 23:9-40

This section describes God's anger at false prophets. They have led the people away from God and into idolatry. God holds them responsible for the apostasy of the nation. Punishment is in store for them.

6.13 Two Baskets of Figs

Jeremiah 24

God gave Jeremiah a vision. In it, there were two baskets of figs. One contained figs that were very good and pleasant for eating. The other contained figs that were poor or rotten and could not be eaten.

God said that the good figs were the exiles from Judah who had been sent to Babylon. God considered them to be worthy of his protection. Being taken from Judah may have been a bitter experience for them, but in fact God sent them away in order to protect them. He was about to bring massive destruction upon Judah. The only way to keep them safe was to get them out of there. God's intention was to nurture them in Babylon and then later bring them back to their land. He would bring them home and they would return to him.

The basket of bad figs represented Zedekiah and his court and the survivors in Jerusalem. To God, they were as useless and offensive as the rotten figs. For them he had sword, famine, and plague in store.

History shows that all of this came to pass. Those who had stayed behind in Jerusalem faced destruction. For those who were exiled, the process of being torn away from Judah was bitter and often brutal, but once they were settled in Babylon they tended to have fairly good lives. They were allowed to exist as Jews, living in communities of Jews. They practiced their professions and their trades. Many of them rose to be high-ranking officials in the government (e.g. Daniel or Nehemiah). When they were finally allowed to return to Judah, many of them chose to stay in Babylon because they had good lives there. God nurtured the people in captivity as he had promised. He also brought them back home, as he had promised.

6.14 Seventy Years

Jeremiah 25

In chapter 25, Jeremiah says that God has been beckoning the people to return to him for many years but the people have not listened. Because of this, the exile will take place. He also says that the captivity will last seventy years. After that time they will be allowed to return. (History records that this did indeed happen.) After that, God will pour out his wrath on Babylon for the evil that they have done to Judah.

It may seem unfair that God used Babylon to punish Judah and then turned around and punished Babylon for its cruelty to Judah. We have considered this question before. Babylon's invasion of Judah was able to serve God's purpose in bringing punishment on his people, but Babylon did not invade Judah out of obedience to God. They invaded out of greed for power and wealth. They showed no respect for human life when they did it. Even though God was able to use them, their actions were abhorrent to him. That was the source of their own punishment.

Jeremiah 25:15ff then addresses the other enemies of Judah. Judgment will be poured out on Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc. Those nations who have inflicted pain on Judah in the past will face the judgment of God in the future. It is not a good idea to oppose Israel militarily.

6.15 Jeremiah's Near Execution

Jeremiah 26

Being a true prophet of God was not necessarily a popular job. When Jeremiah walked through the streets doing his job, he did not receive the same sort of reception that the ice cream man might receive.

Jeremiah was preaching in the streets one day, telling the people that if they did not repent and turn back to God, he would bring destruction upon the city just as he had done to Shiloh. Shiloh is a city in the Northern Kingdom. It had been the headquarters of Joshua's military campaigns. Later it had been the first "permanent" home for the tabernacle. Priests such as Eli and Samuel ministered there. More significantly, the Ark of the Covenant had resided there. When the Northern Kingdom fell, God allowed Shiloh – the former home of his Ark – to be destroyed. Jeremiah's point is that there is no reason to believe that God would not allow the other home of the Ark – Jerusalem – to be destroyed.

People heard his message and said that it was tantamount to treason. How dare he pronounce the destruction of Jerusalem? Jeremiah's defense was that he was only saying what God told him to say. This made matters even worse. Not only was he spreading "negative vibes," but he was claiming to do it in the name of the Lord.

Jeremiah was seized. Some men suggested that he should be executed. A debate erupted among the officials of Jerusalem. One said that Micah (the same prophet for whom the book is named) had preached destruction but nobody killed him for it. (A bit of trivia – Jeremiah 26:18 is the only place in the Old Testament where one prophetic book references quotes another Old Testament prophet and names the source.) Someone else cited another prophet named Uriah, son of Shemaiah. Apparently he had preached a negative message and Jehoiakim had sentenced him to death for it. He escaped to Egypt, but Jehoiakim had him hunted down and killed. Fortunately for Jeremiah's sake, a sufficient number of men came to his defense so that he was not executed.

It is no wonder that Jeremiah is known as the "weeping" prophet and that his writings include some fairly emotional cries to God. He did not have it easy. God placed very high demands upon him. Through it all, however, God was faithful to sustain him.

6.16 Jeremiah's Yoke

Jeremiah 27-28

God told Jeremiah to fashion a yoke and put it across his neck. He was then to deliver a message to Zedekiah and to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon via the envoys that they often sent to Zedekiah in Jerusalem. The message was that they should all submit to the yoke of Babylon. God had chosen to make Nebuchadnezzar powerful and other nations would be subject to him for a time. At the end of that time, Babylon itself would be subjugated to other nations. In the mean time, any nation that resisted Babylon would encounter sword, famine, and plague.

There were false prophets who were saying that the words of Jeremiah were not true. Jeremiah had to confront these false prophets. They were telling the people to resist Babylon. Jeremiah knew that this would be a disastrous choice because God had promised to destroy anyone who resisted Babylon. In 27:18-22, he says:

If they are prophets and have the word of the Lord, let them plead with the Lord Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon. For this is what the Lord Almighty says about the pillars, the Sea, the movable stands and the other furnishings that are left in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away when he carried Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem — yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about the things that are left in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem: "They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them," declares the Lord. "Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place."

We know from 2 Kings 24 that the exile began under the reign of Jehoiachin. During the reign of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar carried off many of the articles of the temple (just as Isaiah had told Hezekiah). Apparently not all of them were taken. Jeremiah challenged the false prophets to pray that the remaining articles would not be taken away as a sign that their prophecies were true. Jeremiah knew that the remaining articles indeed would be taken to Babylon. He also knew that the day would come (at the end of the exile) when they would be returned to Jerusalem.

Chapter 28 says that a specific false prophet named Hananiah challenged the words of Jeremiah. This occurred in the fifth month of the same year as the prophecy above. We are not sure in which month the previous prophecy was delivered. Apparently Jeremiah was still wearing his yoke. Hananiah took the yoke from Jeremiah and broke it and declared that the yoke of the

king of Babylon would be broken within two years and that all the articles from the temple would be returned in that time.

Jeremiah said that he really wished that it would be so, but he knew that it would not happen. He said that Hananiah may have broken a yoke of wood, but that God would place a yoke of iron on these nations that would be subject to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar would reign supreme and the other nations simply needed to subject themselves to it. They ought to make it as painless as possible because it was going to happen. Jeremiah also said that since Hananiah had spoken against the word of the Lord, he would die that same year. Two months later, Hananiah died.

6.17 Letter to the Exiles

Jeremiah 29

There were already many Jews living in Babylon, taken captive during the first exile (at the time Jehoiachin was taken captive). Jeremiah wrote them a letter. Apparently they were all waiting for an imminent return to Judah. He told them to unpack their bags and get on with their lives in Babylon. They were going to be there for seventy years and they ought to begin thinking of it as home. They should go ahead and marry and have children. They should practice their professions, etc. Furthermore, they should pray for the peace and prosperity of that place, because it was now their home.

He also let them know that those who were in Jerusalem were going to face destruction. They were unacceptable to God and he was going to deal with those who were left behind. The exiles were better off where they were and God had put them there to protect them.

There were false prophets in Babylon telling the people that they would be going home soon. The people were to ignore these prophets. God would deal harshly with them for misleading the people. One of these false prophets, Shemaiah, sent a letter back to officials in Jerusalem, asking them to reprimand Jeremiah for spreading this message of gloom among the exiles. God said that he (Shemaiah) would be punished along with the other false prophets for speaking against the word of God.

There is a point to this story for us. There are times when we find ourselves in circumstances that we do not understand. We feel unhappy about where we are or what we are doing. We want God to deliver us and lead us somewhere else. It is easy to "shut down" in situations like this. Mentally we pack our bags and sit on our suitcases, waiting for God's magic carpet to carry us off to a better land. The fact is that God may have placed us in these very circumstances for a purpose. Wherever we are, we must be subject to God. We should unpack our bags and get on with our lives. We should figure out how to serve him under any circumstances and we should pray for peace and prosperity of our home, wherever that may be. This could apply to a home, a job, a relationship, or whatever. God will deliver in his own time. Our deliverance may never come until we are finally taken to be with him. In the mean time, home is where you are.

6.18 Restoration for Judah

Jeremiah 30-31

Chapters 30 and 31 promise the hope of restoration for Judah. There are several themes repeated throughout these two chapters.

The exile is indeed God's punishment for the unfaithfulness of his people.

I will discipline you but only with justice;
I will not let you go entirely unpunished. (30:11)

I have struck you as an enemy would
and punished you as would the cruel,
because your guilt is so great
and your sins so many.
Why do you cry out over your wound,
your pain that has no cure?
Because of your great guilt and many sins
I have done these things to you. (30:14-15)

God will gather the people from exile back into their own land.

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess," says the Lord. (30:3)

See, I will bring them from the land of the north
and gather them from the ends of the earth.
Among them will be the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and women in labor;
a great throng will return. (31:18)

God will punish the nations that have oppressed his people.

"I am with you and will save you,"
declares the Lord.
"Though I completely destroy all the nations
among which I scatter you,
I will not completely destroy you." (30:11)

But all who devour you will be devoured;
all your enemies will go into exile.
Those who plunder you will be plundered;
all who make spoil of you I will despoil. (30:16)

The people who return will be faithful to God. God will also raise up a son of David to be their king (i.e. the Messiah).

"In that day," declares the Lord Almighty,
"I will break the yoke off their necks
and will tear off their bonds;
no longer will foreigners enslave them.
Instead, they will serve the Lord their God
and David their king,
whom I will raise up for them." (30:8-9)

"Their leader will be one of their own;
their ruler will arise from among them.
I will bring him near and he will come close to me,
for who is he who will devote himself
to be close to me?"

declares the Lord.
"So you will be my people,
and I will be your God." (30:21-22)

The land will be fruitful. The people will enjoy prosperity. Cities will be rebuilt. The people's lives will be restored.

This is what the Lord says:
"I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents
and have compassion on his dwellings;
the city will be rebuilt on her ruins,
and the palace will stand in its proper place.
From them will come songs of thanksgiving
and the sound of rejoicing.
I will add to their numbers,
and they will not be decreased;
I will bring them honor,
and they will not be disdained." (30:18-29)

Again you will plant vineyards
on the hills of Samaria;
the farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit. (31:5)

"They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;
they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord —
the grain, the new wine and the oil,
the young of the flocks and herds.
They will be like a well-watered garden,
and they will sorrow no more.
Then maidens will dance and be glad,
young men and old as well.
I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.
I will satisfy the priests with abundance,
and my people will be filled with my bounty,"
declares the Lord. (31:12-14)

It will be a time when God establishes a new covenant with his people. This will be a covenant written on men's hearts rather than on stone. The significance of this is that the new covenant is more relational than it is legal. God wants to move away from having people view him as a list of "do's" and "don'ts" and move towards personal relationships with his people. He wants to stop relating to people through a hierarchy of priests. He wants to relate directly to people as individuals. People will have individual access to him. No longer will a wayward father be a stumbling block to his children.

"In those days people will no longer say,
'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

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

"The time is coming," declares the Lord,
 "when I will make a new covenant
 with the house of Israel
 and with the house of Judah.
 It will not be like the covenant
 I made with their forefathers
 when I took them by the hand
 to lead them out of Egypt,
 because they broke my covenant,
 though I was a husband to them,"
 declares the Lord.
 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
 after that time," declares the Lord.
 "I will put my law in their minds
 and write it on their hearts.
 I will be their God,
 and they will be my people.
 No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
 or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
 because they will all know me,
 from the least of them to the greatest,"
 declares the Lord.
 "For I will forgive their wickedness
 and will remember their sins no more." (31:29-34)

Jesus brought us this new covenant. He broke through the formality of religion and made faith a personal thing. He brought us relationship with the Father on a personal level. Man, in his finite wisdom, has done everything in his power to try to get things back like they once were. In the church, we have often ignored the model that Jesus gave us and have set up a new hierarchy of priests. We have established a professional clergy to stand between God and us. We have wanted to hide behind the priestly robes to avoid confronting God personally. We have wanted to pay others to relate to God for us. But that is not the way it works.

God's church is not a forum for spectators. It is for participants.

The section that we have just examined has one well-known verse in it that should be examined. Jeremiah 31:15 includes:

A voice is heard in Ramah,
 mourning and great weeping,
 Rachel weeping for her children
 and refusing to be comforted,
 because her children are no more.

In Matthew 2, this verse is cited as a prophecy that was fulfilled when the baby boys of Bethlehem were slaughtered after the birth of Jesus. This has posed problems for some Biblical scholars. If one looks at the verse in context he will see why.

This is what the Lord says:

"A voice is heard in Ramah,
 mourning and great weeping,
 Rachel weeping for her children
 and refusing to be comforted,
 because her children are no more."

This is what the Lord says:

“Restrain your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears,
for your work will be rewarded,”
declares the Lord.

“They will return from the land of the enemy.
So there is hope for your future,”
declares the Lord.

“Your children will return to their own land. (31:15-17)

The passage in Jeremiah was clearly talking about the exiles. They were the children for whom Rachel was weeping. The people to whom the prophecy was delivered interpreted it that way. Nobody was expecting the Bethlehem massacre. That being the case, how does one deal with Matthew 2:18?

Some Biblical scholars say that Matthew was stretching things a bit when he cited this prophecy and applied it to the killing of the Bethlehem babies. The problem with that view is that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that all Scripture is inspired by God. The same Holy Spirit that told Jeremiah to write the prophecy told Matthew that it applied to the events in Bethlehem. This is an example of a prophecy with double fulfillment. When the Jews were taken into exile, this was a first fulfillment of this prophecy. When the babies in Bethlehem were killed, it was a second fulfillment.

Chapter 31 of Jeremiah contains the first appearance of the man named Baruch. Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe. He is the one who actually penned the book of Jeremiah. We shall see more of him as the book progresses.

Chapter 31 also contains what is perhaps the most puzzling verse in the book of Jeremiah. 31:22 says:

How long will you wander,
O unfaithful daughter?
The Lord will create a new thing on earth —
a woman will surround a man.

If you think you know what this means, "a woman will surround a man," then you are in better shape than most Biblical commentators. If you have no idea, you are in good company.

6.19 Jeremiah Under Arrest

Jeremiah 32-33

Zedekiah had Jeremiah placed under arrest and confined in the palace. He did this because Jeremiah kept preaching messages about the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. While he was under arrest, God gave Jeremiah some words to deliver to the king and others in the palace.

Jeremiah's cousin came to him and asked him to buy a field. Jeremiah bought the field. This may not seem unusual, but this particular field was in the territory of Benjamin, which had fallen to Babylon some time ago. Jeremiah bought the field as an object lesson to those around him. The word from God was that the day would come when the land would be restored to the Jews and there would be buying and selling of land again. The fact that Jeremiah was willing to buy this field was a display of faith that God's word would come true.

God told Jeremiah to remind the people that they were being punished for their idolatry. This message was delivered at a time when Nebuchadnezzar's troops were camped outside the walls of Jerusalem and the city was under siege. They had no doubt that they were being punished. They needed to be reminded frequently why they were being punished.

God promised them restoration, however. They would be regathered to their land. It would be a time of great joy. The covenant made with the house of David would be renewed and a new Davidic king would reign. 33:14-22 says:

"The days are coming,' declares the Lord,'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

In those days and at that time
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.
In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.
This is the name by which it will be called:
The Lord Our Righteousness."

For this is what the Lord says: "David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices."

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "This is what the Lord says: 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant — and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me — can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.'"

The message is nothing new. The fact that the theme is repeated so often is an indication of its importance and of the certainty of its truth. Note again the descendant of David who will be called "The Lord (Yahweh) Our Righteousness" – a son of man who will be called God.

6.20 Message to Zedekiah

Jeremiah 34

God told Jeremiah to tell Zedekiah that Jerusalem would fall to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's armies would burn down Jerusalem. Zedekiah himself would meet Nebuchadnezzar face-to-face. He would be taken captive and die peacefully in Babylon. He would be mourned by his people.

34:7 indicates that there were only three cities in Judah that had not yet fallen to Babylon – Jerusalem, Lachish, and Azekah.

Starting in 34:8, there is a discussion of the treatment of Hebrew slaves. The law required that Hebrew slaves were to be freed after six years of service. In practice, the people had failed to free their Hebrew slaves. Zedekiah came under some sort of conviction and made a covenant with the people to right this wrong. The Hebrew slaves were freed. Shortly after that, the people who had been freed were reenslaved. This made God very angry with them. Jeremiah 34:12-20 says:

Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said, ‘Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you. After he has served you six years, you must let him go free.’ Your fathers, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me. Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to his countrymen. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name. But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again.

“Therefore, this is what the Lord says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim ‘freedom’ for you, declares the Lord —‘freedom’ to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth. The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

The latter part of this alludes to an image portrayed in Genesis 15. In ancient times, when a covenant was made, the parties involved would sacrifice an animal, such as a calf. They would cut it in two pieces and lay the pieces on the ground with some room in the middle. Both parties entering into the covenant would walk through the path between the pieces as a symbol of voluntarily walking into the covenant agreement. The blood was symbolic of the punishment that was warranted by breaking the terms of the covenant. In Genesis, God entered into a covenant with Abraham and God himself walked between the pieces of the sacrificed animal, not requiring Abraham to do so. Here in Jeremiah, God is saying that he will treat the men who violated the covenant like the sacrificial animal.

6.21 Message to Jehoiakim

Jeremiah 35

We know for a fact that this part of the book of Jeremiah is not chronologically arranged. Chapter 35 is addressed to Jehoiakim. Chapter 34 is addressed to Zedekiah. Jehoiakim was king before Zedekiah (in fact, it was Jehoiakim, then Jehoiachin, then Zedekiah). At times we must remember that parts of the Bible make no claim to be chronological lists of events.

Jeremiah was instructed by God to go and find a family of Recabites – the descendants of a man named Jonadab, son of Recab. There are several characters that we have encountered in the Old Testament thus far named Recab or Jonadab, but we are not really sure which if any of them is the ancestor of the people in Jeremiah 35. It is not really significant.

These people were brought into a room and were offered wine. They did not accept the wine because of instructions that their ancestor Jonadab had given them. He told them not to drink wine, not to build houses or sow seed or plant vineyards. They were to be tent dwellers. If they would observe these commandments, they would live long lives. They had always observed Jonadab's instructions. The only reason that they were in Jerusalem now (and not living in tents) was to get away from Nebuchadnezzar's troops.

God used these people as a model to the rest of the Jews. The Recabites had been faithful to carry out the instruction of their forefathers. As a result, the promises that he had made to them

came true. In like manner, God had expected certain things of his people and made them promises for faithfulness. His people had rejected his ways, however. As a result, they were bringing distress upon themselves.

God promised to bless the Recabites for their faithfulness.

6.22 Jehoiakim and the Scroll

Jeremiah 36

Chapter 36 takes place during the reign of Jehoiakim and we find Jeremiah under arrest again. While he was confined, God told him to write down all the words of the prophecies that he had received and to read them aloud in the temple. Hopefully if the people hear the words they would repent. Jeremiah summoned Baruch, his scribe. Jeremiah dictated all of the prophecies he had received and Baruch wrote them down. Then, since Jeremiah was confined, he sent Baruch to the temple to read the scroll to the people.

Baruch did as instructed. Once there, some of the leaders of the temple were greatly concerned about the message. They knew it was a message that the king should hear. They also knew that most likely he would not receive it well. They asked Baruch to give them the scroll so that they could take it to the king. They also encouraged Baruch to find Jeremiah so that the two of them could hide.

They took the scroll to Jehoiakim. They began to read it. Before they got too far into it, he took out a knife and began to cut up the scroll and toss it into the fire. He had no fear of God. He told his attendants to go and find Jeremiah and Baruch so that they could be punished for spreading such a negative message. It is hard to know how a man under arrest could really hide very effectively, but God hid Jeremiah and Baruch and they were not found.

God told Jeremiah to produce another scroll with the same words as before, but to the end of this one he should add some specific prophecies about Jehoiakim. Because Jehoiakim showed no fear of God when the first scroll was read, he would be punished. Furthermore he would not have an heir to sit on the throne of Judah. History records that after Jehoiakim was deposed and killed, his son Jehoiachin became the next king, but only for about three months. Nebuchadnezzar removed him from the throne and set up Zedekiah in his place. Truly, Jehoiakim did not have a descendant to sit on the throne of Judah.

6.23 More Arrests

Jeremiah 37-38

In chapter 37, we are back in the time of Zedekiah. 37:4 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar was waging war on two fronts, Egypt and Judah, and that he had withdrawn from Judah for a time so that he could focus on Egypt. The withdrawal seemed like good news to Zedekiah. Although he had never paid any attention to Jeremiah's warnings, he sent word to Jeremiah asking what the withdrawal meant.

Jeremiah told him that Babylon would return. They would again attack Jerusalem. They would capture it and burn it down.

While the warfare had subsided, Jeremiah wanted to leave Jerusalem and go to the territory of Benjamin to take care of some personal matters (remember that he had bought the field in the territory of Benjamin – we assume that his home was there). As he was leaving Jerusalem,

someone accused him of being a traitor. They said that he was leaving the city so that he could go join the Babylonians. Jeremiah pled his innocence, but once again he was arrested. He was placed into a dungeon and left there for a very long time. At some point, Zedekiah wanted to speak to Jeremiah. He located him and had him brought out of the dungeon. He asked him whether or not there were any new words from the Lord. Jeremiah told him basically the same thing that he had been telling him all along – that Jerusalem would fall to Babylon and that the king would be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar.

Then Jeremiah began to beseech the king about the way he was being treated. He had committed no crimes and did not deserve to be in a dungeon. He wanted the king to help him and not return him to his prison. Thus Jeremiah was kept under arrest in the palace and was cared for there. Specifically he was kept in the courtyard of the guard.

The courtyard of the guard may not have been a good place to keep Jeremiah, because there he had free access to the soldiers. He took every opportunity to spread his message to his new audience. The message that he gave them is summarized in 38:2-3:

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. He will escape with his life; he will live.’ And this is what the Lord says: ‘This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’”

This is not a message that would encourage the average soldier. He was causing morale problems among the troops. Some officials complained to the king and the king gave them permission to do whatever they wanted to Jeremiah. Thus they took him and put him in a cistern in the home of Malkijah, the king's son.

A cistern was a cavern used to hold drinking water. This particular one had no water in it. Instead, it was a cold, muddy prison. Jeremiah was left there to wallow in the mud. Some people who cared for Jeremiah's safety were concerned about him there. They went to Zedekiah and pled for his life. They feared that he would die in the cistern. Zedekiah let them remove him from there. Once he was out, Zedekiah summoned Jeremiah and asked him again if there were any words from the Lord.

Jeremiah told Zedekiah the same old thing. Babylon would win this war. The only road to safety would be surrender. If they did not surrender, the city would be burned down and there would be much death. Zedekiah told Jeremiah not to tell anyone about their conversation and Jeremiah obeyed. Jeremiah was kept under arrest in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem fell.

6.24 The Fall of Jerusalem

Jeremiah 39

It all came to an end in 586 BC. Nebuchadnezzar's armies finally broke through the wall of the city. Zedekiah fled and headed towards Jericho. He was captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar, just as Jeremiah had said. While Zedekiah watched (he was forced to), all of his sons were executed. The nobles of Judah were killed as well. Then they put out Zedekiah's eyes. The last thing that he ever saw was the execution of those he loved. He was placed into shackles and taken captive to Babylon.

The city was burned. The palace was destroyed, as was Solomon's temple.

Masses of people were taken captive to Babylon. Some of the poorer were left behind. The Babylonians gave them fields and vineyards and left them on the land.

Nebuchadnezzar had given special instructions to take care of Jeremiah. He seemed to hold this prophet in a higher regard than most of the Jews did. How did Nebuchadnezzar know about Jeremiah? We do not know for sure. Jeremiah had corresponded with the exiles who were already in Babylon and thus his reputation may have spread. Nebuchadnezzar probably knew that he had encouraged Zedekiah to surrender and bring the battle to a peaceful conclusion. For whatever reason, Jeremiah was treated well and was allowed to remain in Judah.

6.25 Civil Unrest and the Flight to Egypt

Jeremiah 40-43

After the dust settled from the Babylonian conquest, Nebuchadnezzar appointed a man by the name of Gedaliah to be governor of Judah. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar took into exile all of the upper and middle class people and left behind the lower class, i.e. the poor. They needed someone in charge and Nebuchadnezzar put Gedaliah in place.

Jeremiah received favorable treatment and was told that he could live wherever he wanted. He chose to remain in Jerusalem with Gedaliah.

The Bible gives a fair amount of information about the family of Gedaliah. His grandfather, Shaphan, was a secretary to Josiah. When the book of the law was found, it was Shaphan that read it aloud to Josiah. Shaphan had a number of sons that are mentioned in Scripture. Ahikam was Gedaliah's father. He is mentioned in Jeremiah 26 as one of the men that spoke up in Jeremiah's behalf and prevented him from being executed. Another son, Elashah, was a messenger for Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar. Sons Gemariah and Micaiah were present when Baruch read the scroll in the temple. Gemariah was there when the scroll was subsequently read to Jehoiakim. He urged the king not to destroy the scroll. There is also a man named Jaazaniah, son of Shaphan, mentioned among the exiles in the book of Ezekiel. We are not sure whether or not this is the same Shaphan. Still we know that the family of Gedaliah had ties to the royal family in Judah and they also had an association with Nebuchadnezzar. They had shown support for Jeremiah, which would have put them in a sympathetic position with Babylon. This same fact would have put them at odds with many people in Judah. Thus Gedaliah was not universally accepted as a popular leader. In fact, there was a rumor that a man named Ishmael was going to assassinate Gedaliah. Gedaliah did not take the rumor seriously. He refused to take preventative action. This was a mistake, because Ishmael did indeed kill him. He killed a number of Gedaliah's supporters as well.

This assassination caused great fear among the remnant in Judah. Gedaliah was Nebuchadnezzar's choice. How would Nebuchadnezzar react when he found out that Gedaliah had been killed? The people greatly feared a retributory attack by Babylon. In fear, many of them began to think about running away to Egypt. They asked Jeremiah whether or not God would give them any guidance in this matter.

The word of God came to Jeremiah. God said that he was mourning over the destruction that Judah had already endured. He had every intention of protecting and nurturing the people that were left behind. He would keep them safe from Babylon as long as they remained under his care in Judah. They were not to flee to Egypt (where they would be under the influence of idolatry once again). If they went to Egypt, they would again face sword, famine, and plague.

Jeremiah delivered this message to those who had asked for a word from God. It was not the message they wanted to hear. They had already made up their minds to go and they were

looking only for a confirmation – not really for guidance. Thus they reacted in the only logical way they could. They called Jeremiah a liar and went anyway.

Thus the people directly disobeyed the very instructions that they had asked God to give them. They fled to Egypt. They forced Jeremiah and Baruch to go with them. Once they were there, Jeremiah told those who were with him that Nebuchadnezzar would come and conquer Egypt and that they would experience the same sort of destruction that they saw when Judah fell.

One has to wonder a bit why these people just could not seem to get it. God wanted his people in his land serving him.

6.26 Message to the Jews in Egypt

Jeremiah 44

The idea that the Jews in Egypt would again succumb to idolatry was not just a supposition. Once Jeremiah arrived, he found that the colonies of Jews who were already in Egypt were actively burning incense to the Egyptian gods. Who, one might ask, are these Jews who were already living in Egypt?

Remember that over the years, the Jews had formed military alliances from time to time with Egypt. We have seen specific instances where individuals fled to Egypt for protection (reference the prophet Uriah in Jeremiah 26). Over time, significant numbers of Jews had migrated to Egypt and settled in colonies there. When Jeremiah arrived in Egypt with his companions, there were already a number of his countrymen living there. And they were worshipping the Egyptian gods.

Jeremiah told them that they would incur the wrath of God for burning incense to these idols. Their response was one of indifference. They said that since they had been in Egypt, they had been prosperous when they had burned incense to these gods and had experienced famine when they had not. Thus they would continue to worship these gods in spite of what Jeremiah said.

Jeremiah reminded them that the reason God brought destruction on Judah was because of idolatry. Since those in Egypt would not turn away from idolatry, they would be destroyed. His promise to them was that they would encounter sword and famine. The price of their disobedience would be destruction.

As a sign that all of this was true, they would see the Pharaoh of Egypt defeated by Nebuchadnezzar.

6.27 Baruch is Tired and Depressed

Jeremiah 45

Chapter 45 is a personal interlude, describing an exchange between Baruch and Jeremiah. Baruch is tired and depressed. He says in 45:3:

Woe to me! The Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.

God's reply to Baruch, via Jeremiah, is that God is in the process of bringing destruction – refining his people and his land. It is not a time for Baruch to be seeking comfort or security. He

can, however, take comfort in the fact that God has promised to spare his life in the midst of all of the destruction.

6.28 Woes to Nations

6.28.1 Egypt

Jeremiah 46

The next several chapters of Jeremiah contain woes directed at specific nations. The first is against Egypt. God is going to punish Egypt for her arrogance and for her idolatry. Egypt is going to be handed over to Babylon for destruction. At the end of chapter 46 is a message to the Jews. Even though Egypt will be destroyed, they will be protected. Embedded in this promise, however, is a message that the Jews will face a certain amount of punishment. This must be reconciled with the message in chapter 44. The Jews in Egypt have already been promised punishment for their idolatry. This will come about. They will taste God's discipline. Chapter 46 promises them that they will not be destroyed altogether, however. The day will come when the remnant of these people will be gathered back from Egypt and brought to their own land.

6.28.2 Philistines

Jeremiah 47

Jeremiah next turned to the Philistines. The Philistines had been subdued by Hezekiah and were never really a power after that time. Apparently, however, they were still objects of God's punishment. Jeremiah tells them that they would be overtaken by invading armies. Gaza and Ashkelon would be hit. 47:1 indicates that it was Egypt that was the source of the promised attack. The section does not indicate the reason for the punishment, so we can assume it is a result of the historical hostilities between the Philistines and God's chosen people.

6.28.3 Moab

Jeremiah 48

The next oracle is against Moab. Recall that Moab was one of the sons of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Ruth was a Moabite. The Moabites lived across the Dead Sea from the Jews. The text of this oracle is somewhat lengthy but the message is simple and direct. Moab has been arrogant and idolatrous. Furthermore she has held Israel in ridicule. Because of this, God is going to rain judgment upon Moab, making her the object of ridicule for other nations.

48:11-12 says:

“Moab has been at rest from youth,
like wine left on its dregs,
not poured from one jar to another —
she has not gone into exile.
So she tastes as she did,
and her aroma is unchanged.
But days are coming,”
declares the Lord,
“when I will send men who pour from jars,

and they will pour her out;
they will empty her jars
and smash her jugs."

When wine is made, it is normally allowed to sit in its jar for some time. During this time, the sediment from the wine settles to the bottom of the jar. This sediment is called the dregs of the wine. In order for the wine to be good, it must be carefully poured into another jar. The winemaker must be careful to pour the good wine into a new container but not stir up the dregs in the process.

Moab is like wine that had never been separated from the dregs. The image implies that there are good people in Moab, worthy of being saved, but that there is an element there that is contaminating the whole society. God's intention is to refine and not completely destroy. This is confirmed by the closing verse of the oracle. 48:46-47 says:

"Woe to you, O Moab!
The people of Chemosh are destroyed;
your sons are taken into exile
and your daughters into captivity.
"Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab
in days to come,"
declares the Lord.
Here ends the judgment on Moab.

6.28.4 Ammonites

Jeremiah 49:1-6

The Ammonites were the descendants of Ben-ammi, the brother of Moab. They lived across the Jordan River from the Jews, to the north of the Moabites. They had been military rivals of Israel and Judah off and on hundreds of years. They appear repeatedly as enemies of Israel in the book of Judges. God promises to bring judgment on Ammon for the same reasons as he brought it upon Moab: arrogance, idolatry (and spreading the influence of idolatry among the Jews), and for military confrontation with God's people. As was true with Moab, God also promises to restore the fortunes of the Ammonites after the judgment has come.

6.28.5 Edom

Jeremiah 49:7-22

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. They lived to the south of the Jews. There had been hostility between the Edomites and the Jews since the time of Esau and Jacob. The crimes named against Edom (in 49:16) are arrogance and inciting terror. Judgment is promised. There is no promise of restoration with this oracle.

6.28.6 Damascus

Jeremiah 49:23-27

Damascus was the predominant city in Syria. Syria has continued to engage in hostilities with Israel even to modern days. Jeremiah pronounces destruction to Damascus. There is no promise of restoration.

6.28.7 Kedar and Hazor

Jeremiah 49:28-33

Kedar and Hazor seem to have been nomadic tribes, bearing no relationship to the city of Hazor. We are unsure what they might have done to arouse the anger of God. It is not explained in the passage. Jeremiah predicts that both tribes will be attacked by Nebuchadnezzar and will suffer serious defeat.

6.28.8 Elam

Jeremiah 49:34-49

Elam was to the east of Babylon, in the area that is now Iran. 49:35 implies that it was a warring nation, prone to violence. We are not sure what specific crimes she has committed to arouse God's anger. Jeremiah promised destruction and exile for her people. This oracle does close with a promise to restore her fortunes once the time of judgment is over.

6.28.9 Babylon

Jeremiah 50-51

The longest oracle is against Babylon. God used Babylon to discipline other nations, but the day will come when God will tolerate the sins of Babylon no more. The nation will face destruction. It will be attacked by an army from the north. 51:11 identifies this as the Medes. (History records that a Persian-Mede alliance did indeed overthrow Babylon around 70 years after the exile began.) Babylon will be destroyed. It will become an uninhabitable place. When all of this happens, the exiles will be allowed to return to their land. 50:19-20 says:

"But I will bring Israel back to his own pasture
and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan;
his appetite will be satisfied
on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead.
In those days, at that time,"
declares the Lord,
"search will be made for Israel's guilt,
but there will be none,
and for the sins of Judah,
but none will be found,
for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

They receive both forgiveness and restoration.

51:59-64 indicates that Jeremiah wrote these words (the oracle against Babylon at a minimum, perhaps all the oracles) in the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah, which would have been around 7 years before the fall of Jerusalem. The words were sent to the exiles in Babylon and read aloud. Then a rock was tied to the scroll and it was cast into the river Euphrates. As the scroll/rock sank into the river, so would Babylon sink to rise no more.

The last part of verse 64 says "The words of Jeremiah end here." This implies that chapter 52 was probably added by Baruch after the rest of Jeremiah's words had been recorded.

6.29 *Recalling the Fall of Jerusalem*

Jeremiah 52

Chapter 52 recalls the events of the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar's army. It gives a bit more detail than was in chapter 39. Of significance is the fact that it says that the Babylonian army burned down the temple. 52:17-23 says:

The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the movable stands and the bronze Sea that were at the temple of the Lord and they carried all the bronze to Babylon. They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes and all the bronze articles used in the temple service. The commander of the imperial guard took away the basins, censers, sprinkling bowls, pots, lampstands, dishes and bowls used for drink offerings — all that were made of pure gold or silver.

The bronze from the two pillars, the Sea and the twelve bronze bulls under it, and the movable stands, which King Solomon had made for the temple of the Lord, was more than could be weighed. Each of the pillars was eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference; each was four fingers thick, and hollow. The bronze capital on top of the one pillar was five cubits high and was decorated with a network and pomegranates of bronze all around. The other pillar, with its pomegranates, was similar. There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; the total number of pomegranates above the surrounding network was a hundred.

These details were given because they are the fulfillment of a prophecy that Jeremiah gave in chapter 27. If you recall, Nebuchadnezzar had taken a number of things from the temple earlier. There were false prophets saying that those things would soon be restored to Jerusalem. In 27:18-22, Jeremiah said:

If they are prophets and have the word of the Lord, let them plead with the Lord Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon. For this is what the Lord Almighty says about the pillars, the Sea, the movable stands and the other furnishings that are left in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away when he carried Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem — yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about the things that are left in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem: "They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them," declares the Lord. "Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place."

The words of the prophecy were true and Baruch wanted to confirm that.

This final chapter of Jeremiah also gives some statistics about how many people were taken into exile. It also tells us that Jehoiachin (who had been taken captive years earlier) was treated well in the latter years of his life. 52:27-34 says:

So Judah went into captivity, away from her land. This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile:

in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews;
in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year,
832 people from Jerusalem;
in his twenty-third year,
745 Jews taken into exile by Nebuzaradan the commander of the imperial guard.
There were 4,600 people in all.

In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin king of Judah and freed him from prison on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king of Babylon gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived, till the day of his death.

The book of Jeremiah teaches a hard lesson. Sin exacts a price. Even though God is merciful, he will hand us over to the consequences of our choices for a time. He is a God of wrath and judgment. Still, the object of his judgment is reconciliation.

The letter that Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in chapter 29 may speak the loudest to the faithful. There are times in our lives when we may find ourselves in exile. We may not like our circumstances. We may want to be somewhere else or be doing something else. We can make a choice, however. We can waste our lives waiting for God to move us along to the next milestone or we can unpack our bags and get on with life. God may well have us hidden away to protect us from destruction that would come to us at the place where we think we want to be. Wherever we are and whatever we are doing, we should be of service to God and we should pray for peace and prosperity in our circumstances.

7 Lamentations

The book of Lamentations is generally believed to have been written by Jeremiah. The entire book laments the fall of Jerusalem. It is an expression of pain and dismay – crying out to God for comfort. Jews today still feel this pain. The book is read annually to commemorate the destruction of the temple. It is common to see people reading it at the wailing wall. In some Christian traditions, the book is read as part of holy week observances as a way of remembering the terrible consequences of sin.

Stylistically the book is a carefully crafted poem. It consists of five chapters. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 each have twenty-two verses – one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 has sixty-six verses – three times twenty-two. Each verse of the first and second chapters is three lines long; thus each chapter is sixty-six lines long. Each verse of the third chapter is one line long; thus this chapter is also sixty-six lines long. Each verse of the fourth is two lines long and each verse of the fifth chapter has one line. (The fourth and fifth chapters together contain sixty-six lines.)

The first, second, and fourth chapters are written in the form of an acrostic, such that the first letter of the first verse is aleph (the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet), the first letter of the second verse is bet (the second letter of the alphabet), etc. The third chapter is an acrostic as well but in a slightly different form. Remember that the third chapter has sixty-six verses. Each of the first three verses begins with aleph, each of the second three verses begins with bet, etc. The fifth chapter is not written in acrostic form.

The following chart may help to illustrate. Remember that Hebrew words run right-to-left. In the following, the 'a' stands for 'Aleph,' the 'b' for 'Bet,' and the 'T' for 'Tav' (the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet). Thus 'xxxa' represents a line that begins with 'Aleph'.

Chapter 1	22 verses, 3 lines each	Verse 1	...xxxa
			...XXXX
			...XXXX
		Verse 2	...xxxb
			...XXXX
			...XXXX
			...
		Verse 22	...xxxt
			...XXXX
			...XXXX
Chapter 2	22 verses, 3 lines each	Verse 1	...xxxa
			...XXXX
			...XXXX
		Verse 2	...xxxb
			...XXXX
			...XXXX
			...
		Verse 22	...xxxt
			...XXXX
			...XXXX
Chapter 3	66 verses, 1 line each	Verse 1	...xxxa
		Verse 2	...xxxa

		Verse 3	...xxxa
		Verse 4	...xxxb
		Verse 5	...xxxb
		Verse 6	...xxxb
			...
		Verse 64	...xxxt
		Verse 65	...xxxt
		Verse 66	...xxxt
Chapter 4	22 verses, 2 lines each	Verse 1	...xxxa
			...xxxx
		Verse 2	...xxxb
			...xxxx
			...
		Verse 22	...xxxt
			...xxxx
Chapter 5	22 verses, 1 line each	Verse 1	...xxxx
		Verse 2	...xxxx
			...
		Verse 22	...xxxx

There are several predominant themes in Lamentations. The main one is sorrow at the fall of Judah. This people who once felt the favor of God now feel his wrath. They had become the scorn and laughingstock of other nations. The splendor of Judah is gone.

The author never assumes that the punishment is undeserved. He recognizes the sin of Judah. He recognizes that the judgment is from God and not simply a product of Babylonian aggression.

The desecration and destruction of the temple is lamented. The temple was the one thing that continued to give Judah security. They believed (wrongly) that as long as it stood God would be in their midst. Now they did not even have that. Without a temple, there was no place to make sacrifice or to observe the various feasts of Judaism. Their whole system of worship was no more.

The author cries from feeling the unbridled wrath of God. He weeps to see the devastating effect upon the people. The people were reduced to total poverty. There was no food. Mothers were reduced to cannibalism, eating their own children.

Perhaps more than anything, the author feels hopelessness because he feels cut off from God. Lamentations 3:8-20 says:

Even when I call out or cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer.
He has barred my way with blocks of stone;
he has made my paths crooked.
Like a bear lying in wait,
like a lion in hiding,
he dragged me from the path and mangled me
and left me without help.
He drew his bow
and made me the target for his arrows.
He pierced my heart
with arrows from his quiver.

I became the laughingstock of all my people;
they mock me in song all day long.
He has filled me with bitter herbs
and sated me with gall.
He has broken my teeth with gravel;
he has trampled me in the dust.
I have been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what prosperity is.
So I say, "My splendor is gone
and all that I had hoped from the Lord."
I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.

Still, immediately following this section, the author recognizes that God is good. In spite of everything he is experiencing, the author is able to say in Lamentations 3:21-26:

Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:
Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."
The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.

When our world is crashing around us, in the most bitter circumstances of life, we must still wait on the Lord. In all things he is faithful. He is our only salvation.

It is not often that one hears a sermon preached from Lamentations. Overall its message is depressing. In spite of the peak of hope in the middle, it begins and ends in despair. That makes most of us uncomfortable. The message is real and legitimate, however. Sin exacts a price. That price is depressing and it brings despair. God will discipline and refine, and that is not a pleasant experience. In the midst of it, however, he is our hope and salvation. He shelters through his own disciplining. Great is his faithfulness.

8 Joel

Although parts of the book of Joel are well known and widely quoted, very little is known about the book or its author. We can rely neither on tradition nor on content to place the book historically. Thus we do not know the conditions and historical setting in which the prophet ministered. The text seems to favor a preexilic setting – perhaps even a late preexilic setting – but such a conclusion is only conjecture. Nobody really knows when Joel lived.

The message of Joel is similar in nature to the message of the other prophets that we have considered. There is a threat of judgment for sin with a suggestion that the people should repent. There is a lengthy discussion of the misery that would be inflicted by the judgment. There is hope of restoration at the end.

In chapter 1, Joel has a vision of a swarm of locusts invading the land. Modern urban dwellers might not have any idea why this would be such a problem, but the agricultural mind would understand the implications. Locusts destroy vegetation. A locust invasion, if it were bad enough, could leave the people of the land in poverty and famine. Thus Joel calls upon different groups of people to mourn for the loss. Drunkards will have no more wine because there are no more grapes. Priests should mourn because there can be no more grain offerings or drink offerings. There will be no more oil with which to minister. Farmers should despair for their crops. Cattle and sheep will die because there is neither food nor pasture. The destruction is widespread and great.

In chapter 2, Joel sees a vision of an army invading the land. Commentators are divided on the question of whether Joel is talking about a literal army or if this is another reference to the locusts. Joel 2:20 refers to this as "the northern army." We have seen references in Isaiah and Jeremiah to the armies from the north, referring to Babylon. In the context of Joel, however, this seems to make more sense to interpret it as an army of locusts bringing destruction on the land. Chapter 2 may be seen as a continuation of the vision in chapter 1 or perhaps a second invasion of locusts. They destroy everything in their path. Joel 2:3 says:

Before them fire devours,
behind them a flame blazes.
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,
behind them, a desert waste —
nothing escapes them.

The description of the destruction continues in the first part of chapter 2. In the middle of chapter 2, God offers the people another option. Joel 2:12-14 says:

“Even now,” declares the Lord,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning.
Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity.
Who knows? He may turn and have pity

and leave behind a blessing —
grain offerings and drink offerings
for the Lord your God."

The people are called upon to repent that they might escape the destruction. If they do, God will give to them new grain, wine, and oil – the very things that the locusts would take away.

Chapter 2 concludes with some very well-known verses. Joel 2:26-32 says:

You will have plenty to eat, until you are full,
and you will praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has worked wonders for you;
never again will my people be shamed.
Then you will know that I am in Israel,
that I am the Lord your God,
and that there is no other;
never again will my people be shamed.
And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved;
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be deliverance,
as the Lord has said,
among the survivors
whom the Lord calls."

After the restoration, there will come a day when God will pour his Spirit out on his people. Prophecy will be a common gift – not as unusual as it was in previous days. After that (with no indication of how long after that), the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" would come. This is the time of final judgment. It will be a time when people receive the final punishment for their sins. But everyone who calls upon the Lord for salvation will receive it.

In Acts 2:16-17, Peter said that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the fulfillment of "I will pour out my Spirit..." Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit became a common thing for believers at that time, contrary to the manner in which the Spirit had operated in the past. Men and women, young and old did begin to dream dreams and have visions and prophesy. This manifestation continues to today.

We are still waiting for the final part of this, when the sun turns to darkness and the moon to blood and the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 24 and in Mark 13 when people asked him what would be the sign for the end of the age. We are living in the last days; they began with the coming of Christ. We anticipate this dreadful day

because we know we can call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. In Romans 10 when Paul explained how people may be saved, he quoted this verse. Romans 10:11-13 says:

As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile —the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The book of Joel had an impact on New Testament writers. Jesus quoted it. Paul quoted it.

Joel 3 begins by promising judgment to the nations that have inflicted grief upon God's elect. In an "eye for an eye" manner, they will have done to them all the things that they have done to Judah. They should prepare for war because trouble is coming. Through all of this, God will protect his own. The book of Joel ends triumphantly with 3:17-21:

"Then you will know that I, the Lord your God,
dwell in Zion, my holy hill.
Jerusalem will be holy;
never again will foreigners invade her.
In that day the mountains will drip new wine,
and the hills will flow with milk;
all the ravines of Judah will run with water.
A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house
and will water the valley of acacias.
But Egypt will be desolate,
Edom a desert waste,
because of violence done to the people of Judah,
in whose land they shed innocent blood.
Judah will be inhabited forever
and Jerusalem through all generations.
Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned,
I will pardon."

The Lord dwells in Zion!

9 Index of Scripture References

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

2 Kings 24 -----	29
2 Timothy 3:16-17 -----	34
Acts 2:16-17 -----	50
Deuteronomy 27:15-37 -----	21
Galatians 3:11 -----	15
Habakkuk 1:12-2:1 -----	14
Habakkuk 1:1-4 -----	14
Habakkuk 1:5-11 -----	14
Habakkuk 2:19-20 -----	15
Habakkuk 2:2-20 -----	14
Habakkuk 2:4 -----	15
Habakkuk 3 -----	14
Habakkuk 3:16-18 -----	14
Isaiah 2:1-5 -----	7
Jeremiah 1 -----	17
Jeremiah 1:11-12 -----	18
Jeremiah 10 -----	20
Jeremiah 11:1-17 -----	21
Jeremiah 11:18-23 -----	22
Jeremiah 12 -----	22
Jeremiah 13-19 -----	22
Jeremiah 20 -----	24
Jeremiah 21-22 -----	25
Jeremiah 23:1-8 -----	27
Jeremiah 23:9-40 -----	27
Jeremiah 24 -----	27
Jeremiah 25 -----	28
Jeremiah 26 -----	28
Jeremiah 2-6 -----	19
Jeremiah 26:18 -----	6
Jeremiah 27:18-22 -----	44
Jeremiah 27-28 -----	29
Jeremiah 29 -----	30
Jeremiah 30-31 -----	30
Jeremiah 31:15 -----	33
Jeremiah 32-33 -----	34
Jeremiah 34 -----	35
Jeremiah 35 -----	36
Jeremiah 37-38 -----	37
Jeremiah 39 -----	38
Jeremiah 40-43 -----	39
Jeremiah 44 -----	40
Jeremiah 45 -----	40
Jeremiah 46 -----	40
Jeremiah 47 -----	41
Jeremiah 48 -----	41

Jeremiah 49:1-6	42
Jeremiah 49:23-27	42
Jeremiah 49:28-33	42
Jeremiah 49:34-49	43
Jeremiah 49:7-22	42
Jeremiah 50-51	43
Jeremiah 52	43
Jeremiah 7-9	20
Joel 1	49
Joel 2	49
Joel 2:12-14	49
Joel 2:20	49
Joel 2:26-32	50
Joel 2:3	49
Joel 3	51
Lamentations 3:21-26	48
Lamentations 3:8-20	47
Luke 19:46	20
Matthew 2:18	34
Matthew 22:34-40	9
Micah 1	6
Micah 2	7
Micah 3	7
Micah 4	7
Micah 5:1-5	8
Micah 5:2	8
Micah 5:5-15	9
Micah 6	9
Micah 6:8	9
Micah 7	10
Nahum 1:14	11
Nahum 3:19	11
Nahum 3:4	11
Obadiah	16
Romans 1:17	15
Romans 10:11-13	51
Zephaniah 1:1-2:3	12
Zephaniah 2:12	13
Zephaniah 2:13-15	13
Zephaniah 2:4-7	12
Zephaniah 2:8-11	12
Zephaniah 3	13

10 Topical Index

Ammonites.....	12, 42
Assyria.....	13
Babylon.....	43
Baruch.....	34, 37, 40
Bethlehem.....	8
Cush.....	13
Damascus.....	42
Edom.....	16, 42
Egypt.....	40
Gedaliah.....	39
Habakkuk.....	14
Jeremiah.....	17, 46
Call.....	17
Jerusalem	
Destruction.....	38
Joel.....	49
Locusts.....	49
Micah.....	6
Moab.....	12, 41
Nahum.....	11
Ninevah.....	13
Obadiah.....	16
Philistines.....	12, 41
Syria.....	42
Zephaniah.....	12