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JEREMIAH

Warren W. Wiersbe

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BE DECISIVE
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The Big Idea

An Introduction to *Be Decisive*

by Ken Baugh

Our culture is accustomed to instant everything. We have microwaves that pop our popcorn and cook our instant oatmeal. We have ATM machines that dispense money whenever we want (if we're not overdrawn on our accounts). We have twenty-four-hour convenience stores ready to provide midnight snack attack. We have fast food and fast passes at Disneyland so we don't have to wait in those annoying lines. We have instant messaging, email, overnight shipping, and direct flights that take us from coast-to-coast in less than five hours. Many of us keep in touch through Twitter and Facebook, because who has time to leave a voice-mail message anymore?

I love technology just as much as the next guy. I have a very smart phone, and I love to surf the Web, but I'm not content with dial-up, cable, or even DSL. I want the blazing speed of fiber optics, and I'm willing to pay for it.

Because we love instant everything, sometimes we're lulled into self-deception when God doesn't respond instantly to sin. But Jeremiah reminds us that God disciplines those He loves. Even if we don't experience instant discipline for sin, our sin will be found out, and it will have its disastrous effect on our lives. Jeremiah warns God's people: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives" (17:5–6 NIV). The Big Idea of Jeremiah is that God is loving, but He is

also just and will discipline those He loves when they sin.

Sin is not a popular topic these days. You don't even hear much about it in church anymore. But God still views sin the same way He always has: as rebellion against His ways and His will. God sent Jeremiah as a prophet to His people to warn them of coming judgment for their sin if they didn't repent. What sin did they commit? God said, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (2:13 NIV). The people of Judah had committed idolatry, worshipping other gods instead of the one true God.

Idolatry is one sin that God takes very personally. It actually causes Him pain. If you are a parent, the rough equivalent would be for your child to say to you: "I hate you and all that you have done for me. Leave me alone. I want to live my life my way, not by your stupid rules and what you think is best." Any parent who heard those words from a child they had raised, nurtured, and loved would be crushed. In a similar way, God's heart is grieved when His children turn to idolatry.

Over and over again, Jeremiah warned the people to repent, to turn back to God, but they wouldn't listen. "Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward" (7:23–24 NIV). And this rebellion broke God's heart, because God loves His people, and He cannot let sin go unpunished. God knew that the people's rebellion and lack of repentance would require Him to take decisive action against them, and He knew that this action would bring them both great pain.

Through Jeremiah, God told the nation that His hammer of judgment was about to fall, and it was going to be more horrible than they could ever imagine:

In this place I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will

make them fall by the sword before their enemies, at the hands of those who seek their lives, and I will give their carcasses as food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds. I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives. (19:7–9
NIV)

And all this happened just as God said it would (2 Kings 25). King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon sacked Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed, and all of the gold, silver, and bronze was taken. Most of the city wall was torn down, the city was burned, and most of the remaining Jews were deported to Babylon where they were held captives for seventy years.

The saddest thing in my opinion is that all of this devastation could have been avoided. The Jews were just one repentant conversation away from forgiveness and restoration, but they chose not to repent, and this brought on God's fierce judgment.

The fall of Jerusalem reminds me of the words of the apostle Paul: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7–8 NIV). God's family has a spiritual law of cause and effect: Sin brings God's discipline (Heb. 12:7–11). God is a God of love, mercy, compassion, and kindness—but He is also a God of holiness, righteousness, and justice. He must punish sin or violate His nature, and that He cannot do.

The fact that Jesus took upon Himself the full wrath of God for our sin (Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21) reveals how seriously God takes sin and how seriously God

loves the sinner. At the cross where Jesus shed His blood, God's love and God's wrath came together. I pray that as you read Jeremiah, you will see the numerous times God warned His people to repent. I pray that you will see how they refused and God reluctantly sent His judgment. I urge you, if you are a child of God and if there is sin in your life, to *be decisive* and repent.

Dr. Wiersbe's commentaries have been a source of guidance and strength to me over the many years that I have been a pastor. His unique style is not overly academic, but theologically sound. He explains the deep truths of Scripture in a way that everyone can understand and apply. Whether you're a Bible scholar or a brand-new believer in Christ, you will benefit, as I have, from Warren's insights. With your Bible in one hand and Dr. Wiersbe's commentary in the other, you will be able to accurately unpack the deep truths of God's Word and learn how to apply them to your life.

Drink deeply, my friend, of the truths of God's Word, for in them you will find Jesus Christ, and there is freedom, peace, assurance, and joy.

—Ken Baugh
Pastor of Coast Hills Community Church
Aliso Viejo, California

A Word from the Author

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Lord John Acton wrote that in a letter to his friend Mandell Creighton in April 1887. When he ended the letter, the British historian added this postscript: “History provides neither compensation for suffering nor penalties for wrong.”

As you study the prophecy of Jeremiah, you’ll learn that Lord Acton was right in his first statement, for you will meet in this book some of history’s most powerful and corrupt rulers. But Lord Acton was terribly wrong in his postscript. God is still on the throne and history is His story. The German writer Friedrich von Logau said it better: Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small; Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.

God judges the nations and eventually pays them the wages earned from their sin. No nation can despise God’s law and defy His rule without suffering for it. The prophecy of Jeremiah teaches that very clearly.

In his familiar poem “The Present Crisis,” American poet James Russell Lowell penned words that summarize Jeremiah’s life and ministry: Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,

In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side.

Though at first Jeremiah hesitated when God called him, he surrendered to the Lord and became one of history’s most decisive spiritual leaders. Tragically, however, the people who most needed his leadership rejected him and turned their backs on God’s Word.

As never before, our homes, churches, cities, and nations need decisive leaders who will obey the Word of God. “If you ever injected truth into politics,” quipped Will Rogers, “you have no politics.” The politician asks, “Is it popular?” The diplomat asks, “Is it safe?” But the true leader asks, “Is it God’s

will? Is it right?” To quote James Russell Lowell’s “The Present Crisis” again:
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

That’s what the Lord told Jeremiah: “I am watching over My word to perform it” (Jer. 1:12 NASB).

—Warren W. Wiersbe

A SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Theme: Repent and return to the Lord or He will judge.

Key verse: Jeremiah 3:22

I. Jeremiah's call and commission (Jeremiah 1)

II. Jeremiah's messages to his people Judah (Jeremiah 2—33)

A. During the time of Josiah's rule (Jeremiah 2—13)

1. The sins of the nation (Jeremiah 2—6)

2. The temple messages (Jeremiah 7—10)

3. The broken covenant (Jeremiah 11—13)

B. The coming Babylonian invasion (Jeremiah 14—16)

C. The Sabbath message (Jeremiah 17)

D. The potter's house sermons (Jeremiah 18—19)

E. Messages to the leaders (Jeremiah 20—24)

F. Judah's captivity (Jeremiah 25—29)

G. National restoration (Jeremiah 30—33)

III. Jeremiah's ministry and the fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 34—39)

A. Ministry during the siege (Jeremiah 34—38)

1. To King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 34; 37—38)

2. To King Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 35—36)

B. Jerusalem falls (Jeremiah 39)

IV. After the fall of the city (Jeremiah 40—45; 52)

V. Jeremiah's messages to the nations (Jeremiah 46—51)

A. To Egypt (Jeremiah 46)

B. To Philistia (Jeremiah 47)

C. To Moab (Jeremiah 48)

D. To Ammon, Moab, Edom, Syria, Kedar, and Elam (Jeremiah 49)

E. To Babylon (Jeremiah 50—51)

Chapter Five

Sermons, Supplications, and Sobs

[\(Jeremiah 14—17\)](#)

Our modern age is a pushover for the shallow and the shortcut.

We want to change everything except the human heart.[1](#)

—J. WALLACE HAMILTON

Preaching that costs nothing accomplishes nothing.”[2](#) The famous British preacher John Henry Jowett made that statement, and it certainly applies to the prophet Jeremiah. Pained by the sins of his people, declaring unpopular messages that majored on judgment, and perplexed by what the Lord was allowing him to suffer, Jeremiah paid a great price to be faithful to his divine calling. If ever an Old Testament servant had to “take up his cross” in order to follow the Lord, it was Jeremiah.

In these chapters, the prophet delivered four messages, and interspersed with these messages are his own prayers to the Lord and the answers he received. Jeremiah was bold before men but broken before God, and yet it was his brokenness that gave him his strength.

1. A MESSAGE ABOUT THE DROUGHT (14:1–22) Unlike the land of Egypt, whose food supply depended on irrigation from the Nile River, the land of Canaan depended on the rains God sent from heaven (Deut. 11:10–12). If His people obeyed His law, God would send the rains³ and give them bumper crops (Lev. 26:3–5), but if they disobeyed, the heavens would become like iron and the earth like bronze (Lev. 26:18–20; Deut. 11:13–17; 28:22–24). Over the years, Judah’s sins had brought a series of droughts to the land⁴ (see Jer. 3:3; 5:24; 12:4; 23:10), and Jeremiah used this painful but timely topic as the basis for a sermon to the people.

The plight of the land (vv. 1–6). Whether in the cities (14:1–3), the farms (v. 4), or the open country (vv. 5–6), no matter where you looked throughout Judah, you found suffering and privation. The land was in mourning, and its citizens were lamenting, like people at a funeral. Because of the sins of the people, God was withholding the life-giving rains and thus keeping His covenant promise to Israel. It made no difference how rich you were, there wasn’t any water to be found. The rivers were dry, the cisterns were empty, and both the servants in the cities and the farmers in the country covered their heads like people in a funeral procession. Even the animals were suffering because of the sins of the people. The doe, usually faithful to her young, abandoned her newborn fawn to starve to death, and the wild donkeys, their eyes glazed, could only stand on the barren heights and pant hopelessly for water.

It’s a serious thing to enter into a covenant relationship with God, because He will always keep His word, either to bless or to chasten. If we are the recipients of His love, then we can expect to be the recipients of His chastening if we disobey Him (Prov. 3:11–12). God is always faithful.

The plea of the people (vv. 7–12). As people usually do when they’re in trouble, the Jews turned to God and prayed, but their prayers were insincere and

not linked with repentance. Jeremiah had already confronted these pious hypocrites with their sins when he asked, “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations’?” (Jer. 7:9–10 NKJV).

Because they couldn’t plead for help on the basis of their repentance and God’s covenant promise (Deut. 30:1–10; 2 Chron. 7:12–15), the people of Judah asked God to help them for His own name’s sake. “After all,” they argued, “it’s Your reputation that’s at stake, because we’re called by Your name.” The Hope and Savior of Israel was like a tourist in the land, unconcerned about either its present condition or its future destruction. The Lord was like a person shocked into paralysis or a warrior completely without strength.

When God disciplines us, it isn’t enough that we pray and ask for His help; anybody in trouble can do that. We must repent of our sins, judge and confess them, and sincerely seek the face of God. To weep because of the sufferings that sin causes is to show remorse but not repentance. “Rend your heart, and not your garments” (Joel 2:13) was the prophet Joel’s counsel to the Jews during another time of great calamity; and David, when he sought God’s forgiveness, said, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

God responded to the people’s words, not by sending rain, but by announcing judgment (Jer. 14:10)! For the third time, He told His servant Jeremiah not to pray for the people (v. 11; see 7:16; 11:14). His longsuffering had run out, and He was determined to punish them for their sins. They could fast, pray, and bring sacrifices, but nothing would change His mind. The nation was destined for the sword, famine, and pestilence (14:12). The Babylonian army would bring the sword, and the results of its devastating invasion would be

famine and pestilence.⁵

The protest of the prophet (vv. 13–16). “But is it really the fault of the people?” Jeremiah asked. “Aren’t the people being led astray by the false prophets who are promising them deliverance and peace? *They* are the real culprits” (see 5:12; 6:14; 8:11). God agreed that the prophets were leading the people astray through their false visions and lies, and He assured Jeremiah that these people would suffer for what they had done. The day would come when they and their families would be slain, and nobody would bury their corpses—one of the most humiliating things that could happen to a Jew.

The people, however, were responsible for their actions because they should have known that the Lord had not sent these prophets. There were two tests of a true prophet or prophetess in Israel: (1) their predictions were 100 percent accurate (Deut. 18:20–22),⁶ and (2) their messages agreed with the law of God (13:1–18). *Any prophet who permitted the worship of idols, contrary to God’s law, was a false prophet.* “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). Even if a professed prophet performed miracles, he or she was a counterfeit if God’s revealed truth in the Word did not support the message. Miracles are no guarantee of a divine call (2 Thess. 2:7–12).

The pain and prayer of the prophet (vv. 17–22). How did Jeremiah feel about his people? The same way God felt: He wept for them (Jer. 9:18; 13:17) the way a father would weep for a virgin daughter who had been violated, beaten, and left to die. In prophetic vision, the prophet saw the land ravaged and the people taken captive to Babylon (14:18), and this led him to turn to God in prayer.

Since Jeremiah had been commanded not to pray *for* the nation (14:11), he identified himself *with* the people and used the pronouns “we” and “us,” not “they” and “them” (see Neh. 1:4–10; Ezra 9; Dan. 9; Rom. 9:1–3). In praying for himself, he was praying for them, and he asked God to honor His own name and

keep His covenant by sending healing to the land. Although God was certainly willing to keep *His* part of the covenant, the people weren't willing to keep their part. Therefore, the prophet's prayer went unanswered. A faithful God cannot violate His own word.

Sometimes God permits disasters to occur to bring nations, churches, and individuals to their knees in repentance. The plagues of Egypt should have made Pharaoh a contrite man, but he only hardened his heart even more against the Lord (Ex. 7—12). Israel's treatment of the nations in Canaan was God's judgment because these nations refused to turn from their sins (Gen. 15:16; see Dan. 8:23; Matt. 23:32–35). While we shouldn't interpret every calamity as an expression of divine wrath, we must be sensitive to God and be willing to search our hearts and confess our sins.

2. A MESSAGE ABOUT THE COMING CAPTIVITY (15:1–21) Before the Jews even entered the Promised Land, Moses had rehearsed with them the terms of the covenant, warning them that God would remove them from the land if they refused to obey His voice (Deut. 28:63–68). No sooner did Joshua and that generation of spiritual leaders pass from the scene (Judg. 2:7–15) than the nation turned to idolatry and God had to chasten them. First, He punished them *in the land* by allowing other nations to invade and take control. Then, when the people cried out for help, He raised up deliverers (vv. 16–23). By the time of Jeremiah, however, the sins of the people were so great that God had to remove them *from the land* and punish them in distant Babylon.

Two responses are recorded in this chapter: the Lord's response to Jeremiah's prayer (Jer. 15:1–9) and Jeremiah's response to the Lord's answer (vv. 10–21).

The Lord's response to Jeremiah's prayer (vv. 1–9). No matter who sought to intercede for Judah, God's mind was made up, and He would not relent. At critical times in Jewish history, Moses and Samuel had interceded for the people, and God heard and answered (Ex. 32—34; Num. 14; 1 Sam. 7; 12; Ps. 99:6–8). But God's heart would go out to the people no longer. Instead, His people would go out into captivity. "Send them away from my presence! Let them go!" (Jer. 15:1 NIV) The people faced four possible judgments: death from disease, war, starvation, or, if they survived these calamities, exile in Babylon.⁷ The bodies of those slain by the Babylonian army would be desecrated and eaten by dogs, birds, or wild beasts; none would have a decent burial. It wasn't a bright future that God revealed to His people, but it was a future they themselves had chosen by refusing to repent of their sins. You take what you want from life and you pay for it.

God had chosen the Jews to be a blessing to the nations of the world (Gen. 12:1–3), but now they would become "abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Jer 15:4 NIV; see 24:9; 29:18; 34:17; Deut. 28:25), an object of scorn, "a byword among the nations" (Ps. 44:14 NIV). Not only that, but Jerusalem and the land itself would also bear witness to God's judgment of their sins. "Their land will be laid waste, an object of lasting scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will shake their heads" (Jer. 18:16 NIV; see 19:8; 25:9, 18; 29:18).

One of the causes for this terrible judgment was King Manasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years (697–642 BC) and was the most wicked king in Judah's history (2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chron. 33:1–10). He was the son of godly Hezekiah and the grandfather of godly Josiah, and yet he himself was an evil man who encouraged Judah in the sins that brought about the downfall of the kingdom. God wasn't punishing the nation for the sins Manasseh committed but because the nation imitated Manasseh in their sinning.

In fact, the Lord lamented over the suffering that would come to His people

because of their disobedience (Jer. 15:5–9). Would anybody pity Jerusalem or even ask about her welfare? Nehemiah did (Neh. 1:1–3), and centuries later, Jesus wept over the city (Matt. 23:37). For God to postpone judgment would have meant encouraging the nation’s sins even more, and this He would not do. He was “weary with repenting” (Jer. 15:6).[8](#)

The coming judgment would be like separating wheat from the chaff (v. 7; see 51:2). The wives would become widows, and the mothers would be bereaved of their sons. A woman with seven sons would be considered especially blessed, but if all of them were killed in battle, it would be as though the sun went down at noon, cutting the day short. The light of her life would be gone because the future of the family had been destroyed.

We must not think that God enjoyed sending judgment to His people. If He has no pleasure in the death of *the wicked* (Ezek. 18:23, 32), He certainly has no pleasure in the death of *His own people*! God is longsuffering, but when His people resist His gracious call and rebel against His will, He has no alternative but to send chastening.

Jeremiah’s response to the Lord’s message (vv. 10–21). This is the third of Jeremiah’s recorded laments (see 11:18–23). If the mothers of the dead soldiers had reason to weep (15:8–9), Jeremiah’s mother had even more reason, for the people treated him as though he were the enemy. The soldiers died as heroes, but Jeremiah lived as if he were a traitor to his own people. Jeremiah wasn’t a creditor, pressuring his borrowers. Nevertheless, everybody hated him. God promised to deliver him, and He kept His promise, but God didn’t promise to shield him from persecution. Jeremiah was now running with the horses, and it wasn’t easy (12:5).

In resisting Nebuchadnezzar, Judah was fighting a losing battle, for nothing could break the “northern iron” of Babylon. Judah would lose its treasures and become slaves of the Babylonians. This wasn’t a popular message to proclaim, and Jeremiah knew it would arouse the opposition of the leaders and the people.

Therefore, he asked God for the help he needed to keep going. His requests were “Remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors” (v. 15 NIV).

Jeremiah 15:15–18 reveals the turmoil that was in the prophet’s heart and mind. One minute he was affirming the Lord’s longsuffering and his own faithfulness to the Word,[9](#) and the next minute he was crying out with pain because of the suffering of his people and the difficulty of his work. He even suggested that God had lied to him when He called him and that God was “like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails” (v. 18 NIV; see Job 6:15–20).

Jeremiah was human and had his failings, but at least he honestly admitted them to God. Instead of piously covering up his true feelings, he poured out his heart to the Lord, and the Lord answered him. God’s answer may have shocked the prophet, for the Lord told him he needed to repent! “If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman” (Jer. 15:19 NIV). Because of his attitude toward God and his calling, Jeremiah was about to forfeit his ministry! In some ways, he was mirroring the words and attitudes of the people of Judah when they questioned God.

The Lord usually balances rebuke with reassurance. He promised once again to make Jeremiah a fortified wall and give him victory over all his enemies (v. 20; see 1:18–19). Jeremiah had to learn to walk by faith, which meant obeying God’s word no matter how he felt, what he saw, or what others might do to him. God never promised Jeremiah an easy job, but He did promise him all that he needed to do his work faithfully.

Is it unusual for chosen servants of God to become discouraged and endanger their own ministries? No, because every servant of God is human and subject to the weaknesses of human nature. Moses became discouraged and wanted to die (Num. 11:10–15); Joshua was ready to quit and leave the Promised Land (Josh. 7:6–11); Elijah even abandoned his place of duty and hoped to die

(1 Kings 19); and Jonah became so angry he refused to help the very people he came to save (Jonah 4)! God doesn't want us to ignore our feelings, because that would make us less than human, but He does want us to trust Him to change our feelings and start walking by faith (see 2 Cor. 1:3–11).

3. A MESSAGE ABOUT JEREMIAH'S STRANGE CONDUCT (16:1–21) In order to get the attention of the people, God sometimes told the prophets to do unusual things. Isaiah gave two of his sons odd names, which he used as a text for a message (Isa. 8), and he also dressed like a prisoner of war to call attention to a coming conflict (Isa. 20). We've already noted the many "action sermons" of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Jeremiah's prohibitions (vv. 1–9). The Lord forbade Jeremiah from participating in three normal and acceptable activities: getting married, mourning for the dead, and attending feasts. All Jewish men were expected to be married by age twenty. In fact, the rabbis pronounced a curse on any who refused to marry and beget children. Certainly Jeremiah would have appreciated having a loving wife to encourage him, but this blessing was not his to enjoy. When you consider all the trials he endured and the enemies he made, Jeremiah was probably better off a single man. But his refusing marriage was a symbolic act, for the sons and daughters in Jewish families would either die by the sword or starve to death in the coming Babylonian invasion. Whenever anybody asked Jeremiah why he wasn't married, he had an opportunity to share God's message of the coming judgment.

The Jewish people in Bible times were experts at mourning and marrying, but Jeremiah was forbidden to attend funerals or weddings and the feasts connected with them. What did this unsociable conduct say to the people? For one thing, God had removed His peace and comfort from the nation. Moreover,

the judgment that was coming would be so terrible that the people would be unable to express their grief. There would be so many corpses and so few survivors that nobody would bury the dead, let alone comfort whatever family member remained.

As for wedding feasts, how could people celebrate with such a cloud of destruction hovering over the nation? The days would come when the happy voices of brides and bridegrooms would cease. In fact, all joy and gladness would flee from the land. The exiles would form a funeral march and go to Babylon.

Jeremiah's explanation (vv. 10–13, 16–18). It seems strange that the people would ask why the Lord decreed such a terrible judgment for His people. Surely they knew the terms of His covenant and the extent of their own sins, but they were led astray by the false prophets, who made them comfortable in their sins and deadened their consciences. Their unbiblical theology gave them a false assurance that God would never abandon His people or allow the Gentiles to desecrate the Holy City and the temple. How wrong they were!

Jeremiah's explanation was simple: They had repeated the sins of their fathers instead of listening to the law of the Lord and turning from sin. Furthermore, they had not learned from the past judgments that God had sent. This made them even more guilty than their fathers. Had not Assyria taken the northern kingdom of Israel captive because of their idolatry? Had not the previous prophets proclaimed the word of God and warned the people?

Jeremiah used several images to describe the captivity. The verb “cast you out” (Jer. 16:13) is used for hurling a spear or sending a storm against a ship (Jonah 1:4). God was violently removing His people so the land could be healed and the nation purified (2 Chron. 36:14–21). Jeremiah also used the metaphors of fishing, hunting, and banking (Jer. 16:16–18). The Babylonians would cast out their nets and catch the Jews (Ezek. 12:13), and not one “fish” would escape. If anybody tried to hide in the hills, the fishermen would become hunters and

track them down. Why? Because the nation owed a great debt to the Lord for the way they had treated His law and His land. Now the note was due. “I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin” (Jer. 16:18 NIV) means that God’s judgment would be ample and complete.

Jeremiah’s consolation (vv. 14–15). In wrath, God remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2), and Jeremiah gave the people a message of hope: The exiles will one day return to their land. So great will be this deliverance that it will be looked upon as a “second exodus” and far outshine the glory of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. Later, Jeremiah would explain that the exiles will be in Babylon for seventy years (Jer. 25) and that a remnant would return to the land, rebuild the temple, and establish the nation (23:3; 31:7–9). They would return as a chastened people who would never again turn to the idols of the Gentile nations.

Jeremiah’s affirmation (vv. 19–21). In a burst of faith and prophetic joy, Jeremiah saw not only the gathering of the Jewish remnant but also the coming of the Gentile nations from the ends of the earth to worship the true and living God of Israel. Isaiah had this same vision (Isa. 2:1–5; 11:10–16; 45:14), and so did Zechariah (Zech. 8:20–23). The Gentiles will confess their sin of idolatry and admit that the idols were worthless. Then they will be taught to know the Lord. Meanwhile, it’s the task of the church today to spread the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth so that sinners might abandon their false gods, whatever they may be, and trust in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

4. A MESSAGE ABOUT JUDAH’S SINS (17:1–27)

President Calvin Coolidge came home from church one Sunday, and his wife asked, “What did the preacher preach about?” “Sin,” the president said in his usual concise manner. “What did he say about it?” Mrs. Coolidge further inquired, and the president replied, “He was against it.”

Jeremiah was against the sins of his people, six of which he named in this

chapter.

Idolatry (vv. 1–4). Instead of giving their devotion and obedience to the true and living God, who had blessed them, the Jews adopted the idols of the nations around them and made these false gods more important than Jehovah. At the high places in the hills, they built altars to various gods and planted obscene symbols of the goddess Asherah. This defiled the land—their rich inheritance from Jehovah—and because of their idolatry, their inheritance would be plundered. They would lose everything, and it would be their own fault.

God’s holy law should have been written on their hearts (Prov. 3:3; 7:3; Deut. 6:6; 10:16; 10:17; 10:18; 10:19; 10:20; 10:21; 10:22; 10:23; 10:24; 10:25; 10:26; 10:27; 10:28; 10:29; 10:30; 10:31; 10:32; 10:33; 10:34; 10:35; 10:36; 10:37; 10:38; 10:39; 10:40; 10:41; 10:42; 10:43; 10:44; 10:45; 10:46; 10:47; 10:48; 10:49; 10:50; 10:51; 10:52; 10:53; 10:54; 10:55; 10:56; 10:57; 10:58; 10:59; 10:60; 10:61; 10:62; 10:63; 10:64; 10:65; 10:66; 10:67; 10:68; 10:69; 10:70; 10:71; 10:72; 10:73; 10:74; 10:75; 10:76; 10:77; 10:78; 10:79; 10:80; 10:81; 10:82; 10:83; 10:84; 10:85; 10:86; 10:87; 10:88; 10:89; 10:90; 10:91; 10:92; 10:93; 10:94; 10:95; 10:96; 10:97; 10:98; 10:99; 10:100), but instead their sin was engraved there. We may forget our sins, but our sins never forget us. They’re inscribed on our hearts until we ask the Lord for forgiveness, and then He cleanses our hearts and makes them new (1 John 1:9; Heb. 10:15–18).

The apostle John’s final admonition to believers in his first epistle is “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). There were many false gods in that day (1 Cor. 8:1–5), but there are false gods in our world today, such as money, possessions, fame, success, power, pleasure, achievement, and many more. Anything that we love and trust more than the true and living God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is an idol and must be torn from our hearts.

Unbelief (vv. 5–10). The leaders of Judah were prone to trust their political allies and lean on the arm of flesh instead of depending on the power of God. To emphasize the difference, Jeremiah contrasted a desert bush with a fruitful tree by the water (see Ps. 1:3–4). Unbelief turns life into a parched wasteland; faith makes it a fruitful orchard. Soon, the Babylonian army would overrun the kingdom of Judah, and the land of milk and honey would become a wasteland.

The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart, and the human heart is deceitful (*Jacob* in the Hebrew) and incurable. We often say, “Well, if I know my own heart,” *but we don’t know our own hearts*. God does. He searches the

heart and mind and knows exactly how to reward each person. If we want to know what our hearts are like, we must read the Word and let the Spirit teach us. The hearts of the Jewish leaders were turned away from the Lord and His truth. Consequently, they made unwise decisions and plunged the nation into ruin.

The Jewish people have a record of unbelief. It was unbelief that kept the people of Israel out of the Promised Land (Num. 13—14). It was unbelief that caused them to worship idols and invite the chastening of God during the time of the judges. During the time of the kingdom, it was unbelief that kept the leaders from repenting and turning to God for help, and they became entangled in the costly politics involving Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. Would they ever learn?

Greed (v. 11). During those tumultuous days, the rich exploited the poor and became richer, and the courts did nothing about it. “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness” (Jer. 6:13). Jeremiah quoted a familiar proverb about the partridge, who is supposed to hatch eggs she didn’t lay and have the brood desert her—a picture of wealth deserting the rich people who unjustly acquired it. What good would their wealth be when the judgment fell on the land?

Forsaking the Lord (vv. 12–13). The throne of Judah was stained with sin and clouded by shame, but God’s throne was glorious and exalted. The Jews considered the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies to be God’s throne (Ps. 80:1; 99:1), but even if the temple were destroyed, God’s heavenly throne would endure forever (Isa. 6:1). God had never forsaken His people, but they had forsaken Him. This is why Judah was facing terrible judgment. Instead of being written in the Book of Life, those who forsook God were written in the dust, where their names perished with them (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Phil. 4:3).

Rejecting God’s servant (vv. 14–18). This is the fourth of Jeremiah’s personal prayers to God for help, and this time the emphasis is on deliverance from his enemies. The people called him a false prophet and kept asking when his dire predictions would come true. They didn’t realize that God’s delays were

opportunities for the nation to repent and be saved from ruin. Except for one episode of unbelief (Jer. 15:15–21), Jeremiah had not tried to run away from his responsibilities, nor had he altered the messages God had given him to deliver. But he needed God’s help and protection, and the Lord answered his prayers.

Profaning the Sabbath (vv. 19–27). God had given the Sabbath to the Israelites as a special token of their relationship with Him (see Ex. 16:29; 20:8–11; 31:13–17). It was to be a day of rest for the people, their farm animals, and the land. The people, however, repeatedly disregarded the law and treated the Sabbath like any other day. Their sin was evidence that their hearts were devoted to material gain and not to the Lord.

A mechanical obedience to the Sabbath law wasn’t what God wanted, but obedience that came from their hearts because they loved and feared the Lord. If this were the case, then they would obey all His law, and God could then bless the people, their kings, and their city. If they continued to disobey the law and desecrate the Sabbath, however, God would have to punish them by destroying their city and their temple.[10](#)

Jeremiah faithfully and courageously delivered his sermons to the people; he lifted his supplications to the Lord; he poured out his grief over the sins of the nation; and yet the people only hardened their hearts and stubbornly resisted God’s truth.

In an age of unconcern and indecision, Jeremiah was burdened and decisive, and God honored him. Humanly speaking, his ministry was a failure, but from the divine perspective, he was an outstanding success. We need men and women of Jeremiah’s caliber serving in the church and the nation today. There’s a price to pay, but there’s also a crown to win.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When have you doubted God?
2. Read Jeremiah 14:1—15:9. What was the main point of Jeremiah's sermon to the people?
3. How did the people and the prophet respond?
4. How did God in turn respond to their prayers?
5. Read Jeremiah 15:10–21. How did Jeremiah feel about what God was going to do?
6. Did he have a right to feel the way he did? Why or why not?
7. If you had been in Jeremiah's place, how would you have liked God's response? Why?
8. Read Jeremiah 16—17. What was the next opportunity God provided for

Jeremiah to be decisive?

9. How did Jeremiah respond to it?

10. What specific sins of the people did Jeremiah point out?

11. How can you follow Jeremiah's example and be more decisive in an area of your life?

Chapter Six

The Prophet, the Potter, and the Policeman

[\(Jeremiah 18—20\)](#)

The clay is not attractive in itself, but when the hands of the potter touch it, and the thought of the potter is brought to bear upon it, and the plan of the potter is worked out in it and through it, then there is a real transformation.[1](#)

—J. WILBUR CHAPMAN

The prophet, of course, was Jeremiah. We don't know who the potter was, although he played an important part in the drama. The policeman was Pashur, the priest in charge of temple security, whose job it was to keep peace in the temple and punish troublemakers. Since Pashur considered Jeremiah to be a troublemaker, he punished him by making him spend a night in the stocks. Jeremiah is the chief actor in this three-act drama.

1. JEREMIAH, THE THREATENED PROPHET (18:1–23) These events probably occurred during the reign of Jehoiakim, the king who

burned Jeremiah's prophetic scrolls (36:21ff.). Unlike his father, King Josiah, Jehoiakim had no love for either the Lord or His prophet. He wasn't the least bit interested in what Jeremiah had to say about things political or spiritual.

The sovereignty of God (vv. 1–17). Over thirty words in the Hebrew vocabulary relate directly to pottery, because the manufacture of pottery was a major industry in the Near East in that day. No doubt Jeremiah had passed the potter's house many times, but this time God had a special message for him that, after he preached it, would put him in jail. When you follow the Lord, you never know what will happen to you next.

“He did not get his flash of insight while he was praying but while he was watching a potter engaged in his daily work,” wrote Charles E. Jefferson. “God reveals Himself in strange places and at unexpected seasons. For instance, He once revealed Himself in a stable.”²

The potter sat before two parallel stone wheels that were joined by a shaft. He turned the bottom wheel with his feet and worked the clay on the top wheel as the wheel turned. As Jeremiah watched, he saw that the clay resisted the potter's hand so that the vessel was ruined,³ but the potter patiently kneaded the clay and made another vessel.

The *interpretation* of the image was national, relating to the house of Israel (vv. 6–10), but the *application* was individual (vv. 11–17), calling for a response from the people of Judah and Jerusalem. It also calls for a personal response from us today.

Interpretation (vv. 5–10). As the potter has power over the clay, so God has sovereign authority over the nations.⁴ This doesn't mean that God is irresponsible and arbitrary in what He does, even though He is free to act as He pleases. His actions are always consistent with His nature, which is holy, just, wise, and loving. God doesn't need any advice from us, nor do we have the right to criticize what He does. “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who

has become His counselor?” (Rom. 11:34 NKJV, quoted from Isa. 40:13 and Jer. 23:18) “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Rom. 9:20 NKJV) The Lord presented two scenarios that illustrated His sovereign power over nations (Jer. 18:7–10). If He threatened to *judge* a nation and that nation repented, then He would relent and not send the judgment. He did this with Nineveh when Jonah’s preaching brought the city to repentance (Jonah 3). On the other hand, if He promised to *bless* a nation, as He did Israel in His covenants, and that nation did evil in His sight, then He could withhold the blessing and send judgment instead. God neither changes in character nor needs to repent of His actions (Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19), but He has the sovereign freedom to alter His actions depending on the responses of the people.

To be sure, there’s mystery involved in the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but we don’t have to explain the will of God before we can obey it. We live by divine promises and precepts, not theological explanations, and God isn’t obligated to explain anything to us. (If He did, we probably wouldn’t be able to grasp it!) “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29 NKJV). Jesus promised that if we obey what we know, God will reveal more of His truth to us (John 7:17).

Application (vv. 11–17). Nations are made up of individuals, and individuals have the ability to receive God’s Word or reject it. Yes, humans are made from the dust (Gen. 2:7) and live in a fragile body (Job 4:19; 10:9; 2 Cor. 4:7). Unlike the clay on the potter’s wheel, however, we have the ability to resist. God uses many different hands to mold our lives—parents, siblings, teachers, ministers, authors—and we can fight against them. But if we do, we’re fighting against God.

God announced that He was framing evil (“preparing” ^{NIV}; “fashioning” ^{NASB}; a word related to “potter” in the Hebrew) against the kingdom of Judah. If the people would repent, however, He would deliver them. But the people were so chained to their sins that they chose to follow their own evil plans. They would rather worship dead idols and suffer for it than serve the true and living God and enjoy His blessings! Truly, “the heart is deceitful ... and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9)!

In rejecting their God and choosing dumb idols, the people of Judah were acting contrary to everything reasonable. God made them for Himself, and they could not succeed apart from Him. The birds obey what God tells them to do (8:7); even the heathen nations don’t abandon their gods, false as these gods are. Water in nature is consistent: On the heights, it becomes snow; at lower levels, it flows in the streams. God’s people, however, were totally inconsistent, willing to enjoy God’s blessings but not willing to obey the laws of God that governed those blessings. If nature acted like that, where would we be?

Instead of walking on God’s clear and safe highway of holiness (Isa. 35:8), the people were on a dangerous and painful detour because they abandoned the ancient paths of God’s holy law. Because they wouldn’t repent, God had to chasten them; this meant ruin for the land and exile for the people. Instead of His face shining upon them in blessing (Num. 6:24–26), God would turn His back to them and leave them to their own devices.

Like the patient potter, God is willing to mold us again when we resist Him and damage our own lives. The famous Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte used to say that the victorious Christian life was a “series of new beginnings.” No failure in our lives need be fatal or final, although we certainly suffer for our sins. God gave new beginnings to Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, and Peter when they failed, and He can do the same for us today.

The conspiracy of the enemy (v. 18). Proud sinners don’t enjoy hearing

about God's sovereignty or the threat of impending judgment. They think that by silencing the messenger they will silence the Lord. "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision" (Ps. 2:4 NKJV). Their argument was "We have plenty of priests, prophets, and elders, so we can do without Jeremiah!"

This wasn't the first time Jeremiah had faced a conspiracy that threatened his ministry and his life (Jer. 11:18–23; 12:6; 15:15), and it wouldn't be the last time. His enemies plotted a "smear campaign" consisting of lies about him (see 9:3). The plot probably included quotations from his messages that suggested he was a traitor to the kingdom of Judah. Like the men who plotted against Jesus, Jeremiah's enemies tried to prove he was breaking the law and stirring up the people (Luke 23:1–7).

Faithful servants of God don't enjoy opposition, but they learn to expect it. "In the world you will have tribulation," promised Jesus, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NKJV). He also said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (15:18 NKJV). And Paul reminded Timothy and us, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12 NKJV).

The agony of the prophet (vv. 19–23). This is the fifth of Jeremiah's private "laments" to the Lord concerning his situation and his ministry (see Jer. 11:18–23; 12:1–5; 15:10–18; 17:14–18; 20:7–18). His words seem terribly harsh to us and unlike the spirit of Jesus, but keep in mind that Jeremiah was a divinely appointed prophet who represented God to the nation. Those who opposed him were opposing God, and Jeremiah asked God to deal with them (Deut. 32:35; see Rom. 12:17–19).

Like Elijah and all the other prophets, Jeremiah was "a man subject to like passions as we are" (James 5:17, "with a nature like ours" NKJV), and he felt deep pain because the leaders rejected the truth. I suppose if you and I were attacked

by hateful enemies who lied about us, set traps for us, and dug pits for us, we'd get upset and ask God to deal with them. At least Jeremiah expressed himself honestly to God and left the matter with Him. He needed to remember God's promises when He called him (Jer. 1:7–10, 17–19) and rest in the assurance that the Lord would see him through.

There is a righteous anger against sin that is acceptable to God. “Be angry, and do not sin” (Eph. 4:26 NKJV, quoted from Ps. 4:4). “You who love the Lord, hate evil!” (Ps. 97:10 NKJV; see Rom. 12:9). Jesus was angry at the hardening of the hearts of His critics (Mark 3:5), and Paul was angry because of professed believers who were leading others astray. “Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?” (2 Cor. 11:29 NIV). Unrighteous anger takes matters into its own hands and seeks to destroy the offender, while righteous anger turns the matter over to God and seeks to help the offended. Anguish is anger plus love, and it isn't easy to maintain a holy balance. If Jeremiah seems too angry to us, perhaps some of us today aren't angry enough at the evil in this world. Thanks to the media, we're exposed to so much violence and sin that we tend to accept it as a normal part of life and want to do nothing about it. Crusading has given way to compromising, and it isn't “politically correct” to be dogmatic or critical of ideas that are definitely unbiblical.

2. JEREMIAH, THE PERSECUTED PROPHET (19:1—20:6) The theme of the potter continues with another action sermon from Jeremiah, a sermon that cost him a beating and a night in the stocks.

Jeremiah preaches the sermon (19:1–9). At the command of the Lord, Jeremiah made a second trip to the potter's house, this time as a customer and not a spectator, and he took with him some of the Jewish elders. Knowing their evil plots against him, it's an evidence of his faith that he was willing to walk with them and then do so daring a thing as declare *in their very presence* that

disaster was coming to the land because of their sins. Obviously his prayer to the Lord had brought him peace and courage.

The east gate was the Potsherd Gate, where the potters worked and the broken pottery was thrown. It overlooked the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, the Jerusalem garbage dump (Gehenna). But Jeremiah turned the gate into a pulpit and declared impending disaster because of what the kings of Judah had done: forsaken God, worshipped idols, desecrated the temple, murdered the innocent, and offered their children in altar fires dedicated to Baal.

This valley had been a center for idol worship, but Josiah had desecrated it by making it a garbage dump. *Topheth* means a “fire pit, a hearth,” because the little children had been put through the fires there. After the Babylonian invasion, however, the new name would be “The Valley of Slaughter.” The siege would be so bad that the Jews would have to eat their own children to stay alive!

Jeremiah announces judgment (19:10–15). “I will make void⁵ the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place” (19:7). To demonstrate this, Jeremiah broke a clay jar and said, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter’s jar is smashed and cannot be repaired’” (v. 11 NIV). The nation was beyond discipline (2:23), beyond prayer (7:16), and now, beyond repair! They had so hardened themselves against the Lord that all hope was gone.

In the Near East in that day, kings and generals often smashed clay jars in a special ceremony before they went out to battle, symbolic of their total defeat of their enemies. This image is also used of the Messiah in Psalm 2:9: “You shall break them [the enemy nations] with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel” (NKJV). But here it was God smashing His own people!

We can only imagine how angry the elders were who had accompanied Jeremiah to the Potsherd Gate. After all, they and the priests (and Jeremiah was a priest) had endorsed the “peace messages” of the false prophets as well as the

political schemes of the civil leaders who hoped to get help from Judah's ungodly allies. But what Jeremiah did next made them even more angry, because *he went to the temple and preached the sermon again!* For a man who was broken before God, he certainly had courage before his enemies, but he was trusting God's promise of help (Jer. 1:7–10, 17–19), and the Lord was sustaining him.

Can nations and individuals sin so greatly that even God can't restore them? Yes, they can. As long as the clay is pliable in the hands of the potter, he can make it again if it's marred (18:4), but when the clay becomes hard, it's too late to re-form it. *Judgment is the only response to willful apostasy.* The northern kingdom of Israel refused to repent, and the Assyrians took it captive. Now the southern kingdom of Judah was resisting God's truth, and Babylon would destroy the land and deport the people. The Jewish people rejected their King when they asked Pilate to crucify Jesus; forty years later, the Romans did to Jerusalem what the Babylonians had done six centuries before. "There is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16).

Jeremiah experiences pain (20:1–6). What before had been threats now became a reality. Pashur, son of Immer,⁶ assistant to the high priest and chief security officer for the temple, didn't like what Jeremiah was saying. Therefore, he had Jeremiah arrested, beaten, and put into the stocks until the next day. The stocks were located at a prominent place in the temple area, in order to add shame to pain. Spending all night with your body bent and twisted wouldn't be at all comfortable, and when you add the pain of the beating, you can imagine how Jeremiah felt.

Being beaten and put into the stocks was the first of several acts of persecution the leaders inflicted on Jeremiah. They threatened to kill him (Jer. 26), they accused him falsely and imprisoned him (37:11–21), and they put him into a pit (38:1–13). He was an official prisoner until Nebuchadnezzar set him free (39:11–18).

God, however, met with Jeremiah that night (see Acts 18:9–11; 23:11; 27:23–24) and gave him a special message and a new name for Pashur: Magor-Missabib, which means “terror on every side.” Jeremiah had used this phrase before (Jer. 6:25) and would use it again (46:5; 49:5, 29). It described what would happen to Jerusalem when the Babylonian army finally moved in.

For the first time, Jeremiah named the king of Babylon as the invader (20:4).⁷ Previously, Jeremiah had announced an invasion from the north (see 1:13–15; 3:12, 18; 4:5–9; 6:1, 22–26; 10:22), but he hadn’t named the invading nation. Now the tool of God’s discipline was identified as Babylon, and Jeremiah would mention Babylon in one way or another about two hundred times in his book.

Pashur’s treatment of Jeremiah would receive just recompense, for he and his family would be taken captive to Babylon, and there they would die. For a Jew to be buried outside his own land was considered a judgment, for the Gentile lands were considered unclean. For Pashur and his friends, however, what difference would that make? They’d been preaching lies in the name of the God of truth and had been encouraging idolatry in the temple of the holy God. So why not live in a land of lies and idols and eventually be buried there? They’d be right at home!

If the events described in Jeremiah 18–20 took place during the reign of Jehoiakim (607–597 BC), then it didn’t take long for Jeremiah’s prophecy to be fulfilled. In 605, Nebuchadnezzar plundered the temple and took Jehoiakim and the nobles to Babylon. In 597, he carried off over ten thousand people, and eleven years later, he burned the temple and the city and left it in ruins. Five years later, he deported another group of exiles.

3. JEREMIAH, THE DISCOURAGED PROPHET (20:7–18) This is the last of Jeremiah’s recorded laments; it’s a human blending of grief and

joy, prayer and despair, praise and perplexity. When you call to mind the sensitive nature of this man, you aren't surprised that he's on the mountaintop one minute and in the deepest valley the next. Jeremiah, however, lived above his moods and did the will of God regardless of how he felt. In this honest expression of his deepest emotions, the prophet dealt with three important concerns: God's call (vv. 7–9), his daily peril (vv. 10–13), and his inner despair (vv. 14–18).

His “deceptive” call (vv. 7–9). When the servants of God find themselves in trouble because they've been faithful in ministry, they're often tempted to question their call and reconsider their vocation. Then what do they do? One of the first things they ought to do is *talk to the Lord about it and tell Him the truth*.

The word translated “deceived” carries with it the idea of being enticed or seduced. Of course, God doesn't lie (Titus 1:2), but Jeremiah felt that the Lord had taken advantage of him and lured him into the ministry. “You overpowered me and prevailed” (Jer. 20:7 NIV). Jeremiah felt like a helpless maiden who had been seduced then taken advantage of by a deceptive “lover.” This is strong language, but at least Jeremiah said it privately to God and not publicly to others.

When you review the account of Jeremiah's call (Jer. 1), you find no evidence that God had enticed him. The Lord had told him plainly that he would have a difficult time. If he trusted the Lord, however, He would make him a fortified city and a bronze wall before his enemies. God had warned His servant that the demands of ministry would increase and he'd have to grow in order to keep going (12:5). What Jeremiah's ministry was doing for the nation was important, but even more important was what Jeremiah's ministry was doing *for Jeremiah*. As we serve the Lord, our capacity for ministry should increase and enable us to do much more than we ever thought we could do.

After you've told God how you feel, what do you do next? Jeremiah

resolved to quit being a prophet! He decided to keep his mouth shut and not even mention the Lord to anybody. But that didn't work, because the message of God was like a burning in his heart and a fire in his bones (see Luke 24:32). Jeremiah didn't preach because he had to say something but because he had something to say, and not saying it would have destroyed him. Paul had the same attitude: "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16 NIV).

His daily peril (vv. 10–13). Having settled the matter of his call, Jeremiah then looked away from himself to the enemies around him. Faith doesn't ignore problems; it faces them honestly and seeks God's help in solving them. No matter how much he was constrained to preach God's Word, Jeremiah had to deal with the fact that many people wanted him to keep quiet and would take the necessary steps to silence him.

Borrowing the new name God gave Pashur (Jer. 20:3), it's possible that Jeremiah's enemies used "Terror on every side" as a nickname for the prophet. It was another way to ridicule his prophecies before the people. They watched him and took note of what he did and said so they could find something criminal to report to the authorities. David had a similar experience (Ps. 31:13), and this is the way our Lord's enemies treated Him (Matt. 22:15ff.).

Jeremiah's mood swings from expressing courage to seeking revenge and then to rejoicing in worship (Jer. 20:11–13). Remembering the promises God gave him at his call, Jeremiah was confident that the Lord was with him and would deal effectively with his enemies. Instead of dishonoring him, his enemies would themselves be dishonored. Since his words in verse 12 are almost identical to his prayer in 11:20, perhaps it's one he prayed often.

His deep despair (vv. 14–18). Having committed his cause to the Lord, Jeremiah had every reason to sing, for now the Lord would have to bear his burdens and help fight his battles. "Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour

out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us” (Ps. 62:8 NKJV).

Jeremiah’s euphoria didn’t last long, however, because in the next breath he was cursing his birthday (Jer. 15:10; see Job 3). Jewish parents would rejoice at the birth of a son who could wear the family name and be able to sustain his parents in their old age. A priestly family like Jeremiah’s would be especially grateful for a son who could carry on the ministry to the Lord.

But Jeremiah’s ideas were different. The messenger who announced that a son had been born would bring joy to the family and expect a reward for bringing such good news, but Jeremiah asked that the messenger be treated like Sodom and Gomorrah! He wanted that man to awaken to weeping in the morning and to hear battle cries every noon! “Why didn’t my mother’s womb become my tomb?” asked the prophet. “My life is nothing but trouble and sorrow and shame! Better that I had never lived!”

“Wherefore came I forth out of the womb?” (Jer. 20:18) is an easy question to answer: because God had a special purpose for your life and designed you to fulfill it (Jer. 1:4–5; Ps. 139:13–16). God makes no mistakes when He calls His servants, and we should take care not to question His wisdom. All of us have had times of discouragement when we’ve felt like quitting, but that’s when we must look beyond our feelings and circumstances and see the greatness and wisdom of God.

As V. Raymond Edman, former president of Wheaton College (IL), often said to the students, “It’s always too soon to quit.”

And it is!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe an object that symbolizes your current spiritual condition. Explain the meaning of your object.
2. Read Jeremiah 18:1–17 and chapter 19. What objects did God use to represent the spiritual condition of His people? Why were those appropriate?
3. As Jeremiah continued to proclaim God’s message of judgment to the people of Judah, his decisiveness to speak for God continued to be tested. Read 18:18–23 and chapter 20. How did the people make ministry harder for God’s faithful messenger?
4. What do Jeremiah’s prayers reveal about his feelings in this situation?
5. How would you have felt if you had been in Jeremiah’s situation? Why?
6. What hope did Jeremiah have in spite of his discouragement and despair?
7. What do you learn about prayer from Jeremiah’s prayers in these chapters?
8. How easy is it for you to speak out against evil? What helps or hinders you?

9. What practical steps can you take to speak the truth and trust God if others respond harshly?

Chapter Nine

The God Who Makes Things New

[\(Jeremiah 30—33\)](#)

A small man can see when it is growing dark ... but he cannot see beyond the darkness. He does not know how to put a sunbeam into his picture. A great man pierces the darkness and sees the glory of a hidden dawn.[1](#)

—CHARLES E. JEFFERSON

Bible scholars often call these four chapters the “Book of Consolation.” In them, the Lord amplified the wonderful promise He gave to His people in the letter Jeremiah sent the Babylonian exiles: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (29:11 NIV) Jeremiah 30—33 describes the glory of the dawning of a new day for the people of Israel, not only for the exiles in Babylon but also for the Jewish people in the latter days before the Lord returns. As you study, you’ll discover that Jeremiah had two horizons in view: the nearer horizon of the return of the exiles to Judah and the farther horizon of the regathering of Israel in the end times from the nations of the earth.

REDEMPTION: A NEW BEGINNING (30:1–24) Jeremiah received the words recorded in 30:1—31:25 while he was asleep (31:26), for God sometimes spoke to His servants through dreams (Dan. 10:9; Zech. 4:1). God instructed Jeremiah to write His words in a book (scroll) so the nation would have a permanent record of the promises God was giving to His people (see Jer. 36:1–4).

In His instructions to Jeremiah, God stated the theme of His message: Israel (the northern kingdom, taken by Assyria in 722 BC) and Judah (the southern kingdom) will eventually return to their land as a united people (30:3). While this promise refers ultimately to the regathering of the Jews at the end of the age, it certainly was an encouragement to the exiles in Babylon, for if God can gather His people from *all* the nations of the world, surely He can deliver Judah from the captivity of *one* nation. (Note His promise in v. 10.) This “redemption” of His people from bondage is pictured in several ways.

The broken yoke (vv. 4–11). “For it shall come to pass in that day, ... that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them” (v. 8 NKJV). When the prophets used the phrase “in that day,” they were usually referring to the future time when God will judge the nations of the world and restore the Jews to their land.[2](#)

Before Israel is delivered, however, all the nations of the earth will experience “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (v. 7), a phrase that describes the time of tribulation that will come upon the earth (Matt. 24:21–31; Mark 13:19–27; Rev. 6—19). A frequent biblical symbol of suffering is a woman in travail (Jer. 30:6), and this image is used to describe the tribulation in the end times (see Isa. 13:8 and context; Mic. 4:9–13; 1 Thess. 5:1–3).[3](#)

The promise in Jeremiah 30:9 applies to the future kingdom age, following the tribulation, when the Messiah shall reign over His people. You find corresponding promises in 23:5 and 33:14–26. When Jesus was here on earth,

His people said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14), but in that day, they will recognize their Messiah-King and welcome Him (Zech. 12:8—14:21).

The healed wound (vv. 12–17). In Isaiah’s day, Judah was a “sick” nation (Isa. 1:5–6), and thanks to the superficial ministry of the false prophets (Jer. 6:14; 8:11), the sickness became worse in Jeremiah’s day (10:19; 14:17; 15:18). The wounds on the “body politic” were so bad that there was no medicine that could cure the nation, and the allies (“lovers”) that the Jewish leaders trusted abandoned Judah to her fate. The Lord reminded the Jews that it was He who used other nations to wound them because of their disobedience to Him (30:14). He used Assyria to chasten Israel and Babylon to punish Judah, and in the latter days, He will use the Gentile nations to correct Israel and prepare the Jews for the return of their Messiah. However, God will punish the Gentile nations for the way they treat Israel in the last days (v. 16; see Joel 3) just as He punished Assyria and Babylon. “But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds” was God’s encouraging promise (Jer. 30:17 NIV).

The calm after the storm (vv. 18–24). Jeremiah then picked up the image of the storm (v. 23) that he had used earlier (23:19–20) to describe the Babylonian assault, but now he related it to the trials of the “latter days” (30:24). God promised that Jerusalem and the cities of Judah will be rebuilt⁴ and that the fortunes of the people will be restored. Their mourning will turn to joy, and their children will again enjoy a normal life.

Instead of being under despotic Gentile rulers, the Jews will have the Messiah as their ruler—“one of their own” (v. 21 NIV), that is, a Jew. But here’s a surprising revelation: Not only will the Messiah be their King, but He will also be their Priest! “Then I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach Me” (v. 21 NKJV). This is language that applies especially to the Jewish high priest, who alone entered the Holy of Holies on the annual day of Atonement (Lev. 16).

Only Jesus Christ, who is both King and Priest (Heb. 7—8), can qualify to fulfill this prophecy.

To summarize: The people of Judah and Jerusalem will experience terrible trials at the hands of the Babylonians. They will end up wearing the Gentile yoke, bearing the wounds caused by their sins, and having endured the storm of God's wrath. But God would eventually deliver them, breaking the yoke, healing the wounds, and bringing peace after the storm. All of this will be a foreshadowing of what will happen to the Jews in the end times as they go through the tribulation, meet their Messiah-King, and enter into their kingdom.

RECONCILIATION: A NEW PEOPLE (31:1–30) A nation is more than its land and cities; it's people living together, working together, and worshipping together. In this chapter, Jeremiah described the people of God and the new things the Lord would do for them. He first spoke to a united nation (vv. 1, 27–30), then to Israel (vv. 2–20), and finally to Judah (vv. 21–26).

A united people (vv. 1, 27–30). Because of the sins of Solomon and the foolishness of his son Rehoboam, the Jewish nation divided and became Israel and Judah, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom (1 Kings 11—12). But in the last days, the Lord will gather His people, unite them, and be the “God of all the families of Israel” (Jer. 31:1). In fact, God compared Israel and Judah to seed that will be sown in the land and produce one harvest, not two (v. 27).

Jeremiah's ministry included breaking down and plucking up as well as building and planting (1:10); up to this point, it had been primarily the former. In the future, however, God will build and plant so the people and the land could be restored. There would be no more “blaming the fathers” for what happened (Ezek. 18:1–4, 19–23; Deut. 24:16), for each person will take responsibility for his or her own sins. This principle certainly had application to the remnant that

returned to the land after the captivity, for it was the failure of individuals to obey God that caused the ruin of the nation. If the kings and priests had been like Josiah and Jeremiah, the nation could have been saved.

A restored Israel (vv. 2–20). The names “Ephraim” and “Samaria” are references to the northern kingdom of Israel, whose capital was at Samaria (Jer. 31:4–6, 9, 18, 20). The people of the northern kingdom were captured in 722 BC by the Assyrians, who brought other peoples into the land so as to produce a mixed race (2 Kings 17). When the people of Judah returned to their land from the captivity, they would have nothing to do with the Samaritans (Ezra 4:1–4; Neh. 2:19–20; 13:28), a practice that persisted into New Testament times (John 4:9).⁵ Subsequently, the Samaritans established their own religion, temple, and priesthood, and this alienated the Jews even more.

The promises recorded in Jeremiah 31:2–22 don’t apply to Ephraim/Israel after the captivity, because the Samaritans weren’t a part of the rebuilding of the land. These promises apply to the scattered Ten Tribes⁶ in the end times when God will call the Jews together and restore them to their land. Then there will be one nation, and the Samaritans will worship, not on Mount Ephraim, but on Mount Zion (v. 6; John 4:20–24). Jeremiah pictured God summoning His family and gathering His flock, leading them out of the desert into the fruitful garden. Since none of this happened after the captivity, we can assume it will occur in the end times when Ephraim repents and turns to the Lord (Jer. 31:18–20). As you read these promises, notice the emphasis on singing, praise, and joy.

Matthew later referred to verses 15–17 (Matt. 2:16–18). Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, and Joseph was the father of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two leading tribes in the northern kingdom (Gen. 30:22–24). Jeremiah heard Rachel weeping at Ramah, where the Jewish prisoners were assembled for their long journey to Babylon (Jer. 40:1). Her descendants through Joseph had been captured by the Assyrians, and now her descendants through Benjamin (the southern kingdom) were going to Babylon. Her labor as a mother

had been in vain! (Remember, Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin.) But God assured her that both Ephraim and Judah will be restored (31:16–17), and therefore her sacrifices will not have been in vain.[7](#)

A restored Judah (vv. 21–26). As the Jews started for Babylon, God instructed them to remember the roads and set up markers along the route, for the people would use those same roads when they return to their land. Jeremiah pictured Judah as a silly girl, flitting from lover to lover, and now summoned to come home. (He used this image before. See 2:1–2, 20; 3:1–11.) According to the law, a daughter who prostituted herself should have been killed (Lev. 21:9; Deut. 22:21), but God would do a new thing: He would welcome her home and forgive her!

The phrase “a woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:22; “surround” in NIV) has been given so many interpretations that to examine them all is to invite confusion. The word translated “compass” also means “to surround with care, to shield”; it’s used of God’s care for Israel in the wilderness (Deut. 32:10 NKJV). The word for “man” means “a strong man, a champion,” so the “new thing” God does is make the women so strong that they protect the men! (Keep in mind that this was a strongly masculine society.) In other words, the return of the exiles won’t be a parade of weak stragglers; it will be the march of warriors, including the women, who were considered too weak to fight in that day.[8](#)

This is a picture of that future regathering of the people of Israel in the end times. They will enjoy a renewed land, where the citizens will bless their neighbors in the name of the Lord. Farmers and city dwellers will live together in harmony because of the blessing of the Lord.

REGENERATION: A NEW COVENANT (31:31–40) Any plan for the betterment of human society that ignores the sin problem is destined to failure. It isn’t enough to change the environment, for

the heart of every problem is the problem of the heart. God must change the hearts of people so that they want to love Him and do His will. That's why He announced a new covenant to replace the old covenant under which the Jews had lived since the days of Moses, a covenant that could direct their conduct but not change their character.

Jewish history is punctuated with a number of covenant renewals that brought temporary blessing but didn't change the hearts of the no a

God's command by faith, Jeremiah was now wondering how God would ever give him his property; he did the right thing by praying about it. The best way to handle doubt is to talk to God, be honest about your feelings, and then wait for Him to give you His message from His Word.

True prayer begins with worship (vv. 17–19) and focuses on the greatness of God. No matter what our problems are, God is greater; and the more we see His greatness, the less threatening our problems will become. True prayer also involves rehearsing what God has done for us in the past and remembering how He kept His promises and met the needs of His people (vv. 20–23). Jeremiah's prayer concluded with the prophet sharing his difficult situation with God and turning it over to Him (vv. 24–25). Outside the city was the besieging Babylonian army; within the city were famine, disease, and disobedience; and in Jeremiah's heart was a nagging doubt that he'd made a fool of himself.

The confirmation (32:26–44). God met the needs of His servant and confirmed that his decisions were right. The basic theme of Jeremiah's prayer was "Nothing is too hard for you" (v. 17 NIV), and God reaffirmed that very truth to His servant (v. 27).^{[10](#)} Good theology always leads to a confident heart if we put our trust in the Word, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17 NKJV).

The Lord's reply to Jeremiah affirmed what He had told him in the past: The city was heading for certain destruction because of the repeated sins of the people (Jer. 32:28–35). Their sin of idolatry had provoked the Lord, and the only solution was to put them in the land of Babylon and give them their fill of idols. Because the people had resisted the prophets and refused to obey the law, they would have to take the consequences.

The Lord then affirmed to Jeremiah that the situation wasn't lost, for He would gather His people and bring them back to their land (vv. 36–44). This promise seems to apply to the end times when Israel will be gathered "out of all

countries” (v. 37) and the new covenant will be in force, for the people will have a changed heart toward the Lord. Next, Jeremiah heard the word that gave him joy: “And fields shall be bought in this land” (v. 43). The day would come when Jeremiah’s purchase would be validated and his “action sermon” vindicated!

The application of this Scripture for today’s believer is obvious: The world laughs at us for our faith and our investments in the future, but one day God will keep His promises and vindicate us before people and angels. Instead of living for the sinful pleasures of this present world, we seek the joys of the world to come. We refuse to sacrifice the eternal for the temporal. The unbelieving world may ridicule us, but ultimately God will vindicate His people.

“Unsearchable things” (33:1–26). “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (v. 3 NIV). The word translated “unsearchable” pictures an impregnable city protected by high walls—an apt image during the siege of Jerusalem. The idea is that God’s people don’t learn the hidden things of the Lord by “storming the gates” through their own strength but by seeking Him through believing prayer. Because Jeremiah asked the Lord to teach him, God showed him “hidden things” that related to the future of his people. The prophet knew that the city was destined for judgment (vv. 4–5), but the Lord gave him further words of assurance and encouragement—promises that relate to the end times.

The defiled nation would be healed and cleansed (vv. 6–8) and the disgraceful city would bring joy and renown to the Lord and be a testimony to all the nations of the world of the marvelous goodness and grace of God (v. 9). The deserted city would one day be filled with people praising the Lord and expressing their joy to one another (vv. 10–11). The pasture lands, ruined by devastating judgment, would one day be full of flocks and herds, and the little towns would once more enjoy happiness (vv. 12–13). Since these blessings didn’t come during the post-exilic period, we have to believe they’ll be realized

when the Lord returns and restores His people and their land.

The greatest blessing of all will be their promised King reigning in righteousness (vv. 14–16; see 23:5)! Jeremiah already told us that His name is “The Lord our Righteousness” (v. 6), but now God revealed that *Jerusalem will bear the same name*! That certainly didn’t happen when the exiles returned to rebuild their temple and their city. Therefore, this promise is for the latter days. Then when people call Jerusalem “the Holy City,” the name will be appropriate.

Once again, the Lord used the faithfulness of His creation covenant (Gen. 8:22) to undergird the dependability of His promises and the perpetuity of His people (Jer. 33:19–26; see 31:35–37). But He adds something else: He will multiply the people as the stars of the heaven, which was one of the promises He had made to Abraham (Gen. 15:1–5).[11](#)

“For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them” (Jer. 33:26 NIV). The nation of Israel has a bright and blessed future, and Jeremiah invested in that future.

As God’s people, are we putting our money where our mouth is?

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is an investment you have made for the future?
2. Jeremiah was instructed to make an investment too. Read Jeremiah 30 and 31. What hope for the future did God give Jeremiah and His people?

3. Read Jeremiah 32:1—33:25. What reasons did Jeremiah have for being pessimistic and/or giving up? For being optimistic?
4. If you were in Jeremiah's place, weighing the good against the bad, how would you feel? Why?
5. What object lesson did God instruct Jeremiah to perform to confirm that everything would eventually be okay?
6. Read Jeremiah 32:16–44. What was the overriding theme of Jeremiah's prayer?
7. How did God affirm that Judah's situation wasn't totally lost?
8. What aspects of your own future would you feel more secure about if you focused on God's previous faithfulness rather than the fear of the unknown?
9. Read Jeremiah 33. In addition to promising to restore order back to the land of Judah, what else did God promise Jeremiah?
10. How does this passage relate to our futures?

Chapter Thirteen

Babylon Is Fallen!

[\(Jeremiah 50—51\)](#)

After all, we are not judged so much by how many sins we have committed but by how much light we have rejected.[1](#)

—VANCE HAVNER

After declaring the destiny of the Gentile nations (Jer. 46—49), the prophet now focused on Judah’s hateful enemy, the empire of Babylon. Jeremiah devoted 121 verses to the future of nine nations and 44 verses to the defeat and destruction of Jerusalem. When we count the number of verses in Jeremiah 50 and 51, however, he devoted 110 verses to the fall of Babylon. It is an important subject indeed!

In Scripture, the city of Babylon is contrasted with the city of Jerusalem—the proud city of man versus the Holy City of God. In Hebrew, the name *babel* means “gate of God,” but *babel* is so close to the word *balal* (“confusion”) that it’s associated with the famous tower of Babel and the confusion of human languages (Gen. 11:1–9). The founder of Babylon was Nimrod (10:8–10), “a mighty hunter before the LORD” (v. 9). Some students interpret this to mean “a mighty rebel against the Lord.”[2](#) Babel/Babylon is a symbol of rebellion against

God, the earthly city of human splendor opposing the heavenly city that glorifies God. All of this culminates in the Babylon of Revelation 17:1—19:10, “Babylon the Great,” that symbolizes the anti-God system that controls the world in the end times and then is destroyed by the Lord. There are many parallels between Jeremiah 50—51 and Revelation 17—18, and I suggest you read all four chapters carefully.

Jeremiah wrote this prophecy during the fourth year of Zedekiah (594–593 BC) and gave the scroll to Baruch’s brother Seraiah to read in Babylon and then throw into the Euphrates (Jer. 51:59–64). Since Seraiah was an officer in Zedekiah’s cabinet, he had access to things officially diplomatic. This was the last of Jeremiah’s “action sermons,” performed without Jeremiah, symbolizing the complete destruction of the great Babylonian Empire.

Jeremiah 50—51 is something like an extended declaration coupled with a conversation. Usually it’s the Lord speaking through His prophet, but occasionally we hear the Jewish people speaking and the Lord answering them. God speaks to and about Babylon; He also speaks to the invading army; and He speaks to the exiles of Judah. Three movements are in this declaration: God declares war on Babylon (50:1–28); God assembles the armies against Babylon (50:29—51:26); and God announces victory over Babylon (51: 27–58).

Jeremiah’s prophecy about Babylon has both a near and a far fulfillment. The Medes and Persians captured Babylon in 539 BC (see Dan. 5), but they didn’t destroy the city. Cyrus issued a decree that the Jews could return to their land (Ezra 1:1–4), which many of them did in three stages: in 538 BC (Ezra 1—6), 458 BC (Ezra 7—10), and 444 BC (book of Nehemiah). It was Alexander the Great who finally destroyed Babylon in 330 BC and left it a heap of ruins. Since Babylon symbolizes the anti-God world system, however, the ultimate fulfillment is recorded in Revelation 17—18. Remember, the prophets often looked at “two horizons,” one near and one far, as they spoke and wrote about the future.

GOD DECLARES WAR ON BABYLON (50:1–28) “Announce and proclaim!” is the commandment. “Raise the signal!” God declared war on Babylon and announced that her great god Bel (also called Marduk) was about to be shamefully defeated.

God declared war on both Babylon and the gods of Babylon. The word translated “idols” means “wooden blocks,” and the word translated “images” means “dung pellets.” The Lord didn’t think much of their gods! The invaders would come from the north just as Nebuchadnezzar came from the north to conquer Judah (1:11–15).

God speaks to and about the Jews (v. 4–10). He saw them as lost sheep without a shepherd, a flock greatly abused both by their leaders and their captors. While the immediate application is to the return of the exiles from Babylon, the ultimate reference includes the gathering of the Jews in the latter days. God warned the people to flee from Babylon so as not to be caught in the judgment that would fall (Isa. 48:20; Rev. 18:4). He would bring the Medes and the Persians against Babylon and give them total victory.

God speaks to Babylon (vv. 11–13). Now we find out why God was destroying this great empire. To begin with, the Babylonians were glad that they could devastate and subjugate Judah. Yes, Babylon was God’s tool to chasten His sinful people, but the Babylonians went too far and enjoyed it too much. They acted like a joyful calf threshing the grain and getting his fill! Any nation that cursed the Jews will ultimately be cursed by God (Gen. 12:1–3). As they treated Judah, so God will treat them (see Jer. 51:24, 35, 49).

God speaks to the invading armies (vv. 14–16). Just as Babylon had been God’s tool to chasten Judah, so the invaders (Cyrus with the Medes and Persians, and later Alexander with his Greek army) would be God’s weapon to defeat Babylon. God spoke to the invading armies and commanded them to get their weapons ready and shout for victory, because they would win the battle.

This was no ordinary war; this was the “vengeance of the Lord” (v. 15).

God speaks about the Jews (vv. 17–20). Once more Jeremiah used the image of the scattered flock. Assyria had ravaged Israel (the northern kingdom), and Babylon had ravaged Judah (the southern kingdom), but now God would punish Babylon as He had Assyria. (Assyria fell to a Babylonian-Median alliance in 609 BC.) God will bring His people back to their own land, where the flock may graze safely and peacefully. The prophet then looked down to the latter days when God will wipe away the nation’s sins and establish His new covenant with them. We see the “two horizons” of prophecy again.

God speaks to the invaders (vv. 21–27). The Lord was in command of the invasion, and His orders were to be carried out explicitly. Babylon the rod (Isa. 10:5) was itself shattered. Babylon was caught in God’s trap and couldn’t escape God’s weapons. Their fine young men would be slaughtered like cattle, for the day of judgment for Babylon had come.

The Jewish remnant speaks (v. 28). We hear the exiles who had fled the city and arrived in Judah as they report the fall of Babylon. The ultimate sin of the Babylonians was the burning of the temple, and for that sin the ultimate total destruction of their city was their punishment.

GOD ASSEMBLES THE ARMIES AGAINST BABYLON (50:29—51:26) The first command had been “Declare among the nations!” (NKJV). But now the command was “Call together the archers!” God ordered the armies of the Medes and Persians (and later the Greeks) to shoot to kill and allow no one to escape.

God speaks to Babylon (50:31—51:4). He told them that He was against them because of their pride (50:31–32) and because of the way they had made the Jews suffer unnecessarily (v. 33). The exiles couldn’t free themselves, but their strong Redeemer would free them! The phrase “plead their cause” speaks

of a court case. Jehovah was defense attorney, judge, and jury, and He found Babylon guilty.

Now the Lord told Babylon what to expect on the day of their judgment. The first picture is that of a sword going through the land and cutting down the people (vv. 35–38). God’s sword will even attack the waters and dry them up (v. 38). Why? Because it is “a land of idols” (v. 38 NIV), and God wanted to reveal that the idols were nothing. Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, nothing will be left. Babylon will become a haven for animals and birds, and the city will never be restored.

The Lord directed the Babylonians’ attention to the great army that He had called from the north—a cruel army without mercy, whose march sounded like “the roaring sea” (v. 42 NIV). This report paralyzed the king of Babylon. Like a hungry lion, looking for prey (see 49:19–21), Cyrus (and then Alexander) will attack Babylon, and nobody will be able to resist. God’s chosen servant will always succeed. The Lord’s judgment on Babylon will be like the winnowing of the grain: “Great Babylon” will be blown away like chaff along with its idols!

God speaks to the Jews (51:5–10). God assured His people that He hadn’t forsaken (“widowed”) them, and He ordered them a second time (50:8 was the first) to get out of Babylon when the opportunity arises. When Cyrus opened the door for them to go home, about fifty thousand Jews returned to Judah to restore Jerusalem and the temple. Babylon had been a “winecup” (see 25:15) in God’s hands, making the nations act like drunks (Rev. 18:3), but now the cup would be smashed and Babylon’s power broken. “Wail over her!” (Jer. 51:8 NIV) finds a fulfillment in Revelation 18:9ff. Anybody who pinned his or her hope on Babylon was doomed to disappointment, but so is anyone today who pins his or her hope on this present world. “The world is passing away” (1 John 2:17 NKJV).

To whom does “we” in Jeremiah 51:9 refer—to the Jews or to Babylon’s allies who deserted her? Since the “us” in verse 10 refers clearly to the Jews and

their vindication, it is likely that the exiles are speaking in verse 9, because Jeremiah had instructed them to be a blessing while living in Babylon (29:4–14). No doubt many of the Jews did seek the Lord, confess their sins, and trust His promise of deliverance. Some of them certainly prepared their sons and daughters to return to the land. They had the truth about Jehovah God and would have shared it with their captors, but the Babylonians preferred to taunt the Jews instead of listen to them discuss their religion (Ps. 137).

God speaks to Babylon (51:11–23). He warned them to get their weapons ready, set up their standards on the walls, and post their watchmen, because the invasion was about to begin. “Your end has come, the time for you to be cut off” (Jer. 51:13 NIV). They had been weaving the luxurious tapestry of their power and wealth on the loom, but now God would cut it off and put an end to their plans (v. 13 NIV).[3](#)

The enemy soldiers would swoop down on the Babylonians like locusts and prove the utter helplessness of the gods of Babylon. Jeremiah revealed the stupidity of making and worshipping idols (vv. 15–19), and he magnified the greatness of the one true and living God (see 10:12–16; Isa. 40:12–26).

God speaks to His general (51:20–24).[4](#) Just as Assyria had been God’s “rod” (Isa. 10:5–19), so His chosen commander (Cyrus, and later Alexander) would be His “hammer” (Jer. 51:20 MSG) to break the power of Babylon. The word “break” (shatter) is used nine times in this passage. They would pay Babylon back with the same treatment Nebuchadnezzar had given others. There is a law of compensation in God’s working in history, and the Lord will enforce it.

God speaks to Babylon (51:25–26). The city of Babylon sat on a plain, but in the sight of the nations, it was a huge destroying mountain that loomed on the horizon of history. By the time God was through with it, however, Babylon would be nothing but an extinct volcano (“a burnt mountain,” Jer. 51:25).

Nobody would even excavate the ruins to find stones to build with; the city would be deserted and “desolate forever” (v. 26).

GOD ANNOUNCES VICTORY OVER BABYLON (51:27–58) Throughout this prophecy, God has frequently announced the fall of Babylon, but this closing section seems to focus on God’s total victory over the enemy.

God describes the victory (vv. 27–33). God’s armies were prepared, the commanders were ready, and the battle began; but the Babylonian army was helpless! They lay on the walls exhausted; their courage had failed them. The city was in flames, and the bars of the gates were broken. Nothing kept the enemy from entering the city and doing to it what the Babylonians had done to Jerusalem.[5](#)

The Babylonians had an effective courier system and could quickly send messages to the various parts of their vast empire. In fact, Jeremiah described the runners meeting and exchanging messages for the king: “The river crossings have been seized!” “The marshes are set on fire!” “The soldiers are terrified!” “The city has been captured!” (see vv. 31–32 NIV). It was God’s harvest, and Babylon was on the threshing floor.[6](#)

God speaks to the Jews (vv. 34–50). First, the Jews reminded the Lord what Nebuchadnezzar had done to them (vv. 34–35). Like a vicious monster, he had picked up Judah as if it were a jar filled with food, swallowed down the food, vomited it up, and then broken the jar! He had chewed them up and spit them out! Now the Jews wanted the Lord to repay the Babylonians for all the suffering they had caused the people of God.

God’s reply was encouraging: Like a court advocate, He would take their case, plead their cause, and vindicate them (v. 36). The Lord described vividly what would happen to Babylon: The ruins of the city would become the haunt of

animals and birds, a perpetual cemetery for the people slain in the invasion, a slaughterhouse where people would die like so many cattle, sheep, and goats.

Sheshach in verse 41 is a code name for Babylon (25:26) following a system where the last letter of the alphabet is substituted for the first, the next to the last for the second, and so on. Why Jeremiah used a code name for the enemy in one sentence and then the real name in the next sentence isn't easy to understand.

Nevertheless, the enemy army would cover Babylon just as the sea covers the land (51:42), but when the tide is out, a desert will be left behind. The Babylonian "monster" may have swallowed up God's people, but the Lord would force it to disgorge them (v. 44), and the new king (Cyrus) would permit God's people to return home. "The wall of Babylon shall fall" (v. 44) literally came true under Alexander, but the wall came down when Cyrus decreed that the exiles could go back to Judah and rebuild their temple.

For the third time, God ordered His people to get out of Babylon (v. 45; see 50:8; 51:6) and not to linger (51:50; see Gen. 19:16). Neither should they be afraid of the rumors they would hear about, which were about to happen. They didn't need to be afraid of the vain Babylonian idols that could do nothing to hinder them. Heaven and earth will sing songs of praise when Babylon falls (Jer. 51:48; Rev. 18:20ff.).

The Jews speak and God replies (vv. 51–58). The exiles felt disgraced before the world because of what the Babylonians had done to the temple in Jerusalem. If the Lord wasn't strong enough to protect His house, how could He ever be strong enough to defeat Babylon? If they left Babylon, they would go home only to ruin and shame. During the years of their captivity, those who had obeyed Jeremiah's instructions (Jer. 29:4–14) probably enjoyed fairly comfortable lives. Thus, they would be exchanging security for danger and plenty for want.[Z](#)

God, however, made it clear that there was no future in Babylon, for He had determined to destroy the city. "For the Lord [is a] God of recompenses"

(51:56). If His people remained in Babylon, they would suffer the fate of the city. If they obeyed the Lord and returned home, they would experience a new beginning under the blessing of the Lord.

It's a matter of walking by faith and not by sight, trusting God's Word instead of our own human evaluation. The exiles saw the high walls and huge gates of the city and concluded that such fortifications would repel any enemy, but they were wrong. Those walls and gates would become only "fuel for the flames" when the invaders arrived on the scene (v. 58 NIV).

"Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city!" (Rev. 14:8).

And Babylon is still fallen!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What's the worst judgment you can imagine?
2. Read Jeremiah 50 and 51. Why did God declare war on Babylon?
3. Describe Babylon's judgment and God's victory.
4. Why was God's judgment of Babylon so harsh?

5. In dealing with sinful people, why would God use others who are even more sinful to turn them back to Himself?
6. What lessons can we learn from this dramatic description of the fall of Babylon?
7. Looking back on the book of Jeremiah, what have you learned about being decisive from this study?
8. Think of an ongoing challenge you face. Read Jeremiah 1:4–10. How can these verses help you face that challenge instead of running away from it?

Postlude

Defeat doesn't finish a man—quitting does. A man is not finished when he's defeated. He's finished when he quits.

—RICHARD M. NIXON

Jeremiah died an old man, probably in Egypt, and like the grave of Moses, his burial place is a mystery. The brave prophet has long turned to dust, but the words that he wrote are still with us, because God's Word endures forever.

He wrote a long and difficult book, and we haven't been able to deal with everything he wrote. However, we can't help but glean from his life and ministry some clear and important lessons that apply to all of God's people today.

1. *In difficult days, we need to hear and heed the Word of God.* Since hindsight always has twenty-twenty vision, it's obvious to us that the leaders of Judah did a very stupid thing by resisting what Jeremiah told them to do. Judah had sinned its way into trouble and judgment, and they thought they could negotiate their way out, but it didn't work. What they needed was faith in God's Word and obedience to God's will. Had they confessed their sins, turned to God, and submitted to Nebuchadnezzar, they would have saved their lives, their temple, and their city.

2. *True prophets of God are usually (if not always) persecuted.* The civil and religious leaders of Judah preferred the pleasant messages of the false prophets to the strong words of God's true servant, because the human heart wants to rest, not repent. It wants peace, but it wants it without having to deal with the basic cause of unrest—unbelief.

The people of Israel resisted God's messengers and challenged their authority from the time of Moses to the days of the apostles. It's difficult to

name a prophet or apostle who didn't suffer persecution. If Jeremiah showed up today at the United Nations or some senate or parliament and spoke as he did to the leaders of Judah, he would probably be laughed at and thrown out. But it's a dangerous thing to be a "popular preacher" who has no enemies and pleases everybody. "Prophets are almost extinct in the religious world today," said Vance Havner. "The modern church is a 'non-prophet' organization."[1](#)

3. *True patriotism isn't blind to sin.* Charles E. Jefferson wrote:

He [Jeremiah] loved his country so passionately he was willing to die for it as a traitor. He loved his country so intensely that he would not leave it even after Jerusalem was in ruins.[2](#)

Imagine a patriot like Jeremiah being called a traitor! Yet many a courageous leader who has dared to expose lies and call a nation to repentance has been called a traitor and publicly abused.

A true Christian patriot isn't blind to the sins of the nation but seeks to deal with those sins compassionately and realistically. Both Jesus and Jeremiah were true patriots when it came to giving an honest diagnosis of the diseases of the "body politic" and offering the only correct solution. They didn't heal the wounds of the people slightly and say, "Peace, peace." They both recognized that a nation's greatest problem is not unemployment, inflation, or lack of defense; it's sin. The nation that doesn't deal with sin is wasting time and resources trying to solve national problems, which are only symptoms of the deeper problem, which is sin.

4. *God's servants occasionally have their doubts and failings.* Jeremiah was weak before God but bold before men. He wasn't afraid to tell God just how he felt, and he listened when God told him what he needed to do. Though he once came quite close to resigning his office, he stuck with it and continued to serve the Lord.

Jeremiah was a prophet of the heart. He wasn't content to give a message

that dealt with surface matters; he wanted to penetrate the inner person and see the heart changed. He boldly told the people that the days would come when they wouldn't remember the ark or feel a need for it. In fact, the days would come when they would be part of a new covenant that would be written on the heart and not on tables of stone. This was radical religion, but it was God's message just the same.

Any servant of God who tries to reach and change hearts is a candidate for sorrow and a sense of failure. But God knows our hearts and sustains us.

5. *The important thing isn't success; it's faithfulness.* By today's human standards of ministry, Jeremiah was a dismal failure. He preached to the same people for over forty years, and yet few of them believed him or obeyed his message. He had few friends who stood with him and encouraged him. The nation he tried to save from ruin abandoned their God and plunged headlong into disaster. His record wouldn't have impressed the candidate committee of most missions or the pastoral search committee of the average church.

Jeremiah may have thought he had failed, but God saw him as a faithful servant, and that's all that really counts. "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2 NKJV). He could have quit, but he didn't. As V. Raymond Edman used to say, "It's always too soon to quit."

6. *The greatest reward of ministry is to become like Jesus Christ.* When Jesus asked His disciples who people said He was, they replied, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matt. 16:14 NKJV). What a compliment it would be to have people say, "Jesus Christ is like you!"

The similarities between Jesus and Jeremiah are interesting. Their approaches to teaching and preaching were similar, using "action sermons" and a great deal of imagery from everyday life and from nature. Both spoke out against the commercial "surface" religion practiced in the temple. Both were accused of

being traitors to their people, and both suffered physically, even being arrested, beaten, and confined. Both wept over Jerusalem. Both were rejected by their relatives. Both knew what it was to be misunderstood, lonely, and rejected. Both emphasized the need for faith in the heart, and both rejected the mere “furniture” of religion that was external and impotent.

I could go on, but the point is obvious: Jeremiah became like Jesus because he shared “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). In the furnaces of life, Jeremiah was “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Rom. 8:29). Jeremiah may not have realized that this process was going on in his life, and he might have denied it if it were pointed out to him, but the transformation was going on just the same.

7. *God is King, and the nations of the world are under His sovereign control.* Nothing catches God by surprise. The nations that defy Him and disobey His Word eventually suffer for it. People who claim to know Him but who refuse to obey also suffer for it. In fact, the greater the light, the greater the responsibility. No nation was blessed the way God blessed the people of Israel, but that blessing brought chastening because they sinned against a flood of light.

It’s a solemn responsibility for a people to claim to know God and profess to do His will. It isn’t enough for a nation to put “In God We Trust” on its currency, to mention God in its pledge to the flag, or to “tip the hat to God” by quoting the Bible in political campaign speeches. It’s righteousness, not religion, that exalts a nation. What pleases the Lord is that we “do justly ... love mercy ... and ... walk humbly with [our] God” (Mic. 6:8).

The same Lord who enabled Jeremiah can enable us. The same world that opposed Jeremiah will oppose us. It’s time for God’s people to *be decisive*.

Notes

Chapter One

1. G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1961), 19.
2. It's not likely that Jeremiah's father was the Hilkiah who found the book of the law during the repairing of the temple (2 Kings 22). In the Old Testament, there are several other Hilkiahs mentioned. The name was popular, particularly among the priests and Levites. If Jeremiah's father had been that close to the king, some of the prestige might have rubbed off on his son, but that doesn't seem to have happened.
3. I'm not discounting the fact that a priest's ministry was demanding in that he might disobey God and lose his life. He had to dress properly (Ex. 28:42–43), keep his hands and feet clean while serving (Ex. 30:20–21; Lev. 22:6), do his job carefully (Num. 4:15–20; 18:3), and always seek to glorify God (Lev. 16:13); otherwise, God's judgment could fall on him.
4. The ways of providence are sometimes puzzling. Hezekiah was a godly king, yet his son Manasseh was ungodly. Manasseh's son Amon, who reigned only two years, was as ungodly as his father (2 Kings 21:20–22); but Amon's son Josiah was a godly man. Yet Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, who reigned only three months, was ungodly like his grandfather. I suppose we must take into consideration both the influence of the mothers and of the court officials in charge of educating the princes.
5. The priestly city of Anathoth was located in the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 21:17–18) and was about an hour's walk from Jerusalem. The priests would live in their own homes and travel to Jerusalem when their time came to minister in the temple. Contrary to the law, there were also local shrines at which some of the priests served, making it convenient for the people who

didn't want to go all the way to Jerusalem.

6. Josiah made the mistake of rashly getting involved at the Battle of Carchemish, where Pharaoh Necho of Egypt was engaging the army of Assyria. Pharaoh Necho had warned Josiah to mind his own business, but the king persisted and was slain at Megiddo (2 Chron. 35:20–25).
7. Since many of the nobles, key leaders in the land, had already been deported to Babylon, the king was left with a weak staff. But it's doubtful that stronger men would have made any difference in his character or actions.
8. Compare God's call of Moses (Ex. 3—4) and Gideon (Judg. 6), and note how the Lord is patient with His servants and does all He can to encourage their faith. God still likes to use the most unlikely instruments to get His work done in this world, and for good reason: "That no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:29).
9. God said of the Jews, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). Certainly God is acquainted with all the nations and knows what they do, but Israel is the only nation in history to have a special covenant relationship with the Lord God, and God chose them wholly by His grace (Deut. 4:32–37; 7:7–8). God said of Abraham, "For I know him" (Gen. 18:19), meaning, "I have chosen him."
10. The promise of His presence was given to Isaac (Gen. 26:1–3, 24); Jacob (Gen. 28:15; 31:3; 46:1–4); Moses (Ex. 3:12; 33:14); Joshua (Deut. 31:7–8; Josh. 1:5; 3:7; 6:27); Gideon (Judg. 6:15–16); Jeremiah (Jer. 1:8, 19; 20:11); and to the church (Matt. 28:19–20; Heb. 13:5–6). See also Isaiah 41:10; 43:5.
11. See Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 25:9; 47:2; 50:3, 9, 41; 51:48. The invading Babylonian army is compared to a boiling pot (1:13–14 NKJV), a marauding lion (4:7), and a flooding river (47:2).
12. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

1971), 326.

Chapter Two

- [1.](#) National Fast Day Proclamation, March 30, 1863.
- [2.](#) The break at Jeremiah 3:6 indicates that two messages are recorded in these chapters, the first from 2:1 to 3:5, and the second from 3:6 to 6:30. Later, Jeremiah's messages were written down by his secretary, Baruch, but King Jehoiakim burned the scroll. So Jeremiah dictated them again and added new messages to the book (Jer. 36).
- [3.](#) The NIV seeks to convey this thought, and to some extent so does the NASB.
Jeremiah was a master of imagery. You can't read his book without seeing pictures. This is a good example for all preachers and teachers of the Word to follow.
- [4.](#) The word translated "kindness" in the KJV ("devotion" NIV) describes the grace and unfailing love of the Lord toward His people. It involves not just love but also the loyalty and faithfulness that are a part of true love. Israel was unfaithful to her husband and turned to idols. Today, believers who love the world are guilty of spiritual adultery (James 4:4), and local churches must beware of losing their "honeymoon love" for the Lord (2 Cor. 11:1–4; Rev. 2:4–5).
- [5.](#) The prophet Isaiah used a similar image in Isaiah 8:5–8, warning King Ahaz that if he trusted Assyria, that nation would overflow like a turbulent river and destroy Judah. The quiet waters of Shiloah (peace) flowed from the Gihon spring to the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:30) and represented God's provision for His people (Ps. 46:4).
- [6.](#) See Jeremiah 2:19; 3:6, 8, 11–12, 14, 22; 5:6; 8:5; 14:7; 31:22; 49:4; Hos. 11:7; 14:4.
- [7.](#) According to the KJV and NASB, the "breaking of the yoke" in Jeremiah 2:20

refers to the exodus when God set the Jews free (Lev. 26:13); but the NIV translates it “you broke off your yoke,” referring to the nation’s rebellion against God. Jeremiah 5:5 uses “breaking of the yoke” to describe rebellion against God’s will (see 31:18). The yoke is a recurring image in Jeremiah’s writings (see especially chaps. 27—28, as well as 30:8; 51:23; Lam. 1:14; 3:27).

8. The KJV reads the “imagination of their evil hearts,” based on the view that the Hebrew word comes from a root that means “to observe, to contemplate, hence, to imagine.” But the Hebrew word probably comes from a root that means “to be firm, to be hard.”
9. Verse 4 of Charles Wesley’s “O for a Thousand Tongues.”
10. There was also sexual sin, for the pagan rites usually included consorting with prostitutes, both male and female. Idolatry and immorality often go together (Rom. 1:18ff.).
11. Some of the hill shrines were devoted to Jehovah, but the law prohibited the Jews from sacrificing at any place other than in the temple (see Lev. 17:1–7; Deut. 12:1–16).
12. The NIV translates Jeremiah 3:14 “for I am your husband,” for the Hebrew word for “husband” is the same as *baal* and means “lord.” Baal was the Canaanite rain god that the Jews worshipped so as to have good crops. Therefore, there’s a play on words here. “You are worshipping the false god Baal,” says the prophet, “when your true *baal*—husband—is the Lord.”
13. Jeremiah wasn’t accusing God of deceiving the people, because God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2). He was perplexed that God would even allow the false prophets to deliver their deceptive messages and lead the people into a false security that would be their undoing. But if people don’t want to obey the truth, they will accept lies (2 Thess. 2:10–12). This is the second of fourteen personal prayers recorded in Jeremiah, the first being 1:6 (see 9:1–

6; 10:23–25; 12:1–4; 14:7–9, 19–22; 15:15–18; 16:19–20; 17:12–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–18; 32:16–25). Three times, God instructed Jeremiah not to pray for the people (7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

[14.](#) In their attempt to prove that between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 there was a “gap” during which God judged Lucifer and his angels, some scholars have used Jeremiah 4:23ff., building their case mainly on the phrase “without form, and void” (KJV). But this passage refers to the invasion of the Babylonian army, not Genesis 1. Furthermore, if this passage does refer to Genesis 1, then we must believe in a pre-Adamic race who lived in cities; and yet Adam is called “the first man” (1 Cor. 15:45).

[15.](#) See also Ps. 48:6; Isa. 13:8; 21:3; 26:17–18; 66:7; Hos. 13:13; Mic. 4:9–10; Rom. 8:22; Gal. 4:19, 27; 1 Thess. 5:3.

[16.](#) They are: the search (Jer. 5:1–6), the soiled belt (13:1–11), the unwed prophet (16:1–9), the potter (18:1–12), the broken vessel (19:1–15), the yokes (27–28), the purchased field (32:1–15), the wine party (35:1–19), the stones (43:8–13), and the sunken scroll (51:59–64). You also find “action sermons” in the book of Ezekiel. Whenever people become so spiritually dull that they can’t hear and understand God’s Word, the Lord graciously stoops to their level and dramatizes the message.

[17.](#) For “the remnant” in Jeremiah, see 23:3; 31:7; 39:9; 40:11; 41:16; 42:2, 15, 19; 43:5; 44:12, 14, 28.

[18.](#) The phrase “ask for the old paths” (6:16) is a favorite of people who oppose changes in the church and want to maintain a sterile and boring status quo. But the “old ways” refer to God’s truth as revealed in His Word, not to methods of ministry. Note that Jeremiah gave two instructions: “stand in the old ways” and “walk in the good way.” We stand on His truth in order to make progress in His work. The old Youth for Christ slogan comes to mind: “Geared to the times but anchored to the Rock.”

Chapter Three

- [1.](#) Thoreau wrote this in his journal on September 2, 1851.
- [2.](#) These false prophets may have based their deceptive message on God's deliverance of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18—19; Isa. 37). But Hezekiah was a godly king who listened to the Word of God from the prophet Isaiah, prayed to God for help, and sought to honor the Lord.
- [3.](#) The Hebrew word translated “refuse” means “dung, manure,” and Jeremiah used it again in 9:22; 16:4; and 25:33. What a tragedy that people who could have been children of God ended up manure in a garbage dump (see Mark 9:43–50).
- [4.](#) Vance Havner, *It Is Toward Evening* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1968), 25. Vance Havner was himself a very witty man, and I always enjoyed his fellowship, but he knew how to use humor wisely to get his points across. In that same message, he writes, “Christians are never more ridiculous than when they attempt a religious version of worldly hilarity. It is always an embarrassing imitation that disgusts even the ungodly” (27).
- [5.](#) Jeremiah 9:22 pictures death as the “grim reaper” with the scythe in his hand, mowing people down like wheat in the field (see also Ps. 90:5; 103:14–16; Isa. 40:7; Job 5:26).
- [6.](#) A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 11.
- [7.](#) Jeremiah's prayer reminds us of the “imprecatory psalms,” such as Psalms 35, 69, 79, 109, 139, and 143. If we keep in mind that these prayers were an expression of *national* concern, not personal vengeance, asking God to keep His covenant promises to the nation (Gen. 12:1–3), then they become expressions of a desire for justice and the vindication of God's holy name.

Their spirit is that of Paul's in Galatians 1:6–9 and the saints in heaven in Revelation 6:9–11 and 18:20–24.

Chapter Four

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *Essays*. Of course Emerson used the word *man* generically, referring to either men or women.
2. Jeremiah 11:6 suggests that Jeremiah may have itinerated in Judah and taught the people the law. This was one of the duties of the priests (2 Chron. 17:8–10; Ezra 7:10; Neh. 8:1–9).
3. Note the emphasis on *love* in the book of Deuteronomy. The word is used sixteen times, and love is presented as the motive for obedience to the Lord (6:4–5; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22). The word *heart* is used nearly fifty times in Deuteronomy. In this “second edition” of the law, Moses moved the emphasis from mere outward obedience to inward love and a desire to please God. Why we obey God is a mark of maturity in the Christian life.
4. Eugene H. Peterson, *Run with the Horses* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 61.
5. See my book *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God’s People* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984) for a discussion of this problem from a biblical/pastoral point of view. Other helpful books are: *In God’s Waiting Room* by Lehman Strauss (Radio Bible Class); *The Paradox of Pain* by A. E. Wilder Smith (Harold Shaw); *Through the Fire* by Joseph M. Stowell (Victor); *Where Is God When It Hurts* by Philip Yancey (Zondervan); *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis (Macmillan); and *Surprised by Suffering* by R. C. Sproul (Tyndale). See also *Be Patient*, my study of the book of Job (Victor). The Old Testament system of rewards and punishments was suited to Israel in their “spiritual childhood” (Gal. 4:1–7), but it was never meant to be God’s permanent arrangement for believers today. Jesus lived a perfect life and yet He suffered greatly, and nowhere in the New Testament is the

church promised immunity from suffering. Quite the contrary is true: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12 NKJV).

6. Hugh Black, *Listening to God* (London: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1906), 282.

7. See G. K. Chesterton’s essay “The Romance of Rhyme” in his book *Fancies versus Fads*.

8. The statement in Jeremiah 12:8 that God “hated” His inheritance means that He had to treat them as though they were not His beloved. He withdrew His love by abandoning them to their enemies. God’s love for His people is unconditional, but their enjoyment of that love is conditional (see 2 Cor. 6:17–18; John 14:21–24).

9. The big question relating to this “action sermon” is, where did it take place? The Euphrates was 350 miles from Anathoth, and that would mean four journeys of four months each for the prophet (Ezra 7:8–9). Could he make four such trips during such turbulent times? And how significant would his actions be to the people of Judah if he performed them hundreds of miles away? The Hebrew text of Jeremiah 13:4 reads *Perath*, which is the Hebrew word for the Euphrates, but some scholars think it refers to the town of *Pharah* about three miles from Anathoth (Josh. 18:23), or that perhaps it is an abbreviation for Ephrata, the name of Bethlehem, located only five or six miles from Jerusalem. However, if Jeremiah did travel twice to Babylon, it would have made a tremendous impression on the people of Judah when he returned home with his ruined garment. He then could have preached the message that the garment symbolized.

10. The proverb speaks of wineskins, but the Hebrew word means “wine jars.” The image in Jeremiah 13:14 is that of jars being dashed together and broken. The prophets used familiar sayings as springboards for teaching God’s truth (see Jer. 17:11; 31:9; Ezek. 18:2).

- [11.](#) Henri IV, King of France, said in his coronation address in 1589, “I hope to make France so prosperous that every peasant will have a chicken in his pot on Sunday.” In 1928, the American Republican Party used “A chicken in every pot” as a campaign slogan.

Chapter Five

- [1.](#) J. Wallace Hamilton, *The Thunder of Bare Feet* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1964), 69.
- [2.](#) John Henry Jowett, *The Preacher, His Life and Work* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912), 114.
- [3.](#) The rainy season was from October to April, with the “early rains” coming in the spring and the “latter rains” in the autumn (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24). The “winter rains” began in November/December, the Hebrew month of Kislev.
- [4.](#) The word *drought* in Jeremiah 14:1 (NIV) is plural.
- [5.](#) The three judgments of war, famine, and pestilence are mentioned often in Jeremiah (21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17–18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13; see also 5:12; 11:22; 14:13–18; 16:4; 18:21; 42:16; 44:12, 18, 27).
- [6.](#) Jeremiah had predicted the invasion of the Babylonian army, but that invasion didn’t occur until many years later. Since his prophecy didn’t immediately come to pass, the people didn’t take Jeremiah’s messages too seriously. But God was watching over Jeremiah’s word to perform it (1:12), and the disaster finally occurred.
- [7.](#) For other references in Jeremiah to the Babylonian captivity of Judah, see 9:16; 13:24; 16:13; 18:17; 30:11; 46:28.
- [8.](#) God is holy and never has to repent of sin. The word is used to describe His “change of mind” when He determines not to send judgment. Humanly speaking, God seems to repent. From the divine point of view, however, God’s purposes never change, though His providential workings do change.
- [9.](#) On eating the word (Jer. 15:16); see Ezekiel 3:1–3; Revelation 10:9–10; Job 23:12. Unless the Word becomes a vital part of our inner being, we can’t

receive nourishment and grow in the spiritual life. This is what Jesus had in mind when He spoke about eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:51–58). As we receive the written Word within, we are also receiving the living Word (1:14) and feeding on Christ.

- [10.](#) Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament Epistles for believers to obey, but the Sabbath commandment isn't among them. The Sabbath was a special sign given to Israel (Ex. 31:12–18), not to the church. Believers are free to honor special days as they feel convicted by the Lord (Rom. 14:1–23; Col. 2:16–17) and must not judge one another. To make Sabbath-keeping a means of salvation or a mark of special spirituality is to go beyond what the Scriptures teach, and to equate the Sabbath with the New Testament Lord's Day is equally unbiblical. The Sabbath is identified with the law: You work six days and then you have rest. The Lord's Day is identified with grace: You begin with a resurrected Christ and the works follow.

Chapter Six

- [1.](#) J. Wilbur Chapman, *Revival Sermons* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1911), 231.
- [2.](#) Charles E. Jefferson, *Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1928), 102.
- [3.](#) The word translated “marred” is also used for the ruined girdle in Jeremiah 13:7 and 9. It means to “destroy or corrupt.”
- [4.](#) That God is sovereign over all the nations is proved by such Scriptures as Psalms 115:3; 135:6; Isaiah 46:9–11; Daniel 2:21; 4:17, 34–35; 7:14; Matthew 28:18; Acts 17:22–31; and Ephesians 1:22 to cite but a few.
- [5.](#) The verb means “to empty” and is similar to the Hebrew word for jar. Perhaps Jeremiah had put water in the clay flask and then poured it out as he spoke these words. God would empty all the nation’s plans and then break the nation that conceived them!
- [6.](#) Three men named Pashur are found in this book: the son of Immer (Jer. 20:1), the son of Melchiah (21:1), and the father of Gedaliah (38:1). All three were enemies of Jeremiah and sought to silence his ministry. Whether the Pashur of 20:1 is the father of Gedaliah, we have no way of knowing for sure.
- [7.](#) A century and a half before, Isaiah had predicted the captivity and named Babylon as the aggressor (Isa. 6:11–13; 11:11–12; 39:6). Therefore, any Jew who knew the Word of God would have recognized Jeremiah’s witness as true. Jeremiah added the important facts about the seventy years’ duration of the captivity (Jer. 25).

Chapter Seven

- [1.](#) This is not the Pashur who persecuted Jeremiah (Jer. 20), although this Pashur later assisted in imprisoning Jeremiah and urging the king to kill him (Jer. 38). There's no evidence that Zephaniah the priest was opposed to the prophet. Zephaniah was eventually taken to Babylon and executed (2 Kings 25:18–21).
- [2.](#) See Charles H. Dyer in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1185.
- [3.](#) The phrase “execute judgment in the morning” (Jer. 21:12) reminds us that court was held in the mornings at the city gates when it was still cool outside. But the phrase also suggests that the king needed to make justice the first priority of his day.
- [4.](#) Obviously this message was delivered to King Jehoiakim before he died in 598 BC. It's included in this section of Jeremiah's prophecy because it fits with the special messages to the four other kings. We've noted before that the book of Jeremiah isn't assembled in chronological order. Chapters 21—24 focus especially on the royal house of David.
- [5.](#) The fact that Jehoiakim “slept [rested] with his fathers” (2 Kings 24:6) is no proof that he had a decent burial. The phrase simply means that he joined his ancestors in death. Second Chronicles 36:6 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar bound Jehoiakim to take him to Babylon, which seems to contradict Jeremiah's prophecy. The easiest explanation is that the Babylonians intended to take Jehoiakim to Babylon, but he died. Therefore, they took Jehoiachin, his son and successor, instead (2 Kings 24:10–12). King Jehoiakim was not given a lavish state funeral and buried with the kings of Judah. His body was disposed of ignominiously somewhere outside the

walls of Jerusalem, a shameful way for any man to be buried, especially a Jewish king.

- [6.](#) Zerubbabel, a grandson of King Jehoiachin, was one of the Jewish leaders who helped the exiles return to the land after the captivity and reestablish their government and worship. He was a representative of the Davidic line though he didn't reign as a king. The Lord "reversed" the curse and said that Zerubbabel was to Him like a signet ring (Hag. 2:20–23), which meant he was chosen and precious to God.
- [7.](#) The Hebrew word refers to the hot desert wind that smothers you, leaving you lifeless and ready to give up. In the KJV, the word is translated "terrible" in Lamentations 5:10 ("Our skin was black [hot] like an oven because of the terrible famine") and "horrible" in Psalm 11:6 ("Upon the wicked he shall rain ... an horrible tempest").

Chapter Eight

1. Quoted by Ann Landers in the column “Thoughts at Large” by Sidney J. Harris in *The Washington Post*, Nov. 1979, B-7.
2. The name is also spelled Nebuchadrezzar. Famous leaders often had variant spellings to their names. Cf. Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 15:29 NKJV), and Tiglath-Pilneser (1 Chron. 5:26 NKJV).
3. Bible students don’t agree on the dating of the seventy years of captivity or even on whether the phrase “seventy years” should be considered a round number or be taken literally. From the beginning of the Babylonian invasion (606 BC to the return of the Jewish remnant under Zerubbabel (536) is seventy years, but so is the period from the destruction of Jerusalem (587–586) to the completion of the second temple by the returned exiles (516). Daniel 9:1–2 seems to indicate that Daniel took the prophecy to mean seventy actual years.
4. While the main emphasis is on the world of Jeremiah’s day, there may be a wider application of these words to the nations at the end of the age, for Jeremiah included “all the kingdoms of the world” (Jer. 25:26). In their messages, the prophets often began with a local situation and then used it as a springboard to describe something God would do in the end times.
5. Shaphan, Ahikam’s father, is the scribe who delivered the book of the law to Josiah after Hilkiah found it in the temple (2 Kings 22). Shaphan had four sons, three of whom were friendly to Jeremiah: Ahikam, who saved his life (Jer. 26:24); Gemariah, who pleaded with King Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah’s book (36:12, 25); and Elasah, who delivered Jeremiah’s letter to the captive Jews in Babylon (29:1–3). The fourth son, Jaazaniah, was unfaithful to the Lord and worshipped idols in the temple (Ezek. 8:11).

Ahikam's son Gedaliah became governor of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem.

6. Don't be puzzled when you read the name "Jehoiakim" in verse 1 and the name "Zedekiah" in verses 3 and 12 (and see 28:1), because this event took place during the reign of Zedekiah. "Jehoiakim" in verse 1 appears to be the error of a copyist whose eyes may have read 26:1, which is almost identical to 27:1. The fact that the rest of the chapter names Zedekiah as king is ample evidence that "Jehoiakim" is a scribal error.
7. Some translations give the impression that the prophet wore more than one yoke and that he sent a yoke to each of the envoys of the five nations (Jer. 27:2–3). The word *yoke* is plural in the Hebrew because the yoke he wore was made of two pieces of wood, one in front of the neck and one at the back, held together by leather straps. "Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars" (NIV) is a good translation of verse 2. He sent word to the five kings that they were to submit to the authority of Nebuchadnezzar, and the yoke that he wore symbolized the prophet's message.
8. There were three deportations—in 605, 597, and 586 BC—during which both people and treasures were taken to Babylon. Since Zedekiah ruled from 597 to 586, the false prophets were referring to the deportation in 605, when Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon along with some of the temple treasures (Dan. 1:1–2).
9. It's profitable to compare Jeremiah's counsel to the exiles in Babylon with Peter's counsel to the "strangers and pilgrims" in the Roman Empire (1 Peter 2:11–17). Both men told the people to be good citizens and good witnesses and to do good works. Paul agreed with their approach when he wrote, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18 NKJV).

Chapter Nine

1. Jefferson, *Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah*, 125.
2. Isaiah used the phrase “in that day” at least forty-four times but Jeremiah only seven (4:9; 30:8; 39:16–17; 49:22, 26; 50:30). In chapters 12 to 14 of Zechariah, “in that day” is used nineteen times with reference to end-time events relating to the restoration of Israel and the return of the Lord.
3. Jesus designated the first part of the tribulation as “the beginning of sorrows” (Matt. 24:8), which means “the beginning of birthpangs.” The tribulation will bring pain to Israel and the nations of the world, but out of that pain will come the birth of the kingdom.
4. Visitors to the Holy Land visit Tel Aviv and various other “Tel’s” and learn that the Hebrew word *tel* means “a mound of ruins.” Cities devastated by war or natural calamities rarely relocated; the survivors simply rebuilt the city on the ruins of the old one, thus giving future archeologists something to do.
5. The ancient breach between Jews and Samaritans was healed when Philip the evangelist took the gospel to Samaria and the believing Samaritans received the same gift of the Spirit as the Jews (Acts 8:5ff.; 2:1–4). Later, the Gentiles would receive the gift (Acts 10:44–48). Thus, believing Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles made up the body of Christ (Gal. 3:26–29).
6. We sometimes hear about the “ten lost tribes of Israel,” and various groups claim the identification, but only God knows where all twelve tribes are in the world (Acts 26:7; James 1:1; Rev. 7).
7. How does this relate to Matthew’s quotation? As Rachel died she named her son *Ben-oni*, which means “son of my sorrow,” but Jacob named him *Benjamin*, “son of my right hand” (Gen. 35:16–20). In His humiliation and

suffering, Jesus Christ is the Man of Sorrows, but in His exaltation and glory, He is the Son at God's right hand (Acts 2:22–36). Jacob made Bethlehem a burial place, but Jesus made it a birthplace! The Bethlehem mothers, bereft of their sons, wept in despair, but just as God's promises comforted Rachel, so their sacrifice would not be in vain. No matter how many enemies try to destroy Israel, the nation will not perish, for their Messiah reigns and will come one day and deliver His people.

8. To defend this verse as a prediction of the virgin birth of Christ is an exercise in futility. The word for “woman” means “female” without reference to virginity. The nation is the only virgin mentioned in the context (Jer. 31:4, 21). There is no definite article in the text; it simply says “a female” and not “the woman.” The Hebrew word translated “surround” (compass) has nothing to do with the conception of a child. It's possible that the statement is a Jewish proverb for an amazing and unthinkable thing.
9. Baruch may have had royal blood in his veins since his brother Seraiah was a staff officer in the king's service (Jer. 51:59 NIV), and such officials were usually princes. The fact that Seraiah went to Babylon with the king shows how important a man he was in the eyes of the Babylonians. The family of Neriah may have thought that Baruch gave up a bright future in order to serve with Jeremiah, but they were wrong. Many of the royal officers perished, but God protected Jeremiah and Baruch and provided for them (see Jer. 45). No doubt Baruch was an encouragement to the prophet, who was usually friendless and forsaken.
10. The statement goes back to Abraham (Gen. 18:14), and was also used by Moses (Num. 11:23) and Job (Job 42:2). Gabriel echoed it when he said to Mary, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37), and Jesus said, “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). Paul's testimony was “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13 NKJV).

Jeremiah discovered that God's character is faithful and His promises are true no matter how we feel or what our circumstances may be.

- [11.](#) Good and godly Bible students disagree as to whether these “kingdom promises” are to be taken literally or interpreted in a “spiritual sense.” If these promises are to be applied to the church today, it’s difficult to understand what they mean and how they apply. I have therefore taken the approach that these promises will have their real fulfillment in the future kingdom. For further study, see *There Really Is a Difference* by Renald E. Showers (Friends of Israel); *Millennialism: The Two Major Views* by Charles L. Feinberg (Moody Press); *The Millennial Kingdom* by John F. Walvoord (Dunham); and *Continuity and Discontinuity*, edited by John S. Feinberg (Crossway Books).

Chapter Ten

1. Senator Sheppard said this during remarks made in the U.S. Senate on Dec. 18, 1914, as recorded in the *Congressional Record*, vol. 52, 338.
2. What was recorded is revelation; the way it was recorded is inspiration. Never confuse divine inspiration with the “human inspiration” of great writers like Shakespeare and Milton.
3. For example, eight men named Shelemiah are found in the Old Testament, so it was a popular name. Because of this, we can never be sure of family relationships.
4. John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), 245.
5. The contradiction between Jeremiah 39:11–14 and 40:1–6 is only on the surface. When the Babylonians entered the city, they released Jeremiah and took him under their protective custody. He was free to move about and minister to the people. Apparently through some blunder, he was taken captive with the prisoners going to Ramah, but when the mistake was discovered, he was released and allowed to do as he pleased.
6. Morgan, *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah*, 251.

Chapter Eleven

[1.](#) Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 8.

Chapter Twelve

1. Quoted in *Miracle at Philadelphia*, by Catherine Drinker Bowen (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), 126. Italics are in the original.
2. The phrase in the KJV “this is the day of the Lord” (Jer. 46:10) should not be interpreted to mean “the day of the Lord” that will occur in the end times. The battle Jeremiah described took place in 605 BC and is known as the Battle of Carchemish, named for a town on the Euphrates River.
3. The New English Bible translates it “King Bombast, the man who missed his moment.”
4. The phrase “make a full end” is found in Jeremiah 4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:11; and Ezekiel 11:13. The NIV translates it “completely destroy.” God knows how much discipline to give His people, and He never makes a mistake. He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat.
5. *Madmen* in Jeremiah 48:2 is the name of a Moabite city. It’s not the English word for men who are mad.

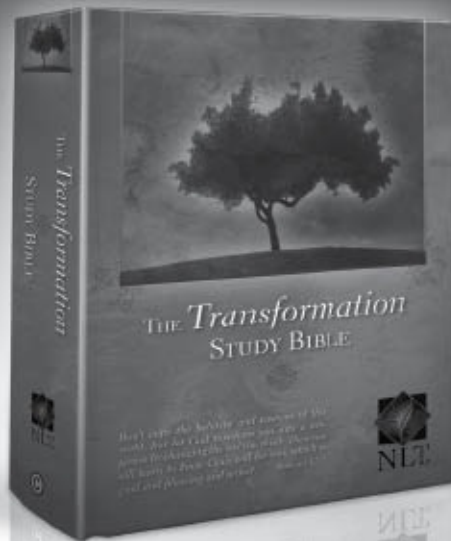
Chapter Thirteen

- [1.](#) Dennis J. Hester, compiler, *The Vance Havner Quotebook* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 124.
- [2.](#) Some Hebrew scholars connect the name Nimrod with the word *marad*, which means “to rebel.” Certainly the building of the Tower of Babel was an act of rebellion against the Lord. Nimrod chased and conquered other peoples the way a hunter chases and catches game.
- [3.](#) King Hezekiah used a similar image (Isa. 38:12). Our lives are a weaving that one day will end, and God will cut it off the loom.
- [4.](#) Some commentators see the hammer as Babylon, but Jeremiah 51:24 seems to require something or someone other than Babylon; otherwise Jeremiah would have used “you” instead of “they.”
- [5.](#) Remember, this didn’t happen when Cyrus took Babylon, for his army was in the city before the Babylonians even knew it. He had diverted the waters of the Euphrates and entered under the gates. It was Alexander the Great whose army destroyed Babylon in 330 BC.
- [6.](#) Before the farmers threshed their grain, they would stamp down the earth to make sure it was hard. This may be the image here: God was stamping down the nation and preparing to cut them down like so much grain in the field.
- [7.](#) The Jews often wanted to go back to Egypt, because there they had plenty of food and security, even though they were slaves. It’s tragic when people sacrifice fulfillment for comfort.

Postlude

- [1.](#) Hester, compiler, *The Vance Havner Quotebook*, 179.
- [2.](#) Jefferson, *Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah*, 192.

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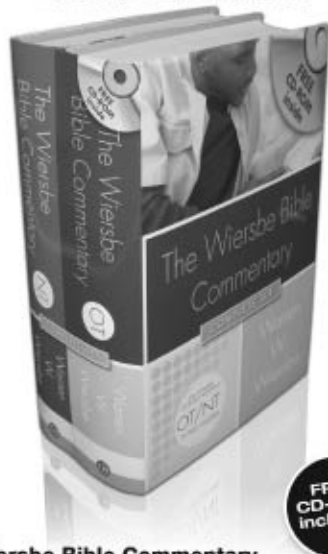
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