

## **Jeremiah**-by Nathan White

### **Chapter 1**

The book of Jeremiah opens with a quick outline of the historical setting in which the prophet lived and preached. Jeremiah will prophesy through the decline and fall of Judah. The northern kingdom, Israel, has already fallen to the Assyrians and the citizens of Judah assume that they are safe. To Judah, the northern kingdom deserved destruction for abandoning worship in Jerusalem and worshiping instead in Samaria. Since Judah still worshiped in the temple at Jerusalem, they believed God would protect them. However, their worship was not genuine. Judah still worshiped idols and made forbidden alliances with foreign nations. Their hard hearts prevented them from caring about their own hypocrisy.

Understandably, when God calls Jeremiah, he is fearful. He knows that dedicating himself to preaching about coming judgment for these sins will be unpopular in contrast to the negligent priests who have been serving Judah. However, God graciously makes a promise to Jeremiah that he will be like a fortified city against whom the idolatrous people of Judah will not prevail.

### **Chapter 2**

Chapter two of Jeremiah follows the pattern of a formal legal document of Jeremiah's day. God is literally bringing a charge against Judah for their covenant unfaithfulness in such a way that they would have very clearly understood the severity of the situation. God takes the basis for his charge against Judah as far back as when the nation was still united. There was a time when all Israel loved God. He had protected Israel in the wilderness and vindicated Israel when other nations attacked her. The people have since abandoned God, first the northern kingdom of Israel and now the southern kingdom of Judah. Their fathers chased worthless things and their priests and prophets served false gods instead of the God who had delivered them. The rebellion of God's people is so egregious that they have been less faithful to God than even pagan nations are to their idols (vs. 11). Such faithlessness is so appalling that God calls all of the heavens to bear witness in his lawsuit (vs. 12). God's people have trusted in other nations and their gods, but those nations will turn against them and those false gods will not save them.

### **Chapter 3**

Judah has "divorced" God, so to speak. But not only have they divorced God, they committed adultery. And not only have they committed adultery, they did so repeatedly. Judah has chased after idols and only now that they have "done all the evil that [they] could," (vs. 5) they cry out to God. They act as though he has been angry for no reason and beg him to relent, but they only ask for mercy because they have no other option. There is no true repentance or contrition. Foolishly, Judah did not even learn from the judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel. Watching the fall of Israel to the Assyrians did not draw Judah to repentance, but instead they took their sin lightly. In fact, God actually calls the sin of Judah greater than the sin of Israel. The northern kingdom had at least been honest about its idolatry. Judah feigned righteousness, coming to God not in honesty, but in pretense (vs. 10-11). Still, on the other side of coming judgment, Jeremiah actually prophesies future hope. God will gather all nations to his throne and he will change their hearts – glorious promises which find fulfillment in Christ.

### **Chapter 4 & 5**

God calls Judah to repentance but insists that it must be thorough. They have been disingenuous in their devotion to God in the past, but half-hearted apologies are not what God is looking for. They must remove their detestable practices and their idols from His presence. If Judah refuses to repent,

destruction will come from the north. This destruction will be so devastating that it will seem as if God is undoing creation itself (4:23-4:26). Still, in all this judgment, God will not bring Judah to a complete end (4:27; 5:18). Unfortunately, in spite of these dire warnings, Jerusalem will refuse to repent. They will remain in their open rebellion against God and they will be attacked by an exceedingly powerful nation (5:14-17) which we will later find out is Babylon. Though we might read this destruction and subsequent exile as harsh punishments, it is important to remember two things: God will save a remnant and exile is analogous to their idolatry. They wanted to serve foreign gods and trust in pagan nations. Ultimately, God is simply giving them over to what they wanted.

## **Chapter 6**

God's rejection of his people is only in response to hundreds of years of their rejection of him. After centuries of disobedience, God is finally bringing them to account for their rebellion. A major theme of this rebellion is the rejection of God's Word. They have been so negligent of what he has said that he even asks who would listen if he continued to warn them (v. 10). Even the prophets and priests who should be diligent in their study, proclamation, and practice of all that God has said use their stations for personal gain and tell people only what they want to hear (v. 11). They are so far removed from any semblance of righteousness that they do not even recognize that what they are doing is shameful (v. 15). They take pride in their sin. They have lost the ability to feel embarrassed by their dishonesty. Though God graciously and patiently showed them the way of righteousness and tried to call them to repentance, nobody listened (v. 16-17). Because they refused to be purified by God's law and his prophets, they are cast aside like silver that is too impure to be valuable (v. 27-30).

## **Chapter 7**

Judah had falsely placed their hope in the mere presence of the temple in Jerusalem. They believed that because they still had the temple, God would never let Jerusalem fall. They had an empty religion. Their hearts were hard, their deeds were wicked, and they were proud of their rebellion. Still, they assumed that they could continue to do whatever they wanted as long as the temple remained. They committed all kinds of abominations shamelessly and then went to the temple, believing that they would be delivered. They disobeyed all of God's laws with glee but continued making sacrifices as if such empty behaviors would somehow make them even with God. This is a temptation that still exists. We might believe that we can shrug at the idea of personal holiness and disregard our sin as long as we pay lip service to Christ or show up to church periodically. We don't need a way to balance out our immeasurable sin with a few good deeds. What we need, and what Judah needed, are new hearts. We need hearts that love God and strive after genuine repentance. And this is the very thing God promises to give us in Christ.

## **Chapter 8 & 9**

God declares to Judah's leaders that their bones will be laid out before the sun, moon, and stars that they had worshipped. The heavenly bodies could not offer protection from the God who created them. The destruction that would come upon these leaders who worshiped created things rather than their Creator would be so devastating that death would seem preferable to life for those who survived. After repeating several previous accusations (8:11-12), God tells Judah that they will be struck down by an army like serpents who cannot be charmed. This imagery would remind them of Adam's exile from the garden and the entry of death into the world. Jeremiah goes on to say that he is so deeply moved by the coming judgment that he doesn't even believe he has enough tears to mourn adequately (9:1), though the punishment is just (9:9). Perhaps the most shocking part of these chapters for Judah is their inclusion in the list of nations who practiced some form of circumcision but did not love God (9:25-26). God promises Judah that they will face the same fate as Gentile pagans.

## Chapter 10

Chapter ten of Jeremiah compares Judah's idols with the true, living God. The chapter openly mocks these false gods, and even takes a mocking tone toward those who would turn from God to worship them (v. 6-8). It deals with both idolatry and astrology (v. 2) as sinful ways of replacing Creator with creation. Both are worship of created things and in the case of idolatry, it entails worship of something formed by the hands of men. These idols are as powerless as scarecrows in a field (v. 5). They totally depend upon their worshipers to move them, speak for them, and act on their behalf. This is in stark contrast with God who is not dependent on us for anything. In the words of Psalm 50:10-12, "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle of a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine." Judah, in their abandonment of the living God, "became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal god for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:22).

## Chapter 11

The central theme of all of Jeremiah's charges against Judah is that they have abandoned the covenant God made with them. They and their fathers were warned for generations that consequences would follow this abandonment, but they refused to listen (v. 7-8). They openly broke the very first of God's commandments, and the commandment on which all the others ultimately rest: they had other gods before him. In fact, by breaking this commandment, they actively returned to the sins about which their fathers were warned (v. 10). This was high-handed rebellion. God even challenges them to run to those false gods for deliverance, only to discover beyond a shadow of a doubt that they cannot save. God is giving them over to the false gods that they loved. He is giving them what they thought they wanted. God even directs Jeremiah not to intercede for Judah (v. 14), bringing attention to the extent to which his anger burns for their generations of sin.

## Chapter 12

Jeremiah now brings a complaint before God: The wicked continue to prosper. This is a question that shows up several times in Scripture, but Jeremiah is personally invested in this complaint in a way that few others can understand as there has already been an attempted conspiracy against him (11:11-23). He is also likely confused by the fact that he continues to prophesy destruction, garnering the unwanted attention of wicked people, and the destruction has not yet come to pass. God promises that judgment will come, but not yet (5-7). He also notes that Judah's shepherds have led people to destruction rather than protecting them, meaning Jeremiah's complaint about wickedness is valid. Men really are prospering in the wickedness right now, but the Lord's sword *will* devour Judah (v. 12). However, God also notes that those who gleefully participate in the destruction of Judah will be judged as well. He'll bring his people to repentance, delivering not only Israel, but all who turn to him (v. 14-17).

## Chapter 13

Jeremiah 13 begins with two different metaphors meant to convey the coming judgment on Judah. First, God tells Jeremiah to buy a linen loincloth and then to go hide it in a rocky place near the Euphrates. After many days, the Lord then commands Jeremiah to find the loincloth and to no one's surprise, it is entirely ruined. It had no use at all. Just as the loincloth is damaged beyond repair, God will spoil the pride of Judah. Judah once clung to God as the cloth did to Jeremiah, but just like the loincloth, Judah will be brought to complete destruction. God then compares Judah to wine jars. The threat to fill them with drunkenness (v. 13) can have a couple possible meanings. It might speak specifically to God giving them over to foolishness or it could be about making them drunk on his wrath, which is a threat used in other places in the Old Testament. In either case, both possibilities come to pass: they will act foolishly

and they will face his wrath. For their foolishness and rebellion, God will dash them to pieces like clay jars (v. 14). He again threatens exile, promising that their shame will be seen by the nations (v. 26).

### **Chapter 14 & 15**

Judah faces a drought as part of God's judgment. This curse on the earth itself (14:4-6) is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's exile from Eden in Genesis 3. Jeremiah then attempts to intercede for his suffering people. However, while God is certainly able to save just as Jeremiah said he is, the people remain unrepentant. God actually directs Jeremiah to stop praying for Judah. They show outward signs of sorrow, but their hearts are still far from God. Even Moses and Samuel could not successfully intercede for these people (15:1). Their sin is too great. When asked where they should go, Jeremiah is to tell them that they will all go to death or exile (15:2). While the nations will look on in horror (15:4), no one will pity or grieve for Jerusalem (15:5). The iron from the north and the bronze in 15:2 are Babylon and Jeremiah, respectively. God's judgment will not be broken in its message or in its delivery. Ultimately, Jeremiah could only prophesy destruction. His intercession could not save. His inability, however, should remind us of the hope we have in Christ whose intercession saves any sinner who turns to him.

### **Chapter 16**

God commands Jeremiah not to take a wife or to have any children. While this first seems like a cruel command to the lonely prophet, it is actually meant to spare him the pain of seeing them suffer (v. 3-4). Further, God actually commands Jeremiah not to mourn for the people of Judah as a sign that God has removed his peace from them (v. 5). In fact, the coming judgment will be so widespread that there will be no one left to mourn. The opportunity to mourn will not even exist. When asked why this destruction is so severe, Jeremiah is to tell them that it is because their fathers turned away from God, they have worshiped idols, they have followed their own evil wills, and they have done all these things even more brazenly than their ancestors who started the process. However, God does follow this judgment with a great promise. He assures them of restoration. As they have previously identified God as the one who delivered them from Egypt, they will one day remember him for bringing them out of exile. They will have to face this judgment, but when it is over, he will bring his people to repentance and restore them.

### **Chapter 17**

Judah's love for their idols was engraved on their hearts of stone. They placed altars to false gods all over the land God gave them and now they would be expelled from that land just like the Canaanites before them. Among Judah's many sins was misplaced trust, not only in idols but in their own strength and in the strength of their political and military alliances. Their hope was not in the Lord, but in themselves. This false hope was accompanied by a curse (v. 5-6). Had they trusted in the Lord, they would have received the blessings that he had promised his people (7-8). Judah's problem, however, was not that they wanted to do the right thing and just kept messing up. Their problem was their wicked, hardened hearts (v. 9). Asherim and altars might seem foreign to us, but hearts that desire sin probably seem painfully familiar. We, if left to our own devices, are also unable to love God and follow his commands because of wicked, hard hearts. Thankfully, we have a promise that in Christ, God will give us new hearts, write his law on them, and indwell us with the Spirit so that we are able to love him (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

### **Chapter 18**

God likens his people to clay and himself to a potter, which is a theme that appears throughout both the Old and New Testaments. It is reminiscent of God drawing Adam from the dust, reminding Judah of exactly who they are and who God is. The potter sees that his clay is not developing properly so he reworks it into a new vessel. In the same way, the Lord can reshape and reform his people. He is

sovereign over all of his creation. In his righteous judgment, he can pluck up what should be plucked up, break down what should be broken down, and destroy what should be destroyed. Again, God graciously reminds Judah that though he is shaping disaster, he could reshape it if they would repent, but they will not. In fact, they mock these warnings, calling them vanity and doubling down on their wickedness (v. 12). In anger, the men of Judah again form a plan against Jeremiah, who again brings this complaint before God. Only now, Jeremiah no longer pleads for Judah. He agrees with God's holy judgment (v. 23).

### **Chapter 19**

Jeremiah is again called to perform a symbolic act to display what God is going to do. He purchases an earthenware flask, gathers the elders, and proclaims that God will smash them like a clay pot. This is not simply delivered in the presence of the people. Their leaders had to follow Jeremiah to a specific location and then hear God's judgment. He is bringing disaster so severe that it will shock the ears of all who hear of it. The Valley of the Son of Hinnom will instead be known as the Valley of Slaughter. Jeremiah then lists some of Judah's sins. They made offerings to foreign gods, committed violence against innocents, and even sacrificed their children to Baal (v. 4-5). Their sins were grievous and the judgment would match them. They would be exiled to the lands of the pagans whose gods they served, they would be slaughtered as they had slaughtered others, and in their despair and depravity, they would even cannibalize their own children (v. 7-9). The judgment they would face ultimately came from being given over to the sins they loved. Their rebellion carried in itself its own judgment.

### **Chapter 20**

Following Jeremiah's message to the elders of Judah, a priest named Pashhur takes a stand against him. Pashhur was a chief officer, which means that he was legally well within his rights to deal with troublemakers and false prophets. Unfortunately for Pashhur, Jeremiah was not a false prophet. Pashhur locked Jeremiah up in stocks until the next day, not punishing the elders and prophets who had misled Judah and instead punishing the only prophet telling the truth. Upon his release, Jeremiah prophesies to Pashhur that God is changing his name to a phrase meaning "Terror on Every Side." Not only will Pashhur be punished for his mistreatment of Jeremiah, but all who know him will face death and exile. Pashhur, a man of status in Judah, will be carried off to Babylon and will die there in disgrace under the judgment of God. Pashhur, full of misplaced zeal, has become the false prophet he thought he was punishing. Jeremiah again brings before God a lament that this task is given to him. He mourns deeply for his people and even more for himself, but he cannot refrain from proclaiming the message given to him (v. 9).

### **Chapter 21**

Zedekiah (whose name ironically means "God is my righteousness") was something of a puppet king, put in place to appease the Babylonians. Other places in the book of Jeremiah indicate that Zedekiah had no love for the prophet and tried to reject his message. Here, however, he sent two emissaries to Jeremiah in the hope of receiving good news. What Jeremiah sends back to Zedekiah is not what he wanted to hear. God will see to it that Judah's weapons do no good for them. Further, God himself promises to go to war on behalf of the Babylonians against Judah. This would have been a particularly striking thing to hear as it was the same promise given to Israel against the Canaanites. Judah will now receive what was once delivered through them: the terrible judgment of God. God does give the Judeans one assurance. Any who leave the city and surrender to the Babylonians will keep their lives. All who resist God's righteous judgment and remain in the city to fight or hide will die. They are given the choice to submit to God and live or fight him and die.

### **Chapter 22**

The oracles that begin in Jeremiah 22 deal specifically with the recent kings of Judah. Where chapter 21 dealt the reigning king, Zedekiah, these oracles speak more broadly to the three kings who had ruled before Zedekiah. It is a judgment regarding the deterioration of the office, not simply on the individual men who held it. Every recent king of Judah has actively participated in the decline of Judah's righteousness. None of these kings, each of whom are still alive, will ever return to power. None will be mourned when they die in captivity and shame. They will not be remembered as heroes. They will be remembered as the leaders who brought God's judgment down on Judah. The lineage of the Judean kings has failed. This brings up serious questions. It was Judah, not the northern kingdom of Israel, who kept the Davidic line. For Judah, that was a point of pride and they viewed it as a sign of their own faithfulness, but now the Davidic line was being judged and presumably ended. God assured David that his line would reign forever. The tension here will be resolved in Christ, the final king of God's people.

### **Chapter 23**

Jeremiah 23 continues the theme of judgment against the leaders of Judah. Instead of taking care of them, these false shepherds drove them to danger. They did not attend to God's flock, but God will attend to them for this failure. After assuring judgment on the failed prophets, priests, and kings, God compassionately guarantees that he will gather the sheep that have been scattered. He will bring them back to himself, see to it that none are dismayed and none are missing, and give them a new shepherd. God will raise up for David a righteous heir who will reign over God's people in wisdom, justice, and righteousness (v. 5). In the day of that great Davidic King, all of God's people will find salvation and will be secure (v. 6). He tells them that King will be called "The Lord is our Righteousness," which you might remember is what Zedekiah's name means. Where their current king has been little more than a puppet for their enemies, this new King will live up to the name. This Davidic King who imputes to his people the righteousness of the Lord and sees to their salvation and security is, of course, Jesus.

### **Chapter 24**

In this chapter, the Lord gives Jeremiah a vision concerning the futures of two groups of Judeans. God shows Jeremiah two baskets, one filled with good figs and one filled with figs that are so rotten they are not good for anything. God reveals to Jeremiah that he will regard the exiles in Babylon like the basket of good figs. They are still precious to him. He will protect them, grow them in their captivity, and will ultimately bring them to repentance. He will give them a heart that loves him. They will be his people and he will be their God (v. 7). A very different fate awaits the Judeans who remain in the land after the final Babylonian deportation or choose to hide in Egypt. For those who remain because, like Zedekiah, they had been propped up by the Babylonians or who hide in Egypt to escape God's justice, God will bring reproach. They will be cursed. Thought it might have seemed better at the time to have Babylon's favor or to rely on the Egyptians, God shows that to submit to his discipline will actually prove to be a blessing, echoing God's warning in 21:9.

### **Chapter 25**

Jeremiah 25 reiterates again how simple it would have been for the people of Judah to avoid God's wrath. Do not worship other gods and do not work evil with your hands (v. 6). On this point, we can all sympathize with Judah. We too have failed to keep God's law in even its simplest form. But what Judah earned for these transgressions is judgment through Babylon. However, God then promises that after Judah has been in captivity for seventy years, he will judge Babylon as well. God's ability to use Babylon's wickedness for the discipline of his people did not excuse them for it. Jeremiah then has a vision in which God tells him to make nations drink the cup of his wrath. The list that follows is extensive and it surely would have been an offense to Judah to be included. This cup of God's wrath is a terrifying thing, reserved for God's enemies. The frightening truth is that all who break God's law – which is all of

us – have chosen to be his enemies. However, Christ drank that cup for all who would repent and trust him.

### **Chapter 26**

In this chapter, Jeremiah faces another threat on his life. You might be noticing that Jeremiah's messages are mostly grim and his life is mostly difficult. Still, the Lord continues to be faithful to Jeremiah, even in the midst of powerful people seeking to do him harm. In this case, Jeremiah is spared because the officials remembered Micah, who prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah. Instead of killing Micah, Hezekiah instead led his people in repentance and the Lord did not bring about the disaster he threatened. They recognize, though for seemingly selfish reasons and without any sign of real repentance, that killing Jeremiah would only worsen their situation. The chapter ends on a sobering note about another prophet, Uriah the son of Shemaiah, who is otherwise unknown but apparently was faithful. Unlike Jeremiah, Uriah's faithfulness was met with death at the hands of Jehoiakim, which highlights the great mercy of God to protect Jeremiah from unhappy kings.

### **Chapter 27**

You might recall that Zedekiah was a king who had been installed by Babylon, presumably because Nebuchadnezzar thought that he would be easy to control. However, here, we are given reason to believe that Zedekiah does not want to submit to God's discipline at the hands of Babylon. God tells Jeremiah to fashion a yoke, like one that would be used to control animals, and wear it around his neck as a symbol of submission. God then commands him to tell all the small nations around Babylon to submit to Babylon, who God is now raising up as an instrument of judgment. As he has said before, God reiterates that Babylon will also eventually be destroyed (v. 7). However, for now, he intends to use the mighty empire for his own purposes. Contrary to the false prophets of Judah telling people what they want to hear (v. 14-16), Jeremiah instead prophesies that the judgment is only beginning and Zedekiah should prepare himself to submit to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar.

### **Chapter 28**

You might remember that Jeremiah spoke about false prophets in the last chapter. In chapter 28, we see a specific example of one. Jeremiah confronts a false prophet named Hananiah, who prophesies that God will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. Like most false prophets, Hananiah simply says what people want to hear. Whether he knew he was lying or genuinely believed his own lie is unclear but also irrelevant. Jeremiah warns Hananiah about his actions, but Hananiah doubles down, taking the yoke Jeremiah made in the previous chapter and breaking it as a symbolic gesture that Judah would soon be delivered from Babylon. The result is not only judgment on Hananiah, but a greater curse on all of the people. In place of the wooden yoke, God would put bars of iron (v. 13). God's judgment was sure, irrespective of this false prophet's lies. Further, Hananiah died just a few months later (v. 17). It is a heinous and terrifying thing to speak falsely in God's name.

### **Chapter 29**

This chapter contains one of the most quoted verses in all of the Bible (v. 11). We read it in devotional books. We see it on decorative items. We hear it at graduations. Unfortunately, it is rare that we pause to consider its full context. In Jeremiah 29, the prophet delivers a message to the surviving exiles in Babylon. These are people who have lost everything. Their homes are gone. They almost surely have loved ones who were killed. They have been ripped from their families. Here, God reminds them not to believe that he has abandoned them, even in these unimaginable circumstances. God tells them to build homes and plant gardens and have children. He tells them to seek the welfare of the cities in which they now live and to be engaged in their communities because this discipline is only for a time. He will bring

them out of exile (v. 10). Verse 11 is a reminder to them that even in the midst of a truly horrific situation, the promises of the Lord do not fail.

### **Chapter 30**

After twenty-nine chapters of bad news, death threats, false prophets and deep mourning, this chapter marks the beginning of a section full of consolation for the people of Judah. "Thus says the Lord" has been frequently followed by devastation. Here, it is followed by "For behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people...and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it" (v. 3). A day will come when God will break the yoke from off of their neck and the people will instead serve God and the Davidic king, a promise that would have seemed nearly impossible as the people entered exile (v. 8-9). While God did bring both Israel and Judah back out of exile to the land promised to Abraham and preserved the Davidic line, this never came to pass quite like they expected. However, these great promises of God do find a glorious fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

### **Chapter 31**

Jeremiah 31 is an oracle of hope for the desperate people of Judah. In fact, the chapter opens with a promise not only to the exiled people of Judah, but for all of Israel. The God who scattered them will gather them and they will be his people. However, what God promises to his people is not simply a reinstatement of the covenant he made with them previously. It will not be like the covenant he made with the forefathers of Israel and Judah. He will make a new covenant with his people. Instead of carving his law on tablets of stone, he will engrave his law on their very hearts. He will forgive all their iniquity and he will never recall their sin. This, of course, is a promise that finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. In Christ, we are made new creations, given new hearts, and all our sins are forgiven. And this new covenant is so sure that God would let all of creation pass away before he would let this covenant be undone (v. 35-37). Christ's faithfulness is as sure as the rising and setting of the sun.

### **Chapter 32**

Jeremiah chapter 32 opens with Zedekiah asking Jeremiah why he continues to prophesy destruction. Zedekiah fails to understand that Jeremiah's words are not his own. He does not give Zedekiah a direct answer, but instead tells him about the sign God gave him. Jeremiah was to purchase a piece of land from his cousin because he held the right of redemption. This probably seemed like an odd thing to Zedekiah and we know it seemed odd to Jeremiah because he asked God to give him understanding. The purpose of this act was to show Jeremiah and display to the people of Judah that God was not abandoning his people to the hands of the Babylonians. He would keep his promise to his people and they would come back to their land again. A time would come when God's people would dwell in total safety in the land once ravaged by the consequences of sin. Judah would indeed come back from exile, but this return is only a shadow of what is to come for those in Christ.

### **Chapter 33**

God continues to comfort Jeremiah. He graciously promises that the places which now face destruction because of judgment will be restored and inhabited (12-13). However, God also assures Jeremiah that this restoration will be accompanied by a king who will be the fulfillment of the covenant with David and a priest who would intercede for the people in God's presence forever (17-18). God's people would inherit a land restored to glory after being destroyed by the effects of sin. A righteous branch would spring up for David who would reign over God's people in perfect righteousness. A priest would stand in the presence of God perfectly interceding for them forever. These promises are as sure as the rising and setting of the sun (20). Surely, this resounding hope points you straight to Christ whose return will signal



the end of all of the earthly effects of sin, the Davidic king who will reign on the throne of the universe forever, and the great high priest whose perfect intercession for his people reconciles us to God for eternity.

### **Chapter 34**

You might remember that Zedekiah has been continuously asking Jeremiah why he is prophesying only destruction. Zedekiah has consistently asked Jeremiah to offer more positive prophecies, as if the prophecies are of Jeremiah's making. Here, Jeremiah tells Zedekiah his fate. Zedekiah will not be killed in the Babylonian siege. Instead, he will be taken into captivity with his people and will die in prison there. While this might at first seem merciful, Zedekiah may very well have preferred death after his capture which we will read about in chapter 39. Jeremiah goes on to explain one of the sins of the people. They had previously given freedom to Hebrew slaves, effectively cancelling the debts that they sold themselves to pay. However, the people of Judah rescinded this freedom, doing a great injustice to their brothers and sisters, ignoring God's commands, and forgetting that God had freed them from slavery as well. Now, they would be sent to Babylon as slaves.

### **Chapter 35**

This chapter actually takes a step back in time from the previous one. It is important to remember that in the Prophets, oracles are not always necessarily organized chronologically. Rather, they are sometimes organized topically. Here we see an example of obedience to contrast against Judah's disobedience that we saw in chapter 34. Jeremiah is told to go to a family known as the Rechabites. The lifestyle of the Rechabites cannot be found in Scripture, but instead has been passed down by their forefathers. They did not drink wine, they did not build houses, they did not sow crops or plant vineyards. They functionally had continued to live nomadically even after God had given Israel land. The text never insists that this lifestyle was especially righteous in itself, but God does commend them for their steadfast obedience to the laws given to them by their forefathers. The example of their obedience to nondivine laws serves to condemn Judah's disobedience to the laws that God himself gave them.

### **Chapter 36**

In this chapter we see Jeremiah actually dictate a prophecy to be delivered to king Jehoiakim. This is another step back in time, which we can notice both by the reigning king and by the fact that the prophecy is written in conditional language. The people can still repent. The coming judgment is not presented as a certainty, but as a warning. However, we can also infer that it is not the very beginning of Jeremiah's ministry because he has already been banned from the temple for upsetting the king and priests with his prophetic messages. As we might have guessed. Jeremiah's prophecy is not well received. Jehoiakim actually cuts it up and burns it while it is still being read (v. 23). This rebellion is not born out of fear, but out of anger. The king and officials did not heed Jeremiah's warnings. God then commands Jeremiah to record the very same words again, but to add a specific curse against Jehoiakim for his refusal to listen. Jehoiakim would lose the throne, would have no heir, and would not even receive burial (v. 30).

### **Chapter 37-38**

Starting in chapter 37, we move forward in time again. The events of these chapters take place close to the time of Jerusalem's fall to Babylon. Judah, as we might expect, is in the throes of panic. These two chapters both contain accounts of imprisonment that Jeremiah faced for being perceived as a threat by the terrified Judeans. Some people read this as two accounts of the same story, equating the dungeon cells of 37:16 and the cistern of 38:6, since both accounts eventually end with Jeremiah being questioned by Zedekiah and then held in the court of the guard. Other commentators think that they

are two separate events with similar details. In either case, Jeremiah faced a great deal of persecution for simply declaring the truth and found himself imprisoned in the court of the guard until Babylon's victory of Jerusalem. Time is short of Zedekiah and the people of Judah, and Zedekiah seems to know it. He has no intention of killing Jeremiah because it would do no good. Instead, Zedekiah asks Jeremiah what his fate will be and learns that though he will live, he will be captured.

### **Chapter 39**

Almost forty chapters into Jeremiah, we see the fall of Jerusalem. After decades, even centuries, of presuming upon the riches of God's kindness that he would not judge Judah, Babylon conquers them. As promised, Zedekiah is not killed. However, all of his officials and his children are slaughtered as he watches. The Babylonians then blind Zedekiah so that the fall of his kingdom and the death of his children are the last things he sees. The Babylonians carry most of the survivors into captivity but leave behind a few of the Judeans who were too unimportant to kill or capture and give them fields to work so that their newly conquered land would not go to waste. After so much persecution and difficulty, we might expect Jeremiah to be exiled or killed as well, but instead he is allowed to stay in the land and live among the remainder of his people. It is worth keeping in mind that although this is an uncharacteristically happy turn of events for Jeremiah, it would also have led his people to believe he collaborated with Babylon.

### **Chapter 40-41**

The beginning of chapter forty reconstructs the events around Jeremiah being allowed to remain in Judah. He is released into the custody of the newly appointed Babylonian governor, Gedaliah. Finally, things seem to be looking up for Jeremiah. He can stay in Judah, he owns land that he redeemed for his family, and he is under the direct care of the governor. Jeremiah's peace will not last long. Judean captains hatch a plot to assassinate Gedaliah and although he is warned, Gedaliah trusts that his promise of peace to the remaining men and women of Judah will keep him safe. Of course, it does not. Gedaliah is killed by Ishmael, along with all of Gedaliah's officials and the Judeans who were with him. Ishmael goes on to slaughter Israelites who had come to mourn the destruction of the temple and captured the rest of the people to take to the Ammonites. Johanan, another Judean soldier, rescues these captives from Ishmael, but intends to take them to Egypt to hide from Babylon's retribution for the death of Gedaliah.

### **Chapter 42**

After narrowly escaping slavery to the Ammonites, the remaining Judeans asked Jeremiah what they should do. They apparently already have their hearts set on going to Egypt (41:17), but still request that Jeremiah seek wisdom from God before they actually act. They assure Jeremiah that they will do whatever God commands, presumably because they thought God would tell them to do exactly what they wanted to do. God, however, commands them not to go to Egypt and promises that if they stay in Judah, they will be safe. Further, if they reject this command and run to Egypt for protection, God would bring new judgment on them there. One of Judah's previous sins had been putting their faith in foreign nations rather than in God and now they are faced with the temptation again. God promises them that if they remain in their land, Babylon will leave them alone. If they go to Egypt, Babylon will follow them. The Egyptians cannot protect them, but God can.

### **Chapter 43**

Immediately after Jeremiah told the Judeans that they should remain in Judah instead of going to Egypt, they rejected Jeremiah's words and did exactly what they were told not to do. They even accused Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch of being traitors. Perhaps this was due to a mistaken belief that Jeremiah

had helped Babylon, earning his right to stay in Judah in the first place. Whether they had a reason for their rejection of Jeremiah's words, however, is irrelevant. They take the remnant of Judah, Jeremiah included, to hide in Egypt from any possible Babylonian retribution. Once Jeremiah is in Egypt, he immediately begins prophesying against Egypt and against his own people. He places large stones at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace at Tahpanhes and proclaims that God will set Nebuchadnezzar's throne on top of those stones. God would use Babylon to judge Egypt and now, the Judean remnant hiding there would face judgment as well.

#### **Chapter 44**

Though Jerusalem has been destroyed and the Judeans are in Egypt, Jeremiah's prophecies do not stop. One might think that suffering death, destruction, and exile at the hands of Babylon would have convinced the Judeans to listen to the words that God gave Jeremiah, but that is evidently not the case. In addition to fleeing to Egypt, which they were explicitly warned against, the Judean exiles apparently began worshiping Egyptian deities. Although idolatry was one of the sins for which Judah was judged in the first place, the Judeans in Egypt could not resist running back to the sins that once brought them comfort even though they were already suffering for them. Just as Zedekiah had been overthrown and taken into captivity, the Pharaoh and the false gods in whom the Judeans now place their hope will be destroyed by Babylon as well. The Judeans would not even repent half-heartedly. They were convinced that this time, their sin would be safe, but sin always and only destroys.

#### **Chapter 45-46**

Chapter forty-five takes a step back in time, revealing to us a glimpse into the inner life of Baruch, Jeremiah's friend a scribe. He evidently felt a great deal of despair for the coming pain of his people, but God assures Baruch that He has lost even more than Baruch has and that disaster is coming upon many other unjust nations as well. This short chapter opens a section of the book in which we find prophecies against those nations, beginning with Egypt. The oracle against Egypt might seem confusing at first because it speaks at first of a defeat of Egypt at the hands of Babylon prior to the destruction that will come while Judeans are hiding there. Egypt had previously tried to stop the advance of the Babylonian empire and failed, resulting in the Babylonians destroying the Assyrian empire. Later, after the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar would come to Egypt to overthrow it. As we have already read, Egypt would fall to Babylon and the Judean refugees would fall with it.

#### **Chapter 47**

The second oracle in this section of Jeremiah is against the Philistines, who were a long-time enemy of the Israelites. In all likelihood, the Judeans who heard or read this prophecy would have considered it overdue. This is probably one of the few prophecies Jeremiah delivered that did not upset his hearers. Although David's conquests had previously ended any Philistine hopes of world power, they still had a noticeable presence in the Ancient Near East. Unlike Egypt who would eventually be able to rebuild after Babylon conquers them, Philistia would be wiped from the map. Babylon's conquest of the Philistines would spell the end of the nation. This Babylonian attack is likened to a coming flood that will destroy everyone and everything that it touches (v. 2). The Babylonian army will be so great that just the sound of their approach will cause fathers to give up any hope of protecting their children (v. 3). The Lord's sword will not be sheathed until it brings Philistia to complete ruin for its centuries of sin (v. 6).

#### **Chapter 48**

Moab is the next focus of God's wrath. The Moabites have a lengthy and often painful history with the Israelites stretching back to the time of Abraham. After escaping Sodom, Lot's daughters sleep with their father and their sinful union brings forth two sons: Ammon and Moab. The Moabites will come from

Moab and the Ammonites from Ammon. Time and again in the history of Israel, the Moabites have opportunities to help or protect Israel, which would be reasonable given their relationship as nations. However, they continuously choose to betray Israel instead. At various times in their history, the Moabites aided Israel's enemies, actively attacked Israel, and led Israel into idolatry. Because of this longstanding enmity between Moab and Israel and the injustices committed by Moab, the oracle against the nation is especially long and intense. The hope at the end of this chapter that God will restore the fortunes of Moab likely refers to the Moabites finding hope in the coming Messiah (Isaiah 16:4-5).

#### **Chapter 49**

Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Habor, and Elam all face judgment through this chapter. Two of these nations, Ammon and Edom, both have a close relationship to Israel. Ammon, like Moab, descended from the son of Lot and his daughter. Edom was descended from Jacob's brother, Esau. Both of these nations, like Moab, refused to protect Israel on multiple occasions and also had violent conflict with the Israelites at various points in their history. Damascus also had a history of armed conflict with Israel but was absorbed by Babylon relatively soon after the fall of Assyria so this oracle might also foreshadow the fall of Babylon. Kedar also has a distant relationship to Israel, as their forefather, for whom they were named, was a descendant of Ishmael. The nation Habor is mostly unknown but was geographically near Kedar. Elam was geographically distant from Israel, and by the time of their final collapse, was a shell of what they once were, but God takes credit for the fall of the once great nation.

#### **Chapter 50-51**

These two chapters contain oracles against Babylon. It should come as no surprise that this particularly lengthy section serves as the climactic finale to Jeremiah's oracles against the nations. After all, Babylon has been the looming threat throughout the book and the tool of God's judgment against Judah and every other nation mentioned in Jeremiah's prophecies. God has used Babylon as an instrument, taking all that they meant for evil and using it for his glory. This, however, does not excuse Babylon for their wickedness. They are still guilty before God and will have to face his judgment just like every nation that they conquered. After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem, Babylon's might would steadily decline until its final defeat at the hands of Persia. The end of this oracle is emphasized by another symbolic act: a scroll containing its words is tied to a stone and thrown into the Euphrates, sinking helplessly just as Babylon will.

#### **Chapter 52**

Against all of our contemporary Western wishes, the book of Jeremiah does not end on a note of triumph. The prophecies against Babylon are the penultimate, not the final, section of Jeremiah. As dark as this ending is, it does serve as vindication for Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. All that he prophesied did come to pass, and the most shocking and significant of his prophecies, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, is recounted to close the book. The composition of this chapter is very similar to the description of these events found in 2 Kings 24-25 and seem to be an extended account of the events already recorded in Jeremiah 39. This might cause us to wonder why it was included at all, especially since it doesn't contain any oracles. The answer is simply to remind the reader what the main focus of the book is. The people rebelled, God warned them, the people scoffed at these warnings and took advantage of his patience, but God eventually did exactly what he said he would do.

#### **-Reflecting on Jeremiah-**

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Jeremiah. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck

you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Jeremiah before we move forward?

*"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Hebrews 1.3*