

August 8 : Scriptures Isaiah 63-66

SUMMARY

Okay, now for the bad news. In the last reading, we left it with the Lord blessing Israel as He returns and all the nations lining up to esteem God's nation and people. In chapter 63, we see that Jesus' arrival won't be universally received. Apparently, Jesus will have to defeat Israel's enemies in the area of Edom and Bozrah. In Isaiah's day, these two areas are south and southeast of the Dead Sea. Joel Richardson makes the case that the End Time final empire is a revived Islamic Caliphate (*Mideast Beast* and *The Islamic Antichrist*).

Given that Mecca and Medina are southeast of Bozrah (Jordan), it could be that the Islamic Antichrist will attempt to take Israel (or have taken it), and Jesus will meet their Islamic army in Edom/Bozrah. It will be a bloody wipeout (63:1, 3). This description is also echoed in Revelation 19:11-21.

63:7-14 is a broad review of God's gracious love and mercy on Israel's behalf and His discipline when His people went astray. Isaiah calls out on behalf of his people for Yehovah to help them (63:17-19). Isaiah cries out for God to act because of the people's covenant with Him via Abraham and Israel (Jacob). Isaiah is prophetically interceding where the Jewish people realize their hearts have been hardened and their Temple has been destroyed. This hardening happened not long after Isaiah's death (586 B.C.) and again in A.D. 70. In both cases, Israel's heart was hardened so God could complete His work and His plan (Isaiah 6:9-13, Romans 11:25). After God completes His work, He will return His gaze to His people, soften their hearts, and pursue them in love to comfort and restore them.

Isaiah continues to call out to Yehovah in chapter 64. Oh, that God would once again "come down" as He did at Mount Sinai (64:1-3). God welcomes all who do right, but Israel hasn't. God's people have turned from Him, and for that, Yehovah has allowed His nation to be destroyed (prophetically foreshadowing Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians). It can also be easily applied to the Roman exile as well. Isaiah's final plea is melancholy, "Lord, after all this, will you restrain yourself? Will you keep silent and afflict us severely?" (64:). The answer comes in the next chapter.

God replies that He revealed Himself to a people who weren't looking for Him, yet they walked into idolatry and refused to repent. Therefore, the Lord judged them and destroyed many of His people (65:1-7). But not all of God's people were to be wiped out. There would be some who would produce the good Yehovah was looking for as one would find a few good grapes in a rotten bunch (65:8-9). The Lord would be merciful and

gracious on their behalf, but the rotten fruit, those committed to idolatry, would face the sword of God's judgment (65:11-12). Those who follow the Lord will be blessed, and those who don't won't (65:13-16). Why? Because God is the God of Truth. The former things of idolatry will pass away along with the people who followed idols. Out with the old and in with the new (65:17)!

We now return to the glorious future, the day when God steps in to restore everything to the way it was in the beginning. "For I will create new heavens and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind (65:17). This isn't a one-off prophecy. Apostles Peter and John both get the same revelation from the Lord. "By the same word, the present heavens and earth are stored up for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly... as you wait for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day, the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat." (2 Peter 3:7, 12). "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (Revelation 21:1).

What follows in 65:18-25 is a description of Eden restored. Note the language that points to Genesis 1-3. 1) "For my people's lives will be like the lifetime of a tree," the Tree of Life. 2) "My chosen ones will fully enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor without success or bear children destined for disaster, for they will be a people blessed by the Lord," the reverse of the ground and childbirth punishment. 3) "But the serpent's food will be dust!" Nope. Not reprieve for Satan. As we see in Revelation, he'll be eating dust in the Pit. "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven holding the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time" (Revelation 20:1-3). Heaven has come to earth (65:25).

We reach the end of Isaiah, chapter 66! After speaking of His presence lighting up the entirety of the land, the Lord reminds His people that it is only a fraction of His presence (66:1). Yehovah favors the righteous (66:2). There are two kinds of people in this chapter – the righteous and the wicked. See the comparison in 65:3. God will judge those who have chosen the wrong way (66:4) and defend those who revere Him and His word (66:5).

On those days, something amazing will happen. God will reconstitute Israel in a single day, and it will begin to bring forth children to God (66:8-11). I believe the world had seen the forerunner to that when Israel became a nation again in 1948. Its population stands at "8,945,725 as of Friday, August 26, 2022, based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest

United Nations data" (worldometers.info/world-population/israel-population) despite the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust (1941-45). Imagine what it will be like when Jesus returns and His blessing falls on His people! It'll be a time of peace, comfort, and great rejoicing over her for all the Lord has done for His people! But for His enemies, it'll be nasty (66:14-17).

One final stunning note from Isaiah. The Lord will send some of His people as emissaries to the nations, and *they will bring Gentiles to live in Jerusalem, and some of those Gentiles will serve the Lord as priests* (66:20-21)! The new heavens and earth will continue into eternity, as will the people of Israel. And in the end, all the world nations will worship the One, True God of Israel. Oh, and the wicked will burn forever, so be warned (66:24).

INSIGHT

In Isaiah 65:1, the Lord calls out to His people, "Here I am." This word is the Hebrew word, "Hineni!" Hineni was used by Isaiah back in 6:8, when God asked, "Who will I send? Who will go for us?" It's a fascinating response because it means more than "I'm here." It has the sense of "I'm here, I'm waiting, I'm listening, and I'm prepared to obey and act immediately." We can see how that applies to Isaiah, and it also applies to the Isaiah 65:1 context. The Lord says to Israel, "Here I am! I'm waiting, listening, and I'm prepared to act!" (The 'obey' part doesn't apply.) God is ready to act on behalf of those who look to Him. And yet, Israel failed to respond. When the Lord calls to us, may we be equally ready to respond to Him as He is to act for us.

August 9 : Scriptures Jeremiah 1-3

SUMMARY

Welcome to the longest prophetic work in the Bible. The book of Jeremiah has the most in-depth look at a prophet's life. Jeremiah was a priest from the town of Anathoth, about 3 miles NW of Jerusalem. This book covers events from 640 to 580 B.C., and Jeremiah's ministry covers 626 to 586 B.C.

Jeremiah ministered during Judah's last days up to and after Judah's exile from their Promised Land to Babylon. Like his predecessor, Isaiah, Jeremiah had many interactions with the line of Judah's kings, and Judah's final kings were a rollercoaster of faithfulness and idolatry.

- Hezekiah (excellent).
- Manasseh (very evil but repented). *Isaiah's ministry ends. Tradition says Manasseh executed him.*
- Amon (evil).
- Josiah (excellent). *Jeremiah's ministry begins during Josiah's 13th year in office.*
- Jehoahaz II (epic fail).
- Jehoiakim (evil), Jehoahaz's brother.
- Jehoiakin (evil), Jehoiakim's son.
- Zedekiah (evil), Jehoiakim's uncle/Jehoiahaz II's brother.

These are God's assessments of "Did what was right in the Lord's sight."

- Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:2).
- Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:2).

These are God's assessments of "Did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord."

- Manasseh (deep idolatry but turned to God after being captured by the Assyrians, 2 Chronicles 33:2, 33:13).
- Amon (2 Chronicles 33:22).
- Jehoiakim (2 Chronicles 36:5).
- Jehoiakin (2 Chronicles 36:9).
- Zedekiah (2 Chronicles 36:12).

Per the HCSB commentary, Jeremiah has three main literary sections:

- Jeremiah faithfully carries out God's commission (ch. 2-24).
- Fierce opposition to Jeremiah's ministry (25-35).
- Judah's demise (36-45).

Here's the outline from the HCSB commentary:

- Prologue (ch.1).
- Jeremiah calls for repentance (ch. 2-25).
- Jeremiah's persecution and firm stance (ch. 26-36).
- Jeremiah sees Judah's impending doom (ch. 37-45).
- Prophecies against the Nations (46-51).
- Epilogue (ch. 52).

I thought I'd share this background information with you because this is such a comprehensive book, and I hope it'll help. So, on to the book of Jeremiah!

Chapter 1 begins with Jeremiah's commission, much like Isaiah's commission in Isaiah 6. Who says the Lord can't use young people in the ministry? Yehovah called Jeremiah when he was a young man, and Jeremiah doubted his ability to represent God because he was so young. But Yehovah would have none of Jeremiah's objection. Yes, Jeremiah was young when God called him to be a prophet. He was so young he wasn't even conceived. And yet, he was in God's mind (1:5). Jeremiah's ministry was for him to speak fearlessly to Judah and the surrounding nations. God's words would serve to "uproot and tear down, destroy and demolish, and to build and plant" (1:10). Yes, Jeremiah would be a world-shaking prophet.

His primary message to Judah comes in this first chapter. God reveals that "all the clans and kingdoms of the north" will come to Jerusalem and "each king will set up his throne at the entrance to Jerusalem's gates." In other words, a siege is coming, and it won't go well for Jerusalem. What are these "clans and kingdoms of the north?" We will soon see it's Babylon. "But isn't Babylon to the east of Judah/Jerusalem, not north?" Yes, O Bible Student. But it's nearly suicidal for an army on the east side of the Fertile Crescent to cross directly west across a vast desert. So, the troops would follow the Euphrates river upstream in a long arc through the Fertile Crescent. Along the way, they would have plenty of water, food to store as provisions, and treasure to take as the Babylon army marched past. By following the Fertile Crescent, the conquering Babylonians would enter Israel's land from the north and travel south to Judah. Hence, the army from the north.

Why would Israel's God do this? Why would the Lord bring the Babylonian army to conquer Judah? Because Judah broke their covenant with God by turning their backs on Him to pursue other gods. Big no-no! They knew the covenant punishments for covenant violations, and one of those would be enemy attack and exile if the infractions were very

bad and lasted long enough. Jeremiah warned Judah about what had been coming for 40 years.

Bible tip: 40 is a number that often refers to God's judgment, and 70 is a number that often refers to completeness. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry (40) and Judah's exile in Babylon (70) show God will pour out His complete judgment on Judah for their rampant and systemic idolatry to cleanse His people to prepare them to bring forth the Messiah 500 years later.

Finally, Yehovah warns Jeremiah that he'll get a lot of pushback from his audience. Nevertheless, Yehovah will stand with Jeremiah and make him a stalwart wall against the opposition. Jeremiah and the people of Judah will butt heads big-time.

Chapter 2 is the beginning of Jeremiah's message to Judah. Yehovah recalls how He rescued Israel from Egypt and "married" them at Mount Sinai. Switching metaphors, Yehovah calls His people the "first fruits of His harvest," meaning the best-off-the-top offering dedicated to the Lord and belongs to Him alone. All those who infringed on what belonged to the Lord (i.e., enemies that attacked Israel) brought disaster to themselves.

But then, Yehovah calls out Israel's apostasy. "What fault did your ancestors find in me that they went so far from me, followed worthless idols, and became worthless themselves?" (2:5). Tragically, Israel and her leaders had turned from God and stopped seeking Him (2:6-8). So, the Lord brings His case against them. Remember, Israel's apostasy is a covenant violation. Therefore, a court case is needed to weigh the charges and determine whether the accused is guilty or not. Israel is guilty of doing what even other nations don't do – abandon their gods. And Israel isn't guilty of just one charge, but two. 1) They turned away from God and 2) turned toward other gods (2:13). Notice the idiom – fountain of living water (living water is moving water, used for cleansing) vs. cracked cisterns (dead water is slimy, yucky, stagnant water). The cracked cisterns, idol gods, are so worthless they can't even hold dead water.

What has come of Israel's apostasy? The northern kingdom has been laid waste, and the destruction of their cities and head-cracking are Israel's fault, not Yehovah's (2:14-17) because they've walked away from their Protector. Rather than turning to God for help, the southern kingdom of Judah is looking to Egypt, their former enslavers, and Babylon (2:18).

What the heck? Judah doesn't need political help. They need spiritual help. And didn't Yehovah free them from Egypt? Yet they refused to obey their rescuing King and

practiced idolatry instead (2:20). How could such a good vine turn out so bad? "A choice vine from the very best seed" is an interesting phrase because Israel started from the very best seed – Abraham. Again, they are God's miracle people. I can tell you what went wrong. They may have been started as a miracle, but Israel needs a miraculous heart transformation. They were born through God's power. Now His power needs to "rebirth" their hearts. It's coming (Jeremiah 31).

Yehovah continues presenting His evidence for Israel's guilt. Though Israel falsely objects to the charge of idolatry, the Lord points to the pagan worship sites as proof (2:23). Pagan worship often involved unrestrained and perverted sexual activity. Hence, the Lord puts His accusation in terms of uncontrolled animalistic lust. Jeremiah portrays Israel as so hot for idols that the gods have no trouble finding her, and she refuses to turn back to God (2:23-25). Great shame is on Israel because they've given credit to their idols, and when trouble comes, they turn to Yehovah for help. How insulting! Yehovah tells them to get help from their many useless idols (2:28).

Their judgment is well deserved, says the Lord. Yehovah struck down Israel's children in judgment, but it was in vain. God's discipline didn't cause the people to return to Him. Instead, the Israelites struck down the Lord's prophets, the ones bringing the call to repentance. Stubborn people! Yehovah asks a rhetorical question about jewelry and wedding sashes that would be important to young women and brides. Of course, they wouldn't forget such things because they're important. And yet, Israel has forgotten God as if He were no longer desired. God's bride has given herself so far over to evil and rebellion, "you also teach evil women your ways" (2:33). Wow! Israel claims to be innocent, but they're guilty as sin. And forget about looking for help elsewhere. Egypt won't help them, just like Assyria didn't help. Israel will still be led away into captivity.

Yehovah asks Israel another rhetorical question to start chapter 3, which is a continuation of His indictment against Judah. "If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him to marry another, can he ever return to her? Wouldn't such a land become totally defiled?" According to God's Torah, the answer is, "Yes!" Marrying a former husband after a remarriage was not allowed. The picture Yehovah is painting is now that Judah has broken her relationship with God and "married" idol gods, how can she even consider returning to her original husband, God? But what's worse is that Judah has had multiple husbands (gods) that she's chased after. "Where hasn't she slept with her many lovers" is the stinging rebuke. Judah's rebellion is why their land has been in a drought, and their food supply is threatened. But despite her outrageous sin and brazen face of a prostitute, Judah calls out to God for help, "My Father." What nerve!

A new section starts in 3:6. During Josiah's reign (which saw a great revival in Judah, by the way), Jeremiah receives a prophetic indictment against both Israel (north) and Judah (south). Israel ran off into rampant idolatry from the very beginning. Judah looked on and learned from Israel. But even though Israel was severely punished for her spiritual adultery, her sister, Judah, boldly kept going (3:8-10). According to the Lord, Judah pretended to return to Him, but not with her whole heart. That would require completely erasing idolatry from the land and a complete national rededication and devotion to God. But Judah only faked it. That turned out to be worse than what Israel did. At least the northern kingdom was honest about their apostasy. But then again, haven't we seen people (or ourselves) who claim to follow Jesus, but our hearts are far from Him? These words can apply to that situation.

Despite all of the Lord's indictment, now comes another stunning prophecy (3:12-18)! Jeremiah proclaims God's call to His people that He still loves them and is willing to forgive them if they would only return to Him with all their hearts (there's that heart change theme again.) There will be a time when a few will respond, and the Lord will take them back and give them good shepherds (leaders, priests) to guide them. The repentant ones will fill the land. Now here's the stunning part. When Jeremiah wrote this, the Ark of the Covenant was in God's Temple. *But a time is coming when it won't exist, and another Ark will not be made to replace it.* Since the Lord's presence hovered over the Ark as His throne, Yehovah will no longer need the Ark as His throne, for the whole city will be His throne. Nations will stream to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, and Israel and Judah's divided kingdoms will be restored and united.

These are benchmarks of the Messianic Kingdom: 1) Israel will be fully restored, 2) the people will be cleansed of their idolatry and have a wholehearted devotion to God, 3) the nations will turn to Israel's God and come to Israel to worship Him, and 4) God's presence will manifest over Jerusalem. *Remember those things because they'll come up again in Jeremiah.*

3:19-20 is heartbreaking, though. The Lord longs for His people as a father longs for his son. He longs to bless them with their rightful inheritance, but they betray Him as wickedly and heartlessly as a woman betrays her lover. While Yehovah's children beg for Baal's mercy on the hills (high places for pagan worship), their true God waits and calls for true repentance. Their hope for salvation is not in the god who consumes their crops, livestock, and children. Their only hope is in their Lord, Yehovah, whom they've disobeyed and betrayed since Israel's early days (3:25).

INSIGHT

"Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest" (2:3). What does this mean?

First fruits belong to the Lord as a dedicated offering, and no one is allowed to touch or take what belongs to God for themselves. Also, the first fruits are a thank-offering to the Lord in anticipation of the entire harvest yet to come. Israel is the first nation that dedicated itself by covenant to the Lord. At the time of the Messianic Kingdom, many countries and people groups will come alongside and support Israel as the Lord harvests faithful nations from the season of the Gospel's growth worldwide.

August 10 : Scriptures Jeremiah 4-5

SUMMARY

While the bulk of chapter 4 is Jeremiah's prophecy of approaching doom, it opens with Yehovah's condition for Judah to return to Him. "if you're going to return, then return." you can only swear in my name if you remove your idols. Judah's return to God will cause the rest of the nations to be blessed (4:1-2). He calls Judah to repent in 4:3-4. Breaking up fallow ground is a stark image of dry rock-hard dirt, and that's the picture of their hearts. Speaking of the heart, the Lord tells them to circumcise their hearts. This is an idiom to remove any impediment or anything that has hardened a person and interferes with their relationship with the Lord. If they don't, then God's wrath will fall (4:3-4).

The rest of the chapter is about God's wrath already moving toward Jerusalem. Babylon grows as an empire, and her armies are already advancing through the Fertile Crescent. They're taking down the Assyrian empire and moving toward Israel. The imagery is excellent in verse 7 because Babylon is depicted as a lion emerging from the tall grass. Babylon is called the destroyer of nations, moving out to take down the countries before it. Jeremiah switches imagery. A great wind is coming in the form of Babylon. The wind is not there to sift Jerusalem, separating the righteous from the wicked. It's coming to destroy them. Jeremiah then switches the imagery to advancing storm clouds. Why is Babylon moving toward Judah as God's punishment? "Your way and your actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment period it is very bitter, because it has reached your heart!" (4:18).

The difficulty of being a prophet, especially in the Old Testament days, is that they often experience what's coming long before the people do. Jeremiah already feels the pain of battle. He hears the sound of battle in his mind and spirit, and he's already experiencing the destruction of battle (4:19-26). When he delivers this prophecy, the people are at ease, but Jeremiah feels the pain of what's coming far in advance. The Lord responds in verses 27 and 28 that he will bring total destruction to Israel. Jeremiah laments in verse 29 how Judah is trying to make itself attractive in the face of coming desolation so that the Babylonians won't destroy her. But it won't avail God's unfaithful wife. She'll be in anguish, like labor pains (4:30-31).

Chapter 5 opens with a scene reminiscent of God talking to Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah's sin and His intention to destroy the two cities. If He can find just ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, He'll spare the people. But, He couldn't, so judgment fell. Yehovah does the same thing here with Jeremiah. God's offer to Jeremiah

is for him to wander through Jerusalem, and if he finds just one righteous person, God won't destroy Judah. But the Lord knows they're sinful and false. Jeremiah responds in verse 3 that even though the Lord has seriously wounded them and afflicted his people, they refused to turn to him. This is astounding! Jeremiah assumes that it's the cares of life of the poor that have turned them from God. However, it's just as bad with the rich people of Judah. Therefore, God says judgment is coming to all, and they'll all be torn to pieces. Why should God forgive them? They've all walked away from him. They're so hungry for sin they're like sexually charged stallions pursuing the mares in heat (5:7-9). So, the Lord will use Babylon to "prune his nation." The Judahites don't believe Jeremiah's words, but it's coming. Again, Yehovah describes Babylon's approach (5:14-17), yet He won't wholly annihilate them (5:18).

However, God knows the people's response. "Hey, Yehovah. What gives? Why are you bringing destruction on us?" The answer is simple – sin. Look at His indictment of Judah (5:23-29). And the worst thing? Most of Judah's prophets are liars, and the priesthood leads the people by their own authority, not God's.

INSIGHT

The people of Judah refused to turn to God, and they had become hardened to His voice through Jeremiah. We're not so different. Most, if not all, Christians have experienced times when we walk away from the Lord because we want to follow our old ways and satisfy our desires, whether it be addiction, lust, deception, anger, unforgiveness, or whatever. When we stay in that state, over time, we begin to harden ourselves to the Holy Spirit's voice calling us to repent. Continually ignoring the Lord's prompting is like trampling on dirt until it's packed down hard. Also, if we ignore our spiritual relationship with the Lord, the same thing happens.

An unused field will settle flatter and flatter until it also becomes hardened. The only way ground can be softened up and used to plant seed to produce a crop is to use a very hard, pointed, sharp plow to spear into the soil and turn it over. Then, other implements are dragged over the ground until the clods are crushed into soft dirt. Plus, we need rain to soften the soil to complete the process. When we turn to the Lord, confess our sin, and say sorry, we're on the way to turning over the fallow ground or the hard-packed dirt. The Holy Spirit softens us like rain on dry land. As we keep that up, we become softer and softer before the Lord and more responsive. Only then can he plant a seed and make us fruitful for Him.

August 11 : Scriptures Jeremiah 6-8

SUMMARY

In chapter 6, Jeremiah continues his prophecy of Babylon's approach. He sees Babylon laying siege to Jerusalem with Babylon's army officers and troops like shepherds and their flocks of sheep grazing around the city (6:1-5). A siege is coming (6:6) because of Judah's fountain of sin (6:7), and if she doesn't repent, Yehovah will turn His back and let her get desolated (6:8). That's pretty concise.

The image of the Lord passing His hand over Judah like a grape harvester is vivid. In judgment, He'll strip the people from the land through death or exile, leaving very few "grapes" on the ground, a remnant of the people (6:9).

Jeremiah is a frustrated prophet because nobody will listen to him. But that doesn't stop the Lord's words from filling him up to bursting. Jeremiah is not only consumed with the Lord's thoughts but also His emotions. It's almost as though the prophetic pressure builds in him; he feels he must spew God's wrathful words upon the people as a declaration of judgment. And boy, does he ever (6:11-12)! But the other priests and prophets, who were *supposed* to get Yehovah's people back on track, are falling down on the job (6:13-14)! They're worthless. The Lord is going to punish them, too.

Jeremiah pictures himself at a crossroads, desperately trying to get the people to turn from the wrong path back to the right one, based on how Israel lived with God. But they refuse. Therefore, Jeremiah calls the nations to witness what God is about to do to them and hear the charge against them. Their worship of God is just empty rituals. And so, God will trip up his people through the soon-to-come terrible battle events. Perhaps that will get them to turn around (6:16-21). That battle will come via the Babylonians.

In chapter 6, we see the purpose of Jeremiah's ministry. How the people respond to his words reveals their hearts and commitment to the Lord. Therefore, Jeremiah is an assayer, a person who works with metals that are mixed to separate dross (unwanted metals and impurities) from precious metals (6:27-30).

A new round of prophecy begins in chapter 7. Yehovah tells Jeremiah to go to the temple, stand in the Temple courts, and call out the people's sins. Why? Because the people evidently think their religious practices make them pleasing before God while they live like hell. Umm, no. God would rather have the people live righteously than participate in empty worship. In truth, God would want both. Jeremiah draws the people's attention to the city of Shiloh, not far north of Jerusalem. About 450 years earlier, the people of

Israel thought they could drag the Ark of the Covenant into battle against the Philistines as a talisman to help them win. They failed to realize their covenant relationship with Yehovah led Him to fight for them against enemies, not the Ark that represented God's throne on earth. The covenant agreement was simple; the people would stay faithful, and the Lord would protect them. Without a relationship with God, all that was left was their false trust in an object rather than a Person.

The same is true for Jeremiah in his day. The people believed they would never be defeated because God would certainly protect His Temple. They failed to realize that worship without the heart is empty, like the shell of the Temple that might as well be torn down. The Judahites put their trust in the wrong thing and not the right Person. Therefore, Yehovah will do the same to the Temple and Jerusalem as He did with the city of Shiloh. He'll destroy everything and remove the people even if it means ritual worship stops and all the precious Temple objects are taken or destroyed. Jeremiah's action would be like a pastor standing in front of the church building today and telling the people to go home and get right with God before they come to sing songs to him or listen to a message. Without the right heart, worship means nothing.

In 7:16, Jeremiah's shocking command from the Lord is to stop praying for the people, either to repent or for protection. Judgment is set because of their stubbornness and refusal to give up their idolatrous ways (7:16-20). Again, God's indictment of the Judahites is because they think sacrifice is more important than obedience (7:21-26). But the people remain stubborn and resistant, just like their ancestors did. They won't listen to Jeremiah, just like they won't listen to the Lord. They'll continue with the grossest of idolatry spread throughout the whole area. The sacrifices they make in their places of idol worship will be replaced with God's sacrifice of their corpses (7:32-34).

Chapter 8 is a massive woe for the people of Judah who loved, served, followed, consulted, and worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. One of the terrifying degradations and desecrations that could happen to a person is to have their dead body exposed to the elements. What's left of the person is exposed and vulnerable to being eaten by birds and wild animals. God says he will cause the bones of his idolatrous people to be dug up from their graves and spread out in front of the so-called gods they worshipped. The bodies won't be buried but lie like manure on the ground. I guess the Lord doesn't mince words.

The Lord again rebukes his people for turning away and not returning to him, but they're set on their course. And what's humiliating is that birds know more about how to return than God's people do. A bird's instinct in migration is to return to its starting point. Yehovah is saying His people don't even have the instinct to return to Him, much less

the brains. In this chapter, the leaders get the brunt of God's rebuke. They claimed to be wise, but they're fools because they've turned from the fear of the Lord. Therefore, Yehovah will do horrendous things to them by giving their wives and their homes/fields to their enemies. The leaders are held most responsible of all of the people of Judah. They should have called the people to repent, but they were the worst offenders. Therefore, they're going to lose *everything* they hold dear.

With his prophetic view of the battles and devastation to come, Jeremiah voices what the people will say, "Let's get moving! The enemies on the horizon!" The reference to Dan in verse 16 is important because Dan is the northernmost tribe at the time. When Babylon marches into Israelite territory, Dan will be the first area and city to be hit. Chapter 8 finishes with Jeremiah's lament that he knows is coming from the people when they're finally in Babylon. They will lament in their exile. They will cry out for God and question whether he's still in Zion. He must not be because they're still in exile. Jeremiah cries because the horror of what's coming profoundly affects him. He knows God could heal his people and wonders why they're not healed. To me, the answer is simple. They haven't returned to their Doctor for their healing medicine, the balm in Gilead.

INSIGHT

"They have treated my people's brokenness superficially, claiming, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (6:14). Occasionally, people don't need comfort when they need correction. Sometimes, we have to "call it like it is" with people. No more pussyfooting around. We may be so deep in sin they need a prophetic intervention, a God-inspired smack in the face to wake us up. Usually, Jesus does this by letting us go through a terrible event, a "significant emotional experience," which shakes us to our core. Those divine interventions can be extremely painful, but they do their job to open our eyes and propel us to seek the Lord. Hebrews 12:11 says, "No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Discipline can be a long-term effort to break a bad habit and form a new one, or it can be an intense, short-lived spanking. It all depends on what's needed to help us turn to God and learn to follow Him and not the idols in our lives, those things that grab our time, talent, and treasure more than He does.

August 12 : Scriptures Jeremiah 9-11

SUMMARY

Jeremiah continues his lament over Israel, which began in 8:18. Let's revisit that part. Jeremiah saw his people in exile, crying and wondering why the Lord abandoned them, to which the Lord replied, "Why have they angered me with their carved images, with their worthless foreign idols?" (8:19). They've missed their opportunity (8:20), and Jeremiah is heartbroken. Jeremiah wonders if there's no hope for recovery (8:22).

In chapter 9, the prophet mourns deeply, beyond what he can bear. But even though he weeps over them, they continue their attacks against him and each other. They deceive one another with impunity. I'm concerned because I see this same thing today. People from politicians to business people to academics (teachers, professors) to artists and even supposed pastors and Christian leaders lie to us daily. There's an adage about someone urinating on my shoes and telling me it's raining. I can't tell you how many times I've cited that adage as I watch the news and surf the internet. This is the case in Jeremiah's day. He sees what's coming, but God's people continue their lying ways (9:4-6). So, the Lord will allow catastrophe to come upon them to test (reveal each person's devotion to Him) and refine them (purify them from idolatry if possible). What else can Yehovah do? His people are unable to change. Therefore, devastation, death, and exile is coming. God calls for the women to sing a funeral dirge. This is the practice of hiring professional mourners to start a funeral service. Their singing was meant to move people to grieve for their loss. Judah's loss will come through death, personified as climbing through our windows to take the young and old (9:21). Jeremiah's description is disgusting, describing corpses falling on the ground like manure.

Rather than wallow in their sin, to what should the Judahites aspire? The wise, strong, or wealthy person shouldn't brag about their wisdom, strength, or wealth. Our highest value should be understanding and knowing the Lord, the One who shows faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth. The last paragraph lumps the people of Judah in with neighbors who practiced circumcision but didn't understand or know God. See the connection? A mere religious ritual doesn't take the place of a relationship.

In chapter 10, the Lord appeals to His people to understand the difference between a dead, inanimate, worthless idol and their Living God. A nation may have a national god, but Yehovah is the King of *all* the nations. Man creates idols, but God created everything, so how foolish can people be (10:9-12)? There's absolutely no comparison! The idol makers are "stupid and foolish," and their idols are "a lie, without breath, worthless, and worthy of being mocked."

But God's people won't give up their idolatry. Therefore, God tells them through Jeremiah to prepare for exile after the Babylonian siege (10:17-18).

Jeremiah is an emotional wreck because of his ministry. How terrible it must have been to carry the Lord's burden for His stubborn, sinful people, knowing the horrible things that were on the horizon and few would listen. The ones who *should* have been heeding Jeremiah's words, the leaders, were stupid and refused to seek God. They should have listened to the prophecy of the oncoming commotion in the north that would arrive in 587 B.C. to desolate the land. The final part of chapter 10 is Jeremiah's prayer for himself. He doesn't want to avoid God's discipline, but Jeremiah wants it according to God's justice. Honestly, this is the prayer the people of Judah should have been praying. But as for the nations that God is using and will use to "discipline" His people, Jeremiah calls down a woe for how far they've gone regarding God's people.

Chapter 11 starts a new prophetic thread. It's God's call to Judah to remember their covenant with Him that their ancestors made with Him at Sinai. He tells them to keep their covenant obligations, or the covenant punishments will fall. In fact, because they've been stubborn and refused to repent for their violations (idolatry and sin), they're already experienced God's discipline.

It's unclear what the conspiracy was to which Yehovah referred, and my Study Bible says it might have been a general agreement to reject King Josiah's reforms to help the people return to God. This claim is believable because King Josiah was the last great and godly king before the final string of mediocre and ungodly kings just before Judah fell. Well, because of this general rejection of God's call to repent, the hammer has dropped, and Yehovah declares His unstoppable judgment. Since they won't listen to God, He won't listen to them. They can just call on their stupid inanimate idols for help (11:11-13). They should find plenty of help because they have so many idols!

And here's the worst part. God tells Jeremiah to stop praying for the people (11:14). Judah's sin is grave, and there's no more forgiveness. Unavoidable judgment is coming. The Lord turns toward an olive tree metaphor for His people. Although He planted them in the land, He will set them on fire, a metaphor for judgment. Since they burned incense to Baal, God will let the fire burn them – figuratively and literally. Regarding the conspiracy, the Lord tipped off Jeremiah about it (11:18). Jeremiah says he was clueless about the plot "I was like a docile[g] lamb led to slaughter. I didn't know that they had devised plots against me" (11:19). The conspirators from Anathoth, Jeremiah's home town, had planned to kill the prophet, so the Lord says they'll be killed instead. Every. Last. One.

INSIGHT

What? God told Jeremiah not to pray for His rebellious people? It's there in black and white. But God would never do that today. We're Jesus' New Covenant people. We're just automatically forgiven, right? Yes and no. Jesus' forgiveness and cleansing are always available to us whenever we want (I John 1:8-9). But what happens when we don't want it? What happens when we stubbornly follow our sinful ways and refuse God's call to turn back to Him? We become fruitless and risk being "cut off" and destroyed (John 15:1-6), just like the Judahites were. However, God's mercy is available even for those who've wandered so far away that they think nothing can bring them back. "Indeed, the Lord's arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear" (Isaiah 59:1). But we still have to do our part to simply turn our faces toward Him, even if we feel like our sin has cemented our feet in place. He can do the rest. Please don't be the person about whom the Lord says to those who pray for you, "do not pray for these people. Do not raise up a cry or a prayer on their behalf, for I will not be listening when they call out to me at the time of their disaster."

August 13 : Scriptures Jeremiah 12-14

SUMMARY

Again, chapter headings sometimes break up the flow of the text. At the end of Jeremiah 11, the Lord assures Jeremiah that He will judge the wicked people plotting against the prophet. *BUT* Jeremiah brings his case before the Lord in chapter 12. "Why do the wicked prosper? You know me and my heart for you. Why do you allow them to be wicked and the land to wither?" (12:1-4). Of course, this makes me think of the mighty Job debates. Didn't Jeremiah ever read the book of Job? The Lord's response to Jeremiah is, "Hey, if you can't deal with your family members turning on you, how will you withstand the onslaught of an entire nation of reprobates, your fellow Israelites (12:5-6)? Yehovah continues with His complaint tagging Jeremiah's complaint about his family, his "house." "You think *your* house is fighting you? What about Mine? 'My inheritance has behaved toward me like a lion in the forest. She has roared against me. Therefore, I hate her.'" (12:8) WOW! That's some tough stuff there! "Therefore, I'm going to let Babylon tear up the nations around Judah that have been attacking her, along with the people of Judah." So says the Lord.

We have a new thread in chapter 13. It starts with a vivid object lesson. God's point is like the linen underwear (priestly undergarment), God's people are ruined. Their pride has done it. Even though Yehovah tied His people to Himself (the Sinai covenant) and sought to keep them close, they refused and were ruined. Also, notice Yehovah told Jeremiah to bury the linen garment next to the Euphrates River, likely northeast of Israel. This act is symbolic of Babylon despoiling Judah for their pride. It was common for prophets to act out the Lord's word to them. In one sense, it was the visual aspect of the prophecy and helped drive home the point. It was also regarded as an "activator" of the word, assuring that it would be set in motion and come to pass.

Again, the Lord gives Jeremiah an illustration of wine jars. Duh! Of course, wine jars are to be filled with wine, and that's their purpose. In God's eyes, since His people have been unfaithful without repentance, their purpose is to be filled with stupor and smashed against each other (destroyed) as part of God's judgment. Why? Because Israel was proud, arrogant, and high-minded toward God. They refused to trust Him, and they rejected Him. Because of their pride and self-sufficiency, the Lord would show them just how self-sufficient they were. Judah's king and queen will weep when they see what's coming (13:18). Speaking of leaders, my Study Bible has a great comment. "The Hebrew word for leaders [*ro'sh*] has a twofold sense – 'head/chief' and 'a poisonous plant/poison.' Accordingly, Judah's self-chosen allies will become not just their chiefs but their poison as well" (HCSB). "Why?" Because of centuries of the Israelites (Judah's) guilt due to

rejecting God, following other gods, and violating the covenant laws. God will allow his "wife" to be "sexually assaulted" (13:22, 26). The answer to the rhetorical question, "Can the Cushite (Ethiopian) change his skin (color), or a leopard his spots?" is an obvious "No." After so long, Judah won't repent, and God knows that. God's declaration of judgment (sexual attack, metaphorically and literally speaking) has to do with Judah's idolatrous practices, which often involved ritualistic sex as part of a god's worship. So Judah will get what they crave.

And we come to another object lesson in chapter 14. Judah has experienced a severe drought, and the Lord uses their experience to underline His point. Jeremiah sees the drought's devastation as a covenant punishment for repeatedly breaking God's laws (Deuteronomy 11:16-17, "Be careful that you are not enticed to turn aside, serve, and bow in worship to other gods. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you. He will shut the sky, and there will be no rain; the land will not yield its produce, and you will perish quickly from the good land the Lord is giving you."). Jeremiah cries out to the God he knows lives in Israel's midst. Remember, God's *shekinah*, His physical presence, still resides in the Temple in Jerusalem. "You're with us, Yehovah. Why allow this drought?" Yehovah responds, "Truly they love to wander; they never rest their feet. So the Lord does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins" (14:10).

Again, the Lord tells Jeremiah not to intercede or pray for the Judahites (14:11). He's going to put an end to the betrayers. "But," Jeremiah tells the Lord, "that's not what the 'other prophets' are saying." "They lie," says the Lord, "and they're going to die along with the people and lay like refuse in the street." Even though Yehovah tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people, he is to still prophesy to them as if he were a Judahite crying and calling out to God (14:19). In their place, Jeremiah questions if God had rejected them, confesses their sin to God, and admits Yehovah is their sole source of help. The answer to this comes in the next chapter.

INSIGHT

Not all bad things come into our lives because the Lord has something against us, but it does happen. If we won't listen to the prodding of the Holy Spirit, then the next step is usually something more forceful to get our attention. It's best to cultivate a "sensitive ear" so the Lord doesn't have to smack us alongside our heads to get us to pay attention. Trust me. I know what I'm talking about.

August 14 : Scriptures Jeremiah 15-17

SUMMARY

Jeremiah's question is met with a bombshell answer, "Even if Moses and Samuel should stand before me, my compassions would not reach out to these people. Send them from my presence, and let them go" (15:1). In short, "even if the two biggest spiritual giants of Israel pray for you, Judah, I'd ignore them." What does God declare to Judah? Four outcomes for every person – death, sword, famine, or captivity. The only One who would or could show Judah any mercy is the Lord, and He isn't going to do so any longer. Then Jeremiah laments over his despised and rejected state among the people of Judah (15:10). But Yehovah says He'll care for Jeremiah even though He's bringing unstoppable, unsmashable "iron/bronze" (Babylon) from the north. They'll strip Judah's wealth and take her people captive.

Who said being a prophet was/is easy? Again, Jeremiah vehemently complains about the ministry the Lord created him to carry out. He has to endure persecution not for his words but for the words God had given him to speak. So why should Jeremiah endure such suffering and opposition? What did he ever do to deserve this (15:15-18)? Yehovah basically tells Jeremiah to repent for his foolish complaint. Jeremiah will continue as Yehovah's spokesman if he stops with the worthless talk and speaks the Lord's words. It's not Jeremiah who needs to cave, but the people who've gone astray. If Jeremiah commits himself to the Lord's task, then Yehovah will make him an unstoppable force and an immovable wall! God, Himself, will defend Jeremiah.

Well, that's not the end of the price Jeremiah has to pay for being the Lord's spokesman. Marriage and family are among the greatest blessings and looked forward to parts of life, and God tells Jeremiah that marriage and family life are not for him. Why? Because a spouse will lose a spouse, parents will lose children in the coming judgment by famine and sword. Death will be so widespread the corpses won't be buried. Yehovah also tells Jeremiah not to mourn with the mourners. This action isn't because Jeremiah is to show that both he and God are heartless. As God's representative, Jeremiah is to show that God will have no sympathy for those who have turned from Him. In other words, "You brought this on yourself through your rebellion." Jeremiah will have no marriage and family life because God is about to cut off the same from Judah.

The people ask, "Hey! What gives? Why are you doing this, Lord?" Yehovah tells them through Jeremiah it's because of their ancestors' sins, idolatry, and failure to follow His covenant laws, the same things they're doing but worse. Therefore, they've earned the ultimate covenant punishment – exile from the land God granted to them (16:13). *BUT*

even though the Lord says He has no grace for them (16:13), He will honor His word and bring them home from exile in such a remarkable and complete way that people will no longer refer to the Egyptian Exodus. The Greater Exodus (the Return) will overshadow the First Exodus (the Deliverance). This will only happen after the Lord has repaid His people fully (“doubly”) for their sin against Him.

Chapter 17 is an amazing section. Judah’s sin is so deep and defined, and it’s as if it were inscribed with a diamond drill on their stony hearts and altars (17:1). They’ve taken their land grant and used it for idol worship, so they’re going to lose it. The Judahites trusted in themselves rather than God, so they were cursed. But the person who trusts God is like the person of Psalm 2, full of life and spiritual vitality, who doesn’t have to worry when the circumstances of life aren’t favorable (17:5-8). What’s the key to living as the Lord wants His man or woman to live? The heart. But the heart is bent and twisted through sin. It continually leads us astray because of its condition, and we’re unaware of how deceitful it is. We easily convince ourselves that the wrong we’re doing is right, and that’s what’s happened to the Judahites. But the Lord knows our hearts. We can kid ourselves, but we can’t fool God. People think they’re clever by gaining wealth through unfair means, but they’ll be proved a fool when they lose it. That’s one example of a deceitful heart the Lord knows. Another is 17:12-13, where the Judahites trust their sanctuary, which is truly magnificent *if it’s used to worship the Lord correctly*. But if they abandon their relationship with God, they shouldn’t expect having God’s Temple in their midst to save them. They’ll be “written in the dust,” i.e., “doomed.” Rather than experiencing God’s life-giving Living Water, they’ll get dead, dry dust.

Once again, Jeremiah cries out to God for help because of his persecutor. They mock Jeremiah with, “Where’s God’s word, prophet? Bring it,” as a way to mock him. Jeremiah calls on God to defend him and bring down his persecutors because he’s remained faithful to Yehovah (17:14-18).

Jeremiah’s final word in chapter 17 is a choice. God’s Torah commands His people to observe the Sabbath by not working on it. Why is this an issue? Because the Sabbath is about God Himself. He was the first to observe it (Genesis 2:1-3), and those who follow Him also observe it. By keeping the Sabbath, God’s people remember Him as their Creator. Therefore, the call at the end of Jeremiah 17 is God’s call to His people to focus on Him and look to Him as their Provider and Protector, not their jobs or Temple.

INSIGHT

When God asks you to forsake something in your life that He allows for others, He’s not being mean. He knows His plans for you, and it’s likely His mercy at work. For the sake

of His plans for you, He might not want you to be encumbered with a spouse or a family, as in Jeremiah's case. The Lord once asked me to forsake a job for a few months to focus on Him. At the right time, He brought a job to me and set it in my lap. The fascinating part was that my focus-on-God time was preparation for my next ministry position. For some, it might be lifelong (see Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 7:32-35).