

The Prophets, Book 2

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was born near the end of the reign of the extremely wicked King Manasseh, the king who had Isaiah so cruelly put to death.

He was called to the prophetic ministry when very young, about 65 years after the death of Isaiah, in the 13th year of good King Josiah. He was undoubtedly a participant in Josiah's great revival, for it began one year after Jeremiah's calling. The remainder of his ministry, which was always difficult after Josiah's death, lasted about 25 years. Whereas the threat of destruction by Assyria was the setting for Isaiah's ministry, the threat of destruction by Babylon (and its final accomplishment) was the setting for Jeremiah's ministry.

The death of good King Josiah, which was lamented by Jeremiah, was an unhappy turning point for Jeremiah¹. The future for what was left of the backslid Southern Kingdom was entirely bleak, for the leaders and the people steadfastly refused to repent. For this reason, Jeremiah was in uninterrupted conflict with kings, priests, false prophets, and the people, telling them what they did not want to hear.

Jeremiah's message of unwelcome truth kept him in trouble; and, toward the end, he was cruelly imprisoned, along with his friend and scribe, Baruch. The only bright spot in his career was in its beginning: the revival under good King Josiah; after Josiah's death it was downhill all the way--to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. It was Jeremiah's painful lot to foresee, and then experience, the death throes of the nation, and its final destruction.

"Bad News Today, but Good News Tomorrow." Although most of Jeremiah's prophecies dealt with the present and immediate future, and were rebukes, condemnations and lamentations concerning the sins of the kings and the people, he also prophesied of the distant future, and some of it was very good news. He spoke of the Israelites' return to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity, of the coming Messiah, of the later dispersion of the Israelites under the Romans, and of the final re-gathering of Israel, at the end of the age, under the kingship of the Messiah. This latter event is one for which we still wait.

The "Weeping Prophet." Because Jeremiah foresaw the coming fall of Jerusalem and its destruction by Babylon, and because his prophecies were mostly of coming tragedy, which greatly grieved him, he is sometimes referred to as "the weeping

¹ II Chronicles 35:25.

prophet." His unhappy life has even given us a word in the English language; for, today, a message of impending bad news is called a "jeremiad."

Backsliding. The style of much of the Book of Jeremiah is poetic, and the signature term is "backsliding" (the kingdom's chief occupation after Josiah's death). Jeremiah uses the term 16 times; only one other book of the Bible (Hosea) uses it at all (three times)².

The International Setting. During Jeremiah's life a three-way struggle for world supremacy took place among Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. To the north Assyria, in the northern Euphrates Valley, had virtually ruled the world for 300 years, and had carried away the 10 northern tribes; but she was now growing weak. Babylon, in the southern Euphrates Valley, was growing steadily stronger. To the south and west Egypt, which had been the world power 1,000 years earlier, was again becoming ambitious. About the middle of Jeremiah's ministry, Babylon moved north and conquered declining Assyria; then, two years later, she crushed the invading Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish; and, 20 years later, Jerusalem fell. For the rest of Jeremiah's life, Babylon ruled the world.

Contemporary Prophets. Jeremiah was one of a brilliant constellation of Seventh Century BC prophets, whose ministries centered on the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. Habakkuk and Zephaniah were contemporaries of Jeremiah, as were Nahum, who was predicting the fall of Assyria, and Obadiah, who was predicting the ruin of Edom. Ezekiel preached in Babylon the same message that Jeremiah preached in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, also in Babylon, Daniel, God's man in Nebuchadnezzar's palace, was peering into the far distant end of this age, with prophecies concerning the End Times, which are not yet fulfilled.

Apparently, God had prepared and called a number of great prophets for this crucial, final, period in the history of His backslid, earthly kingdom.

Chronology in Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah is **not** chronological. This may be due to the fact that it was burned by wicked King Jehoiakim, and had to be completely rewritten by Baruch, with some later prophecies added. And, because of the practice of Old Testament prophets of mixing and combining prophecies, it is also possible that the separate prophecies were not chronological when Jeremiah dictated them to Baruch the first time. At any rate, it was rewritten on a long scroll, a continuous strip of papyrus or parchment, which prevented rearrangement of its portions³. Chapters 22 and 23 represent an example of this discontinuity. Chapter 22 consists of prophecies concerning Jehoiakim and his son Jehoiachin

² A variation of this word ("backslider") occurs in Prov 14:14; there are no other uses of this word, in any form, in the Bible.

³ Such long scrolls (or roles) were long, continuous strips; but they were carefully written in separate page-like portions, which are generally referred to by scholars as "leaves."

(Jeconia/Coniah), immediately following Chapt 21 which deals with the reign of Zedekiah, the final king, who reigned after Jehoiachin.

Finally, Chapter 23 is connected to no particular time; it stands alone in terms of chronology. This chapter is a sobering one, dealing with corrupt pastors and false prophets⁴.

Jeremiah's Boldness. Because, finally, he advised surrender to the Babylonians, to avoid the utter destruction of Jerusalem, he was accused of being a traitor and put into a miserable dungeon. Nebuchadnezzar spared his life when Jerusalem fell and offered him high office; yet Jeremiah cried against Babylon that, because she was destroying god's people, Babylon would be destroyed and never rebuilt. He could only speak the truth--and the news was all bad. He declined Nebuchadnezzar's offer, remained in Jerusalem to preside over its destruction and face an uncertain future.

Jeremiah's Last Days. After the killing of Gedeliah, Nebuchadnezzar's governor, the remnant of Judah's court, fleeing the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar, went down to Egypt for protection and took Jeremiah and Baruch with them. The written record of Jeremiah and Baruch ends at this point, but they were very likely put to death there, stoned by the Jews who still hated him.

There is a tradition to the effect that Nebuchadnezzar found Jeremiah and Baruch there, and took them back to Babylon where they lived out their lives.

There is also an Alexandrian tradition that Alexander the Great, when he conquered Egypt, found his grave in Egypt and took his bones to Alexandria where he gave them proper burial.

In the final analysis, only God knows how Jeremiah died, and where he was buried; the same is true of his friend Baruch⁵.

Jeremiah and the Tabernacle. There is, in the apocryphal book of II Maccabees (Chapter 2), an account of Jeremiah's removing the Tabernacle where it had been stored, and the Ark of the Covenant and Altar of Incense from the Temple, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. According to the passage, he hid them in a cave on Mount Nebo, which he then sealed, supernaturally, so that even those who went with him could not find it later, and that it would remain hidden "until the time that God gather his people again together...." This tradition is appealing, but is generally discredited.

⁴ The only place where the word "pastor(s)" occurs is in the Book of Jeremiah; he uses the word eight times.

⁵ One of the apocryphal books bears the name of Baruch, and purports to contain his prayers and messages to the captive Israelites. Like the other apocryphal books, it was rejected by the Great Synagogue when the Hebrew Scriptures were finalized after the return from Babylonian captivity. In this regard, see "Closing of the Canon" in Introductory Material.

A. Author. Jeremiah spoke the prophecies that constitute the content of the book that bears his name. His prophecies were written down (twice) by his faithful friend and helper, Baruch, who lived with him and probably died with him.

B. Place and Date. The book of Jeremiah was written (and rewritten) in Jerusalem, before, during and after the final conquering of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, with additions written in Egypt, about 600 BC.

C. Theme. The consistent theme of his message is that if Judah won't repent, Babylon will conquer and destroy Jerusalem. Toward the end, when backslid Judah had steadfastly refused to repent and return to God, Jeremiah knew that they would **never** repent, and that they **would be conquered**. Knowing this, he tells them that if they will submit, militarily and politically, to Babylon, they can at least escape total destruction of the city and the Temple. This only causes him to be accused of treason and consigned to a miserable dungeon.

D. Highlights. Highlights of Jeremiah include the following:

1. Jeremiah's Call to the Prophetic Ministry. (1:1-10)

Jeremiah, a son of the priest, Hilkiah, of the tribe of Benjamin, is called to the prophetic ministry in the 13th year of the reign of good King Josiah. God tells him that he was chosen for this work before he was born (perhaps, before he was even conceived). Jeremiah demurs, saying that he is too young; but YHWH Himself touches his mouth, imparting the prophetic gift⁶.

2. God Gives Jeremiah an Overview of the Future. (1:11-19)

God tells Jeremiah that He will bring judgment on Jerusalem in the form of the kings of the north, because of the paganism of the people, the kings, and the priests. He also warns Jeremiah (again) not to allow the kings, priests and people to intimidate him, and promises to protect him when they attack him.

3. The Foolishness of Turning to Paganism. (2:9-13)

In powerful poetry, Jeremiah summarizes the utter foolishness of the Israelites in rejecting the true and living God and His provision, to embrace pagan worship of idols which they have made, or otherwise provided for, themselves. The beautiful metaphor of the LORD as the fountain of living waters will be used by Jesus 500 years later as He ministers to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, and as He cries out to the people in the streets of Jerusalem on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles⁷.

NOTE: The phrase "living water(s)" appears in seven places in the AV (KJV): four places in the OT, and three places in the NT. Non-traditional, critical,

⁶ This is reminiscent of the call of Moses ("...I am not eloquent"), and the call of Isaiah ("...I am a man of unclean lips...").

⁷ John 4:1-14, 7:37-39.

translators sometimes render the underlying Hebrew or Greek as "Running" or "flowing" waters, rather than "living," thus replacing the supernatural with the natural. For an examination of this see the explanatory NOTE: following Highlight 22 in the study guide to Zechariah.

4. A Vision of the End Times. (3:12-19)

In the midst of condemnations for the prevailing paganism, there is a call to repentance, and a promise that individuals who repent will be part of a future ingathering of God's people. In apparent reference to the Millennial Reign of Christ, the prophet speaks of a time when the two kingdoms will be reunited, and there will be no need for the Ark of the Covenant as a symbol of God's presence, for the Lord Himself will reign in Jerusalem, over "all the nations⁸."

5. A Glimpse of New Covenant Righteousness. (4:1-4, 9-14)

Under the Old Covenant system, which prevailed until the coming of Jesus the Messiah, righteousness was external--a matter of what people did, and did not, do. It consisted of obeying the Law of Moses, in such things as dietary restrictions, sacrifices, circumcision of males, Sabbaths, and ceremonial washings.

When Jesus came, He shocked the nation by teaching that all such things were not what really mattered, but that what mattered was what went on within--our thoughts and attitudes. He spoke of adultery in the heart, of hatred as murder, and made possible righteousness as a gift from God, not of our own works, lest any man should boast. This radical change, from the Old Covenant system to that of the New Covenant, is still 600 years in the future, yet Jeremiah sees it coming, and speaks of it in beautiful metaphor. Verse 14 alone is a powerful, poetic, summary of the message of the Sermon on the Mount, concerning attitudes, values and thoughts.

To us, its meaning is clear, but to those of Jeremiah's day it must have been puzzling; and, to the few who could comprehend their meaning at all, his words must have been shocking.

6. "They Will Not Harken to Thee." (7:21-28)

Jeremiah (along with his fellow prophets) is to deliver God's warning one last time. He is to preach it all over the backsliding nation; but God informs him in advance that the nation is beyond repentance, from the common people to the king, and will not heed God's message of truth.

It seems almost cruel to send these dedicated men of God out to preach and prophesy, knowing that it will be in vain; but it isn't cruel, and it won't be in vain.

⁸ It is generally believed among Christians that Jesus the Christ of God will come to Earth a second time ("Second Advent"), and that He will reign over all the Earth for 1,000 years of peace while Satan is bound and powerless. This period of bliss is referred to as "the Millennium" or "the Millennial Reign of Christ." See in this regard, Rev 20:1-4.

It is actually a demonstration of the gracious love of God, for He is sending in his first team to warn the people fully, one last time, before they bring final destruction upon themselves. And it isn't in vain; for, in the process, we (and all generations after Jeremiah's time) are thus blessed with the truths and lessons in the writings of these prophets.

7. "Is there No Balm in Gilead?" (8:4-12, 18-22)

In Chapter 8 there is a ringing rebuke of the spiritual leaders, and of the people ("from the least even unto the greatest"), for their failure to teach, learn, and live according to, the Word of God. The spiritual leaders, both priests and prophets, have rejected the Scriptures and are telling the people what they **want** to hear (that they are doing fine when they aren't), and not what they **need** to hear (that they are grieving God with their sin and are about to be destroyed for it). The people of Judah are in deep trouble with God, and all they get from their apostate leaders is empty assurance that they are doing fine, "saying 'Peace, peace when there is no peace'." They give them superficial comfort, but do not deal with the very real, underlying, problem of sin; so nothing really changes⁹. They have lost their sense of shame, and cannot even blush¹⁰. The last verse is often quoted today, and gave rise to a popular old hymn. Gilead was noted for its "balm of Gilead," a healing substance made from the aromatic resin of a tree.

NOTES:

a. See the study guide to Genesis 31:22-35, **NOTE c**. Either the tree grew there, or the Gileadites imported the resin and produced the balm. Either way, Gilead was the center of commerce in this healing balm. This famous balm was known to Jacob (Gen 37:25). Today monks at Jericho make and sell a "balm of Gilead" from local plants, but it is probably not the same as that of Jacob's and Jeremiah's times.

b. *One of the sure signs of a sick culture is that it is not ashamed of its sins. A glaring example of this is the homosexual activist movement with their "gay pride" parades, where they publicly flaunt their perversions. And, sad to relate, this is true of our formerly Christian culture as a whole today--our culture has largely lost its sense of shame.*

8. "Learn Not the Way of the Heathen." (10:1-16)

⁹ There is a great deal of this being done today. There are huge churches built on what they call "seeker-friendly" ministry, centered on self-esteem, a shallow version of the love of God, and entertainment, with little or no mention of sin and the need to repent. More plainly it is what I call "feel-good religion" and, I fear, it is deceiving multitudes of people who think they are rightly related to God and headed for Heaven, but who are lost, unredeemed and undone.

¹⁰ Mark Twain wisely observed that man is the only animal which can blush, and the only one who has a reason to.

In exhorting the people to reject "the way of the heathen" with its man-made idols, Jeremiah gives us some interesting information about idols and how they were made. They were made in many forms and of various materials; the most crude were molded from fire-hardened clay or carved from soft stone. Some were made in molds, from molten metals. The idols were not only valued for their supposed spiritual power, but also for the materials of which they were made¹¹. Here Jeremiah describes some that were expensive and highly valued idols. They were made of wood, carved from a tree trunk or shaped so as to have a broad base, covered with beaten silver and gold, and then dressed in fine fabrics of purple (for royalty) and blue (for deity). The more wealthy the person, the more elaborate and expensive were the idols he possessed.

NOTE: Most of the things done at Christmas time have decidedly pagan origins, beginning with the date of the celebration (Jesus was not born in late December), which was chosen to coincide with the Roman festival of Saturnalia. Although there is a charming tradition about Martin Luther and the origin of the Christmas tree, there is no scriptural justification for it; and vv 1-5 can be used to argue the case for its pagan origins.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told the date of the birth of Jesus. He was probably conceived in December and born in September; this probability can be inferred with a fair degree of certainty from the fact that Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, was a priest of the course of Abia, which tells us at what time of year he was on duty in the Temple. Since Luke tells us that Zacharias' wife, Elisabeth, was six months into her pregnancy with John when Mary miraculously conceived Jesus, we can calculate the approximate time of the birth of Jesus. For a more thorough explanation of this, see "When Was Jesus Born?" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

9. How Far They Had Fallen! (11:11-23)

In Chapter 11 there is revealed a glimpse into how far gone Judah was in her rejection of the true God, and her zealous embracing of paganism. The LORD tells Jeremiah to proclaim in the streets of Jerusalem that the wicked people have gone so far with their spiritual adultery that, no matter what they cry to Him, He will not listen; their punishment is irreversible, and they have happily brought it upon themselves. They have pagan gods for every city, and pagan alters in every street. Even in Anathoth, a Levitical city, a city of refuge, and Jeremiah's

¹¹ I am using the past tense here, for we are dealing with the time of Jeremiah; but the very same thing is true today. There are pagan cults today, all over the World, who maintain their favorite idols, dress them and, in festivals, carry them about in public celebrations.

hometown, Jeremiah has been told that if he continues to speak for YHWH they will kill him! Anathoth is singled out for God's condemnation¹².

10. Jeremiah's Complaint and God's Reply. (12:1-5)

Jeremiah is troubled by the fact that, although the people, including the spiritual and political leaders, are living so wickedly, in open defiance of God and His laws, yet they are prospering in it. He doesn't understand, and he is wearied from his futile efforts to get them to repent. Why, he asks the Lord, does the way of the wicked prosper? The Lord's reply is an oft-quoted classic, and one which must have staggered even Jeremiah when he heard it. The Lord asks him how, if he has run with the footmen (lesser problems) and been too tired to carry on, can he then expect to run (successfully) with horses (greater problems). The Lord says that things will get even worse, speaking metaphorically of the Jordan when it is a peaceful benefactor, compared with it in flood, when it is dangerous and cannot be crossed. In effect, He is telling Jeremiah (a) things will get worse; and (b) toughen up and get ready for it.

11. Can a Leopard Change Its Spots? (13:22-27)

The Bible has had a tremendous impact on our English language, especially in its distilled nuggets of metaphor ("sayings") that express in a few words a significant bit of truth. The Lord continues to speak to Jeremiah of the awful fact that the Israelites of Judah have gone so far in their love of pagan sin that there is finally no remedy for them except destruction and captivity. They are not going to repent, and they are not going to change. This terrible sin is so well established, so deeply rooted in their hearts, that it is more likely that a leopard could change its spots and get rid of them, or the Ethiopian change his (dark) skin and become fair, than that Judah will repent.

12. Intercessors with Influence. (15:1)

God is no respecter of persons; He is not impressed with any of our titles or lofty positions, and He holds us all to the same standards of belief and behavior¹³. In one sense He loves us all alike; and yet there are a few who have occupied a special place in His heart. Enoch walked with Him "and was not," apparently taken up to Heaven without experiencing death. He calls Abraham His friend. David was a man after His heart, and the Lord was still talking about Him and granting relief from destruction "for my servant David's sake," centuries after David's death. And there were some who had a particularly close relationship which made them unusually effective intercessors with the Lord. This is clearly

¹² In Jeremiah's day Anathoth was a large, walled city of considerable importance; today, in its place, is Anata, a dismal village of about 100 inhabitants.

¹³ Acts 10:34.

revealed where He declares to Jeremiah that the sins of the Israelites have brought them to the place where destruction is inevitable. He declares to Jeremiah that He would not change his mind, **even if Moses and Samuel interceded** for the people and the kingdom.

13. A Second (and Complete) Exodus. (16:12-18)

As we have seen before, in the writings of the prophets we can have a problem with contexts, for one passage, even one verse, can apply to one thing, time or place, and the next passage to another. Chapter 16 is an example of this, and it is difficult to know how to apply certain parts of it. Yet, a careful reading of verses 12-18 reveals an important thing: that after the people are destroyed, and a remnant goes into captivity in Babylon, they will return, as in the exodus from captivity in Egypt. And, not only will the captives of Judah return, but also all those from the Kingdom of Israel ("from the land of the north, **and all the lands whither He had driven them**"). Here is another revelation that there were no "ten lost tribes of Israel." It is only reasonable to assume that when Babylon conquered Assyria and absorbed its land, it also absorbed its population, including its Hebrew captives. God did not allow 10 of His tribes to wander off to Europe as claimed by the British-Israel heresy; he declares that he will seek out every single one of His children. The wording of verses 15 and 16 makes this clear; and verse 16 causes us to wonder if Jesus was thinking of this prophecy when He called the first disciples to follow Him and become "fishers of men."

14. Whom Shall We Trust?--Two Choices. (17:5-8)

In four verses, Jeremiah summarizes a fundamental fact of life: there are only two possibilities when it comes to placing our trust (and, thus, choosing whom we will serve). One choice is to trust in man and the resources of man; the other is to trust in the LORD (YHWH) and his resources. In two verses he states one choice, and its consequences; and in the following two verses he states the other choice, and its consequences.

***NOTE:** Remember that, in the OT, "arm" (singular) is used to mean "strength" or "power"; and "hand" (singular) is sometimes used in the same way (for an example, see Ps 20:6-9).*

15. The Danger in Trusting Our Emotions. (17:9-10)

Many bad decisions are made because we act on our emotions. Debby Boone, a very fine Christian woman, wrote a beautiful song, "You Light Up My Life," which won awards and was extremely popular, in both the Christian and secular worlds. In it, however, there is one line that is unscriptural, and she was widely criticized for it in Christian circles. That line, "It can't be wrong when it feels so right," is in direct contradiction with Jeremiah 17:9, which tells us that the heart

(our emotions) can deceive us. In fact, in referring to our sinful nature, the verse tells us that, in this way, our hearts are "desperately wicked." This is strong language, and it should give us pause.

Emotions can be good, but they can also deceive us and lead to wrong choices; and the following verse (verse 10) tells us that only the LORD (YHWH) sees clearly what our emotions represent, and where they will lead. This verse also tells us that the LORD will sometimes put our emotions to a test ("try the reins [inner feelings or consciences]") The entire Bible tells us that emotions can be good, and are even necessary if we are to enjoy life and please God; but to make choices on the basis of emotion alone is to take a deadly risk¹⁴.

NOTE: In v 13 here the YHWH is beautifully described as "the LORD, the fountain of living waters." "Living waters" is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, and it appears in seven places in the AV(KJV). It appears in four places in the OT and in three places in the NT. Some non-traditional critical translators render this phrase as "running" or "flowing" water, thus reducing the supernatural to the natural. For a more thorough discussion of this and its dangers see the explanatory NOTE following Highlight 22 in the study guide to Zechariah.

16. Conflict with Pashur: a Turn for the Worse. (19:14-20:6)

After prophesying in Tophet, where the Lord had sent him to prophesy, Jeremiah returns to Jerusalem and prophesies in the Temple¹⁵. Pashur, a priest and Chief Governor of the Temple, hears Jeremiah prophesying final judgment on Jerusalem and doesn't like what he hears. He has Jeremiah beaten (or does it himself), and confines him in stocks¹⁶.

King Zedekiah, if he is aware of this, undoubtedly approves. It is a turning point (downward) in the conflict between Jeremiah, the people of Tophet, and Zedekiah, who do not want to hear the truth; from this point onward, Jeremiah will suffer physical punishment.

The following day, when Jeremiah is released from the prison and brought to Pashur, he tells Pashur that his name is now changed to "Magormissabib" (Terror on every side). Jeremiah tells him that Jerusalem will fall, that his friends shall fall by the sword, that he will witness it all. Furthermore, he, with all his family

¹⁴ See also Jer 18:11-13.

¹⁵ Tophet was in the Valley of Hinnom, somewhere east and south of Jerusalem, and was the very center of evil--the place where children were burned in the fire as offerings to Moloch. Its name is thought to be derived from the Hebrew word "toph" (drum), for the drums which were used to drown out the cries of the children who were being burned. Today there is not a trace of Tophet remaining, and its exact location is unknown.

¹⁶ Stocks were wooden devices for restraining a prisoner, which held the head, hands and feet of the prisoner in a fixed position, unable to move. It quickly became extremely painful for the prisoner thus confined. Stocks were still being used for public punishment in the early years of our American republic.

and many others to whom he has prophesied lies, will be taken captive to Babylon and will die there.

NOTE: The following highlight is an example of the discontinuities in Jeremiah. Chapter 22 contains prophecies about King Jehoiakim, and his son Jehoiachin (Jeconiah/Coniah), who reigned before Zedekiah, the final king.

17. Good News--and Bad News--for Two Wicked Kings. (22:1-5, 17-30)

The LORD sends Jeremiah to King Jehoiakim, with a message. First, the king is told that if he would only rule in righteousness, protect the helpless and shed no innocent blood, he would be allowed to reign in peace and prosperity¹⁷. However, knowing that he will not do these things, a final and terrible judgment is then pronounced upon him, climaxed with the most terrible thing a king could hear: not only will he not be buried with his ancestors, he will not be buried **at all**. Rather, he will have "the burial of an ass," cast on the ground, outside of the gates, and left to rot. And then, beginning with v 20, Jeremiah prophecies concerning Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin (Coniah/Jeconiah), telling him: that he will be childless (which he was) and will thus leave no son on the throne of David; and that he will be carried off to Babylon as a prisoner, with his mother (which he was).

NOTES:

a. Josephus wrote that Nebuchadnezzar had Jehoiakim killed, and his body dragged ignominiously a great distance from Jerusalem and left unburied.

b. It is interesting to note that here (and many places elsewhere) the LORD speaks of the monarchy as "the throne of David," and not as "the throne of Saul," who was the original king on that throne.

18. A Condemnation of Wicked Spiritual Leaders. (23:1-17)

Whereas Chapter 22 is an example of the discontinuity in Jeremiah, in that it is out of chronological order, speaking of a time previous to the situation in Chapter 21, Chapter 23 is tied to no particular time; it stands alone in terms of chronology, and could, in that sense, appear anywhere.

The entire chapter is a ringing denunciation of leaders who are in positions of authority over God's people, but who lead them astray and victimize them, rather than protecting them and leading them in paths of righteousness.

At the same time, there is the promise that, although the false prophets and wicked pastors have failed and will be punished, there will be a time in the future when the Lord Himself will provide leaders that will lead in righteousness, protect

¹⁷ Here, again, we see the concern of God for the helpless, and the priority in his mind of protecting them. Here, also, we see again how He hates the shedding of innocent blood. How long can we expect Him to withhold judgment on our sick nation for the oceans we have shed of the **most** innocent of blood, that of helpless, unborn babies?

the people, and feed them (spiritually). In the process of promising to make things ultimately right, there is a prophecy of the coming Messiah called "a righteous Branch" and "King" (verse 5) And, in the prophecy another name of the Lord is revealed: "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (*YHWH Tsidkenu*).

NOTE: Throughout the Bible, the shepherd and his flock of sheep are used as a symbol of the relationship of God with His people in general; Psalm 23 is, I believe, the classic example of this. This shepherd-sheep symbolism also applies to the NT Church, and to individual congregations of the Church. "Pastor" is a synonym for shepherd, but it is used only nine times in the entire Bible: eight times in the OT (all in Jeremiah), and once in the NT (Ephesians 4:11). The rest of the time the same words (the Hebrew "ra-aw" in the OT, and the Greek "poimen" in the NT) are translated "shepherd." In this the translators of the Authorized Version (KJV) followed the example of the earlier Geneva Bible. The significance of this is unknown, but it is not a contradiction, for the English word "pastor" is simply the Latin word for "shepherd." A benefit of thus introducing the word "pastor" to the Church's lexicon is that its use eliminates confusion as to whether one is referring to a spiritual leader, or to a literal keeper of sheep.

19. The Prophecy of 70 Years. (25:1-13)

In Chapt 25 (another chapter out of chronological order) there is Jeremiah's amazing prophecy as to the length of the coming Babylonian captivity¹⁸. Calling Nebuchadnezzar "my [God's] servant," Jeremiah prophesies that Nebuchadnezzar will conquer Judah and Jerusalem, leave it a desolation, and that he will carry away the king and the people into captivity in Babylon where they will be captives for 70 years¹⁹. He states that after the 70-year period Babylon will be punished (conquered), and that the Israelite remnant will return to the Promised Land²⁰.

NOTE: This prophecy, which is clearly supernatural, troubles critical theologians, who tend to reject all supernatural aspects of the Bible. So, how do they explain Jeremiah's knowing this, nearly 90 years in advance? You probably guessed it-- they contend that, what appears to be a supernatural prophecy, was actually written much later by someone else, after the return from captivity (maybe 300 BC) so as to make it appear to be supernatural.

20. Jeremiah's Letter: A Promise of a Happy Ending. (29:1-14)

¹⁸ The first verse of Chapt 25 states that the fourth year of King Jehoiakim was the first year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. This becomes important in the study of Daniel Chapt 1 and the first verse of Daniel 2. See the study guide to Daniel, Highlight 3, footnote 15.

¹⁹ The Lord (LORD of Hosts) also calls Nebuchadnezzar "My servant" in 27:6. "Nebuchadnezzar," here, elsewhere in Jeremiah, and in Ezekiel, is just another form of "Nebuchadnezzar."

²⁰ Jeremiah will repeat this prophecy in a letter of encouragement to the captives in Babylon, which Daniel will read and understand (29:10 f; Dan 9:2).

Having delivered his prophecy about the 70-year duration of the captivity in Babylon to those in Jerusalem, Jeremiah very thoughtfully repeats it in an encouraging letter to the captives who are already in Babylon. Having assured them that their captivity will end in victory and freedom, he encourages them to marry, have children, and make good lives for themselves in Babylon. Among those in Babylon who will read the letter and act upon it is the prophet Daniel (Daniel 9:1-2). Included in his letter to the captives are two beautiful promises, which have become favorites among Christians today. In fact, these promises have taken on lives of their own, usually lifted from their prophetic context.

21. But False Prophets in Babylon Reject the Letter. (29:20-23)

Not only are there false prophets in Jerusalem who hate and oppose Jeremiah, but there are some of the same in Babylon opposing the truth. They speak against Jeremiah's letter to the captives, and will pay a high price for their wickedness. Jeremiah states that Nebuchadnezzar will execute them, and apparently in a terrible way: like two false prophets already executed by Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah and Ahab, who were roasted to death over a fire--a slow and very horrible way to die²¹.

22. "The Time of Jacob's Trouble." (30:1-9)

There are nine verses in Chapt 30 which speak of a time of great, unprecedented, difficulty--a time which Jeremiah calls "the time of Jacob's trouble." At the end of this period, the LORD of Hosts (this name of God describes YHWH as the Commander of an invincible army) will free the people of God and they will "serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom [the LORD] will raise up."

Until relatively recent times, these verses were thought to speak of Babylonian (and Assyrian) captivity and the return to Jerusalem. But the prophecy says that the returned people will serve "David their king, whom [God] will raise up unto them." What can this mean? Was David to be raised from the dead and restored to his throne? Will he be raised at some time in the future²²?

When the prophecy was delivered by Jeremiah, it was undoubtedly taken to refer to the contemporary situation: the fall of Jerusalem; the final captivity in Babylon; and its predicted end of the exile, with the return to the Promised Land and the restoration of Jerusalem.

Today most orthodox Christian scholars interpret this as a reference to the Great Tribulation of Daniel and Revelation, and the eventual triumph of God, with Jesus on the throne of David, as the ultimate fulfillment of the perfect king, symbolized and foreshadowed as a type of Christ by the historic David.

²¹ These two are not the kings of the same names, for King Ahab is already long dead (in the time of Elijah), and King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, is still alive in Jerusalem (although he will be blinded by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem, and taken in chains to Babylon where he will die).

²² Hebrew scholars have taken this reference to David to mean the coming Messiah.

As we ponder this, we should remember that both interpretations can be (and probably are) valid.

23. The Ten Northern Tribes Will Also Return. (31:15-21)

Chapter 31 is filled with wonderful assurances that there will be a limit to the self-inflicted exile of the Israelites, and that they will in the fullness of time return to the Promised Land in peace and prosperity. Included is the beautiful declaration that God's love for His people is without limits (verse 3), and a statement rich in prophetic meaning, including a messianic prophecy that will be quoted by Matthew (Matthew 2:17-18) concerning the slaughter of the innocents by Herod (verse 15). And, almost as a side issue and easily overlooked in the reading, in the midst of the promises of restoration for the Kingdom of Judah there is the prophecy that the remnant of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), which had been taken into captivity more than 100 years earlier, is included in the promises of return and restoration²³.

24. The Promise of a New and Better Covenant. (31:31-34)

As Jeremiah prophesies of better times in the future, he announces that the covenant made with the Israelites through Moses will someday be replaced by a new and better covenant. There will be no need for the Law as it was physically engraved on tables of stone, for it will be spiritually written in the fleshly tables of their hearts, that is, it will be implanted in their affections and change their values from within.

We now call this the New Covenant, and we know that it was established by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; but, as Jeremiah spoke of it, that would be 600 years into the future. This New Covenant is the theme of the Book of Hebrews, and this prophecy of Jeremiah is quoted there in Chapter 8²⁴. This concept of the law, written "in the fleshly tables of the heart" is also presented by Paul in his Second Letter to the church at Corinth²⁵.

It is this new way of God in dealing with His people that now makes possible our personal, intimate, redemptive, relationship with Him--a thing unknown and unthinkable under the Old Covenant of the Mosaic Law. Today, we understand and rejoice in the blessings of the New Covenant; but, to those sinful, backslid people in Jerusalem in 600 BC, with Nebuchadnezzar losing patience with them and disaster at their doorsteps, it must have sounded like fantasy.

²³ This is further evidence of the falseness of the theory that the 10 northern tribes failed to return and became the "ten lost tribes of Israel." Notice also that in announcing the future New Covenant in 31:34, the future promise is to both the houses of Israel and Judah. This is also stated clearly in vv 1-3. For a fuller discussion of this, see "The Ten 'Lost' Tribes" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

²⁴ Hebrews 8:8-11. This is the longest passage of the Old Testament that is quoted in the New Testament

²⁵ II Corinthians 3:3.

25. The Amazing Accuracy of the Prophecies Concerning Zedekiah. (32:1-5; 34:1-3)

Jeremiah is imprisoned by Zedekiah for prophesying that Nebuchadnezzar will prevail, and will conquer Jerusalem. In the prophecy Jeremiah declares that Zedekiah will be captured, will see Nebuchadnezzar's eyes, up close, and will hear him speak ("mouth to mouth"). He further says that Nebuchadnezzar will "lead" Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will stay until he dies. Meanwhile, Ezekiel, a captive in Babylon, prophesies that Zedekiah will be captured and brought to Babylon, and will die there, "although he will not see it²⁶."

How perfectly accurate were those prophecies, delivered by two men of God who were hundreds of miles apart, even to the detail that Nebuchadnezzar will "lead" Zedekiah to Babylon for, of course, he will be blind! For, we know from the record in II Kings 25:6-7 that Zedekiah, with his entourage, was captured and taken to Riblah, where he literally saw a furious Nebuchadnezzar's eyes (and that must have been a terrifying sight!), and heard him speak, in pronouncing judgment (another unsettling experience). He then saw his sons executed (his last sight), was then blinded, and (literally) led to Babylon where he stayed until the LORD "visited him" (until he died).

26. The Rebellious King Burns the Scroll of Jeremiah. (36:1-26)

Chapter 36 is another chapter of Jeremiah that is out of sequence (for the probable explanation, see "Chronology in Jeremiah," in the introduction to this study guide to Jeremiah).

In the 4th year of King Jehoiakim, the Lord commands Jeremiah to write all the prophecies he has been given, in a scroll. And so Jeremiah dictates his prophecies to Baruch, who writes them "with ink"; then Jeremiah sends Baruch to the Temple to read the prophecies to all who will hear him. There is a fast day proclaimed ("before the LORD"), which makes for a large crowd at the Temple, including all the princes²⁷. In the Temple, in the chamber of one "Gemeriah, the son of Shaphan the scribe" (apparently an important man in the Temple), Baruch reads the prophecies to a crowd (perhaps from a balcony or window of the chamber).

When Michaiah, son of this Gemeriah, hears the prophecies he is impressed; he goes to a gathering of all the princes and summarizes the prophecies for them. The princes are impressed, and send for Baruch to read it all to them. When the princes hear the prophecies they are fearful; they tell Baruch to hide (with Jeremiah), and they describe the prophecies to King Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim sends

²⁶Ezekiel 12:13. Ezekiel had been taken to Babylon with King Jehoiachin, 11 years earlier.

²⁷ Apparently, even in this time of extreme apostasy, the religious leaders (and the king) were still mixing a little orthodoxy with their paganism.

for the scroll, hears only the first part ("three or four leaves"), and becomes very angry. He takes the scroll, cuts it into pieces, and then burns it in his fireplace. The furious king then orders the arrest of both Baruch and Jeremiah, but the Lord supernaturally hides them.

NOTE: In 1975 a collection of clay seals was found, 44 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Among them were the seals of three individuals mentioned in Chapter 36: one was a seal of "Baruch, son of Neriah"; another was a seal of "Gemeriah, son of Shaphan"; and the other was the seal of "Elishama, servant of the king." Once again, archeology confirms the Biblical narrative.

27. Jeremiah and Baruch Replace the Scroll (and Add More). (36:27-32)

The Lord then tells Jeremiah to make a new scroll, to replace the one which Jehoiakim had destroyed. In addition, the LORD gives Jeremiah another prophecy for Jehoiakim--a terrible prophecy, that none of his offspring will sit on the throne of David, and a reminder that his body shall be thrown out on the ground--not buried²⁸. Baruch and Jeremiah not only replace the scroll that the king had destroyed, but add more prophecies to the ones on the first scroll.

* * * * *

THE END OF THE KINGDOM: THE HISTORICAL SETTING

The final 22 years of the Kingdom of Judah and its capitol, Jerusalem, were turbulent years, as God's patience with the prevailing paganism came to a violent end.

Those years were lived out against the backdrop of geopolitical power struggles, with the Promised Land alternately controlled by Syria, Egypt, and Babylon, in that order, punctuated with broken vows of loyalty and rebellions against the controlling powers. The history must be assembled from parts found in II Kings, II Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. It is difficult to avoid confusion in reading Jeremiah and Ezekiel without a basic understanding of the times. The following summary should be helpful in keeping events and their significance straight.

1. Good King Josiah was allied with Syria during its war with Egypt, and he was killed in battle, fighting the Egyptians, who eventually conquered Syria. Josiah was the last godly king of Judah; and, in many ways, the most godly of them all.
2. Upon the death of Josiah, his son, Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum), ascended to the throne. By this time the Egyptians controlled the region; and, after only

²⁸ See in this regard Jer 22:18-19.

three months, Pharaoh Necho deposed Jehoahaz. He placed his brother Eliakim, on the throne as a puppet, and changed his name to Jehoiakim (the one who burned Jeremiah's prophecies). Pharaoh Necho then took Jehoahaz as a prisoner to Egypt, where he died.

3. During the 11-year reign of Jehoiakim, Egypt was weakening, and the balance of power in the region was shifting to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem; Jehoiakim became a puppet king under Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar carried many of the Temple implements and treasures to Babylon, along with some of the leading citizens. Included among these leading citizens were the young prophet Daniel and his three famous friends, Hananiah [Shadrach], Mishael [Meshach], and Azariah [Abednego]), all of the royal family.

Jehoiakim broke his oath and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who again moved upon Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was murdered and his body was thrown over the wall to be eaten by dogs and vultures and rot, as Jeremiah had prophesied.

4. Upon the ignominious death of Jehoiakim, his young son, Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah and Coniah) replaced him on the throne of David. At the time of his succession, the Egyptians had been driven back to Egypt, and the Babylonians were occupying the fortified cities around Jerusalem. After only three months of Jehoiachin's reign, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin wisely surrendered. Thereupon he, his family, and many of the leading citizens (including the prophet Ezekiel) were taken to Babylon as prisoners.

5. Nebuchadnezzar replaced Jehoiachin as a puppet king with his uncle, Mattaniah, whose name Nebuchadnezzar changed to Zedekiah; he was king for the last 11 years of the kingdom.

After 8 years on the throne, Zedekiah stupidly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, unwisely allied himself with Egypt, and Nebuchadnezzar's army returned to besiege Jerusalem for the final time. Jeremiah was in and out of prison during this period, with his imprisonment increasingly cruel, as Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem reached its climax.

Zedekiah was somewhat sympathetic with Jeremiah and his message, even intervening on one occasion to save Jeremiah's life; but he was weak. In the scriptural account we find him actually speaking with Jeremiah in secret, to ask him to pray and prophesy²⁹. And, when the princes wanted to put Jeremiah in a muddy cistern to die, Zedekiah disapproved; but, like Pilate with Jesus would later say to the murderous mob, he told them in effect, "Go ahead, but it won't be my fault³⁰."

²⁹ Jeremiah 37:17.

³⁰ Jeremiah 38:1-6.

6. After a terrible siege, which ended with famine and pestilence, Jerusalem fell and Zedekiah was taken, blinded and in chains, to Babylon where he died. The Temple was burned, and the city reduced to rubble.

7. Nebuchadnezzar installed one Gedeliah as governor of the region, and Gedeliah made his headquarters at Mizpah (Jerusalem's days as the Isrialite capitol were over, and it would not regain that status for more than 2,500 years).

Nebuchadnezzar, who was aware of Jeremiah's urging the king to surrender to Babylon, freed him from prison and offered him an honored place in his court; but Jeremiah chose to stay with Gedeliah. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon, leaving only administrators and a small military force.

8. One Ishmael, an ambitious surviving member of the royal family, foolishly led a rebellion against Babylon, murdered Nebuchadnezzar's governor, Gedeliah, slaughtered many, including the small Babylonian army contingent. The commanders of outlying security forces gathered and defeated Ishmael, but feared that Nebuchadnezzar would blame them for the revolt. They fled to Egypt, and took Jeremiah and Baruch with them.

Jeremiah and Baruch probably died in Egypt.

And, now, back to the study.

* * * * *

28. Ebedmelech Saves Jeremiah's Life. (38:1-13)

With the king's reluctant permission the princes, who hate Jeremiah with passion, lower him into a muddy cistern with neither water nor food, and leave him there to die. Ebedmelech, an Ethiopian eunuch and a personal servant of the king, goes to Zedekiah and intercedes for Jeremiah, telling him that if Jeremiah is left there he will die. Zedekiah, again dealing secretly for fear of the princes, sends Ebedmelech and 30 men to rescue Jeremiah³¹.

29. The Fear of Man Brings Disaster. (38:14-28)

When Jeremiah is brought up out of the cistern, the king has a meeting with Jeremiah, again in secret, asking him what he should do. Jeremiah tells him that if he will go outside the wall and surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, he and his family will live. Then Zedekiah truly reveals his weakness of character: he tells Jeremiah that he fears that if he does that, the Jews who have already surrendered, and gone over to Nebuchadnezzar's side, will mock him. The king rejects Jeremiah's

³¹ It is interesting to note that when Ebedmelech raises Jeremiah up out of the cistern, he arranges to have cloth pads put under Jeremiah's arms to ease the pain of being pulled up by a rope (38:11-13). The princes gave him no such padding when they lowered him into it.

prophetic advice and Jeremiah, sworn to secrecy, does not reveal to the princes what the king has said. He remains a prisoner, in chains but in relative comfort, until the city falls.

NOTE: It is natural for us to desire the approval of others, but this desire can be a deadly trap. Here we see the king with an opportunity to obey God, save his life, save the lives of all in his family, and prevent the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Yet, because he fears that the Jews who are already in the service of Nebuchadnezzar will mock him and treat him with disrespect, he chooses to allow the real disaster to take place. What a price he paid! And how true is the scriptural warning that, "The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe"³².

30. The End of the Kingdom. (39:1-10)

In Zedekiah's 11th year the Babylonian army is about to breach the walls of Jerusalem and Zedekiah realizes that he is finished. As we have seen (II Kings 25; II Chron 36), he attempts to flee with his family to Jericho, probably headed for Egypt, but is captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar has Zedekiah's sons executed before his eyes, and then blinds Zedekiah so that his last sight on earth is the killing of his sons. Zedekiah is then taken in chains to Babylon where he will die³³. Jerusalem is rubble, the Temple is burned, and the kingdom begun by Saul and Samuel has come to a dismal, ignominious, end.

31. Jeremiah Is Given Carte Blanche. (39:11-40:6)

Upon the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, still in chains, is taken with other captives from Jerusalem to Ramah; but Nebuchadnezzar has Jeremiah on his mind. He is aware that Jeremiah, all along, has been advising the kings of Judah to cooperate with Nebuchadnezzar and submit to his authority. He seeks out Jeremiah, has his chains removed, and offers him carte blanche: he offers Jeremiah a place of honor and wealth in Babylon, but gives him freedom to choose to stay in Judah, or to go anywhere else that he chooses. Meanwhile, Gedaliah is made governor over the remnant left in Judah, and he makes his headquarters in Mizpah, near Jerusalem, with a contingent of Babylonian soldiers³⁴. Gedaliah is a good man, and the son of Jeremiah's friend, Ahikam, who had protected Jeremiah about 20 years earlier while Jehoiakim was king³⁵. Jeremiah elects to stay with Gedaliah.

³² Proverbs 29:25.

³³ This event is related by Josephus, in perfect accord with the scriptural account, but adds greater detail, including the statement by Nebuchadnezzar that God is displeased with Zedekiah's treachery (Antiquities x. 8. 2). It is obvious that Josephus was familiar with the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

³⁴ At Lachish in 1935, J.L. Starkey of the Wellcome-Marston archeological expedition found, in the layer of ash from its burning by Nebuchadnezzar, a seal which read "Belonging to Gedaliah, the one who is over the house [in the position of authority]."

³⁵ Jeremiah 26:24.

NOTE: *The scattered Hebrew remnant that is left in the Promised Land includes some armed bands that have been evading the Babylonian army, and they have apparently been living largely by banditry. There are also many scattered Jews who have fled into the surrounding pagan nations. Gedaliah sends word around that the people who remain behind are free to take possession of abandoned orchards, vineyards and farms, and to settle down and prosper in peace under the authority of Babylon. Many of the people who had fled into the surrounding pagan nations return and happily settle down; but some of the bandit leaders don't want to settle down and reap the good of the land. One of these leaders, Ishmael, is a member of the royal family who has ambitions to take over the region for himself and rule it. Gedaliah is warned about Ishmael's intentions, but refuses to believe it. Gedaliah's job will be difficult, and he will not last long.*

32. Ishmael Ruins Everything. (Chapter 41)

After seven months Gedaliah, a good man but too trusting, is visited by Ishmael, an ambitious, wicked member of the royal family, accompanied by 10 other men of the royal family; they are welcomed by Gedaliah as friends, and they all dine together³⁶. After eating, Ishmael and his men rise up and murder Gedaliah and those with him; they then carry out the slaughter of many more in Mizpah, including the detachment of Babylonian soldiers posted there by Nebuchadnezzar. They then throw the large number of corpses into a pit, a fortified excavation that had been made by King Asa more than 200 years earlier, take the rest of the people at Mizpah (including the king's daughters) and head for Ammon. Word of the slaughter reaches Johanan, one of the captains of Gedaliah's outlying military force, who gathers the rest of the force, overtakes Ishmael and frees the captives. Ishmael and a few of his men escape. Fearing that they may be blamed for the rebellion by Nebuchadnezzar, Johanan does not return to Mizpah. He, his forces, and the rescued captives, camp at Chimham, near Bethlehem, with thoughts of fleeing to Egypt. Jeremiah and Baruch, having survived Ishmael's slaughter, are with them.

NOTE: *In an interesting footnote to the treachery and cruelty of Ishmael, after he has slaughtered Gedaliah and many others, a group of 80 pious men approach Mizpah on some sort of religious pilgrimage; they seem not to have heard that Jerusalem has been destroyed and the Temple burned. Ishmael goes forth to meet them, weeping (What an evil deceiver he was!); he welcomes them, gains their trust, and then has them also slaughtered and their bodies thrown into the pit with*

³⁶ It is pretty obvious, although not stated, that Ishmael was accompanied by more than just his 10 fellow aristocrats, for otherwise he could not have carried out the slaughter at Mizpah, including the killing of the detachment of Babylonian soldiers. It also seems that he was acting in partnership with the King of Ammon (see 40:13-16).

the rest of his victims. One wonders about them and their origins; but they simply appear mysteriously, are slaughtered, and disappear into the mists of time.

33. "Seek the LORD Thy God for US." (Chapter 42)

Johanan and the other leaders of the Israelite remnant ask Jeremiah to seek "the LORD thy God" for them, so they will know what to do next³⁷. Jeremiah prays for 10 days, and the Lord speaks to him, saying that they should remain in the land of Judah, that they need have no fear of Nebuchadnezzar, and if they remain in the land He will protect and prosper them. But, says the LORD, if they go to Egypt Nebuchadnezzar will follow them and kill them there. Then Jeremiah rebukes them, telling them by a word of knowledge that he knows that they never intended to obey the LORD's guidance anyway; he tells them that they will follow their own advice, will go down to Egypt, and will be destroyed there.

34. Jeremiah Is Taken to Egypt. (Chapter 43)

Johanan takes the remnant, including the king's daughters, Jeremiah and Baruch, to Egypt; the vast majority of them will never see the land of Judah again. They settle in Tahpanhes, a border town on the eastern side of the Nile delta, where Pharaoh maintains a palace. At the entrance to Pharaoh's palace Jeremiah prophesies to the people that the LORD will send Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Egypt, that he will take over that palace, and that they will die there for their disobedience.

35. And the LORD Says, "Just Watch Me." (44:1-19; 26-30)

In Egypt Jeremiah again prophesies to the rebellious Israelites. They are insisting that when they had served the pagan gods in the past, they had prospered (they are obviously exercising extremely selective memory); and they declare that they will continue to serve the pagan gods, especially "the Queen of Heaven" (Asherah, goddess of sex and fertility, known in Egypt as Isis). Through Jeremiah, the LORD tells them to watch and see what will happen; He tells them that, for their disobedience, He will cause Pharaoh to be conquered, Egypt will be made desolate and the pagan gods destroyed, in the same way that He has caused Zedekiah to be conquered and Jerusalem to be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. And in the process, the LORD says, all the men will die by the sword and by famine. Only a small remnant will escape to return to Judah.

NOTE: Chapter 45 is a short prophecy to Baruch (out of sequence); Chapters 46 through 49 are prophecies of the destruction, by Babylon, of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria, Kedar (nomadic Arabs), Hazor (non-nomadic Arabs),

³⁷ When Elhanan and the other leaders speak to Jeremiah about seeking guidance, they speak of "the LORD **thy** God." This tells us two interesting things: (a) they know very well the name of Jeremiah's YHWH the Elohim; and (b) by this time they are so thoroughly committed to the pagan gods of the Canaanites that they no longer consider YHWH the Elohim to be **their** God.

and Elam (the land beyond the Tigris and east of Babylonia, centered on Susa [Shushan]). And, finally, Chapters 50 and 51 (out of sequence) predict the downfall and destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians. Chapter 52 (out of sequence) is a summary of the downfall and destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the Israelites of Judah, already told in Chapter 39.

36. An Unpleasant Message for Babylon. (50:1-3, 9-11, 35-42; 51:7-12, 56-64)

Chapters 50 and 51, out of sequence, contain a prophecy of doom for Babylon. These two chapters seem to have constituted a single scroll to be delivered to Babylon in the 4th year of King Zedekiah. In them Jeremiah predicts the conquering of Babylon by an irresistible power "out of the north" in the form of the Medes and Persians³⁸. The prophecy seems even to describe the way that the city of Babylon, thought to be impregnable, would be entered by the conquering armies: by diverting the flow of the Euphrates, drying up the channel and providing entrance to the city through the river bed. Jeremiah's prophecy is in perfect harmony with that of Isaiah, 100 years earlier, and repeats the significant fact that when the glorious city of Babylon is finally and completely destroyed, it will never again be rebuilt and inhabited, but will be the dwelling place only of wild animals³⁹. This prophecy was to be taken to Babylon by Seraiah, Baruch's brother and a chamberlain (high ranking servant) of King Zedekiah. Seraiah accompanied Zedekiah, in the 4th year of his reign, on a trip to Babylon in which he apparently was to renew and confirm his oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar (which he soon broke). Jeremiah commanded Seraiah to read the prophecy publicly in Babylon (an extremely bizarre thing to do when on a diplomatic mission to profess friendship and loyalty), and then to tie a rock to the scroll and throw it into the Euphrates⁴⁰. Thus, he was to dramatically illustrate, by the scroll's sinking into the river, the ultimate sinking of Babylon into permanent oblivion, a message not likely to make friends with the leaders in Babylon⁴¹.

NOTE: *When the scriptural accounts are all taken together, they tell us that the Lord used Babylon as His instrument, to bring final judgment on Judah; it even seems from the Book of Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar, once delivered from his*

³⁸ This prophecy, written 60 years before the event, unthinkable at the time of its utterance, is particularly accurate in that it speaks, not of one great nation, but of "an assembly of great nations" which will conquer Babylon (50:9). This was fulfilled by the joint attack of the Medes and Persians, which finally accomplished the breach and destruction of the city.

³⁹ See the study guide to Isaiah 13 (Highlight 9) and the associated footnote.

⁴⁰ All, or portions, of the scroll of the Book of Jeremiah were destroyed and had to be rewritten, at least twice: first, when wicked King Jehoiakim burned it in the fireplace, and here, where two chapters were thrown into the Euphrates.

⁴¹ As an example of the amazing validity of the Word of God, see the description of the fall of Babylon in 51:57; the princes of Babylon were literally drunk on the night that the city fell, as Jeremiah prophesied in v 57 (Dan 5:1-4).

pride, became a believer and a child of God. Yet, because Babylon's subsequent leaders clung to their paganism, the city would ultimately be destroyed. None of these prophecies could have been comprehensible to the Babylonians of that day (perhaps not even comprehensible to Isaiah and Jeremiah); but they were, nonetheless, true. There is a lesson here for us: the only wise course is to take the Lord at His word, whether or not we understand it.