



**JEREMIAH
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

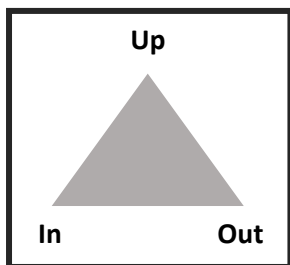
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH: 1-26

I love Jeremiah, who is generally known as the weeping prophet. When you heard he was coming, you needed to stock up on the old tissues! He was likely around fourteen years of age when he took up office, hence, the Lord says to him in chapter 1, *“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’”*.

Jeremiah served for around forty years. The word God gave him, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I set you apart,”* has been quoted over thousands of years and is still a powerful expression of how God is the Master of all creation, proving there are no accidents. God who began a good work in YOU will see it to fulfillment! (Philippians 1:6)

Jeremiah was the major prophet during the decline and fall of Judah’s southern kingdom. The nature of his ministry consisted of tearing down and rebuilding, uprooting and planting. Basically, Jeremiah was a prophet of doom who was even forbidden to marry so he could fully devote himself to the preaching of God’s judgment. What a guy!

Bible at the ready, journal and coffee! Off we go!

Phil

Read

Jeremiah 1

Live

I love how the Lord called Jeremiah to prophesy even before he was born. His sole purpose in life was to prophesy to Judah. His call is very similar to that of John the Baptist. Neither had any private life at all; their lives were solely for the purpose of God to be fulfilled. It would seem that the Lord didn't want Jeremiah weighted down with worldly things and separated him for a purpose. Jeremiah didn't choose to be a prophet, God poured out His Spirit on him and ordained him for this purpose.

Notice that Jeremiah was to prophesy to the nations, plural, not just to Judah. This prophecy, like all inspired Scripture, is both the word of man and the Word of God. It is the divinely inspired and infallible Word of God but brought through the personality of man. When God uses a person, He does not erase their personality; He wants to use that person's sanctified personality.

King Josiah was one of the better kings of Judah, zealous for reform. In the eighth year of his reign Josiah sought the Lord, and a few years later he began an aggressive campaign to purify Israel of idolatry to return to the Lord. God called these two giants, Josiah and Jeremiah, to serve at the same time. Each supported the other. They served God faithfully and removed every excuse Judah might offer for the judgment that eventually came through Babylon.

Because many of his prophecies have echoes and hints of previous prophets of Israel, it seems that Jeremiah grew up knowing God's Word. His life and thoughts were moulded to a large extent by an early acquaintance with the utterances of the eighth century BC prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, and probably also by the lives and sayings of Elijah and Elisha. What a rich heritage!

Pray

Father, I am called by my name. You have searched me, LORD, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It's good to note at the outset in this book that God often refers to Judah and Jerusalem as all of Israel, even though the ten northern tribes fell to the Assyrians some 100 years before Jeremiah's work as a prophet.

Jeremiah's training was over and God was ready to give him "*the word of the Lord*" for the nation. Israel was forsaking God yet again in the committing of not just one sin but two! They had forsaken the true giver of life, God Himself, and as if that weren't bad enough, they began to dig for their own stuff. They forsook God, the fountain of life, light, prosperity, and happiness, and they joined themselves to idols from which they could receive neither temporal nor spiritual good! Their conduct was the excess of stupidity and madness. Imagine putting anything in a broken pot. Who would do such a thing? Yet we all do it, and when we do, we too commit two huge mistakes: we forsake God, and we lean on our own understanding, not a good idea!

The key word in this chapter is "*contend*" as it appears a few times. These people certainly had a lot to contend for. Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord in the wilderness, but compared to the present, Israel's love for the Lord then was like that of a betrothed bride for her groom. When Jeremiah began speaking with the statement, "*Thus says the Lord,*" the Hebrews would listen. This proclamation was for all the people and it was to be spoken so every ear could hear. God had not overlooked the loyalty of their past and still absolutely loved His people. Their espousal was to God; they were the wife of the Lord. They sought God when they were helpless in Egypt and God led them and cared for them in the wilderness for forty years. They were repentant and thankful when God performed a miracle for them, but they would quickly fall back into idolatry the minute the problem was over.

Pray

Father, I cast my cares on You and bring You my insufficiency and fears, my stress and weariness. In my restlessness, grant me grace to be still and to know You are God. Don't let me make the foolish mistake of putting my gifts in bags that have holes. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

According to the law and practice of the country, if a woman was divorced by her husband and became the wife of another man, the first husband could never take her back again. Israel had been married to the Lord, joined in solemn covenant to worship and serve only Him, but they turned from following Him and became idolatrous. On this ground, considering idolatry as a spiritual adultery, the law said Israel could nevermore be restored to Divine favour. But God, this first husband, in the abundance of His mercy, was willing to receive back this adulterous spouse if she would abandon her idolatries and return to Him. This was, and still is, the shocking revelation of the height, depth, breadth and length of God's incredible love for you and me.

Israel had been set aside by God to walk holy lives before Him. They were to demonstrate His holiness here on the earth and were actually the firstfruits of God's family. They had 'first son' status with God, the firstborn son of each family having to be bought back with silver shekels of redemption. God blessed those who blessed Israel and cursed those who did them evil. They were truly God's chosen people and yet what injustice and injury has been done to them. There is no unrighteousness in God, nor can any be done by Him. He never suffers His faithfulness to fail or any of the good things He has promised to be lacking.

As the chapter closes out, again we have the people turning back to God. It seems that God's people have finally realised that they brought the destruction upon themselves by worshipping false gods. They realise they cannot help themselves, so repent and ask for God's help. God loves a humble heart and He will rescue them from their despair again. What a God!

Pray

Father, how amazing is Your love. An eternity of eternities will not be able to fathom it. Its strength is unbreakable, its force unstoppable, its ability unmeasurable. Yet You bestow it upon me. In a world that says, "me, me, me," You step in and offer *agape* love – a love that seeks no return, that has no boundaries and doesn't even demand a response. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The images in this chapter are again filled with the rebuke of a long-suffering God towards His chosen people. One cannot miss the stark contrast between the disobedience of these people and the natural order of the world. Patrick Miller comments, "*Covenant and creation are so connected that the dissolution of the one threatens the other.*" God's judgment makes us aware of the fact that human sinfulness is not simply about us alone. Obedience to God's covenant is intimately connected to our relationship with others and to the created order. When things are not right among humans, the whole earth groans. When we inflict violence on each other, we hurt the earth. And when we abuse God's good creation, we damage ourselves. Knowing God, by the prophetic definition, means that we act justly with each other and live responsibly in relationship to all of God's creation.

I have always been intrigued by verse 3. Fallow ground is ground that having once been tilled has lain uncultivated for a long time. Jeremiah is speaking to a nation that has been long uncultivated in righteousness. His cry is that true repentance would break up their fruitless and hardened hearts. Then, when the seed of the word of life is sown, there will come a restoration. It is an ongoing warning to us against worldly cares and concerns that can arise like thorns and choke the good seed. Oh how we need to break up the unploughed ground today!

This chapter provides us with much to ponder on the nature of divine judgment. God's judgment causes us to take a sobering look at the consequences of our failures as human beings. Here, we read the plain truth about the outcomes of our short-sightedness. This judgment pushes us to take responsibility for these failings, to turn from our destructive ways and fix what we have made wrong. How we do that is quite simple really; it is called repentance – turning away from evil and turning toward good.

Pray

Father, help me to break up the hard ground. Cultivate in me righteousness, and steer me away from the thorn bushes of stress, worry, shame, and guilt. I want to seek Your ways above all others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jeremiah, having described the judgments against his countrymen, now tells us about the corruptions among them. Their profession of religion was false and hypocritical. Even when they were corrected, they kept on sinning. This was not just those who were low and uneducated but more so those of the higher order, from whom, because of their knowledge and opportunities, we would have expected more. God therefore threatens them with the cruelest of enemies and then commands their enemies to bulldoze the walls of Jerusalem, the holy city.

Verse 3 sticks out for me, proclaiming that God demands honesty. The message is clear. Honesty was nowhere to be found among them with the result that God struck and even crushed them, but to no avail. They didn't even seem to flinch. It would seem that these people had not only lost their moral direction, but they also displayed an attitude of stubbornness and rebellion. They refused to turn back to Yahweh, their covenant partner.

Jeremiah viewed everything from the covenant relationship with God and the ethical demands that flow from this relationship. In his view, the people had an obligation towards God that should be reflected in worshipping Yahweh alone and in truthful and just actions. He holds the leaders accountable for the moral decay and rebellious attitude displayed by the Judean society resulting in the break of relationship with the covenant God and God giving them into the hands of the Babylonians. The chapter closes with a picture of the moral condition of the Jewish people at that period immediately preceding the Babylonian captivity. Always remember, God is not mocked. Whatever we sow, we reap. It is an age-old biblical principle!

Pray

Father, forgive me for hidden sin. Forgive me for not just the sins of commission (the sins I commit) but also for the sins of omission (the things I know I should do but don't). Israel ran rampant with their sin even though You kept forgiving and forgiving, and a little part of me thinks how silly they were, and then I look in the mirror and I see how You have constantly loved me despite *my* errors and waywardness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Jeremiah 6

Live

If this were a movie, the director would shout ‘Action!’ in this chapter. The judgment prophesied against Judah and Jerusalem in the preceding chapters is now vividly portrayed. Tekoa, the home of Amos, is six miles south of Bethlehem. The location of Beth-haccherem is unknown but is probably near Tekoa. As the enemy came from the north, the people would flee south. The city of Jerusalem was part of Benjamin, who we know was greatly favoured of God. Because the temple grounds were in Benjamite territory, the temple had been spared before, but this time even the temple will be attacked.

True to the pattern throughout Jeremiah, three subjects are handled: a description of the tragic fate of the city; the character and identification of who God would use in the execution of His judgment; and a summary of the reasons why God judged Jerusalem and Judah to be worthy of the penalty about to fall upon them. Jeremiah jumbled all of these topics together in his writing – a good study if you are daring!

Verse 11 really grabbed me as I read today. God’s longsuffering has come to a tipping point and now the fury of His wrath is released. It’s almost as if Jeremiah’s soul is burdened with this prophecy and even if he endeavored to suppress it, he cannot. It will, or maybe a better word is *must*, pour forth upon the children and young people, upon the old, upon husbands and wives. None will get away. All must partake in these judgments. It’s as if that one invasion should carry away everything till all their disobedience, hypocrisy, and other sins end in their total overthrow. I’m reminded that one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Better to confess Him in life than be forced to in death!

Pray

Father, how amazing You truly are. Sometimes we shrink who You are to one of us but You’re not a mere human with super powers. You are eternal God, from everlasting to everlasting. You were, You are, You always will be God. I sincerely bow my knee before Your magnificence today and hail You as my King, my Lord, and Father of all creation. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

God had no tolerance for the spiritual adultery that Israel committed. The reason for Judah's fall was because they violated one commandment, the exclusive worship of the one true God. It is plainly stated in verse 23, *"But this thing commanded I them, saying, 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.'"*

Israel had a history of declining to make Jehovah their exclusive God, going all the way back to their release from Egypt. Despite Jeremiah's warnings, he knew from God that the people of Jerusalem would not repent. The little section from verse 23 shows the utter folly of Israel. It was not sacrifices that God required of them in the wilderness but obedience – to walk in the way of righteousness that He had commanded. God would then have acknowledged them as His people and He would have been their God. Think about their response today, *"But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts."* When was the last time you heard the whispers of God, and did you obey?

Let's be up front about this, these people were two timing God. On the one hand, they showed a token reverence toward Him, but they revered other gods as well, even the "queen of heaven" (verse 18). This was Ashtoreth, the moon-goddess of the Phoenicians, their principal female deity and frequently associated with Baal the sun-god, their chief male deity. These names often occur in the plural – Ashtaroth Baalim. There was a temple of this goddess among the Philistines in the time of Saul. She was one of the great deities of the Assyrians, under the name of Ishtar. Solomon introduced the worship of this idol and Jezebel's 400 priests were probably employed in its service. That's how low God's people had fallen!

Pray

Father, again, it is easy to think how foolish these people were and not look within my own heart. You said the heart of man has gone astray, so I examine my own obedience to Your Word today. Search me and know me, see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in Your paths. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I feel sorry for poor Jeremiah. He had to foretell terrible judgments upon the guilty people who had often been warned, but who had at last gone beyond all warning and were about to be destroyed by the Chaldeans. That's what the picture is of today, Judah and Jerusalem invaded by the Chaldeans and Babylonians just before the city was utterly destroyed. It was a common practice to bury treasure with the bodies of kings, hence, when any land was invaded by foreign enemies, they broke open the tombs and searched for hidden valuables. It was a sign of the scorn of the enemy and their fury against the people when they dragged carcasses out of the graves and scattered the bones to the four winds of heaven. In this case, it was foretold that this desecration would not only take place at the graves of kings (where the greatest treasure might be found), but the bones of princes, priests, prophets, and people were all alike to be brought forth.

Verse 20 has been the topic of thousands of gospel preachers over the years. The practicalities of the verse are that the siege of Jerusalem lasted two years. Nebuchadnezzar came against it in the ninth year of Zedekiah and the city was taken in the eleventh, according to 2 Kings 25:1-3. It would seem they expected deliverance in the first year, but none came. They hoped for it in the second year and again were disappointed. Thus the declaration, "*we are not saved.*" No deliverance had come. Then, in verse 22, the question is asked, "*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?*" Of course, there is a resounding 'Yes! The most excellent one in all the world!' Sadly, they had not adhered to the physician nor used the balm. They were dying because they would not apply the remedy. We cannot complain about God not turning up if our door is constantly locked!

Pray

Father, how often I have cried for mercy and deliverance only to lock the door of my heart by disobedience and resistance to change. Even my attitude can be wrong and a prideful spirit turns away everything I need from You. Jesus, You are my righteousness, holiness, and redemption, and I trust You as my Lord and Saviour. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Sometimes we think that the Old Testament prophets were just machines who delivered their messages with no emotional connection. Today we see how untrue that is. We see Jeremiah broken over the terrible judgments about to be inflicted upon his countrymen. Judea shall be utterly desolated, and its people scattered into heathen nations. The lament expressed here is applicable not only to the fallen condition of ancient Israel; the words are just as appropriate today for the millions of people who have forsaken their first love and have chosen to wallow in the sensuous pleasures of sin rather than live by the true standards of God's Word.

Verse 21 is really shocking when you begin to realise the extent to where these people had fallen to bring this onslaught of judgment. Death is personified in this verse and is seen climbing through their windows, *“cutting off the children from the streets and the young men from the squares.”* This makes me realise that the God I serve is a God who abhors evil, hence, Jesus became sin for you and me that we might live, walk, and move in Him.

In this world of sin and sorrow, ending soon in death and judgment, how foolish for men to glory in their knowledge, health, strength, riches, or anything which leaves them under the dominion of sin and the wrath of God! Those who worship God in spirit and truth rejoice in Jesus and put no trust or confidence in the flesh. We ought to prize our inheritance and destiny which comes from God and will last forever. We ought to seek it diligently. If our hearts are un-humbled, we tend to lament our calamity, but not our sin, which is the cause of the calamity. Let's hearken to the Word of the Lord and mourn with godly sorrow. This alone can bring true comfort, and it can turn the heaviest of afflictions into glorious mercies.

Pray

Father, chapters like this are all too common in the Old Testament and wound me like they did Jeremiah. I am freshly in awe of the love You have lavished on rebels, fools, and idolaters, like me. Jesus, who never sinned became sin for me, that I might freely receive Your righteousness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The Jews were about to be carried into captivity and Jeremiah warns them against the superstition and idolatry of the country where they were going. Chaldea was overly addicted to astrology; therefore, the prophet begins by warning them against it. What he does next is class. He contrasts helpless idols that have to be carried everywhere with the wonder and splendour of their own true God. The next time you are tempted to worship or bow down to something fleshly, just compare it to your true God, Jehovah. The prophet shows the glory of Israel's God and exposes the folly of idolaters. Charms and other attempts to obtain supernatural help or to pry into the futuristic were copied from the wicked customs of the heathen.

Let us stand in awe and not dare to provoke God by giving glory due to Him alone to another. He is ready to forgive and save all who repent and believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. Faith learns these blessed truths from the Word of God; all knowledge not from that source leads to weird doctrines of vanity. If we are not willing to trust and take God all the way we go, we cannot expect to prosper in His ways.

The report of the enemy's approach was daunting and dreadful, and all the plans of man were dashed to pieces. Often events can be overruled, so as to be quite different to what we intended and expected. Our prayer needs to be for the Lord to direct our steps. Don't worry about the Lord correcting you, as long as He doesn't have to do it in anger; the weight of His wrath we cannot bear. However, correction is for our good, even though, like a child being corrected by their father, the rod may sting for a moment. I have often heard people pray, "Lord, humble me," and my response is always a resounding "NO!" If the Lord has to humble you, it is because you haven't done so yourself, as Scripture endorses us to do. Humble *yourself* before the Lord.

Pray

Father, what a generous God You are. This chapter contrasts the beauty of Your love with the mess of my stubbornness. I praise You for Your relentless commitment to bless unworthy, unbelieving, ungrateful people, just like me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

After delivering the word of the Lord, the prophet appears to reiterate it, as if to say, ‘Guys, do you hear what God is saying?’ – *“Cursed is the one who does not obey the terms of this covenant ... Obey Me and do everything I command you, and you will be My people, and I will be your God.”* A great reformation had taken place under the reign of Josiah and the public worship of idols had been abolished, but under the reign of his son and his successors, the people had turned back to idolatry and had become worse than ever. It required a captivity to cure the lack of obedience, and God sent one. It makes me wonder, what will it take for God to truly fully get our attention?

The theme here is the breaking of the covenant that was made at Sinai. The sacred covenant made by God with the children of Israel when He brought them up out of Egypt had been neglected and nearly forgotten ... until a copy of the Law of Moses was discovered by Hilkiah during the renovation of the temple during the days of Josiah the king. We can read about this in 2 Kings 22-23. God was now in the act of terminating the covenant and bringing the punishment for breaking it. Hosea's unhappy marriage with Gomer was terminated in exactly the same manner when he bought back his adulterous wife from slavery and returned her to his home not as his wife, but as his slave.

The huge question that seems to arise is, why did God continue to preserve Israel? My thought is that the Old Testament is full of types and shadows of things to come, those things made alive and eternal in the New Testament. That being the case, God was giving us a foretaste of His matchless grace that would become typified in Christ alone. Beautiful.

Pray

Father, I really want to worship You in spirit and in truth; may nothing ever rob that from me. You give and You take away. Blessed be Your name. You created beauty, yet You allowed Jesus to become one with no beauty, for me. You took the vileness and ugliness of my sin that I might become pure and beautiful in You. Thank You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is a strange passage in which Jeremiah struggles with how the wicked fly in the face of God and yet prosper, God seemingly choosing to ignore it. I'm sure you're like me and have thought similar thoughts! We know that God is righteous and that everything is done well by Him, but we would still like to know why this apparent injustice happens. Many people before us have asked the same question, like Asaph in Psalm 73. He almost lost his way when he spent too much time focusing on the wrong people. Jeremiah was certainly in a tough place where he faced the spiritual, mental, and emotional pain of persecution from his fellow villagers in Anathoth. I suppose if there is a lesson to be learned, and I suggest it is a huge one, it would be to keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, so we won't slip ourselves. It is interesting to see Jeremiah's shift from the sadness of pleading for his people to calling on God to punish them. We also pick up this thread throughout the Psalms.

Jeremiah had been obedient to the call God had made upon him, but he is very angry with the Babylonians who come and do this terrible thing. He is saying, 'Lord, sacrifice these evil ones, not Your family!' But what he does not understand is that the problems that have come upon Judah and Jerusalem are to make them return to God. It appears that Jeremiah had just got tired (and we dare not judge him for that) before the race was over. God's answer to our prayers is seldom what we expect, and I find His answer to Jeremiah kind of shocking. Instead of comforting, God rebukes him. To paraphrase, God says, 'If you have been worn out by men, what are you going to do when you have to run against horses? You haven't seen anything yet, son. Put your seat belt on tight; the worst (and the best) is yet to come!'

Pray

Father, forgive me when I start being the judge and jury of other people. I praise You for being so extraordinarily kind, gentle, and patient with me. You don't love me to the degree I love others; You've hidden my life in Christ, and You love me completely. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jeremiah wore a linen girdle around his waist. Linen was the material worn in the temple by the priest and symbolised righteousness when it was clean and white. It appears that Jeremiah's garment was intended to be worn next to his body, perhaps showing his closeness with God. It also occurs to me that a garment of this nature was not shared; it was private property. This is true also of the garments of righteousness the Lord Jesus furnishes for us, garments washed clean by His precious blood. In another sense, this girdle symbolises how God had been close to His people, as an inner garment is on a person. He had clothed them with His blessings, He had been their righteousness. The soiling of the girdle speaks of how God's people had soiled the righteousness given by God. They had committed spiritual adultery and had ruined their relationship with Him. God shows His act of putting them away and bringing them into captivity through Jeremiah taking the soiled girdle and hiding it in a hole in a rock. The girdle lying long in a hole by the side of the River Euphrates speaks of the length of the Babylonian captivity, which would be seventy years. Then, just as Jeremiah went and retrieved the girdle, God would go and free His people.

Verse 23 is a powerful image for us today in dealing with deep-rooted sin. Can a person, at his own pleasure, change the colour of his skin? Can the leopard change the variety of his spots at will? These two things are natural and they cannot be altered. So too sin, and especially our attachment to it, becomes a second nature. We cannot change ourselves, but we can pray to God to do it and come to Him through Christ, that He may do it for us. How reassuring and beautiful!

Pray

Father, do in me today what I could never do without You. Though I try to be self-sufficient, You call me to be Christ-dependent. Though I try to be the author of my story, You've made me a character in Your story. Though I try to be the potter, You've made me to be the clay. So, today, I bow my knee afresh to You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jeremiah draws a stark picture of the feelings of the people as they saw their land wither around them and struggled to find water for their families while the hot sun continued to burn. Judah was in mourning and those who sat in the gates (the elders responsible for the cities and towns) were anxious and troubled. They had clothed themselves in black as a sign of their distress while a collective cry went up from the whole of Jerusalem to the Lord for rain. Of course, according to their current theology, it was Baal who should have sent rain for he was the god of rain and storm. But they recognised that Baal had failed them, and in such circumstances, there was only one final port of call and that was to God.

Jeremiah then points out that many prophets claiming to speak in the name of God were promising that neither sword nor famine would come on the people but they would have assured peace. There is never any shortage of those who promise fair weather ahead and dismiss ideas of God's hand against sin. There were plenty of such people in the final days of Judah before disaster came. It was, of course, a popular message and one that the people wanted to hear. This made life very difficult for Jeremiah and his constant warnings of judgment.

This is heavy stuff. God's mercy is withdrawn in every way. Verse 21 catches my attention and reminds me of my own selfish heart, *"Remember Your covenant with us and do not break it."* These people had already broken the covenant, and now they want God to fulfil His part. They ceased to be His people by abandoning themselves to idolatry, and yet they wished Jehovah to be their Lord to defend, support, and fill them with all good things. I'm sure you've noticed, mankind is inherently selfish! I am so thankful for the New Covenant of God.

Pray

Father, I show up in this story in so many places. I often want to receive but not give, and want Your blessings more than Your commands. I desperately want to love and serve You but my flesh gets in the way. I'm desperate for my heart and conduct to match my creed and profession. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I find it quite powerful that God declares to Jeremiah that not even Moses and Samuel could turn Him from His course of punishment. The people held these two men in high regard as men whose prayers turned the heart of God. Moses had turned God's heart when the children of Israel made the golden calf, but his prayers wouldn't turn Him this time. The judgment is arrayed in a variety of images so full of terror that the prophet Jeremiah complains in verse 10 of having to deliver such words. He is reprov'd for this complaint in the next four verses. I'm sure God has spoken things to you which you have found difficult to do. Following Him with all your heart and mind isn't easy, but it is eternally rewarded!

I love the little phrase in verse 16 about Jeremiah finding God's words. Even in the midst of oppression, he had a passion for God's Word, something every child of God should seek to cultivate because there is an old saying, 'You won't find it unless you're looking for it!' The main reason I write these devotionals is to get us all to seek God's words. This is where we will find them, in His truly inspired Word. There is another old saying, 'You can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.' I totally agree with this, but venture to add, 'You can put salt in its oats to make the horse thirsty!' That's my aim, to make you thirsty for the Word of God. Always remember this, one does not dig into the Word of God to simply gain information but to commune intimately with the God of the Word and be transformed into the image of His Son! To know the Father's heart, the Son's love and the Spirit's power should always be our goal when we seek God's words. Read to be transformed, not just informed!

Pray

Father, it hasn't been easy to follow You with a constant fervour but today I want to pledge my fresh allegiance to You. You are my Alpha and my Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Author, and Sustainer of my faith. It is in You I live and move and have my being because it is for You that all things exist and have their being. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is aptly named in my Bible 'The Day of Disaster'. The scariest phrase is in verse 5b, *"I have withdrawn My blessing, My love and My pity from this people," declares the LORD.* As we think about such a terrible disaster in Judah, we cannot stop the natural emotion of pity rising in our hearts, although we need to consider how these people had totally rebelled and flaunted God's laws. Remember how God instructed Joshua to destroy entire populations of ancient Canaan in the most ruthless manner. They were displaced to make room for Israel. Now that Israel had become worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, God's eternal justice required their removal also.

Jeremiah is forbidden to marry just in case he had children who would fall under this judgment against Judah. He is forbidden to mourn the dead or go to a wake. He is even forbidden to go to a wedding, such is the wrath of God against His people. I am reminded of the verse that says, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31). Again, today we are challenged about how we take the New Covenant for granted and live far too loosely at times. We will stand before God one day and give an account of every deed done in the body!

In the final section, Jeremiah describes the scattering of the people like hunting animals. Very few will escape. The ancient method of hunting was to bait and net. The hunter would set traps and then herd the animals towards their sure capture. One of the horrible customs of ancient warfare was the destruction of the whole male population. This method would wipe out a nation or clan in a single day. It was brutal. The result of God's judgments on the Jews would be that both the Jews, when restored, and the Gentiles who witness those judgments, shall renounce idolatry and worship the true God.

Pray

Father, John 3:20 helps me put today's chapter in perspective. John writes, *"This is the crisis we're in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness."* Father, may I not run for darkness today but run towards the light, towards You and all Your glory. I believe, help my unbelief, Lord. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

“The sin of Judah is inscribed with an iron chisel, engraved with a diamond point on their stony hearts.” This, to me, is one of the most daunting verses in the whole book of Jeremiah. The graphic, defined detail makes me look with intrigue and a godly fear. Iron is unbendable. Something engraved with a pin of iron and the point of a diamond would be deeply set. Instead of God's laws engraved into their hearts, they have engraved their sins. When Scripture talks about the heart, it is referring to the core and seat of everything. The heart is the very centre of a person. To have your heart full of sin would mean you were totally absorbed with sin. The Bible reminds us that out of the heart the mouth speaks, so what is in there will boil its way out.

Jeremiah says in verse 5, *“Cursed be the man that trusts in man”*. This was pointing to their vain confidence in trusting in Egypt, a nation which, in relation to God, was too feeble to help Judah in any way, nor did they actually want to help, which is more alarming. God's people were putting their eyes on people who didn't even want them!

Verses 10 shows us that nothing escapes the attention of a holy God as He searches the heart and examines the mind to reward each person according to their conduct and what their deeds deserve. That is one scary verse! Then, in the next verse, Jeremiah uses the analogy of a bird that hatches eggs it did not lay, referring to wealth gained by unjust means. With no loyalty or bond, such wealth will soon flee. This reminds me of Matthew 7 – the one who hears and does the words of God is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. Are you building on rock or sand?

Pray

Father, thank You for commanding me to abide in Your love. Your commands are no longer a burden to me. By them I understand how to love others as You love me. I'm no longer under the weight and condemnation of the Law, but in You I'm under grace, set free from sin to worship You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the command at the opening of this chapter, *“Go down to the potter’s shop”*. Jeremiah must leave his own familiar spaces. He must leave his office, as it were, and his understanding of what Scriptures he had. God had a lesson to show him in the shop of an artist! I think we all, if truth be told, must visit the potter’s shop. Watch dancers dance in perfect rhythm. Hear worship leaders practise with their team, trying new chords and tunes. When you do this, you will learn something new about God for He is the Master Artist. Scriptures invite us to imagine God as a farmer and athlete, ruler and judge, builder and teacher, poet and potter, father, mother, and lover. Genesis 1 portrays God as the first gardener, poet, designer, metalworker, and landscaper as He speaks, divides, fashions, and populates the cosmos. In Genesis 2:7 God shapes clay, sculpting and forming humankind from the red clay, hence the name, Adam. God breathes life into the new creation so the human being is made from earth and divinely connected to heaven. Only the greatest artist could do this! Jeremiah invites us to see God as an artist.

Today’s chapter reminds me of a visit I made many years ago to a potter’s house. I watched, transfixed, as the old lady moulded her blob of clay into a beautiful vessel. It looked complete, but she then wet her hands and started to dig out the inside, cupping out handfuls of clay and occasionally knocking the edges of the vessel that she had to repair. It struck me that while the pot looked good on the outside (its character), it could only be of value if it had capacity. When God begins to create capacity in us, it can be very painful, but this process rids us of the mire within and allows us to hold and carry something of Him, for Him. Maybe God is creating some capacity in you at present!

Pray

Father, I’m so glad You are such a tenderhearted, loving God. May Your perfect love continue to drive out all my fears, including the fears related to the demands and risks of love. Continue to reveal to me the measureless width, length, height and depth of Your love for me as there is no other way I can love others. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The imagery of the broken jar is very powerful. You can imagine the devastation of it; it would be beyond repair. It seems as if God's longsuffering has been tested to the max and now this display shows the finality of His hand. The main focus of this chapter is the status of Israel as God's chosen people, a status which, by their actions, they forfeited to the New Israel in whom all the glorious prophecies of the fathers would be fulfilled. This chapter has been aptly named 'the parable of the smashed potter's vessel'.

The previous chapter showed God's patience and ability to accommodate the imperfections of the clay, moulding and remoulding that which was marred and busted. This chapter stresses a much different lesson. It now seems that it is no longer possible for even God to work with hardened Israel; they have overstepped their line. The symbol here is of another potter's vessel, but one that has already been fired and hardened. It was a new vessel, one just purchased, which I take to mean that it was empty. This symbolised the emptiness of this nation and their complete failure to produce the righteous works which God desired. The shattering of the vessel symbolised the divorce and casting off of Israel as God's wife and as God's chosen people. There was no known way such a shattered vessel could be mended, and this symbolised the final, total, and irreversible nature of Israel's rejection, though always with the exception of the 'righteous remnant' destined to form the nucleus of the New Israel in the kingdom of Messiah. One day God will call it all to order as the Church, the bride of Christ. His longsuffering is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance and live. He will banish death and Satan as the final enemies and call His people to His side to be in His presence forever. What a day, what a prospect for the believer!

Pray

Father, forgive me for the times when I take any day for granted. Every day was accounted for before I drew my first breath. You have never been out of control, quite the opposite actually. In complete and utter control, Your timings are impeccable. Just believing this gives me such peace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Just for a wee recap and a history lesson to keep you in tune with this book as we near halfway. In chapter 1, we found out that Jeremiah was what we would call a pastor's kid; he was from a minister's home. He grew up in the small town of Anathoth a few miles north of Jerusalem. Born around 645 BC, Jeremiah was about 18 when he was called to be a prophet in 627 BC, the thirteenth year of King Josiah's administration. This was the same year that the emperor died, signalling that the days of the Assyrian empire were numbered. The end came for Assyria with the fall of Nineveh to the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC, and by 605 BC, Babylon ruled the world, including Judah. The prophet lived through these tumultuous times, witnessing the end of Assyria, the beginning of Babylonian rule, and the downfall of his own nation, Judah. Jerusalem was burned and the majority of the citizens taken into exile to Babylon in 587 BC. Jeremiah's work extended for some 40 years, from 627 to 587 BC.

This has to be one of my favourite chapters as we see Jeremiah's complaint to the Lord. Because Jeremiah has obeyed God and spoken His Word, he has been beaten and imprisoned by Pashur, chief governor of the temple. Jeremiah complains bitterly of the reproaches heaped upon him by his enemies, and, in his haste, decides to not mention the Lord anymore. But the Word of the Lord is in his heart like a fire so he is not able to stop himself. If the Word is truly in you, NOTHING can stop it coming out. I love, love, love this! No one who has a light hides it under a bush! Let your light shine for all to see. There will be times when every person trying to live a responsible life with God runs into unbearable, tragic situations. At such times, one may have to say, 'Lord, You got me into this mess; now get me out of it!'

Pray

Father, with joy and confidence today I run to the occupied throne of grace. No one understands and empathises with my weaknesses like You, and no one has the ability to dispense copious amounts of mercy and grace like You. You know where I struggle the most and trust You the least. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Most theologians agree that there is a skip of twenty years between Jeremiah 20 and 21, and, as I'm sure you know, a lot can happen in twenty years. Jehoiachin came to the throne and reigned for eleven years in Judah. He played in and out between the idea of paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar and rebelling against Babylon (contrary to Jeremiah's advice). Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and carried Jehoiachin away to Babylon, along with many of the captive nobility, including Daniel and others. At the same time, Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah, his own choice of king, on the throne.

When Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem. Zedekiah sent Pashur and Zephaniah to Jeremiah to request him to intercede with God on behalf of the people. Zedekiah evidently expected Jehovah to lift the siege against Jerusalem by some tremendous miracle. The ancient Jews never learned the lesson that God's promises are all conditional, even those of His everlasting love and blessing. They believed all right, but they did not propose to *do* any of the things God commanded.

Time fairly changes things. Jeremiah's ten-year-old prophecies had begun to take effect and now he receives an honoured delegation from the king himself, requesting his prayers. Characteristically though, they paid no attention to his warning, his prophetic advice, and his instruction as to how some lives could be saved. In the second siege and destruction of Jerusalem, not even the temple was spared and the sacred golden vessels were carried away to Babylon. These people had certainly outworn God's longsuffering and the city was doomed to fall to the Babylonians. I have found in my Christian walk that when I stop hearing God, I usually need to back up to my last act of disobedience and do a bit of repenting before I can move on.

Pray

Father, You don't say to us "*if*" we pass through deep waters and rushing rivers, but "*when*" we do so, You will be with us. Thank You for being upfront about what life involves between the resurrection and return of Jesus. There will be difficult seasons and all types of suffering in this life, but to know You is peace indeed. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is an interesting chapter in God's Word. The beginning of the Jewish state had been contrary to God's will as it was based upon the people's desire to be like the nations around them. When the scandal of their behaviour and rebellion became known, God spoke to the prophet Amos in 9:8 and declared, "*Behold, the eyes of the Lord are upon the sinful kingdom; and I will destroy it off the face of the earth.*" Hosea was also commanded to name his firstborn son Jezreel, which means, "*I will cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease*". Following the death of Josiah who was a good king, the last four kings of Judah (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah) did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. This chapter details their disobedience that brought judgment on the nation, causing the Lord to remove the sons of David from the throne. Jeremiah tells the nation that they need not mourn the death of the king Josiah, who had been slain in battle in 609 BC.

There is no playing fast and loose with God. He is the King of all kings and so we must seek Him first. This was true then, and it is still true today. Jeremiah spoke of a principle mentioned in several other places in the Bible, especially in 1 John. The idea is that our love and knowledge of God can be accurately measured by how we treat other people, especially others in God's family. The rulers of Judah did not know God at all because they did not live out His love and justice towards others.

When God makes up His mind to do something, He does it. This chapter shows His wrath has been provoked and He means business. I have to admit I'm glad He made up His mind about a lost world and sent Jesus to die for our sin. Because of Jesus' finished work, all of our sins have already been forgiven and we've been declared righteous in His sight. His banner over us is love, His desire for us is passionate, and His delight in us is constant.

Pray

Father, I'm Your inheritance, Your beloved treasure, and secure child. I'm an heir of You of the new heaven and new earth, destined for a life beyond all I could ask or imagine. Who can measure such a spectacular standing in grace? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the chapter title in my Bible, 'The Righteous Branch'. This chapter concerns the ideal king – Messiah. He is called in verse 6, "*The LORD Our Righteous Saviour*". He is Jehovah and He is our righteousness because He justifies us by His merits. Under the reign of the Messiah, all Israel will reach the destiny designed for it by the Lord. We don't have many prophecies of Christ in this book, but here is a very beautiful one. Jeremiah has been a hard book of judgment and doom, so it is life-giving to come upon this hope for an eternal future. The writer of Hebrews says, "*looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith*". Let's look to Him today; His return is imminent!

Shepherding was a lowly occupation involving long hours, dangerous work, and basic wages. However, it would seem most people respected the attentiveness shown by good shepherds to their sheep. Sheep are not very smart and unless they have a good shepherd, they are inclined to wander away. They are defenceless against predators of the wild and need a shepherd to lead them to water and pasture, and to guard them against a host of dangers. The shepherds of Judah had not been doing their job.

In this chapter, the Lord gives us a glimpse of the return from exile that will take place once Cyrus of Persia defeats the Babylonians and allows the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem. When we examine the history of Judah after the exile in Babylon, it can be difficult to find much that is righteous. However, we in the church confess that in the fullness of time, God did raise up a Righteous Branch, Jesus of Nazareth. The words Jeremiah prophesied had been put in his mouth by God. The false prophets were prophesying from their own evil thoughts, and God warns not to listen to them. Even today, we must be careful who and what we listen to. I have two rules of thumb to live by: does it align with the Word of God? Do I have peace in my heart?

Pray

Father, may this day be one when I slow my life a little to think about the 'Righteous Branch'. May I lift my thoughts and heart to Him today, even to just say thank You for coming down to this broken world to redeem it onto Yourself. Here is beauty and majesty indeed. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The lesson that shouts loudly to me from this story today is that proximity to the temple is no sign whatsoever of the holiness of the people living nearby. They were like that basket of rotten figs right at the front of the temple. The people in Jerusalem may have been close to the temple all right, but they were not close to God! Makes me think today how even in ministry we can get close to the stuff and miss God entirely. People can minister out of all kinds of brokenness, trying to appease their conscience but missing the desire of a Father who runs towards them seeking relationship. Let Him embrace you today. Go somewhere quiet and open your heart afresh to His love!

I've never been more aware that the devil always seeks to divert or diminish our love for God, even in the so-called doing of 'God's work'! And when he's successful in his diversions, everything else in our lives gets out of balance. When we become distracted from fellowshiping with God, we medicate our pain in unhealthy ways and get busy with things that don't really matter. We get irritated quicker and repent slower. All of these things rob us and those around us of His grace.

When Nebuchadnezzar left Judah with Zedekiah as a puppet king, it was easy for the people in Jerusalem to think the worst was over. They were fortunate to survive and escape exile, and those who remained thought they were better off than those taken to Babylon. But awful things would happen to King Zedekiah and all those who, like him, refused to surrender to Babylon. This included those who fled to Egypt. God made it clear that He didn't want them to go to Egypt; He wanted them to stay in Judah. God wanted the people to repent and if they did, then He would have withheld judgment. Oh, the longsuffering of our God!

Pray

Father, though my love for You ebbs and flows, Your love for me is always at a max, relentlessly pursuing me down the back alleys of my life. Please rescue me from whisperings and lies that are spawned in hell, and help me to be alone with You this day. You are my all in all. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This daunting chapter records the prophecy of Jeremiah which came at the end of twenty-three years of his ministry. Throughout this time, he had continuously pleaded with Judah to repent and return to the worship of their true God. Unfortunately, Judah never heeded him, so the message here was really awful. Jeremiah is right in the middle of his career at this point and it's a crucial point. He has been desperately faithful to God and the words he was given to speak. But this is crunch time. This is God's moment to push the red button, so to speak. His longsuffering has been stretched to the max and is now about to break.

The words beginning verse 7 make a powerful headline, *"But you have not listened"*. Despite Jeremiah's many years of faithful service to God and the people, they did not listen. They also refused to listen to the other prophets God sent to them. Over his complete ministry, there were other faithful prophets who spoke a similar message to Jeremiah, warning the people against idolatry to return to godly living. These prophets constantly called the people to repentance and to hearken to God's voice.

When the people of Judah ignored the faithful prophets, they weren't just ignoring human messengers, they were rejecting the God who sent the message. This continual hardened disobedience provoked God to anger. Judah's day of grace had expired; the longsuffering mercy of God could no longer postpone the deserved judgment of the rebellious nation; the calamity stored up for the Chosen People could no longer be averted or postponed; the time of judgment was at hand! Makes me think of how we can be so attached to life that we seldom think of heaven or Jesus' return. It will arrive one day, maybe sooner than we think! Think about it today.

Pray

Father, may I take time today to see Your beauty in the things You have made. Open my eyes to Your fingerprints everywhere. Help me to see Your beauty in every person. May I have time today to ponder my eternal destiny and Jesus' soon return. As I do that, may I come to appreciate the things that really matter and disperse the stresses that don't. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

These first six verses record Jeremiah announcing the doom of Jerusalem, just as God commanded him to do. The false prophets and priests accuse him of blasphemy and declare him worthy of death, to which Jeremiah pleads his innocence. Thankfully, the elders and princes decide in favour of Jeremiah. When we look a little closer, we see some things worthy of note. Jeremiah is commanded by God to go into the court of the Lord's house and foretell the destruction of the temple and city. As we have already mentioned, it didn't go down well at all, and his life was in great danger. Ahikam had befriended Jeremiah and he saves his neck. He protects Jeremiah and refuses to turn him over to the king, knowing full well the consequences of doing so.

Ahikam was indeed a powerful man in that period of Jewish history. What a wonderful thing he did in his faithful protection of the true prophet Jeremiah! Ahikam was also one of those whom King Josiah, when struck by the words of the book of the Law, sent to inquire of the Lord (2 Kings 22). His intervention here on behalf of Jeremiah is what we would expect from his past association with that good king.

How would you stand up if your faith was put to the firing test? Would you be prepared to die for your faith? This is why we support organisations like *Release International* and *Open Doors* who befriend and speak up for those who are persecuted for their faith. We need more Ahikams around us today, I think! In western culture we may not face the death threats Jeremiah faced because of his faithfulness to God, but around the world today many are being martyred for their faith. Often our biggest battles are within our own selfish hearts. We need to remember that things could change quickly. We have all lived long enough to know that life can turn on a penny.

Pray

Father, You've always been faithful, generous, and present; and You'll never cease to be. I choose stillness and trust over fear and worry. Help me see the plight of others around the world who aren't in as favoured a situation as I am, and to speak up for and support these people in whatever way I can. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Some theologians would try to make out that the prophecies told by the prophets were played out in their day. I think this chapter defies that idea. The extreme behaviour of men like Jeremiah and Isaiah before him (who walked around barefoot and naked for two years) would scream out a warning to come. Jeremiah wore an ox yoke upon his own neck and did so in the presence of the king of Judah and his court, including the ambassadors of five foreign nations! Such weird behaviour was done by these prophets in connection with their declarations of things yet to come. Let's face it, it took some guts for Jeremiah to stand against these envoys as well as his own countrymen, but he was exerting his commission as a prophet to the nations.

God promised that if they did respond to the message of the bonds and the yokes, He would allow them to escape the forced exile that the Babylonians imposed. We should learn from these words that our best attitude is one of humble and reverent submission. James tells us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Daniel 5:25, a verse I love, says, *"The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will"*. By divine inspiration, Jeremiah made it plain that God had given world dominion into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. This is a powerful thought; evil men often prove to be the very ones that God gives vast power and dominion. Matthew Henry is worth quoting on this... *"The things of this world are not the best things, for God often gives the largest share of them to bad men, men who are rivals of God and rebels against him. Nebuchadnezzar was a proud, wicked man, but he had world dominion by divine right. He was a very bad man, but God called him his servant. If God so uses and rewards evil men who serve him, however unwittingly, how much more wonderfully will God reward and honour those who love God and truly serve him!"* I love this.

Pray

Father, oftentimes I've struggled with how wicked people prosper. But then I think about how earthly pleasures can never compare to spiritual riches. One of the greatest of those riches is knowing You, Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jeremiah's enemies had tried to destroy him by electing a false prophet – Hananiah, who had a loud voice and the arrogant self-confidence that made him quite convincing with his smooth message of peace and prosperity for Judah! It is easy to see how such a message of restoration could have been welcomed, in contrast with Jeremiah's message of impending doom.

Zedekiah was the puppet king set on the throne of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. In this season of his life, Nebuchadnezzar was distracted by problems in other parts of his empire, so Judah and some of the surrounding nations thought it was a smart time to rebel against what seemed to be a weakened king. In the previous chapter, the prophet spoke to a gathering of representatives of the kingdoms who came to Zedekiah to plot their strategy. Hananiah, a prophet and son of a prophet, didn't like Jeremiah's gloomy message to the gathered kings. Hananiah was a native of Gibeon – a place with a reputation for deception and violence. It was one of the priestly cities, so, like Jeremiah, Hananiah may have been a priest also, hence he would have been listened to. Hananiah spoke in the name of the Lord, contradicting the message of Jeremiah recorded in the previous chapter. Jeremiah said they would be under the yoke of the king of Babylon; Hananiah said the Lord had broken the yoke. Jeremiah calls him out on it and pronounces his doom.

You don't need to fret about God's enemies; He is in control ALL of the time. I love it! It is interesting to note the reference to the yokes of iron. It would seem that the people made their own yokes much stronger than the yokes of wood God appointed for them. If we resist God's gentler discipline which are yokes of wood, we may find ourselves under much more unpleasant yokes of iron; these, I suggest, are the sinful habits that can easily enslave us.

Pray

Father, if this chapter does anything today, it shows me Your complete control in every event. When enemies are close by and threatening, You're even closer. The nearer I live to You, the more I feel and know Your goodness, love and greatness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today's chapter contains a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon. It was directed especially to the leaders of the Jewish community there. It is important to remember that the Jewish people were in Babylon by the will of God; He was bringing judgment on Judah for their generations of rebellion against Him. In God's plan, they would be in Babylon for a long time, so it was best for them to settle in and make the best of their lives and families there. Jeremiah had foretold the ultimate overthrow of Babylon with no frills or party poppers, but as long as it remained and the Jews were held as captives by the will of God, they needed to secure peace for themselves by seeking the peace of the city, and they did this by prayer.

Jeremiah has the double duty of putting down the exiles' false hopes and sustaining their right expectations. He plainly warns them against expecting more than God had promised. Through Jeremiah, God is telling the exiles that their scattering isn't accidental. God has plans for them, plans that includes even what seemed chaotic and random. Moreover, these plans mean that even though the exile will be long, it won't be permanent. This is not because of their faithfulness, but because of God's promise to Abraham, a promise that was looking forward to Abraham's descendant, the Lord Jesus, which we read about in Romans 4.

Just as the exiles had a hope, we have as well – not, thankfully, by observing our present condition but by the Word of God, His oath, and His covenant. Our plans may evaporate, our dreams may be crushed, even our life snuffed out, but the God who raised Jesus from the dead will raise you up with Him. If you are in Christ, you can count on it. Oh, I love this! Short-term, we may suffer, but long-term, our future is co-signed with Christ's blood. That is a future for our welfare and not for evil, a future of hope, not of despair.

Pray

Father, today I am reminded that no matter what life may bring to me, You are the God Who is completely in control. Thank You that You have plans to prosper me and not to harm me. You have plans to give me a future and a hope that will not disappoint. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The next three chapters have become known as ‘The Book of Consolation’. They are full of a promise that God would bring the captives back from exile and establish a New Covenant with Israel that would enable His people to live in right relationship with Him. These prophecies of Israel’s restoration look beyond the return from exile to the second coming of Jesus and His thousand-year reign in the millennial kingdom. Jeremiah prophesies of a day to come for Israel, one which includes the Gentiles under one New Covenant. He talks about the coming of Messiah, the Branch, the Son of David, the Mediator between God and man, Jehovah Our Righteousness, One who, as both Priest and King, would bring a new age of prosperity to Israel. I love reminders of His coming; it makes me realise that God knew the end from the beginning and does all things well. Hold on, my friend, He is coming soon!

There is a little statement found often in Scripture that we could easily overlook. We see it in verse 2, *“Write down for the record everything I have said to you”*. Each time there is a new word from the Lord to Jeremiah, it is for a specific purpose and He wants a record kept of each word. This command could cover all the prophecies that God had already given Jeremiah as well as the new things for He says, *“all the words I have spoken”*. They are to be gathered in a book for future reference. Most of this chapter, I believe, is speaking of things that have not yet occurred. The need for a book was because the generation these prophecies were for had not even been born yet. This was not a history book and it would only be possible to put it in chronological order after all prophecies were fulfilled. I love how we get to lay legacies that our children and grandchildren will benefit from!

Pray

Father, forgive me for getting earth-bound like a pot-bound flower or plant. This hinders growth and advancement but I want to grow to be more like You. I lift my eyes and my heart to You today in great assurance that You do all things well and You are never late or out of control. This is a great comfort to my soul today. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is one of the most beautiful in all Scripture. God is expressing His continual love and regard for Israel and promising to restore them to their land and liberty. He makes such gracious promises of both leading them tenderly by the way and making them happy in their own land. Israel is then directed to prepare for returning home and the vision closes with a promise to Israel and Judah of abundant peace and security in the latter days.

I must say, I love the first three verses where God's everlasting love for His people is accompanied by infinite patience. We know that this is speaking of the twelve tribes of Israel, but I believe Israel includes all the believers in Christ as well. We are powerfully reminded of this in John 1:12, *"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."* All who will be His people are His family and He will be their God. This is the gospel, this is John 3:16, this is *"whosoever will"*. There are a number of things that are required for Him to be our God. The first is to believe. The second is to turn our will over to His will and be obedient to our God.

I am reminded today that God is not slack concerning His promises. Maybe today it would be good to browse over some of those promises to you from God. You may have forgotten one or two! His promises are yea and amen; not one will fall short of its fulfilment because they are all backed with the royal household of heaven. God's mercy has been extended to us personally, therefore, our souls ought to glorify Him as our God and Saviour. As His love goes deeper into our hearts, may it free us from all fears and help us to finish our days on earth full of His glory.

Pray

Father, I'm a blessed person because You've done great things for me and You continue to do so. I have no concern for what anyone may say about me. It's enough to know what You say about me – that I'm Yours, I'm forgiven, I'm declared righteous, I'm desired, enjoyed, and as loved as anyone could ever be. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Zedekiah was pretty upset by Jeremiah's prophecies concerning Jerusalem and its king. We need to remember that Jeremiah prophesied not only that Jerusalem would be conquered, but also that the king would be captured. This was obviously displeasing to the king, so he put Jeremiah in prison. At the time of the incident recorded here, Jeremiah has been removed from the dungeon and put in the stockade area of the palace where it seems he enjoyed some privileges. While he was in prison, Jeremiah's cousin came and offered him the family right of redemption to purchase a piece of property in Anathoth, which was already in Chaldean control. God told Jeremiah to purchase the land and go through the proper legal proceedings as a prophetic drama emphasising that God would keep His promise of restoring Israel to the land. Of course, good old Jeremiah obeyed, but then he got a bit confused. The sound of the enemy army was just outside the city walls. If God was going to overthrow Israel by the Chaldeans as seemed imminent (and as Jeremiah had been preaching), then why did God tell him to buy this land? After the transaction was completed, Jeremiah prayed and God granted him the answer he needed to endure.

Jeremiah's prayer teaches us some lessons on how to pray by faith in a bleak, confusing situation. Most of us can relate to wondering where God is at times and why He allows some stuff to happen. If we're not there at the moment, we have been there, and we will be there again! Jeremiah's prayer shows that by faith, we must pray for God to graciously fulfil His promises, no matter how bleak the situation. I know that's easier said than done! Jeremiah makes me think of how in many parts of the world today people are imprisoned, beaten and martyred for their faith. Would you speak up for Jesus if it meant prison or death?

Pray

Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters in North Korea, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan – the five countries in the world where Christians are most likely to be singled out for daily persecution. I pray that Your perfect love will tame their fears and deepen their trust in You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

As I read this chapter, I am reminded of my mum's favourite little phrase in Scripture... *"and it came to pass"*. Everything in this life comes and it passes. In striking contrast to that, everything God has promised will come to stay! This includes us, the bride of Christ from every nation, and the renewal of this broken world into a new heaven and new earth.

This is a bleak moment for Israel and yet God invited Jeremiah and all who heard him to come to Him in faith-filled prayer, confident of His answer. This promise is especially remarkable considering the terror of the soon fulfilment of promised judgment. Even as judgment was at the door, God spoke a word of hope, invitation, and faith to Jeremiah and Jerusalem. The promises of future restoration must have seemed especially hard for Jeremiah to believe while he was imprisoned in the midst of the Babylonian crisis, and so the Lord encouraged him to pray with the promise that He would tell him great and mighty things, *"which you know not"*. The promises of God are certain, but He still calls on His people to activate those promises through prayer. God wants to be involved in people's lives, to be asked to help. People must call upon Him so He can answer them.

Israel were about to be deported into a shameful exile for a period of seventy years. All of their ancient glory which they remembered from King David's reign had been blotted out forever, and, for many of the people, it seemed like the end of all hope. But God knew what He was doing. Descendants of David would indeed return from captivity and in the fullness of time, Mary, the betrothed wife of Joseph, a descendant of David, would lay the infant Messiah in the Bethlehem manger! This is a reminder of the One who holds all time in His hand – our King and our God in whom we delight today.

Pray

Father, one day I will never be selfish, petty or defensive again. I will never get my feelings hurt, insist on being right or demand more. I will think of others more highly and more often than myself. I won't keep a record of anybody's wrongs. I will forever be with You. What an incredible day that will be. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I'm reminded of a storm that has been predicted and forewarned; some people board up windows, fill sand bags, and dig in; others flippantly go about their normal day-to-day stuff, hoping the storm will pass them by or that the Met office got it wrong. Today, in this chapter, the storm hits. The forewarned and ignored destruction arrives in full fury of a hurricane. Jeremiah then bombs another word to the king, given through the covenant God of Israel who has been provoked by their sins: *"Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire."* We discussed in a previous reading how King Zedekiah did not want to hear Jeremiah's prophecy; he would much rather believe the false prophets who were saying they would be quickly restored. Jeremiah now says that the destruction will be by fire.

I find verse 18 fascinating. This was the ancient and solemn way of making a covenant. A calf was offered and was then divided exactly from the nose to the tail. The spinal marrow was split in the most careful manner so half of it might remain on each side. These divided parts were laid opposite each other with a walkway in between. The contracting parties entered this passage at each end, met in the middle, and there took the covenant oath, declaring themselves to death should they break this covenant.

Jesus became our covenant in His death. He is the Maker and fulfilment of it for us. We get it for free! Amazing or what? He is both the Just and the Justifier of our faith. How could that be? God became the Just in judging sin, but became the Justifier by laying our sin on Jesus. What a beautiful picture of the covenant that we become partakers of, one that can never be broken. Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through Him.

Pray

Father, I thank You that Jesus became flesh and moved in among us. He didn't consider His glory something to be tightly grasped or held selfishly onto. Jesus, You emptied Yourself by becoming a man. You accomplished everything necessary for the redemption of Your beloved Bride and the restoration of the world You love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I don't mean to be flippant, but the name of this bunch, the Rechabites, makes me think of a bunch of cartoon characters. I have to say, though, I love them and what they stood for. The pledge of the Rechabites was probably instituted by their ancestor Jonadab who wanted to keep the clan pure from corruption when Jehu was purging Baal worship from Israel (2 Kings 10). If the Rechabites were this observant of the instructions of their forefather, then Judah should have obeyed the Word of God all the more.

The Rechabites were a group of simple-living people who lived above the sinful lifestyle of the cities. They were nomads. They did not settle down to one spot even when they were in the city but were constantly on the move. Their lifestyle depicts the truth that all believers are strangers in this land and that this is not our home. They were people of very high morals. Their daughters were said to marry men from the Levitical tribe and their children ministered. Their religious convictions were much like the Israelites, the difference being they lived more holy lives than the Israelites. They met in one of the rooms attached to the temple – this is what is meant by “*chambers*”. It was believed they were teetotallers and the wine mentioned had some religious significance. They provided a wonderful opportunity to show the rebellious children of Israel an example of obedience and loyalty.

How is your example today? Could God use you as an example to unbelievers? These Rechabites stayed loyal to their call and are an example to us of faithfulness to a cause. After all, God has been outrageously generous, kind, and good. We could never earn His perfect righteousness, but He has credited it to us as a gift. Because of Jesus' perfect and finished work, our transgressions are forgiven, our sins are covered, and God will never hold us guilty for them. How cool is that!

Pray

Father, thank You for not just welcoming me, but for wanting me. How could I not stay loyal to You? Paul charges the church at Rome to give their bodies as a living sacrifice, which, he says, is their reasonable service. Today I freshly pledge my allegiance to You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

At this strategic point in their history, Israel had reached an all-time low. God had commanded only one day of fasting, the Day of Atonement. The problem was these people had made public fasting a political weapon. It is an example of how religion can take away from the real presence of God. People buy into strategies and formulas to appease conscience and guilt. The enemy of our souls will see to it we get really busy in the things that have no eternal benefit. Jeremiah had been speaking the Word God had put into his mouth to prophesy, but now we see the written Word is powerful as well. I love this! This written Word would be the second witness against them and with both the written and the prophetic aligning, stuff really happens. It did then and it's the same now. When a person prophesies from God, the words are actually God's words; they are inspired.

Jehudi was sent by the king to fetch the scroll and every time he read a section, the king cut it with a penknife and threw it in the fire until it was all burned up. After destroying the writings, the enraged king ordered Jeremiah and Baruch to be seized but they could not be found. A special providence of God had concealed them; verse 26 tells us the Lord had hidden them. Jeremiah is commanded to re-write his prophecies and to declare the judgments of God against the king who had destroyed the first scroll. Baruch accordingly writes a new copy dictated from the mouth of Jeremiah, only this time (you've got to love this), he adds much more than was in the original. This is like a scene from a blockbuster movie; when the enemy thinks he has overcome, the good guy has an ace up his sleeve and, boom, the enemy is obliterated in a puff of smoke. You cannot destroy the Word of God; it lives on forever. You may burn the Bibles, but someone would just write them down again.

Pray

Father, You are calling me to Yourself, so please have mercy on me and grant me wisdom, strength, and tonnes of grace. Help me today to set time into my program for listening and reflecting more. Write stories of redemption and restoration into my life with the ink of Your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Jeremiah's prophesying ministry was now reaching its close. He had faithfully and fervently proclaimed God's Word ever since Josiah's day. For more than thirty years he had warned, pleaded, and entreated his backsliding and treacherous people but there had been no true response. What a man he truly was. They gave him no encouragement, actually, the opposite is true, they treated him with scorn. They put the Word of the Lord behind them out of sight and hearing and drifted further and further from His counsels. While the Lord waited in patience, displaying supernatural longsuffering, now the judgment announced for so long couldn't be delayed any longer; it would fall with fury upon the nation.

Men still love to deceive themselves with a vain optimism founded on the desires of their own deceitful hearts, ignoring the sure testimonies of both God and godly people. We can live in a religiosity and culture that in no way affects the heart! There is a little phrase in verse 9 I'd love to comment on: *"Do not deceive yourself"*. I firmly believe that Satan himself, though he is the great deceiver, could not deceive us if we did not deceive ourselves. We are by default our own destroyers; we know right from wrong pretty soon in life. The people in Jeremiah's generation, despite being so frequently warned and despite the relentless voice of the prophet, never repented. We have in our possession the Word of God, which is the greatest book in the world to help us undeceive ourselves and yet, like Israel, how easily we allow sin to trip us up! The writer to the Hebrews warns us to steer clear of the things that so easily trip us. Mostly it is the wee things. I've never met anyone who was bitten by an elephant, but I've met loads of people who have been stung by a bee. Be careful, it's the little things in life that get you.

Pray

Father, You are neither predictable nor manageable, but You are good and faithful, merciful, and mighty. Forgive me when I get impatient with Your timing and second-guess Your ways. My times are in Your hands, Lord. May I never remove them from that place as that's where I am safest. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The Jewish historian Josephus kept a record of Jeremiah's imprisonments – both the one in chapter 37 and this one in chapter 38. Interestingly, he adds these details, *'Jeremiah stood in the mire up to his neck ... The intention of the rulers was that he might be suffocated.'* This makes me think of how life swamps us at times and we feel like we are 'up to the neck' and 'about to suffocate'. They sent thirty men to rescue Jeremiah; our rescue is in Christ.

The bulk of the remainder of the book of Jeremiah describes his trials as a prophet and the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah preached to the people as Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonian army. His message was that the city would fall and anyone who would go out and surrender to the Babylonians would live. The officials of Judah did not consider this a properly motivating sermon. With the king's permission, they threw Jeremiah into a cistern where, presumably, he would either die of hunger during the siege or drown during the next rain. Then a surprising thing happened. A guy named Ebed-melech, a servant in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. He went and asked the king to spare Jeremiah's life and the king commanded him to take thirty men and pull the prophet up. Jeremiah must have been well stuck in the mud to need thirty men to pull him up!

Ebed-melech's action on the prophet's behalf is a prime example of how God sometimes uses people who we don't even know to deliver us. Ebed-melech could not have known in advance whether the king would listen to him or not, whether going outside the chain of command would be a step up the career ladder or a life-ending move, considering what happened to Jeremiah. It appears that he trusted God to provide for him, however the king might respond.

Pray

Father, thank You for Your steadfast and liberating love. Today isn't about getting everything done, but knowing You, walking with You, and enjoying You. I can't add a day or hour to my life by stress and worry, so better to do a few things well today than rush through my list treating people like projects and obstacles. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

For many years, God's prophets had foretold the fall of the holy city and the chosen people, but the Israelites refused to believe it. In this chapter, we have the record of the disaster itself when it fell. At last, the iniquity of God's people had reached a point of no return. Their day of grace was past and Jerusalem was given over to the sword, famine, and pestilence, as so often proclaimed by Jeremiah. I am reminded of how we can go on with life never thinking that a day will come when we will either be called home or Jesus will return. Remember, Scripture warns us ... in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man will come!

This chapter is the culmination of much of what we've already read throughout the first 38 chapters. God has made many threats in an attempt to turn His people back to Him, but they refused over and over again. I'm sure you're like me, wondering, what will happen to the bad guys? And what will happen to those who have obeyed the Lord? In this chapter, we get the answer to both of these questions. The little remnant left in the land may seem to be stripped of all that could make life worth living, but they had God Himself. They could call upon His name, knowing that if He had been faithful to His own holy character in chastening them for their sin, extravagant bowls of mercy were now moved for them when, in lowliness of mind and confession of their iniquities, they sought His face.

It is the poor in spirit who are blessed, those who own their nothingness. Even after the judgment of Israel, God could still meet the need of any who would confide in Him. In every trial He is near. In every hour of discouragement and gloom He abides faithful forever. How stirring and how beautiful is this God in whom we put our trust. He is altogether lovely.

Pray

Father, I live in a Martha world of many distractions, never ending demands, and overstimulation. Help me to cultivate a Mary heart in a Martha world. My must-get-it-done list may not change considerably, but as You refresh and deepen my communion with You, I'm certain I can live with a quieter, gentler, kinder heart. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There are many big names in this chapter but let's look at one, Gedaliah son of Ahikam. By all reports he was a really good person. His problem was his naivety as he seemed to believe evil of no man. He reminds me of something my mum used to say to me, "Son, your biggest problem is that you think everyone is like yourself, and they're not!" Gedaliah was like this and it cost him his life. Scripture reminds us to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. That's a great combination right there!

Towards the end of chapter 39, we were told that Nebuchadnezzar gave orders for Jeremiah to be released from prison and to live with Gedaliah, but Jeremiah stayed among the people instead. He could have gone to live in the governor's home, probably some distance from the normal folk of Judah, but Jeremiah stayed with the people to whom God had called him so many decades ago. Because Jeremiah made that decision to stay with his people, he found himself "*bound in chains*". He was led from Jerusalem to this city called Ramah. This was apparently the city from which Babylon was sending the Judeans into exile. This is where Jeremiah finds himself chained and on his way to Babylon with his people, but then Nebuzaradan apparently recognises him among those ready for deportation and he releases the prophet.

In appointing Gedaliah, it was apparent that Nebuchadnezzar no longer trusted the men of the house of David. He chose a man who had administrative experience but was not of the royal line. I find it incredibly amazing how God directs the paths of peoples and nations as He wills. I read chapters like this and get the picture of a chess game, only both sides are played by the one mighty hand. God does what He wants, when He wants.

Pray

Father, may I give You, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit the worship of which You are worthy. Feed my mind with Your Word, fill my heart with Your truth, and empower my worship by Your Spirit. Your Word declares that if I lack wisdom, I can ask You for it and You give it without casting up. You are the Author and the Finisher of my faith. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

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Live

Ishmael and ten men fall upon Gedaliah and in an awful way murder him. Their quarrel against him was that he was governor to the king of Babylon. These people were so hardened that they would not see that God had given their country into the hand of the Babylonians. Because they had been conquered, the Babylonian king had authority to set whoever he pleased as governor over them. Gedaliah was a peaceful man and it would appear they rushed in on him unawares. This was an act of violence against Gedaliah but was also an act of rebellion against Babylon. Josephus says that having slain those who were at the feast with Gedaliah, Ishmael went out in the night and slew all the Jews in the city. Gedaliah and those who were with him were relaxing and feasting and never dreamed that Ishmael had such terrible plans. They were caught unaware and unprepared. This is a lesson to be learned; we must be ready at all times to combat the enemy. We must be more alert at recognising who the enemy is and we must listen to warnings.

There is so much instability in the world today as we hear of senseless murders of believers by groups and armies that defy God's righteousness. Here, we see it in Old Testament days. The senseless murder of seventy pilgrims in this chapter is utterly inexplicable. This guy Ishmael intended to fill the whole land with terror, to utterly frustrate Gedaliah's work, and to destroy the last possibility of the land being in peace. There is surely nothing new under the sun. It would be good today to take some time and pray for the persecuted church around the globe. The most certain and stable and dependable reality in our lives is God's love. We could never have deserved it or earned it, and now we can never lose it or reduce it. He fills our lives with good things. He is nearer than our next breath. Sometimes He seems so very far away, but in all of it His love endures forever.

Pray

Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters around the world who today are being imprisoned, tortured and even slaughtered for their faith in You. You are coming again, that's for sure, and then Your glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love how all the people now come looking for Jeremiah to ask for his assistance in crying out to God for them. In every time of hardship and difficulty, we must look to God for direction and pray to be guided by a spirit of wisdom and by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We must be careful in asking for things that our hearts are not ready to hold. Many can pray and yet want to direct God on how to answer so it doesn't interrupt the comforts of their own wee world.

There is a little phrase in verse 7... *"ten days later"*. Jeremiah waited upon God all this time, which implies the prophets could not prophesy whenever they pleased, no more than the disciples of Jesus could work miracles whenever they wished. The gift of prophecy and the gift of miracles were both dependent on the will of the Lord, and each of them was given only for the moment. When the necessity was over, the influence ceased. This is what stops me opening up my own thing and naming things *"my ministry"*. It's always *His* ministry, *His* house, *His* time, and *His* call!

Jeremiah did not speak his own thoughts, but waited for God's time and revelation, showing the reality of His inspiration. If we go in our own steam, we can actually run ahead of God just to please man and quench the impatience of those awaiting a word. The delay was designed to test the sincerity of their professed willingness to obey, giving them time to deliberate. True obedience bows to God's time as well as to His way and will. The summary of God's message to Judah is this: remain in the land of Judah and God will bless you and build you up. Go to Egypt, and you will run into the wrath of God; you shall die there by the sword, famine, or pestilence. The very things that make you afraid to remain in Judah will befall you in Egypt.

Pray

Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, I want to know You much more. I realise more and more as life goes on that I'm not as smart as I used to think I was and without You I can do nothing at all. I love and trust You more each day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This, I think, is one of the most tragic chapters in Scripture. We read how God's chosen people returned to Egypt. Remember how Moses led them out from there? They had been delivered from their bondage only to return nearly nine hundred years later a defeated, busted, hopeless remnant!

Two prominent leaders, Azariah and Johanan, were backed up by a group of men, called here *"the arrogant men"*. Other versions call them the *"insolent"* or *"proud"* men, but whatever each version names them, they were totally opposed to the things of God and they led their people astray. Bad leadership is a tragic misfortune for those being led. Pray for your leaders today, political and spiritual; they desperately need it! Is it any wonder our weaknesses persist and our anxieties flare up when we listen to the evening news? Leaders who have no desire to do what's right just make us run to God, confident of His welcome and needful of His grace.

As awful as this chapter is, it is the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy in chapter 24, that Jerusalem would be emptied out. This moving to Egypt accomplished the total clear out of the land. When we look at the unbelief and ignorance of that whole generation, there was nothing whatsoever God could have done with them, unless there was sincere repentance. One of the things I find interesting here is that it is difficult to tell whether Jeremiah went to Egypt with them as a prisoner or by his own choice. They probably wanted shot of him and of Baruch too. If, on the other hand, Jeremiah went to Egypt by his own choice, he must have done so convinced that Yahweh wanted him to be His voice among them. However, many of the commentators think he was taken prisoner, so who am I to argue!

Pray

Father, please help me with situations I'd love to control but can't. Help me to pray for my leaders and show me how to build them up without meddling and manipulating. The biggest need in my life isn't relief from political unrest, but for more of You. The psalmist hit it right in 20:7, *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

These people just didn't get it, all the warnings given to them by both the word and the rod of God. The mind boggles at how much grace God had given them and even now, when judgment has fallen, they are still blinded.

I am intrigued by the references to the "*queen of heaven*". This worship had all kinds of astrological links to the mythological gods and goddesses of antiquity. They were individually identified with the sun, the moon, the stars, and certain planets. In Acts 7, Stephen refers to this when he mentions the Israelites having worshipped "*the host of heaven*". The "*queen of heaven*" referred to Ishtar, an Assyrian and Babylonian goddess, also called Ashtoreth and Astarte. She was thought to be the wife of the false god Baal, also known as Molech. The motivation of women to worship Ashtoreth stemmed from her reputation as a fertility goddess, and, as the bearing of children was greatly desired among women of that era, worship of this "*queen of heaven*" was rampant among pagan civilisations. Sadly, it became popular among the Israelites as well. This is what happens when a people start worshipping the created instead of the Creator.

Before you judge the people of Judah, think about your own life and what westernisation has done to us! Maybe, like me, you need to ask God to forgive you today for the things you have been worshipping. "What things?" you may ask. Things like money, relationships, our home and car, on and on the list goes. These are just things! They will disappear into dust and rust, but God is our eternal King, the only One worthy of all our worship. He will soon return and there won't be any misunderstandings or incomplete conversations. There won't be any insiders or outsiders, no pecking order or ordering one another around. Finally, God's Church, the beloved Bride of Christ, will love Him the way He loves us.

Pray

Father, I love You and pledge my fresh allegiance to You alone today. You are the only One worthy of all my love. You are the One and only King of heaven, King of all kings. How can I give You less than my all when You gave all of heaven for me? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

Baruch, who had scribed the prophecies of Jeremiah and read them publicly in the temple, is totally broken because of the awful judgments that were landing on the people of Judah. He is broken too because of the imminent danger his own life was exposed to, being the bearer of such bad tidings. To quench Baruch's fear, the prophet reassures him that the total destruction of Judah was because of their own discrepancies and bad behaviour, yet his own life would be preserved.

This small chapter has a personal message from the Lord to Baruch. Why it appears at this place in the book could be either by design or by accident; the chapters in this wonderful prophecy do not appear to be organised in any consistent pattern. I know this, Baruch is a pretty discouraged boy! Maybe he was overwhelmed with the prophet's words concerning the seriousness of the people's sin and the disaster they had caused. Have you ever been discouraged by the stuff going on around you? The Bible exhorts us to look to heaven, to fix our gaze on the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Baruch was ambitious and of noble birth, being the grandson of Maaseiah the governor of Jerusalem during the times of Josiah. He was a scribe and probably looked forward to some kind of prominent position because of that role. This short prophecy commands Baruch to give up his ambitions and be satisfied with being able to escape with his life. When the last memorials of Jeremiah's life were added to the history of the fall of Jerusalem, Baruch added this chapter. Humbled by the weight of years and by the sorrows of private and public disasters, he probably read this little chapter in his old age with far different feelings than those he had when Jeremiah first revealed what the Lord had prophesied concerning His faithful scribe.

Pray

Father, today I need to lift my eyes from the evening news and look to You. Feed my mind with Your Word and fill my heart with Your presence. Empower my worship by Your Spirit and help me to not be just another selfish consumer seeking to be pleased, but a true worshipper who is longing to be consumed. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We have just finished witnessing all of God's declarations of judgment against His chosen people and the fulfilment of such. All of these brought on, of course, by their own sin and disobedience. Now we enter the section of the book that runs through to chapter 51 consisting of God declaring punishment on many of the other nations at that time. For the most part, this whole book has dealt with the punishment that Judah deserved. And now we find out that God is going to deal not only with His people, but also with the whole world of Jeremiah's time, starting with Egypt.

Egypt sat to the southwest of Israel. In verses 2–12, God tells that nation it will be defeated outside its own borders by Babylon. Then, in verses 13–26, God tells Egypt it will experience defeat from Babylon at home, inside its own borders. At the end of the chapter, we'll see a short encouragement for Judah. Egypt will be defeated abroad and at home. Judah is to take some encouragement from this fact. This, in a nutshell, is what chapter 46 is about.

The preservation of the Jews and the total destruction of their enemies through so many ages are amazing events, made still more amazing by being told beforehand by the spirit of prophecy, like in the passage today. The Jews' preservation is one of the most incredible acts of Divine Providence. They are dispersed among all nations, yet not confounded by any. I'm reminded of water flowing down a river and out to sea, lost forever in the vastness of the ocean. That's what should have happened to Israel, but God kept recalling them, kept giving them a second chance with His longsuffering. Personally, when I apply that principle to myself, I would have been lost forever only for Jesus. That's why I love Him who has saved and kept me.

Pray

Father, I am reminded of two little *unto Him's* today. Jude 24, "*Now unto Him who is able to keep me from stumbling and present me blameless before the presence of glory with great joy*". How beautiful is that right there. And Ephesians 3:20, "*Now unto Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.*" In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

Just as the Egyptians were no friend to Israel, so the Philistines had always been sworn enemies. They were more dangerous than the Egyptians for the Philistines were neighbours to Israel and proximity made them a constant nuisance. They were pretty subdued in David's time, but it seems they had raised their head up again and were a force to contend with ... until Nebuchadnezzar cut them off with their neighbours, which is what we have recorded here. The Philistines were an enthusiastic people who migrated in very early times to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea from the island of Crete. Israel was never able to drive them out of the land, but under King David, they did submit to the government of Israel. Their principal cities were Ekron, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Gaza.

Have you ever had a nuisance in your life that you feel you can't get rid of, a thorn in the flesh, a thing that just trips you up? Scripture tells us to submit to God, then resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7). We can resist and resist all we want, and yet forget the submitting bit! One is pointless without the other; they go hand in hand. There are so many other voices trying to get our attention. There's the voice of Satan who tries to condemn us for sins God has already forgiven. There's the voice of regrets, haunting us about past failures and missed opportunities. There are the voices of guilt and shame, those terrible twins that are spawned in hell itself. May we hear no other voice save God's blessed voice. By the Spirit, may we hear Him say, "I have loved you with an everlasting love and with cords of kindness I have bound you to My heart. I've robed you with Jesus' righteousness, and have sealed you with My Spirit. Nothing will separate you from My love, nothing, for I'm with you and for you. Your past is forgiven; your present is in my hands; and your future is beyond all you could ask or imagine. Trust Me."

Pray

Father, while Your love, grace, and mercies are boundless and unfathomable, Your judgment and strength are also swift and true. Who can stand before Almighty God? I thank You that to know You as Father is much better than to know You as Judge. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

Today is a message to Moab, which was a Gentile city and, as you will see, had a bleak history. Moab was the name of Lot's eldest daughter's son whom she bore from committing incest with her father. The Moabites had an evil beginning and their morals were no better at the time of this prophecy. 'Nebo' was a place in the mountains where the false god Nebo was worshipped. 'Kiriathaim' was known as the city of the terrible. It is into this mish mash that the prophet speaks. In reading this long roll of threats and thinking about the terror, may we all have our hearts realigned to the awesomeness of our God who is not mocked or belittled.

The chapter ends with a promise of the Moabites' return from captivity in the latter days. Even with Moabites God will not contend forever, nor be always angry. The Jews refer to it as the days of the Messiah when captives under the yoke of sin and Satan shall be brought back by divine grace under the New Covenant, which shall make them free indeed.

There is so much I could write here but verse 4 jumps out at me... *"Moab will be broken; her little ones will cry out."* The *"little ones"* referred to were in all probability the infant sacrifices offered to the savage god Molech, or Chemosh. The desperate rebellion against God in offering such sacrifices was certainly one of the reasons the wrath of God came upon Moab. The Bible says that children are a blessing from the Lord and yet we read of so much child slavery and terrible injustices in the world today. Maybe it would be good to pray for all the children in your sphere of influence today. The Gospels record for us how Jesus looked on little children, so God notices how we treat children!

Pray

Father, as Your child, my future is just as spectacular as it is certain. Today I lift all the children around me ... children and grandchildren, friends and neighbours. Bless them and protect them, Lord. Because of the great and living hope I have in You, I really want them all to live a life shaped by the cross and compelled by Your love. Continue to free them by Your grace and change them by Your Spirit. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

These nations had a horrible heritage. Both Ammon and Moab were born to Lot by incest with his daughters (Genesis 19). The Ammonites were eventually absorbed into the peoples of Arabia, some of whom were present on Pentecost. It is very likely that the 3,000 souls saved that day included some of the descendants of the Ammonites. Goes to show, it doesn't matter where you come from, the love and power of God can redeem and restore.

This chapter is a collection of prophecies relating to several nations in the neighbourhood of Judea. After the initial onslaught against Ammon and Heshbon, there is a glimmer of hope in a promise that the Ammonites shall be restored to their liberty. Then it just goes haywire again with a prophecy against the Edomites (who shall be utterly exterminated the same way Sodom and Gomorrah were), a prophecy against Damascus, Kedar, and Elam.

The Babylonians would not only conquer the land and the peoples of the Ammonites, but also their national deity, Molech, together with his priests and princes. When one nation conquered another, it was seen as a victory of that nation's gods over the conquered nation's gods. Remember this, Yahweh was not just the national deity of Israel; He was and is the King of all the earth. When Babylon conquered Ammon, one might say the Babylonian idols were superior. But when Babylon conquered Judah, it was at the direction of Yahweh, whose purpose the Babylonians served. I love this.

The promise of some kind of restoration for other nations shows that God's mercy extends past Israel. It's awful that for some of these nations, no such restoration is mentioned, revealing the possibility of resisting not only the judgments of God, but His mercy also, leaving no chance of restoration.

Pray

Father, You redeem and restore, You renew and redesign all who come to You through Jesus. The fact that You are jealous for the affection of my heart is the greatest compliment You could ever pay me. Who am I that the Lord of glory would make me His Bride? Who am I that You would rejoice over me with the desire-filled gaze of a Bridegroom? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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The prophecy contained in this chapter and the next was sent to the captives in Babylon in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign. It predicts the destruction of the Babylonian empire and the return of the Jews from their captivity. What is strange about this is that Babylon was the world power at this time and freedom for the Jews was almost impossible. If God can squash a world power in a moment or free a nation in the blink of an eye, is there anything you would like to chat to Him about today? Nothing is too difficult for Him!

After all the predictions of judgment inflicted on other nations by Babylon, now we have this one against Babylon itself, the longest prophecy of all, consisting of one hundred verses to be precise. There is no doubt Jeremiah would have preferred to prophesy against Babylon instead of against his homeland from the beginning. However, we can see from this that even though judgment begins at the house of God, it finally reaches everyone. God was never content or satisfied with the morals of the Babylonians; He just used them to accomplish His judgments and now He turns to them and judges them for their evil ways. Jeremiah doesn't tell just Babylon this message, but all who will hear.

'Bel' and 'Merodach' were the names of false gods worshipped by the Babylonians. The statues of these false gods were broken in pieces. The destruction of Babylon is spoken of as being done thoroughly. God's ways are always the best ways and they will come and will not tarry. One of the good things about God's people is that though they are weak, their Redeemer is strong. This may be applied to all believers who lament the dominion of sin and corruption, their own weakness, and constant failures. Our Redeemer is able to keep what we commit to Him, and sin will not have dominion over us. How beautiful is that.

Pray

Father, thank You for hiding my life in Christ. He is my guarantee of complete forgiveness, perfect righteousness, and citizenship in heaven. Nothing is too difficult for You and whatever else is going on in my world, in You I have riches beyond measure and life truly abundant. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

In the first couple of verses, we read of the spirit of a destroyer. It was a human destroyer, Cyrus and the Medes, who would destroy Babylon. Throughout this chapter, the destruction of Babylon and the protection and blessing of Israel are repeatedly mentioned in that order. I am reminded today of the little phrase, “Long runs the fox”. Here all the evil has caught up with wicked Babylon and judgment is meted out. Be not deceived, for God is not mocked and whatever we sow, we will surely reap; it is a divine law and an established principle in Scripture.

The particulars of this prophecy are brutal and unrelenting. Babylon is abundant in treasures, yet neither her waters nor her wealth can help her now. Destruction comes when she didn’t expect it. Wherever we are, in the greatest depths or in the furthest places, we need to remember the Lord our God is in full control and always there. This prophecy is sent to the Jews in Babylon by the hand of Seraiah who is to read it to his countrymen in captivity. Seraiah was a brother of Baruch, whom we have met several times in past chapters, and he was the grandson of the high priest Hilkiah who discovered the lost book of the Law in Josiah’s reign.

Remember, the Old Testament is a book of types and shadows, simply meaning what is depicted here can often be seen played out in the New Testament. In Revelation 18, we read of the fall of the New Testament Babylon, the wicked coming under the weight of God's wrath and curse forever. Babylon and every other antichrist will be dealt with, of that you can rest assured. We need to continue to hope in God's Word and quietly wait for His salvation, for then we will see (but thankfully not share) the destruction of the wicked. God wins, He always wins!

Pray

Father, You are truly righteous and to be feared – not a shrinking away fear but rather a drawing near fear, a respect and honour to the God who called the universe into existence with a word and a breath. You will one day call all the peoples of earth to stand before You. What an awesome day that is going to be. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

And so we reach the final chapter of an awesome book, a book filled with the judgments of a holy God against a rebellious nation – the people He had chosen to be His own. I wonder if the addition of this last chapter is to show how accurate Jeremiah's prophecies concerning Jerusalem and Judah were. This chapter was most likely added after Jeremiah's time, probably by Ezra after the return from Babylonian captivity. It is quite specific in detail in order to show how exactly the prophecies were fulfilled. The fall of Jerusalem fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecies of doom and validated him as a true prophet. The return of the Jews to their land was in many ways a disappointment; the full restoration of Israel will not come until the second coming of Jesus. God's 'yes' is 'yes' and His 'no' is most definitely a 'no'. He doesn't make idle statements and He is always longsuffering.

As we close off this book today, I am reminded by these fifty-two difficult chapters that our God is for us. He is able to do *"exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."* (Ephesians 3:20) What is most at work in you? God or self? It would be great to hand over fresh control to Him today. May our thirst for more of Him rise to new heights. We can bring our thirst to Him. A thirst to know Him better and better. A thirst to be filled with the Holy Spirit. A thirst to be quicker in our repentances and slower in our excuses. A thirst to be more generous and less fearful. A thirst to be freer to love others as He loves us. Thirsty for the Day when His glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Thirsty for the Day of no more thirst. Let's give Him the glory and have no doubt He will fully satisfy all of these thirsts in His perfect time.

Pray

Father, as I conclude this amazing book today, I am once again humbled that You, the great Yahweh of eternity past, present and future, would look on me. I am indeed Your humble servant but also Your eternal heir and child. I love You with all my heart. Thank You a thousand times over. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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