

Jeremiah 6-8 • Be warned, O Jerusalem

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Let's pray as we get into this tonight. Heavenly Father, we are so thankful that You have preserved Your Word for us. What a delight it is, Lord, to dig into the Scriptures. And even though, Lord, what we're going through here in Jeremiah is pretty hard to read and difficult to study, we know it's important because it's part of the inspired Word of God that You've preserved for us all these years.

And so, Lord, I pray that we would be able to lay hold of it tonight. And that You would speak to Your children as You are so capable of doing and really minister Your wisdom that we can put into practice in our lives. We pray also, Father God, for the groups that are going on in the other building.

We thank You for our junior high group and how big it has gotten. And we thank You, Lord, for all the kids that are over involved in the Awana program in the children's ministry building. We pray for them tonight as well, and we pray for all the leaders and teachers and those who are just hanging out with the kids tonight and sharing Jesus with them.

Bless them as well, Father. Be with all the children, open their hearts, fill them with Your Word. We look to You, Lord. And we ask these things in Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen.

As we begin our study tonight here in Jeremiah chapter 6, I want to remind you of something that I think is important. When we're going through a prophecy or a book like this, I've mentioned many times that it's difficult to go through Jeremiah from the standpoint that there's just prophecy after prophecy after prophecy related to the confrontation of God to Israel, or in this case, the southern kingdom of Judah, for their sin.

But one of the things you have to remember, and this is an important reminder, is that Jeremiah was giving these series of prophecies over a period of probably 10 plus years. So there's a protracted period of time in which Jeremiah is speaking this message to the southern kingdom of Judah. God is giving them plenty of time to repent.

But for you and I it becomes kind of just this long string of negative prophetic statements. Which can be difficult to read through. I mean, Jeremiah, if you've ever just sat down to read through the book of Jeremiah, chapter 1 through the very end, it can be difficult. In fact, there's many parts of the Bible that can be difficult. Sue and I were kind of joking earlier today that people always make a New Year's resolution, well, not always, but often make a New Year's resolution to start reading through the Bible on January 1st.

And we expect sometime around mid-February for our YouTube numbers to jump up when people get to Leviticus. Because they get into Leviticus and they're like, what? How in the world? And they have a struggle, some time, figuring it out. And that's when they start tuning in because they realize they kind of need help to make sense of it.

Well, Jeremiah can be kind of that way. Because of all the things that are happening here. But these warnings, again you need to understand, came through a lengthy period of time. God is showing remarkable patience with His people, speaking to them about their sin and their need to repent. And He did so without holding anything back.

And that's why these chapters are difficult. And if nothing else, they remind us of how God views sin. And they remind us of the gravity of our sin, which caused the Lord to send His Son to bear our sin on the cross. And that's an important reminder. It's never fun to look at sin. I don't think anyone enjoys it.

We come to a place as Christians where we get used to it. And we know what to do when God reveals sin in our lives. We bring it quickly to the cross, and we find forgiveness there through the blood of Jesus. But being confronted with sin is never a very fun thing. And I'm sure this wasn't fun for Jeremiah.

Because the Lord told him at the very beginning, you have a message here from Me to My people, and they're not going to receive it. They're not going to accept what you have to say. So from the get go, Jeremiah knows that he's in for a very challenging ride as it relates to the communication that he is making to the people of the southern kingdom of Judah.

So it begins here in chapter 6 with the words: "*Flee for safety, O people of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem, for disaster looms out of the north,*" (speaking of the Babylonian army, which will come from the north) "*and great destruction.*"

So here the Lord is warning to anyone who will listen that an invader is coming. Now, the important thing for you and I to remember about this is that God warned them. He didn't just say, you know, I've had it up to here with these people. And so I'm going to raise up the Babylonian army and I'm not going to tell them what's coming. And they're going to think everything is just hunky dory and then disaster is going to strike. He didn't do that. He gave them many years, in fact, to know about this.

Notice what He goes on to say in verse 2. He says, *"The lovely and delicately bred I will destroy,"* (referring here, He says, to) *"the daughter of Zion."* Then He says, *"Shepherds with their flocks"* (and this refers to the Babylonian commanders and their troops, but He calls them shepherds and their flocks) *"shall come against her; they shall pitch their tents around her: they shall pasture, each in his place."* In other words, they're going to kind of take over.

Now, the following verses that you're going to look at here, verses 4 and 5. We begin to see the invasion from the perspective here in these 2 verses of the invading army. So here's what they're saying:

*"Prepare war against her;
arise, and let us attack at noon!
Woe to us, for the day declines,
for the shadows of evening lengthen!
Arise, and let us attack by night
and destroy her palaces!"* (ESV)

And this is kind of an insight to the people of Judah to remind them that the enemy is anxious to attack. He's ready and anxious and wants to come and do this attack.

And then the Lord speaks beginning in verse 6, saying:

*"For thus says the LORD of hosts:
Cut down her trees;
cast up a siege mound against Jerusalem.
This is the city that must be punished;
there is nothing but oppression within her."* (ESV)

Notice here in these verses that God is the instigator of the punishment of the Babylonians. And He's saying here this must happen because I find nothing but oppression within the walls of this city.

Verse 7:

*"⁷As a well keeps its water fresh,
so she keeps fresh her evil;
violence and destruction are heard within her;
sickness and wounds are ever before me.
⁸Be warned, O Jerusalem," (ESV)*

or as the New King James says, *"Be instructed, O Jerusalem,"*

*" lest I turn from you in disgust,
lest I make you a desolation,
an uninhabited land." (ESV)*

You'll notice here in verse 8, God is still giving a warning and still holding out hope that they're going to change. He says, lest I bring destruction. Even while He's speaking of the coming of the Babylonian army to destroy them, He says, it's not too late. Lest I respond this way, please turn from your ways.

Verse 9:

*"⁹Thus says the LORD of hosts:
"They shall glean thoroughly as a vine
the remnant of Israel;
like a grape gatherer pass your hand again
over its branches." (ESV)*

Now this is an interesting verse because I don't know if you've ever gleaned grapes. I haven't, but I've learned that in the Law, God told His people that when they go out to glean, whether it's in the vineyard or in the wheat fields or whatever, the gleaners were not to go thoroughly through the crops.

They were to leave some fruit on the vine. They were to leave some wheat on the stock so that those who were poor could come behind the gleaners and they could also get enough. This was God's welfare program essentially. And it was a good one. And it commanded the people of Israel to be gracious to those who were poor.

You'll remember that the book of Ruth talks about this. That's how she ended up meeting Boaz. She found her way into Boaz's field. And there she followed the gleaners. And Boaz even instructed them to leave stuff on the ground. He said that when you pick some stalks with wheat on it, just drop them on the ground

because I want to make sure they get plenty, and particularly this woman, Ruth (Ruth 2:16). And so it's really a beautiful picture of God taking care of poor people.

Notice what He says, though, about the enemy who is going to come and figuratively glean from the vine of the southern kingdom of Judah. He's telling the gatherer to pass his hand again over the vine. And that is a way of saying that the enemy is going to come and thoroughly attack the land in terms of his destructive work and he's not going to leave anything untouched. He's not going to leave anything behind. He's going to destroy. And it's going to be a complete destruction.

Verse 10, *"¹⁰To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear?"* God asked the question. *"Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen; behold,"* (in fact, He says) *"the word of the LORD is to them"* (check this out) *"an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it."* And of course that's a very serious charge from the Lord.

Verse 11:

*"¹¹Therefore I am full of the wrath of the LORD;
I am weary of holding it in.
"Pour it out upon the children in the street,
and upon the gatherings of young men, also;
both husband and wife shall be taken,
the elderly and the very aged.
¹²Their houses shall be turned over to others,
their fields and wives together,
for I will stretch out my hand
against the inhabitants of the land,"
declares the LORD." (ESV)*

Wow! Now, the Lord gives Jeremiah yet another message, saying:

*"¹³"For from the least to the greatest of them,
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
and from prophet to priest,
everyone deals falsely.
¹⁴They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
saying, 'Peace, peace,'
when there is no peace." (ESV)*

And when He says ¹⁴*"They have healed the wound of my people lightly,"* the picture is like putting a band aid on a compound fracture. Something as ridiculously out of sync as that would be.

He says, ¹⁵*"Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush."* In other words, no regrets, no conviction, no sense of wrongdoing. *"Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,"* says the LORD."

¹⁶*Thus says the LORD:*

*"Stand by the roads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls.*

But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'

¹⁷*I set watchmen over you, saying,
'Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!'*

But they said, 'We will not pay attention.'

¹⁸*Therefore hear, O nations,
and know, O congregation, what will happen to them.*

¹⁹*Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people,
the fruit of their devices,
because they have not paid attention to my words;
and as for my law, they have rejected it." (ESV)*

Can I stop you there for just a moment? This is kind of an important distinction. The Lord does bring up, quite often throughout the course of Jeremiah's prophecies, the specific sinful actions that the people were guilty of. But I want you to notice in these last several verses we've looked at, the main key is not sin from the standpoint of deeds. It's sin from the standpoint of stubbornness.

It's sin from the standpoint of unwillingness to respond to the Word of God that is brought through the prophets saying, repent for their sin in the camp. The people refused to listen. And what we see in these last verses is that's what grieved the Lord so much. It was that the people were stubborn. And when they were confronted with their sin, they just shrugged it off or ignored it completely.

I think there's a lot of people who struggle understanding why God calls David a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). They look at the life of David in the pages of Scripture and they say, wow, look at some of the things he

did. I mean, you know, he killed a lot of people, most of whom in a sense of justice. But he did commit adultery with another man's wife.

He then arranged to have that man essentially put into a place where he would die in warfare. And he wasn't that great of a father. His kids pretty much went astray. And some of the people read what David did over the course of his life and they say, wow, a man after God's own heart, huh? And what they're expecting is some kind of almost moral perfection that goes along with that statement.

Well, David was not a morally perfect man in any stretch of the word. None of us are. I believe what made God say that David was a man after His own heart was David's willingness to hear the Lord when He spoke and respond. David had a soft heart.

And even though he was guilty of some pretty heinous sins against the Lord, when he was confronted with his sin, he didn't make excuses. He didn't get angry and become abusive to the people who were speaking to him, like some of the other kings who came after him. David broke and he said, you're right. I've sinned against the Lord.

That was what he said when Nathan came to respond about the sin of adultery with Bathsheba. I've sinned against the Lord (2 Samuel 12:13). And that, I believe, is what makes for a beautiful connection.

There are a great many Christians I've come to learn who labor under what I think is a misunderstood idea of their need to walk in some level of holiness in order for God to love and accept them. I believe it's a misunderstanding on their part that they need to attain to some level of holiness. They need to attain to some level of moral rightness in their actions, words, thoughts, and so forth, in order for them to come to a place where God is going to really, truly accept and love them.

And I find that the people who give into this sort of thinking are miserable in the extreme. And they struggle. And their walk with the Lord is one of difficulty and heaviness and weariness. And they come to me as a Bible teacher and pastor, and they want to know what they can do to be a better Christian.

Pastor Paul, what can I do to be better? Because they're trying to attain this level of goodness, but they know nothing of grace. They know nothing of God's grace. Which is His unmerited favor that is given to the believer by faith. Not according to merit, but by God's goodness, mercy, tenderness, and so forth.

And they know nothing of it. And I try to communicate as best I can that God looks to the heart. And what He wants out of His children, most of all, is tenderhearted children who tremble at His Word. And who respond when the Word brings conviction. Not with this terror that says, oh, no, I'm done for, but who quickly run into the arms of their loving heavenly Father and say, I'm not what I should be. But I know that Jesus died on the cross, that my sins might be forgiven. I come to You that I might be cleansed and washed and renewed. And I ask You to strengthen me to live the life You've called me to live.

That's what God's looking for out of His kids. That kind of openheartedness that quickly comes to the Lord when we mess up. Rather than staying away from God thinking, oh I can't go to God, He's mad at me. Listen, He poured out His wrath on His Son. And that wrath has been poured out and it's no longer aimed at you. Now, when you're convicted with sin, go quickly to the throne of grace to find that peace and forgiveness.

We all sin, you guys. We, every one of us, continue. We will not be free of our sinful nature until we leave these bodies behind. I wish that there was such a thing as true, complete holiness this side of the veil. But it doesn't exist. I wish it did. And every hundred years or so a movement comes along that says that it's possible. And then it goes down in flames. Because people realize it's not possible. I can't attain to that level of holiness.

But what I can do is I can come quickly to God. I can be responsive to His Word. I can say, yes, Lord, You're right. I've sinned. I need forgiveness. I know that You accept me because of what Jesus did on the cross. I know that my righteous standing before You is already mine through Him. I have received the robe of righteousness and I stand before You cleansed and renewed and full of hope because of what You've done. Not because of what I have not been able to attain to. So, it's very important as we see in these verses, God is talking about this disaster to come upon the people because they paid no attention to His words.

Verse 20, *"²⁰What use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba, or sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to me."* So here are the people literally living in the throes of paganism. And yet they're bringing sacrifices to the Lord as if everything's good. And God is saying to them, I don't want this. We're not right. So you're bringing these thank offerings and you're doing these sacrifices. And I'm not accepting them.

Verse 21:

²¹*Therefore thus says the LORD:
'Behold, I will lay before this people
stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble;
fathers and sons together,
neighbor and friend shall perish.'*"

²²*Thus says the LORD:*

*"Behold, a people is coming from the north country,
a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth.*

²³*They lay hold on bow and javelin;
they are cruel and have no mercy;
the sound of them is like the roaring sea;
they ride on horses,
set in array as a man for battle,
against you, O daughter of Zion!"*

²⁴*We have heard the report of it;
our hands fall helpless;
anguish has taken hold of us,
pain as of a woman in labor.*

²⁵*Go not out into the field,
nor walk on the road,
for the enemy has a sword;
terror is on every side.*

²⁶*O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth,
and roll in ashes;
make mourning as for an only son,
most bitter lamentation,
for suddenly the destroyer
will come upon us." (ESV)*

Then another message given to Jeremiah:

²⁷*"I have made you a tester of metals among my people,
that you may know and test their ways.*

²⁸*They are all stubbornly rebellious,
going about with slanders;
they are bronze and iron;
all of them act corruptly.*

²⁹*The bellows blow fiercely;
the lead is consumed by the fire;" (ESV)*

And if you don't know much about how they purified metals back then, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. But they would put lead into the crucible when silver and gold were put in there and heated up. Because the lead would attract the elements. The impure elements of the metals. And they could bring them away. But here He says the lead is consumed by the fire.

He goes on to say that, *"in vain the refining goes on,"* (in other words, it's not working) *"for the wicked are not removed."* In other words, the lead, which was put in there to do its work, isn't doing anything. So He says in verse 30, *"³⁰Rejected silver they are called, for the LORD has rejected them."* Wow.

Chapter 7 goes on. *"¹The word" (of the Lord) "that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:"* (We don't know how long there was between these 2 chapters.) *"²Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word,"* alright, now you got to think about this in your mind's eye. Because what Jeremiah is being told to do is to stand in the gate of the temple. To go into Jerusalem and stand in the gate and proclaim these words. And you can imagine that would take some courage on Jeremiah's part.

Here's what he was told: *"and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. ³Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. ⁴Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'"*

And the reason that is spoken thrice that way is because the people had a belief that since God dwelled in the temple, that His presence was manifest in the temple, that it could never be destroyed. And therefore, the people of the city would always be safe. You know, they probably had some reason to think that might be the case, because both Jerusalem and the temple was spared about a hundred years earlier when the Assyrians came in and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel.

But the southern kingdom of Judah was spared. Jerusalem was spared. The temple was spared. And now the people are literally convincing themselves there's no way. There's no way the enemy can get in here. There's no way God's going to let the enemy come in here. Because this is the temple of the Lord. And yet, they're not even really truly worshipping. Alright, so they go on here:

"⁵For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, ⁶if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other

gods to your own harm, ⁷then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever." (ESV)

Notice God is still holding out a promise to protect and keep His covenant people if they will repent.

"⁸Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. ¹²Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel." (ESV)

Now let's stop there for a moment. I think most of you, if you know your Old Testament, know that before the temple and the, well, actually even the tabernacle was established in Jerusalem, the center of Israel's worship was in Shiloh. And that is where the tabernacle of meeting and the altar of God were originally set up.

But He's challenging them and He's saying, go back to Shiloh. Why don't you take a little road trip, get the family together, put some picnic stuff together, and just make a little road trip to Shiloh. See what you find there. They would have found nothing. Because it had been abandoned. And the place of the Lord was obviously no longer standing. And He's referring to them their own history.

You'll remember back at the period of time that was very close to the end of the judges during the high priesthood of Eli. When Samuel was also assisting Eli at that time. Eli had two very wicked sons, named Hophni and Phinehas. Very wicked. And the Philistines were coming against the Israelites. And you'll remember that they went out to fight against the Philistines. And they basically got kicked. So they decided they were going to take the Ark of the Covenant out in battle with them. And they figured they were using it like a lucky rabbit's foot. Oh, we're going to take the Ark out and then we'll be victorious. So they had this great cheer among them and everybody, their morale was boosted and they went out to war and they got beat by the Philistines, who not only beat the army of Israel, they took the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4:17).

And took it back to Philistine territory. And that was the end of Shiloh, essentially. So God is reminding them, this thing you have going on in your head, where you think that just because the Ark of the Covenant is there, there's

no possible way you can be defeated by your enemies. What does your history tell you?

Verse 13:

"¹³And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, ¹⁴therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh." (ESV)

God is saying here, He's going to let the enemy destroy the temple. He's telling them right there, prophesied, I'm going to let this happen. *"¹⁵And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim."* Referring to the northern kingdom of Israel. And the Lord made good His Word.

And now as we get on in verse 16 and following, the Lord's going to speak directly to Jeremiah. We're not sure how long this message came after the previous one was delivered, but He says:

"¹⁶As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. ¹⁷Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. ¹⁹Is it I whom they provoke? declares the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own shame? ²⁰Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched." (ESV)

And then comes another message from the Lord:

"²¹Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. ²²For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²³But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'" (ESV)

I want you to stop there for a minute. Let me explain the Lord is saying to the people through Jeremiah, because this statement needs a little explanation for a modern audience. The Lord is reminding Jeremiah that when He brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt, before He ever got around to talking to them about sacrifices and burnt offerings, He basically just took them to Mount Sinai and gave them the Law, the Ten Commandments.

And He basically said, obey My voice (Exodus 19:5). That was the first and most important thing God said to His people. Obey My voice. It was much later that the sacrifices were then enumerated and clarified and so forth. So God literally said, at the very first, I told them obey.

And what we're kind of seeing here in these verses is a form of Hebrew argument that allows for the denial of one thing in order to highlight and focus on the other thing. And we don't usually argue this way because we don't have a method of arguing that encompasses this sort of a system. Because we would come back and say, oh yes, you did tell us about sacrifices.

But He's saying not at first. And so the point of what He's saying here to them is the very first thing I told you was obey Me. Later, much later on, we got on to talking about sacrifices. Here you are doing sacrifices and you forgot the paramount issue of obedience. So you don't obey Me and yet you sacrifice, right? You've rejected the primary in favor of the secondary.

Verse 24:

"²⁴But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.

²⁵From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. ²⁶Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

²⁷So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. ²⁸And you shall say to them, 'This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

*²⁹'Cut off your hair and cast it away;
raise a lamentation on the bare heights,
for the LORD has rejected and forsaken
the generation of his wrath.' (ESV)*

You know, the statement here to cut off hair was probably as an expression of mourning. Verse 30:

"³⁰For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the LORD. They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. ³¹And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. ³²Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. ³³And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away. ³⁴And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste." (ESV)

You know, by the time Jesus came along, the Valley of the Son of Hinnom was basically a dump ground and it's smoldered constantly. And that constant smoldering of fire in this dump area became a picture of hell, Hades. Because about Hades and hell, it says that the fire is never quenched. It constantly burns. And so that became a visual picture.

Chapter 8:

"¹At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs. ²And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshiped. And they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground." (ESV)

You know, we've made the point on several times before that a proper burial to a Jew was considered to be a sign of God's blessing and an improper burial where someone was refused burial was considered to be a sign of God's curse. And so the Lord speaks of the fact that even these people who have died before their bones will be exhumed and they will be left out on the ground to be bleached in the sun as a perpetual sign of God's curse upon the land.

He says in verse 3, *"³Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I've driven them, declares the LORD of hosts."*

Now, Jeremiah is given another message beginning in verse 4. He says, the Lord says:

"⁴You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD:

When men fall, do they not rise again?

If one turns away, does he not return?

*⁵Why then has this people turned away
in perpetual backsliding?*

They hold fast to deceit;

they refuse to return." (ESV)

You know, God is kind of making the point here when the people backslide, they come back. They eventually, like the prodigal son, see the error of their ways and they return. But He says, not my people, they never return. There's a perpetual backsliding.

Verse 6, *"⁶I have paid attention and listened, but they have not spoken rightly; no man relents of his evil, saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle. ⁷Even the stork in the heavens knows her times, and the turtledove, swallow, and crane keep the time of their coming,"* (speaks of the instinctive knowledge of the birds concerning the seasons and their migrations. He says,) *"but my people know not the rules of the LORD. ⁸How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us'? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie,"* (a scribe was a copyist, but they also came to be known as experts in the Law. And yet God says they've been conveying what is false and not what is true.)

"⁹The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken;" (speaking of when the enemy comes) *"behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, so what wisdom is in them? ¹⁰Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors, because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. ¹¹They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace."* (so a second reference here to the people healing, or the prophets rather, healing) *"the wound of the people lightly,"* (and he's speaking there of the words of the prophets promising peace and victory from the Lord when in fact there was none.)

Now, I want you to think about that for just a moment. You got prophets over here. And there's a bunch of them and they're saying peace and victory and security and prosperity. And you got Jeremiah over here, and he's going the enemy's coming and if you don't repent it's going to be bad. Now which one would you want to believe? Which one would you follow? Which one would you be drawn to?

Well in my flesh, I know exactly what I'd be drawn to. The message about prosperity and peace and goodness and good times. And yeah, Jeremiah can go talk to himself somewhere in a corner. And yet he's the one speaking the truth, the one speaking the truth. And yet the people are believing the message about peace.

"¹²Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?

*No, they were not at all ashamed;
they did not know how to blush.*

*Therefore they shall fall among the fallen;
when I punish them, they shall be overthrown,
says the LORD.*

*¹³When I would gather them, declares the LORD,
there are no grapes on the vine,
nor figs on the fig tree;
even the leaves are withered,
and what I gave them has passed away from them." (ESV)*

Isn't that an interesting statement? And quite sad. What I gave them has been frittered away. It's passed on. Now the people speak. *"¹⁴Why do we sit still? Gather together; let us go into the fortified cities and perish there, for the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and has given us poisoned water to drink,"* (figuratively speaking there, of course,) *"because we have sinned against the LORD. ¹⁵We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing, but behold, terror."* So this is kind of a preview of what the people are going to say when the enemy comes to attack. They're going to say, we longed for peace. We looked for peace because that's what we were told by these false prophets would be coming. But we found none, only terror.

Now the Lord responds. *"¹⁶The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan;"* (remember, Dan is the northernmost tribe. And so, he's going to obviously see these things first.) *"at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it, the city and those who dwell in it. ¹⁷For behold, I am sending among you serpents, adders that cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you," declares the LORD."*

Now Jeremiah speaks, and I want you to hear what he has to say because he's broken hearted. He says:

*"¹⁸My joy is gone; grief is upon me;
my heart is sick within me.*

*¹⁹Behold, the cry of the daughter of my people
from the length and breadth of the land:*

*"Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?"*

*"Why have they provoked me to anger with their carved images
and with their foreign idols?"*

*²⁰"The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved."*

*²¹For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded;
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me.*

²²Is there no balm in Gilead?" (ESV)

That's an interesting question, isn't it? Gilead was a region that was known for its healing balsams and yet we really don't even know what made up the balm of Gilead. It's interesting. It was obviously some kind of soothing ointment, but he goes on and asks also, *"Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?"*

And so, Jeremiah ends this chapter with a question. Although I think he probably knew the answer to it. So you can see how Jeremiah labored and was wearied under the prophecies that the Lord brought through him to the people. And he was brokenhearted to see his nation, knowing that they were on the road to destruction and they refused to see it or to repent. So that's where we're going to stop for tonight. Wow, can't believe it. We got through 3 chapters. Amazing. We'll continue on next week, Lord willing.

I understand there was an inauguration today. I got news for you though. God is still on the throne. He still rules and reigns. He is still sovereign. He is the eternal Lord. And His purposes no one can thwart. And you and I can trust in that and put our hope in Him no matter what.

Heavenly Father, thank You so much. Thank You so much for Your Word. Thank You for Your love. Lord, thank You for understanding. Even as we go through these chapters in Jeremiah, as difficult as they are, we know, Lord, that Your heart is for people, that they might live, that they might choose life, that they might choose the Lord. Lord, we pray for our nation, tonight in the name of

Jesus, as we begin a new term with a new leadership, we ask You, Father God, to lead this nation.

We ask You, God, to forgive this nation. We ask You, Lord, to forgive our sins, for they've been grievous in Your sight. We've forgotten the Lord and we've walked away from Your Word. Much like we've read tonight concerning the southern kingdom of Judah. We have ignored the Word of God and truth has stumbled in the streets.

Father, we ask You to forgive us and cleanse us. We ask You, Lord God, to lead us in the right way. And we pray in Jesus' name that You would bring a spirit of truth that would invade the land. We ask, Father God, that the hearts of people would be softened to hear Your voice. That the stubbornness and stiff-necked condition that we see around and so prevalent would be soothed and that people would open their hearts and open their eyes to see the truth.

Lord, we pray that people would come to a knowledge of the cross and what Jesus did there in sacrificing Himself for our sins. That the wrath of God might be taken away on our behalf. We thank You, Lord. We praise You. We pray for Your Spirit to guide us and direct us, through Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.