

Triennial Torah Study – 2nd Year 05/11/2011

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This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:
<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

I missed some weeks, therefore I am combining 4 weeks into this one Torah study.

Ex 37	Jer 7-9	Prov 9-10	Acts 7:23-60
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Ex 38	Jer 10-12	Prov 11	Acts 8
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Ex 39	Jer 13-15	Prov 12	Acts 9
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Ex 40	Jer 16-18	Prov 13	Acts 10
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Exodus 37, 38, 39 40

The building of the tabernacle and the items God commanded to be in it was a monumental task. In chapters 37 and 38, Bezalel makes the implements of the temple according to the commands God had earlier given Moses. No doubt the details are repeated to show that all was done exactly as God had instructed. And it should be pointed out that Bezalel did not work alone. He was the overseer and had many artisans working under him (see 36:8). Aholiab and those under him did all of the weaving and engraving (38:23).

Chapter 37, concerning the furnishings of the sanctuary, begins with the manner in which Bezalel constructed the Ark of the Covenant, including the mercy seat and the cherubim. The text exactly follows the instructions God had given Moses on how the construction was to be done (see 25:10-22). The only thing left out here is God's instruction that the tablets of the Testimony be put into the ark and that the mercy seat be put on top of it—which we will later find Moses doing once the tabernacle is complete (40:20). In the same way, all of the instructions God gave regarding the table of showbread (25:23-30) are followed by Bezalel in chapter 37. The only detail not repeated is God's instruction that the showbread be placed on the table—which, again, is something that happens once the tabernacle is finished (40:4, 2223). Then we see here the construction of the lampstand or menorah—also according to God's instructions in chapter 25 (verses 31-40). The only thing left out is the lighting of its lamps,

which, still again, is done when the tabernacle is completed (40:4, 25). Then we are presented with the making of the altar of incense, following the instructions God gave in chapter 30.

Chapter 38 concerns the court of the tabernacle. It begins with the construction of the altar of burnt offering, according to God's instructions in 27:1-8. Then follows the bronze laver or washbasin, according to God's instructions from 30:17-21. Finally, we see the construction of the court itself, following what God told Moses in 27:9-19. Notice that the various furnishings, including those inside the sanctuary, were made with rings to slide poles through for carrying. This was to keep people from touching the holy implements. God's perfection and glory were symbolized by these items, and thus they were not to be profaned.

The chapter ends with a summary of the precious metals that went into the building of the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings. As a talent weighed about 70 pounds, equaling 3,000 shekels, the weight of all the gold used may have been around a ton. The weight of the bronze was around 2 1/2 tons. And the silver added up to the enormous weight of 3 1/2 tons! Indeed, silver was used in even the most basic elements of the tabernacle and its accoutrements. As The Nelson Study Bible notes: "Although the tabernacle was a tent, it was not a makeshift dwelling. It was a glorious shrine that symbolized the presence of the living God in the midst of His people." Lest we think these are unimportant or insignificant details, Hebrews 8:5 and 9:23 remind us that the tabernacle and its furnishings were "the copy and shadow of the heavenly things" and "copies of the things in the heavens."

The priestly garments were made according to the fashion God had instructed Moses in chapter 28. The only thing left out here is the placement of the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate (see 28:30)—a step that takes place in Leviticus 8:8. Notice here the short trousers that were part of the priestly uniform. This linen undergarment, God had earlier explained, was for modesty's sake—"to cover their nakedness" (Exodus 28:42). "Given the sexually preoccupied worship of Israel's neighbor's, this provision was decidedly countercultural" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 42). "This modesty communicated to the Israelites that human sexuality could not influence God. That idea was a central feature of Baal worship, which continually tempted the Israelites. The priests of Baal would use obscene gestures and actions in the pagan worship of their depraved god" (note on Leviticus 6:10). In stark contrast, "Nothing obscene or unseemly was permitted in the pure worship of the living God" (note on Exodus 20:26).

With the completion of the priestly garments, the work of construction was finally finished. Verses 32-43 of chapter 39 list "all the work" that God had commanded through Moses. It was now finished. "Then Moses looked over all the work" (verse 43)—a final inspection. And the result? "And indeed they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, just so they had done it"

(verse 43). May the same be said of us as we strive to please God in our lives. In the end, Moses blessed them, just as Christ will bless us if we follow God's instructions.

God gave Moses explicit instruction regarding every detail of the building of the tabernacle. And the Bible makes two interesting statements regarding the care with which Moses followed these instructions. Verse 16 says, "Moses did according to all that the Lord had commanded him," while verse 33 simply says, "So Moses finished the work." Moses was a faithful man of God. He strove for excellence in everything God gave him to do. The book of Hebrews comments on his faithfulness, "Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant" (Hebrews 3:5).

The tabernacle was finally set up and its furnishings arranged on the first day of the first month, Abib or Nisan on the Hebrew Calendar, of the second year of Israel's journey out of Egypt (verses 2, 17). This was around 10 months after the people had arrived at Sinai and nearly two weeks before their second keeping of the Passover. When everything God had commanded had been completed, He came near in a dramatic descent that manifested His glory among the Israelites, filling the tabernacle with His glory so that even Moses could not enter. The appearance

of God's glory is sometimes called the Shekinah or the Shekinah glory, coming from the Hebrew for "to dwell." The Nelson Study Bible states: "The glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle demonstrated His Presence with the Israelites, His significance to them, and His awe-inspiring wonder. The words of John 1:1-18 are appropriate to recall here. In the Incarnation, the glory of God was manifest not in a tent, but in His Son.... How wonderful that the Book of Exodus concludes with this image of the gracious God, hovering protectively over His people.... A faithful Israelite follower of God could see the tabernacle and realize that God was there in His splendor and power. And with Him the people advanced to Canaan, the land He had promised to them."

Jer 7-16-18

I really wanted to share this study as much of it was what we learned in Israel and has deep meaning to all of us today.

The message here is one of rebuke, warning and exhortation. Delivered in a public place, it is a call for the people to "amend their ways" (verse 3). The people of Jeremiah's day had a form of religion—they worshiped in God's temple. But this gave them a false sense of security— indeed, they believed a lie. The temple of the Lord is presented in verse 4 as almost a chant. It was viewed as a superstitious talisman to save them. The same thing often happens today. People may place too much faith in considering themselves part of God's spiritual temple— His Church—rather than in God Himself. They may think that just because they attend worship services and consider themselves a member of the Church that this will save them—an example of the false reasoning of righteousness by association.

But God demands heartfelt obedience. Incredibly, part of the lie the people believe is that God's law somehow no longer applies—that, in a twisted view of God's grace, they are "delivered to do all these abominations" (verse 10). Yet God decries this for the outrage that it is, stating that His temple has become to them a "den of thieves" (verse 11). "The 'den' of robbers was the refuge where they hid out in search of their next victim. The analogy is devastating. How could God's people steal, murder, commit adultery and perjury, and worship other gods (v. 9), and then assume 'we are safe' because of God's house?" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on verse 11). Jesus would later quote verse 11 when He chased the moneychangers out of the temple of His day (Matthew 21:13).

God brings up an example from Israel's history to make His point. In the time of the judges, Shiloh, in the land of Ephraim (Joshua 18:1), was the site of the tabernacle of God with the Ark of the Covenant—just as Jerusalem was later the site of the temple. Back then, "leaders in the family of Eli had abused their priestly position for personal gain, and idolatry was rampant in the land. When the Israelites attempted to use the ark as a victory-giving talisman, the ark was captured (see 1 Sam. 4) and the sanctuary was destroyed by the Philistines" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Jeremiah 7:12). Shiloh was later destroyed and abandoned, and today, as in Jeremiah's day, one can go to Shiloh and see nothing but desolation and a few scattered ruins. The lesson is striking. Clearly, Judah's confidence in the temple is misplaced. So is placing such confidence in any church or organization. Such thinking carried many into apostasy at the end of the first century—and the pattern has been sadly repeated throughout the centuries. What is vital is that we be firmly grounded with a personal relationship with God, rather than unquestioningly following a church or organization and trusting in loyalty to that organization to ensure our salvation.

In verse 16, the people had descended so far into depravity that God actually forbade Jeremiah from interceding for them.

God then strongly rebukes Israel for worshiping "the queen of heaven" (verses 17-18). This goddess, also mentioned in Jeremiah 44:15-30, is elsewhere referred to as Ashtoreth—known to other Middle Eastern cultures as

Ishtar or Astarte—from which the modern name Easter derives. As Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words reports: “The term ‘Easter’ is not of Christian origin. It is another form of Astarte, one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven. The festival of Pasch [Passover] in post apostolic times was a continuation of the Jewish feast.... From this Pasch the pagan festival of ‘Easter’ was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity” (“Easter,” New Testament section, 1985).

Ishtar was a fertility goddess. And today rabbits and eggs are the symbols of sexual fertility and procreation used to celebrate the holiday named after her. Indeed, the special “cakes for the queen of heaven” (verse 18) may be the origin of the popular Easter custom of hot cross buns. It is also interesting to note that many of those who worship Mary as the “Mother of God” today also refer to her as the “Queen of Heaven.”

Because of their rebellion, terrible punishment was coming on the Jews of Jeremiah’s day (verse 20)—and will likewise come upon all Israel of the latter days, as many other prophecies confirm.

Again, God says there is too much emphasis on form of religion and not enough on right substance. He tells them to go ahead and make all the sacrifices they want but that it won’t do them any good (verse 21). God did not command such sacrifices when He first delivered Israel from Egypt. The first thing He commanded was obedience (verses 22-23). Consider that some people today may give offerings or do a few good deeds believing that’s enough to satisfy God. Others may do far more—being legalistically meticulous over the smallest details of obedience—and yet ignore the weightier matters of the law, as was the case with the Pharisees whom Christ denounced in His day (see Matthew 23:23; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Through the centuries, the Israelites had failed to obey (Jeremiah 7:24)—and this despite the fact that God had sent so many prophets. In Mark 12:1-12, Christ related a parable that expressed the efforts God had made in this regard—all to no avail. God tells Jeremiah that his situation will be no different—the people will not listen to him either (Jeremiah 7:27). And even now, with Jeremiah’s words nearly everywhere in modern Israel (being part of the Bible), they still don’t.

Because of the people’s refusal to obey, God has Jeremiah tell them to cut off their hair—an apparently figurative reference. “The Heb[rew] feminine form tells us that it’s Jerusalem [rather than Jeremiah] who is to cut her hair. The reference is to a person who made a Nazarite vow and was set aside as holy [as all Israel was supposed to be in a sense]. If defiled, one had to cut off his or her hair to symbolize pollution [see Numbers 6:1-21]” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on 7:29).

The Jews had gone so far as to set up abominations—idols and pagan altars—in the temple of God (this having occurred a few decades earlier during the reign of Manasseh). And they went further still, sacrificing their children at Tophet: “In the valley of Hinnom, a gruesome place throughout the history of Judah, King Manasseh had built an altar to the pagan god, Molech. There the children of worshippers were burned on a fiery altar as sacrifices to the pagan god. ‘Topheth’ means ‘fireplace’ or ‘furnace’ and was probably the name of a pit dug in the ground for this abominable ritual” (Russell Dilday, Mastering the Old Testament, 1987, Vol. 9, p. 484).

Of this ghastly practice, God says, “...which I did not command, nor did it [even] come into My heart” (Jeremiah 7:31)—seeming to imply that they believed God had commanded it. Why would they have thought such a thing? Because their worship was syncretistic—blending paganism into the true religion. The Hebrew word for “Lord” was Baal, a name that also denoted the false sun god. And God was their King, the Hebrew word for which was Melek or Molech, another name denoting a pagan deity. Many thus believed that the Lord and King—in their mind the true God—had commanded their traditional religious practices, when these practices had actually come from

paganism. God would not accept such worship even if people believed they were properly serving Him through it (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

God says the Valley of Hinnom (Gai Hinnom or, in the Greek New Testament, Gehenna) will be renamed the Valley of Slaughter—"so named because of the great slaughter of the Jews about to take place at Jerusalem: a just retribution of their sin in slaying their children to Moloch in Tophet" (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on Jeremiah 7:32). However, it is likely that this is also representative of the terrible punishment to come on Judah and Israel in the end time. It may also be typical of the final judgment on all rebellion since the New Testament 12 times uses Gehenna as a designation for the place of final punishment, where the incorrigibly wicked will be burned up—called the "lake of fire" in the book of Revelation.

In chapter 8, we see the propensity of conquering nations to dishonor the dead. In ancient times, they would often dig up the graves—usually tombs and ossuaries—for anything of value to plunder (verses 1-2). This was, of course, looked upon as a horrible desecration. The point is that death and destruction are not the full measure of punishment. The people are also to suffer national ignominy and shame. The ones who aren't dead will wish they were dead—being dragged away as slaves (verse 3).

God laments that His people are perpetual backsliders (verse 5). He heard their past cries for relief and rescued them many times—but they just won't turn their lives around (verse 6). In verse 7 God points out that while birds know when it is time to take major action in migrating, responding to promptings God has put within them, human beings seem oblivious to God's promptings to obey Him—the increasing calamities intended as warnings.

In verses 8-9, the educated people who are supposed to be preserving and teaching God's Word have actually rejected it—and proclaim falsehood instead. As the apostle Paul later remarked of pagan philosophers, "Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22).

Warning of judgment then, God repeats the reason He gave for it in Jeremiah 6:10-15 (8:10-12). God tells Jeremiah that punishment is coming (verse 13), whereupon the prophet relates the sentiments the people will express when judgment falls (verses 14-16). Forces of enemy invasion are described in the past tense to demonstrate the certainty of their coming—and, terrifyingly, they are declared to be God's forces (verse 16)—carrying out His will—and likened to the plague of serpents He sent among the ancient Israelites when they rebelled in the wilderness (verse 17; see Numbers 21:6).

As we read through these sections, it is evident that a dialogue is transpiring, wherein sometimes Jeremiah speaks and sometimes God speaks directly—and sometimes one of them relates the words, or future words, of the people. Verse 18 begins a lament of Jeremiah. In verse 19, he quotes the future words of the people, "wondering that God should have delivered them up to the enemy, seeing that He is Zion's king, dwelling in her" (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on verse 19). Of course, they shouldn't have placed so much stock in this—just as they shouldn't have relied too much on the temple in chapter 7. God interjects at the end of 8:19 to explain that the people have brought the situation on themselves. Verse 20 then has the people speaking a proverb about the harvest being past and the summer being ended. "Meaning: One season of hope after another has passed, but the looked-for deliverance never came, and now all hope is gone" (note on verse 20).

This is all too much for Jeremiah. He says he is deeply hurt over what is going to happen to his people—the NIV has "crushed," the Hebrew here meaning "broken" or "shattered" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 20-22). "Rather than gloat at the vindication of his ministry, Jeremiah is heartbroken at the suffering of his fellow countrymen. Love for God and love for others sometimes are in tension. But loving God doesn't mean we must stop caring for others,

even when their tragedies are a consequence of their own sins” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on verse 21). Indeed, God Himself actually cares for these others even more than we do. And He looks for people who will love as He loves—who are willing to “stand in the gap” for mankind (compare Ezekiel 22:30). This quality abounds in Scripture among the leaders God chose—such as Abraham (Genesis 18:24), Job and Noah (Ezekiel 14:14, 20), Moses (Psalm 106:23), the apostle Paul (Romans 11:1), and of course Jesus Christ (John 3:17; Hebrews 7:25). We must exhibit this quality too (1 Timothy 2:1).

Jeremiah asks, “Is there no balm in Gilead...?”—that is, to heal the people. “The region of Gilead was known for its balsam ointment (see Gen. 37:25). There is no healing, physical or spiritual, for a people intent on rebelling against God” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Jeremiah 8:20-22). The prophet’s lament continues into verse 2. Yet it appears that the last sentence of this verse begins another interjection by God, an interjection made clearer in verse 3, wherein He identifies blatant sins of the people—that they are not “valiant for the truth” but, instead, “proceed from evil to evil.” In the same verse He says, “They do not know Me.” Nor, as we previously read, did they understand His judgment (8:7). “Like his northern counterpart Hosea (see Hosea 4:6), Jeremiah identified the people’s major deficiency as their lack of knowledge of the Lord and His judgment” (note on 8:7). And yet they were supposed to be Israelites—of God’s own nation. Sadly, in one negative respect they did take after their father Israel—or, rather, Jacob as he was named before his conversion. God says, “Every brother will utterly supplant” or, literally, “trip up by the heel” (JFB Commentary, note on verse 4). This is the root meaning of the name Jacob, who was deceitful in supplanting His brother Esau before he changed and turned his life around.

In verse 9, God repeats His question regarding punishment from chapter 5 (verses 9, 29). It is almost as if He is convincing Himself that this action needs to take place. He is loath to completely remove His people and allow destruction to come. But He must—for their sake and for everyone’s sake. All people must know where forsaking God’s law leads (compare verses 12-16).

In verses 17-22, God speaks of a resultant time of great sorrow. “This brief poem has been called the most brilliant elegy in the O[ld] T[estament]. The weeping women are professional mourners hired to wail loudly at funerals. The prophet calls for them to quickly train their daughters, for there will not be enough of such women to put to rest all the slain. When death, like a robber, climbs in through the windows [verse 21], every household will be affected. We can lock our doors against disaster. But there is always some window through which calamity can creep unexpectedly. For security we must rely on the Lord (v. 23)” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on verses 17-22).

Indeed, verse 23 shows that the only way we as human beings should legitimately feel good about ourselves is through the acceptance we have in God through knowing Him, understanding His character and—as the clear implication is—exhibiting His character traits in our own lives. Yet this is not truly glorying in ourselves, as we know that all of this comes only through God’s grace. That’s why Paul paraphrased the verse this way: “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD” (1 Corinthians 1:31; see verses 29-30).

To truly live by God’s character requires a spiritual change within us—a circumcision of the heart and not just of the flesh (see Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4). In fact, Paul later states that mere circumcision of the flesh is counted as uncircumcision if it is not accompanied by obedience to God (see Romans 2:23-29).

In Jeremiah 9:25-26, God says He will punish Judah along with its uncircumcised national neighbors. In an end-time context, it is of interest to know that the Muslims practice circumcision. Thus most of the men of Egypt, Edom, Ammon and Moab today are circumcised as a matter of their religion. But God looks on them all, including Judah, as uncircumcised because they are uncircumcised in heart. Interestingly, Judah here “is listed as just another

nation. In fact, it is not even at the head of the list. The point of this text is similar to the concept of temple inviolability (ch. 7). Just as God would destroy even the temple (7:12-14), so He would ignore even circumcision when it was merely an outward symbol (see Deut. 10:12-22)" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Jeremiah 9:25-26).

In chapter 10, God makes it very clear: "Learn not the way of the heathen...for the customs of the peoples are vain" (verses 2-3, KJV), stressing His total rejection of practices adopted from other religions even if they are intended to honor Him. For God is never honored by disobedience. We can read Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and 2 Corinthians 6:14 along with these verses.

God first points out here that pagans were "dismayed at the signs of heaven" (Jeremiah 10:2).

As believers in astrology, they considered their lives to be controlled by celestial events.

Today, it is no different among the huge number of people who make daily decisions based on their horoscopes. This practice is utterly condemned by God. Even if astrological forces existed—which they do not—the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the universe would have power over them.

Worse still, the sun, moon, planets and stars were actually worshiped by ancient nations—and their movements were used to determine times for worship. Again, this was all based on fear and superstition. For instance, the winter solstice was observed because the sun reached its lowest zenith on that day, the shortest day of the year. It was believed that worship, fires and sacrifices were needed to encourage and boost the sun god back to his higher station.

Afterward, the people celebrated the rebirth of the sun.

Indeed, the sun god was understood to have been born of his mother goddess around the time of the winter solstice—in fact, by the reckoning of various ancient cultures, on December 25. Evergreen plants and trees were used in this particular worship because they seemed to retain life through the winter months. These customs have continued down to our day in the form of the Christmas tree and decorations of holly and mistletoe.

Continuing then in Jeremiah 10, at least in the King James, New King James or Jewish Publication Society translations, the Christmas tree must surely come to mind. However, many mainstream Christian scholars, and other Bible versions, identify the objects addressed in this section as wooden poles or idols. That is certainly possible. In fact, it may even be likely if the word translated "workman" in verse 3 can only mean a skilled craftsman and if the word translated "ax" here can mean a carving tool, as some have rendered it. The exact meaning of the verse remains unclear.

Interestingly, it should be noted that the Hebrew word translated "wooden idol" in verse 8, etc, is normally translated "tree" in the Bible. Notice God's instruction back in Deuteronomy 16:21: "You shall not plant for yourself any tree [ets], as a wooden image [asherah], near the altar which you build for yourself to the LORD your God."

There are a number of references in Scripture to Asherah—understood to be an idol representation of the goddess Ashtoreth or Astarte, the mother goddess referred to in Scripture as the "queen of heaven" (mentioned in the highlights on Jeremiah 7:1-27). "From the Biblical references, it appears that Asherah is referred to in three manifestations: (1) as an image, probably a statue or figurine representing the goddess herself; (2) as a tree; and (3) as a tree trunk. The latter two are, in effect, symbols of the goddess" (Ruth Hestrin, "Understanding Asherah: Exploring Semitic Iconography," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Sept/Oct. 1991, p. 50). Indeed, the phrase "under every green tree" (Deuteronomy 12:2), is used a number of times in Scripture to denote a pagan sacred place—that is, not just trees but evergreen trees.

Jeremiah 10 is indeed talking about the setting up of idols. But what many fail to realize in reading through the chapter is that sometimes trees themselves were set up by ancient pagans as idols. Depending on the exact meaning of the words translated workman and ax in the chapter, a carved idol or an actual tree could be meant. Both were cut from the forest, with stands fashioned to keep them fixed and upright but still able to be moved and set up anywhere (compare verses 3-5). Both, in the ancient world, were decorated with silver and gold and draped with costly fabrics (compare verses 4, 9). With tree idols, idolatrous metal ornaments were sometimes fashioned and hung from the branches—which verse 9 could be describing. Yet the verse could alternatively be a reference to metal adornments for a carved idol.

In direct disobedience to God, the Jews under Manasseh actually set up an asherah in honor of Baal, the son and husband of Ashtoreth (see 2 Kings 21:3). Indeed, such was used in surrounding cultures to honor the sun-god Baal and his mother on the birthday of the sun, December 25—which is when this abomination of Manasseh may have taken place, in imitation of neighboring societies. Even if that's not exactly what Manasseh did, it is rather likely that such decorated trees in winter would have been part of the Jews' worship of Baal, as in other cultures.

(As you read this think of Christmas tree and Chanukah Bushes)

More amazing to consider is the fact that in the syncretistic blending of religions, Baal ("Lord") was identified with the true Lord. Thus, the apostate Jews, in copying pagan worship customs, may well have set up decorated evergreen trees to worship the birthday of the true Lord—the One who later came to earth as Jesus Christ! And the Lord called their adoption of such customs to honor Him an abomination. Indeed, He still does.

While people today do not worship trees when they set up Christmas trees or other evergreen decorations such as holly and mistletoe, they are nevertheless using accoutrements of past idolatry to supposedly honor God. Yet the true God will have none of it. He sees it as disobedience and rebellion—and idolatrously clinging to tradition over His direct commandments. For anything that comes before the true God is an idol, whether we literally bow down to it or not. Indeed, it is even possible that modern Christmas trees are intended by Jeremiah's words—particularly when we consider that this may be, as it seems to be on some level, an end-time prophecy to the "house of Israel" that speaks of God's coming wrath on the nations and the destruction of all idolatry (compare verses 1, 10-11, 15). For in the end time, the Israelite nations are not setting up wooden Asherah poles. But every winter, there are millions and millions of Christmas trees. And even if Christmas trees are not directly intended by the prophecy, the principle is the same.

Eventually, all false gods will be utterly destroyed—not only through the obliteration of physical idols but through removing falsehood from the minds of all people. Verses 12-13 tell of God who created all the things that people worship. The latter part of verse 13 is also found in Psalm 135:7—it is not clear which was written down first. Jeremiah 10:14-15 goes on to reveal the folly of idolatrous worship (compare Isaiah 44:14-18; Romans 1:22-31). And verse 16 of Jeremiah 10 focuses again on the true and living God—the Maker of all things. He is here referred to as the "Portion" or "share" of His people—as He supplies our every need and will one day share His very power and glory with all who will submit to Him and His righteous ways. (Verses 12-16 are repeated in Jeremiah 51:15-19.)

But the time of the exaltation of Israel is yet future. For the time being, God pronounces His judgment on the people of the land (verses 17-18, 21-22). Jeremiah is again distraught, personally identifying with the hurt of the people (verses 19-20). He pleads with God, stating that it is not possible for mankind to find the right way—rather, the people need God to direct their steps (verse 23). Standing in the place of Judah, Jeremiah does not ask God to avert punishment—as God had told him not to (see Jeremiah 7:16). Rather, He asks that God's correction be according to His sense of righteous judgment and fair justice (10:24)—and that it rightly be poured out as well on the nations who have been enemies of God and His people (verse 25).

Jeremiah 11 concludes with a plot against the prophet's life. Those behind it wanted to destroy "the tree with its fruit" (verse 19)—that is, the prophet with his prophecies. But God gave Jeremiah supernatural awareness of it. Indeed, God had warned when Jeremiah was first called that such threats would come—and He had encouraged him with the promise of divine protection and help (Jeremiah 1:17-19). Yet that was long ago, and it is possible that Jeremiah had not faced such threats so far—as he surely had state protection during the reign of godly Josiah. Now Josiah was dead though, and the nation was conspiring against God and His prophets. Moreover, the circumstances no doubt made this situation particularly difficult for Jeremiah: "Throughout his four decades of service to God the prophet would know the wrath of kings and courtiers, prophets and priests, and the entire population of Judah. He would be accused of betraying his country. He would be imprisoned and almost killed. But perhaps nothing would hurt as much as this first crisis, when God revealed that the people of his hometown, Anathoth, were plotting to murder him! The conspiracy was even more dreadful because Anathoth was a city settled by priestly families. Anyone who has taken a stand for his or her moral convictions, or witnessed outspokenly about faith in Christ, will understand the pain of ridicule or rejection. But few have any notion of the hurt Jeremiah experienced when those he had known from childhood wanted to take his life" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on 11:18-20).

This parallels the reception Jesus Christ later experienced in His hometown of Nazareth (see Luke 4:16-29). Indeed, there are other parallels with Christ here as well. "His own familiar friends had plotted against the prophet. The language [about being a lamb led to the slaughter] is exactly the same as that applied to Messiah (Isa. 53:7). Each prophet and patriarch exemplified in his own person someone feature or more in the manifold attributes and sufferings of the Messiah to come; just as the saints have done since His coming (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24)" (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on Jeremiah 11:19).

Jeremiah lays the case before God as the righteous Judge and Vindicator. And God pronounces a punishment of death by sword and famine, both of which would come with the later Babylonian invasion and siege. God says that "no remnant" would be left to "the men of Anathoth" (verse 23)—that is, to the men involved in the conspiracy. That there were some in the town who weren't involved is evident from the fact that Ezra later reported that some men of Anathoth returned to the town following the Babylonian captivity (see Ezra 2:1, 23).

In Jeremiah 12, we see the prophet terribly disturbed at the whole affair. He asks questions that had been asked before. "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (verse 1; see Job 12:6; Psalm 73:12). He remarks on how such treacherous people spoke of God often—indeed, Anathoth was a town of priests!—but their hearts were far from Him (Matthew 15:8; Isaiah 29:13). This is a problem so many have today. They give lip service to following Christ, but they don't obey Him (Matthew 7:21-23). In contrast, Jeremiah served God from the heart as God well knew (Jeremiah 12:3). How strange then that the wicked seemed to have it so good and he seemed to have it so hard.

Jeremiah seems to wonder why God is talking about doing something but not yet doing it. He pleads for God to act. As he had been like a lamb led to the slaughter, he asks that they experience the same (verse 3). In verse 4, Jeremiah appears to be remarking on droughts that were already occurring as warnings of greater punishment to come (see 14:1-6). These hurt the plants and animals but were not reforming the wicked! They still said, "He [Jeremiah] will not see our final end" (12:4). In other words, they were basically saying that he would die before them—that he would be killed and they would go on living, in no worry over this dreadful "final end" he spoke of.

In verse 5, instead of giving an answer of comfort, God says things are going to get much worse. He first uses the metaphor of a race. If Jeremiah is worn out in his contest with the "footmen" (the men of Anathoth), how can he make it against "horses" (the much greater and more powerful antagonists he still has to face)? If he can't take it in

peacetime (as he yet suffered no actual harm), how would he make it through the “floodplain [or thicket] of the Jordan”? That is, as this expression connoted “the wild, luxuriant and beast-infested growths of the hot marshy land beside the Jordan” (New Bible Commentary, note on verse 5), how would he endure real physical suffering later? Even now, it was already worse than Jeremiah knew.

Some of his own family members were part of the conspiracy against him (verse 6).

The fact is, God had already told Jeremiah He would handle it—and would protect him. So He now expects the prophet to grit his teeth and develop strength. That is a call to character. Indeed, what he was now going through was to prepare him for tougher times ahead. It is very much like the Christian experience today. God does not remove all our trials. We constantly witness the seeming prosperity of those who don’t follow His ways while things don’t always go so well for us. Moreover, our families and others close to us sometimes turn against us as Jesus warned (Matthew 10:36). But in spite of it all we must remain strong and devoted to following God—just as Jeremiah was required to. And in doing so, there will be great reward (see Mark 10:29-30).

In Jeremiah 12:7, God appears to simply pick right back up where He left off in 11:17—as if to say, “All right then, let’s get back to it.” But in his words there is a message for Jeremiah and his situation. God basically states that He has had to forsake His house and those He loves because others have ruined them. God, we see, does not ask His people to endure things that He Himself has not endured. This was made most evident in the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh to suffer and die for the sins of the world.

After speaking of the destruction that would come on His people for their sins, He then turns to the surrounding lands—“evil neighbors” who worshiped other gods and taught God’s people to do the same (verses 14-17). They would now invade. These neighbors “included the powerful nations of Babylon and Assyria, as well as opportunistic kingdoms like Edom, Moab, and Ammon. These latter kingdoms seized land, crops, and hostages when Judah was weakened by invasion” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 14). Ultimately, God would bring punishment on them all. But He also “gave them an amazing promise: He would show compassion on them by allowing them to learn about him, the God of Israel, even as they had taught the Israelites about their gods (12.16). Rather than just wiping them from the face of the earth, the Lord would give them an opportunity to turn from their worthless idols and serve him. This was truly amazing kindness. This gesture shows God’s heart of compassion for all the people of the world. It demonstrates the truth that Peter would later express, that the Lord is ‘patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost’ (2 Peter 3.9 [Contemporary English Version])” (“An Amazing Promise,” Word in Life Bible, 1998, sidebar on Jeremiah 12:14-17).

The beginning of Jeremiah 13 (verses 1-5) may have followed chapter 12 in time order, but since the remainder of chapter 13, explaining the significance of the first five verses, appears to refer to events during the reign of Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin or Jeconiah (compare verses 6, 18), we will read all of chapter 13 at a later time.

Jeremiah 11 is a clear break from preceding chapters in the book. The section hearkens to God’s covenant with His people—which included blessings for obedience to God’s law and curses for disobedience. During Josiah’s reign, the nation had renewed its covenant relationship with God after the Book of the Law was found. But the recommitment of the people was merely outward as their return to evil ways following Josiah’s death made clear. “To a forgetful people the prophet says that the ancient stipulations still hold force, including the curses on the unfaithful. A date in the reign of Jehoiakim is appropriate for this discourse. Apparently Jeremiah was residing in, or frequenting, his native Anathoth, for he is made aware of a plot against him [there] (11:18-21)” (The New Bible Commentary: Revised, 1976, note on 11:1-12:17).

Because of Judah’s violation of the covenant, God pronounces the curse on disobedience called for in the covenant (verse 3). Verse 5 ends with Jeremiah responding, “So be it”—or, in Hebrew, Amen, which was the response the

people were to give to the proclamation of the curses according to Deuteronomy 27:15-26, showing concurrence with God's justice.

All the towns of Judah as well as the city of Jerusalem were to hear God's case against Judah (Jeremiah 11:6). In verses 9-10, God describes the return of the people to their evil and idolatrous ways following Josiah's death as an intentional plot—a planned rebellion to throw off the yoke Josiah had put on them. Just as the house of Israel had broken God's covenant, so had Judah (verse 10).

Thus, God decreed that certain calamity was coming (verse 11). The many gods of the people wouldn't save them (verse 12). God interjects with scorn over the fact that Judah had as many gods as they had towns (verse 13)—perhaps meaning that each town had its own god. Sadly, this statement is a repeat of the one made in Jeremiah 2:28, showing that the people had not changed at all since the time prior to Josiah's reformation. Furthermore, God adds the fact that they had as many shrines to Baal as they had streets! So He repeats his earlier directive that Jeremiah not pray for them (11:14; see 7:16).

In verse 15 of chapter 11, "My beloved" refers to "Judah, who remains the object of Yahweh's love although she must leave His house for her hypocrisy" (New Bible Commentary, note on verses 15-16). The mention of "holy flesh" in verse 15 is unclear in the New King James Version. Most other translations render this as meaning sacred offerings. For example, the New International Version has, "Can consecrated meat avert your punishment?" "The reference is to sacrifices offered at the temple. It is hypocritical as well as futile to hurry to church after sinning and then return eagerly to your sins" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on verse 15).

God looked on His beloved Bride—His people Israel, of whom Judah was now the remnant— as a beautiful and fruitful green olive tree (as King David was inspired to describe himself in Psalm 52:8). Olive oil represented richness and blessing (Psalm 23:5; 104:15). But here the tree is pictured with broken and burning branches. These branches, representing individual sinning Israelites, were to be broken off. Paul later uses this imagery in Romans 11.

Jeremiah 11:18-12:6, the first part of our next reading, appears to be an interjection, as 12:7 seems to pick up from 11:17.

We turn back now to chapter 13 of Jeremiah, as most of what it describes—starting in verse 6 and continuing to the end of the chapter—appears to fall during the three-month reign of the 18-year-old Jeconiah, who was apparently heavily guided in his rule by his mother Nehushta (compare verse 18; 22:24-27; 29:2; 2 Kings 24:8, 12). The events of the first five verses of Jeremiah 13, however, likely happened during the reign of Jeconiah's father Jehoiakim, as we will see—perhaps soon after the events of chapters 11 and 12.

God starts out telling Jeremiah to obtain a linen "girdle" (13:1, KJV). There is a difference of opinion as to exactly what this piece of clothing was. Many say the Hebrew here should be translated belt. Some say sash. Others contend that a waistcloth, or loincloth, is meant. Still others argue for a skirt or kilt, or even shorts. It is not clear whether the girdle was decorative outerwear or an undergarment. What is clear is that it was worn around the waist (verses 2, 4, 11). This was to symbolize Israel and Judah, which God had bound to Himself by covenant— and which relied on clinging to God's very being to be "held up," so to speak (compare verse 11).

The waistband would also have been valuable. All of this was fitting symbolism for Israel and Judah. "Linen was a costly material (Is 3.23, 24), often imported from Egypt (Pr 7.16). The Israelites generally reserved its use for making exquisite furnishings, such as those in the sacred tent [the tabernacle] (Ex 26.1, 31, 13), and fine garments, such as those worn by the priests (28.39) or a favored person (Es 8.15; Ez 16.10.13)" ("A Waste

of Fine Material,” The Word in Life Bible, sidebar on Jeremiah 13:1-11). Israel, rescued from Egypt and supported by God, was to be a special treasure and chosen priesthood. The waistband was not supposed to get wet (verse 1), as this would cause it to begin deteriorating.

God then instructs Jeremiah to take the waistband to the River Euphrates (Hebrew Perath) far to the north and hide it in a hole. “This would have meant a round-trip journey of some seven hundred miles—a trip that would have taken two to three months” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 3-5). And Jeremiah ends up going twice. Not believing that the prophet would have left his responsibilities in Judah for so long, some commentators argue that Perath should in this instance be rendered Ephrathah (another name for Bethlehem) or Parah (a town of Benjamin, Joshua 18:23), both of which were quite near Jerusalem. Yet the Euphrates seems far more likely.

First of all, Perath normally denotes the Euphrates in Scripture. The objection that Jeremiah would not have left his duties for so long is improper reasoning since his duty would always be to go where God told him. Consider also that Jeremiah preached for many, many years in Judah—so an absence of a few months is not at all unreasonable. God could even have supernaturally sped up Jeremiah’s journey if time was a factor.

Most important, however, is the symbolism of the Euphrates. The land promised to Israel actually extended all the way to the Euphrates (Exodus 23:31; Deuteronomy 11:24)—and reached as far in the days of David and Solomon (2 Samuel 8:3, 6; 1 Kings 4:21, 24). Beyond the Euphrates was the territory of the Mesopotamian powers—previously Assyria and now Babylon. The Euphrates itself was the crossing point. The “hiding” of the waistband there would seem to imply God’s people seeking refuge and help from the powers of Mesopotamia. This was true of their national alliances. It was also true religiously, since the false gods the people worshiped originated in Babylon. The people of Israel were ultimately taken beyond the Euphrates themselves—in captivity. And the same would soon befall the people of Judah.

(Interestingly, the Euphrates continues to play a part in Bible prophecy right to the end of the age of mankind—see Revelation 16:12-14.)

The expression “after many days” in Jeremiah 13:6 could actually mean that Jeremiah didn’t return to the Euphrates until years later. If a few months of travel were required for the journey, the events of the first part of the chapter must have happened prior to Jeconiah’s three-month reign—thus sometime during his father’s reign.

Spending years in a hole by a river—far away from its owner—there was no way the waistband would not get wet and dirty and thus suffer damage. Indeed, Jeremiah finds it rotted and worthless. This parallels what happened to Israel and Judah: “Rather than clinging to the Lord, the people chose to worship idols (13:10). They became as useless to God as Jeremiah’s rotten linen belt was to him. The processes in [the physical realm of] creation often parallel the realities of the spiritual realm. Spiritual decay may not be as obvious as the damage of

moisture to buried cloth, but the results are even worse.... Jeremiah’s ruined belt still paints a vivid picture of our ruined condition [when we fail to cling to God and His ways]” (“INDepth: Jeremiah’s Symbolic Acts, Nelson Study Bible, sidebar on Jeremiah 13).

God then tells Jeremiah to say to the people, “Every wine jug is to be filled with wine”—to which the people basically respond, “Of course they are” (compare verse 12). Commentators believe the statement Jeremiah made was a proverb of the time. Some think it meant “good times ahead”—and that the complacent Jews were saying they already knew this (indeed, the false prophets had told them so). Yet it may also be that the statement was a proverb denoting a truism—that wine jugs were made to hold wine. Either way, the common understanding of this proverb was not what God meant by it. He meant that the people, as the wine jugs, were going to be filled with His wrath until they reeled as if drunk: “As wine intoxicates, so God’s wrath and judgments shall reduce them to that

state of helpless distraction that they shall rush on to their own ruin (ch. 25:15; 49:12; Isa. 51:17, 21, 22; 63:6)” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on Jeremiah 13:12).

In verse 17, we again see Jeremiah’s tremendous heart of feeling. As bold as his pronouncements have been, he knows he will deeply lament with weeping when his countrymen are carried away captive.

We then see a message for the king and queen mother (verse 18)—again, most likely Jeconiah and Nehushta. They would be exiled to Babylon very soon. The mention of the “cities of the South” in Judah (verse 19) is evidently to point out that even these—though located the farthest away from northern invasion (see verse 20)—will be shut up in a siege that no one will break. And all Judah—the whole land—will be taken captive.

The nation will be stripped of her people and violated (verses 20-22, 26). God depicts the sins of Jerusalem as a prostitute that has no shame—sentenced for adultery and immorality, having forgotten Him to whom they were bound by covenant and trusting in false idols (verses 25, 27).

God speaks a now-famous proverb in verse 23—concerning Ethiopian skin color and leopard spots—that implies people cannot change their character and live rightly. “Habit is second nature...it is morally impossible that the Jews can alter their inveterate habits of sin” (JFB, note on verse 23). Yet notice God’s remarkable statement at the end of the chapter: “Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?” (verse 27). The fact is, while the Jews were incapable of transforming themselves into people of right character, they actually could “be made clean”—through the miraculous power of God. Yet they had to respond to Him and cling to Him for this to happen. But alas, they did not.

The same situation remains true for everyone. While the normal human mind is hostile against God and cannot be subject to His law (Romans 8:7), through the transforming power of God we can be changed. Indeed, we must be changed. That is the message of the whole Bible.

Drought, first apparently mentioned in 12:4, continues to afflict the land (14:1-6; see also 23:10). Things get so bad that the people resort to calling on God, Jeremiah here recording the people’s plea for relief in which they confessed their sins and asked God to save them for His own name’s sake (14:7-9). This was according to the prayer Solomon had long before prayed at the temple’s dedication: “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess your name, and turn from their sin because you afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance” (1 Kings 8:35-36).

But there was a major problem here. The people confessed but they did not “turn from their sin” as Solomon had stated. They asked God to act for the sake of His name (His reputation) after they had, by their wicked conduct, profaned God’s name among the nations—and would not desist from doing so. Therefore, their repentance is meaningless and God will not accept it. He knows that such pleas always come in times of need. In the past He answered the calls over and over again. This time He has drawn the line and will follow through with the threatened punishment (Jeremiah 14:10). Again, God tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people (verse 11; compare 7:16; 11:14).

In verse 12 of chapter 14, God says that He will not accept any of their hypocritical displays of piety but will send worse punishment than just the droughts. The people will be consumed by the sword (of warfare), by famine and by pestilence (disease epidemics). Centuries before, King David was given a choice between these three punishments for sin (see 2 Samuel 24:13).

But the people of Judah would now suffer all three (Jeremiah 14:12; compare 16:4; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17-18; Ezekiel 14:21). Indeed, these terrible occurrences have often formed a cycle in human history. In war, people are

pillaged, their crops and livestock ruined, their water taken or polluted. This leads to famine. Widespread malnourishment then weakens people to the point of greater susceptibility to infection with disease.

Jeremiah's love for the people is obvious. While he is not allowed to pray for the people's deliverance from punishment, he proposes mitigating circumstances that may alleviate the people's guilt to some degree. "He says it's the prophets' fault. The prophets have misled the ordinary folks. There are two things to note here. First, we are each responsible for our own choices. We can't pass that on to anyone else, even preachers! Second, the prophets were guilty of misleading Judah and would suffer more greatly than others [compare James 1:1-3]. [But] don't suppose that 'he said it was all right' or 'I was obeying orders' relieves us of responsibility" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on Jeremiah 14:13-16, emphasis added).

In verses 17-18, God gives Jeremiah a lament to utter when the prophesied punishment actually comes. "Jeremiah's tears, portraying his own and the Lord's anguish over a destroyed people, are part of his message to them and have the force of an 'acted oracle.' They show the backlash of the message of doom on him who preaches it, and none should preach destruction who cannot weep for those under its threat" (New Bible Commentary, note on verse 17). Surely we will feel the same when we see our nations suffer in the years ahead. Indeed, many tears were shed by God's people over the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. Thus we can certainly empathize with Jeremiah.

At the end of verse 18, it is not clear in this case if the "land they do not know" is a foreign land or their homeland so devastated as to be unrecognizable. Eventually, as other prophecies make clear, they will be removed to a foreign land.

In verses 19-22, the people make another empty plea for mercy. "The people of Judah based their hope for relief on an appeal to God to act for the sake of (1) His name, (2) His temple (e.g., His 'glorious throne'), and (3) His covenant. Why was the plea empty? Because Israel's blatant idolatry had already dragged God's name through the mud. His temple was defiled by those who supposed they could [brazenly] sin and still worship. And His covenant had been broken by those who now wanted to claim it. There comes a time when only judgment can preserve God's honor" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on verse 21).

So God responds in Jeremiah 15:1-9 with His determination to proceed. Moses and Samuel were among the great leaders of God who interceded for Israel with favorable results (Exodus 32:11; 1 Samuel 7:9). But even their intercession would avail nothing for the people now. Verse 2 of Jeremiah 15 is rather ominous, telling the prophet to respond to inquiries about where to go (i.e., what to do now) with the pronouncement of judgment. "The imagery of dogs, birds and beasts devouring human flesh vividly illustrates not only death but desecration" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 3-4). These animals may also portray gentile nations here.

"The basis for this desecration is the defilement of Jerusalem that took place during the reign of Manasseh, when idolatry reigned in the temple courts and children were sacrificed to Molech" (note on verses 3-4). Manasseh was the most evil king Judah ever had (2 Kings 21:9-18). It seems he did turn to God later, but had caused much damage to the relationship between Judah and God. "He was now dead, but the effects of his sins still remained. How much evil one bad man can cause! The evil fruits remain even after he himself has received repentance and forgiveness. The people had followed his wicked example ever since; and it is implied that it was only through the long-suffering of God that the penal consequences had been suspended up to the present time (cf. I Kings 14:16; II Kings 21:11; 23:26; 24:3, 4)" (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on verse 4).

Jeremiah has faithfully pronounced the message God has told him to. But no one, of course, is happy to hear it. His comment regarding not having lent for interest is "proverbial for, 'I have given no cause for strife against me'"

(Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on verse 10). Yet his preaching has generated nothing but strife it seems. Everyone hates him, whereupon Jeremiah is understandably dejected. He wishes he hadn't been born. "Note that his call was from the womb and that God decreed from birth that he would be a prophet (see 1.5; 20:14-18)" (The HarperCollins Study Bible, 1993, note on Jeremiah 15:10).

The Hebrew of verse 11 is difficult. The New Revised Standard Version renders it, "The LORD said: Surely I have intervened in your life for good, surely I have imposed enemies on you in a time of trouble and in a time of distress." But, God asks in verse 12, can anyone break iron and bronze? This appears to symbolize Jeremiah, whom God referred to as an "iron pillar" and "bronze walls" in his call (1:18; compare 15:20). That is, God would protect him.

In verses 13-14 it is not clear whether God is speaking to Jeremiah or to Judah again. The latter seems more likely but some have suggested that Jeremiah is to experience some measure of punishment as a representative of the people—perhaps, in some sense, as a type of Christ. We do know that Jeremiah was later carried away against his will to Egypt. In any case, Jeremiah asks that God, in fairness, would protect him and take vengeance on the real wrongdoers, those who are persecuting him. The prophet declares his faithfulness to God. He "ate" God's words—accepting and internalizing them and finding joy in them (verse 16). He was not part of the assembly of mockers because 1) he would not mock God's message and 2) what he preached prevented him from being part of the assembly at all—he was isolated from everyone.

In verse 18, we see Jeremiah in great anguish over his predicament. But then he goes too far. Having declared his own faithfulness, he actually accuses God of faithlessness. God is the fountain of living waters (2:13), but now Jeremiah wonders if He is not like a dried up stream as far as the prophet's welfare is concerned.

In 15:19, God responds with a gentle rebuke. It is a rebuke because God calls on Jeremiah to "return"—the Old Testament word for repent. He tells him to "take the precious from the vile" — an "image from metals: 'If thou wilt separate what is precious in thee (the divine graces imparted) from what is vile (thy natural corruptions, impatience, and hasty words), thou shalt be as My mouth': my mouthpiece (Exod. 4:16)" (JFB Commentary, note on Jeremiah 15:19). God warns him, "Let them return to you [that is, let the people change to walking in your right, faithful ways], but you must not return to them [you must not change to walking in their wrong, faithless ways]." If Jeremiah turns from his negative, wrong thoughts, then he will be able to continue in God's service and God will continue to protect him, just as was promised at Jeremiah's initial call (verse 20). It is in this way that God's rebuke is gentle, for it is accompanied by a wonderful positive reassurance of His enduring faithfulness even despite the weakness of His servant. This is something for which we should all be ever so grateful.

Jeremiah is commanded by God not to marry and have children while in Judah. He is also forbidden from taking part in social activities such as mourning and feasting. Both were to serve as a witness against Judah. "The prophet is ordered to behave in an eccentric manner [as prophets often were]...; celibacy was extremely uncommon, refusal to participate in funerary rites ill-mannered and disrespectful. Both actions had one meaning: There is no future here" (New Bible Commentary, note on verses 1-21). "The prohibition against marriage is to underscore the coming death and destruction that will face parents and children. Even burial will be denied the dead. The theme of lament is repeated in God's refusal to allow Jeremiah to intercede on the people's behalf (7.16; 14.11-12; 15.1). He is also forbidden to rejoice with them, for joy will be taken from the land during the impending destruction and exile" (HarperCollins Study Bible, note on 16:1-13). Jeremiah 16:9 is a repetition of 7:34—and will be repeated again in 25:10.

Moreover, the restrictions imposed on Jeremiah actually served his well-being. He would not have been able to have a normal family life anyway with his commission and the animosity it brought. Furthermore, the near future

was going to be calamitous—“so severe that the single state would be then (contrary to the ordinary course of things) preferable to the married (cf. I Cor. 7:8; 26:29; Matt. 24:19; Luke 23:29)” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on verse 2). In times of great trial, worry over loved ones increases the pain of the circumstances. This being so, we can perhaps see how the prohibition against fraternizing in normal social contexts was also a great blessing to Jeremiah. It kept him from developing close friendships with those who were soon to suffer. Moreover, we should consider that many of the social customs of the people, such as those in Jeremiah 16:6, were derived from paganism.

Jeremiah would, of course, have to separate himself from such practices.

Verses 10-13 illustrate the falsity of the people’s confession of sin in chapter 14. For they here do not even know what sins they are guilty of—even though they have committed terrible idolatry worse than their ancestors! So punishment is certainly coming—they will be taken away to another land where they will learn through painful experience what it really means to be subject to paganism and cut off from the true God (16:13).

Verses 14-15 (repeated in 23:7-8) offer a glimmer of hope about the future. God will bring Israel back in a second Exodus (compare Isaiah 11:11). This is speaking not of the Jewish return from Babylonian captivity in ancient times, but of the return of all Israel from captivity at the end of this age. This should be clear from the fact that the Jewish return from Babylonian exile never overshadowed the Mosaic Exodus from Egypt—as God said this return would.

In the next verse, Jeremiah 16:16, God seems to return to the theme of immediate punishment, as hunting and fishing are elsewhere used as metaphors for captivity by enemies (compare Ezekiel 12:13; Amos 4:2; Habakkuk 1:15; Micah 7:2). Yet perhaps God is actually using similar imagery to describe the bringing back of His people mentioned in the previous verse. Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary states: “It is remarkable, the same image is used in a good sense of the Jews’ restoration, implying that just as their enemies were employed by God to take them in hand for destruction, so the same [i.e., hunters and fishers] shall be employed for their restoration. (Ezek. 47:9, 10). So spiritually... [God’s ministers are “fishers of men”], employed by God to be heralds of salvation, ‘catching men’ for life (Matt.

4:19; Luke 5:10; Acts 2:41; 4:4...II Cor. 12:16)” (note on Jeremiah 16:16).

But before any future regathering, God’s people are to receive “double” for their sins (verse 18). It is not clear exactly what is meant here. It may refer to the fact that God expects more from those to whom He gives special gifts so that Israel and Judah are to receive a more severe judgment than the rest of the nations (compare Luke 12:47-48; James 3:1). Some suggest that “double” is idiomatic for “fully” or “amply.” Others maintain that the double punishment actually refers to two periods of punishment, the ancient captivity and the one to come later—just prior to the ultimate restoration promised in the preceding verses.

The point of verses 19-21 is also not exactly clear. These seem to refer to the time of Christ’s return, when the relationship between God and man is restored and all nations on earth come to know God and worship Him (compare Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:9). The word “gentiles” in verse 19 of Jeremiah 16 actually means “nations” and, in that sense, could include Israel and Judah. So the point may be the happy ending of Israel’s future return, followed by all nations. However, the point may also be that while God’s people have filled His land with foreign idols and are rejected (verse 18), many foreigners would come to forsake their pagan past and embrace the true God—that is, during the Church age (from apostolic times until Christ’s return). This would serve as a point of shame against God’s own people (see Romans 11:11). Either way, we can still be thankful for the happy ending promised in verses 14-15 of Jeremiah 16 and throughout Scripture.

Rather than the law of God, rebellious idolatry—including pagan offering and asherah worship—is ingrained in the heart, the inner character, of the people of Judah, being passed down from one generation to the next (17:1-2).

This is much like the sin of modern Israelite nations. Christmas trees and other pagan traditions are clung to so strongly as to be considered part of the very heart of the people—again, passed down through the generations.

For the people's rebellion, God will give their enemies the wealth of His "mountain [Jerusalem] in the field [of the nation of Judah]" and of all their "high places" (worship centers) in the land (verse 3). Indeed, even the people themselves will be given to their enemies—deported to a foreign land (verse 4). God's anger will burn "forever"—that is, against the sin as long as the sin persists.

God then contrasts trust in man with trust in God. In verse 5, two different Hebrew words are translated "man": "Cursed is the man [the person] who trusts in man [mankind]." The Jews should have realized this regarding their national and religious leaders. And we must understand this today. This does not mean we cannot place any trust in other human beings. But our ultimate faith and trust must not be in other people—or ourselves. Consider that God Himself gives human beings to guide and teach us. But He cautions that our allegiance must be to Him and His Word first. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In fact, Scripture contains many warnings about false teachers who will rise up, some even within the fellowship of the true Church (20:29; 2 Peter 2:1-4). And God makes it clear that people will not be excused if they choose to follow what a man says above what God says. Human beings have no authority to change any of God's directives. Those who rely ultimately on other people or themselves are inevitably cursed.

Those who place faith and trust in God, on the other hand, are blessed. They are compared to fruitful trees, as in Psalm 1:3. They do not need to fear times of physical drought—as Judah was experiencing when Jeremiah prophesied—because the Almighty God is there to sustain them. He will ensure their fruitfulness on a physical level and, more importantly, on a spiritual level—granting them abundant eternal life in the end.

Failure to discern this is a problem of the heart—a person's inner thoughts and feelings. God declares that the heart is deceitful—the original Hebrew word here coming from the same root as the name Jacob (the designation for unconverted Israel)—and "desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 7:9). For the latter expression, some margins have "incurably sick." It is like a mental illness: "Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead" (Ecclesiastes 9:3). Romans 8:7 tells us that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." Clearly, the human mind needs spiritual healing, which God ultimately will bring (see Jeremiah 31:33).

Lest any think that the heart is so deceitful that even God can't see what it's about, God assures us that He is quite aware of it and, knowing to what degree each person is culpable, is able to deliver just recompense to everyone (17:10).

The discussion then moves from those who trust in human beings to those who trust in wealth apart from right living. A "nest egg" won't ultimately save anyone (verse 11). God is our only real source of hope (verse 12).

Those who depart from the Lord, "the fountain of living waters," shall be "written in the earth" (verse 13). This apparently refers to being written in sand, which signifies no permanence at all—as opposed to being "written in heaven" (Luke 10:20) in the "book of life" (Revelation 13:8; 20:12, 15). Perhaps Jeremiah 17:13 explains why Jesus, after declaring Himself the source of living waters (John 7:37-38) and being rejected as such by the religious leaders of His day (verses 45-53), "wrote on the ground" when these religious leaders came to entrap Him the next morning (8:1-9).

Jeremiah prays for his own spiritual healing (Jeremiah 17:14). He knows that his message will provoke further scorn, beyond what he has already suffered. In verse 15, he declares that his persecutors are essentially inviting the day of doom in their mocking. In verse 16, Jeremiah points out that he himself has not desired the coming of that

day. He has taken no joy in pronouncing judgment on the people—certainly not on the nation as a whole. However, he does ask for vindication—that he would be protected (verse 17) and that his persecutors would suffer the judgment they themselves called for (verse 18), the “double destruction” here being what God had already foretold (see 16:18).

The remainder of chapter 17 is devoted to God’s admonition about keeping the Sabbath holy.

In verses 19 and 20, Jeremiah addresses the “kings” of Judah. It may be that Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) was a coregent with his father at this time (a possibility we will later give more attention to). The people, be they kings or commoners, are told to stop violating the Sabbath—to stop bearing burdens and doing work on God’s Holy Day (verses 21-22). This should be understood within the teachings of Jesus Christ. He explained that it was acceptable and within the keeping of the Sabbath to take care of emergencies, to visit the sick and to carry one’s bedroll on the Sabbath (Luke 13:15; 14:5; Mark 3:4). Indeed, He spoke against the extreme limitations the Pharisees placed on the Sabbath and on all of God’s laws (Matthew 23:4).

But there are clearly things we should not be doing on the Sabbath, as the Fourth Commandment and Isaiah 58:13 make clear. The burdens Jeremiah spoke of referred to the typical errands of the people—for instance, lugging wares home from the market. And the work the people were doing referred to their regular business or household responsibilities. This should all have ceased so as to observe God’s holy time—from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Sadly, Israel and Judah both had a terrible record when it came to keeping God’s Sabbath. Ezekiel 20 makes it clear that the two main sins of Israel in the past were idolatry and Sabbath breaking—and that they had been severely judged for these. Now their continued violation of the Sabbath would be met with judgment again (see Ezekiel 22:8, 14-16, 26, 31).

The Sabbath was very important. Besides being enjoined in one of the Ten Commandments, God had given the Sabbath as a special sign between Him and His people (Exodus 31:12-17). It identified Him as the true God, the Creator. If the people had continued in its faithful observance, perhaps they would have continued to worship the Creator rather than elements of creation as the pagan world around them did.

In verse 25 of Jeremiah 17, God states that even at this last moment He could change His mind and stay the punishment against Judah—allowing Jerusalem to remain standing and the line of David to continue to rule from it—if they would just start hallowing the Sabbath. Of course, this would have required keeping it properly from the heart—not the hypocritical way in which the people engaged in various ritual practices. But they would not. Nor will the nations of Israel do so today. Thus, punishment was coming in Jeremiah’s day—and it is likewise coming in the not-too-distant future. The warning of destruction with which the chapter ends is essentially a quote from the prophets Hosea and Amos—concerning ancient and future calamity (see Hosea 8:14; Amos 1:4-2:5).

With such strong declarations from God about the Sabbath, it is utterly foolhardy to think and teach, as many do today, that the Sabbath can be changed to Sunday or that it no longer matters. It obviously mattered a great deal to God—and still does. It should likewise matter to us. (To learn more, send for or download our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest.*) <http://www.ucg.org/booklet/sunset-sunset-gods-sabbath-rest/>

God here uses the example of a potter forming clay vessels. Almost a century earlier, Isaiah had written, “But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8). Thus, the potter and clay was a familiar image of God’s absolute authority over His creation. But “the message God intended to communicate through this illustration was not, as some have thought, one of divine sovereignty. It was a message of grace. Judah had resisted the divine potter. Yet even now God was willing to begin anew and reshape His people into that good vessel He had had in mind from the beginning” (Lawrence Richards,

The Bible Reader's Companion, 1991, note on Jeremiah 18:6). God desires that all Israel be saved (Romans 11:26)—in fact, all mankind (1 Timothy 2:4).

In verses 7-8 of Jeremiah 18, we see what Jonah well knew when he “dragged his feet” in bringing God's warning message to Nineveh (see Jonah 3:10). If people will repent at God's warning of destruction, He will call off the destruction. But the opposite is also true. If God pronounces good on a nation and it turns to evil, He will bring punishment on it instead (Jeremiah 18:9-10). So there was a warning inherent in the potter-and-clay analogy as well. But the main focus here was on mercy. God was fashioning disaster but was willing to start over with the people if they would soften their hearts and allow Him to work with them.

“But when Jeremiah preached this good news the people continued to resist the heavenly potter! It was too late to surrender their passion for idolatry and sin. What a tragedy! In the coming invasion the people who were unwilling to change would be crushed by suffering. The few survivors would become workable clay in His hands” (note on verse 6).

In verse 12, it is interesting to consider that people here see obedience to God as hopeless— perhaps viewing it as impossible. It may be that the false prophets had corrupted them by a message of “cheap grace”—teaching that since they supposedly couldn't obey God, the only thing to do was mouth confessions and rely on their sacrifices and other acts of piety. This is not so different from what is often espoused in modern mainstream Christianity. Furthermore, the people's concept of God had been corrupted by pagan teachings so that they were essentially appealing to pagan gods while believing they were trusting in the true God. He is astonished that they would forsake Him and His ways for false religion. “Snow water of Lebanon” (verse 14) refers to the waters from high Mount Hermon, which looms over the northern part of the land of Israel (Lebanon actually means “White Mountain”). These waters sank into the ground and emerged in the form of many springs, providing most of the water for the Jordan River to water the Promised Land. God likewise provided their physical and spiritual needs. Why would they look elsewhere?

Since the people have forgotten God and forsaken His ways, the land will be desolate and the people taken captive and scattered (verses 15-17). God will turn His back on His people (verse 17), just as they had turned their backs on Him (2:27). While this was, no doubt, difficult for God, being a loving Father (compare Hosea 11:8), the evil of the people had to stop. Today some might call this needed approach “tough love.” Indeed, the need for intervention was made even more pressing by the people's mistreatment of each other and of God's servants.

In Jeremiah 18:18, we find the people again plotting against the prophet, whereupon he cries out to God (verses 19-23). Jeremiah has done all he could to intercede for them, and yet they are trying to bring him down (verse 20). So he now cries out for God to act in terms that seem to violate Christ's instruction that we love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 4:43-48). But we should suspend such judgment, not really knowing all the facts. It is likely that Jeremiah understood the truth of the second resurrection—that these people would be given an opportunity for salvation at a later time—and that he was here asking that God not provide a present atonement so as to relent from present destruction (as God had said earlier in Jeremiah 18 that He would upon repentance), for the sake not only of himself but of God's message. “Some have questioned the bitter prayer for vengeance. But those Jeremiah inveighs against have not only slandered him, but distorted the truth and so brought judgment upon the entire nation” (note on verses 19-23).

Moreover, God Himself may have inspired His prophet with this call for judgment. Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary states: “In this prayer he does not indulge in personal revenge, as if it were his own cause that was at stake; but he speaks under the dictation of the Spirit, ceasing to intercede, and speaking prophetically, knowing they were doomed to destruction as reprobates; for those not so, he doubtless ceased not to intercede. We are not

to draw an example [of how to pray concerning our enemies in general] from this, which is a special case” (note on verse 21). In any case, as with other calls for vengeance in Scripture, what is expressed is that the perfect vengeance of God is awaited rather than any hint of personal acts of revenge being taken by God’s servant (see Romans 12:17-21).

The Psalms of David contain several calls for God to exact vengeance. Regarding these, the Tyndale Commentary remarks, “We may summarize [these] as the plea that justice shall be done and the right vindicated” (note on Psalms 1-72, p. 26).

We shall save the commentary on Proverbs and Acts for next week as well as the 613 laws.

But because Proverbs 9 fits this study so well we just had to include it.

The prologue of the book of Proverbs closes in chapter 9 with the choice of two paths represented by the two figurative women, Wisdom and Folly; each here described as making an appeal.

The NIV Application Commentary notes on this chapter: “These descriptions and quotations of Wisdom and Folly are a study in similarities and contrasts. Both Wisdom and Folly call out from a house situated in the highest place. Both begin with the same invitation: ‘Let all who are simple come in here,’ adding an invitation to a meal. Both Wisdom and Folly use proverbs; Wisdom’s speech concludes with a series of proverbs, ending with, ‘If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer’ (9:12). Folly has only one proverb, but it is revealing: ‘Stolen water is sweet; food {bread} eaten in secret is delicious’ (9:17). However, the teacher shows these similarities only to point out the glaring differences. Wisdom works at building and preparing in order to have a sumptuous banquet to offer her guests while Folly sits at her door, loud [as was the adulteress in 7:11], undisciplined, and without knowledge. The meals are different, Wisdom offering wine and meat [along with bread], Folly offering only bread and water. There are the differences in outcome. Wisdom offers a future, a call to maturity, and in a word, life. Folly only offers the immediate pleasure of good things enjoyed outside their intended boundaries, hiding the fact that such pleasure brings death.”

Wisdom’s house is supported by seven pillars (9:1) perhaps merely signifying complete stability, as seven is the number of perfection and completion. Some, however, see a parallel with the creation of the previous chapter standing through the seven creation days of Genesis. Some, on the other hand, take the book of Proverbs as a whole to be the house of wisdom, especially given its seven attributed sections (see 1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1).

Wisdom’s banquet, with slaughtered meat, is sumptuous. Mixed wine here may refer to wine mixed with spices, as in Song of Solomon 8:2, or to wine mixed with water, as was common for wine drunk at meals. Joining Wisdom in her house could, as in former parallels, signify marrying her in a sense; dwelling with her in perpetuity.

“The section that follows Wisdom’s invitation [i.e., verses 7-12] appears to intrude, interrupting the contrast with the invitation of Folly. While most interpreters conclude that the section is secondary and therefore unrelated, it is possible to observe an intention behind the inclusion of this discourse. This section not only repeats significant terms from the prologue, it also summarizes the theme of receiving or rejecting instruction that carries throughout the rest of the book (13:1; 15:5, 12; 16:20; 17:16; 18:15; 19:8, 25; 23:9; 27:22). The structure of the section begins with the responses of the mocker and the wise person (9:7-9) and ends with their rewards (9:11-12). In the central position of this frame, ‘the fear of the Lord’ links response and outcome” (note on verses 7-12). This being defined as the beginning of wisdom shows chapter 9 as closing the frame opened in the book’s initial instruction in 1:7, which said that the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge.

Verse 12 lays out the choice between two ways one last time. Then the final section, the appeal of Folly, shows the worthlessness of her offer and where the wrong choice will lead; to the “depths of the grave” (verse 18, NIV). Whose invitation will you accept? If you desire wisdom and the abundant life that results, then you are ready to enter the main part of the book.