

# Triennial Torah Study – 2<sup>nd</sup> Year 10/12/2011

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Lev 6	Jer 29-31	Prov 18	Acts 15
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## Leviticus 6:8-7:38

### A Perpetual Fire (Leviticus 6:8-7:38)

This section is basically a review of the various offerings, albeit with many interesting additional bits of information. One fascinating fact we find in this passage is that the fire upon the altar was to be kept burning (6:9, 12-13). The Nelson Study Bible comments: "The fire on the altar was never to go out. This was accomplished at night with a burnt offering that was not extinguished. It could have been stoked with wood through the night to keep it burning. After being renewed in the morning [with wood] (see v. 12), the fire was kept going throughout the day for the succession of [various offerings].... Five times in this paragraph the priests are instructed to keep the fire burning. There are at least three reasons for this: (1) The original fire on the altar came from God (9:24). (2) Perpetual fire symbolized the perpetual worship of God. (3) Perpetual fire symbolized the continual need for atonement and reconciliation with God, which was the purpose of the offerings" (notes on 6:9 and verses 12-13).

When the altar was transported, the ashes were removed and a cloth was put on top (Numbers 4:13-14). The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary states in its note on verse 13: "No mention is made of the sacred fire; but as, by divine command, it was to be kept constantly burning, it must have been transferred to some pan or brazier under the covering, and borne by the appropriate carriers." Though we can't be certain about this, it is plausible since sacrifices were offered every morning and evening, which may well imply that they were done even at times of transport. When tabernacle worship was later transferred to the temple at the time of Solomon, God ignited that fire too. However, it is not known whether the same fire was kept burning through periods of apostasy when temple worship was abandoned, although it certainly could have been. However, there is no indication that God ignited the fire of the altar built after Judah's Babylonian captivity.

## Jeremiah 29

### Letter to the Exiles (Jeremiah 29)

Jeremiah 29 appears to fall in the same time frame as chapters 27-28—the fourth year of King Zedekiah (see 28:1). Though chapter 27 contained rumblings and plotting of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, it is evident that Zedekiah has not yet actually revolted—for we see him sending a delegation to the emperor in Babylon (29:3). Later in his fourth year, Zedekiah himself travels with others to Babylon (see Jeremiah 51:59). The reason for these journeys is not given, "but it is altogether possible that they had to do with the annual presentation of tribute" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 463). Regarding the second journey, The HarperCollins Study Bible alternatively suggests, "It may be that Zedekiah made such a trip in order to explain

his participation in the conspiracy mentioned in chapter 27” (note on 51:59-64). The same could be true of this earlier delegation.

Jeremiah sent messages from God with key individuals in both delegations—the first message being a letter to the Jews in captivity. He entrusts the letter to Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah. They are clearly important dignitaries. Elasah was evidently the brother of Ahikam, who defended Jeremiah (26:24), and brother of the Gemariah who allowed the use of his room at the temple for the proclamation of Jeremiah’s prophecies (36:10)—all three being sons of Shaphan, who reported the finding of the Book of the Law by the high priest Hilkiyah to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-13). The Gemariah of Jeremiah 29 may have been the son of Hilkiyah the high priest. “If so, Jeremiah was supported by two very powerful families in Judah who had been involved in Josiah’s reform” (verse 3).

In the letter, God tells the exiles through Jeremiah that they will be there for a long time and that they should make the most of it by settling down, building houses, growing food, expanding their families and being good citizens of Babylon, even praying for it: “For in its peace you will have peace” (verse 7). This parallels the responsibility of God’s people today, which dwells in the “Babylon” of this world. Besides telling us to obey the governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7), the apostle Paul writes: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Indication of Judah’s integration into Babylonian society is confirmed by archaeology. Over the course of excavations in 1889, 1900 and 1948 at Nippur, southeast of Babylon, 700 inscribed tablets known as the Murashu Archives were uncovered. “These tablets record contracts, certificates and receipts for payments, in documents belonging to a Jewish family living in Babylon in the fifth century B.C. The names of the individuals mentioned there are both Hebrew and non-Hebrew names, perhaps indicating that the family was integrating into Babylonian society” (Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?*, 2001, p. 163 ).

In general, “the Jews experienced economic well-being, and some found opportunities to rise high in the government, just as Daniel did. There is evidence that they were able to form their own council of elders and to have the advantage of prophets and priests in their midst as well, for Jeremiah addressed all three groups when he wrote to the captives (Jer. 29:1)” (Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 1998, p. 414). Yet Jeremiah warns the people against listening to the prophets among them (Jeremiah 29:8-9). For these prophets were preaching the same message the false prophets in Judah were propagating—that the captivity would be over shortly, with the people soon resettled in the Jewish homeland.

Yet Jeremiah reaffirms the time as 70 years, as in chapter 25 (see 29:10). He also reaffirms the wonderful fact that God’s people actually would go free and return to Judah—but that they had to wait a while. Verses 11-14 “are undoubtedly among the most comforting in Scripture. The exiles in Babylon are to settle down and wait, for God knows the plans He has for them, plans to give them a hope and a future. In the Old Testament ‘hope,’ either *miqweh/tiqwah* or *yahal* invites us to look ahead in confident expectation. Each assumes a time of waiting. But the latter especially reminds us that our future is guaranteed by our personal relationship with God. Because He is our God, He has plans for us too. And those plans are good—both beautiful and beneficial. Like the exiles, we may have to wait for God’s plans for us to bear fruit. But we can wait confidently, because our hope is in Him” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on 29:11-14).

The point of verses 15-20 can be a little confusing. In essence, God seems to be saying: “Because you think these false prophets are telling you the truth—that you’ll be going back to Judah soon—let me tell you what’s going to happen to the land of Judah and the people who remain there....” “He informs them that their hopes of returning soon are fruitless, for Zedekiah, the present occupant of Judah’s throne, will shortly be unseated and the last vestiges of the kingdom will be cruelly eroded away” (Merrill, p. 463). The imagery of cyclical punishment and rotten figs is again used (verses 17-18; compare Jeremiah 24). So the exiles just needed to wait it out—keeping their hopes and trust on God’s true message.

In Jeremiah 29:21-23, two prophets were singled out for speaking lies in God’s name. As punishment, Nebuchadnezzar would have them “roasted in the fire,” a form of execution that was certainly used in Babylon (see Daniel 3).

Next Jeremiah sends instruction to proclaim a message to another false leader in the exile, Shemaiah (Jeremiah 29:24), who went on a letter-writing campaign to the people and priests of Jerusalem to have Jeremiah reprimanded or locked up for his prophecies. One important recipient was Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah (compare 21:1-2; 34:3-4; 2 Kings 25:18), who read aloud the letter he received to Jeremiah. The prophet then received God's judgment against Shemaiah. His treachery would be paid back in his having no descendants and being prevented from seeing the blessings God had promised to the exiles.

### **Deliverance From Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:1-31:26)**

It is not known specifically when chapters 30 and 31 of Jeremiah were written. Since they follow our previous reading, chapter 29, which contains the letter sent to the captives in Babylon, we are reading these chapters now. Indeed, there is a thematic continuity here. In the letter, Jeremiah delivered God's message that the people would later be brought back from captivity. The message of this section, communicated to Jeremiah in a dream (31:26) is also one of return from captivity—yet clearly in the end time. "In the latter days," God says, "you will consider it" (30:24). This ties in with "Behold, the days are coming..." in verse 3. We will see more about this phrase in our next reading.

In no way can the return of this section refer to merely the Jewish return from the ancient Babylonian captivity. Notice that this is a return of Judah and Israel to the Promised Land (verses 3, 10). This has never happened. However, some who recognize that this section is a prophecy of events in modern times have argued that it refers to the Jewish return to establish the state of Israel in the 1900s. Yet it is only a low percentage of Jews in the world who have returned to live in the land of Israel. Moreover, only a very small percentage of Jews are ethnically descended from Israelites of the northern tribes. Most are descended from the southern tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. Moreover, most of the people in the world today who are descended from the northern tribes of Israel are not Jews at all—rather, they are largely people of northwest European heritage (as northwest Europe is the area to which the "lost tribes" eventually migrated following their ancient captivity). The United States and Britain are the preeminent nations descended from ancient Israel (download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more).

Also noteworthy is the great joy described in Jeremiah's account of the return from captivity. When some of the Jews under Zerubbabel returned from Babylonian captivity, they apparently were not feeling relieved and liberated, since they had not suffered an oppressive slavery prior to this. They had mixed feelings when they arrived at Jerusalem, saw the ruins and realized they would not be able to restore the temple to its former glory (Ezra 3:11-13; Haggai 2:1-3). Shortly before Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, he "wept and mourned for many days" at the pitiful state of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:3-4). So the description in Jeremiah 30-31 of miraculous interventions, huge masses of people and great excitement, joy and thanksgiving just does not fit the return of Jews from Persian-ruled Babylon.

We should also observe that the release from captivity described here follows a period of greatest suffering for both Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 30:4-7). The greatest suffering the people of the northern kingdom had experienced so far was the Assyrian conquest of their nation and their subsequent deportations. Yet God could not here be referring to those events, as He gave Jeremiah this prophecy of Israel's suffering more than a century later. So to what was He referring?

Notice verse 8: "Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it"—that is, after suffering through it, not that Israel would never have to go through it at all. This is parallel with other passages of Scripture. The end of Daniel 11 describes events "at the time of the end" (verse 40). Of the same period, the prophet Daniel was told, "At that time...there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered" (12:1). The next verses show that this refers to the time of the resurrection at Christ's return. We see this here in Jeremiah 30 as well. God says He will "raise up" King David after this terrible time (verse 9), so there should really be no question that we are dealing with future events.

Matthew 24:21-22 says of the time preceding Christ's second coming, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [preserved alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." Clearly, there is not more than one worst time ever. These verses are all describing the same

period. Jeremiah 30:12-15, regarding Israel's incurable affliction and wound, abandonment by allies and severe chastisement from God is obviously parallel to Hosea 5:12-15, which was previously explained in the Bible Reading Program to be a prophecy of this same period of the Great Tribulation.

In fact, as we have elsewhere noted, God offers a promise of protection even during this terrible time to those who will repent and seek Him. In Luke 21:36, Jesus said: "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." And He tells all who remain faithful in this age: "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10). This should not be viewed as a guarantee against death or even martyrdom, as death itself can be a "place of safety" until the resurrection (see Isaiah 57:1-2). Nevertheless, it does appear that God will give His faithful servants protection from the kind of suffering the rest of the world will experience—and in general will hide His faithful people from what is coming (see Revelation 12:13-16; Zephaniah 2:3).

### **A Dream That Ends Sweet (Jeremiah 30:1-31:26)**

Humbled and repentant, the Israelites will be restored to a position of honor and glory in the world (Jeremiah 30:18-20). Foreigners will no longer be their masters (verse 8). In fact, the nations that enslaved them will be destroyed (verse 11)—that is, the political entities, not all the people in them, since we also see that these enemy nations will themselves be put into captivity for a time (verse 16). At long last, Israel will have peace and no longer need to fear (verse 10).

The beginning of Jeremiah 31 contains what The Expositors Bible Commentary describes as "one of the most beautiful poems in [Jeremiah's] book" (1998, note on verses 3-4). It is a continuation of the magnificent prophecy about Israel and Judah's future in the previous chapter. God's love won't be just a nice platitude—He will demonstrate it with action. He will bring Israel's people home, the land will be fertile, producing plenty of food, and there will be peace and abundance.

God says in verse 8, "Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the ends of the earth"—wherever they have been scattered. A proclamation is issued to the nations and to the remnant of Israel "in the isles afar off" (verse 10) that God is the one who has humbled, freed and now amazingly blessed Israel. The scattered Israelites will come "streaming to the goodness of the LORD" (verse 12).

We then see a sad picture of Rachel weeping inconsolably for the loss of her children, which is heard at Ramah in the territory of Benjamin, five miles north of Jerusalem. Rachel, wife of Jacob, was the mother of Joseph and thus of the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh that descended from him. She was also the mother of the southern tribe of Benjamin, so she is representative of both kingdoms. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin and was buried not too far to the north of Bethlehem, which itself is five miles to the south of Jerusalem (Genesis 35:19; 48:7). The location of her tomb was later referred to as Zelzah, which in Samuel's day was within the territory of Benjamin (see 1 Samuel 10:2-3). The traditional spot is about a mile north of Bethlehem, and thus around nine miles from Ramah. The image of Rachel weeping from the grave is not to be understood literally. Like the image of Abel's blood crying out to God from the ground (see Genesis 4:10), it is figurative—especially considering that this is a prophetic dream.

Rachel's northern children had in one sense been lost in the Assyrian conquest and deportation more than a century earlier. Many of her southern children had been lost to the Assyrians not long afterward. And many more were lost in the stages of Babylonian conquest, the final stage of which was coming soon. Ramah was "the very place where exiles were gathered before deportation to Babylon (cf. [Jeremiah] 40:1).... Jeremiah himself was in a camp for exiles in Ramah (cf. 40:1)" (Expositor's, note on 31:15). So the prophecy apparently had some application to Jeremiah's day. However, in context, it should be clear that the primary meaning here relates to what we have already seen in this prophetic dream—the terrible time of Jacob's trouble, when Rachel loses more children than ever before. In verses 16-17, the weeping is to stop because the children will be brought back. In fact, Ephraim is specifically mentioned as returning in the next few verses, making the end-time context plain—since Ephraim will not return in the repentant way described until after the Great Tribulation.

It may seem strange, then, that the New Testament book of Matthew applies the verse about Rachel weeping for her children to King Herod's massacre of the innocent children in the region of Bethlehem in his attempt to kill the infant Messiah (Matthew 2:16-18). Expositor's comments: "How can this prophecy be fulfilled in

Matthew's reference? First, it must be stressed that Matthew's method of quoting an Old Testament reference does not automatically imply a direct fulfillment.... For proof see the immediate context in Matthew 2:15, where Hosea 11:1 in its original context unmistakably speaks of the nation Israel but by analogy and higher fulfillment (called by some 'compenetration') refers to Christ. Similarly, that which related to Israel in original revelation (v. 15) is by analogy ('typological fulfillment'...) used in speaking of Herod's atrocities. In both cases God will overrule the nation's sorrow for her ultimate joy" (note on Jeremiah 31:16-17; see also Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on verse 15). Indeed, though children were lost to Rachel in Herod's massacre, they will ultimately be restored in a future resurrection (see Ezekiel 37:1-14).

It should be pointed out that though we have spent time exploring the meaning of Rachel's weeping, that's not really the main focus of the dream. The main focus of the dream, and why it is so positive at this point, is that the time for weeping has ceased. The mention of the weeping itself was in fact very brief. It is God's declaration concerning the wonderful time that follows that filled most of Jeremiah's present vision.

In Jeremiah 31:21, Israel is directed back to God. In verse 22, God intends to bring Israel's gadding about to an end. "For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth—a woman shall encompass a man." This is one of the most disputed sentences in the book of Jeremiah. Many interpretations have been suggested. A tradition going back to early Catholic theologians is that it refers to Jesus in Mary's womb. But most modern interpreters reject this view. Indeed, just to say that a male child is inside a mother's womb does not seem that unique.

Interestingly, rabbis have used verse 22 to explain the custom of a bride walking in circles around the bridegroom seven times at a traditional Jewish wedding. This is also related to the encirclement of Jericho seven times, whereby the city wall was brought down. The idea with bride and groom seems to be one of collapsing any wall or barrier between them—and in Jeremiah would imply collapsing the wall that has been built up between the woman Israel and her Husband the Lord. However, if the interpretation does relate to God and Israel, perhaps it is much simpler. In the beginning of the verse, God asked Israel how long she would gad about. And now the new thing He has brought about is that she encircles her Husband with her arms—embracing and clinging to Him rather than continuing to wander. The New Living Translation renders the verse: "For the LORD will cause something new and different to happen—Israel will embrace her God." This seems most reasonable. Nevertheless, we cannot be certain as to what is meant. We do know that Israel returns to God—and that is sufficient.

Verses 23-25 show Judah, Jeremiah's beloved homeland, ultimately restored with great blessings. The prophet had been afforded a marvelous picture. After all the warnings and the people's continuing rebellion, beyond the sin and punishment of Israel and Judah, he sees through God's vivid testimony that they would ultimately turn back to God and be gloriously restored to such blessings as he could only imagine. It was such a change for Jeremiah from the sadness of so many previous visions, and the frightening images at the beginning of this one, that he woke up in the middle of it feeling on top of the world—or, as he put it, "my sleep was sweet to me" (verse 26). Greatly comforted, he was able to rest easy—for he saw with clarity what the future would ultimately bring.

### **A New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:27-40; 49:34-39)**

At the end of our previous reading, Jeremiah awoke from a prophetic dream that had become peaceful and even blissful regarding the future of Israel and Judah. Comforted, he fell soundly back asleep. And it appears that he went right back into the dream.

This final part of the prophecy is divided into three sections, each beginning with the same words we read in Jeremiah 30:3, "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD..." (31:27, 31, 38). "This expression introduces a new era in the history of God's dealing with His people" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 38-40). The Expositor's Bible Commentary says it is "an eschatological formula that places the prophecy in messianic times in the Day of the Lord, the consummation period of the nation's history" (note on verse 31).

The first section continues the millennial picture of the prophetic dream. Though the population of Israel and Judah will be greatly diminished due to the calamities they will suffer in the end time, God will begin to multiply them once again when He returns them to the Promised Land. He will also multiply the animals of the nation—bringing back the livestock and general wildlife (verse 27). As God has overseen the destruction of the nation,

He will now oversee its building and planting—here using the same words as those describing Jeremiah’s commission (see 1:10).

In God’s just society, children will not be made to pay for their parents’ sins, as happens in various ways in the present age (31:29-30). The New Living Translation paraphrases the thought this way: “The people will no longer quote this proverb: ‘The parents eat sour grapes, but their children’s mouths pucker at the taste.’ All people will die for their own sins—those who eat the sour grapes will be the ones whose mouths will pucker.” (The discontinued proverb is also mentioned in Ezekiel 18:2; see verses 1-20 there for a fuller exposition).

We then come to the second section here (Jeremiah 31:31-37). God says He will make a “re-newed covenant” with Israel and Judah (verse 31). “This mountain-peak Old Testament passage stands in a real sense as the climax of Jeremiah’s teaching” (Expositor’s, note on verse 31). Indeed, in Jeremiah 17:9 God proclaimed that the human heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Here, we see how this is going to change.

Under the terms of the Renewed Covenant, the laws of God (i.e., those that were His laws at the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy, when the Old Covenant was in force!) are to be written in the hearts and minds of God’s people—engraving them into their very character and making it possible for them to truly obey. God says that all will know Him under this new arrangement (Jeremiah 31:34). And how do people really know God—developing an intimate, loving relationship with Him? The New Testament answers: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4). That should be pretty clear—God’s law is still required under the Renewed Covenant. Of course, God desires and expects more than mere grudging compliance. That’s not at all what God’s laws and covenant are all about. He wants our hearts to be in the covenant and the covenant to be in our hearts. This is the spirit and intent of God’s commandments.

Finally, we come to the third section of Jeremiah 31 (verses 38-40). With the Renewed Covenant will come a rebuilt Jerusalem. “The rebuilding of the city will encompass the four corners of the capital (cf. Zech 14:10). The Tower of Hananel was the northeast corner of the city (cf. Neh 3:1; 12:39; Zech 14:10). The Corner Gate probably refers to the one at the northwest corner of the city wall (cf. 2 Kings 14:13; 2 Chron 26:9). The locations of Gareb and Goah are unknown (v. 39); conjecture places Gareb on the western side of Jerusalem and Goah towards the Valley of Hinnom on the south. There are no clues to the sites. The valley of the corpses and ashes (v. 40) is generally understood to be the Valley of Hinnom (cf. 7:31). It has been suggested that the fields are quarries. The Kidron flows east of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 15:23). The Horse Gate is apparently at the southeast corner of the temple courts (...cf. Neh 3:28 with 2 Kings 11:16; 2 Chron 23:15). Thus even the polluted areas would be sanctified to the Lord” (Expositor’s, note on Jeremiah 31:38-40).

Prophecy Against Elam (Jeremiah 31:27-40; 49:34-39)

The prophecy against Elam (49:34-39) apparently came to Jeremiah at a later time than the several prophecies immediately preceding it in chapters 46-49. Yet they are all grouped together in his book, along with chapters 50-51, as these are prophecies against other nations. This one was given to Jeremiah “in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah.” This would date the prophecy to sometime in the first half of Zedekiah’s reign, from 597-593 B.C.

Elam was a son of Shem (Genesis 10:22). As we have seen previously in the Bible Reading Program, the ancient territory of the descendants of Elam eventually came to be called Persia (known today as Iran). Western Persia was called Elymais by the Greeks. During the day of Assyrian rule, some of the Elamites were evidently pressed into Assyrian military service and may have participated in assaults on Israel and Judah. This may be partly what is meant in Isaiah 22:6, which states that “Elam bore the quiver with chariots of men and horsemen” (though, as was explained in the Bible Reading Program commentary on this verse, it may well be an end-time prophecy). Yet the Elamites, along with the nearby Medes, actually opposed Assyrian rule in the main. They allied with the Chaldean Babylonians in overthrowing the Assyrians. Following that, they also “helped Nebuchadnezzar against Judea” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on Jeremiah 49:34)—at least in the initial incursions.

For the Elamites’ actions and pride in their strength, God pronounces punishment on them. He would break their “bow”—the implement of their power (again compare Isaiah 22:6). “God often orders it so that that which

we most trust to [at] first [later] fails us, and that which was the chief of our might proves the least of our help” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, note on verses 34-39). The “four winds from the four quarters of heaven” (verse 36) represent a mustering of power by God (compare Ezekiel 37:9; Daniel 8:8)—evidently military forces under His direction in this case.

Interestingly, “the last exploit of Nebuchadnezzar which is recorded in the Babylonian Chronicle is a campaign against the Elamites...594-593 [B.C.]” (Eugene Merrill, Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel, 1987, p. 452). Once Babylon was secure as the imperial successor to Assyria, the Elamites and Medes were no longer needed as allies. So they were conquered and became subjects of the Chaldeans. Some see this as the prophesied destruction on Elam. In this context, the Lord setting His throne in Elam (Jeremiah 49:38) is said to be Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest, as this is by God’s doing (compare 27:4-8; 43:10), and the Elamite return from captivity (49:39) is considered to be the later conquest of Babylon by the Persians and Medes under Cyrus in 539 B.C. Still others identify the destruction of Elam as the Persian Empire falling to the Greek forces of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.—this later episode seeming to fit better since it was the great destruction of the Elamites in ancient times and the prophecy states that recuperation from the foretold loss does not occur until “the latter days” (verse 39).

Yet while verses 35-37 may refer to ancient destruction, perhaps they actually refer to end-time calamity—or it could be that they are dual in meaning, applying to past history and events yet to be. In any case, verses 38-39 are probably exclusively for the end time—which would seem to give some latter-day context to the previous verses as well. The Lord setting His throne in Elam (verse 38) most likely refers to the establishment of the Kingdom of God over all nations following Christ’s return—and this will be accompanied by great destruction, as the nations of the world will attempt to fight Him.

Recall from the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 21 that the Elamites today are apparently to be found in Eastern Europe as well as their ancient homeland of Iran (with a few in western India). When the kings “of the whole world” gather to fight the returning Christ (Revelation 16:14), it is evident that a representation of Elamite forces will be present and thus destroyed. Soon afterward, forces of Persia are part of a great military host that will be destroyed for attempting to invade a reestablished Israel under Christ’s rule (see Ezekiel 38-39, especially 38:5). Either or both of these events would well fit Jeremiah’s prophecy.

## **Proverb 18**

In 18:1, the person who “isolates” or, literally, “separates” himself is not here a quiet recluse or hermit. Rather, the latter part of the verse makes clear that this individual is one who “rages” at other people. The NIV translates the Hebrew term here as merely “defies,” but the literal sense is “breaks out,” the word also being used in 17:14 and 20:3 in the sense of engaging in quarreling. The person identified in 18:1 is therefore contrary and schismatic, one who is divisive, setting himself against others and bringing strife. The proverb thus fits well with the next one in verse 2.

Second Part of Major Solomonic Collection Cont’d (Proverbs 18)

42. Diverse Teachings (18:22?20:4)

“TYPE: THEMATIC, RANDOM REPETITION, INCLUSIO SERIES....The verses of this text do not readily organize into small, discrete units. At the same time, this is not simply a jumbled collection of unrelated proverbs. Within this section are many parallel or similar verses, and some of these serve as structural markers. Also, a number of proverbs are collected into groups that follow distinct themes, although the borders of these groups may not be clearly marked.

“First, 18:22 and 19:13-14, describing family life and repeating the assertion that a good wife is from the Lord, are an inclusio that marks off a section of verses. This does not mean that all intervening verses concern wife and family, but the opening and closing assertions that a good wife is a gift of Yahweh are significant.... Second, proverbs on laziness (19:15,24; 20:4) demarcate two further sections. Once again, this does not mean that the intervening proverbs concern laziness. In addition, two pairs of similar proverbs in chiasmic order [when taken together] on forbearance and a king’s wrath (19:11-12; 20:2-3) close off the major sections.

“Three sections that for the most part adhere to common themes occur within these three divisions. There are (1) the inequities and abandonment suffered by the poor (18:23?19:10), (2) the disciplined life (19:16-23), and (3) the mocker (19:25?20:1). Thus the structure of the whole is illustrated below.

“In addition, many verses closely parallel each other either within or between the sections. Close parallels include 19:1 and 19:22; 19:4 and 19:7a,b; 19:5 and 19:9; 19:8 and 19:16. Also 19:17, on kindness to the poor, appears to be a response to 18:23?19:10. These interrelationships among the verses have two functions. First, they help to tie the whole text together; and second, by randomly repeating certain points, they reinforce the lessons in the reader’s mind” (NAC).

Most scholars agree that the first colon of Proverbs 18:24 is mistranslated in the King James and New King James Versions. While it is true that a key to friendship is being friendly, this is evidently not what the proverb says. Indeed, how would this contrast with the loyalty of a true friend in the second colon? On the phrase “must himself be friendly,” the NKJV gives the following marginal note: “Masoretic Text reads may come to ruin.” Several modern translations render the verse accordingly. The New American Bible has “Some friends bring ruin upon us.” The Expositor’s Bible Commentary notes on the phrase: “The Hebrew *lehit ro?ea?* is difficult. It means ‘for being crushed’ or ‘to be shattered’ but not ‘to show oneself friendly’ (cf. KJV). The idea may be that there are friends to one’s undoing....If a person has friends who are unreliable, he may still come to ruin, especially if these nominal friends use him. The second line is clearer: ‘there is a friend {?oheb} who sticks closer than a brother.’ This indeed is a rare treasure!” Indeed, Proverbs 19:4 highlights the fickle nature of fair-weather friends. And verse 7 shows that even brothers may abandon a person in adversity. Thus the need for a true, loyal friend who is closer than a brother. The epitome of such a friend is Jesus Christ.

## Acts 15

Last week we ended with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch, with many believers and taught ones there following much success in their witness of the Good News to the Gentiles with many receiving belief in Messiah Yahshua. Chapter 15 directly follows these things and tells us of “certain men coming down from Judah” v.1, who were going behind Paul and Barnabas and telling the Assemblies of new believers that they must be circumcised according to the Law of Moses in order to be saved. This created great strife within the teaching, because Paul, being the most knowledgeable Pharisee in the land – had not been teaching this to the Gentiles and knew that this doctrine had no foundation in Scripture.

So the assembly of believers prayed over Paul and Barnabas and sent them out from Antioch on their way to Jerusalem so settle this dispute of salvation and circumcision within the elders of the assembly at Jerusalem. A real revival must have truly been happening in the land, for we are told of how Paul and Barnabas are traveling through Phoenicia and Samaria sharing all the good reports of all that God had done while on their way to Jerusalem. Not too much earlier than this period – men of Jerusalem and Judah would not even walk through that land, they would walk around it. A great witness to the power of Truth and Messiah Yahshua!

Here was the claim of some who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, v5 “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Torah of Moses.” Much debate and discussion ensued on this matter until Peter rose up and said in v7, “Men, brothers, you know that a good while ago Elohim chose among us, that by my mouth the gentiles should hear the word of the Good News and believe.” Relating and reminding them of his experience with Cornelius, the Italian guard. He reminds them that only God knows the heart of men and that by giving the gentiles the Holy Spirit that God Himself makes no distinction between the Judeans (tribe of Judah) and them. God can cleanse the heart of both peoples. Peter goes so far as to ask them “why do you try Elohim?” He emphasises that all must trust to be saved... both Jew and Gentile alike and in the same way.

After this, they all listened intently as Paul and Barnabas related story after story with miracles that Elohim had accomplished through them unto the gentiles. Then James, who seems to be the leader and primary decision-maker of the congregation of elders spoke up and said, “Elohim first visited the gentiles to take out of them a people for His Name. And the words of the prophets agree with this, as it has been written: After this I shall return and rebuild the Booth of David which has fallen down. And I shall rebuild its ruins, and I shall set it up, so that the remnant of mankind shall seek ?????, even all the gentiles on whom My Name has been called, says ????? who is doing all this, who has made this known from of old.”

At this, he declares his judgment concerning the gentiles and circumcision... that being they should not be troubled with it at this time. Then James proclaims the minimal amount of requirements that should be made so that the Jews and Gentiles could come together to learn and worship the One Elohim of Israel together. These are: 1) abstain from defilement of idols, 2) abstain from whoring, 3) abstain from things that are strangled



(eating), and 4) abstain from blood (ingesting). James already knew that the written Torah as given to Moses was being read in the congregations every Sabbath, and that the gentiles would hear the Torah.

The Jerusalem congregation then wrote a letter to the assemblies at Antioch, Syria, and Kilikia stating their decisions on these matters and they sent it through Paul, Barnabas, and some other leaders: Barsabba (Judah), and Sila – to proclaim also this decision by word of their mouths to them. The letter and words were read aloud to the assembly at Antioch and everyone rejoiced and were very happy. Judah Barsabba and Sila also taught and prophesied to them there.

After a little while there at Antioch, Paul wants to go back through all the previous cities that he and Barnabas went through proclaiming the Good News to check on them and strengthen them. Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them, but Paul did not. Paul remembered how Mark had left them previously on a different journey because of his lack of faith. Barnabas and Paul had a severe disagreement that ended up with them going separate ways for a time. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus while Paul took Sila and went to Syria and Kilikia.