

Do not diminish a word

At the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, the Lord sent Jeremiah to stand in the court of the temple. He was to speak to all the worshippers who had come up from the cities of Judah (1). A new king could bring a change for the better to a nation which had fallen into wicked ways. God is most gracious but his word was not heeded (3). The words of verses 1 to 9 echo an earlier prophecy of Jeremiah (7:1–15).

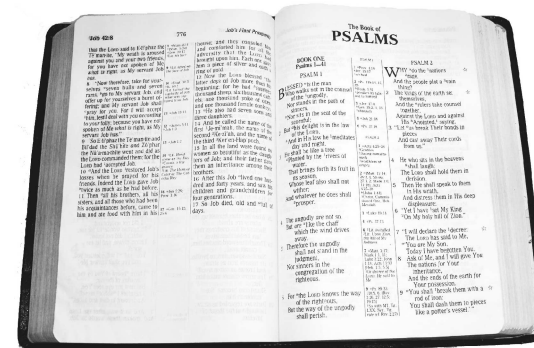
The Lord instructed Jeremiah, *'Speak ... all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word'* (2). We must never 'water down' the teaching of the Bible in order to please men or to avoid opposition. We may be scorned and it is painful to hear the name of God blasphemed but we must always seek to be faithful in our Christian witness. The preacher also must be fearless in his preaching and *not diminish a word* of what Scripture teaches.

The priests and (false) prophets were angry at Jeremiah's dire predictions of doom and desolation. They seized him and demanded that the princes have him put to death (6–11). Help came from an unexpected quarter. The princes and certain of the elders spoke for Jeremiah with timely words of warning and he was spared (16–19, 24).

Another prophet, Urijah, who repeated Jeremiah's prophecy against Judah and Jerusalem, was hunted down by evil Jehoiakim. He fled to Egypt but was captured by men led by Elnathan, father-in-law of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:8). Urijah was taken to the king who then killed him (20–23). Why didn't the Lord intervene to prevent Urijah from suffering as he did in the case of Jeremiah (24)? We just do not know. We do know that even death cannot separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35–39). James was killed, but the Lord miraculously released Peter from the condemned cell (Acts chapter 12). The Lord did not love James any less than Peter. **We must never murmur against God when we are perplexed at his ways with us.** We must submit to his most wise providence and trust in him. He will never let us down and he will never let us go.

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



June 2015

Jeremiah chapters 6 to 26

Ask for the old paths, where the good way is

The Jews had forgotten God though they saw the magnificent temple of Solomon towering over Jerusalem. God said of them, ‘*My people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to worthless idols. And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, from the ancient paths ...*’ (Jeremiah 18:15; cp. 2:32). The nation was at a crossroads, where a number of paths met, but they were on the wrong path.

The Lord appealed to his people, ‘*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls*’ (16). God is full of mercy and patience but stubborn Judah refused to walk in the good way and they refused to listen to his word. He had given them true prophets who had been as watchmen warning them of impending danger with blasts of a trumpet. They refused to listen however (17). They continued with their religious ritual but sacrifices without obedience are useless (19–20; cp. 1 Samuel 15:22–23). God would bring judgment from the north (21–26). The people were like unrefined silver which was corrupted with dross. God had rejected them as rejected silver (30).

These are confusing times which have seen the most bizarre teachings and practices introduced into many evangelical churches. We must remain faithful to *the old paths* and walk in *the good way*. What are these old paths? Believing in the Bible to guide us in all things pertaining to Christian life and doctrine; trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour; proclaiming that he died to save us from our sins and that he rose from the grave; the need for holiness of life and obedience to the word of God.

The *old paths* have stood the test of time. They alone bring rest to our souls and they will never lead us away from God. **Let us beware of attractive-looking new paths. If they lead us to depart from the Lord and the teaching of the Bible they are slippery slopes that lead to hell!**

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This wine cup of fury

The Lord sent Jeremiah to prophesy not only to Judah but also against the nations (15–26; cp. 46:1). God does care about the oppression and injustice perpetrated by wicked rulers. He cares enough *to roar from on high* and to unleash his *fierce anger* (30, 37–38). God’s anger or wrath against sinners is here called a ‘*wine cup of fury*’ (15). Jeremiah symbolically gave this wine cup to the nations (17, 28). We must never forget that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* (Romans 1:18). When he comes again, the Lord Jesus *himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God* (Revelation 19:15). He will punish the ungodly (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). God’s wrath is to be much dreaded (Revelation 6:16–17) and it abides on all who refuse to believe (‘to trust’) in the Lord Jesus (John 3:36).

The Lord Jesus cried out in Gethsemane, ‘*Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done*’ (Luke 22:42). He loved us so much, that he drank the wine cup of his Father’s wrath in order to save us. He was punished for sinners; the holy Son of God died for sinful men and women (1 Peter 3:18). God the Father did not spare him as he was mocked, humiliated, tortured and then crucified. The Lord Jesus drank *this wine cup of fury* for our sake! **When did you last thank him? When did you last tell him that you love him and want always to obey him?**

*Man of sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned he stood;
Sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!*

(Philip P. Bliss)

You have not listened

The prophecy in this chapter is precisely dated. It was the fourth year of the reign of King Jehoiakim (604 BC) and Jeremiah was in the twenty-third year of his ministry. He and other faithful prophets had proclaimed God's word, urging the people to repent and to forsake idolatry (1–6). Their pleading had been ignored by rebellious Judah. The statement, '*You have not listened*' appears three times (3,4,7). They refused to pay any attention to God's word (8).

At the time of this prophecy, Babylon had become the dominant power in the region, having defeated Egypt in the Battle of Carchemish. Jeremiah warned the people that the Lord would use Babylon as his instrument to judge them (9–11). God called Nebuchadnezzar his '*servant*' (9), this being a reminder that he is absolutely sovereign over kings and nations.

Judah and the nations around it would be destroyed by the Babylonian army. Judah would be exiled in Babylon for seventy years, a captivity that would be ended when Babylon itself would be punished by God and destroyed (12–14). When the prophet Daniel was very old, he was inspired to pray for the exiles towards the end of the seventy years, after he had read this prophecy of Jeremiah (Daniel 9:1–19).

There is a warning for us in these verses. We may hear God's word preached week after week without opening our ears to listen to what the Lord has to say to us. **Do we come to church expecting to hear God speaking to us through his preached word? Do we pray that the Lord will speak to us when we read his word? Do we want to listen to God and obey him?**

*Master, speak! Thy servant heareth
Waiting for thy gracious word,
Longing for thy voice that cheereth;
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
What hast thou to say to me?*

(Frances R. Havergal)

Hear the word of the LORD

King Josiah's reforms had brought about the destruction of idol shrines and groves and the restoration of the worship of Jehovah in the temple (2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 34). As the nation drifted from the Lord following the death of Josiah, worship degenerated into an empty ritual. The outward show of temple worship had not brought about a change of lifestyle from wickedness to godliness (5–11). The people had been told by false prophets that Jerusalem and its temple would never be destroyed. God would not allow such a catastrophe. The Lord told them not to trust in such *lying words* (4). He told Jeremiah to stand in the gate of the temple as the people came to worship. He was to say, '*Hear the word of the LORD, all you who of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!*' (1–2).

Jeremiah told the people that they had made the temple *a den of thieves* (11). Over six hundred years later, the Lord Jesus used the same words as he cleansed the temple (Matthew 21:12–13). God told his people to go and visit Shiloh and learn from history about his dealings with their ancestors. God was worshipped at Shiloh during the days of the Judges but he did not overlook wickedness in the lives of his people. He visited them with judgment and the temple would not be spared any more than Shiloh was spared (11–15).

The people were ripe for judgment and the Lord told Jeremiah not to pray for them (16). What a frightening situation! They were worshipping the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, *the queen of heaven* and this provoked God to anger (17–19). Many venerate Mary as 'the queen of heaven'. This is an offence to God! We must worship only him (Exodus 34:14). The Jews refused to pay attention to God's word and they refused to obey it (13, 23–26). **If our church-going is not accompanied by godly living, our religion is in vain! '*Hear the word of the LORD.*'**

Truth has perished

Judah refused to obey God and to receive instruction. The Lord said, *'Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth'* (28). When truth is despised, a nation is on a slippery, downward slope to destruction. We must vigorously defend truth taught in the Bible and uphold integrity and honesty. We can have no fellowship with those who compromise truth but we must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Be determined to know the teaching of the Bible and to love its truth so much that it will fashion your thinking.

The Lord called on the people to lament because he had rejected their generation. The cutting off of the hair was a symbol of deep mourning (29). Matthew Henry points out that the Hebrew word *'hair'* used here is peculiar to the hair of the Nazirites, *'which was the badge and token of their dedication to God, and it is called their crown. Jerusalem had been a city which was a Nazirite to God and separated to him. She now must cut off her hair, be profaned, degraded, and separated from God. It is time for those that have lost their holiness, to lay aside their joy.'*

The holy temple had been desecrated with the introduction of idols into its precincts and children were being sacrificed to the god Molech in the high places of Tophet in the valley of the Son of Hinnom (30–31; cp. 2 Kings 21:6; 23:10). The Lord warned that this valley would become a valley of mass-slaughter. The streets of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah would no longer ring with joyful voices because the land would be desolate (34)

Chapter 8 opens with a picture of the victorious invaders desecrating the graves of the wicked kings, princes, priests and false prophets and others in Jerusalem. This practice was calculated to cause deep offence and insult to the defeated city. The sun, moon and stars which many had worshipped would be powerless to help (1–3). **When truth is despised and allowed to perish, judgment is inevitable!**

I will set my eyes on them for good

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, conquered Judah in 597 BC and installed Zedekiah as king in place of Jehoiachin (known also as Jeconiah; 1). The elite of the population were deported to Babylon and eleven years later, the remaining Jews were taken into exile (2 Kings 24:8–20). Ezekiel the prophet was among the captives in Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1–3).

The Lord gave Jeremiah a vision of two baskets, one very full of good figs, the other containing very bad figs (1–3). The two baskets represented two groups of Jews. The good figs symbolised the Jews who had been taken to Babylon and the bad figs were those left in Jerusalem and Judah following the deportation of 597 BC (4–10). The *'figs'* remaining in Judah were so very bad and wicked that God would deliver them into trouble, punishing them with death through the sword, famine or plague (8–10).

There was a message of hope for the Jews in Babylon. Their captivity was for their own good and had removed them from Judah which was doomed to judgment (5). Their deportation to Babylon was painful but was to spare them from greater judgment. God had some glorious promises for the faithful remnant of the Jews: *'I will set my eyes on them for good ... I will bring them back to this land; I will build them ... I will plant them ... then I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God'* (6–7).

There are times when the Lord chastens us because we need correction. No chastisement is pleasant but God chastises us because he loves us and cares for us (see Hebrews 12:5–11). He wants our whole-hearted devotion and obedience. **Let us not murmur when we are chastised. God's eyes are always set on us for good. He has our best interests in his heart!**

He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully

God's word is different from the light and superficial utterances of the false prophets which were like chaff, empty husks and not nourishing grain (28). God's word is powerful; it is like:

- *A fire* which burns in the bones of the true prophet or preacher (29; cp. 20:9; 5:14).
- *A hammer that breaks the rock in pieces* (29). It is able, by the Spirit of God, to break down the most stubborn resistance and boasting pride of the sinner.

God's word to the prophets is often described as '*the burden of the word of the LORD*' (eg. Malachi 1:1). The false prophets in Judah were using the same expression to make themselves appear as genuine prophets. The New King James Version translates the Hebrew word for '*burden*' as '*oracle*' in verses 33, 34, 36 and 38. God had not sent the false prophets and their message did not come from him. He told them through Jeremiah, '*The oracle of the LORD you shall mention no more. For every man's words will be his oracle, for you have perverted the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God*' (36).

G. Campbell Morgan observed, 'We, who are in the Christian ministry, are sometimes told, that what we need in order to be successful is to catch the spirit of the age. Nothing of the kind; our work is to correct the spirit of the age, and never to catch it; to know it, and to correct it.' (STUDIES IN THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH, page 132).

The preacher has an awesome responsibility. The Lord says, '*He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully*' (28). The preacher's life must be beyond reproach and his message faithful to God's word. He must not be a man-pleaser, but always seek to honour the Lord in his preaching. He must expose the wickedness of the human heart and point sinners to the only One who is able to save them, the Lord Jesus Christ. **Pray for your pastor, that he will always speak God's word faithfully. Be sure that you too are faithful and obedient to God's word.**

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!

The terrible consequences of the stubborn attitude and rebellion of the people are described in verses 4 to 17. Deceit and covetousness were rife but the religious leaders did not call the nation to repentance. They promised peace '*when there is no peace*' (10–11; cp. 6:12–14). They had become so brazen in their sin and their conscience was so hard that they did not know how to blush (12; cp. 6:15). God would bring judgment and the people would vainly look for peace. Dan, in the far north of the country had already fallen and the invaders would not be appeased; they were like snakes that could not be charmed (15–17).

All this was too much for Jeremiah. Though he was hated and persecuted by the people he loved them. He poured out his soul in his grief and in his tears for them (18–21; 9:1). He lamented three desperate situations concerning his people:

- The absence of God from among them. '*Is not the LORD in Zion (Jerusalem)? Is not her King in her?*' (19).
- The absence of the harvest to enable them to survive famine. '*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!*' (20). The long summer of God's forbearance had run out and it was now too late to escape Divine judgment. **Oh, the tragedy of a people who had squandered countless opportunities to turn to God in repentance!**
- The absence of a physician to heal the sick. '*Is there no balm in Gilead, Is there no physician there? Why is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people?*' (22). Gilead balm was famous for its healing virtues for wounds and sores. Jeremiah likened the condition of his people to those who were wounded and sore, with no apparent cure. The people of Judah were not turning to the Lord who alone was able to heal their sin-sick souls.

Is your heart right with God? If you are not a Christian, dare you continue to be careless? If you rebel against God and continue to be stubborn, those terrible words will be yours on the day of judgment, '*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!*'

Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place

The first two verses of this chapter are the words of Jeremiah, the remainder are the words of God. The opposition and the loneliness he felt, were becoming too much for Jeremiah. The people to whom he preached were treacherous (2–10) and Jerusalem would be reduced to a heap of rubble (11). The distraught prophet wanted to escape from it all and he said, ‘*Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for wayfaring men*’ (2). There, the pressure would be removed from him. He would be able to relax in the company of travellers, staying at a lodge where he would enjoy their tales and hear their news from afar. David once expressed a similar sentiment, ‘*Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness*’ (Psalm 55:6–7).

There are times when we may want to escape the pressures of Christian life and service. We may be afflicted with severe physical pain or crushed by disappointment from which there is no escape. We may feel isolated and alone like Jeremiah because we seek to live for the Lord in a hostile world. In fierce trial, Satan will whisper to us urging us to give up, get up and go.

Are you feeling like Jeremiah? Remember that the Lord is with us at all times and in all our trials. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6). Jeremiah made no attempt to escape when the Babylonian army swept through Jerusalem and God preserved him. **We must also remember that the Lord has put us where we are, and that he is in control of all our circumstances.** When we learn to accept the perplexing providences of God we will know the contentment that the apostle Paul speaks of, even though he was in prison (Philippians 4:11–12).

*His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through.*

(John Newton)

I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem

If chapter 22 could be called, ‘Concerning kings,’ the verses in today’s reading could be entitled, ‘Concerning prophets.’ Jeremiah was very distressed *because of the prophets ... because of the LORD, and because of his holy words* (9). The Lord warned that he would bring disaster upon the wicked prophets and priests (10–13).

What were the charges against these false prophets?

- The Lord had *seen folly* (Hebrew better translated ‘distastefulness’) *in the prophets of Samaria*. They were prophets of the god Baal who had caused the people of God to go astray before the northern kingdom went into captivity. The Lord had, however, *seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem*. These men were adulterers, liars and they strengthened the hands of evildoers (10–15).
- They claimed to speak in the name of the Lord but God had not spoken to them nor commissioned them (16–17, 21–22, 30–31, 34, 37–38).
- Their message was full of lies, promising peace to those who despised God, and they took a light view of sin (17).
- They had no message of the majesty and omnipresence of God (23–24).
- They failed to turn people from their wicked ways because they did not speak the word of the Lord (22).

God is omnipresent (everywhere) and no one is able to hide from him. He heard the lies of these false prophets who were trying to make the people forget about the name of Jehovah and turn to Baal (23–27). Many people still claim to have gifts of prophecy. Take no notice of these self-appointed ‘prophets’. They have not been sent by God and their teaching is often very suspect. We must also beware of preaching that ignores man’s plight as a sinner and which pretends that all is well. If there is no message of repentance or the need to trust in Christ and his work on the cross for salvation and to own him as Lord we must be suspicious.

Jehovah Tsidkenu – The Lord our Righteousness

*I once was a stranger to grace and to God,
I knew not my danger, and felt not my load;
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree,
Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.*

*When free grace awoke me, by light from on high,
Then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die;
No refuge, no safety in self could I see —
Jehovah Tsidkenu my Saviour must be.*

*My terrors all vanished before the sweet name;
My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came
To drink at the fountain, life giving and free —
Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.*

*Jehovah Tsidkenu! my treasure and boast,
Jehovah Tsidkenu! I ne'er can be lost;
In thee I shall conquer by flood and by field
My cable, my anchor, my breastplate and shield!*

*Even treading this valley, the shadow of death,
The “watchword” shall rally my faltering breath;
For while from life’s fever my God sets me free,
Jehovah Tsidkenu my death-song shall be.*

(R.M.M’Cheyne)

Who is the wise man who may understand this?

God warned Judah, ‘*I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins and a den of jackals. I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant*’ (11). He asked if there were a wise man among them who understood why this was happening: ‘*Who is the wise man who may understand this? ... Why does the land perish and burn up like a wilderness, so that no one can pass through*’ (12). He then gave the answer to those who would listen: ‘*Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the imagination of their own heart and after the Baals*’ (13–14). God would feed them with poison food and bitter water and scatter them among the Gentiles (the heathen nations around them; 15–16).

How could they expect God to smile upon them when they had forsaken him for idol worship, when they followed the perverse inclinations of their own hearts? The Lord was just in bringing judgment upon them. He told them to call for the women who were professional mourners. They must weep and wail and teach their daughters to wail because of the disaster that was to come upon Jerusalem. Death is pictured as a terrible visitor destroying the children and young people (17–21).

Circumcision was the outward mark of their covenant with God and the people could not imagine that he would punish them and that they would perish with the uncircumcised heathen nations. The inward circumcision of the heart is more important in the sight of God than the outward ritual (25–26; cp. Romans 2:29).

It is a sad fact that in the western world most people do not give God a thought. When disasters come upon us, very few people see the hand of God in judgment. **Only those who fear the Lord possess true wisdom. They understand that he is in control of his world and that he is wise and just in all his ways.**

*Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands
and knows me*

We are repeating yesterday's reading to consider verses 23 and 24. What are the most important things in life? Many people have wisdom, power and wealth high on their list of priorities. We must not glory (boast) in such things, but glory in something far more important. *'But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the LORD'* (23–24). To know God is to have eternal life (John 17:3; 1 John 5:12,20). To please God is to love those things in which he delights – *'lovingkindness (steadfast love), judgment (justice), and righteousness'*.

Alexander Stewart, a Free Church of Scotland preacher from early in the 20th Century wrote: 'Wisdom, power, wealth — it is on these three objects of human glorying that Jeremiah lays the interdict of Heaven. The wise man, after all, is ignorant if he lacks the knowledge of God; the mighty man is a weakling if he is not equipped with the armour of God; and the rich man is a bankrupt if his soul is empty of the grace of God.' (JEREMIAH, published by the Knox Press, Edinburgh, page 164).

We must not boast about what we are, but in who God is. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things* (Psalm 103:2–5).

The apostle Paul quotes from these verses. *He who glories, let him glory in the LORD* (1 Corinthians 1:31). He also wrote, *But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (Galatians 6:14). **When we glory in the cross, we are humbled by the amazing love of God, and we will not boast in our own wisdom, riches or greatness, but will see these things in their right perspective.**

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

False shepherds (wicked kings) had neglected God's flock and had scattered them. The Lord promised that he would set good shepherds over the remnant of those whom he would gather from exile (1–4). There follows a wonderful prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (5–6; cp. 33:15–16). He is described as a *Branch of righteousness* (cp. Isaiah 11:1–2; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12). The Hebrew translated 'Branch' is not the usual word but one which describes a shoot sprouting up from the roots of a tree which had fallen down. The royal house of David had become like a fallen tree but from its roots would spring a tiny shoot which would grow into a mighty tree (cp. Romans 15:12). The Lord Jesus came to this earth and was born into a humble family from David's line, but he is the almighty King! One of his titles is **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS** (Hebrew = 'Jehovah Tsidkenu'). **Jesus is more than a man, much more than a prophet, and greater than any angel. He is Jehovah God!**

The Lord Jesus is our righteousness (cp. 1 Corinthians 1:30). We do not have to work for our salvation; the perfect obedience and goodness of Christ is put to our account (*imputed to us*; Romans 4:22–25). He bore our sin, being made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21). How wonderful! We are *justified freely by his grace* (Romans 3:24).

Just before he became a Christian, the poet William Cowper was in great despair on account of his sin. He then read Romans 3:24–25 and wrote, 'Immediately I received strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement he had made, my pardon sealed in his blood, and all the fulness of his justification. Unless the Almighty arm had been under me I think I should have died with gratitude and joy.'

I spoke to you in your prosperity

This chapter has messages concerning the three kings of Judah who followed Josiah. We are first taken to the period in Judah's history following King Josiah's death in battle against the Egyptians (10; cp. 2 Chronicles 35:20–24). The Lord urged the king to rule righteously and warned him that if he refused to obey these words, Divine judgment would come upon Judah and Jerusalem (3–9). The people were not to weep for the dead Josiah but rather for his son, Shallum (Jehoahaz) who reigned only three months before being taken captive to Egypt where he died (10–12; cp. 2 Kings 23:31–34).

Josiah was a good king who knew the Lord, but his sons were wicked men. When a man knows God he has compassion on the poor and needy but Josiah's sons were covetous men who shed innocent blood and practised violence and oppression (16–17).

Jehoiakim who succeeded his brother Jehoahaz to the throne of Judah relied on political alliances to protect him against Babylon. These 'lovers' whom he had taken for his protection would themselves be destroyed and unable to help him (20). He would be unlamented and despised in death (18–19). Jehoiakim had prospered and God said, *'I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, "I will not hear"'* (21). **Oh, the danger of setting our heart on material possessions! Riches can make us smug and self-satisfied, and deaf to the voice of God (1 Timothy 6:9–10; Revelation 3:17).**

The Lord also had a bleak message for Coniah (elsewhere referred to as Jehoiachin). He would be cast out into a foreign land never to return to Judah (24–30). He only reigned for three months before he was taken into exile in Babylon. The Babylonians installed his uncle Zedekiah, the younger brother of his father, on the throne of Judah (2 Kings 24:8–12). Zedekiah later rebelled against Babylon (encouraged by the Egyptians) and was slain after a reign of eleven years. When the Lord speaks to us, let us be quick to obey him. We ignore God at our peril.

He is the living God and the everlasting King

G. Campbell Morgan entitles this chapter, 'Substitutes for God.' He writes, 'When men lose the consciousness of God they do not lose their sense of the need of God; and consequently they substitute the false for the true' (STUDIES IN THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH, page 73). The prophet vividly contrasted the true God with idols in verses which echo Psalm 115 and Isaiah 44:9–20. Idolatry is a useless substitute for meeting man's greatest need – to know and to worship God who created him. Idols inspire fear in those who worship them but they are dead, impersonal, breathless and useless (5,11,14–15).

Let us consider the Lord our God: *But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King ... He is the Maker of all things* (10,16). He is awe-inspiring in his great majesty and power (6–7,10,12–13). Wonder of wonders! The almighty God gave his only begotten Son to die on the cross to save sinners. He triumphed over death (2 Timothy 1:10) and he gives eternal life to all who trust in him and follow him. We serve a living God, we have a risen Saviour.

Idol worship is still with us and we do not have to look at images of the Buddha or of Hindu gods to find it. Many people trust in horoscopes, charms or crystals. There are more subtle substitutes for God such as devotion to wealth, power or pleasure-seeking. None of these things can satisfy the hungry soul; they can offer no real comfort to those in distress; they cannot remove the burden of sin. They cannot give life because they are dead. **Have you been trying substitutes for God in your life?** You know that they are worthless and that they will not last. Repent of your idolatry and come to God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. The living God, the everlasting King, will give you eternal life and a peace and joy that the world can never give.

O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself

There is another grim warning of judgment in these verses. Matthew Henry suggests that the lament comes from the prophet who puts into the mouths of the people ‘the words they should say.’ They acknowledge that they are deeply wounded and that they must bear it (19). Why was the country ruined and wasted (20)? It was because the foolish rulers (‘*shepherds*’) of the people had not sought the Lord. These rulers would not prosper and their flocks would be scattered (21). A great commotion was coming from the north and the invaders would *make the cities of Judah desolate, a den of jackals* (22; cp. 9:11).

Jeremiah prays, ‘*O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*’ (23). Matthew Henry comments, ‘The prophet here acknowledges the sovereignty and dominion of the divine providence, that by it, and not by their own will and wisdom, the affairs both of nations and particular persons are directed and determined. This is an article of our faith, which it is very proper for us to make confession of at the throne of grace, when we are complaining of an affliction, or suing for a mercy.’ God himself would direct the king of Babylon to invade Judah. When you pray, never forget that God is sovereign over all things. Also be encouraged that he uses your prayers in his purposes. We must pray *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).

The prophet also prayed, ‘*O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. Pour out your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know you*’ (24–25; cp. Psalm 79:6–7). Matthew Henry points out that this prayer is not uttered out of malice or revenge, but is an appeal to God’s justice. His people had provoked him to wrath but so had other nations. Should only Judah be punished when their enemies were also the enemies of God? **In distressing and perplexing times, let us always take encouragement from the fact that God is altogether good and wise in his dealings with us.**

I myself will fight against you

This chapter takes us to the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. He was a man who refused to obey God’s word but who wanted to know what God had to say (2). Pashhur in verse 1 is not the man found in the first verse of chapter 20. Both of these men were from different priestly families.

The army of Babylon had surrounded Jerusalem and was poised to attack. The king was in desperate trouble but he was very presumptuous in saying, ‘*Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all his wonderful works, that the king may go away from us*’ (2). He knew that the Lord had miraculously delivered the city from the Assyrian army over one hundred years earlier in 701 BC (Isaiah chapters 36 and 37). Godly King Hezekiah had then sought the Lord, but Zedekiah was nothing like Hezekiah. He was a wicked, cowardly man who preferred to please the godless leaders of Judah rather than obey the Lord.

God’s reply to Zedekiah was devastating. ‘*I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath*’ (5). The king had persistently refused to obey the Lord but he expected God to be there for his convenience to help him out of his mess. It was too late! Zedekiah had more than Babylon against him. He had God against him. Jeremiah’s message from the Lord was that God would visit Jerusalem with famine and with plague (6–7). God is patient and merciful, but if we reject his word and continue to refuse to listen to what he has to say to us, let us be warned! **If we persist in rebelling against God, we must not expect him to intervene and help us when we are in trouble.**

The Lord also gave Jeremiah a stark message for Jerusalem: ‘*Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.*’ The city would be delivered into Nebuchadnezzar’s hands who would destroy it by fire. The only hope was to surrender; captivity would be better than death (8–10).

His word was in my heart as a burning fire

The greatest opponents of true religion are often found among non-Christian religious leaders. They persecuted the prophets (Matthew 23:29–31) and they plotted against the Lord Jesus and had him crucified. If you read the Acts of the Apostles, you will find that the early church was continually persecuted by religious people.

Pashhur, the priest, who was also chief governor of the temple, was furious when he heard the words of Jeremiah (1; cp. 19:14–15). He struck the prophet and put him in stocks, leaving him there the whole night (2–3). Jeremiah was not silenced by this persecution. He told the wicked temple official that the Lord had changed his name from *Pashhur* to *Magor-Missabib* which in Hebrew means ‘fear on every side’. Pashhur had prophesied lies, and he, his family and friends, would be carried off captive to Babylon. Jerusalem would be plundered in that dreadful day (4–6).

We have already seen that Jeremiah was deeply hurt by the persecution he suffered and here he again pours out his heart to God alternating between praise and despair. He is mocked every day (7–8) and the hardened people use the words God had given him to taunt him saying, ‘*Fear on every side*’ (10; ‘*Magor-Missabib*’). His persecutors were waiting for the opportune time to attack him (10). The distressed prophet curses the day of his birth (14–18), but in his cry to God there is an affirmation of faith. He had determined not to speak any more in the name of the Lord but he cannot remain silent. He said, ‘*But his word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones*’ (9).

It takes more than taunts and threats to silence a man who is walking with God. What is the prophet’s comfort? He reassured himself, saying, ‘*But the LORD is with me as a mighty, awesome one*’ (11). **When God is with us, what have we to fear? We can sing in the darkest night (13).**

So be it, LORD

‘*The words of this covenant*’ (2) most likely refer to the Book of the law (Deuteronomy) discovered in the temple in the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign (2 Kings 22). The book of Deuteronomy sets out God’s will for Israel. Disobedience to the Lord will bring his curse upon them, obedience brings great blessing. Moses urged the people to choose the way of obedience and life (eg. Deuteronomy 30:11–20).

The Lord told Jeremiah to preach the words of the covenant to the people of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2,6). He was to remind them of the promises of blessing if they obeyed God and to warn them that the curse of the Lord would be on those who disobeyed the words of the covenant (2–4).

What was Jeremiah’s attitude to God’s word? He answered God saying, ‘*So be it, LORD*’ (5; the Hebrew is ‘*Amen, LORD*’). He was completely submissive to God’s word and he proclaimed the Scriptures which warned of judgment as well as those which offered consolation. The people were guilty of the same sins as their forefathers who had refused to hear God’s words and had forsaken him to serve idols. They had broken the covenant that God had made with the patriarchs (9–10). Jeremiah did not have a comfortable message for his people. When calamity came upon them they would cry out to God but he would not hear them. They would cry out to the false gods who were useless and unable to help them (11–14).

Jeremiah’s message brought such great opposition, that he felt like *a docile lamb brought to the slaughter* (19). The men of his own town of Anathoth threatened that if he did not stop prophesying in the name of the Lord, they would kill him (21). God heard their threats and he told Jeremiah that he would bring judgment on those evil people (22–23). If we are faithful to God’s word and seek to lead a godly life, we will suffer scorn and persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). **We must never seek personal revenge but look to the Lord to deal with our enemies (20). We must overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19–21).**

Why does the way of the wicked prosper?

Jeremiah was distressed by the hostility of the people of Anathoth and he asked the same questions that godly people still ask: ‘*Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?*’ (1). The same question is also asked in Psalm 73. We may wonder at times whether it is worth following the Lord Jesus. The hassle, the misunderstandings, the battles and the satanic opposition sometimes appear to be too much to endure. The ungodly seem far more happy and carefree. Is God being fair to us?

It is important to notice that Jeremiah begins by acknowledging the righteousness of God (1). God is just, he is fair! The end of the wicked, though they may not know it, is dreadful (3, cp. Psalm 73:17–19). The apostle Paul was another man who suffered much for the Lord. He wrote, ‘*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*’ (Romans 8:18). The godly have a glorious future; they will have everlasting joy in the presence of God.

The Lord asked Jeremiah how he would be able to cope in running against horses if running with men on foot wearied him. If he was wearied in times of peace, how would he manage with *the flooding of the Jordan* (5)? *The flooding of the Jordan* refers to the luxurious growth on its banks which was the haunt of lions in those times. God was telling Jeremiah that though he felt drained by the present trials and the treachery of his family, he was being strengthened for greater trials yet to come. The Lord also had a treacherous house which he would deliver to their enemies (6–13). Despite all this, God still loved his people. He called them, ‘*the dearly beloved of my soul*’ (7). He promised to restore them if they would repent and obey him (15–16). Many people do not correctly read the Old Testament. They accuse the prophets of being messengers of doom and gloom. Some even dare to call God ‘a tyrant’. **Ah, no! In all the warnings of judgment for sin, there are passionate pleas and offers of forgiveness if the people will repent and turn to him.**

Which cannot be made whole again

The Valley of the Son of Hinnom lay to the south of Jerusalem. It was a place where children were sacrificed to the god Molech (32:35; 2 Chronicles 33:6). Josiah desecrated this idol shrine, and during the remainder of his lifetime, the vile practices of the valley were prohibited (2 Kings 23:10). In New Testament times, the valley was the garbage tip of Jerusalem where the corpses of criminals and animals were burned with the city’s refuse.

The Lord told Jeremiah to get a potter’s clay vessel and take with him some of the elders of the people and of the priests to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. When they arrived at the valley, the prophet proclaimed a grim message of doom upon the wicked and idolatrous nation which had filled the valley with the blood of the innocents. The days were coming when the *Valley of the Son of Hinnom* would be called the *Valley of Slaughter* (1–13). He broke the clay flask in the presence of those who were with him in the valley as a symbol of God’s judgment. The Lord’s word was, ‘*Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot be made whole again*’ (11).

Jeremiah then returned to the court of the temple in Jerusalem and repeated his message (14–15). Those words, *which cannot be made whole again* are a grim warning to those who persist in rebellion against God. In the last chapter, we saw how the potter was able to remake the marred vessel into something good while the clay was still soft. Once a clay pot is fired and hardened, it *cannot be made whole again* if it is shattered. **There comes a point of no return when sin must be judged (Proverbs 29:1). There is no second chance after death. (Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9; Hebrews 9:27).** If you are not a Christian, I urge you to beware of hardening your heart. Seek the Lord while he may be found and repent of your sin.

As it seemed good to the potter

The Lord told Jeremiah to go to the potter's house where he would instruct him (1–2). The prophet saw the potter working at his wheel but the clay pot became marred as the man was forming it in his hand. *So he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make* (4). The Lord's message was that he is the sovereign God. He was in control of Israel just as the potter was in complete control of the clay, to fashion it as he pleased. The nation was being prepared for judgement, the Lord was *fashioning a disaster* against them. That disaster was ruin and exile. If they turned from their evil ways, however, the Lord would be pleased to prepare them for mercy and blessing (5–11). The Lord is gracious and will never turn away those who repent of their sin and come to him (cp. John 6:37).

God's gracious overtures to the stubborn Jews were rejected, making judgment inevitable. They had forgotten God, turned to idols and left the old paths (15–17). They were determined to follow their own plans and said, *'We will every one do the imagination of his evil heart'* (12). Jeremiah's message for his people was for their own good, to turn away God's wrath from them, but they would have none of it. They not only rejected God's offer of mercy but also slandered the prophet and sought to kill him (18, 22–23). **How frightening the hardening power of sin!**

The prophet had been so crushed by the hatred and plotting of the people that it was becoming unbearable. What are we to do when we are slandered and persecuted, when we feel something of Jeremiah's experiences? We must never take personal revenge, but go to the Lord in prayer. Jeremiah poured out his heart to the Lord and so must we (19–23; cp. Romans 12:19–21). Have you noticed that he constantly turned to the Lord in prayer? Since the people had rejected his message from God, he prayed that the Lord would punish them. This may appear to be out of character for a man who loved his nation, but above all other considerations, he saw that God's cause must be vindicated.

Profitable for nothing

The prophecies in this chapter were probably given during the reign of Jehoiakim, except verses 18 and 19 which may have been addressed to his son, Jehoiachin and the queen mother, Nehushta (cp. 2 Kings 24:8–12). The Old Testament prophets often used symbols to convey spiritual truth. The Lord told Jeremiah to put a linen sash around his waist. He later told the prophet to go to the Euphrates where he was to hide the sash in a hole in a rock (1–5). After many days, he was told to recover the sash from the hiding place. He found it ruined and useless. *It was profitable for nothing* (7). The symbolism was quite clear. The Lord had chosen Judah to cling to him as a sash grips the waist of its wearer. Separated from God, his people were like the rotten sash. They were *profitable for nothing*.

We know of those who once appeared to be keen Christians. They delighted in being at the services of the church; their prayers encouraged us, their zeal inspired and challenged us, but they have drifted away from the Lord. They are *profitable for nothing*. When he was in prison, Paul sorrowed over Demas who had forsaken him, *having loved this present world* (2 Timothy 4:10). **How is it with you? Have you grown cold in your love for the Lord? Do you really want to be unprofitable to the Saviour who loved you and died to save you?** Oh, repent and the Lord will restore to you the joy of your salvation!

The prophet not only warned of impending disaster; he pleaded with the people to turn to God. Jeremiah said that he would take no pleasure in the fulfilment of his dire warnings, but he would weep from the depths of his being (17). He urged the people, *'Give glory to the LORD your God'* (16; a Hebrew way of saying, 'confess your sins'; cp. Joshua 7:19). God alone is able to deal with the problem of human sin. Only he can change our sinful disposition. We can no more reach his holy standards than an Ethiopian change the colour of his skin, or a leopard change its spots (23). A change of heart, of attitude, is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We are called by your name; do not leave us!

Some believe that the drought so vividly described in verses 2 to 6 occurred towards the end of the reign of Josiah or early in the reign of Jehoiakim. Jeremiah did not distance himself from his wicked people. He still loved them and he was driven to intercede for them. See how he identified himself with them in his prayers — *‘Our iniquities testify against us ... and our backslidings are many, we have sinned against you’* (7). The headings in our Bibles are often very helpful but we must remember that they are man-made. The heading before verse 19 in the New King James Version, ‘The People Plead for Mercy’ is misleading. It should be, ‘Jeremiah Pleads for Mercy’ as the context shows that it is Jeremiah at prayer, not Judah (7–11; cp. 15:1).

Most of us know so little about true intercession (deep, heartfelt pleading with God in prayer). The prophet did not hide the sin of the people (7,20–21), but he pleaded the name, and thus the glory of God: *‘We are called by your name; do not leave us’* (9). They were known as the people of Jehovah and God’s name was being dishonoured by their unfaithfulness. Notice how Jeremiah pleaded with God. Look at his questions in verses 8 and 9: *‘Why should you be like a stranger in the land ... why should you be like a man astonished, like a mighty one who cannot save?’* The living God seemed to be absent and unable to save. Jeremiah wanted to see the people convinced of God’s presence and power. He wanted God to be honoured. An intercessor is burdened and determined in his prayers.

Though the Lord had told Jeremiah not to pray for the people (11–12), the prophet came back pleading that the people had been deceived by the false prophets. They had believed the lie that they would enjoy peace, that they would not be punished (13). The Lord replied that they would indeed be destroyed. Jeremiah again came back in prayer with pleas and confession of sin. Idols could not send rain nor bring an end to the famine. God alone could send help (19–22). **Do you pray with fervent desire, pleading with God and confessing sin? Do you pray with faith and with expectation?**

A glorious high throne

The people of Judah had turned away from the Lord and they also violated God’s covenant with their Sabbath-breaking (19–27). They were so busy with their work that they had no time for God and they did not hallow (set apart) the Sabbath to worship God. They had forsaken the Lord, *the fountain of living waters* and they would never know satisfaction away from him (13). The prophet poured out his heart to the Lord in prayer. He was heartbroken by the hardness of the people and their hostility to his message (14–18). We must warn sinners of God’s wrath and judgment but never do so without heartfelt compassion.

What was Jeremiah’s confidence in his lonely, heartbreaking ministry? What is our confidence? *A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary* (12). The Hebrew word translated ‘sanctuary’ (‘miqdash’) means ‘a place set apart.’ The sanctuary was a place of purity (cp. ‘the Holy Sanctuary’ – Leviticus 16:33). It was a place where the troubled, perplexed soul could meet with God (Psalm 73:16–17). The sanctuary was also a place of protection (Isaiah 8:12–14). Where is our sanctuary? It is the throne of God. This is a glorious throne from which the Lord reigns in majesty (Psalm 93:1). God rules as Sovereign over all creation from his high throne (1 Chronicles 29:11; Isaiah 6:1; Daniel 4:35). It is an eternal throne (*from the beginning*; cp. Daniel 4:34). No one is able to topple the Almighty from his throne. What a safe, glorious, wonderful sanctuary we have in the throne of God!

Are you troubled in your soul? Are you afraid or anxious about the future? **Remember that this sanctuary, this throne, is a place of grace.** Our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ is full of sympathy for his people and he bids us come to him. *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:15–16). *A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.*

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD

Sin was so much part of Judah's way of life that it is described as being engraved upon their heart; nothing could erase it. Their wickedness had provoked the anger of God who would cause them to serve their enemies (1–4). They no longer trusted in the Lord but were relying on alliances with godless nations for protection against their enemies. There is a contrast here between those who trust in men and those who trust in the Lord which echoes the teaching of Psalms 1 and 146:

- If we depart from God and trust in men, we will bring his curse upon ourselves (5).
- If we trust in the Lord, we will flourish and be fruitful in our Christian lives (7–8). *Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD.*

*Why should I make a man my trust?
Princes must die and turn to dust!
Vain is the help of flesh and blood:
Their breath departs, their pomp and power,
And thoughts all vanish in an hour,
Nor can they make their promise good.*

*Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel's God! He made the sky,
And earth, and seas, with all their train:
His truth for ever stands secure;
He saves the oppressed, and feeds the poor,
And none shall find his promise vain.* (Isaac Watts).

Verse 9 describes the plight of every man and woman. God says, '*The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*' (or 'incurably sick'). The ungodly are so deceived by Satan that they are in great danger. God knows and searches our hearts and he will judge us according to our deeds (10). The Lord alone can change the human heart through the mighty power of his Holy Spirit. **Let us persevere in prayer for our non-Christian relatives and friends.** May God be pleased to make them aware of their plight and turn them to himself.

Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be favourable toward this people. Cast them out of my sight

The Lord told Jeremiah that it was pointless to intercede for the people; they had passed the point of no return (1–9). Even the combined prayers of Moses and Samuel, two great intercessors, would be of no avail: '*Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be favourable toward this people. Cast them out of my sight*' (1; cp. Exodus 32:31–35; 1 Sam. 7:12–13). Matthew Henry comments, 'How can it be thought that the holy God should have any remaining complacency in those that have such a rooted antipathy to him? It is not in a passion, but with a just and holy indignation, that he says, "*Cast them out of my sight*, as that which is in the highest degree odious and offensive; and *let them go forth*, for I will be troubled with them no more.''

God would punish the people for their own sins, but also bring judgment to the land because of the sins of Manasseh who had shed so much innocent blood in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:3–4). He told Jeremiah that Judah was appointed to destruction and that he would *hand them over to trouble*. Many would be killed by the sword, others by famine and the remainder would go into captivity. (3–4). There would be none to pity Jerusalem or any to show concern for her (5). God would destroy his people because they would *not return from their wicked ways* (7). Matthew Henry suggests that the *plunderer at noonday* (8) is a reference to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon whom God would use as his instrument of judgment upon Judah: '*I will cause anguish and terror to fall on them suddenly.*' (8). Widows would be increased because of the slaughter of their husbands.

It is dreadful to be cast out of God's sight and to have his ears shut to our prayers (1). *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Hebrews 10:31). **Let us be sure to learn the awesome lesson of these verses that there is a terrible price to pay if we forsake God.**

Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart

Jeremiah felt utterly dejected and bemoaned the day of his birth (10). His intense loneliness and isolation brought about on account of his faithfulness to God is summed up in three stark words, “*I sat alone*” (17). He began to doubt the goodness of God (‘*an unreliable stream, as waters that fail*’ – 18). What prevented him from sinking completely? He was convinced that God knew all about him and about his suffering (15). He took great comfort in the word of God and said, “*Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart*” (16). The Lord reassured his disheartened servant. He would make him invincible against his persecutors and would deliver him (19–21; cp. 1:18–19).

Dale Ralph Davis writes, ‘God communicates his revelation. Jeremiah imbibes it fully and finds his highest pleasure as he assimilates God’s Word. It is such a delight because it is God’s Word. It reveals God himself, even if it is a severe Word. It still reflects the character and the ways of God and the plan of God, and that always delights the servant of God’ He also observes a paradox: ‘You have the joy of Yahweh’s Word (v.16) and you have the costliness of Yahweh’s call (vv. 15 and 17)’ (TRUE WORD FOR TOUGH TIMES, pages 29 and 31).

Paul wrote about the ‘*comfort of the Scriptures*’ (Romans 15:4). **Do you feel low in spirit, lonely or perplexed? Perhaps you do not feel like reading your Bible? Now is the time to read it!** You will find within its pages *exceedingly great and precious promises* (2 Peter 1:4). As you grasp them by faith, you will be able to say with Jeremiah, ‘*Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.*’

*Father of mercies in thy word
What endless glory shines!
For ever be thy name adored
For these celestial lines.
Here springs of consolation rise
To cheer the fainting mind,
And thirsty souls receive supplies,
And sweet refreshment find.*

(Anne Steele)

My refuge in the day of affliction

The Lord placed restrictions upon Jeremiah so that his way of life as well as his words would warn of the calamity coming upon Judah. He was forbidden:

- To marry or to have children. There was no future for the young in Judah who would *die gruesome deaths* (1–4).
- To mourn because God was visiting judgment upon Judah. He said, ‘*I have taken away my peace from this people, lovingkindness and mercies*’ (5–7). What solemn and frightening words!
- To feast with the people. The Lord warned that the devastation of Judah would be so complete that he would take away the sound of rejoicing and gladness from the land (8–9).

God told Jeremiah that when the people heard these words, they would ask, ‘*Why has the LORD pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?*’ (10). They were so hardened in their sin and so insensitive to its effects on them, that they could not understand why the Lord was going to judge them. The Lord told Jeremiah to tell them that this was because of their idolatry and their refusal to listen to the word of God (11–13). People have not changed and the same attitude prevails today. We must also remember that God does not change and he still sovereignly works in the lives of those who are indifferent or hostile to the gospel so that they repent of their sin and trust in him.

In all this gloom there was a ray of hope! God was remembered as the living God who had brought his people out of Egypt, but a day would come when he would be remembered for bringing them out of captivity to their own land (14–15). Jeremiah reminded himself of God’s greatness and he looked forward to the day when Gentiles would seek the Lord (19–21). That day is now here; it is the gospel age. Let us rejoice in God, praying, ‘*O LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction*’ (19).