

So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments

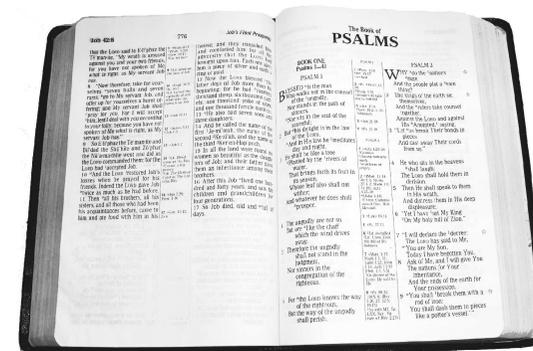
The last chapter of Jeremiah reviews the reign of Zedekiah, the collapse of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people. It is almost identical to 2 Kings 24:18 to 25:30. The prophet had told the king to surrender to the Babylonians for the sake of his family and Jerusalem, but he would not listen (38:14–23). The siege of the city lasted eighteen months before it fell (1–7). Zedekiah and his soldiers escaped under cover of darkness but were eventually captured in the plain of Jericho. They were taken to Riblah where Zedekiah saw his sons and nobles executed. The Babylonians then put out his eyes and took him off to their country in chains (8–11). Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the population of Judah was taken into exile except for some of the poor of the land whom the Babylonian army commander left behind as vine-dressers and farmers (8–12).

The book of Jeremiah ends with a note of hope, however. Jehoiachin, a wicked young man who had been imprisoned in Babylon after reigning only three months (2 Kings 24:8–12) was restored to favour in the thirty-seventh year of his imprisonment. *So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments* and went from prison to palace (31–34). Why was the Lord gracious to Jehoiachin? We do not know, but it is possible that after this, he came to faith and obedience to God just as wicked Manasseh did in a Babylonian prison (2 Chronicles 33:10–13). God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

We do know that Jehoiachin's grandson was godly Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2; cp. Matthew 1:12). Zerubbabel led the people back to Judah after the captivity and directed the rebuilding of the temple (his story is found in the Book of Ezra). He was an important instrument in the purposes of God. How encouraging! God often sees fit to choose men and women from the most wicked homes to be used in his service. **Let us give thanks to the Lord who is absolutely sovereign, infinitely wise, and full of grace.**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



July 2015

Bible readings from Jeremiah chapters 27 to 52

The King, whose name is the LORD of hosts

The end of Babylon is vividly described by Jeremiah. Its strong army was reduced to weakness and the soldiers were overtaken by fear and panic (30–32). Destruction came upon the proud nation and her cities lay in ruins (37–49). Jeremiah wrote in a book the prophecies against Babylon. He told Seraiah (probably the brother of his scribe, Baruch; cp. 32:12) that when he arrived in Babylon, he should read the words of the book and after prayer, tie a stone to the book and cast it into the river Euphrates (59–64).

How were God’s people in Babylon to react to the turmoil and devastation that came with the invasion of the Medes and Persians? How must we react when judgment seems to be looming on the wicked around us, or in any time of crisis? We must not be faint-hearted, nor must we fear, or we would be paralysed and useless (46). Days of judgment on the enemies of God are days of opportunity for his people. The Jews were not to stand still but to escape their captivity. They were also told, ‘Remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come to your mind’ (50). It is so easy to forget the Lord when we need him most. We forget to worship and to praise him, we forget to encourage ourselves in him and we do not commit our way to him.

Who is the Lord whom we are to remember? He is *the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts* (57; cp. 46:18; 48:15). This title of God (Hebrew = ‘Jehovah-Sabaoth’) is found repeatedly throughout the Psalms and the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The NIV translation, ‘The LORD Almighty’ loses the feel and sense of the Hebrew. The Lord has vast armies (‘hosts’) of angels *who excel in strength* (Psalm 103:20–21). God’s army is invincible and far greater than all the evil powers of darkness. The Lord is the King of the universe. He gives his army of angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways (Psalm 91:11–12). **Are you feeling faint or fearful? Are you beset with anxious thoughts? Remember the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts and take heart!**

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We would have healed Babylon

This prophecy against Babylon was brought in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign, 594 BC (59–64). There were already many Jews in Babylon who had been taken captive in 597 with King Jehoiachin (29:1–2; 2 Kings 24:8–16). The 'winnowers' and 'the archer' (2–3) were the Medes and Persians who were to destroy Babylon almost sixty years later (11).

The judgment on Babylon was *the vengeance of the LORD* (50:15,28; 51:6,11,36). God had not forsaken Israel or Judah, despite their sin (5). The Lord said that he would repay the Babylonians for all the evil that they had done in desecrating the temple and for their atrocities against his people (11,24,26). He did bring a swift and devastating end to Babylon (Daniel 5:13–31). We saw a similar thing toward the end of the 20th century. Communist regimes which had relentlessly persecuted the church of God were toppled within a matter of days. The Lord avenges his people and woe betide those who persecute us! We must never seek to 'get even' with those who have wronged us, however. Paul wrote to the church at Rome, '*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*' (Romans 12:19,21).

Babylon was privileged to have the witness of Daniel and other godly men, but she persisted in her idolatry (17–18). The God of Jacob is so different from man-made gods. Idols make nothing, but Jehovah is the Maker of all things! (19). The Lord said, '*We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed*' (9). It is very sad when men and women reject God's offer of mercy and healing for their souls (cp. Matthew 23:37–38). **If your heart is not right with God, dare you persist in rejecting his gracious offers of mercy?** You have the witness of Christian friends, you know that God has worked in their lives. Do not be like the Babylonians who refused the remedy for their sinfulness. Repent of your sin and ask the Lord Jesus to save you while there is time.

To whom it seemed proper to me

Dale Ralph Davis comments that 'we must look at Jeremiah chapters 27 to 29 to see that 'God sometimes decrees a course of history which his people cannot welcome enthusiastically but in which they must live faithfully ... The text underscores the sovereignty, the kingship, the total dominance of Yahweh over history. We need to look at what Jeremiah tells us of God's sovereignty, because it is that sovereignty which decrees the way history goes' (TRUE WORD FOR TOUGH TIMES, page 44).

Chapter 27 begins with the same words as chapter 26: *In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah*. The name '*Jehoiakim*' (1) should be translated 'Zedekiah' as verse 3 and chapter 28:1 makes clear (different manuscripts have one or other of these names). After the death of Jehoiakim in 597 BC, his son was king for just three months before being taken with some of the leading people of Judah to Babylon (20). The prophet Ezekiel was among those captives (Ezekiel 1:1–2). King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon installed Zedekiah as puppet king over Judah. Some of the surrounding nations encouraged Zedekiah to rebel against Babylon.

The Lord told Jeremiah to put a yoke around his neck (1–2; cp. 28:10). He was to go to the messengers from those nations who were in Jerusalem and warn them that *the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel* had a message for them to take to their masters.: '*I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to me. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon*' (3–7). Jeremiah urged them not to listen to the lies of their prophets, fortune-tellers and sorcerers (9–11).

They needed to know that the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel is absolutely sovereign in his dealings with nations and individuals. We too need always to remember this great truth.

'I have not sent them' says the LORD, 'yet they prophesy a lie in my name'

Jeremiah brought a message to King Zedekiah similar to that which he had delivered to the foreign messengers in Jerusalem. He was not to imagine that any rebellion against Babylon would succeed. He said to the king, *'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon," for they prophesy a lie to you, for I have not sent them' says the LORD, 'yet they prophesy a lie in my name'* (14–15).

Jeremiah appealed to the priests and the people, telling them that they should *serve the king of Babylon, and live* (12–17). They should not listen to their prophets who were saying that the items plundered from the temple (by the Babylonians at the time that Nebuchadnezzar had installed Zedekiah as king in 597 BC) would soon be returned. They were lying (16). Moreover, the temple vessels that had not been earlier plundered by Nebuchadnezzar would also be taken to Babylon in the coming captivity. There was a message of hope, however. God would visit the people and the vessels of the temple would be returned to Jerusalem (22).

The prophet would have appeared to be a cowardly traitor when he delivered such a message, but he was bringing God's word to the king and nation. Such a message brought much suffering to Jeremiah, but he remained faithful to God throughout his long ministry.

Many religious leaders, especially those who are popular on state radio and television, *prophesy a lie* when they deny that God will surely punish sinners and claim that there are many ways to God. **Such multi-faith sentiments are lies and we must not listen to them but remain faithful to God's holy word whatever the cost.**

Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD

The Lord used Babylon to punish many of the nations mentioned in chapters 46 to 49. The prophecy against Babylon is almost as long as all of the prophecies against those nations put together. The Jews were punished because of their sin *against the LORD*. Their enemies knew that God was using them as instruments of Divine judgment, but this did not excuse them for what they did (7). Though Babylon was used by God to punish Judah, she would herself be punished because she also had *sinned against the LORD* (14). The mighty Assyrian empire had been humbled and crushed by the time of this prophecy of Jeremiah. God now warns through his prophet that he would punish the king of Babylon just as he had punished the king of Assyria (18). The fall of Babylon (2–3, 8–16) came on the night that king Belshazzar dared to defy God when he desecrated holy vessels that had been plundered from the temple in Jerusalem (Daniel 5:2–4, 23, 30).

Jeremiah prophesied that the fall of Babylon would bring the restoration of the Jews to their land and spiritual blessing (4–5, 18–20). The people would say, *'Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant'* (5). Those Jews who returned from the captivity in Babylon, did seek the Lord to join themselves to him (Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10).

When we come to faith in Christ we are joined to the Lord in an everlasting covenant. The Lord Jesus is the Mediator of this new covenant and he shed his precious blood to bring us into this special relationship with God (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 12:24). Every Christian is joined to the Lord! We are often described in the New Testament as being *'in Christ'* (eg. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17, 19). Dare we deliberately enter into sin if we are joined to the Lord? **Being joined to God brings awesome responsibilities and we must glorify him in our bodies. Being joined to the Lord also means that he is with us wherever we go (Hebrews 13:5).** We are very privileged and blessed. Let us be encouraged and rejoice in him.

The wealthy nation that dwells securely

Damascus was also to be judged because she was the enemy of Israel (23–27; see 1 Kings chapter 20; 2 Kings chapters 6 and 7). The term, ‘sea’ (23) is used figuratively to describe turmoil (cp. Isaiah 57:20). Damascus and the Syrian cities would be fainthearted and seized with terror. They would be like a troubled sea at news of the approaching Babylonian army.

The people of Kedar and Hazor were nomads who were wealthy and careless. They were so confident about their security that they are described as ‘*the wealthy nation that dwells securely ... which has neither gates nor bars*’ (31). God warned them that Nebuchadnezzar was planning to attack them and that their wealth would be plundered (30–32). Notice that the Lord was behind all of Nebuchadnezzar’s actions. He moved the king of Babylon to strike Kedar and Hazor; it was he who would bring calamity upon them (28,32), as he did on the other nations (5,15–16,20,27). God’s hand would also be seen in the destruction of the Elamites (34–39).

There is an important spiritual lesson to be learned from Kedar and Hazor *the wealthy nation that dwells securely*. We may desire wealth to bring us comfort and security but though money may meet our material needs, wealth often brings a sense of spiritual apathy. The Lord Jesus had stern words for a wealthy church: ‘*You say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing” – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked ...*’ (Revelation 3:17). Wealth led to the church at Laodicea being lukewarm and spiritually impoverished. The Lord Jesus urges us to lay up for ourselves *treasures in heaven* (Matthew 6:20). **We will have heavenly treasure if we put the interests of God’s kingdom first in our lives (Matthew 6:33).**

The LORD has not sent you

Hananiah took it upon himself to contradict Jeremiah in the presence of the priests and people in the temple (1). He prophesied in the name of the Lord that God had broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. He said that God would bring Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) and his fellow captives back to Jerusalem within two years (2–4).

Jeremiah boldly stood up to the self-proclaimed prophet of the Lord, adding a sarcastic “*Amen!*” to the false prophecy (6). He told the people that if a man prophesied peace and peace came, then he was a true prophet (7–9). Hananiah responded by breaking the wooden yoke that was around Jeremiah’s neck to represent the breaking of the yoke of Babylon. He then repeated his false prophecy and Jeremiah went his way (10–11).

The Lord gave Jeremiah a message for the false prophet. He had broken yokes of wood but had made in their place yokes of iron. God had put a yoke of iron on the neck of the nations who were planning to rebel against Babylon. Jeremiah went to Hananiah with this message and with a very solemn warning of divine judgment. He said ‘*Hear now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the LORD: “This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the LORD”*’ (15–16). The false prophet who declared that the yoke of Babylon would be broken within two years (2–3) died within two months (17; cp. verse 1).

The Lord Jesus warns us against false prophets (Matthew 7:15). Some of them are well-meaning misguided Christians who we hope will learn the error of their ways. Others are rogues who trade in deception and who will be cast into hell (Matthew 7:21–23). **Do not allow yourself to be deceived by any who claim to be prophets today. God has not sent them!**

The thoughts that I think toward you

We have already seen that some of the elite of Judah's population were carried away captive to Babylon in 597 BC (27:20). Jeremiah sent a letter to those captives with two of King Zedekiah's ambassadors (1–3). These men may have been sympathetic to Jeremiah as they were the sons of Shaphan the scribe and Hilkiyah the high priest. These two men had office in the reign of good King Josiah (2 Kings 22:3–4).

The letter contained warnings but it was also full of comfort and reassurance. Jeremiah told them to settle in Babylon, building houses and planting gardens because their captivity would last seventy years. They were to *seek the peace of the city* (7). They were not to pay any attention to the false prophets in Babylon who were promising a speedy end to their captivity (4–10). Look at some of the wonderful promises in Jeremiah's letter:

- *'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope'* (11).
- Their prayers would be answered and they would find God (12–13).
- God would bring them back from their captivity after seventy years were completed (10,14).

Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'We must live faithfully within a life situation that we do not like but cannot change. There is no immediate solution to our set of circumstances, but there is a way to be faithful. That is the situation here. Jeremiah is spelling out for those already in Babylon a way to be faithful even in a "down situation"' (TRUE WORD FOR TOUGH TIMES, page 56).

Christian, rejoice in the thoughts of God toward you. God not only thinks of you but toward you! You do not have the bleak future that awaits the ungodly. The Lord has given you *a future and a hope*. Are you passing through deep trial? Look at God's promise: *'You will call upon me and go and pray to me, and I will listen to you'* (12). Come to him in faith and thanksgiving. He does listen to your prayers.

You shall not go unpunished

This chapter has prophecies against Ammon (1–6), Edom (7–22), Damascus (23–27), Kedar and Hazor (28–33) and Elam (34–39). The Ammonites, like the Moabites, were descended from Lot (Genesis 19:38), and the Edomites from Jacob's twin brother, Esau (Genesis chapter 36). Both of these nations were hostile to Israel and were often at war with God's people (cp. Numbers 20:14–21; Judges 10:7–8; 11:4–33; 1 Samuel 14:47).

The Ammonites were a cruel (Amos 1:13). They had a sadistic pleasure in cruelty and in humiliating others (cp. 1 Samuel 11:1–2; 2 Samuel 10:1–5). They were also behind the assassination of Gedaliah (40:14). They had constantly sought to take land from the tribe of Gad (1). It is because of this that the Lord asks the question, *'Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? Why then does Milcom inherit Gad, and his people dwell in its cities?'* (1:– 'Milcom' was the god of the Ammonites). Israel did have an heir; the Gadites remained to inherit the land. As with Moab, the Lord promised a return from captivity for the Ammonites.

The Edomites rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem and stood in the way of those who sought to escape (12; cp. Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 10–14). Ammon gloried in its fertile valleys (4) and proud Edom in its rocky mountain fortresses (16–17) but the prophet warned them that they would not escape Divine judgment. Let those who oppose God's people in any age, beware! The Lord says to such people, *'You shall not go unpunished'* (12). Christian, you will face opposition in this world if you are faithful to the Lord (John 15:18–21), but do not lose heart. The Lord is with you and if those who oppose the gospel do not repent, they will not go unpunished! **There is also a sober note here for those who are rejecting the message of the gospel and God's offer of mercy. *You shall not go unpunished.***

He magnified himself against the LORD

Moab would not be drunk with his wine for which he was renowned, but with the terror of Jehovah: *'For he magnified himself against the LORD'* (26,42). One of the reasons that Moab's scent did not change (11) was that he was too proud to be changed. The Lord declared, *'We have heard of the pride of Moab (he is exceedingly proud), of his loftiness and arrogance and pride, and of the haughtiness of his heart'* (29; cp. Isaiah 16:6). Israel was *a derision* to the proud Moabites, but the scorers of God's people would themselves become *a derision* (26–27, 39). Verses 30 to 46 provide a vivid picture of the desolation, lamentation and captivity that was to come upon Moab at the time of God's judgment. God is merciful, however, and the chapter closes on a note of hope for Moab (47). *'Moab is to be thrust under fierce discipline, not doomed to destruction.'* (THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY; 1958 edition).

Some foolish people imagine that they can magnify themselves against the Lord as Moab did and not be punished (cp. Psalm 2:4). There are many who despise the Bible and mock us, but we must not allow ourselves to be intimidated and silenced by those who deride us because of our Christian faith. God always has the last word!

Christians are not immune from pride and the New Testament warns us against falling into this sin (eg. Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:3–4). A great hindrance to Christian growth in grace is the pride of our hearts. **Are we too proud to receive a loving rebuke when we are wrong, or even to admit that we are wrong? Are we too proud to apologise to a brother or sister whom we have wronged?** A proud heart is a sinful heart (Proverbs 21:4). *Be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time* (1 Peter 5:5–6).

He has taught rebellion against the LORD

There were false prophets among those who had been taken captive to Babylon with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC (15). The Lord later called Ezekiel to be his prophet among the captives in 593 BC. Some of the captives in Babylon preferred to listen to the false prophets rather than Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's letter reminded the captives that it was the Lord who had sent them into exile (20). The false prophets were strongly opposed to the message in Jeremiah's letter that the captives should build houses and settle in Babylon (28). Two of their number, Ahab and Zedekiah (not to be confused with kings who had the same names) would be slain because they prophesied lies and committed adultery (15–23). Immoral men do not like God's word which demands holiness of life.

One of their colleagues, Shemaiah, sent letters to Zephaniah the priest in which he denounced Jeremiah as a self-appointed, demented prophet. These men may have been brothers – both were the sons of Maaseiah (21,25). Shemaiah urged that Jeremiah be thrown into prison, in stocks (26–28). Zephaniah read this dreadful slander in the hearing of Jeremiah and this brought a swift response from the Lord (29–30). Jeremiah was to send word to those in captivity warning that Shemaiah had *taught rebellion against the LORD* causing them to trust in a lie. God would punish him and his family so that they would never see the good that the Lord would do for his people (31–32).

We dare not trifle with God's holy word. We are not permitted the luxury of picking and choosing the parts of Scripture that are agreeable to us. We must be careful that we do not ignore or reject those passages of the Bible that challenge and convict us. Such an attitude is one of rebellion against God. **Let us humbly submit to God's word – all of it, at all times.**

They shall serve the LORD their God

Hananiah had falsely prophesied that the yoke of Babylon would be broken within two years from the beginning of Zedekiah's reign (28:1,11). Jeremiah had a true message of comfort from the Lord. The people would be restored from captivity and the yoke of Babylon would be broken (3,8). This would happen after seventy years (25:12; 29:10). There was 'a future and a hope' for God's people (29:11). *

The true prophet does not hide the fact of man's sin and God's judgment even though he may also have words of comfort (11–15, 23–24). God promised a fivefold restoration:– of health (this should be taken in a spiritual sense; 17), of a restoration to their land (18), of an increasing population (18–20), of a godly governor (21) and a restoration to fellowship with God (22).

God's promises are for those who love him and who seek to please him: *They shall serve the LORD their God* (9). **Are you trying to serve God day by day? Do you obey his word and delight in pleasing him? Is the Lord first in your life?** Let us pray that God will strengthen us to serve him wholeheartedly. This is the only way to spiritual contentment and true happiness. *They shall serve the LORD their God.*

*How blest is life if lived for thee,
My loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

* The seventy years captivity dates from the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign when many young Jews of royal or noble descent were taken captive into Babylon. Daniel and his three friends were among these captives (25:1,12; Daniel 1:1–7). There is no contradiction between Jeremiah 25:1 and Daniel 1:1. Daniel employs the Babylonian method of reckoning where the first year of a king's reign is counted from the year following his coming to the throne.

His scent has not changed

The country of Moab was situated on a high fertile plain on the east of the Dead Sea. Amos (2:1–3) and Isaiah (chapters 15 and 16) prophesied against the Moabites over one hundred years before Jeremiah spoke against them. The Moabites who were descended from Abraham's nephew, Lot (Genesis 19:36–37) were often hostile towards Israel. On one occasion, they hired the false prophet, Balaam, to curse God's people (Numbers chapters 22 to 24).

The people of Moab had enjoyed tranquillity from their early history, though surrounded by powerful neighbours. *'Moab has been at ease from his youth; he has settled on his dregs ... his scent has not changed'* (11). Wine is poured from one container to another to filter out the dregs but Moab had not been unsettled by judgment. They were the same as they had always been and were settled on their dregs of wickedness and idolatry. They were complacent and smug; they smelled the same.

God would send *wine-workers* (pourers of wine) who would tip Moab over to empty the land and to destroy them (12). Chemosh, the god of Moab, would be powerless to help them and was just as useless as the golden calf which was worshipped by Israel at Bethel. *Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence* (13; cp. 1 Kings 12:25–33). The Lord said that Moab would suffer calamity and distress (16–25).

If we are at ease in the Christian life we will never grow in grace. The Lord uses trials and difficulties to refine us (Romans 5:3–4; 2 Timothy 3:12). Our *scent* is changed for the better as our lives increasingly show the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15). **Are we more Christlike than we were a year ago? Are we more thoughtful and kind to others? Are we more gracious in our speech?**

O you sword of the LORD, how long until you are quiet?

This prophecy against the Philistines was uttered *before Pharaoh attacked Gaza* (1). This attack may have taken place in 609 BC during the campaign in which King Josiah was killed at the Battle of Megiddo. Gaza and Ashkelon (5) were Philistine cities; Caphtor (4) probably refers to Crete, from where the Philistines migrated to settle in Palestine (cp. Amos 9:7). The Philistines were renowned for their warriors (eg Goliath). Their armies were a constant threat to the Israelites from the time of the Judges to the early reign of David (cp. 1 Samuel 17).

The Lord said that he would destroy this proud nation. He would not use the Egyptians, but the Babylonians to fulfil his purpose. The Babylonian army is likened to a mighty flood coming down from the north (2). Matthew Henry points out, ‘Waters sometimes signify multitudes of people and nations (Revelation 17:15) sometimes great and threatening calamities, (Psalm 69:1). These here signify both ... the Chaldean army shall overflow the land like a deluge.’ The people who had in the past caused so much havoc among God’s people, would themselves be reduced to panic, disarray and defeat. They would not be able to find any help from their Phoenecian neighbours, Tyre and Sidon, *for the LORD shall plunder the Philistines* (4). There are powerful enemies of the gospel. Let us remember that these enemies are nothing to God. He will deal with them as he dealt with the Philistines.

Jeremiah asked, ‘*O you sword of the LORD, how long until you are quiet?*’ (6). The reply was that it could not be quiet until God’s purposes of judgment were completed (7). Jeremiah brought many terrifying prophecies of doom but he was a compassionate man who did not delight in seeing men and women cut down. **We must beware of being hard-hearted when we warn of God’s coming judgment, and always point people to Christ our Saviour, who is gracious and merciful.**

Grace in the wilderness

The verses in today’s reading concern mainly the northern kingdom. The Lord had words of encouragement for the people as well as of judgment. Northern Israel (Ephraim) would be rebuilt and its land cultivated. The people would again worship God in Jerusalem (1–6). Verse 2 speaks of something yet to take place as if it had already happened. *The people who survived the sword found grace* (favour which they did not deserve) *in the wilderness*. The Lord would ransom a remnant from the might of their enemies (7–11). There is still a godly remnant among the Jews according to the election of grace (Romans 11:5).

Jacob’s wife Rachel was buried at Ramah which is about five miles north of Jerusalem (Genesis 35:16–20). She is seen weeping and turning in her grave over the exile of her sons, Joseph and Benjamin (15). This prophecy also points to the sorrow of Bethlehem at the slaughter of its infants by Herod (Matthew 2:17–18). The Lord promised restoration and hope in the future to a sorrowing, despairing people (16–17).

What God says about the Jews in these verses is also true of every Christian: ‘*Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you*’ (3). Christian, before God created the world and the stars, before he raised up the mountains and scooped out the oceans, he loved you! He loves you now and he will love you for ever (Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:28–39; 1 John 4:19). When you were in the ‘wilderness’ of sin and alienated from God, you found grace. The Lord has drawn you to himself with lovingkindness. He gives you grace in the wilderness of suffering, heartache, trial and disappointment. There is grace in the wilderness of backsliding. The Lord chastises us because he loves us and yearns over us (18–22; cp. Hebrews 12:5–11). **He gives grace in every ‘wilderness’ experience.** Let us meditate on the wonderful promises in these verses and encourage ourselves in the Lord.

Their sin I will remember no more

The wonderful promises in this chapter were given during dark days of judgment upon Judah. The promise of a return from exile may have been given to the prophet as he was sleeping (26). The exiles already in Babylon blamed previous generations for the calamity that had befallen them, quoting the proverb found in verse 29 (cp. Ezekiel 18:2). God declared that they themselves were also guilty before him and that they deserved to be punished (30).

The expression, ‘Behold, the days are coming’ is found three times in our reading (27,31,38). There are prophecies here which relate to the return of the remnant of the Jews to their land (23–30; 38–40) and beyond this time to the new covenant in which Jewish and Gentile believers are united in Christ (31–37). The Lord Jesus is the Mediator of this better covenant, which was established on better promises than those given to Israel of old (Hebrews 8:6). Some of the promises here in Jeremiah are applied to Christians in the New Testament (33–34; cp. Hebrews 8:8–12; 10:16–17).

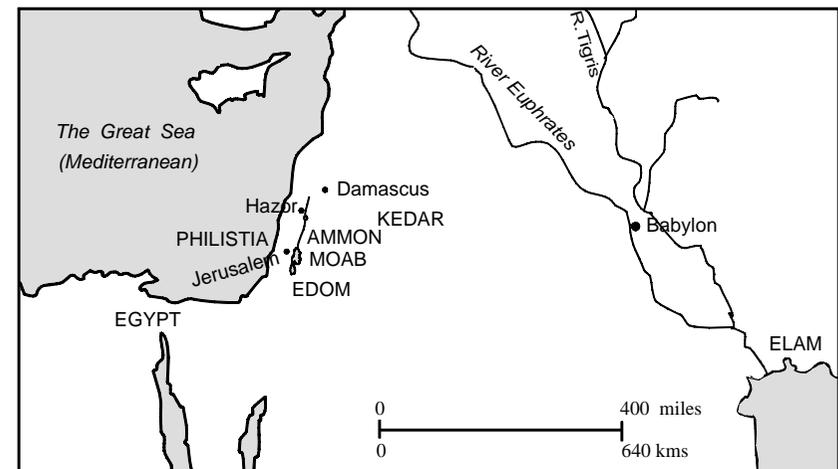
Those who belong to the new covenant are a holy people who love God’s law. The Lord says, ‘I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts’ (33). If we have no interest in knowing God’s word or in obeying it, we must question whether we are genuine Christians. Let us think of some of our new covenant privileges:

- We have a personal relationship with the living God. He is no longer distant or unknown to us, but he says, ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people ... they all shall know me’ (33–34).
- The Lord says, ‘I will forgive their iniquities, and their sin I will remember no more’ (34). Satan may accuse us and condemn us, but God has forgiven us. We can rejoice in those wonderful words of Scripture, *If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us* (Romans 8:31,34). **Their sin I will remember no more.**

But I will not make a complete end of you

There are two prophecies against Egypt in this chapter. The first (1–12) followed the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC when the Babylonians defeated the army of Pharaoh Necho. Here is a vivid description of the Egyptian preparation for war (3–4), their confidence (7–9), their fear and defeat (5–6, 10). The second prophecy (13–26) predicts the invasion of Egypt by the Babylonians which took place 568/67 BC. It is important to see that Babylon defeated Egypt not because of better strategy nor the possession of superior armed forces, but because God purposed it (10, 15–18, 25–26).

The Lord had gracious words of reassurance for his rebellious people. They were not to fear in all the turmoil surrounding them. Though God was punishing them for their sin, he said, ‘But I will not make a complete end of you’ (28; cp. 4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:11). **When we stray from the Lord, he will chastise us and correct us, but that is because he loves us (Hebrews 12:6).** He will not make a complete end of us. *When we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world* (1 Corinthians 11:32)

Map of the nations mentioned in Jeremiah chapters 46 to 51

Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them

The prophecy in this chapter was given during the reign of Jehoiakim. Life as Jeremiah's friend and scribe was dangerous (36:4,26). The Lord had a message for Baruch who keenly felt the persecution (3): *'And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them'* (5). Baruch was from a family of high social standing. His brother, Seraiah, became quartermaster to King Zedekiah, a very trusted position. It would appear that he too was a friend of Jeremiah (51:59–64).

Baruch was an able man who had everything going for him in this world, but not if he remained with Jeremiah. The hardship of persecution brought with it the temptation to look after his own personal interests, to opt for an easier and more comfortable life. Baruch heeded these words of advice and he was Jeremiah's faithful friend to the end, going with him to Egypt (43:3,6).

The temptation to *seek great things* for ourselves is always with us. The Christian life is not easy and the Lord Jesus calls us to self-denial (Luke 9:23–26). People will despise us for our allegiance to Christ and we may encounter opposition at school, university or in our workplace if we refuse to compromise our faith.

Selfish ambition is also found in the church. The disciples argued among themselves about who should be the greatest (Luke 22:24–30). The desire for pre-eminence can blight a church (cp. 3 John 9–10). True spiritual greatness includes serving (John 13:13–17). *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (Philippians 2:3). Let us have the mind of Christ who humbled himself, taking the form of a servant and dying in shame and agony to save us (Philippians 2:5–8). **Let us search our own hearts and examine our motives. Does self-seeking lie behind our apparent zeal for Christ? *'Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them.'***

There is nothing too hard for you

Jerusalem was surrounded by the Babylonian army in 587 BC, the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign (1). The king had imprisoned Jeremiah because he had warned that Jerusalem would be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. Resistance was futile because the Lord had given the city over to the Babylonians (2–5). The Lord told Jeremiah that his uncle Hanameel would approach him and offer to sell him a field in Anathoth. As nearest relative the prophet had the right to purchase before any other bidder. When his uncle came to see him in prison and make the offer Jeremiah knew that this was the word of the Lord (6–8). What was the significance of the purchase of the field? It was now occupied by invading Babylonians and would have been of little value. The purchase of the field was a symbolic act to show that houses and fields would again be possessed in Judah. The captivity would not last for ever (9–15)!

The prophet could not understand why he had to go through the process of buying the field when Jerusalem would be destroyed (25). Jeremiah did what we should always do in times of bewilderment or doubt – he prayed (16). His prayer was full of worship and praise. He acknowledged God as the Creator, great in power and wonderful in love, justice and wisdom (17–19). Jeremiah reminded himself of a glorious truth when he addressed God: *'There is nothing too hard for you'* (17). The Lord answered him asking, *'Is there anything too hard for me?'* (27; cp. Genesis 18:14). Our great confidence when we come to our heavenly Father in prayer is that he can do anything. *With God nothing will be impossible* (Luke 1:37).

Have you been losing heart in prayer? Have you given up praying for someone or for the supply of some need because the answer seems long in coming? **Encourage yourself in our almighty, all-wise Father in heaven. Come to him with your worship and praise, come confessing your sin, come with your needs.** There is nothing too hard for him. Hallelujah!

I will rejoice over them to do them good

The Lord told Jeremiah that he had given Jerusalem into the hand of the Chaldeans (Babylonians). The people had provoked God to anger by their idolatry and wickedness (28–35). They had turned their back toward God and would not listen to him to receive instruction (33). They had desecrated the temple which had been set apart for the worship of Jehovah with idols (34). The references to God being provoked to anger are found in each verse from 29 to 32. If you turn your back on God as Judah had done, if you refuse to listen to what he says to you through his word, you must expect his displeasure and judgment.

There are more expressions of hope and promises of a return from captivity and of the new covenant which will last for ever (40). Look at one of the covenant promises: *‘I will not turn away from doing them good ... I will rejoice over them to do them good’* (40–41). How wonderful! God does us good and he rejoices over us in doing us good. Satan deceives millions with the lie, that if we follow Christ, we will be miserable and bereft of joy. What nonsense! The Lord rejoices over us and he does us good. He gladly supplies our needs and we are able to come to him with confidence in prayer because he loves us and delights in us.

Those who are in the new covenant have the fear of God in their lives (40); this brings a sense of awe and adoration of God. Let us be sure that there is nothing in our lives which grieves the Holy Spirit. **Let us always seek to honour God and to please him that he may rejoice over us and that we might enjoy his smile upon us.**

*But saints are lovely in his sight
He views his children with delight;
He sees their hope, he knows their fear,
He looks, and loves his image there.*

(From Isaac Watt’s hymn based on Psalm 147).

Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves?

Jeremiah continued to prophesy to the Jews who had fled to Egypt but he met with opposition and resistance to his message right to the end of his life. These people soon turned to idolatry and Jeremiah reminded them of the disaster that had befallen Judah because of unfaithfulness to God and a refusal to heed his word. He warned them that they too would be punished for their wickedness (1–14). A great crowd gathered and told the prophet that they would not listen to him. The men and the women would continue to worship the queen of heaven (cp. 7:18). They attributed their food shortages to their past neglect of the worship of this goddess, rather than to their disobedience to God (15–19).

Jeremiah responded to the rebellious people with a solemn warning of judgment. The Lord cannot bear idolatry or any form of sin (22). He is holy and absolutely pure, and sin is a great offence to his perfect nature. The Jews in Egypt refused to learn from the past dealings of the Lord with Judah and they would surely be punished. The Lord would give the Egyptian king, in whom they trusted for protection, into the hand of his enemies (26–30). Those who escaped the sword or famine would see that God’s word through Jeremiah was true (28)

The Lord said to those who were rebelling against his word, *‘Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves?’* (7). Dale Ralph Davis writes, ‘You may think as you look at chapter 44 and at this second component of Jeremiah’s experience that these defiant Judeans are going to face judgement for this; but you would be wrong. No, you are watching the judgement actually happening in chapter 44! The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven. You recall how Romans 1 teaches this? Three times you read: “God handed them over ...” God hands people over to what they refused to let go of ... and that is the tragedy of Jeremiah’s ministry’ (TRUE WORD FOR TOUGH TIMES, Page 87–88). **The devil promises so much but gives so little. Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves?**

You speak falsely!

Johanan and the people did not take kindly to the ‘displeasing’ word from the Lord. They accused Jeremiah, “*You speak falsely! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, ‘Do not go to Egypt to sojourn there.’*” (2). They broke the promise that they had made when asking the prophet to pray for them (cp. 42:6). They told Jeremiah that Baruch had influenced him in his response to them, to hand them over to the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to deliver them to death or exile (3). Some Bible scholars suggest that the word *proud* (2) would be better translated ‘defiant’. Johanan and his men were daring to defy the word of God.

They went to Tahpanhes, a city on the Egyptian frontier, forcing Jeremiah and Baruch to go with them (4–7). The Lord still had work in Egypt for his prophet. He instructed Jeremiah to take some large stones and in the sight of the men of Judah, hide them in the clay (the brick-kilns). His message was that God would send Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon to Egypt, and he would set up his throne above these stones (9–10). Ezekiel also prophesied that this would happen (Ezekiel 29:19; 30:10). The Babylonian king would bring destruction and death and those surviving would be carried off captive. The Egyptian temples, dedicated for idol worship would be broken down and burned (11–13). An inscription has been discovered which informs that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt in 568 BC.

Many people want reassuring words of comfort from Scripture, but they refuse to listen to the solemn warnings of judgment. They tell faithful preachers and those who witness to them, ‘*You speak falsely!*’ We must be faithful to the teaching of the Bible and never compromise its message to please men or women.

*O grant us grace, Almighty Lord,
To read and mark thy holy word;
Its truth with meekness to receive,
And by its holy precepts live.* (B. Beddome and T. Cotterill).

Great and mighty things

The theme of the restoration of the Jews to their land continues in this chapter: The restoration of the people to the land (1–8), of the land to prosperity (9–13), and of a king from the line of David (14–26).

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time while he was in prison (1). He reminded the prophet that he made and established the earth (2). We need to be reminded of the might and sovereignty of God, especially when we face adverse circumstances as Jeremiah did at this time. God said to him, ‘*Call to me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know*’ (3). What are these *great and mighty* (‘hidden’ – ESV) *things*? There is:

- The repeated promise of the return of the captives from exile, with *health and healing*. The Lord promised to reveal to them *the abundance of peace and truth* (6).
- Cleansing and forgiveness of sin (8).
- The restoration of the Levitical priesthood and offerings (18).
- The promise of the new covenant and the coming of the Messiah to rule his people justly. God had covenanted with King David that a king would come from his line who would reign over an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12–16). This covenant would not be broken (20–21). The promised king is the Lord Jesus Christ (cp. Luke 1:31–33). His righteousness will be evident to such an extent among his people that Jerusalem will be called ‘*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*’ (14–16; see notes for chapter 23, verse 6). This promise is fulfilled in the church, the new Jerusalem (cp. Revelation 21:2), rather than in national Israel.

When did you last praise God for his goodness to you? Let us *praise the LORD of Hosts, for the LORD is good, for his mercy endures for ever* (11). Let us *bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD* (11; cp. Hebrews 13:15). The Lord is worthy of our praise for he has done *great and mighty things*.

You recently turned ... then you turned around

Zedekiah had rebelled against the Babylonians who were now besieging Jerusalem. The Lord gave Jeremiah a message for the king to tell him that he had given Jerusalem into the hand Nebuchadnezzar and that any rebellion against Babylon was futile. The king's life would be spared however and he would die in peace in Babylon (2–7). Zedekiah made a covenant with the people to give liberty to slaves (8–10). The siege of Jerusalem was temporarily lifted when the Egyptians came to Zedekiah's aid (37:5–7).

God's law stated that slaves should be set free after serving their master for six years and this requirement had been ignored by many Jews. The covenant made by Zedekiah corrected this abuse but when it appeared that Jerusalem would be spared from destruction, the slave-owners changed their minds. They took back those whom they had freed and enslaved them again (11). Jeremiah had a word from the Lord for these covenant-breakers: *'You recently turned and did what was right in my sight ... then you turned around and profaned my name'* (15–16). They had taken part in a solemn covenant ceremony when they proclaimed liberty to their slaves. The Lord now proclaimed liberty to them – liberty to the sword, to plague and to famine (17–19).

It is very easy to make promises to God when the going is tough, or when we are faced with trouble. God will hold us to our word and we should remember that we must keep the vows that we make to him and to others. Let us be careful to think about the promises that we make to God when we sing our psalms and hymns. Many people are not troubled when they fail to keep their word. Think of the solemn vows made in marriage services which are so often broken without any feeling of shame. Such unfaithfulness is treachery (Malachi 2:14–16). **Christian men and women must be people with integrity.**

Pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD

Johanan and the Jews who remained in Judah were now afraid of Babylonian retaliation for the murder of Gedaliah. They set out to go to Egypt staying for a time in Bethlehem (41:16–18). They appeared to have some doubt about going to Egypt because they asked Jeremiah to pray for them, *'that the LORD your God may show us the way in which we should walk, and the thing we should do'* (1–3). The prophet agreed to their request, telling them that he would tell them all that the Lord answered and that he would keep nothing back from them. They called on God as witness if they did not obey the word of God sent to them by Jeremiah. They promised, *'Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God'* (4–6).

God gave Jeremiah his answer for the people after ten days. They were to remain in Judah and not be afraid of Babylonian reprisals because the Lord would protect them and prosper them. He cautioned them, that if they disobeyed God and went to Egypt, disaster would befall them. They would die there by sword, by famine and by plague. God gave a very solemn warning, *'As my anger and fury have been poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so will my fury be poured out on you when you enter Egypt'* (7–18).

God knew that the people were being hypocritical when they asked Jeremiah to pray for them, promising to do whatever the Lord said (4–6). He knew that they had no intention of obeying God, but were determined to go to Egypt (19–22). They convinced themselves that what they desired was the will of God.

The Lord knows our hearts. We all want his guidance but what if God deals with us in a way which is *displeasing* to us? Let us beware of hypocrisy when we seek God's guidance. **It is easy to deceive ourselves into believing that our will is God's will. It is difficult to submit to the Lord when he leads us in ways that we do not desire.**

Gedaliah ... did not believe them

Johanan and other army officers discovered that one of their number, Ishmael, was planning to murder Gedaliah. This Ishmael was a member of the royal family of Judah but the treacherous plan was devised by the king of the Ammonites (14; 41:1). Johanan and his fellow officers warned Gedaliah about the plot. *But Gedaliah ... did not believe them.* He rejected Johanan's offer to foil the plot by killing Ishmael and he accused Johanan of speaking falsely concerning Ishmael (14–16).

Chapter 41 contains a gruesome account of Ishmael's treachery in murdering the unsuspecting Gedaliah, his Jewish companions and some Babylonian soldiers (1–3). He then murdered seventy pilgrims who were heading for Jerusalem after appearing to befriend them. These men were from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria, places belonging to the former northern kingdom. They were dressed as mourners because they lamented the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple. Ten other pilgrims were spared because they promised Ishmael a great quantity of provisions (4–8). Ishmael then captured the remaining people of Mizpah, intending to go to Ammon. They were rescued by Johanan but the murderer escaped to Ammon (10–18).

There is a vital lesson for us all in this tragic story. After famine hardship and uncertainty, those remaining in Judah began to enjoy peace and prosperity. Gedaliah refused to believe that danger was looming and he was caught off guard. **Times of spiritual blessing in our own individual lives or in the life of our church can make us unaware of danger.** Many a Christian has been defeated, many a church has been torn apart after enjoying great blessing. We are engaged in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10–12). *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8).

Will you not receive instruction to obey my words?

This chapter takes us back from the reign of Zedekiah to that of Jehoiakim who rebelled against paying tribute to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1). The Babylonians responded by invading Judah and thousands of refugees crowded into Jerusalem (11). The Rechabites were among those refugees (see 2 Kings 10:15–23 for information about Jonadab). God commanded Jeremiah to bring the Rechabites into the temple and there to offer them wine to drink (1–5). They refused the wine, pointing out that their ancestor Jonadab, had forbidden them to drink wine. He had also instructed them to live in tents and not to build houses for themselves. They were determined to obey their ancestor's instructions (6–11).

The Lord used the example of the Rechabites to rebuke rebellious Judah (12–19): *'Surely the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them, but this people has not obeyed me'* (16). The Rechabites stood firm on their principles. They refused to violate their conscience, even for the prophet Jeremiah. They did not take the view, 'When in Rome do as Rome does.' The adherents of false religions often put us to shame by their zeal (which is not according to the knowledge of the truth). They will not compromise their views for anyone. Let us examine our own hearts. Are we bold to stand for truth?

The world is determined to squeeze us into its mould and so sap our spiritual vitality. Worldliness is the plague of the church and is every bit as dangerous as erroneous teaching. Let us keep ourselves *unspotted from the world* (James 1:27; cp. 1 John 2:15–17). We must not be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2). The Lord says to us just as he said to Judah, *'Will you not receive instruction to obey my words?'* (13).

Yet they were not afraid

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign, the Lord told Jeremiah to have all his prophecies from Josiah's time written in a scroll (2). The words spoken in chapter 25 came in the same year of Jeremiah's ministry and were probably the words written in the scroll.

God was still giving the people chance to repent and to avoid his judgment (3). Baruch the scribe wrote as the prophet dictated God's word to him. Jeremiah then told him to read the words of the scroll at the temple on a day of fasting (6–7). The words had a sobering effect on the princes so that *they looked in fear from one to another*. They promised Baruch that they would tell the king about the message in the scroll but they could see trouble coming. They urged Baruch to find a hiding place for himself and Jeremiah (16–19).

The princes stored the scroll in a scribe's chamber and told the king of its content. Jehoiakim then called for the scroll to be read to him. It was December (the ninth month) and he was sitting by a fire in his winter house. He heard only a small portion of the scroll before he took it, cut it with a knife and threw it into the fire (20–23). Some of the princes had begged the king not to burn the scroll but he refused to listen to them (25). He ordered that Jeremiah and Baruch be arrested but the Lord hid them (26). The king and his servants were quite unmoved by God's word. *Yet they were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments* (a sign of mourning over sin and of repentance; 24).

Arrogant, scornful sinners will not escape God's judgment even though they reject his word. The Lord told Jeremiah to have the scroll rewritten and more sombre words of judgment were added (27–32). God's enemies have burned Bibles and persecuted his servants throughout the history of the church, but the message is still proclaimed. God is still pleased *through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe* (1 Corinthians 1:21). **Let us be encouraged to persevere in our witness for Christ whatever the difficulties we face.**

The LORD ... has done just as he said

We are not given the details of *the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD* (1). The prophet had been chained with other inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah to go into captivity and was taken to Ramah. Nebuzaradan, the commander of the Babylonian army had been instructed by his king to look after Jeremiah and once he had identified him, the prophet was released.

Nebuzaradan knew about Jeremiah's prophecies and he recognised that God keeps his word. He said to Jeremiah, *'The LORD your God has pronounced this doom on this place. Now the LORD has brought it, and has done just as he said'* (2–3). This heathen man acknowledged that disaster had befallen Judah because the people had sinned against God and had disobeyed his voice. Many of the Babylonians would have known about the Lord through the witness of Daniel and his three friends who had been in captivity since 606 BC. **We should always remember that God will certainly keep his word. Every promise in the Bible is true and the Lord will carry out all his threats against those who refuse to repent of their sin (cp. 2 Peter 3:1–9).**

Nebuzaradan gave Jeremiah the option of going to Babylon or of remaining in Judah. He gave him a present and food and suggested that he go to Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Nebuchadnezzar (4–5). Gedaliah was the son of Ahikam who had saved Jeremiah's life during the reign of Jehoiakim (26:24).

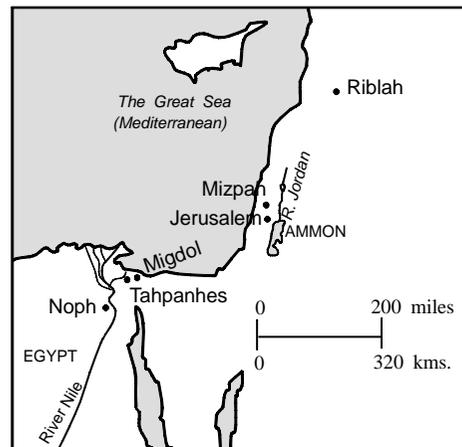
The soldiers of Judah who had avoided capture by the Babylonians joined Gedaliah. He urged them to serve the king of Babylon so that they would enjoy peace and prosperity (7–10). Other Jews who had fled as refugees to Moab, Ammon, Edom and other neighbouring countries returned to Judah to enjoy the first harvest since the Babylonian invasion. They knew that they would have to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar but there was a bumper crop of fruit and all seemed set fair for peace and prosperity (11–12). Trouble was not far away, however!

Summary of Events – Jeremiah chapters 39 to 44

15 JULY

Jeremiah 37:1–21

1. The Babylonians break through the wall of Jerusalem in 586 BC after eighteen months siege (39:1–3).
2. Zedekiah and his soldiers escape from Jerusalem by night. The king is captured near the Jordan valley. He is later taken to Riblah in the north where the Babylonians execute his sons and blind him. He is then taken in chains to Babylon (39:4–7).
3. Jerusalem's walls are demolished and its buildings including the temple are burned down. All the people, except the poor, are taken into captivity (39:8–10).
4. Jeremiah is released by the Babylonians who treat him kindly. He is committed to the care of Gedaliah who was appointed as governor of Judah (39:11–14; 40:5–6).
5. Refugees return to Judah from the surrounding countries where they had been living; they help to gather a bumper harvest (40:11–12).
6. Ishmael, a member of the Judean royal family, takes ten soldiers to Mizpah. He treacherously murders the unsuspecting Gedaliah and those with him, including some Babylonian soldiers. He then murders seventy pilgrims (41:1–9).
7. The remaining Jews, fearful of reprisals from Babylon, set out for Egypt. Jeremiah urges them to remain in Judah where the Lord will protect them; if they go to Egypt, God will bring calamity upon them (41:17 to 42:22).
8. The people reject Jeremiah's word from the Lord and forcibly take him with them to Tahpanhes in Egypt (43:1–7).
9. The Jewish settlers in Egypt return to idolatry and still refuse to listen to Jeremiah's entreaties from the Lord (44:1–30).



Is there any word from the LORD?

This chapter takes us to the closing months of Zedekiah's reign. It was 587 BC and the approach of the Egyptian army brought relief to Jerusalem as the Babylonians lifted their siege of the city (5). Zedekiah had persistently refused to obey God's word, but he now had the audacity to ask Jeremiah, 'Pray now to the LORD our God for us' (3). The Lord's response to Jeremiah's prayer was that the Babylonians would return and that they would destroy Jerusalem. Even if the invaders were defeated their wounded soldiers would still rise up and destroy Jerusalem (7–10).

When the siege of Jerusalem was lifted, Jeremiah went out of the city to claim the field which he had purchased (see chapter 32). An army officer mistakenly thought that he was defecting to the Babylonians and the prophet was beaten and imprisoned for *many days* (11–16). King Zedekiah had Jeremiah secretly brought to him and he asked, 'Is there any word from the LORD?' (17). The king wanted a message of hope from God but there was no hope. The king listened to Jeremiah's protest about his unjust imprisonment and then made conditions easier for him (18–21).

Dale Ralph Davis points out that Zedekiah was religious and that we, like him, can resist God's Word but still have keen interest in it; we can resist the Word though we have reason to believe it (37:14); resist the Word by submitting to fear (38:5). He also writes, 'You notice that even though Zedekiah vacillates and cannot make up his mind, he still always wants to know what Yahweh's Word is. He is always curious, he is always fascinated and always has to know. He is constantly calling Jeremiah in for private one-to-one conferences, but it will not make any difference. There is a word from the Lord for men and women today – a message of warning, but also of hope to all those who will turn from their sin to trust in the Lord Jesus and serve him' (TRUE WORD FOR TOUGH TIMES, Pages 62 to 72). **Do you take God's word to heart and obey what he says to you?**

Please, obey the voice of the LORD

Jeremiah's message to Jerusalem was that if they surrendered to the Chaldeans (Babylonians), they would live. It was useless resisting the invading army which would take their beloved city (2–3). The princes of an earlier generation feared when they heard the word of the Lord (36:14–16). The princes at the end of Zedekiah's reign did not fear the warnings from the Lord. They were furious with Jeremiah because his prophecies were disheartening the men defending Jerusalem. They demanded that Zedekiah put Jeremiah to death as a traitor (4–5).

The spineless king left the prophet to their mercy. They threw Jeremiah into a well (translated here a 'dungeon') which had no water left in it, but which was full of mire. They left God's servant to die. One of the king's eunuchs, Ebed-Melech heard about the prophet's plight and begged the king to save his life. Zedekiah commanded that Ebed-Melech take thirty men to rescue Jeremiah (7–13). Dale Ralph Davis observes, 'Here in Jeremiah 37–39 you have Zedekiah and Ebed-Melech. You have the one who is afraid to believe and the one who believes in spite of his fear. Ebed-Melech receives this marvellous assurance from the Lord but he is the opposite number from Zedekiah' (TRUE WORD FOR TOUGH TIMES, Page 74).

Zedekiah had Jeremiah brought to meet him in the precincts of the temple. The prophet repeated his message that he must surrender to the Babylonian army if he wanted to remain alive. The king was afraid that the Babylonians would hand him over to Jewish defectors who would then ill-treat him (14–19). Jeremiah assured him that his fears would not be realised and begged him, '*Please obey the voice of the LORD which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live*' (20). Zedekiah did not obey what God had to say to him and suffered terrible consequences. He bound Jeremiah to secrecy about their conversation because he was afraid of the princes. The prophet was left in prison until Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians (21–28). **When God speaks to you through the reading or preaching of his word do you obey his voice?**

Because you have put your trust in me

Jerusalem finally fell after a siege which lasted for eighteen months (1–3). Zedekiah and his soldiers escaped the city under cover of darkness but they were eventually captured in the plain of Jericho. They were taken to Riblah where the king saw his sons and nobles executed. The Babylonians then put out his eyes and took him in chains into captivity. Jerusalem was burned down and its walls were destroyed, just as Jeremiah has predicted (4–9). The population of Judah was taken into exile except for the very poor, who were given vineyards and fields by Nebuchadnezzar's army commander (10–11). The king of Babylon gave orders for Jeremiah's release from prison and committed him to the care of Gedaliah the new governor of Judah (11–14).

Before all this happened Jeremiah had a word from the Lord for Ebed-Melech who had bravely intervened to save his life (38:6–13). God had not forgotten his kindness to Jeremiah. He would see the prophet's predictions of judgment upon Jerusalem fulfilled but the Lord would keep him safe from his enemies (the princes of Judah?) and from the Babylonians. The Ethiopian slave of Zedekiah was so different from his unbelieving master. God told him, '*I will surely deliver you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but your life shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in me*' (16–18).

The Lord Jesus said, '*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*' (Matthew 5:7). These words were true for Ebed-Melech who trusted in the Lord when most of Jeremiah's own people rejected God. **The Ethiopian's trust in God led him to be kind and merciful in the face of great personal danger from Jeremiah's enemies.** The Lord does not forget such good works which are an evidence of real faith (cp. Matthew 25:34–40).