

Jeremiah – Man of God in a Disintegrating World

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History moves in an ever broadening spiral. The spiral began with God at creation and will end with God in the final judgment at the throne of His eternal Son. Along the main course of that spiral there are two mighty forces every operative: man's sinfulness and God's all-surpassing grace in Christ. The interaction of those two forces with resultant blessing or judgment forms the core of history's record and makes one generation strongly resemble others that have gone before. Thus, the period of human history which we touch in a study of the prophet Jeremiah is strikingly like our own.

In that long gone day, history's spiral curve, of course, was small. It embraced only that relatively small sphere of western territory comprising Egypt, Palestine, Assyria, Babylonia, and Media. But within that little area sin was strong and active. For there the greatest powers of the world were wrestling in blood for prestige and the power of control. The great question was: which power was to supersede which? In convulsive turmoil and deadly sinful struggle men were weaving their history out of threads dyed in their own blood, even as today. And, as in our day the church of Christ is caught in the bloody net of the nations' weaving, so Judah, the land of God's O. T. people, was tangled up in the strangling cords that the warring powers had cast about each other; better, Judah had willfully, faithlessly entangled herself!

Judah, the people of God, chosen, established, and preserved by the Lord God Himself, long had tired of being an island of spiritual grace and refuge as Jehovah had intended it to be among the nations of the earth. Judah's eyes had become dazzled by the show of pomp and power that she so long had watched among her mighty neighbors. Judah had an itching desire to be counted among the earthly great, to have a voice among the mighty, to be envied and feared for her power, instead of being sought after for her message of mercy, as God had willed. Judah was determined - despite the ringing cries of men of God like Jeremiah - determined to gain a seat among the contemporary giants of the earth. And in her willful determination Judah found destruction under the feet of those giants, in the days of Jeremiah.

The period spanned by the life and labors of Jeremiah was one of general upheaval and crack-up. It appears like a prototype in miniature of our own time. The whole world that men had built up threatened to fall apart. Violent breakup was seizing the old order that had weathered more than three and a half millennia. History's path was being blasted through for the entrance of a new order. The scepter of world power and leadership was soon to be torn from the hands of a decrepit Egypt and Asia by a youthful Europe. The Greeks, who as scattered mercenaries were present here at the beginning of the death struggle of the decadent Orient, in a few centuries were to inherit the fullness of her power and glory, destined as they were to prepare the world for the advent of Israel's Messiah, Redeemer of the world. The tents of Shem were being ripped open to make room for the sons of Japheth. Under God the ancient heathen powers together with Judah were now being driven to the slaughter.

Yet within Judah the grace of God was still alive and active. As a consequence, one figure stands out especially, more than head and shoulders above all the others: Jeremiah, Prophet and Man of God: That towering Prophet demonstrates the all-overpowering grace of God, and should teach us as individuals and church, how to stand up under the bloody woes, the terrifying dangers, and the threatening fears that are surging against us in the world of today. We should look to learn. On the pages of God's own Word, for our strengthening he stands: **JEREMIAH, MAN OF GOD IN A DISINTEGRATING WORLD.**

In order to understand this great man of God and the message he still brings, we must study him as he stands chiseled in striking relief against the darkening background of Judah in her relationship to her contemporary neighbors. We shall undertake therefore

1. A rapid survey of Jeremiah's character, his station, his personality, and his assignment from God.

Then, 2, a more detailed close-up study of his service as Prophet of God under the last kings of Judah preceding the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar,

One approaches the specific character study of Jeremiah half in awe, half in misgiving, for fear one might fail to do justice to this truly great man of God. -- Midst the terrifying convulsions that mark the awful end of a long and brilliant period of Israel's history, Jeremiah stands as a lone sentinel of God. And in such a lone sentinel one is inclined to look only for power and strength. But in Jeremiah a strong tincture of human weakness mingles with that expected godly power. And one then is tempted to underscore the weakness, while overlooking at the same time the overshadowing might of strength and worth! It is easy to delineate the timid, dejected, complaining Jeremiah, and to forget the fearless prophet who stood against kings, priests, prophets, and people in the awe-inspiring might of God's own power.

It is true, the even flow of majestic strength and constant courage -- both faith -- born that places Isaiah at the head of the list of God's prophets, finds perhaps an inferior counterpart in this second-great among the men of God. But it hardly could be otherwise. For Jeremiah's personality and Jeremiah's station in Judah differed greatly from that of the revered statesman-prophet; and Jeremiah's times differed from Isaiah's as widely as midnight differs from dusk.

Never did Jeremiah hold the exalted position at the right of the throne chair of Judah. Even while his God-fearing friend Josiah sat on that chair, we do not hear that Jeremiah was his confident and sought-out advisor as Isaiah was to the good Hezekiah -- or even to faithless, reprobate Ahaz. And during the fitful years following Josiah's early death, while Judah's four faithless kings sat on their shaking throne, -- instead of being respected and sought out, Jeremiah -- feared though he was -- was hated, hunted down, and persecuted second to none who ever wore the prophet's cloak.

Without questioning or in any way crying out against the wisdom of God's own righteous ways, -- a lot like that which fell to Jeremiah always has its own reactions and untoward effects on the lives and the working even of the chosen servants of God, who still are born of women. The evil, dangerous days of this second-great among God's last towering prophets certainly dare not be overlooked, if we are to judge him rightly. -- Isaiah's star burned in might and beauty in the dusk; Jeremiah's burned in power and fury at fullest, blackest midnight. Isaiah labored in the twilight hours of Judah, when God was just beginning in earnest to scatter the seeds of his judgment. To him God said; "Go and tell this people, 'Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.' Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and convert and be healed" (Is. 6:9-11). Jeremiah saw God's harvest of judgment already overripe at midnight. To him God said: "I have set thee to root out, to pull down, and to destroy" (Jer. 7:16.) "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my mind could not be turned toward this people: cast them out of my sight and let them go forth" (Jer. 15:1). Evil, dangerous were the days of Jeremiah, fraught with judgment: they could not but have their telling affect on the flesh under that mantle that Jeremiah wore as the prophet of God: Man of God, mighty, great, and true, that he is, Jeremiah still bears the stamp of his time. Indeed, his own character almost seems to reflect the troubled, convulsive nature of his turbulent day: heights of holy passion, love and earnest pleading, -- yet intermingled with deepest dejection, hopelessness, personal vindictiveness, and blameworthy revenge! -- Nevertheless, among the last great lights that God kindled on the firmament of blessing above His erring, faithless people: Jeremiah is outshone only by the brilliance of the great Isaiah. Across the blackness of the night of Judah's judgment Jeremiah streaks like a great new star, growing ever in brightness until it finally burns itself out above the plains of bond-house Egypt. -- He was what he was only by the goodness of his merciful Lord.

In Anathoth, hilltown of Benjamin and ancient seat of Jewish priests (Josh. 21:18; I Chron. 6:60), God kindled this light that was to burn in grace and blessing through Judah's dark hours of judgment. In the house of Hilkiah, priest of Anathoth (who bore the same name as the high priest at Jerusalem but no further relationship

to him), God struck that light. And now it was time for it to burn and to bless. To Jeremiah, son of Hilkiyah, God brought the prophet's call and the prophet's cloak.

Jeremiah was at the time a sensitive, timid, and retiring young man of perhaps some 20 years, who neither knew nor half appreciated the full measure of the gifts with which God had endowed him. When he felt the brush of the prophet's mantle, his timid and sensitive nature recoiled. Like Moses in the presence of the burning bush or Isaiah before the high altar of God in the vision, Jeremiah's feeling of his own unworthiness and incompetence surged over him, and he wanted nothing so much as to evade the assignment of God. "Ah, Lord, behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jer. 1:16). That was his answer to the call of his Lord. But God who had formed him, sanctified, and ordained him "a prophet unto the nations" before ever he was born, was not ready to take 'no' as an answer. "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee and whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak" (Jer. 1:7). -- God was definite! But when He proceeded to outline the specific call He was bringing, saying: "See, I have set thee this day over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant," -- again Jeremiah rebelled from within. A sudden paleness, that spoke louder than any objections he might have raised, revealed his fearsome thoughts. But again the Lord who was calling brought the assurance of strength that was needed: "Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jer. 1:8). And again: "Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For behold, I have made thee this day a defended city and an iron pillar and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, and against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee: but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:18-19). -- With those inspiring words of his God sounding through his soul, despite the fears that still were shaking him, Jeremiah shouldered the prophet's burden. And through more than 40 years of service that followed, God fulfilled His every promise of strength and upholding. And so we take up now the more detailed, close-up study of that service as prophet of God under the last kings of Judah before Jerusalem's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.

II.

From the fitful, frightful days of Ahaz, Judah's apostasy had rolled with ever heightening speed and force forward. In vain had Hezekiah tried to stem the onrush by reopening and renovating the temple that his apostate sire had closed. God-fearing Hezekiah brightened the temple service, reintroduced the solemn passover, removed the high places, smashed the groves and the idols, and broke up the brazen serpent of Moses to which the people of Judah had been burning idolatrous incense. And though he did it "with all his heart" (2 Chron. 31:21; 2 Kings 18:6-7), in vain was all his striving for Jehovah-God! Manasseh, son of pious Hezekiah, out-Ahazed Ahaz in wickedness (2 Kings 21:11-12; 2 Chron. 33:9; Jer. 15:4). With a will he splintered every brake that Hezekiah had forged to stay the surge of godlessness. The evils that men do live after them. Though Manasseh repented in the days of his need and fear, his godless acts outlived all his penitent counteracts. And Amon, his son (named after Egypt's sun-god!) walked in the footprints of his father's wickedness. Then, like balm in Gilead, came Josiah to walk at the side of Jeremiah, to serve the Lord with His prophet.

"Like unto Josiah was there no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might; neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kgs. 23:25). Mindful of the little remnant of His faithful people among the thousands of apostates in Judah, the Lord God Himself awakened faithful Josiah and sent him to his working even before He had commanded the voice of Jeremiah to speak out (2 Chron. 34:1-6; Cp. Jer. 12; 2 Kgs 22:1). For in the 8th year of his reign 16-year old King Josiah began to seek after the God of his father David. And just 4 years later, one year before the Lord called Jeremiah to be His spokesman in Judah, the young Kite seized the sword of Gideon and began to slash fearlessly, zealously about him among his erring people (2 Chron. 34:1-6). Down came the Asherim and the altars of the Baalim under the powerful blows of young Josiah. Out of the house of the Lord came the horses that had been dedicated by Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon to the worship of the sun; burned were their chariots; smashed were the Molech altar and

idols of the horrendous kings of Judah (2 Kings 23). What even the most God-fearing kings of Judah before him had never dared, Josiah dared to do. The altars and high places that brilliant Solomon had erected in the days of his backsliding to Ashtoreth (Sidon), Chemosh (Moab), and Milcom (Ammon) at last were brought low by Judah's most God-fearing King. And after a 5-year association with Jeremiah, following the renovation of the temple and the finding of the book of the Law, Josiah celebrated the most solemn passover that Israel had seen since the days of Samuel (see 2 Kgs. 23:23; 2 Chron. 35:18). But even the unflagging efforts of idol-toppling Josiah, coupled during the greater part of his reign with the powerful preaching of Jeremiah, could not turn the flood of evil from the walls of Judah-Jerusalem. Too long and too constantly bad kings, priests, prophets, and people had been sowing the whirlwind of faithlessness (Cf. Jer. 30:23 & Jer. 4:13). Under God the whirlwind began to bear its frightful harvest (Jer. 23:19), driving the flood of evil over land and city with crushing, almost annihilating force -- in the days of Jeremiah!

Despite the light that the Lord God had rekindled in the two blazing beacons of His choosing, Josiah the King and Jeremiah the prophet, spiritual night had fallen over Judah. In the shadow of death its masses stumbled about helplessly, yet with a visions willfulness. Only in the hearts and homes of the few scattered faithful the flame of simple trust in Jehovah-God still glimmered, as once in the tents of Israel midst the darkness of Egypt. - The closing chapters of 2 Kings and 2 Chron., complemented by the first 10 chapters of Jeremiah's record, draw the thick black lines of Judah's hopeless picture in the days when Josiah and Jeremiah tried to bring again the full light of God to dispel the annihilating darkness of Judah's faithlessness and idolatry. In those two brilliant torches of God there still was the light of heaven. But the wayward people of God, piloted by their own reeling, reprobate prophets and priests, had learned to love the darkness more than the light. -- And while WE today read those last records of 2 Kings and 2 Chron. in conjunction with Jeremiah's scorching pronouncements, we ought not to miss their patently modern slant. For the darkness of Jeremiah's day is yet the darkness of our own!

Against the brilliance of the light of God, shed abroad by King and prophet, the spiritual night of His people becomes full midnight! -- The zeal of God-seeking Josiah (2 Chron. 34:1-6) had cut deep even before the Lord had called His prophet to assist him. Not only had Josiah come to grips with the arrogant, erring priesthood in Jerusalem by cleansing the temple of his God, but out in the thousand high places of Judah he had come to grips with the masses of Judah's people, when with an earnestness that even an Asa and a Hezekiah had never known, he broke down the cherished graves of Judah's people and removed their erring Levitic priests from their shrines (2 Kings 23:9ff; Cp Jer. 44:16-17)!

We must not get the idea that Judah in the days of Josiah & Jeremiah had abandoned religion. Nothing could be further from truth. Judah's people were deeply religious after their own way. But their way was not the way of God! We must not think, however, that all Judah's thousands were consciously committing the abomination of the heathen, sacrificing consciously to Molech and Ashtoreth, the queen of heaven. Some to be sure, following the reprobate example of Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon, had exchanged Jehovah for the more pleasurable idols of the heathen (Cp. Jer. 44:16-17), but great numbers by ignorance or willful choice, whetted by the example of priest and prophet, had come truly to think that they were worshipping Jehovah, the only true God, out there in the groves and on the high places where the altars of their fathers had stood for hundreds of years. For, remember, we hear that constant chant ringing through all the books of Kings and Chron.: "The high places were not taken away, - as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places." Only in the days of Hezekiah does that chant become muffled! -- So it was in the days of Josiah that in the hearts of a still religious people the simple faith and the true worship of an Abraham and a Moses and a David was seldom found. Instead there dwelt in them a faith of their own choosing: they felt they were worshipping Jehovah, as His people, - and they saw no reason why they should turn to worship Him according to the ancient directions God had given His people in those long-gone days then He chose & instructed them as minor children. Modern in their thinking were the masses of Judah! The temple at Jerusalem was no better than the more inspiring places out there on the hills and under the trees of their God-given homeland. It would almost seem as though men in our day have borrowed their thinking from those ancient men of Judah: for they don't have to go to church and still can be Christian. They can worship Cod according to their own likes and dislikes and still be sure of

heaven. As though God must bow to their ideas, since they profess to know Him; have “joined His church”; and call themselves His own.

Thus it was that a renegade Levitic priesthood (2 Kings 23:9) together with the thousands of Judah were practicing a vicious cult in the name of Jehovah in the groves and on the high places across the land. Under the images of countless heathen idols on every green hill and under every green tree (Jer. 2:20) priests and people were awhoring after false gods, offering wine and burning incense to stock and atone in the name of Jehovah (Jer. 2:27), -- still feeling innocent and secure! (Jer. 2:35: “Yet thou sayest because I am innocent, surely His anger shall turn from me!” – Jer. 16:10. What is our iniquity? What is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?”

With destruction the Lord God had punished Israel (722 B.C.) who had professed to worship Him at the altars of its golden calves at Dan & Bethel (1 Kgs. 12:29). Would He do less to Judah whose people were standing on the high places offering their adulterous incense? Josiah knew: the punishment of twice-blest Judah must be double that of Israel & Samaria! Fearlessly therefore he smashed the groves, the high places, the idols; fearful neither of people nor priesthood, he drew the corrupt Levitic priests away to Jerusalem, where they were allowed to share in the portion of Levi, but not to stand at the alter of the Lord (2 Kings 23:9). -- But despite all Josiah’s and Jeremiah’s efforts stamp out the corrupt and idolatrous cult of Jehovah in Jerusalem (Jer. 2:11: Is this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers? Behold, I have seen it, saith the Lord!) and on the high places, - it was impossible to stay the tide of evil from washing destruction over land and city.

For 18 years (Cp. Jer. 1:2 & 2 Kgs. 22:1) the lone king and the lone prophet carried an their hopeless task, trying to save a people that mould not be saved. Strengthening the hand of his sovereign and friend, pleading with his nation to repent and obey the Lord instead of bringing its idolatrous sacrifices (Cf. Jer. 7:22-23; Jer. 11:4), Jeremiah stands out like an angel of light in a very dark place. Among the mighty and the humble alike we hear his never ceasing cry to repent and change. We hear him pray for his hardened people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11; 15:1), even when the Lord Himself forbids him to pray for them. But the faithless priests and prophets who still called Jehovah their God and presumed to speak to His people in His name (Jer. 23:21-28) cried God’s prophet down. Their lying words, “the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these (perhaps even pointing to the groves & high places, Jer. 7:4) - their deceitful cries of “Peace! Peace!” when there was no peace (Jer. 6:13-14; & 23:16-17) out-sounded Jeremiah’s “Repent - return!” Judah’s black picture found no light!

Jeremiah himself sketches again and main Judah in her howling darkness that proclaimed certain destruction. Glance at a few of those powerful sketches! “Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this and be ye horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:11-13), - for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah!” (Jer. 2:28). “The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree and there hath played the harlot. - And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away and given her a bill of divorce: yet her treacherous sister feared not, but went and played the harlot also, - and committed adultery with stones and stocks. The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah” (Jer. 3:6, 8, 9,12). “The prophets prophesy falsely, AND MY PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO! (Jer. 5:31). “For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it” (Jer. 7:30). “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23).

King Josiah’s efforts had been applied earnestly, zealously to turn Judah back to the old paths of Jehovah. Josiah strengthened the hands and the voice of God’s prophet for almost 18 years. But now suddenly 39 yeas old Josiah was torn from his working, torn from the side of Jeremiah. It was one of those unexpected events -- in that ancient world that was falling apart. - Briefly this is what happened.

The great Assyrian Empire that had undisputedly ruled the world for more than 125 years (Tiglath-Pileser III, 745-727), suddenly felt the cold steel of the sword at her own throat. Her young vassal Babylon under ambitious Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, wielded that sword with the brutality he had learned from Assyria and brought her down together with her haughty capital Nineveh in the year 612. The shock of Assyria's downfall stirred Egypt, her mightiest vassal, to action. Three years after Nineveh's fall Egypt marched under Pharaoh Neco II to claim her share of the bones of the fallen Assyrian lion. And when Egypt marched, for some reason hard to explain fully, Judah was stirred to action also. Good King Josiah, child of his time, desiring a better place in the sun, hoping perhaps to claim his share of fallen Assyria's spoils at least in this regions of conquered Israel. to the north, marched to Megiddo, ancient battleground of the nations, to do battle against Egypt's Neco. He went without a commission from God. He went without the benediction of Jeremiah. Indeed, he went in spite of Jehovah's warning spoken by Egypt's king (2 Chr. 35:22).

Earthy hopes drove Josiah to Megiddo. Without hope he was carried back from the valley in his chariot – back to Jerusalem that needed him so much -- back to Jerusalem to die. Megiddo brought mourning instead of joy to Judah. Megiddo presaged the rapid approach of destruction that was rolling toward Jerusalem and Judah. Megiddo marked the end of freedom for Judah-Jerusalem forever. Egypt was now her earthly overlord. Soon it would be Babylon: and that meant fire, sword, and death! Jeremiah knew it. He had spoken no blessing on Josiah when he willed to go to Megiddo. Now, however, he chanted Josiah's dirge, which the mourning men and wailing women of Judah were to sing through many years to come (Cf. 2 Chron. 33:25). Josiah's death was perhaps one of the hardest personal blows that Jeremiah was ever to count in his burdened life. He sang Josiah's lament (Cf. 2 Chr. 35:25ff; Lam. 4:20-22; Jer. 22:10) from the heart – and the overtones of his song prophetically echoed the dirge for Jerusalem itself. King Josiah's successors were to speed the end of both Judah and Jerusalem.

The last two important rulers during the final days of Judah's withering, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, again cut asunder all the bonds wherewith Josiah and Jeremiah had sought to bind Judah once more to her God. The old idolatries with their misleading tinge of Jehovistic color burst anew into fullest bloom. There was nothing now to keep them from bearing their fatal, bitter fruit far all the adulterous people of God. The resounding voice of Jeremiah was the voice in the wilderness with no one to hear. -- The false-dealing prophets now, consciously or unconsciously, tuned their voices to the vain hopes and wishful thinking of sovereign and nobility and filled all the land with their deluding cries of "Peace! Peace!" when there was truly no thought of peace. And then Jeremiah dared to rip from them their mask of ignorance or deceit, they seized the spokesman of God (Jer. 20:1ff) and shrieked into the ears of the princes their demand as well as their accusation, "This man is worthy to die: for he both prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears" (Jer. 26:11). But despite their vicious crying, for this time at least, the threatening voice of Jehovah coming from the lips of His appointed servant stayed the executioner's coming. Still the lying prophets kept up their false pronouncement which kings and people desired to hear. -- Under those beguiling strains of the false prophets' song froth Jehoiakim and Zedekiah still kept the farcical pretension of looking to the Lord and bearing the crown of Judah with the promise of His blessing. But their every act belied their every claim! It is interesting to note for example that when Judah's liege-lords first of Egypt (2 Chr. 35:4) and then of Babylon (2 Kgs. 24:17) changed the names of these last Jewish kings as evidence of their vassalage, but apparently allowed then their own selection - both of these renegade rulers incorporated the name of Jehovah into their own new names. Eliakim (God doth establish) chose Jehoiakim (Jehovah doth establish), and Mattaniah (gift of Jehovah) chose Zedekiah (righteousness of Jehovah). On the basis of their subsequent acts, we must say that this was nothing short of ribald mockery under the wretched guise of piety. – We examine the record of Jeremiah's testimony and there find the evidence and proof plain on the surface.

Not only did Jehoiakim refuse Jeremiah's every call to repentance, but he became at the most covetous and oppressive kings that ever sat on David's throne. For that he drew that terrible curse of Jehovah from the mouth of His prophets: "Jehoiakim shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. 22:19). Jehoiakim could not escape from these stinging words, nor could he ever forget

them and the man who had uttered them. That became apparent in the bitter retaliatory action he took in the 5th year of his reign against the prophet.

The dramatic account is found in the 36th chapter of Jeremiah's book. -- God had given Jeremiah the command to take a scroll and to write down all the words that He, the God of Judah had spoken against His faithless people. Jeremiah had obeyed. For almost a year and a half he and Baruch, his secretary, had labored on the scroll. He had dictated every thing carefully to Baruch, who wrote it down word for word in ink upon the papyrus scroll. And when the scroll was finally completed, Jeremiah, who like Elijah before him was hiding from the royal fury, sent Baruch to read it in the ears of all Judah on a great fast-day in the temple, that everyone might turn from his evil way: for great was the anger and fury that the Lord had pronounced against His people; He was about to send the "for from the north," Babylon, with utter destruction against his reprobate people.

Baruch obeyed. And the effect upon the people was so deep that Baruch was called to read the scroll also to the princes of Judah. Again the prophet's message cut so deep that the princes resolved that King Jehoiakim, Jeremiah's sworn enemy must hear it. First they directed Jeremiah & Baruch to hide themselves and let no man know where they were. Then the princes informed the King of the gripping message they had heard; whereupon Jehoiakim had Jeremiah's scroll brought to him. There in his winter palace King Jehoiakim perpetrated one of the most insolent pieces of godlessness to be found anywhere on the pages of Scripture.

It was December (605, after Egypt's defeat at Carchemish) and King Jehoiakim was sitting at an open fire in the great brass brazier at his feet. His servant read the scroll. At every word or promise & pleading, warning & threat that Almighty God had spoken through His prophet, King Jehoiakim grew more and more defiant. Then, as his servant finished column after column -- deliberately, defiantly Judah's King slashed piece after piece from the scroll of God and threw it into the blazing brazier to warm his royal feet. And when the whole scroll was destroyed, King Jehoiakim gave the command to arrest at once Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. -- Could the curse of Jehovah, spoken by His prophet, be stayed from such a man who bore the crown of His people? It could not. Before Jehoiakim could strike Jeremiah & Baruch God struck Jehoiakim with destruction, and his whole family as well (2 Kgs. 24:10-17). The Lord God sent Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar against Jehoiakim and the city of God. Three years before, Nebuchadnezzar had come to call his wavering vassal to account, at that time he had allowed him still to retain the crown of Judah. Now Babylon's king came with force and fury to mete out justice of death to his faithless vassal.

Before his own appearance Nebuchadnezzar incited bands of Chaldees, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites to harass Jehoiakim (2 Kings. 24:1-4). During this turmoil that preceded Nebuchadnezzar's own approach, Jehoiakim must have fallen under Jeremiah's curse that he should die and be cast like a dead ass out of his own capital. No doubt the common people of Judah, whose ears in some measure were still tuned to the voice of persecuted Jeremiah, had had enough of the oppressive king -- and gave him the cursed end the prophet had foretold. One can say this even in the face of the words, 2 Kgs. 24:6, where one reads: "So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers." The phrase 'slept with his fathers' does not rule out Jehoiakim's cursed end, as though he must have died peacefully. For of murderous adulterous Ahab of Israel who met a violent death and whose blood the dogs licked up from his chariot, the writer of the Book of Kings also says: "So Ahab slept with his fathers" (1 Kgs. 22:40). -- Thus ended Jehoiakim who had willfully and consistently trampled on Jeremiah's every warning. -- And Nebuchadnezzar stood before the gates of Jerusalem, while Jehoiakim's 18 year old son Jehoiachin (Jeremiah calls him Coniah) trembled beneath the heavy crown of his apostate sire.

Three months (2 Chron. 36:9) and ten days after his father had met his inglorious end and Jehoiachin had received his crown, Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem grew so sore that -- but let the writer of Second Kings chapter 24:8ff tell the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words: "And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his princes and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the 8th year of his (Babylon's king's) reign. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon King of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord as the Lord had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem and all the Princes and the mighty men of valor... none remained, save the poorest sort of the people

of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon and the king's mother and the king's wives and his officers and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon." -- A grievous end indeed of the family of Jehoiakim with the fall of his 18 year old son (2 Chron. 36:9: text should read 18 instead of 8; cp. 2 Kgs. 24:8). This is the great humbling of Judah that took place about 598 B.C., in which the prophet Ezekiel was carried away captive to Babylon with the other 9,999 (2 Kgs. 24:14). (cf. also Ez. 33:11; 40:1; 2 Kgs. 24:11-16). Yet in a patience that is hard to understand Nebuchadnezzar still allowed the temple of Judah to stand in its poverty and the throne of her kings to stand in its shadow. -- On that throne he placed the 21 year old brother of Jehoiakim and changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah (apparently leaving the choice of the name to Judah's king), "Righteousness of Jehovah." Ironically that was a fitting name indeed for him in whose day Jerusalem should find her fiery end under the judgment of a righteously angered Jehovah.

Though Zedekiah treated Jeremiah more considerately than Jehoiakim ever had done, he nevertheless did not hearken unto the voice of God's prophet. For of Zedekiah it is written in Jeremiah's record: "Neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land did hearken unto the words of the Lord which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah" (Jer. 37:1-2). Those words referring to the time when the turmoil and suffering of Judah were the heaviest in all its long history, a time when king and people should have been on penitent knees before Jehovah their God, - yea, those words brand Zedekiah as a man ripe unto judgment! And indeed, is his day the harvest of the whirlwind that Judah had sown and nurtured for centuries ripened fully to the reaping.

Zedekiah, oblivious of the significance of his name, carried the same evil character as Jehoiakim, but he lacked the strong spine and the insolent daring of the latter. For the 11 years of his reign he wavered on the gray toward Jerusalem's fall, while the voice of Jeremiah rang out ever sharper and clearer against him. Between abject submission to Babylon and favor toward Egypt (in accord with the policy of Jehoiakim) Zedekiah swayed like a reed in the wind, until Nebuchadnezzar broke the reed with a vengeance. Zedekiah offers the unforgettable picture of a man who does not know the Lord-God in whom he might trust, but who does know that he cannot trust a single one of his fellowmen, except the man of God whom he hates and fears. Over against this pitiable puppet stands suffering Jeremiah like a pillar of power. While the quavering king piled high the pyre of Jerusalem, miseries multiplied for the prophet of God!

During the whole 11 years of Judah's last tottering king the deep bass of Jeremiah's prophecies sounded with the rumbling threat of doom, if Judah should fail to look God's way and repent. Perhaps it was already too late for that! - Yet ceaselessly, fearlessly Jeremiah pointed to Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument of God for the chastising of His faithless people Jer. chap. 27-chap. 29; 2 Kings. 24:30). Untiringly he called upon monarch and nation to humble themselves in penitence before Jehovah and submit to the instrument in His hand, that the Lord still might have mercy on His undeserving people. But the voice of this lone man of God went unheeded. Faithless prophets & priests chirped out their beguiling little songs in harmony with the thought and feelings of God-resisting Judah (Jer. 27; 28:1-11; 29:21.24-32). Nebuchadnezzar's yoke and power over Judah should soon be broken, Judah's suffering would soon be ended -- such were their beguiling little songs! And King, princes, and people stopped up their ears and shut up their hearts to the message of the one faithful spokesman of God with his "Repent, return!" (2 Chr. 36:13.16; Jer. 29:19; 37:15; 38:4). With one voice the whole nation raised the accusation against Jeremiah -- that he was filled with subversive intent and was helping the enemy from within. And the cry went up: "Let this man be put to death: for thus he weakened the hands of the men of war that remain in the city and the hands of all the people in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt" (Jer. 38:4). Such words tell us more clearly than anything else could that the ears of all Judah were definitely tuned against the message of Jehovah-God. They were tuned only to earthly hope and carnal desire. King and people failed to understand in the least that Jeremiah as the spokesman of God was still promising to a repentant Judah that God in His mercy would salvage and save the remnant of His people, when he would bring down even mighty Babylon for their deliverance. (Jer. 51; esp. v. 63). The voice of Jeremiah, man of God in this day of general crack-up and disintegration, could not outshriek the hurricane that was carrying Judah-Jerusalem to destruction. With the debris of his nation already being batted about, the man of God found himself squeezed into the guardhouse where he almost died in lonely terror (Jer. 37:10) or

squashed hip-deep into the mire of a slim-pit where it took 30 men to pull him out of the clutch of death (Jer. 37:20b). Jeremiah was experiencing the full bitterness of the fearsome day of Judah's undoing.

Jeremiah's boil of bitterness started to come to a head in the 4th year of Zedekiah's reign (Jer. 27-28), - (read 27:1 Zedekiah instead of Jehoiakim, cp. v. 3!). -- It appears that already at that time Zedekiah had pretty well forgotten the significance of the name that Nebuchadnezzar had allowed him to assume together with Judah's crown. For Zedekiah was entertaining seditious friends, official ambassadors of other vassal nations of Babylon, who had come to Judah's king for assistance in planning revolt. -- God who was directing Babylon's growth for the chastising of His own faithless people looked down from heaven and gave Jeremiah direction. To Zedekiah and his royal friends of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, at the hands of their distinguished representatives in that conference of intrigue at Jerusalem, the prophet sent sets of chains and yokes of wood. With a like yoke on his own neck and bonds on his hands, the prophet brought God's message to the half-puzzled, half-furious (Jer. 28:1) counselors (Jer. 27:1ff): "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; thus shall ye say unto your masters (the kings of Edom, Moab, etc.): it shall come to pass that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the Lord, with the sword and with famine and with pestilence until I have consumed them by his hand." That was daring and powerful testimony regarding God's intention! One of Judah's lying prophets by the name of Hananiah dared to contradict it by seizing the wooden yoke from Jeremiah's neck and smashing it, saying that the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, had thus broken the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar and that in 2 years Judah's captives would return from Babylon with all the vessels of the Lord's house. Now Jeremiah under God's direction stepped up the power of his testimony saying, "Thus saith the Lord: thou hast broken the yoke of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon" (Jer. 28:13-14). No word of Jeremiah was ever clearer, describing the intention of God, - and it marked for the prophet the beginning of his long years of approaching sorrow. King, princes, and people from that time forth were violently arraigned against him together with prophet and priest.

Temporarily, however, the prophet's action and testimony appear to have had some effect on Judah's vacillating Zedekiah (who seems never to have forgotten the hopes of his predecessor Jehoiakim in regard to Egypt, instead of looking to the God of Jeremiah for help, cf. 37:5a). For Zedekiah, who once before had sent an embassy to assure Nebuchadnezzar of his questioned loyalty (Jer. 29:3ff - Jeremiah's letter to captives in Babylon went along!), now journeyed himself to Babylon to grovel before Nebuchadnezzar and pledge his loyalty anew (Jer. 51:59-64), thus staving off fire and sword for a few years more for himself and Judah.

It wasn't, however, as though Zedekiah at last had turned to Jehovah through Jeremiah's efforts. It was mere politics. For 2 Chr. 36:12 we read: "He (Zedekiah) did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God and humbled not himself before the prophet Jeremiah speaking from the mouth of the Lord." Five years after the king's trek to Babylon, came farther proof. Near the end of the 9th year of his reign (2 Kgs. 25:1) Zedekiah openly disavowed all the words of the great man of God who should have been his chief counselor. He rebelled against Babylon, -- and Nebuchadnezzar marched against him in answer. Both the patience of God and Babylon, the instrument He had fashioned, were at an end.

Now the heaviest sufferings of Jeremiah began in earnest, with the siege of Jerusalem. It was not until Jerusalem found her death that Jeremiah found his freedom. -- But to get the picture more clearly!

In the early days of Jerusalem's siege the prophet still was free to go about in the city whose king and people stood stark against the Lord, whose servant he was and whose message he brought (Jer. 37:4). But that message had to be proclaimed. Full in the face of death's danger, Jeremiah spoke out in Jehovah's name. Without flinching he pronounced God's judgment on Judah-Jerusalem and called upon both penitently to submit to the Lord's scourge to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar & Babylon, - and thus escape full destruction which otherwise must surely strike. To the king he proclaimed captivity but no death by the sword (Jer. 34:4-3), wherefore he should bow to Jehovah's will (Jer. 38:17-18). But with hearing ears both king and people heard not. Then suddenly it sewed as though Jeremiah himself was at last to be proved wrong!

Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar abandoned the siege of Jerusalem -- but for good reason (which Jerusalem's king & people did not know). Egypt's Pharaoh Hophra was on the march toward Palestine and had to be dealt with (Jer. 37:5ff; also 34:8-11). Nebuchadnezzar was gone! Within the suffering city new hope began to pulse, and people & king returned with greater abandon than ever to their godless ways. The slaves and the bondmen who in a gesture of repentance had been freed at the beginning of the siege were reshackled with heavier chains than ever (Jer. 34:11). And no doubt the altars of the idols everywhere smoked with new incense (Jer. 37:9). Only Jeremiah, the lone end lonely man of God (Jer. 16:2), knew that Jerusalem's respite was to be short, very short. And he did not keep that knowledge to himself (Jer. 37:6-11).

Publicly he arose and proclaimed that Nebuchadnezzar would return again and take the city in fullest pillage & plunder. With that message powerfully delivered, the prophet stalked out of the doomed fortress to take up residence perhaps in his home city of Anathoth, a few miles northeast of Jerusalem, in the land of Benjamin. But he did not get away. An angry populace seized the man of God on the charge that he was deserting to the Chaldeans and threw him into a desolate dungeon in the house of Jonathan, a scribe, where death must have constantly brushed shoulders with him (Jer. 37:20).

Only a short time before Jeremiah's arrest as the way out of the city, Zedekiah had called the prophet to him with the only such plea we ever hear cross his lips: "Pray now unto the Lord our God for us!" (Jer. 37:3 - time, perhaps at the lifting of the siege). Now again the fearful king had a question for the prophet: "Is there any word from the Lord?" So he sent for Jeremiah and took him out of the dungeon in the house of Jonathan the scribe (Jer. 37:17). Grateful was the prophet to be freed from death's company -- but honest and fearless still, he faced Zedekiah. Any word from the Lord? There was! To Zedekiah, the prophet said clearly: "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!" It was a hard message and it took courage to pronounce it. And when Jeremiah coupled it with a plea not to be sent back to the terror of Jonathan's dungeon Zedekiah actually gave command to commit him to the court of the prison and to give him a daily ration of scanty bread till all the bread in the city be spent (Jer. 37:21). It was more comfortable in the prison court, but comfort for a man as hated and feared as Jeremiah was not likely to last for long in days like these.

The princes had been considering Jeremiah's seditious pronouncements delivered publicly before his attempt to 'desert the city!' Now their minds were made up. There was only one safe thing. They presented their request to the king: "Let this man be put to death, for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city and the hands of all the people in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt!" (Jer. 38:4ff). Self-seeking Zedekiah was on the spot. He had dared to rescue the old prophet from the terror of his dungeon when he himself wanted some word of hope from this man of God. He hadn't received it. He would risk no more. "Behold, he is in your hands: for the king is not he that can do anything against you." His answer was satisfying to the haters of Jeremiah. Into an empty cistern-dungeon God's spokesman was let down by cords, to die painfully yet surely in mire and slime. God alone could save His servant this time -- and He did: through an Ethiopian servant of the king -- to whom later God showed mercy, and his prophet showed gratitude (Jer. 39:15-18). Jeremiah was taken back to the court of the prison where he stayed until Nebuchadnezzar came to break down the walls and bring a freedom and ease that the prophet's own people had never afforded him. -- The Ethiopian had effected the rescue with Zedekiah's permission (Jer. 38:7-14). For Zedekiah seems to have been haunted by the thought of Jeremiah's dying without giving some word of hope from his God! Secretly now the king called Jeremiah into the third entry in the house of the Lord, bidding him, "Hide nothing from me!" (Jer. 38:14). More fearful than ever of death that so recently had been so near, the prophet sought the king's assurance of safety. And when it was given, straightforward, honestly he told Zedekiah: he must submit to Nebuchadnezzar and thus save Jerusalem from her burning, for if he held out, he should certainly cause the city to be burned with fire and he himself should be led away by the victorious hand of Babylon's king. God's determined decree could not be changed (Jer. 38:17-23). It was Jeremiah's final word to Judah's last faithless king. Zedekiah parted from him by giving instructions to him how to answer vaguely, evasively, his princely enemies, should they ask. Ask they did! And for the first time we find the aged man of God himself flinching, ready to repeat the evasive words of the king, assuring himself

thereby a place in the court of the prison until he should stand face to face with the conquering commanders of King Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 38:24-28)

Years of suffering, years of labor and constant danger indeed were the lot of Jeremiah under those last two tottering kings of falling Judah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Yet it was under these two kings that Jeremiah stepped into his place as a truly great man of God. During the lifetime of Josiah, the two servants of Jehovah, king & prophet, had worked hard yet peacefully in each other's shadow. But after Josiah's untimely death at Megiddo, with reprobate Jehoiakim mounting the throne of David and equally reprobate Zedekiah following him, Jeremiah found no one to look to for help and encouragement. Yet it was in those days that the man of God truly grew in spiritual stature and power. Then it is that we see him appearing more and more like one of God's dark angels of doom against the ever darkening picture of faithless Judah. The deeper Judah fell into faithlessness and wickedness, the louder and more confidently Jeremiah thundered his fearless pronouncements of judgment, while he still called upon Judah to repent and to accept the punishment that God had inexorably determined for his apostate people and city: submission to Babylon, the scourge of His closing -- or ruthless subjection and destruction. Almost like the still greater Isaiah (Is. 1:2), Jeremiah steps before God's people, dramatically and forcefully to cry out his "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." (Jer. 22:29). And to his accusations and withering pronouncements of doom again and again like an impressive, ever recurring chorus, he thunders God's own damning charge against rulers, priests, prophets, and peoples: "Ye have not hearkened -- ye would not hearken unto me." That cursing, crushing charge so often repeated cannot escape the attention of anyone reading the prophet's book! When apostasy and wickedness reached its peak under arrogant, God-despising Jehoiakim, Jeremiah at the height of his spiritual power and righteous indignation cries out perhaps the most terrible indictment ever uttered by anyone against the people of God in any age: "I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem the most horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah" (Jer. 23:14). That indictment becomes still more scathing and frightening when we remember that Jeremiah also wrote (Jer. 5:30-31): A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their names; and my people love to have it so, and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

But while we read all Jeremiah's scorching indictments that still seem to trail the smoke of a hell fully earned, we dare not overlook in the record of his book a thing of wondrous beauty and power, that needs must bring comfort and living hope to the true but trembling Church of God to the very moment that will separate sinful time from sinless eternity. As the tone of Jeremiah's denunciation of Judah and his pronouncements of coming judgement grows in fiery intensity, the comforting words that he has for the faithful little remnant of God's people grow in strength and warmth and beauty. In the middle of some of his most vehement denunciations we find some of the most glorious promises for the suffering, faithful remnant (Jer. 33:15; 31:31; 23:5-6). The day shall come, when doom shall strike again, -- doom this time for Babylon, for its proud king, for all the enemies of God's true flock. The prophet strikes a new and glorious chorus which he sings again and again in the name of Jehovah his God: "I shall not make a full end!" (Jer. 4:27; 5:10; 30:11). In the hearts of his faithful people, even in the land of their exile and suffering, He Jehovah, will keep alive the flame of faith & living hope, even in Babylon beyond the river; in the hearts of men like Daniel and Ezekiel and the little band that walks with them Jehovah will fan the flickering flame of faith and cause it to grow strong until the day that His own deliverance will come! (And in anticipation of that day Jeremiah in the time of Judah's greatest suffering & terror confidently purchases a field and buries the deed to it in the soil that still belongs to the faithful God of Judah (Jer. 32:8-15).)

Especially in chapters 31 to 33 of the prophet's book the light of heaven itself and the living power of God's grace break forth from the inspired words that he proclaims. Those words were born in the throes of Jerusalem's dying. Many a time during his long ministry the prophet had sunk to the sharp edge of bleak despair. But now a sure and brilliant hope brightened for him the dark days of destruction that had struck with the armies of Nebuchadnezzar - From the very beginning of his ministry he had been commanded by God to root out and pull down and destroy among His people. But now God sent him to plant a new promise and a new

assurance in the hearts of God's people forever. Again and again he had scourged his people for breaking the covenant that God had made with their fathers when He took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. Now he was come to announce to them in the name of their God a new and wondrous covenant. Above the dying fires and smoldering ruins of faithless Jerusalem, above the cries and the wailing of her despairing people Jeremiah sang out with clear and comforting voice this message: "Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers... but... I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people... for they shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

No words of even the greatest of the prophets of God are more brilliant and beautiful in promise than those of Jeremiah of Anathoth. Against the background of Jerusalem's burning those words flash 600 years full ahead to reveal God's new covenant of grace and forgiveness is His own Son Jesus. That new covenant will not be written on tablets of stone, but into the very hearts of God's people; it will not be another covenant of the threatening, killing Law! Is the new covenant of mercy written in the blood of the Christ and Son of God, Redeemer of the world! -- For Jeremiah who chose to remain in his ravaged, burned-out homeland, this new covenant of salvation took all the terror and hopelessness out of the fiery end that had struck Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. It soothed his sorrow over the captivity of God's people who were carried off to Babylon.

Jerusalem is gone! Silence hangs in the smoke over the ruins. Frightful almost beyond telling were her last fiery days -- in the 11th year of the reign of Zedekiah. In the 9th year, 10th month of his reign the siege began; in the 4th month of the 11th year it ended (Jer. 39:1-2). Jerusalem was dead. Breached and broken were her once proud walls; - a stone-heap, her splendid temple; slaughtered or captive her people; blinded, Zedekiah her king, and before his blinding, his own sons and the nobles of Judah, butchered before his very eyes. - A fearful end in awful payment for the faithless people of God's Judah who would not hearken to the word of His mouth in the days of Jeremiah, His prophet.

Thus ended the earthly hopes of Judah with the destruction of her once glorious capital in the year 587 B.C. The prophets of God had called in vain for change and repentance. Judah had not been satisfied to follow the calling God had given her to be His people who should give eternal hope to men on earth through the Messiah Savior who should be born of her. Judah instead had desired to be great, as men count greatness - and found destruction in her attempt to achieve it. She who had wanted so much to sit among the earthly great found herself crushed under the basis of the mighty. Jeremiah, the last great voice of God had not been able to save her -- and himself had to suffer woefully under her faithless, brutal hands in his trying.

For even after all his words of judgment had been fulfilled by the Lord God who had given them, that renegade, rabble crowd that Nebuchadnezzar still left in Judah even now had not learned to look in faith and hope to Jehovah. After the murder of Babylon's puppet governor, Gedaliah of Judah, the rabble mob dragged the ancient prophet against his will to far off heathen Egypt. And there as a capstone to all the accusations & denunciations of Judah written in this scroll, Jeremiah places these self-condemning words from the lips of the still faithless refugees: "As for the word thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, WE WILL NOT HEARKEN UNTO THEE! But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of victuals, and were well and saw no evil!" (Jer. 44:16-17) This was a people beyond all turning. A people who found in terror that the Lord God will not be mocked.

Only against the fiery backdrop of Jerusalem's burning and the policy that brought it about can we in the church today rightly read the warning of Jeremiah, prophet and man of God in that disintegrating world that so closely resembles our own. -- Only by the grace of the Lord God Himself who called and commissioned him to be his own spokesman was Jeremiah able to stand faithful and fearless, even while he faced death in his loneliness -- even while he watched Jerusalem, the City of God that he loved dying in her flames.