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# Introduction

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The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for the means and ends of our scripture readings and ponder questions.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by what I call "questionary," questions for meditation with brief comments. The questions are often such that they contain a sort of commentary as they lead the reader toward specific insights. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following general questions to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site found on the site's home page

- ? What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- ? How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- ? What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- ? How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- ? Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- ? How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- ? How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- ? What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- ? How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder and meditate on every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful meditation and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader

to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and meditation experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and meditated the day's passage. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and meditation into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

## Jeremiah 1.<sup>4-5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

<sup>5</sup>“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee;  
and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee,  
and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

### Questionary

---

This is the first of three readings examining Jeremiah 1.<sup>4-10</sup>. These verses report Jeremiah’s call as prophet to the Jewish people.

1. Verse 5 is a well-known and oft-used proof-text for the existence of a “premortal life.” Whether one believes in a “premortal life” or not, this is, it seems to me, a misunderstanding of Yahweh’s statement to Jeremiah. The focus of Yahweh’s declaration is not Jeremiah, his status, his character—a misunderstanding that Jeremiah, himself, and many modern readers share. Yahweh is saying nothing about any supposed inherited “nobility” from the “pre-mortal existence” on the part of Jeremiah. Rather, Yahweh is focused on his own extraordinary foresight, which Jeremiah is called upon to trust.
  - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you read Yahweh’s words as a statement of his own extraordinary character, capacities, and foresight rather than any statement concerning Jeremiah, who will often prove himself to be a most flawed messenger?
  - ? Read in this way, what do you learn about God’s character, capacities, and foresight?
  - ? How would you apply this message to yourself and any call to serve that you may receive?
  - ? What do you hear and feel when you read Yahweh’s focus on his own active labors visa via Jeremiah: “*I* formed thee;” “*I* knew thee;” “*I* sanctified thee;” “*I* ordained thee”?

## **J**eremiah 1.<sup>6-8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Then said I, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.”

<sup>7</sup>But the LORD said unto me, “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. <sup>8</sup>Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.”

### **Q**uestionary

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This is the second of three readings examining Jeremiah 1.<sup>4-10</sup>. These verses report Jeremiah’s call as prophet to the Jewish people.

- ? How is Jeremiah correct in his self-assessment: “I cannot speak...”?
- ? How would it shape your understanding of Jeremiah’s self-understanding if we replaced, “I cannot speak” with “I don’t know what to say”?
- ? How does Jeremiah’s self-assessment, though accurate, demonstrate a lack of faith in Yahweh and the reality of the self-revelation He provided in his call from verse 5?
- ? How do we demonstrate a lack of faith in God when we focus on our own abilities or the lack thereof rather than on God’s infinite capabilities?

## Jeremiah 1.<sup>9-10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, “Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. <sup>10</sup>See, I have this day set thee 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.”

### Questionary

---

This is the last of three readings examining Jeremiah 1.<sup>4-10</sup>. These verses report Jeremiah’s call as prophet to the Jewish people.

- ? How does Yahweh’s putting forth his hand to touch Jeremiah’s mouth serve to qualify Jeremiah, rather than any inherent gifts Jeremiah might possess?
  - ? How does Yahweh’s touching of Jeremiah’s mouth relate to his touching of Isaiah’s mouth at the time of his calling as found in Isaiah 6.<sup>5-7</sup>?
1. In the seven verses that represent Jeremiah’s initial call, we hear Yahweh speak these words: “I shall send thee;” “Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak;” “I am with thee to deliver thee;” “I have put my words in thy mouth;” “I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms.”
- ? How do such testimonials of Yahweh concerning his sovereignty remind Jeremiah that he is called, not because of who he, Jeremiah, is, but because of who Yahweh is?
  - ? What does it mean, do you think, that Yahweh appointed Jeremiah to “root out,” “pull down,” “destroy,” “throw down,” “build,” and “plant”?



## **J**eremiah 1.<sup>11-12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, “Jeremiah, what seest thou?”  
And I said, “I see a rod of an almond tree.”

<sup>12</sup>Then said the LORD unto me, “Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it.”

### **Q**uestionary

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1. In Jeremiah’s first oracle after his call, Jeremiah see an almond tree. Then, using a pun, the Lord explains the significance of the vision.
  - ? Can you ferret out the pun based upon the context?
  - ? If you are not sure why an almond tree makes for a good symbol for the Lord hastening his word, do a little research. When, for example, do almond trees bud during the growing season?
  - ? What “word” is Yahweh going to bring about in short order?

## Jeremiah 1.<sup>13-16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying,  
“What seest thou?”

And I said, “I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north.”

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said unto me,

“Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. <sup>15</sup>For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; And they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah.

<sup>16</sup>And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.

## Q

uestionary

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Today’s reading represents Jeremiah’s second vision. In it, he learns what the Lord is quickly bringing on as warned of in verses 13-16.

1. The Hebrew prophets utilized poetic imagery in their prophecy.
  - ? What imagery do you find in today’s reading?
  - ? What does it mean to “seethe”?
2. Jeremiah compares the Babylonian army to a tipped pot of boiling water.
  - ? What do you see in your mind when you contemplate this imagery?
  - ? What does boiling water do to human flesh?
  - ? How is a pot of boiling water being dumped on human flesh an appropriate symbol for the impact that the Babylonian army will have upon Jerusalem?
  - ? What is Jerusalem likely to feel and look like after the attack? What type of pain can it expect from the vision’s predicted scalding?
  - ? How do you feel about this very graphic image being used by a prophet to teach the word of God?
  - ? What specific Jewish sins are mentioned in today’s passage as reasons for the Babylonian threat?
  - ? What is the relationship between idolatry and misplaced priorities concerning our personal accomplishments and material accumulations?

As we make our way through Jeremiah, note how often the sin of idolatry is mentioned as opposed to other specific sins. Clearly idolatry was a major problem in ancient Judah.

- ? Is it any less a problem today?
- ? What are the idolatrous objects, individuals, and institutions of our day?

## Jeremiah 1.<sup>17-19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. <sup>18</sup>For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. <sup>19</sup>And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.”

### Questionary

---

Having received his call and his first two visions concerning Judah’s impending trials due to its national sins, Jeremiah is encouraged to arise and deliver the message given him.

- ? What language and imagery do you find in today’s reading that you feel would be encouraging to Jeremiah?
- ? What difference does it make that Jeremiah is informed that *God* will “make” him “a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls,” rather than describing Jeremiah as “a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls”?
- ? What do you see when you contemplate “an iron pillar” and “brazen walls”?  
Jeremiah is to be “a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls” “*against* “ “the whole land,” “the kings of Judah,” “the princes,” “the priests,” and “the people of the land.”
- ? What is the impact, the tone, and the mood of this five-times-repeated “against”?
- ? How do you feel about the Lord’s revelation to Jeremiah that, essentially, “war will break out between Jeremiah and every class of Judean citizen, from the greatest to the least, including religious leaders?  
We found in his call, that Jeremiah was not to focus on himself or his capacities, but to trust in the Lord... his understanding and his power.
- ? How is this emphasis continued in today’s reading?

## Jeremiah 2.<sup>1-5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD;

‘I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth,  
the love of thine espousals,  
when thou wentest after me in the wilderness,  
in a land that was not sown.

<sup>3</sup>Israel was holiness unto the LORD,  
and the firstfruits of his increase:  
all that devour him shall offend;  
evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD.

<sup>4</sup>Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob,  
and all the families of the house of Israel:

<sup>5</sup>Thus saith the LORD,  
What iniquity have your fathers found in me,  
that they are gone far from me,  
and have walked after vanity,  
and are become vain?

## Q

uestionary

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Today’s reading is the first of two readings examining Yahweh’s lamentation concerning Judah’s infidelity toward him as found in Jeremiah 2.<sup>1-8</sup>.

- ? What metaphor does Yahweh use to represent the relationship between Himself and Judah?
- ? What do you think and how do you feel when you contemplate the intimate relationship that existed between God and Judah?
- ? What do you think and how do you feel when you contemplate how Judah jilted Yahweh as one spouse acts with infidelity toward another?
- ? What other passages come to your mind in which God expresses his heartbreak over infidelity toward him?
- ? Consider Jacob 5.<sup>46-47</sup> and Isaiah 5.<sup>1-2, 4</sup>. What language do you find here that reflects God’s hurt over infidelity toward him?
- ? How do you feel about a God so committed to his people that he allows Himself to be wounded and to suffer heartbreak at the unfaithfulness of his people?

The word translated as “vanity” often, and probably should here be understood as “idol.” God likens the idol to a “lover.”

- ? What does one hope to acquire through idolatry?
- ? For what idols or lovers does one leave God?
- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider the irony that in turning to idols for profit, Judah experienced no profit, but, instead, loss?

## Jeremiah 2.<sup>6-8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Neither said they,  
“Where is the LORD  
that brought us up out of the land of Egypt,  
that led us through the wilderness,  
through a land of deserts and of pits,  
through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death,  
through a land that no man passed through,  
and where no man dwelt?”

<sup>7</sup>And I brought you into a plentiful country,  
to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof;  
but when ye entered, ye defiled my land,  
and made mine heritage an abomination.

<sup>8</sup>The priests said not,  
“Where is the LORD?”  
And they that handle the law knew me not:  
the pastors also transgressed against me,  
and the prophets prophesied by Baal,  
and walked after things that do not profit.

## Q

uestionary

---

Today’s reading is the second of two readings examining Yahweh’s lamentation concerning Judah’s infidelity toward him as found in Jeremiah 2.<sup>1-8</sup>.

1. Throughout Jeremiah 2, the prophet uses the interesting technique of quotation, quoting the nation’s own rebellious and false words as evidence against them. In today’s reading, Jeremiah “quotes” words that ought to have been spoken but were not.  
? What are those words?
2. Neither the nation nor its religious leaders ask, “Where is the LORD?”  
? What is the significance of the absence of this question?  
? How do you feel about Israel’s willful forgetfulness concerning the many benefits Yahweh had granted them?  
? What do you think and feel when you consider the nature of “defilement” and “abomination”?  
? What does it mean, do you think, that the “prophets *prophesied* by Baal”?
3. Keeping in mind that “Baal” is a “fertility god,” and thus represents the inordinate drive to accumulate wealth, power, and prestige, consider the following possibilities concerning the meaning of the “prophets prophesying by Baal.”
  - It simply means that they invoked the name “Baal” rather than “Yahweh” when praying and prophesying.
  - They prophesied of fertility (economic success) through false gods, or false means.
  - They prophesied for the purpose of material attainments to themselves.
  - They maintained their “prestige” and “popularity” with their adherents by promising economic blessings.
  - Economic attainments was their god.  
? Which of these seems most likely to you? Is there another way to understand it?

## Jeremiah 2.<sup>9-13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD,  
and with your children's children will I plead.

<sup>10</sup>For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see;  
and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently,  
and see if there be such a thing.

<sup>11</sup>Hath a nation changed their gods,  
which are yet no gods?  
but my people have changed their glory  
for that which doth not profit.

<sup>12</sup>Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this,  
and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate,  
saith the LORD.

<sup>13</sup>For my people have committed two evils;  
they have forsaken me  
the fountain of living waters,  
and hewed them out cisterns,  
broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

## Q

uestionary

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1. In today's reading, Jeremiah wonders at one of Judah's totally irrational decisions.
  - ? What is that irrational decision?
  - ? In what way is Judah compared unfavorably to other nations?
  - ? What does it say about Judah that it traded the one and only true God for new, false gods while other nations, supposedly spiritually inferior to Israel, had not been known to abandon gods that were, in fact, not gods at all?
  - ? How, do you suppose, did Jeremiah's audience, one that considered itself God's chosen people, respond to this unfavorable and offensive comparison to other, supposedly inferior nations?
2. In wondering at Judah's irrationality, Jeremiah utilizes two metaphors.
  - ? What two metaphors does he utilize?
  - ? What is the nature of a "fountain of living waters"? What is a cistern? And how do they differ?
  - ? What do you think and feel when you consider Judah's turning away from Yahweh, represented by a natural, dependable, continuous, and pure water source, and replacing it with idols, represented by what is, essentially, a leaky man-made reservoir of stagnant water?
  - ? In what ways had Yahweh shown his trustworthiness in Judah's history? In what ways has God demonstrated his faithfulness to you?
  - ? What are some of the untrustworthy things, people, and institutions to which we turn for happiness, security, and peace rather than God?
  - ? How are these things "broken" and useless for the purposes of producing real and lasting happiness, security, and peace?
  - ? To the extent that you might have placed trust in something, someone, or some institution above God as a source of happiness, security, and peace, what could you do to free yourself from the false god?

## **J**eremiah 2.<sup>14-17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave?  
Why is he spoiled?

<sup>15</sup>The young lions roared upon him,  
and yelled,  
and they made his land waste:

his cities are burned without inhabitant.

<sup>16</sup>Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes  
have broken the crown of thy head.

<sup>17</sup>Hast thou not procured this unto thyself,  
in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God,  
when he led thee by the way?

## **Q**uestionary

---

In preceding verses, 9-13, Jeremiah had wondered at Judah's irrational decision to exchange their true and dependable God, Yahweh, for false and untrustworthy gods. In today's reading, Jeremiah explores the punishing consequences of that irrational departure from Yahweh.

- ? What are those punishing consequences?
- ? Who are "the children of Noph and Tahapanes"?
- ? What do you see in your mind and how do you feel when you consider and picture the metaphor of Judah being ravaged by a lion?

## Jeremiah 2.<sup>18-19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt,  
to drink the waters of Sihor?

Or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria,  
to drink the waters of the river?

<sup>19</sup>Thine own wickedness shall correct thee,  
and thy backslidings shall reprove thee:  
know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter,  
that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God,  
and that my fear is not in thee,  
saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

## Questionary

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1. In preceding verses, 9-17, Jeremiah wondered at Judah's irrational decision to exchange their true and dependable God, Yahweh, for false and untrustworthy gods. In today's reading, Jeremiah very specifically identifies two of the uncertain water sources, or idols, to which Judah had turned.

? What are those water sources?

? *Of what are the Nile and Euphrates rivers symbolic?*

2. Historically, as Judah became more and more endangered by the Babylonian ascent, the nation turned to Egypt and Assyria as allies against the threat. A century earlier, Israel and Judah had engaged in the same behavior, and were criticized for it by the prophet Hosea.

“When Ephraim saw his sickness,  
and Judah saw his wound,  
then went Ephraim to the Assyrian,  
and sent to king Jareb:  
yet could he not heal you,  
nor cure you of your wound” (Hosea 5.<sup>13</sup>).

? Why is Jeremiah critical of Judah for seeking an alliance with these two nations against Babylon?

? How is entering into such an alliance indicative of Judah's forsaking of and not relying on Yahweh?

? What are modern day examples of nations and individuals replacing trust in God with trust in other things, people, institutions, or nations?



## **J**eremiah 2.<sup>20-22</sup>— just scripture

<sup>20</sup> Long ago you broke off your yoke<sup>1</sup>  
and tore off your bonds;  
you said,

“I will not serve you!”

Indeed, on every high hill  
and under every spreading tree  
you lay down as a prostitute.

<sup>21</sup> I had planted you like a choice vine  
of sound and reliable stock.

How then did you turn against me  
into a corrupt, wild vine?

<sup>22</sup> Although you wash yourself with soap  
and use an abundance of cleansing powder,  
the stain of your guilt is still before me,”  
declares the Sovereign LORD (NIV).

## **Q**uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

<sup>20</sup>For of old time I have broken thy yoke,  
and burst thy bands;  
and thou saidst,

“I will not transgress;”

when upon every high hill  
and under every green tree thou wanderest,  
playing the harlot.

<sup>21</sup>Yet I had planted thee a noble vine,  
wholly a right seed:  
how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant  
of a strange vine unto me?

<sup>22</sup>For though thou wash thee with nitre,  
and take thee much soap,  
yet thine iniquity is marked before me,  
saith the Lord GOD.

1. In our first reading from Jeremiah’s second chapter, we mentioned that one of Jeremiah’s techniques is to criticize Judah for its apostasy by quoting the words of Judah’s citizenry and using their own words against them.
  - ? What words in today’s reading represent those spoken by Judah’s citizenry?
  - ? How does Jeremiah show the lie behind Judah’s claim that “I will not transgress”?
2. Verse 20, as translated in the KJV, is a little misleading. Compare the NIV translation.
  - ? Based on the NIV translation, what is the nature of Judah’s sin as described in verse 20?
3. Jeremiah asserts that Judah worships idolatrous “fertility” gods “upon every high hill and under every green.”
  - ? What is the relationship between idolatry and “fertility”?
  - ? What is economic fertility?
  - ? How is the focus on personal and societal economic gain, materialism, and consumerism like prostitution?

? How do you feel about Jeremiah resorting to the somewhat offensive imagery of prostitution to describe Yahweh's feelings about Judah's apostasy?

4. In the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Jeremiah uses the following imagery for Judah's idolatry.

"I had planted thee a noble vine,  
wholly a right seed:  
how then art thou turned  
into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?"

A little more than a century earlier, Isaiah had used the following imagery for the injustices committed in the nation

<sup>1</sup>Now will I sing to my wellbeloved  
a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.

My wellbeloved hath a vineyard  
in a very fruitful hill:

<sup>2</sup>And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof,  
and planted it with the choicest vine,  
and built a tower in the midst of it,  
and also made a winepress therein:  
and he looked that it should bring forth grapes,  
and it brought forth wild grapes...

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,  
and the men of Judah his pleasant plant:

and he looked for judgment,  
but behold oppression;

for righteousness,  
but behold a cry." (Isaiah 5.<sup>1-2, 7</sup>).

? What is the relationship between idolatry and injustice?

? How do idolatry—or, in this context, the inordinate focus on wealth, materialism, consumerism, etc.—and injustice relate to each other?

? How does idolatry as reflected in the inordinate focus on wealth, materialism, consumerism cause individuals to be "objectified" thus making it easier to justify societal injustices?

5. Jeremiah declares that even though Judah washes "with nitre" and "much soap," its societal iniquity is not removed.

? What would remove the societal sin?

A century or so earlier, Isaiah had spoken to Israel concerning how its societal sins might be removed.

"Wash you,  
make you clean;  
put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes;  
cease to do evil;

Learn to do well;  
seek judgment,  
relieve the oppressed,  
judge the fatherless,  
plead for the widow.

Come now, and let us reason together,  
saith the LORD:

though your sins be as scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they be red like crimson,  
they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1.<sup>16-18</sup>).

- ? Do Isaiah's instructions alter your answer to how societal sin is removed? If so how?
- ? What role does justice and the rejection of idolatry play in societal health and survival?

**Jeremiah 2.**<sup>23-25</sup>— just scripture

<sup>23</sup>“How can you say, <sup>1</sup>  
‘I am not defiled;  
I have not run after the Baals’?  
See how you behaved in the valley;  
consider what you have done.  
You are a swift she-camel  
running here and there,  
<sup>24</sup>a wild donkey accustomed to the desert,  
sniffing the wind in her craving—  
in her heat who can restrain her?  
Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves;  
at mating time they will find her.  
<sup>25</sup>Do not run until your feet are bare  
and your throat is dry.  
But you said,  
‘It’s no use!  
I love foreign gods,  
and I must go after them’” (NIV).

**Q**uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the King James Translation.

<sup>23</sup>How canst thou say,  
“I am not polluted,  
I have not gone after Baalim?”  
See thy way in the valley,  
know what thou hast done:  
thou art a swift dromedary  
traversing her ways;  
<sup>24</sup>A wild ass used to the wilderness,  
that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure;  
in her occasion who can turn her away?  
all they that seek her will not weary themselves;  
in her month they shall find her.  
<sup>25</sup>Withhold thy foot from being unshod,  
and thy throat from thirst:  
but thou saidst,  
“There is no hope:  
no; for I have loved strangers,  
and after them will I go.”

1. We have seen that Jeremiah often uses the words of Judah’s citizenry against them in his case asserting their idolatry and apostasy. In 2.<sup>6</sup> and 2.<sup>8</sup>, Jeremiah accuses Judah and its leaders of never asking, “Where is the LORD.” In 2.<sup>20</sup>, he quotes their false contention, “I will not [or have not] transress[ed].”  
? In today’s reading, Jeremiah twice quotes Judah. Identify these two quotes.  
? What evidence does Jeremiah provide as evidence that Judah’s claim, “I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim” is a lie?
2. Jeremiah likens Judah’s worship of the fertility gods, such as Baal, to a camel and wild donkey in heat.

- ? How do you feel about Jeremiah's use of such an offensive metaphor?
  - ? How is this analogy of an animal in heat appropriate to the inordinate drive for "fertility," or economic gain, materialism, and consumerism?
3. Jeremiah suggests that idolatry, this drive to accumulate profits and acquire materials leads to something analogous to running until one's feet are bleeding and one's throat is dry.
- ? How is this analogy appropriate to the passions and efforts involved in accumulating and consuming?
4. Jeremiah quotes Judah's response to his call to abandon their false gods and return to Yahweh as follows:

"It's no use!  
I love foreign gods,  
and I must go after them."

- ? What does this response suggest to you about Judah's mind set in relation to worshipping Yahweh versus worshipping fertility gods?
- ? How do you feel about their feelings that there is simply no other option but to follow the fertility gods; that their worship is inevitable?
- ? What does it say to you about the "addictive" nature of materialism and consumerism?
- ? How does one arm oneself against and protect oneself from such a subtle addiction?

## Jeremiah 2.<sup>26-30</sup>— just scripture

<sup>26</sup>As the thief is ashamed when he is found,  
so is the house of Israel ashamed;

they, their kings, their princes,  
and their priests, and their prophets,

<sup>27</sup>Saying to a stock,

“Thou art my father;”

and to a stone,

“Thou hast brought me forth:”

for they have turned their back unto me,

and not their face:

but in the time of their trouble they will say,

“Arise, and save us.”

<sup>28</sup>But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee?

Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble:

for according to the number of thy cities

are thy gods, O Judah.

<sup>29</sup>Wherefore will ye plead with me?

Ye all have transgressed against me,  
saith the LORD.

<sup>30</sup>In vain have I smitten your children;

they received no correction:

your own sword hath devoured your prophets,

like a destroying lion.

## Questionary

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We have seen that Jeremiah often uses the words of Judah’s citizenry against them in his case asserting their idolatry and apostasy. He first quotes faithful words never spoken by Judah’s citizenry and leaders: “Where is the LORD.” He also quotes their false assertions of innocence: “I will not [or have not] transgress[ed],” “I am not polluted,” and “I have not gone after Baalim.”

1. In today’s reading, Jeremiah quotes words spoken by Judah’s political and religious leaders in the course of their idolatrous worship.
  - ? What are those words?
  - ? What is the significance of a “stock” and a “stone”?
  - ? What is the significance of calling an idol “Father,” or “my progenitor”?
  - ? How might “fertility,” or financial achievements feel “generative”?
2. Jeremiah speaks of Israel, especially its religious and political leaders, being “ashamed” as a thief who is caught is “ashamed.”
  - ? How is a thief, caught in the act of stealing, “ashamed”?
  - ? What is meant by “shame”?

Just as a thief, discovered in his theft, does not realize his expectations of possessing the stolen items that he hoped to enjoy, think of Israel’s being “ashamed” as meaning that Israel was “disappointed,” “experienced failure,” “did not realize its expectations.”

- ? How does this understanding or “ashamed” shape your understanding of Jeremiah’s insight into idolatry?
- ? In what ways does materialism and consumerism fail to satisfy the expectations that we might have of it?
- ? How is unbridled materialism like theft?
- ? What and who are the victims of this theft?

3. While Judah usually goes along worshipping idols, finding security and pleasure in acquiring and consuming, during good times, Jeremiah accuses Judah's citizenry and leaders—both political and religious—of hypocritically calling upon Yahweh for deliverance during times of trouble.
  - ? What does this suggest about Judah's real understanding of the idols?
  - ? How do you feel about the fact that Judah's idolatry was actually "willful;" that they knew in their hearts that fertility gods were vain, devoid of real power, but choose to ignore that knowledge for the sake of the pleasures of profit and acquisition?
  - ? How does our society engage in this sort of self-deception?
4. In verse 30, Jeremiah speaks of Judah's hostility to prophets who step forward with a message of correction and repentance.
  - ? What is it about idolatry that is of such strength that it resists criticism and calls to forsake it?
  - ? What grip, if any, and how strong a grip does idolatry have on our society? Upon you, personally?

**Jeremiah 2.**<sup>31-35</sup>— just scripture

<sup>31</sup>O generation, see ye the word of the LORD.

Have I been a wilderness unto Israel?

A land of darkness?

Wherefore say my people,

“We are lords;

we will come no more unto thee?”

<sup>32</sup>Can a maid forget her ornaments,

or a bride her attire?

Yet my people have forgotten me

days without number.

<sup>33</sup>Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?

Therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways.

<sup>34</sup>Also in thy skirts is found

the blood of the souls of the poor innocents:

I have not found it by secret search,

but upon all these.

<sup>35</sup>Yet thou sayest,

“Because I am innocent,

surely his anger shall turn from me.”

Behold, I will plead with thee,

because thou sayest,

“I have not sinned.”

**Q**uestionary

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I am not sure any prophet, dead or alive, is any more pertinent to our day and what is happening in the U.S. than this fearless and creative prophet.

1. One of Jeremiah’s preaching techniques is to quote lies that he has heard Jews utter about themselves and their nation. In today’s reading he addresses three things he has heard them say.

“We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?”

“Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me.”

“I have not sinned.”

- ? How do you feel about these false assertions?
- ? Do you suppose they believed them?
- ? How do individuals and nations manage to be so self-unaware?
- ? Do you see similar self-deception among us and in our nation?
- ? What types of actions suggest that a nation thinks of itself as a “lord,” or “master”?
- ? Are such actions evident among the nations of the earth today?

2. After the most cursory of searches, Yahweh has made a terrible discovery about his people:

“Also in thy skirts is found

the blood of the souls of the poor innocents...”

Think about this imagery.

- ? How is it possible that the Lord found in his quick search what the Jews do not see as they put on and take off their garments day after day after day?
- ? Clearly, their blindness to their sins is willful. They simply could not have missed the blood day after day. How do you feel about this “willfulness”?
- ? Is there such “willfulness” in us and in our society today when it comes to the way we treat the poor among us?



- ? What forms of “justifications,” “philosophies,” “ideologies,” and “doctrines” does our society use to remain in our “willful ignorance”?
  - ? How is the “blood of the poor” being shed? Is society running them through with swords and knives?
  - ? Obviously, it is a metaphor for all types of violence. What types of “violence” does our society practice against the poor?
2. The following two lines of poetry are a bit difficult.
- “Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?  
Therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways.”
- ? What do you make of them? What do you envision?
  - ? Does the following translation from the NIV help? What do you see now?
- “How skilled you are at pursuing love!  
Even the worst of women can learn from your ways.”
- ? How is the violent treatment of the poor an act of adultery and infidelity toward God?

## Jeremiah 3.<sup>1-5</sup>

**Warning:** *Jeremiah, like much of the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible, uses strong and offensive language in order to be heard by a hardened people and in hopes of shocking Jewish audience into a realization of the depth of their rebellion against God. The King James Version often softens harsh and offensive language through use of euphemisms. I have not resorted to euphemism in my translation. Therefore, it contains strong adult content. If the reader is offended by strong adult content, he or she may wish to restrict their reading to that found in the KJV below the author's translation.*

*assertion*

<sup>1</sup>It is said,  
    “If a husband divorces his wife,  
        she leaves him, and becomes another man's wife,  
can the first husband take her back?  
    Wouldn't such a people be considered totally perverted?”

*response*

Though you have prostituted yourself with many partners,  
    “Return to me”—  
    This is YHWH's reaction.  
<sup>2</sup>Lift your gaze to the high, exposed places.  
    Look! Where is the place where you have not been fucked?  
You wait on road sides for lovers  
    as desert dwellers [wait in ambush].  
Thus, you have polluted your country  
    with your wicked whoring.  
<sup>3</sup>Even when light showers are withheld  
    and heavy spring rains disappear,  
she possesses the defiance of a whore;  
    she will not allow herself to feel shame.

*assertion*

<sup>4</sup>Do you not even now cry out to me  
    “My father, you have always been my friend.  
<sup>5</sup>Will he nurse his anger forever?  
    Will he nurture it to perpetuity?”

*response*

Look, you have spoken and done  
    as much evil as is possible to do (Author's translation).

## Questionary

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Following is the King James translation for those who prefer it, or wish to compare translations.

<sup>1</sup>They say, “If a man put away his wife,  
    and she go from him, and become another man's,  
shall he return unto her again?  
    Shall not that land be greatly polluted?”  
But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers;  
    yet return again to me,  
    saith the LORD.  
<sup>2</sup>Lift up thine eyes unto the high places,  
    and see where thou hast not been lien with.  
In the ways hast thou sat for them,  
    as the Arabian in the wilderness;  
and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms

and with thy wickedness.

<sup>3</sup>Therefore the showers have been withholden,  
and there hath been no latter rain;  
and thou hadst a whore's forehead,  
thou refusedst to be ashamed.

<sup>4</sup>Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me,  
"My father, thou art the guide of my youth?"

<sup>5</sup>Will he reserve his anger for ever?  
Will he keep it to the end?"

Behold, thou hast spoken  
and done evil things as thou couldest.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah, as he often does, utilizes the very words he has heard from Judah's citizenry in order to demonstrate the false, arrogant, and rebellious assertions of Judah's citizenry.

In verse 1, Jeremiah quotes the citizenry, which is quoting the Law of Moses. He refers to their belief, based upon the Law of Moses, that it is perversion for a husband and wife to remarry after a divorce and after the woman has been wife to another man.

- ? How do you feel and what do you think about this stipulation found in the Law of Moses?
- ? Why, do you suppose, did Yahweh issue this stipulation?

2. Jeremiah suggests that Judah is in just this position. It was originally "married" to Yahweh through covenant. Judah left Yahweh and married and or had sex with not one, but many men. However, Yahweh suggests that in his relationship with his former wife, he is not under the same restrictions as the Law put upon married and then divorced men.

- ? How do you feel about Yahweh not being subject to the same law that he had given Judah?
- ? Why, do you think, is he not subject to the same law?
- ? What does Yahweh's exemption from such a restriction suggest to you about his character as opposed to the character of a jilted husband.

3. Jeremiah likens Judah's idolatrous worship of other gods to a woman's having sex with other men. These sexual relationships are not forced upon them. Rather the woman actively pursues multiple sexual partners.

- ? How do you feel about this analogy?
- ? What does it teach you about the seriousness of idolatry?
- ? How do you feel about a God who takes people back into an intimate relationship with him after they have been so completely and blatantly disloyal to him?

4. Jeremiah says that Judah has had a "whore's forehead" and that she has refused to allow herself to feel shame for her infidelity with multiply sexual partners.

- ? What do you think and how do you feel about the society when you read such an indictment?

5. Verses 4 and 5 contain additional words that Jeremiah has heard asserted among his fellow Jewish citizens.

- ? What is Jeremiah's point in quoting these words?
- ? How are they to be related to Yahweh's earlier promise to take unfaithful Judah back into an intimate relationship?
- ? What, if anything, will be required of Judah before Yahweh will take her back as his wife?

## Jeremiah 3.<sup>6-11</sup>

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>And I said after she had done all these things, ‘Turn thou unto me.’

But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. <sup>8</sup>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 Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. <sup>9</sup>And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. <sup>10</sup>And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD.”

<sup>11</sup>And the LORD said unto me, “The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

## Questionary

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In Jeremiah 3.<sup>1-5</sup>, Yahweh used marital infidelity as a metaphor for his intimate relationship with Judah and Judah’s idolatrous infidelity to Yahweh. This metaphoric message was delivered in poetic verse.

1. In today’s reading, Yahweh utilizes the same metaphor and delivers the same message. However, the metaphor and message are delivered via narrative rather than poetic verse.
  - ? After reading today’s passage, compare it with verses 1-5. What new insights into Judah’s infidelity and Yahweh’s relation with Judah does today’s reading add to those found in verses 1-5?
  - ? What does it tell you about Judah and its rebellion that Judah disregarded Israel’s experiences of infidelity to and divorce from Yahweh?
  - ? What is the significance of a “high mountain,” “green trees,” “stones,” and “stocks”?
  - ? What aspects of modern day idolatry are analogous to these symbols?
  - ? What is meant by “the lightness of her whoredom”?

## Jeremiah 3.<sup>12-13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say,

Return, thou backsliding Israel,  
saith the LORD;

and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you:  
for I am merciful, saith the LORD,  
and I will not keep anger for ever.

<sup>13</sup>Only acknowledge thine iniquity,  
that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God,  
and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree,  
and ye have not obeyed my voice,  
saith the LORD.”

## Q

uestionary

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In Jeremiah 3.<sup>1-5</sup>, Yahweh used marital infidelity as a metaphor for his intimate relationship with Judah and Judah’s idolatrous infidelity to Yahweh. This metaphoric message was delivered in poetic verse. In 3.<sup>6-11</sup>, Yahweh returned to this theme, this time with narrative rather than poetry. In doing so, he added the insight that in committing the same sin as Israel, Judah was more accountable.

1. Jeremiah is told to “proclaim these words toward the north.”  
? What is the significance of “the north”?
2. Notwithstanding the grievous nature of Israel’s sin, Yahweh invites them to return from exile.  
? According to the text, on what basis is return, or forgiveness offered?

You might have answer in one of three ways:

- a. Because God is merciful.
  - b. If the nation acknowledged its iniquity.
  - c. Because God is merciful if the nation acknowledged its iniquity.
- ? Which of these three options did you choose and why?  
? Do you now wish to amend your answer? Why? or Why not?  
? How would you respond to the following statement:  
“The nation of Israel, as with every and any individual, could acknowledge every tiniest sin in the most genuine manner till the cows come home, but still not be forgiven if God was not merciful.”  
? How do you feel about Jeremiah’s assumption that “sinning” is indicative of a kind of “bypassing” God?
3. Consistent with the metaphor of marital infidelity that Jeremiah has utilized throughout the chapter, he speaks of Israel as having “scattered thy ways to the strangers.”  
? What image comes to your mind as you consider this indictment?
  4. In verse 12, we read, “I will not keep anger for ever.”  
? In the King James Version of the Bible the word “anger” is in italics. Why is the word in italics? What do italics indicate in the KJV?  
? Do you feel that the KJV translators were justified in supplying “anger”? Why?  
? Can you imagine supplying another word? What word would that be?

## Jeremiah 3.<sup>14-16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: <sup>15</sup>And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. <sup>16</sup>And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more,

“The ark of the covenant of the LORD:”

Neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.”

## Q

uestionary

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1. Throughout his third chapter, Jeremiah has utilized the imagery of marital infidelity to discuss Israel's and Judah's idolatry and unfaithfulness toward Yahweh. The prophet suggested that Judah should have learned from Israel's experiences, and so was more accountable than Israel. In verses 12-13, Yahweh promised Israel that he would take it back, notwithstanding its apostasy. One might wonder: “If Judah is more accountable than Israel, will Yahweh allow Judah to return, as he will Israel?”
  - ? What does Jeremiah have to say in answer to this question?
  - ? How will he accomplish his work of restoration?
  - ? How will Israel and Judah's future leaders “feed [the nations] with knowledge and understanding?
  - ? What role will their own personal examples play? What role will their establishment of just laws play? What role will their teaching of the law play?
2. When Israel and Judah are restored, Jeremiah says that they will no longer say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.”
  - ? What is the significance of the words, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD”?
  - ? What is the significance of Israel and Judah no longer saying these words?
  - ? What do you think of when you consider the difference between the actual presence of God and symbolic representations of his presence such as the ark or, today, the temple?
  - ? When you consider Israel's and Judah's deep, deep infidelity toward Yahweh, how do you feel about his willingness to take them back into an intimate relationship?
  - ? What application does this have to your life?
  - ? How “present” is God in your daily life?
  - ? What can you do to increase and deepen his presence in your daily life?

## Jeremiah 3.<sup>17-18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. <sup>18</sup>In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers.

### Questionary

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Throughout his third chapter, Jeremiah has utilized the imagery of marital infidelity to discuss Israel's and Judah's idolatry and unfaithfulness toward Yahweh. The prophet suggested that Judah should have learned from Israel's experiences, and so was more accountable than Israel. In verses 12-13, Yahweh promised Israel that he would take it back, notwithstanding its apostasy. If one wondered whether Yahweh would allow Judah, more accountable and thus more guilty than Israel, to return. Jeremiah answered this in 14-16 in the affirmative.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah expands on Judah's miraculous return.
  - ? What additional information does Jeremiah share concerning Judah's return?
  - ? What do you think and feel when you learn that not only Judah and Israel will return to their inheritance, but that "all the nations shall be gathered"?
2. Jeremiah says that when Judah, Israel, and the nations are gathered, they will no longer "walk... after the imagination of their evil heart."

- ? Consider the following two scripture passages.

"They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall" (DC 1.<sup>16</sup>).

"And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6.<sup>5</sup>).

- ? What additional insights into human imagination do these two verses provide?
- ? What do men imagine today that become the "substance... of an idol?"
- ? What do you think it will be that produces such a drastic change in the long, habituated, evil, and idolatrous imagination of mankind?

## Jeremiah 3.<sup>19-22b</sup>

- <sup>19</sup> I myself said,  
“How gladly would I treat you like my children  
and give you a pleasant land,  
the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.’  
I thought you would call me ‘Father’  
and not turn away from following me.  
<sup>20</sup> But like a woman unfaithful to her husband,  
so you, Israel, have been unfaithful to me,”  
declares the LORD.  
<sup>21</sup> A cry is heard on the barren heights,  
the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel,  
because they have perverted their ways  
and have forgotten the LORD their God.  
<sup>22</sup> “Return, faithless people;  
I will cure you of backsliding” (NIV).

## Q

uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, below is the KJV.

- <sup>19</sup>But I said,  
“How shall I put thee among the children,  
and give thee a pleasant land,  
a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?”  
And I said,  
“Thou shalt call me, ‘My father;’  
and shalt not turn away from me.  
<sup>20</sup>Surely *as* a wife treacherously departeth from her husband,  
so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel,  
saith the LORD.”  
<sup>21</sup>A voice was heard upon the high places,  
weeping *and* supplications of the children of Israel:  
for they have perverted their way,  
*and* they have forgotten the LORD their God.  
<sup>22</sup>“Return, ye backsliding children,  
*and* I will heal your backslidings.”

After utilizing the imagery of marital infidelity to discuss Israel’s and Judah’s idolatry and unfaithfulness toward God, Jeremiah extends Yahweh’s surprising and generous invitation to repent and return. Even with such hope in his mind, Yahweh can’t help but return to the tragic reality of the present.

1. In verses 19-20, Yahweh laments, again, the infidelity of his people. This is made all the more tragic as Yahweh recalls the high hopes he had possessed for them.  
? What were his hopes as described in these verses?
2. Compare the Lord’s lament, found here, “I thought you would call me ‘Father,’” with his lament found in Moses 7.<sup>33</sup>.  
“Unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood...”  
? What do you feel when you read such laments, reflective of God’s broken heart over his



- dashed hopes for his children?
- ? Take a moment to identify and reflect upon other scripture passages that record the Lord's pain over his children's failures to enjoy the life he had planned for them.
  - ? What does it suggest to you that God, the Greatest of All, opens himself to such personal disappointment and pain?
  - ? How does the Atonement of Jesus Christ serve as a kind of "revelation of this particular divine characteristic?"
3. Jeremiah speaks of "a cry" that is "heard on the barren heights." It turns out to be "the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel."
- ? If you close your eyes and imagine the scene, what do you see when you imagine "the barren heights?"
  - ? What words do you hear, what body language do you witness, what feelings do you sense when you imagine this "weeping and pleading" upon "the barren heights"?
4. God returns to his future hope and promises to "cure you of backsliding."
- ? What does it mean to "backslide"?
  - ? Do you envision it as "slippage," as if sliding backward in slippery mud, or do you see it as "rebelliously planting the feet and resisting the pull forward," as a reluctant sheep might resist the pull toward sheering?
  - ? Is there another way you imagine it?
  - ? How would these differing "imaginings" alter the way you view Israel's rebellion and infidelity?

**J**eremiah 3.<sup>22c-25</sup>— just scripture

<sup>22c</sup>“Behold, we come unto thee;  
for thou art the LORD our God.  
<sup>23</sup>Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills,  
and from the multitude of mountains:  
truly in the LORD our God  
is the salvation of Israel.  
<sup>24</sup>For shame hath devoured  
the labour of our fathers from our youth;  
their flocks and their herds,  
their sons and their daughters.  
<sup>25</sup>We lie down in our shame,  
and our confusion covereth us:  
for we have sinned against the LORD our God,  
we and our fathers,  
from our youth even unto this day,  
and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”

**Q**uestionary

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After utilizing the imagery of marital infidelity to discuss Israel’s and Judah’s idolatry and unfaithfulness toward God, Jeremiah extended Yahweh’s surprising and generous invitation to repent and return. Even with such hope in his mind, Yahweh can’t help but return to the tragic reality of the present in the form of a lament (verses 19-22b). Now, in verses 22c-25, we hear Israel’s reply, itself a lament over wasted past efforts.

1. In their lament, the people speak of “salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains.”
  - ? To what are they alluding, here?
  - ? What was the false hope, or the false “salvation” Israel sought through its idolatry?
  - ? How does “fertility” or the “promise of individual or societal economic/political advancement” become twisted into a kind of “salvation”?
  - ? How do you feel about such “mundane” desires as individual or national economic and political wellbeing (“salvation”) being thought of as “idolatrous”?
2. Jeremiah focuses on the irony that principles, practices, and attitudes intended to bring about economic “salvation” actually had the exact opposite effect. Their idolatry  
“devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth;  
their flocks and their herds,  
their sons and their daughters.”
  - ? How do you feel about Jeremiah’s observation?
  - ? Can you explain the phenomenon in which the “worship” of individual and societal “temporal salvation” has the opposite effect as the one desired: the ushering in of economic/political collapse?
  - ? What, if any, application does such prophetic observations and societal critiques have to you and the society in which you live?
  - ? What attitudes and actions would an individual or nation need to adopt to avoid these same ironies in their own experiences?
3. In its lament, Israel confesses, “from our youth even unto this day, [we have] have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”
  - ? As you review in your mind the history of Israel as found in the Old Testament what

evidences do you find that confirm this sad confession?

- ? How do you feel about Israel's candid and honest confession, when you consider that Israel was God's "the chosen people"?

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>1-2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"If thou wilt return, O Israel,"  
saith the LORD,  
"return unto me:  
and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight,  
then shalt thou not remove.  
<sup>2</sup>And thou shalt swear, 'The LORD liveth,'  
in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness;  
and the nations shall bless themselves in him,  
and in him shall they glory."

## Questionary

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Today's is the first of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

1-4	Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not
5-18	Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors
19-22	A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster
23-26	Jeremiah has a disturbing vision
27-29	Jeremiah's vision is interpretation
30-31	Metaphor of two women representing Judah

For those who wish to compare translations, following is the author's translation of today's reading.

<sup>1</sup>"If you wish to come back, Yisrā'ēl"—  
this is what YHWH himself says—  
"then come back to me.  
If you abandon all that is repulsive to me  
and stop vacillating;  
<sup>2</sup>If you bind yourself with, 'as YHWH lives'  
truthfully, justly, and rightly  
then nations will be blessed in him  
and will praise him.

1. In verse 1, Yahweh suggests that if Israel wishes to repent and recommit itself to him, they need do no more than choose to do so.
  - ? How do you feel about the ease with which Yahweh is prepared to accept Israel back?
  - ? How do you feel about Israel being so thoroughly in control of its own destiny?
2. The second part of verse 1 and the first half of verse 2 provide revelation concerning what Yahweh thinks of as "coming back to him."
  - ? What is involved in "coming back to him"?
  - ? What, do you think, are the "abominations" mentioned in verse 1?
  - ? "Abomination" often refers to idolatry. Why is idolatry such an abomination in the eyes of God?

God is less concerned about the harm that idolatry might do to his honor and more about the harm that it does to the individual and society.

- ? What are the harms that idolatry does to individuals and societies?
- ? How do individuals and societies invoke the name of God in ways that are untruthful, unjust, and unrighteous?

3. The final two lines of verse 2 describe the blessing that will come to Israel as a result of its having “come back to Yahweh.”

? What is that blessing?

We might have expected the blessing to involve Israel and benefits accruing to it directly. Rather, Yahweh only mentions blessings that Israel’s return to God brings upon the rest of the world.

? What do you make of this?

? What does it suggest about the motives that should exist as we contemplate serving God and being blessed as a result of that service?

? Is this the standard, worldly view of the blessings that flow into one’s life because of one’s commitment to God?

? How faithful was and is Jesus to this idea of “blessedness”?

? How does this view toward personal blessings verses the blessing that we can be to others compare with the covenant that God made with Abraham?

“And I will make of thee a great nation,  
and I will bless thee, and make thy name great;  
and thou shalt be a blessing:  
and I will bless them that bless thee,  
and curse him that curseth thee:  
and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12.<sup>2-3</sup>).

? How fulfilling and satisfying to you is the blessing of being a blessing to others?

? What can you do to be a blessing to those around you?

? How does idolatry keep one from being a blessing to others?

## **J**eremiah 4.<sup>3-4</sup>— just scripture

<sup>3</sup>For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem,  
“Break up your fallow ground,  
and sow not among thorns.

<sup>4</sup>Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,  
and take away the foreskins of your heart,  
ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem:  
lest my fury come forth like fire,  
and burn that none can quench it,  
because of the evil of your doings.

## **Q**uestionary

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Today's is the second of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1-4   | Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not |
| 5-18  | Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors  |
| 19-22 | A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster                                    |
| 23-26 | Jeremiah has a disturbing vision   |
| 27-29 | Jeremiah's vision is interpretation  |
| 30-31 | Metaphor of two women representing Judah   |

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah warns of an unnamed looming disaster and utilizes two metaphors to represent Judah's needed repentance.

? What are those metaphors?

In the first, an agricultural, metaphor, citizens of Judah and its capital city have two choices about where they put their efforts in planting a crop.

? What are those two choices?

? What is the symbolic meaning of “fallow ground”?

? How do you feel about their decision to spend wasted effort planting in weedy, uncultivated soil rather than in prepared cultivated soil?

? What is the spiritual meaning of sowing among thorns, or in uncultivated soil?

? What is the relationship between Jeremiah's agricultural metaphor and Jesus' parable of the sower in which the word is planted among the thorns, representative of the waste that is found in “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches”—a care and deceitfulness that “choke the word,” and cause a citizen and a follower of Jesus to become “unfruitful” (Matt. 13.<sup>22</sup>)?

? Keeping in mind that Jeremiah's criticism is directed against Judah's culture and citizenry rather than at any particular individual, how do you feel about an entire culture that sows among thorns, or gets lost in “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches”?

2. In his second metaphor, Jeremiah uses the imagery of circumcision.

? What would the “foreskins of your heart” represent?

3. The Lord warns of an anger that burns unquenchably.

? What is the result of such anger leveled against societies?

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>5-6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say,

“Blow ye the trumpet in the land:

cry, gather together, and say,

‘Assemble yourselves,

and let us go into the defenced cities.’”

<sup>6</sup>Set up the standard toward Zion:

retire, stay not:

for I will bring evil from the north,

and a great destruction.

## Questionary

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Today’s is the third of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

1-4	Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not
5-18	Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors
19-22	A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah’s foolishness and the consequent disaster
23-26	Jeremiah has a disturbing vision
27-29	Jeremiah’s vision is interpretation
30-31	Metaphor of two women representing Judah

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah’s needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah’s sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world.

For those who wish to compare translations, following is the NIV translation

<sup>5</sup>“Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say:

‘Sound the trumpet throughout the land!’

Cry aloud and say:

‘Gather together!

Let us flee to the fortified cities !’

<sup>6</sup>Raise the signal to go to Zion!

Flee for safety without delay!

For I am bringing disaster from the north,

even terrible destruction.”

1. In today’s reading, Yahweh names the previously unnamed threat.
  - ? What is the nature of the threat?
  - ? What is the significance of the threat coming from the north?
2. Yahweh suggests a series of public actions will be taken in response to the threat.
  - ? What are those actions and how what do they suggest concerning any attack by an invading Babylonian army from the north?
  - ? What do you hear when you contemplate the warning blast of a trump?
  - ? What do you visualize as you observe the public’s response to the trump’s warning?
  - ? What do you visualize when you imagine citizens from the surrounding hamlets and countryside rushing to get inside the fortified walls of larger cities?
  - ? What do you visualize when you imagine the warning signal or standard?

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>7-8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The lion is come up from his thicket,  
and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way;  
he is gone forth from his place  
to make thy land desolate;  
and thy cities shall be laid waste,  
without an inhabitant.

<sup>8</sup>For this gird you with sackcloth,  
lament and howl:  
for the fierce anger of the LORD  
is not turned back from us.

## Questionary

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Today's is the fourth of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1-4   | Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not |
| 5-18  | Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors  |
| 19-22 | A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster                                    |
| 23-26 | Jeremiah has a disturbing vision   |
| 27-29 | Jeremiah's vision is interpretation  |
| 30-31 | Metaphor of two women representing Judah   |

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah's needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah's sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster.

For those who wish to compare translations, following is the NIV translation

<sup>7</sup> A lion has come out of his lair;  
a destroyer of nations has set out.  
He has left his place  
to lay waste your land.  
Your towns will lie in ruins  
without inhabitant.  
<sup>8</sup> So put on sackcloth,  
lament and wail,  
for the fierce anger of the LORD  
has not turned away from us.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah utilizes his first of several metaphors representing the looming destruction that the Babylonian army represented.
  - ? What imagery does the Lord use to represent the invading army?
  - ? What damage does a lion do to a human body?
  - ? What should the citizenry think, feel, and anticipate when they consider this imagery?
  - ? What will the society, the "body politic" look like after the army has completed its rampage?
  - ? How do you feel about the prophet using such graphic, intense, and violent imagery to represent Judah's impending destruction?



- ? What does it say about the citizenry that God must resort to such language in hopes of getting their attention?
- 2. Jeremiah mentioned several public responses to the Babylonian invasion in verses 5-6. He mentions another in today's reading.
  - ? What is that response?
  - ? What do you see in your mind when you picture someone publicly lamenting while dressed in sackcloth.

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>9-10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD,  
that the heart of the king shall perish,  
and the heart of the princes;  
and the priests shall be astonished,  
and the prophets shall wonder.

<sup>10</sup>Then said I, “Ah, Lord GOD! Surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying,  
‘Ye shall have peace;’ whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.

## Questionary

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Today’s is the fifth of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

1-4	Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not
5-18	Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors
19-22	A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah’s foolishness and the consequent disaster
23-26	Jeremiah has a disturbing vision
27-29	Jeremiah’s vision is interpretation
30-31	Metaphor of two women representing Judah

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah’s needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah’s sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster. In the fourth reading (7-8), Jeremiah utilized the violent metaphor of a ravaging lion rending its victim to represent the horrendous impact the Babylonian invasion would have upon Judah’s society.

1. The national responses to the Babylonian army’s invasion so far predicted by Jeremiah could be seen as the response of the general public. Today’s is different.
  - ? How is it different?
  - ? Whose response to the invasion does Jeremiah specifically describe in today’s reading?
  - ? What, do you think, is the significance of the Lord’s focus on the weak and failing response of political and religious leaders’ to the threat?
  - ? What should the citizenry learn from their leaders’ failure?
  - ? What should we learn today from ancient Judah’s failed leadership?
2. In Isaiah 2.<sup>23-3.8</sup>, Isaiah described the same sort of failure of leadership in Israel’s earlier demise.

“Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils:  
for wherein is he to be accounted of?  
For, behold, the Lord,  
the LORD of hosts,  
doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff,  
the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water,  
The mighty man, and the man of war,  
the judge, and the prophet,  
and the prudent, and the ancient,  
The captain of fifty, and the honourable man,  
and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.

And I will give children to be their princes,  
and babes shall rule over them.  
And the people shall be oppressed,  
every one by another, and every one by his neighbour:  
the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient,  
and the base against the honourable.  
When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father,  
saying, 'Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler,  
and let this ruin be under thy hand:'  
In that day shall he swear, saying,  
'I will not be an healer;  
for in my house is neither bread nor clothing:  
make me not a ruler of the people.'  
For Jerusalem is ruined,  
and Judah is fallen:  
because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD,  
to provoke the eyes of his glory."

- ? What do you think and how do you feel when you hear prospective leaders resist leadership because they can't even take care of themselves ("for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people")?
- ? After reading Isaiah's description, what additional insights do you have into the inadequacy of earthly leaders?

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>11-13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, ‘a dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse, <sup>12</sup>even a full wind from those places shall come unto me: now also will I give sentence against them.’”

<sup>13</sup>“Behold, he shall come up as clouds,  
and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind:  
his horses are swifter than eagles.  
Woe unto us! For we are spoiled.”

## Questionary

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Today’s is the sixth of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

1-4	Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not
5-18	Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors
19-22	A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah’s foolishness and the consequent disaster
23-26	Jeremiah has a disturbing vision
27-29	Jeremiah’s vision is interpretation
30-31	Metaphor of two women representing Judah

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah’s needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah’s sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster. In the fourth reading (7-8), Jeremiah utilized the violent metaphor of a ravaging lion rending its victim to represent the horrendous impact the Babylonian invasion would have upon Judah’s society. In the fifth reading (9-10), Jeremiah points out the inadequacy of Judah’s leadership and the folly in relying on them to know or do what is needed.

1. In today’s reading, Jeremiah uses a meteorological metaphor to describe the approaching Babylonian army and the impact it will have of Judah’s society.
  - ? What is that metaphor?
  - ? What is the significance of “a dry wind of the high places in the wilderness”?
  - ? What is located east of Judah, from which this wind blows?
  - ? What would be the long term impact of high and regular winds blowing in off the desert to Judah’s east?
  - ? How is this an apt metaphor for the Babylonian army?
  - ? What do you see in your mind’s eye when you contemplate the dust cloud that Babylon’s invading army, with its horses and chariots and marching men, stirs up?

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>14-18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved.

How long will you harbor wicked thoughts?

<sup>15</sup>A voice is announcing from Dan,  
proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim.

<sup>16</sup>“Tell this to the nations,  
proclaim concerning Jerusalem:

‘A besieging army is coming from a distant land,  
raising a war cry against the cities of Judah.

<sup>17</sup>They surround her like men guarding a field,  
because she has rebelled against me,’”

declares the LORD.

<sup>18</sup>“Your own conduct and actions  
have brought this on you.

This is your punishment.

How bitter it is!

How it pierces to the heart!” (NIV)

## Q

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### uestionary

Today’s is the seventh of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1-4   | Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not |
| 5-18  | Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors  |
| 19-22 | A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah’s foolishness and the consequent disaster                                    |
| 23-26 | Jeremiah has a disturbing vision   |
| 27-29 | Jeremiah’s vision is interpretation  |
| 30-31 | Metaphor of two women representing Judah   |

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah’s needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah’s sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster. In the fourth reading (7-8), Jeremiah utilized the violent metaphor of a ravaging lion rending its victim to represent the horrendous impact the Babylonian invasion would have upon Judah’s society. In the fifth reading (9-10), Jeremiah points out the inadequacy of Judah’s leadership and the folly in relying on them to know or do what is needed. In the sixth reading (11-13), Jeremiah likened the Babylonian army to a hard, constant, and dry windstorm that blows over Judah from the desert regions to the east.

For those who wish to compare translations, following is the KJV.

<sup>14</sup>“O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness,  
that thou mayest be saved.

How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

<sup>15</sup>For a voice declareth from Dan,  
and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim.

<sup>16</sup>Make ye mention to the nations;  
behold, publish against Jerusalem,

that watchers come from a far country,  
and give out their voice against the cities of Judah.

<sup>17</sup>As keepers of a field, are they against her round about;  
because she hath been rebellious against me,  
saith the LORD.'

<sup>18</sup>Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee;  
this is thy wickedness,  
because it is bitter,  
because it reacheth unto thine heart."

1. In today's reading, a herald is announcing Judah's invasion and defeat "to the nations."
  - ? What is the significance of Judah's humiliations being announced on the international stage?
  - ? Why would the announcement be so widespread?
  - ? How, do you suppose, did Judah feel about having its humiliations announced the world over?
  - ? How would any nation feel and respond to having its humiliations so publicly revealed and lauded?
2. In witnessing Judah's humiliations, Yahweh laments that Judah's humiliating punishments "pierces to the heart."
  - ? What does this suggest to you?
  - ? When you contemplate the complete collapse of a society, as happened to ancient Judah, what do you think and about and what feelings do you have?
  - ? Are there examples of such societal collapse in your life time? What are they and how were individual's impacted?
  - ? How conceivable is it to you that your own society could face such a humiliating demise?

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>19-22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>“My bowels, my bowels!  
I am pained at my very heart;  
my heart maketh a noise in me;  
I cannot hold my peace,  
because thou hast heard, O my soul,  
the sound of the trumpet,  
the alarm of war.  
<sup>20</sup>Destruction upon destruction is cried;  
for the whole land is spoiled:  
suddenly are my tents spoiled,  
and my curtains in a moment.  
<sup>21</sup>How long shall I see the standard,  
and hear the sound of the trumpet?  
<sup>22</sup>For my people is foolish,  
they have not known me;  
they are sottish children,  
and they have none understanding:  
they are wise to do evil,  
but to do good they have no knowledge.”

### Q

uestionary

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Today's is the eighth of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

1-4	Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not
5-18	Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors
19-22	A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster
23-26	Jeremiah has a disturbing vision
27-29	Jeremiah's vision is interpretation
30-31	Metaphor of two women representing Judah

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah's needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah's sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster. In the fourth reading (7-8), Jeremiah utilized the violent metaphor of a ravening lion rending its victim to represent the horrendous impact the Babylonian invasion would have upon Judah's society. In the fifth reading (9-10), Jeremiah points out the inadequacy of Judah's leadership and the folly in relying on them to know or do what is needed. In the sixth reading (11-13), Jeremiah likened the Babylonian army to a hard, constant, and dry windstorm that blows over Judah from the desert regions to the east. In the seventh reading (14-18), Yahweh commanded that Judah's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Babylon be announced internationally.

1. Having described and announced Judah's sin and the humiliating consequences of those sins, Jeremiah records another lament. The lament might be that of Jeremiah himself, or it might be that of Yahweh.  
? What do you feel when you read this lamentation as that of Jeremiah? As that of Yahweh?
2. Verse 19 contains these two parallel lines

the sound of the trumpet,  
the alarm of war.

- ? How does a knowledge of Hebrew poetry, and its use of parallel lines to, often, say the same thing in different words assist you in understanding the implications of “the sound of the trumpet”?

3. Jeremiah laments that

“suddenly are my tents spoiled,  
and my curtains in a moment.”

- ? What are the possible meanings of “my tents” and “my curtains”?
  - ? What do you see in your mind if we interpret these as the innermost room, the bedchamber of a home?
  - ? What do you see in your mind if we interpret these as the inner curtains/veils of the temple?
4. Yahweh resorts to name calling, calling Judah “foolish,” “senseless,” “ignorant,” and “skilled at being evil.”
- ? How do you feel about God calling Judah such names?
  - ? How do you feel about Judah being “worthy” of such names?



## Jeremiah 4,<sup>23-26</sup>

- <sup>23</sup>I beheld the earth,  
and, lo, it was without form, and void;  
and the heavens,  
and they had no light.
- <sup>24</sup>I beheld the mountains,  
and, lo, they trembled,  
and all the hills moved lightly.
- <sup>25</sup>I beheld, and, lo, there was no man,  
and all the birds of the heavens were fled.
- <sup>26</sup>I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness,  
and all the cities thereof were broken down  
at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger.

## Questionary

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Today's is the ninth of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1-4   | Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not |
| 5-18  | Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors  |
| 19-22 | A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster                                    |
| 23-26 | Jeremiah has a disturbing vision   |
| 27-29 | Jeremiah's vision is interpretation  |
| 30-31 | Metaphor of two women representing Judah   |

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah's needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah's sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster. In the fourth reading (7-8), Jeremiah utilized the violent metaphor of a ravaging lion rending its victim to represent the horrendous impact the Babylonian invasion would have upon Judah's society. In the fifth reading (9-10), Jeremiah points out the inadequacy of Judah's leadership and the folly in relying on them to know or do what is needed. In the sixth reading (11-13), Jeremiah likened the Babylonian army to a hard, constant, and dry windstorm that blows over Judah from the desert regions to the east. In the seventh reading (14-18), Yahweh commanded that Judah's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Babylon be announced internationally. In the eighth reading (19-22), Jeremiah utters a lament over Judah's self-induced destruction.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah has a very disturbing vision.  
? In your mind, what does Judah look like?
2. Consider Jeremiah's vision in light of Genesis' creation account at the beginning of Genesis 1.  
? How does the "reverse creation" that Jeremiah sees impact what you see in your mind?  
? How do you feel about the fact that human unethical behavior can frustrate and undo the hopes, the plans, and the efforts of God?  
? How does immoral and unethical behavior impact the actual environment of nature?  
? How is human greed impacting the environment today?

## Jeremiah 4,<sup>27-29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>For thus hath the LORD said,  
The whole land shall be desolate;  
yet will I not make a full end.

<sup>28</sup>For this shall the earth mourn,  
and the heavens above be black:  
because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent,  
neither will I turn back from it.

<sup>29</sup>The whole city shall flee  
for the noise of the horsemen and bowmen;  
they shall go into thickets,  
and climb up upon the rocks:  
every city shall be forsaken,  
and not a man dwell therein.

## Questionary

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Today's is the tenth of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1-4   | Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not |
| 5-18  | Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors  |
| 19-22 | A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster                                    |
| 23-26 | Jeremiah has a disturbing vision   |
| 27-29 | Jeremiah's vision is interpretation  |
| 30-31 | Metaphor of two women representing Judah   |

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah's needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah's sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster. In the fourth reading (7-8), Jeremiah utilized the violent metaphor of a ravening lion rending its victim to represent the horrendous impact the Babylonian invasion would have upon Judah's society. In the fifth reading (9-10), Jeremiah points out the inadequacy of Judah's leadership and the folly in relying on them to know or do what is needed. In the sixth reading (11-13), Jeremiah likened the Babylonian army to a hard, constant, and dry windstorm that blows over Judah from the desert regions to the east. In the seventh reading (14-18), Yahweh commanded that Judah's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Babylon be announced internationally. In the eighth reading (19-22), Jeremiah utters a lament over Judah's self-induced destruction. In the ninth reading (23-26), Jeremiah has a disturbing vision of creation reversed and returned to its original chaotic state.

1. In today's reading, Yahweh follows up Jeremiah's vision of "un-creation" with a promise that although the "un-creation" will not be carried out to its completion, there is no way he will reverse his decision to bring destruction upon Judah.  
? How do you feel about the finality of Yahweh's decision?  
? What does this tell you about Judah?

2. Because of the invading army Judah's citizenry

"shall go into thickets,  
and climb up upon the rocks."

- ? As you picture streams of refugees hiding and living in wooded areas and in mountainous caves, what do you see?
- ? Compare what you see with what you have seen on T.V., and read of in news reports as refugees tried to escape war.

3. Yahweh confirms the previous imagery of fleeing refugees with this imagery,

every city shall be forsaken,  
and not a man dwell therein.

Not only is God's created order frustrated and undone, but the "creative" efforts of Judah's citizens are also frustrated and undone.

- ? What do you see in your mind when you consider cities depopulated?
- ? What does this look and feel like in today's world?
- ? How realistic are such occurrences in your society?

## Jeremiah 4.<sup>30-31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>And when thou art spoiled,  
what wilt thou do?  
Though thou clothest thyself with crimson,  
though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold,  
though thou rentest thy face with painting,  
in vain shalt thou make thyself fair;  
thy lovers will despise thee,  
they will seek thy life.  
<sup>31</sup>For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail,  
and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child,  
the voice of the daughter of Zion,  
that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying,  
“Woe is me now!  
For my soul is wearied because of murderers.”

## Questionary

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Today's is the last of eleven readings taken from the fourth chapter of Jeremiah. The chapter can be outlined as follows:

1-4	Yahweh speaks to Judah of repentance, promises blessings if they do, and warns of an unnamed disaster if they do not
5-18	Yahweh names the disaster utilizing a series of metaphors
19-22	A lamentation is heard, lamenting Judah's foolishness and the consequent disaster
23-26	Jeremiah has a disturbing vision
27-29	Jeremiah's vision is interpretation
30-31	Metaphor of two women representing Judah

In the first reading (1-2), Yahweh invited Judah to repent and abandon its idolatry, promising that in doing so they would fulfill their role as a blessing to the nations of the world. In the second reading (3-4), Jeremiah warned of an unnamed looming disaster and utilized two metaphors to represent Judah's needed repentance. These metaphors confirmed Judah's sin of idolatry and its concern with the vain things of this world. In the third reading (5-6), Jeremiah named the previously unnamed looming disaster as that of the Babylonian army, and predicted a series of public responses to that disaster. In the fourth reading (7-8), Jeremiah utilized the violent metaphor of a ravaging lion rending its victim to represent the horrendous impact the Babylonian invasion would have upon Judah's society. In the fifth reading (9-10), Jeremiah points out the inadequacy of Judah's leadership and the folly in relying on them to know or do what is needed. In the sixth reading (11-13), Jeremiah likened the Babylonian army to a hard, constant, and dry windstorm that blows over Judah from the desert regions to the east. In the seventh reading (14-18), Yahweh commanded that Judah's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Babylon be announced internationally. In the eighth reading (19-22), Jeremiah utters a lament over Judah's self-induced destruction. In the ninth reading (23-26), Jeremiah has a disturbing vision of creation reversed and returned to its original chaotic state. In the tenth reading (27-29), Yahweh follow up Jeremiah's vision of "un-creation" with a promise that although the "un-creation" will not be carried out to its completion, there was no way that he would reverse his decision to bring destruction upon Judah.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah and Yahweh leave behind the literal effects of Judah's looming destruction, and resort to metaphor.
  - ? What is the nature of that metaphor?
  - ? What is the emotional impact on you of Jeremiah's resort to a metaphor that involves females under attack, rapine, and murder?

- ? What is the emotional impact on you of Jeremiah's resort to a metaphor that involves expectant mothers under attack, rapine, and murder?
  - ? Why, do you think, did Jeremiah resort to such intense and uncomfortable imagery?
2. In Judah's attempt to ward off Babylonian aggression through diplomacy, Yahweh compares Judah to a prostitute making herself fair for potential clients.
- ? Why was Judah's attempted diplomacy with Babylon considered a departure from Yahweh and trust in a false god?
  - ? What does it mean, at the individual and national level, to trust alone in God and his mercy?
  - ? How is such distrust in God through diplomacy different than nations seeking peace through cooperation?

## **J**eremiah 5.<sup>1-5</sup>

### *yahweh's invitation*

<sup>1</sup>Roam through Jerusalem's streets.  
Please, have a look.  
Become familiar with and search its squares.  
If you can find any,  
if there be one who acts justly;  
one who seeks what is real,  
I will forgive it.  
<sup>2</sup>If they swear, "YHWH lives,"  
they are certainly swearing in bad faith.

### *jeremiah's response*

<sup>3</sup>Yahweh, is not your sight set on what really is?  
You have beat them, but they have felt no wound.  
You have laid them waste, but they refused to take the correction.  
They have made their faces rock hard.  
They have refused to turn back.  
<sup>4</sup>As for me, I thought, "These are the underprivileged.  
They are unlearned  
such that they do not understand YHWH's principles  
or their obligation to their God.  
<sup>5</sup>I'll go personally to the privileged  
and speak with them.  
Surely they understand YHWH's principles,  
their obligation to their God."

### *jeremiah's discovery*

But these, as one, have broken the constraints;  
shredded bonds that tie (Author's translation).

## **Q**uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

### *yahweh's invitation*

<sup>1</sup>"Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,  
and see now, and know,  
and seek in the broad places thereof,  
if ye can find a man,  
if there be any that executeth judgment,  
that seeketh the truth;  
and I will pardon it.  
<sup>2</sup>And though they say,  
'The LORD liveth;'  
surely they swear falsely."

### *jeremiah's response*

<sup>3</sup>"O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth?  
Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved;  
thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction:  
they have made their faces harder than a rock;  
they have refused to return.

<sup>4</sup>Therefore I said, ‘Surely these are poor;  
they are foolish:  
for they know not the way of the LORD,  
nor the judgment of their God.  
<sup>5</sup>I will get me unto the great men,  
and will speak unto them;  
for they have known the way of the LORD,  
and the judgment of their God:’

*jeremiah's discovery*

but these have altogether broken the yoke,  
and burst the bonds.”

1. In verses 1-2 Yahweh sends Jeremiah on a search.
  - ? What is he to search for?
2. Yahweh promises that he will forgive the city if Jeremiah can find anyone who advocates for justice and is interested in knowing what is true—not so much theological or theoretical truth, but the truth about the spiritual and moral state of individuals and society.
  - ? Of what other Biblical narrative does this remind you?
  - ? He does Genesis 18.20-33 relate to Jeremiah's search?
  - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that this is the Lord's way of saying that Jeremiah's Jerusalem is as wicked as the Sodom and Gomorrah of Abraham's day?
3. Apparently, Jeremiah began his search among the poor, uneducated among the people.
  - ? Why, do you think, did he begin there?
  - ? What was the result of his search for moral people among the poor?
4. Having failed to find any moral among the poor, Jeremiah redirected his search.
  - ? Among whom did he search next?
  - ? What was the result of his search for moral individuals among the more educated, wealthy, and influential?
  - ? What does all this tell you about Jerusalem's moral state and the city's future?
5. In the KJV, Jeremiah charges that rich and poor alike “have altogether broken the yoke.”
  - ? What do you understand “the yoke” to mean?
  - ? How do you feel about and what do you learn from my translation that they “have broken the constraints” rather than “broken the yoke”?
  - ? When you have a few moments, take some time to read, say, the chapter before and the chapter after this one. What constraints do these two chapters mention as having been broken by Judah?

## Jeremiah 5.<sup>6-9</sup>

(Warning: this passage with its accompanying questions and meditation contains strong adult language.)

<sup>6</sup>Therefore, a lion will attack them out of the thicket.

A jackal out of the wilds will ravage them.

A leopard will stalk their cities.

Anyone who leaves them will be torn to pieces  
because their rebellions are many  
their apostasy massive.

<sup>7</sup>How, given this, can I possibly forgive you?

Your children forsake me

and devote themselves to those who are not gods

Though I fully satisfied their need, they commit adultery,  
and cram whorehouses.

<sup>8</sup>Stallions, aroused, erect,

they are men who moan with other men's wives.

<sup>9</sup>Should I just ignore such things?

An oracle of YHWH:

“With a people such as this,  
should I not be avenged?” (Author's translation)

## Q

uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

<sup>6</sup>“Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them,  
*and* a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them,  
a leopard shall watch over their cities:  
every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces:  
because their transgressions are many,  
*and* their backslidings are increased.

<sup>7</sup>How shall I pardon thee for this?

Thy children have forsaken me,

and sworn by *them that are* no gods:  
when I had fed them to the full,  
they then committed adultery,

and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.

<sup>8</sup>They were *as* fed horses in the morning:

every one neighed after his neighbour's wife.

<sup>9</sup>Shall I not visit for these *things*?

Saith the LORD:

and shall not my soul be avenged  
on such a nation as this?

In 5.<sup>1-5</sup>, we learned that God sent Jeremiah on a search to find anyone in Jerusalem who had not broken faith with Yahweh. After searching, first among the poor and educated and then among the wealthy and educated, Jeremiah could not find anyone and so reported to Yahweh. Today's reading is the Yahweh's response to Jeremiah's findings and report.

1. Today's reading provides parade examples of the prophetic use of imagery and the powerful emotive impact it can have.

? What imagery do you find in today's reading?

? What is its emotional impact on you?



1. In describing the disaster that awaits Judah because of its unfaithfulness toward God, Yahweh uses the metaphor of wild beasts—lion, jackal, and leopard—that stalk, tear, and devour their prey.
  - ? How do you feel about the violence of this imagery?
  - ? How do you explain it, and how do you reconcile it with whatever your thoughts about the character of God are?
  - ? What do you know about how this threat was realized? Who was the agent of this violence?
2. In describing Judah’s idolatry, Yahweh uses sexual imagery. Given that Yahweh is often likened to Judah’s husband and Judah as Yahweh’s wife, this imagery is appropriate.
  - ? How do you feel about this imagery?
  - ? How do you feel about Jeremiah using such explicit sexual imagery?
  - ? What does the Lord’s use of such explicit, disturbing, and offensive language tell you about the intensity of His feelings about idolatry—the covetous desire for the things of this world: wealth, power, and prestige—and the dangers it poses?
  - ? To what degree do we find such idolatry in our society today?
  - ? Should we expect any different outcome from such idolatry than that experienced by ancient Judah? Why do you answer as you do?
3. Today’s reading ends with two questions.
  - Should I just ignore such things?
  - With a people such as this, should I not be avenged?

? What thoughts do you have when you consider these two questions?

There are passages that suggest that God does sometimes “ignore”—we might say, “forgive”—individual’s sins. For example,

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins;  
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103.<sup>10</sup>).

“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,  
O Lord, who shall stand?  
But there is forgiveness with thee,  
that thou mayest be feared” (Ps. 130.<sup>3-4</sup>).

- ? Why does God sometimes overlook sin while at other times he does not?
- ? Does it make a difference that Yahweh is addressing society-wide sin?
- ? How is sin that an individual commits—one that is personal, unique, and the result of individual weakness—different from one that is societal, near universal, and, perhaps, because of its pervasiveness goes unrecognized as sin?
- ? What does it say about a society that swims in sin to such an extent that it is no longer noticed or thought of as sinful?
- ? How do you feel about God treating such pervasive societal sin differently, perhaps more harshly than that which flows from personal weakness?

## Jeremiah 5.<sup>10-13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Climb up the city's terraced vineyards and lay them waste,  
though not utterly.

Remove their branches,  
for they are not YHWH's.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>11</sup>For they have acted with extreme infidelity to me,  
both Yisrā'ēl and Y<sup>c</sup>hûdâ.

An oracle of YHWH.

<sup>12</sup>They lie about Yahweh, and assert,  
"He wouldn't do this."

Also, "Disaster cannot come to us.

We will not experience military threat or hunger."

<sup>13</sup>And, "The prophets are hot air.

The truth is not in them.

So, this shall be done to them" (author's translation).

## Q

uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

<sup>10</sup>Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy;

but make not a full end:

take away the battlements;

for they are not the LORD's.

<sup>11</sup>For the house of Israel and the house of Judah

have dealt very treacherously against me,

saith the LORD.

<sup>12</sup>They have belied the LORD, and said,

'It is not he;

neither shall evil come upon us;

neither shall we see sword nor famine:

<sup>13</sup>And the prophets shall become wind,

and the word is not in them:'

Thus shall it be done unto them.

These verses continue Yahweh's response to Jeremiah after the latter had surveyed Jerusalem in search of any who were faithful to Yahweh and had reported back to Yahweh that he could find none (5.<sup>1-5</sup>).

1. Verse 10 can be read both literally and figuratively.
  - ? What is the literally and figurative meaning of this verse?
  - ? What would be the meaning and consequences of the destruction if the vineyards that were planted on the terraces surrounding Jerusalem was taken literally?
  - ? What would be the meaning and consequences of the destruction if the vineyard were seen as symbolic of Judah—Israel and Judah were often symbolically represented as vineyards?
2. Verses 12-13 represent the peoples' response to the warning found in verse 10 along with all the rest of Jeremiah's (and others') warnings.
  - ? How do you feel when you read their response?

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between the author's translation and that of the KJV is found in the text used. I have translated from the Hebrew Masoretic text, whereas the KJV translated the Septuagint.

? Why would they believe that God would not bring disaster upon the nation?

Consider the following sentiments expressed by the Book of Mormon characters, Laman and Lemuel.

“And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them. Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets” (1 Ne. 2.<sup>12-13</sup>).

“And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them...” (1 Ne. 17.<sup>22</sup>).

- ? We often think of Laman and Lemuel and their rebellion in terms of teenage rebellion. But, how might the similarity between the peoples’ response to Jeremiah, and Laman and Lemuel’s response to their father, alter that perception?
  - ? What do you think when you consider that Laman and Lemuel were not involved in teenage rebellion but in a deep theological disagreement with their father?
  - ? What were the Jewish theological arguments, adopted by Laman and Lemuel, against Jerusalem being destroyed, especially with God’s participation?
3. Jeremiah charges that the people “lie about Yahweh.”
- ? What “lies” are told about God in today’s society?
  - ? How applicable is the ancient prophetic warning of impending punishment for sins to today’s society?
  - ? Are there ideologies and “doctrines” that would be called upon to assert that America is too strong and too “righteous” to experience something similar to what Jerusalem and Judah experienced? What are those ideologies and doctrines? How do you feel about them?

## Jeremiah 5.<sup>14-19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, this is what YHWH, 'ēlohê Šēbā'ôt says:

Because you utter such things,  
understand that I am turning your words into fire  
and this people into the wood it consumes.

<sup>15</sup>Understand that I am leading against you a distant nation,  
O nation of Yiśrā'ēl.

An oracle of YHWH.

It is a nation of long standing,  
a nation with a long past,  
a nation whose language you do not understand  
so that you cannot comprehend what they say.

<sup>16</sup>Their weapons are like an open grave.

All of them are valiant.

<sup>17</sup>The force will consume your crops, and devour your food  
meant for your sons and daughters.

It will consume your flocks and herds.

It will devour our vineyards and your fig orchards.

It will bring impoverishment to your fortified cities—  
the very ones in which you put your trust—violently

<sup>18</sup>Nevertheless, at that time—an oracle of YHWH—

I will not completely obliterate you.

<sup>19</sup>And when you ask, “For what reason has YHWH, our God, done all this to us?” you are to say to them, “Because you forsook me and served foreign gods in your own land. So, we will serve foreigners in a land not your own (author’s translation).

## Questionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

<sup>14</sup>Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts,  
Because ye speak this word,  
behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire,  
and this people wood, and it shall devour them.

<sup>15</sup>Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far,  
O house of Israel, saith the LORD:

it is a mighty nation,  
it is an ancient nation,  
a nation whose language thou knowest not,  
neither understandest what they say.

<sup>16</sup>Their quiver is as an open sepulchre,  
they are all mighty men.

<sup>17</sup>And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread,  
which thy sons and thy daughters should eat:  
they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds:  
they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees:  
they shall impoverish thy fenced cities,  
wherein thou trustedst, with the sword.

These verses continue Yahweh’s response to Jeremiah after the latter had surveyed Jerusalem in search of any who were faithful to Yahweh and had reported back to Yahweh that he could find none (5.<sup>1-5</sup>).

1. These verses continue Yahweh's warning about the devastation that the Babylonian army will visit upon Judah, a warning that Judah rejected as a lie perpetrated by malcontent prophets such as Jeremiah.
  - ? What do you learn about the nation of Babylon and their military forces?
2. In verse 14, Yahweh uses a metaphor of fire and wood.
  - ? In your mind, what do you see when wood catches fire? What do you see when Judah "catches fire"?
3. Yahweh warns that the Babylonian army resources "are like an open grave"?
  - ? What does this mean to you?
  - ? What sorts of devastation are mentioned as coming from the Babylonian army?
  - ? How and does war bring about economic collapse as is warned in verse 17?

## Jeremiah 5.<sup>20-25</sup>

<sup>20</sup>“Declare this in the house of Jacob,  
and publish it in Judah, saying,  
<sup>21</sup>“Hear now this, O foolish people,  
and without understanding;  
which have eyes, and see not;  
which have ears, and hear not:  
<sup>22</sup>“Fear ye not me? Saith the LORD:  
will ye not tremble at my presence,  
which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea  
by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it:  
and though the waves thereof toss themselves,  
yet can they not prevail;  
though they roar,  
yet can they not pass over it?  
<sup>23</sup>“But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart;  
they are revolted and gone.  
<sup>24</sup>“Neither say they in their heart,  
‘Let us now fear the LORD our God,  
that giveth rain,  
both the former and the latter, in his season:  
he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.’  
<sup>25</sup>“Your iniquities have turned away these things,  
and your sins have withholden good things from you.

## Questionary

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These verses continue Yahweh’s response to Jeremiah after the latter had surveyed Jerusalem in search of any who were faithful to Yahweh and had reported back to Yahweh that he could find none (5.<sup>1-5</sup>).

1. Through Jeremiah, the Lord accuses Judah of being blind and deaf.
  - ? This is strong language. Can you point to any examples in which current leaders of the Church have directed strong and pointed language at large numbers of Church members?
  - ? If so, what was the language and what was the subject?
  - ? If not, is it due to the fact that sizable populations in the Church are not unseeing and unhearing on any given issue or due to the fact that modern Church leaders simply do not use such strong and pointed language? Why do you answer as you do?
  - ? How, do you suppose, Jeremiah’s audience reacted to Jeremiah’s strong language?
  - ? How, do you suppose, a modern Church audience would react to Church leaders’ use of such strong language?
2. The Lord asks Judah to consider the massive power he exhibits in creating and controlling the world’s oceans.
  - ? What comes to your mind as you consider this sort of power?
  - ? What does it say about an individual or society that rejects the counsel of one who is so knowing and powerful?
3. Jeremiah, like so many others, thinks of God as in control of earth’s weather and weather patterns.
  - ? To what extent, do you feel, does God control the earth’s weather and weather patterns? Why do you answer as you do?

## Jeremiah 5.<sup>26-29</sup> — just scripture

- <sup>26</sup>For there can be found among my people ungodly individuals.  
They keep watch, like bird catchers watching a trap.  
They place traps, they capture human beings.
- <sup>27</sup>Just as a bird cage is full of birds,  
their houses are filled with deceit.  
This is how they have become powerful and wealthy.
- <sup>28</sup>They have grown fat and plump,  
having gone beyond, even, the wicked words they speak.  
They will not hear a legal case—  
such as that of an orphan— and yet they enjoy success.  
Nor will they bring the cases of the impoverished to trial.
- <sup>29</sup>Should I not level a charge against these?—  
an oracle of YHWH—  
Should I not take vengeance on a nation such as this? (author's translation)

## Q

uestionary

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For those who wish to compare translation, here is the KJV.

- <sup>26</sup>For among my people are found wicked men:  
they lay wait, as he that setteth snares;  
they set a trap, they catch men.
- <sup>27</sup>As a cage is full of birds,  
so are their houses full of deceit:  
therefore they are become great,  
and waxen rich.
- <sup>28</sup>They are waxen fat, they shine:  
yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked:  
they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless,  
yet they prosper;  
and the right of the needy do they not judge.
- <sup>29</sup>Shall I not visit for these *things*?  
Saith the LORD:  
shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

These verses continue Yahweh's response to Jeremiah after the latter had surveyed Jerusalem in search of any who were faithful to Yahweh and had reported back to Yahweh that he could find none (5.<sup>1-5</sup>).

1. Jeremiah likens Judah's wealthy citizens to bird catchers who catch and cage birds. But these wealthy citizens catch and cage human beings.
  - ? What do you see when you picture this imagery in your mind?
  - ? What is the purpose of other human beings in the view of the wealthy?
  - ? How do the wealthy use, objectify, and dehumanize others today?
2. Jeremiah can think of at least two means the wealthy use to acquire their wealth, power, and success.
  - ? What are those two ways?
  - ? How do you feel about Jeremiah attributing the accumulation of wealthy, power, and success to wickedness and injustice?
  - ? To what examples can you point that are indicative that this is true in today's society?Jeremiah's belief that injustice allows the wealthy to accumulate wealth represents a challenge to

the common assertion that wealth is accumulated through “righteousness.”

? How do you feel about this challenge?

3. The wealthy make sure that vulnerable segments of society such as orphans and the poor are denied justice in the legal system and in the legislative bodies. We might be tempted to think only in terms of the judicial system and of courtrooms—of the poor not getting justice in the legal system. While this undoubtedly is part of it, we must think beyond such terms. The Hebrew word often translated as “judgement” can be translated as “governance.”

? How are the poor denied justice in these two settings—policy making and civil/ criminal courts?

? How do governments and societies neglect to “legislate” the “cause” and “rights” of vulnerable classes of society?

? How are your local, state, and national leaders doing in these areas of legislation?

4. Consider the following images from today’s reading

- Wealthy and governing classes of society “set “traps” to “capture human beings.”
- As a “cage is full of birds,” the homes of the wealthy and governing are fully and beautifully furnished with resources accumulated through deceit.
- The wealthy and governing classes “grown fat and plump.”

? What do you picture in your mind as you consider these images?

? What modern realities do these images reflect in the governance and lifestyle of the wealthy and governing classes?

The Lord’s statement that the wealthy have “grown fat and plump” is not meant as a criticism of their weight, but is indicative of their health made possible by a healthy diet, made possible by their wealth.

? How do you feel about Jeremiah’s criticism that individual health is often tied to personal finances?

? How is the true today?

5. Because the wealthy and powerful will not allow the cases of vulnerable citizens to be heard, God will himself bring the wealthy and powerful to trial.

? How do you feel about this?

? How do you feel about the Lord looking to be avenged for all the injustice that the wealthy and powerful have perpetrated against the poor and powerless?



## Jeremiah 5.<sup>30-31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>An appallingly horrid thing  
has occurred in the land:

<sup>31</sup>The prophets utter oracles with intent to deceive,  
the priests rule as their power allows,  
and my people love it this way.

How do you imagine this will end? (author's translation)

## Questionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

<sup>30</sup>A wonderful and horrible thing  
is committed in the land;

<sup>31</sup>The prophets prophesy falsely,  
and the priests bear rule by their means;  
and my people love *to have it so*:  
and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

These verses continue Yahweh's response to Jeremiah after the latter had surveyed Jerusalem in search of any who were faithful to Yahweh and had reported back to Yahweh that he could find none (5.<sup>1-5</sup>).

1. In accusing Judah's prophets of uttering deceptive oracles and accusing Judah's religious leaders of ruling in any way that they could get away with, Yahweh announces that "my people love it this way."
  - ? Why would a people prefer religious and political leaders who speak something other than the truth and lead by their personal influence?
2. Yahweh calls this state of affairs "appallingly horrid."
  - ? What is it that is so "appallingly horrid"—Is it the behavior of religious leaders, the acceptance of the behavior by the masses, or both?
  - ? Is one more "appallingly horrid than the other? Why do you answer as you do?
  - ? Do you see examples of religious leaders governing and influencing as the Lord describes in today's reading? Why do you answer as you do?
  - ? Do you see examples of the masses being satisfied and preferring such religious leadership? Why do you answer as you do?
3. Yahweh ends with this question: "How do you imagine this will end?"
  - ? How would you answer this question?

# Jeremiah 6

## Questionary 1 — jeremiah 6.<sup>1-5</sup>

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### *the prophetic voice*

<sup>1</sup>Seek refuge, you children of Binyamin,  
outside Y<sup>c</sup>rûšalāyim.

In T<sup>c</sup>qôa' sound the alarm,  
and over Bêyt-ha<sup>k</sup>erem raise a smoke signal  
because something bad menaces out of the north,  
a tremendous disruption.

<sup>2</sup>To an attractive and beguiling woman  
have I likened the daughter of Şiyyôn.

<sup>3</sup>They come to her, shepherds and their flocks.  
They pitch their tents against and all around her.  
They bring disaster with their power.

### *the attacker's voice*

<sup>4</sup>“Engage her in holy war.  
Arise and attack at high noon.  
Unfortunate for us that the day passes away,  
that evening shadows stretch out.

<sup>5</sup>Arise and attack at night.  
Let us destroy their strongholds” (author’s translation).

## Questionary

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For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

O Ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee  
out of the midst of Jerusalem,  
and blow the trumpet in Tekoa,  
and set up a sign of fire in Beth-haccerem:  
for evil appeareth out of the north,  
and great destruction.

<sup>2</sup>I have likened the daughter of Zion  
to a comely and delicate woman.

<sup>3</sup>The shepherds with their flocks shall come unto her;  
they shall pitch their tents against her round about;  
they shall feed every one in his place.

<sup>4</sup>“Prepare ye war against her;  
arise, and let us go up at noon.  
Unfortunate for us that the day comes to an end;  
that the shadows of the evening are stretched out.”

<sup>5</sup>Arise, and let us go by night,  
and let us destroy her palaces.”

This reading is the first in a series of readings that examine the sixth chapter of Jeremiah.

It is common for Jeremiah to report his oracles as if they were conversations. For example, in Jeremiah 5, the prophet records Yahweh’s request that he conduct a search for any righteous in Judah (5.<sup>1-2</sup>), Jeremiah’s report concerning the results of his search (5.<sup>3-5</sup>), and Yahweh’s response to

Jeremiah's report (5.<sup>6-31</sup>). The entire 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters can be read as a back and forth between Jeremiah and Yahweh as follows.

- 14.<sup>2-6</sup> Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah
- 14.<sup>7-9</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah's advocate
- 14.<sup>10-12</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah
- 14.<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy
- 14.<sup>14-16</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
- 14.<sup>17-18</sup> Yahweh shares another lamentation
- 14.<sup>19-22</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah's advocate
- 15.<sup>1-9</sup> Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah's sins and punishment
- 15.<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
- 15.<sup>11-14</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
- 15.<sup>15-18</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
- 15.<sup>19-21</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah

Chapter 6 can be similarly structured and understood, with different voices heard.

- 6.<sup>1-3</sup> The voice of Jeremiah or Yahweh.
- 6.<sup>4-5</sup> The voice of an attacking army.
- 6.<sup>6-9</sup> The voice of Yahweh
- 6.<sup>10-11</sup> The voice of Jeremiah
- 6.<sup>12-23</sup> The voice of Yahweh
- 6.<sup>24-26</sup> The voice of Jeremiah (representing the people)
- 6.<sup>27-30</sup> The voice of Yahweh

? How does knowing that there are different voices represented in today's reading help you better understand and interpret today's reading?

1. Jeremiah admonishes his people to blow a trumpet or sound the alarm and send a smoke signal from Tekoa and Beth-haccerem.
  - ? What is the purpose of doing so?
  - ? Why will this be necessary?
2. Jeremiah warns that "disaster" or "something bad" (KJV, "evil") is approaching from the north. This is consistent with one of the visions he saw in the course of his call, when he saw a boiling pot dipped over and its waters spread southward (See 1.<sup>13-15</sup>; See also, for example 4.<sup>5-6</sup>; 10.<sup>22</sup>).
  - ? What is the significance of "the north"?
3. Jeremiah likens Judah to "an attractive and beguiling woman."
  - ? What is the significance of this comparison?
  - ? In what ways will Judah be as helpless in the face of the looming threat as females were in ancient cultures?
4. We understand verses 4-5 to reflect the feelings of the Babylonian army attacking Judah.
  - ? What do these verses tell you about the confidence and commitment the army had in invading and defeating Judah?
  - ? What do these verses tell you about the success the Babylonians enjoyed in their invasion of Judah?

## Questionary 2— jeremiah 6.<sup>6-9</sup>

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Yahweh's voice

<sup>6</sup>In fact, this is what YHWH Š<sup>e</sup>bā'ôṭ has said:

“Cut down trees

and construct an attack ramp against Y<sup>e</sup>rûšalāyim.”

This is the city to be condemned;

for oppression runs deep in it.

<sup>7</sup>As a well keeps its water fresh,

this city maintains its misconduct.

Violence and exploitation are heard in it.

Confronting me constantly is the pain of lashing.

<sup>8</sup>Accept admonishment, Y<sup>e</sup>rûšalāyim, lest I become alienated from you;

lest I make you desolate,

a land not inhabited.

<sup>9</sup>This is what Yahweh Š<sup>e</sup>bā'ôṭ has said:

“As a grapevine is harvested a second time, any Israelite survivors will be harvested.

As a harvester, pass your hand again over its branches” (author's translation).

For those who wish to compare translations, here is the KJV.

<sup>6</sup>For thus hath the LORD of hosts said,

“Hew ye down trees,

and cast a mount against Jerusalem:

this *is* the city to be visited;

she *is* wholly oppression in the midst of her.

<sup>7</sup>As a fountain casteth out her waters,

so she casteth out her wickedness:

violence and spoil is heard in her;

before me continually *is* grief and wounds.

<sup>8</sup>Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem,

lest my soul depart from thee;

lest I make thee desolate,

a land not inhabited.”

<sup>9</sup>Thus saith the LORD of hosts,

“They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine:

turn back thine hand as a grapegatherer into the baskets.”

This reading is the second in a series of readings that examine the sixth chapter of Jeremiah.

It is common for Jeremiah to report his oracles as if they were conversations. For example, in Jeremiah 5, the prophet records Yahweh's request that he conduct a search for any righteous in Judah (5.<sup>1-2</sup>), Jeremiah's report concerning the results of his search (5.<sup>3-5</sup>), and Yahweh's response to Jeremiah's report (5.<sup>6-31</sup>). The entire 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters can be read as a back and forth between Jeremiah and Yahweh as follows.

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- 6.<sup>12-23</sup> The voice of Yahweh
- 6.<sup>24-26</sup> The voice of Jeremiah (representing the people)
- 6.<sup>27-30</sup> The voice of Yahweh

1. Verses 6d and 7 identify evils found in Judean society. Verses 6a-c, 8 and 9 identify consequences of those evils.
  - ? Why societal evils do you identify?
  - ? What consequences for those evils do you identify?
  - ? How are "violence and exploitation" manifested in our society today?
2. God commands that trees be cut down for the purposes of constructing siege works against Jerusalem.
  - ? To whom is he speaking?
  - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate God condoning Judah's enemy as it conducts war against Judah?
3. God speaks of ingrained oppression, exploitation, misconduct, and the pain this brings to those so abused.
  - ? What types of behaviors do you think of when you consider painful oppression and exploitation of others?
4. God warns and commands,
  - "As a grapevine is harvested a second time, any Israelite survivors will be harvested. As a harvester, pass your hand again over its branches."
  - ? What do you understand this to mean?

**J**eremiah 6.<sup>13</sup>— just scripture

For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them  
every one is given to covetousness;  
and from the prophet even unto the priest  
every one dealeth falsely.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? With its use of poetic parallelism, adjacent Hebrew lines of poetry normally repeat or enhance each other. With this mind, consider the relationship between “covetousness” and “dealing falsely.” ? How do they play off each other?
- ? What is the likelihood of one being covetousness and not dealing falsely?
- ? Why, do you think, does covetousness lead to deception?

## **J**eremiah 6.<sup>28-30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>They are all grievous revolters,  
walking with slanders:  
they are brass and iron;  
they are all corrupters.

<sup>29</sup>The bellows are burned,  
the lead is consumed of the fire;  
the founder melteth in vain:  
for the wicked are not plucked away.

<sup>30</sup>Reprobate silver shall men call them,  
because the LORD hath rejected them.

## **Q**uestionary

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- ? What is “reprobate silver”?
- ? What does it say about Judah that the nation is likened to silver that has been placed in the hottest of purifying furnaces but remains impure?
- ? Judah’s citizens are called “revolters,” “slanders,” and “corrupters.” What do each of these suggest to you about their character and the treatment of others?

**Jeremiah 7.<sup>5-7</sup>**— just scripture

<sup>5</sup>For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; <sup>6</sup>if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: <sup>7</sup>then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? How is it that how a society/nation treats vulnerable populations such as resident aliens, orphans, and widows is so determinative as to that societies security and longevity?



**Jeremiah 8.<sup>10</sup>**— just scripture

...For every one from the least even unto the greatest  
is given to covetousness,  
from the prophet even unto the priest  
every one dealeth falsely.

**Q**uestionary

---

- ? In what ways do citizens of your nation “deal falsely” with one another?
- ? How does “covetousness” drive this false dealing?
- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you read that religious leaders are at the forefront of covetousness that leads to false dealings with others?

## Jeremiah 9.<sup>3-6</sup>— just scripture

<sup>3</sup>And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies:  
but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth;  
for they proceed from evil to evil,  
and they know not me,  
saith the LORD.

<sup>4</sup>Take ye heed every one of his neighbour,  
and trust ye not in any brother:  
for every brother will utterly supplant,  
and every neighbour will walk with slanders.

<sup>5</sup>And they will deceive every one his neighbour,  
and will not speak the truth:  
they have taught their tongue to speak lies,  
and weary themselves to commit iniquity.

<sup>6</sup>Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit;  
through deceit they refuse to know me,  
saith the LORD.

## Qquestionary

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Tragically, today's reading seems all too apropos for the current circumstances taking place in the United States.

1. Jeremiah charges Judah's citizenry of "bend[ing] their tongues like their bow for lies."
  - ? We often think of lies only in terms of an individual's relationship, or lack of relationship to "truth" or "facts." But there is more to lying than that. Jeremiah resorts to the metaphor of bows and arrows to represent lies. What do you understand from Jeremiah's use of this metaphor?
  - ? We understand how lies harm those who are the object of the lies, but how do lies harm those who simply hear the lies?
  - ? What harms come to a society when lying becomes acceptable and common behavior?
2. Jeremiah charges that Judah's citizenry is "not valiant for the truth."
  - ? What would being "valiant for the truth" look like?
  - ? What do you do to be "valiant for the truth"?
  - ? Is there anything more that you could do?
3. In verse 3, Jeremiah has God saying that liars and those who support them "know not me." In verse 6, he has God saying that liars and those who support them "refuse to know me."
  - ? What do you think and feel as you consider these insights?
  - ? What is God's relationship with the truth?

Not "knowing" God is one thing. It might be the result of simple, unintended ignorance. But "refusing" to know God is quite another. It is the result of willful choices.

  - ? How do you feel about thinking of liars as willful deniers and even haters of God?

Jeremiah says that Judah's citizenry "have taught their tongue to speak lies."

  - ? What does this suggest to you?
  - ? How does this compliment Jeremiah's charge that Judah's citizenry willfully "refuse" to know God?
  - ? How do you feel about someone who "studies" to be a more effective liar?
4. Verses 3 and 6, with their association of liars as ignorantly and willfully rebellious, bracket verse 4 and 5.

- ? In their discussion of lying and liars, what is the emphasis of verses 4-5?
  - ? How is disloyalty to one's neighbors and fellow citizens disloyalty to God?
  - ? As you consider the pervasiveness of lying and liars, how would you characterize the welfare of the state?
5. I began by suggesting that today's reading "seems all too apropos for the current circumstances taking place in the United States."
- ? How do you feel about this assertion?
  - ? How would you feel if we changed the "seems" to "is"?
  - ? How is lying on the part of citizens and public officials impacting the welfare of the U.S.?
- ? When you read Jeremiah's extraordinary critical estimation of his culture and citizens of his country what do you see in your mind and feel in your heart?
  - ? How does it compare with your view of your own culture and its citizenry?

**Jeremiah 9.**<sup>23-24</sup>— just scripture

<sup>23</sup>Thus saith the LORD,

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,  
neither let the mighty man glory in his might,  
let not the rich man glory in his riches:

<sup>24</sup>But let him that glorieth glory in this,  
that he understandeth and knoweth me,  
that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness,  
judgment, and righteousness, in the earth:  
for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

### Questionary

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- ? Wealth, power, prestige: these are the three Satanic temptations he used against Jesus during his forty days in the desert, and uses against all mankind. How are these three temptations manifest in your life?
- ? How are they a reflection of idolatry, replacing God with wealth, power, and prestige for happiness and a sense of being?
- ? How do nations fall prey to these three temptations?

**Jeremiah 10.**<sup>23-24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself:  
it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

<sup>24</sup>O LORD, correct me, but with judgment;  
not in thine anger,  
lest thou bring me to nothing.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? Jeremiah teaches that men and women are incapable of “directing their steps.” What does this mean to you?
- ? Clearly, Jeremiah includes himself among those who are incapable of “directing his steps.” How do you feel about this?
- ? How will this awareness influence your thoughts about and efforts to repent during the lent season leading up to Easter?

## Jeremiah 11.<sup>18-20</sup>

- <sup>18</sup>And the LORD hath given me knowledge of it,  
and I know it:  
then thou shewedst me their doings.
- <sup>19</sup>But I was like a lamb  
or an ox that is brought to the slaughter;  
and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying,  
“Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof,  
and let us cut him off from the land of the living,  
that his name may be no more remembered.”
- <sup>20</sup>But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously,  
that triest the reins and the heart,  
let me see thy vengeance on them:  
for unto thee have I revealed my cause.

## Q

uestionary

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The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, has always intrigued and inspired me. He reveals more of his personal life, and more of his feelings about his life and ministry than any other writing prophet of the Old Testament. Today’s reading is part of several passages that many Biblical scholars identify as “the laments of Jeremiah,” and is the first of four passages that record the back and forth between Yahweh and Jeremiah. The dialogue looks like this:

Jeremiah	11. <sup>18-20</sup>
Yahweh	11. <sup>21-23</sup>
Jeremiah	12. <sup>1-4</sup>
Yahweh	12. <sup>5-6</sup>

1. In verse 18, Jeremiah, in prayer to God, says that Yahweh has revealed a secret to him.  
? What is that secret?
2. Consider the following imagery: “Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof.”  
? If we understand the tree to represent Jeremiah, what is the fruit?  
? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider that Jeremiah’s enemies were not so much concerned to do away with Jeremiah the man as they were determined to be rid of his message, so critical of Judah?
3. In verse 20, Jeremiah ask that God avenge him for the violence planned against his life.  
? How do you feel about this request?  
? When, do you think, is such a request for vengeance justified?
4. Jeremiah’s prayer, as so many of his prayers are, is very direct and very open.  
? How would you characterize your own prayers?  
? What kind of relationship with God would your personal prayers imply to another who listened in?  
? What can you do to improve your “prayer life”?

## Jeremiah 11.<sup>21-23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, “Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand.” <sup>22</sup>Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, “Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine: <sup>23</sup>and there shall be no remnant of them: for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, even the year of their visitation.”

### Questionary

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The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, has always intrigued and inspired me. He reveals more of his personal life, and more of his feelings about his life and ministry than any other writing prophet of the Old Testament.

Today’s reading is the second of four passages that record the back and forth between Yahweh and Jeremiah. The dialogue looks like this:

Jeremiah	11. <sup>18-20</sup>
Yahweh	11. <sup>21-23</sup>
Jeremiah	12. <sup>1-4</sup>
Yahweh	12. <sup>5-6</sup>

In Jeremiah 11.<sup>18-20</sup>, the prophet complained about plots planned by his enemies against his life, and asked Yahweh to avenge him for these wrongs. In today’s reading, Yahweh responds to Jeremiah’s prayer.

1. The Lord promises Jeremiah that he will grant his request and avenge him his enemies This vengeance will include members of their families.
  - ? How do you feel about this positive response to Jeremiah’s request for vengeance?
  - ? How do you feel about the Lord’s vengeance including “innocent” family members?
2. The vengeance that God intends to bring upon Jeremiah’s enemies is similar to the violence that Jeremiah’s enemies wish to do against him.
  - ? What is the “law of restoration” and how does it relate to the suffering that will come upon Jeremiah’s enemies?
  - ? Consider the following passage and how it relates to the suffering of Jeremiah’s enemies.

“Yea, verily, to seal them up unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure—unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man” (DC 1.<sup>9-10</sup>).
3. In announcing his vengeance against Jeremiah’s enemies, Yahweh quotes the words and/or the attitude of Jeremiah’s enemies:

“Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand.”

  - ? This quoting of the words of the wicked is a common feature in Jeremiah. What, do you think, is the significance of quoting the actual and rebellious words of the wicked?

## **J**eremiah 12.<sup>1-4</sup>— just scripture

<sup>1</sup>Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee:  
yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments:  
Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?  
Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?  
<sup>2</sup>Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root:  
they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit:  
thou art near in their mouth,  
and far from their reins.  
<sup>3</sup>But thou, O LORD, knowest me:  
thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee:  
pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,  
and prepare them for the day of slaughter.  
<sup>4</sup>How long shall the land mourn,  
and the herbs of every field wither,  
for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?  
The beasts are consumed, and the birds;  
because they said,  
‘He shall not see our last end.’”

## **Q**uestionary

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The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, has always intrigued and inspired me. He reveals more of his personal life, and more of his feelings about his life and ministry than any other writing prophet of the Old Testament.

Today’s reading is the third of four passages that record the back and forth in one conversation between Yahweh and Jeremiah. The dialogue looks like this:

Jeremiah	11. <sup>18-20</sup>
Yahweh	11. <sup>21-23</sup>
Jeremiah	12. <sup>1-4</sup>
Yahweh	12. <sup>5-6</sup>

In Jeremiah 11.<sup>18-20</sup>, the prophet complained about plots planned by his enemies against his life, and asked Yahweh to avenge him for these wrongs. In 11.<sup>21-23</sup>, God replied to Jeremiah and promised that he would, indeed, avenge him. In 12.<sup>1-4</sup>, Jeremiah responds to God.

1. Having successfully complained and pleaded with God in regard to the wrongs committed against him, Jeremiah finds the courage to boldly query Yahweh about another matter that he has found perplexing and troubling.

? What issue was troubling Jeremiah?

In this query, Jeremiah finds reason to question Yahweh’s judgment and justice.

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?

Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

- ? How do you feel about Jeremiah’s question and his challenging God’s justice?
- ? What does it suggest to you about the relationship between Jeremiah and God?
- ? Have you had the confidence in God and the security in your relationship with him to make known to God your uncertainties, doubts, and even your doubts about the appropriateness of his actions?
- ? How is it that the “wicked” and “treacherous” do seem so often to “prosper” as to the things of this world?
- ? Why does God permit such “injustice,” especially when it so often comes at the expense of



- others, often innocent?
- ? Have you ever found yourself wondering about why things are as they are in this world?
  - ? How do we determine when our “complaint” about the injustice of economic inequality is just “envy,” or “sour grapes” on our part and when it is a legitimate and godly concern for the poor and the societal evils that the inequality produces?
2. Compare Jeremiah’s complaint about the apparent comfort of the wealthy with that of the Psalmist.
- “But as for me, my feet were almost gone;  
my steps had well nigh slipped.  
For I was envious at the foolish,  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
For there are no bands in their death:  
but their strength is firm.  
They are not in trouble as other men;  
neither are they plagued like other men.  
Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain;  
violence covereth them as a garment.  
Their eyes stand out with fatness:  
they have more than heart could wish” (Psalm 73.<sup>2-7</sup>).
- ? What additional thoughts, feelings, impressions, and life-direction do you glean from this passage?
3. In verse four, Jeremiah indicates that the wicked behavior of the well-off is impacting nature, or, better, is impacting the economy.
- ? How does extreme wealth of some, always at the expense of others, negatively impact the economy?
  - ? How do you respond to the dangers that economic inequality present to society?

## Jeremiah 12.<sup>5-6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>If thou hast run with the footmen,  
and they have wearied thee,  
then how canst thou contend with horses?  
And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst,  
they wearied thee,  
then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?  
<sup>6</sup>For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father,  
even they have dealt treacherously with thee;  
yea, they have called a multitude after thee:  
believe them not,  
though they speak fair words unto thee.

## Questionary

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The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, has always intrigued and inspired me. He reveals more of his personal life, and more of his feelings about his life and ministry than any other writing prophet of the Old Testament.

Today's reading is the fourth of four passages that record the back and forth between Yahweh and Jeremiah. The dialogue looks like this:

Jeremiah	11. <sup>18-20</sup>
Yahweh	11. <sup>21-23</sup>
Jeremiah	12. <sup>1-4</sup>
Yahweh	12. <sup>5-6</sup>

In Jeremiah 11.<sup>18-20</sup>, Jeremiah complained to God about his treatment at the hands of his enemies. He asked God to avenge him. In 11.<sup>21-23</sup>, God replied to Jeremiah and promised that he would, indeed, avenge him. In 12.<sup>1-4</sup>, Jeremiah, having been assured of the Lord's protection against his enemies, found the courage to boldly query Yahweh about another matter that he had found perplexing and troubling. In this query, Jeremiah finds reason to question Yahweh's judgment and justice in regard to the comfortable life that the wicked live. In today's reading, Yahweh offers his response to Jeremiah's question.

1. In answering Jeremiah's questions, Yahweh asks his own question.

“If thou hast run with the footmen,  
and they have wearied thee,  
then how canst thou contend with horses?”

- ? What is the point of this question?
- ? How do you feel about Yahweh's reply to Jeremiah that if he thinks his trials and irritations are difficult now... “You ain't seen nothing yet”?
- ? How would you respond if, after expressing your heartfelt worries, God told you that you didn't know the half of it and that things would get worse yet?
- ? How would you characterize Yahweh's overall reply to Jeremiah?
- ? Does Yahweh directly answer Jeremiah's second question about the prosperity of the wicked? Why did he leave it unaddressed?
- ? How compassionate is Yahweh's reply?

2. In this exchange, Yahweh's final warning is:

“believe them not,  
though they speak fair words unto thee.”

- ? How do you suppose Jeremiah felt about the fact that he could not trust anything he heard others say?
- ? How is our current culture in regard to being honorable and truth-telling?
- ? Having seen the entire back and forth conversation between Jeremiah and Yahweh in 11.<sup>18</sup> through 12.<sup>6</sup>, what principles do you take from the encounter?
- ? What do you learn about your own prayer life from the back and forth between Jeremiah and Yahweh?

## Jeremiah 14.<sup>1-6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth.

<sup>2</sup>“Judah mourneth,  
and the gates thereof languish;  
they are black unto the ground;  
and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up.

<sup>3</sup>And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters:  
they came to the pits, and found no water;  
they returned with their vessels empty;  
they were ashamed and confounded,  
and covered their heads.

<sup>4</sup>Because the ground is chapt,  
for there was no rain in the earth,  
the plowmen were ashamed,  
they covered their heads.

<sup>5</sup>Yea, the hind also calved in the field,  
and forsook it, because there was no grass.

<sup>6</sup>And the wild asses did stand in the high places,  
they snuffed up the wind like dragons;  
their eyes did fail,  
because there was no grass.

## Questionary

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Today’s reading is the first of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

14. <sup>2-6</sup>	Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah
14. <sup>7-9</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate
14. <sup>10-12</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah
14. <sup>13</sup>	Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy
14. <sup>14-16</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
14. <sup>17-18</sup>	Yahweh shares another lamentation
14. <sup>19-22</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate
15. <sup>1-9</sup>	Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment
15. <sup>10</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
15. <sup>11-14</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
15. <sup>15-18</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
15. <sup>19-21</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah

1. Today’s reading represents a lament that Yahweh revealed to the prophet, uttered because of an extended drought.
  - ? What are your thoughts about God composing and then revealing a lament for Jeremiah to share with his people?
  - ? What do you learn about the nation?
2. Several images are utilized to depict the extent of the draught.
  - ? What are those images?
3. The sort of imagery that we see here, invites readers to respond emotionally, and to use their imagination to create a whole story of their own based upon the imagery. Use your imagination to create a story based upon the following imagery.

“Children, sent to get water, return home with empty vessels.”

- ? What do the children say upon returning empty handed?
  - ? What do the parents say?
  - ? What are the facial expressions and body language of the parents?
  - ? What thoughts and worries pass through the parents' minds?
  - ? What conversation takes place between the mother and father?
  - ? Now, do so with each image found in the lament.
  - ? What do you see and feel when you envision the deer abandon its newborn because there is no pasturage to eat?
  - ? What do you see and feel when you see the donkey standing on a barren height struggling to breathe?
4. Two times we hear of individuals being “ashamed” and covering their head.
- ? What do you see in your mind when you read this?
  - ? Does the image you see change at all if we read “experience failure” for “ashamed”?
- ? How do you feel about the poetic skills exhibited in the lament?
  - ? Do they belong to Jeremiah or Yahweh? Why do you answer as you do?
  - ? How much “freedom,” “agency,” and “responsibility” does a prophet have in shaping the form that the revelation he has received from God takes?

## Jeremiah 14.<sup>7-9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>“O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us,  
do thou it for thy name’s sake:  
for our backslidings are many;  
we have sinned against thee.

<sup>8</sup>O the hope of Israel,  
the saviour thereof in time of trouble,  
why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land,  
and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?

<sup>9</sup>Why shouldest thou be as a man astonished,  
as a mighty man that cannot save?

Yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us,  
and we are called by thy name; leave us not.”

## Questionary

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Today’s reading is the second of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

14. <sup>2-6</sup>	Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah
14. <sup>7-9</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate
14. <sup>10-12</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah
14. <sup>13</sup>	Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy
14. <sup>14-16</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
14. <sup>17-18</sup>	Yahweh shares another lamentation
14. <sup>19-22</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate
15. <sup>1-9</sup>	Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment
15. <sup>10</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
15. <sup>11-14</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
15. <sup>15-18</sup>	Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
15. <sup>19-21</sup>	Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In today’s reading, we hear a response.

1. Traditionally, there have been two different approaches to the response. Some hear it as one coming from the people of Judah. For reasons that will become clear later, another hears in the response the voice of Jeremiah advocating for his people, offering a repentant tone that he wished would come from the nation.  
? Which of these two seems most likely to you? Why do you answer as you do?
2. The response to Yahweh’s lament begins with a confession of sin.  
? How do you feel about the confession?  
? Does it seem sincere? What makes you answer as you do?  
? Do you hear in it, Judah’s remorse for sin, or Jeremiah’s wishful advocacy of Judah—his expression of confession that he wishes were in the hearts and on the lips of Judah?
3. After the confession of sins, iniquities, and backslidings, the speaker asks Yahweh several related questions.
  - Why do you act like a stranger?
  - Why do act like a stranger staying only one night?
  - Why does it seem that the draught has taken you by surprise?
  - Why do you seem unable to rescue?

- ? How do you feel about these questions?
  - ? Do they seem “respectful” and “honest”? Or do they seem “disrespectful” and “belligerent”? Why do you feel as you do?
4. Today’s passage ends with a plea for relief from the draught.
- ? What is the basis for the request for help?
  - ? We will find in upcoming readings how Yahweh feels about this response, but, for now, what are your feelings about the response to the lament that Yahweh revealed?

## Jeremiah 14.<sup>10-12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Thus saith the LORD unto this people,  
Thus have they loved to wander,  
they have not refrained their feet,  
therefore the LORD doth not accept them;  
he will now remember their iniquity,  
and visit their sins.”

<sup>11</sup>Then said the LORD unto me, “Pray not for this people for their good. <sup>12</sup>When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.”

## Q

uestionary

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Today’s reading is the third of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 14. <sup>2-6</sup>   | Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah                                      |
| 14. <sup>7-9</sup>   | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate   |
| 14. <sup>10-12</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah                         |
| 14. <sup>13</sup>    | Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy                                       |
| 14. <sup>14-16</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 14. <sup>17-18</sup> | Yahweh shares another lamentation   |
| 14. <sup>19-22</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate                                    |
| 15. <sup>1-9</sup>   | Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment |
| 15. <sup>10</sup>    | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>11-14</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 15. <sup>15-18</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>19-21</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah                            |

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught.

In today’s reading, Yahweh responds to the reply, and makes a direct demand of Jeremiah.

1. Whether one decides that the initial reply to the lament, with its confession of sin, was that of Judah or Jeremiah speaking for Judah (we consider the second the likelier), Yahweh rejects the confession of sin, and refuses to forgive Judah its sins.
  - ? If the confession represented that of the people, why do you suppose the confession was rejected?
  - ? How do you feel about its rejection, and Yahweh’s refusal to forgive Judah?
  - ? If the confession represented Jeremiah’s wishful advocacy of the people, how do you feel about its rejection and Yahweh’s refusal to forgive Judah?
2. Yahweh commands Jeremiah, “Pray not for this people for their good.” Some see this command as a response to Jeremiah’s attempt to pray for his people in verses 7-9. The requirement that Jeremiah not pray for his people might be surprising and seem harsh.
  - ? Why do you think Yahweh would command Jeremiah to not pray for Judah?
  - ? How do you think this felt to Jeremiah? Was it an easy command to follow, or did he struggle with it?
  - ? How do you feel about this command?
  - ? How would you feel if you were told not to pray for someone who was struggling with sin and whom you love much?



? Would you obey?

## Jeremiah 14.<sup>13-16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Then said I, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, the prophets say unto them, ‘Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place.’”

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said unto me, “The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. <sup>15</sup>Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say,

‘Sword and famine shall not be in this land;’

“By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. <sup>16</sup>And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.

## Questionary

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Today’s reading is the fourth of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- 14.<sup>2-6</sup> Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah
- 14.<sup>7-9</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate
- 14.<sup>10-12</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah
- 14.<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy
- 14.<sup>14-16</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
- 14.<sup>17-18</sup> Yahweh shares another lamentation
- 14.<sup>19-22</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate
- 15.<sup>1-9</sup> Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment
- 15.<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
- 15.<sup>11-14</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
- 15.<sup>15-18</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
- 15.<sup>19-21</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh’s replies by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah.

In today’s reading, Jeremiah replies to Yahweh’s demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responds to Jeremiah’s justification for his continued advocacy.

1. One way to read Jeremiah’s reply in verse 13 is to hear it as Jeremiah’s justification for wanting to continue to pray or advocate for his people.
  - ? If read in this way, what is Jeremiah’s excuse for praying for the people?
  - ? Considering Yahweh’s previous command, how do you feel about Jeremiah offering a reason for why he should be allowed to continue his advocacy for the people?
2. Jeremiah seems to suggest that Judah has rejected Yahweh’s call to repent because some prophets are prophesying future success. Such prophecy might reasonably imply to the people that they are, in fact, following Yahweh’s directives.
  - ? What justification do you suppose these prophets are finding and offering for their optimistic predictions?
  - ? How do you feel about Jeremiah presenting Yahweh with these prophets’ words as a reason to allow him to continue advocating for his people?
  - ? What does it suggest about Jeremiah that he wishes to continue his advocacy of the people?

- ? Is he more loyal to Yahweh or to the people?
- 3. Without, here, responding directly to Jeremiah's inclination to continue his advocacy, Yahweh does respond to the claims being made by the prophets.
  - ? How does Yahweh feel about these prophets?
  - ? How will Yahweh deal with these false prophets and their false prophecies?
  - ? Why did Yahweh feel the need to inform Jeremiah of these things? Was Jeremiah unsure about other prophets' messages? His own message? Is it simply information for information's sake? Is Jeremiah meant to pass this information on to the people?

## Jeremiah 14.<sup>17-18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them;  
‘Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day,  
and let them not cease:  
for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach,  
with a very grievous blow.  
<sup>18</sup>If I go forth into the field,  
then behold the slain with the sword!  
And if I enter into the city,  
then behold them that are sick with famine!  
Yea, both the prophet and the priest  
go about into a land that they know not.’”

### Questionary

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Today’s reading is the fifth of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 14. <sup>2-6</sup>   | Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah                                      |
| 14. <sup>7-9</sup>   | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate   |
| 14. <sup>10-12</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah                         |
| 14. <sup>13</sup>    | Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy                                       |
| 14. <sup>14-16</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 14. <sup>17-18</sup> | Yahweh shares another lamentation   |
| 14. <sup>19-22</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate                                    |
| 15. <sup>1-9</sup>   | Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment |
| 15. <sup>10</sup>    | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>11-14</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 15. <sup>15-18</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>19-21</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah                            |

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh’s replied by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah. In the fourth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh’s demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responded to Jeremiah’s justification for his continued advocacy.

In today’s reading, we return to lamentation, which seems to be a direct response to Jeremiah’s report concerning the false prophets’ assertion that Jerusalem will not experience famine or attack by its enemies.

1. The lamentation found in today’s reading may be that of God himself. It may be that of Jeremiah. It might also be that of the people.  
? Consider each of these possibilities. What do you feel and learn if the lament is that of  
God?  
Jeremiah?  
The people?
2. We don’t normally, of course, think of God being pleased when the wicked suffer. Yet we might, if we examine our own feelings, feel a certain “satisfaction” when the wicked seem to get their comeuppance. We might, if we are honest, even suppose that God might feel a similar “satisfaction.”

- ? How does this lament, temper our own feelings and serve to correct our sometimes misrepresentation of God and his feelings and attitudes?
3. The imagery of these verses, unfortunately became more than imagery. It represents an actual and terrible occurrence.
- ? What, do you suppose, God felt when he saw the many dead, slain by sword outside the city or the many inside the city dying of starvation?
  - ? What, do you suppose, Jeremiah felt when he saw the many dead, slain by sword outside the city or the many inside the city dying of starvation?
  - ? What, do you suppose, an individual inhabitant of the city felt when he saw the many dead, slain by sword outside the city or the many inside the city dying of starvation?
  - ? What do you feel when you consider these horrific sights, sounds, smells, etc.?

## Jeremiah 14.<sup>19-22</sup>

- <sup>19</sup>“Hast thou utterly rejected Judah?  
Hath thy soul lothed Zion?  
Why hast thou smitten us,  
and there is no healing for us?  
We looked for peace, and there is no good;  
and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!  
<sup>20</sup>We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness,  
and the iniquity of our fathers:  
for we have sinned against thee.  
<sup>21</sup>Do not abhor us, for thy name’s sake,  
do not disgrace the throne of thy glory:  
remember, break not thy covenant with us.  
<sup>22</sup>Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain?  
or can the heavens give showers?  
Art not thou he, O LORD our God?  
Therefore we will wait upon thee:  
for thou hast made all these things.”

## Q

uestionary

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Today’s reading is the sixth of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 14. <sup>2-6</sup>   | Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah                                      |
| 14. <sup>7-9</sup>   | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate   |
| 14. <sup>10-12</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah                         |
| 14. <sup>13</sup>    | Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy                                       |
| 14. <sup>14-16</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 14. <sup>17-18</sup> | Yahweh shares another lamentation   |
| 14. <sup>19-22</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate                                    |
| 15. <sup>1-9</sup>   | Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment |
| 15. <sup>10</sup>    | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>11-14</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 15. <sup>15-18</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>19-21</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah                            |

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh’s replied by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah. In the fourth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh’s demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responded to Jeremiah’s justification for his continued advocacy. In the fifth reading (17-18), we returned to lamentation, which seemed to be a direct response to Jeremiah’s report concerning the false prophets’ assertion that Jerusalem will not experience famine or attack by its enemies.

1. In today’s reading, Jeremiah, having heard in the lamentation of the looming catastrophe, again advocates for Judah by acting as voice for the nation.
  - ? What other instances can you identify when prophets advocated for their followers?
  - ? What “tone” do you hear in the initial three questions found in verse 19 and the complaint that immediately follows them?
  - ? Have you thought to pose, or have you posed such difficult, almost challenging questions to

God?

2. In asking the two questions found in verse 22, we return to the subject of draught with which the entire dialogue began.
  - ? What is meant by the “vanities of the Gentiles”?
  - ? Keeping in mind that one of the principle Jewish sins upon which Jeremiah focuses is idolatry, what do you think is Jeremiah’s intent in posing these two questions?

## Jeremiah 15.<sup>1-4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Then said the LORD unto me,  
“Though Moses and Samuel stood before me,  
yet my mind could not be toward this people:  
cast them out of my sight,  
and let them go forth.

<sup>2</sup>And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee,  
‘Whither shall we go forth?’

Then thou shalt tell them,  
Thus saith the LORD;

‘Such as are for death, to death;  
and such as are for the sword, to the sword;  
and such as are for the famine, to the famine;  
and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.’

<sup>3</sup>“And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the LORD: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy. <sup>4</sup>And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.

## Questionary

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Today’s reading is the seventh of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 14. <sup>2-6</sup>   | Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah                                      |
| 14. <sup>7-9</sup>   | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate   |
| 14. <sup>10-12</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah                         |
| 14. <sup>13</sup>    | Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy                                       |
| 14. <sup>14-16</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 14. <sup>17-18</sup> | Yahweh shares another lamentation   |
| 14. <sup>19-22</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate                                    |
| 15. <sup>1-9</sup>   | Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment |
| 15. <sup>10</sup>    | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>11-14</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 15. <sup>15-18</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>19-21</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah                            |

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh’s replied by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah. In the fourth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh’s demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responded to Jeremiah’s justification for his continued advocacy. In the fifth reading (17-18), we returned to lamentation, which seemed to be a direct response to Jeremiah’s report concerning the false prophets’ assertion that Jerusalem will not experience famine or attack by its enemies. In the sixth reading (19-22), Jeremiah, having heard in the lamentation of the looming catastrophe, again advocated for Judah by acting as voice for the nation.

In today’s reading, we hear Yahweh’s response to Jeremiah’s advocacy for Judah.

1. In 14.<sup>19-22</sup>, Jeremiah offered what we might call “an advocate’s prayer.” Consider this portion of Yahweh’s response to Jeremiah’s advocacy for Judah.



“Though Moses and Samuel stood before me,  
yet my mind could not be toward this people.”

- ? How do you feel about Yahweh’s continued resistance to his people?
  - ? How do you think Jeremiah feels about Yahweh’s resistance?
2. Yahweh seems to suggest that even if greater prophets than Jeremiah—Moses and Samuel—advocated for Judah, Yahweh still would resist his people.
- ? How do you think Jeremiah feels, knowing that Yahweh deems him to be inferior to the two prophets mentioned prophets—“if these two couldn’t convince me, what makes you think you can?”?
3. Jeremiah is commanded to stop advocating for the people and to go back out with the uncompromising message of catastrophe by four means. In a famous passage, Jeremiah tells us how he feels about the punitive message he has been told to deliver.

“O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived:  
thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed:  
I am in derision daily,  
every one mocketh me.  
For since I spake, I cried out,  
I cried violence and spoil;  
because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me,  
and a derision, daily.  
Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of him,  
nor speak any more in his name.’  
But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire  
shut up in my bones,  
and I was weary with forbearing,  
and I could not stay” (Jeremiah 20.7-9).

- ? Can you sense Jeremiah’s frustration?
  - ? How do you feel about him feeling this way?
  - ? How do you feel about him expressing his frustration so openly and directly to God?
  - ? What does this teach you about prayer, about honesty in prayer, about God’s expectation that we be honest, and about God acceptance of honest prayer?
4. If you are unsure about the character and actions of the Judean king, Manasseh, you can review the following passages: 2 Kings 21.<sup>1-18</sup> and 2 Chronicles 33.<sup>1-20</sup>.
5. Yahweh threatens Judah’s citizenry with four things:

The sword to slay  
Dogs to tear  
Fowls of the heaven to devour and destroy  
Beasts of the earth to devour and destroy

- ? What is the significance of each of these threats?
- ? What does it tell you about the number of citizens who will die that their corpses will be eaten by dogs, birds, and wild animals?
- ? How would you feel to be told that the dead would be so numerous that you would not be buried and that your body would become food for animals and birds?

This actually came to fulfillment. We should never allow scripture to become a caricature of itself. Therefore, though uncomfortable, imagine the scene that met survivor’s senses inside and outside the cities at the time of this threat’s fulfillment.

- ? How do you feel? What are you thinking?

## Jeremiah 15.<sup>5-9</sup>

<sup>5</sup>“For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem?  
Or who shall bemoan thee?  
Or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest?  
<sup>6</sup>Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD,  
thou art gone backward:  
therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee,  
and destroy thee;  
I am weary with repenting.  
<sup>7</sup>And I will fan them with a fan  
in the gates of the land;  
I will bereave them of children,  
I will destroy my people,  
since they return not from their ways.  
<sup>8</sup>Their widows are increased to me  
above the sand of the seas:  
I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men  
a spoiler at noonday:  
I have caused him to fall upon it suddenly,  
and terrors upon the city.  
<sup>9</sup>She that hath borne seven languisheth:  
she hath given up the ghost;  
her sun is gone down while it was yet day:  
she hath been ashamed and confounded:  
and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword  
before their enemies, saith the LORD.”

## Questionary

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Today's reading is the eighth of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- 14.<sup>2-6</sup> Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah
- 14.<sup>7-9</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah's advocate
- 14.<sup>10-12</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah
- 14.<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy
- 14.<sup>14-16</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
- 14.<sup>17-18</sup> Yahweh shares another lamentation
- 14.<sup>19-22</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah's advocate
- 15.<sup>1-9</sup> Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah's sins and punishment
- 15.<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
- 15.<sup>11-14</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah
- 15.<sup>15-18</sup> Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life
- 15.<sup>19-21</sup> Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh's replied by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah. In the fourth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh's demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responded to Jeremiah's justification for his continued advocacy. In the fifth reading (17-18), we returned to lamentation, which seemed to be a direct response to Jeremiah's report concerning the

false prophets' assertion that Jerusalem will not experience famine or attack by its enemies. In the sixth reading (19-22), Jeremiah, having heard in the lamentation of the looming catastrophe, again advocated for Judah by acting as voice for the nation. In the seventh reading (15.1-4), we heard Yahweh's response to Jeremiah's advocacy for Judah.

In today's reading, Yahweh continues to outline the catastrophe that is quickly approaching Judah and its citizenry.

1. In verse 5, Yahweh asks three questions.
    - ? What is the tone of these questions?
    - ? How do you feel about Yahweh posing them?
  2. In verse 3, Yahweh announces "I am weary with repenting."
    - ? How do you understand this statement? With what is he weary?
    - ? How would you understand this statement if we read "I have grown tired of relenting?"
  3. In verses 8 and 9, Yahweh focuses his attention upon the distresses that women, especially widows and mothers, will experience due to Judah's apostasy and during the coming collapse. He goes so far to describe how some die of heartbreak.
    - ? Why do you think he focuses on the women?
    - ? How do you feel about this focus?
- ? How do you feel as you read the entire description of Judah's looming catastrophe?

## Jeremiah 15.<sup>10-14</sup>

<sup>10</sup>“Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me  
a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!  
I have neither lent on usury,  
nor men have lent to me on usury;  
yet every one of them doth curse me.”

<sup>11</sup>The LORD said,  
“Verily it shall be well with thy remnant;  
verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil  
and in the time of affliction.

<sup>12</sup>Shall iron break  
the northern iron and the steel?

<sup>13</sup>Thy substance and thy treasures  
will I give to the spoil without price,  
and that for all thy sins,  
even in all thy borders.

<sup>14</sup>And I will make thee to pass with thine enemies  
into a land which thou knowest not:  
for a fire is kindled in mine anger,  
which shall burn upon you.”

## Q

uestionary

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Today’s reading is the ninth of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 14. <sup>2-6</sup>   | Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah                                      |
| 14. <sup>7-9</sup>   | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah’s advocate   |
| 14. <sup>10-12</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah                         |
| 14. <sup>13</sup>    | Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy                                       |
| 14. <sup>14-16</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 14. <sup>17-18</sup> | Yahweh shares another lamentation   |
| 14. <sup>19-22</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah’s advocate                                    |
| 15. <sup>1-9</sup>   | Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah’s sins and punishment |
| 15. <sup>10</sup>    | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>11-14</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 15. <sup>15-18</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>19-21</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah                            |

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh’s replied by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah. In the fourth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh’s demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responded to Jeremiah’s justification for his continued advocacy. In the fifth reading (17-18), we returned to lamentation, which seemed to be a direct response to Jeremiah’s report concerning the false prophets’ assertion that Jerusalem will not experience famine or attack by its enemies. In the sixth reading (19-22), Jeremiah, having heard in the lamentation of the looming catastrophe, again advocated for Judah by acting as voice for the nation. In the seventh reading (15.<sup>1-4</sup>), we heard Yahweh’s response to Jeremiah’s advocacy for Judah. In the eighth reading (5-9), Yahweh continued to outline the catastrophe that was quickly bearing down on Judah and its citizenry, emphasizing

especially the impact that it would have on women.

1. In verse 10, Jeremiah offers a self-pitying lament after Yahweh has so sternly rejected his advocacy in Judah's behalf, and has so graphically described the catastrophe that is bearing down on Judah and its citizenry.
  - ? How do you feel about the feelings Jeremiah expresses?
  - ? What is the significance of Jeremiah's highlighting the fact that he does not engage in the lending or borrowing of money at interest as a principle sign of his innocence?
  - ? What does this tell you about his and Yahweh's attitude toward money lending?

“If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury” (Exodus 22.<sup>25</sup>).
  - ? What are the reasons, do you think, for the Lord's prohibition against lending money at interest?
  - ? What does it say about the way we are supposed to feel and relate to those poorer than us?
2. Verses 11-14 represent Yahweh's reply to Jeremiah's lament. After speaking comfortingly in Jeremiah in verse 11—promising him that as he is ill spoken of at present, he will be well thought of at some future time—Yahweh redirects his message to Israel, presumably so that Jeremiah can pass it on to Judah.
  - ? What is the meaning of the symbolic “northern iron and the steel”?
  - ? What country will come from the north and carry Judah into captivity?
  - ? What does it mean that Babylon will spoil Judah “without price”?
  - ? How is it appropriate that Judah will be spoiled of all its treasures?
  - ? What has been Judah's principle interest, and received most of its attention—and is a source of much of its sin?

## Jeremiah 15.<sup>15-18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>O LORD, thou knowest:  
remember me, and visit me,  
and revenge me of my persecutors;  
take me not away in thy longsuffering:  
know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke.  
<sup>16</sup>Thy words were found, and I did eat them;  
and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart:  
for I am called by thy name,  
O LORD God of hosts.  
<sup>17</sup>I sat not in the assembly of the mockers,  
nor rejoiced;  
I sat alone because of thy hand:  
for thou hast filled me with indignation.  
<sup>18</sup>Why is my pain perpetual,  
and my wound incurable,  
which refuseth to be healed?  
Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar,  
and as waters that fail?

## Q

uestionary

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Today's reading is the tenth of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 14. <sup>2-6</sup>   | Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah                                      |
| 14. <sup>7-9</sup>   | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah's advocate   |
| 14. <sup>10-12</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah                         |
| 14. <sup>13</sup>    | Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy                                       |
| 14. <sup>14-16</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 14. <sup>17-18</sup> | Yahweh shares another lamentation   |
| 14. <sup>19-22</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah's advocate                                    |
| 15. <sup>1-9</sup>   | Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah's sins and punishment |
| 15. <sup>10</sup>    | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>11-14</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 15. <sup>15-18</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>19-21</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah                            |

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh's replied by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah. In the fourth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh's demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responded to Jeremiah's justification for his continued advocacy. In the fifth reading (17-18), we returned to lamentation, which seemed to be a direct response to Jeremiah's report concerning the false prophets' assertion that Jerusalem will not experience famine or attack by its enemies. In the sixth reading (19-22), Jeremiah, having heard in the lamentation of the looming catastrophe, again advocated for Judah by acting as voice for the nation. In the seventh reading (15.<sup>1-4</sup>), we heard Yahweh's response to Jeremiah's advocacy for Judah. In the eighth reading (5-9), Yahweh continued to outline the catastrophe that was quickly bearing down on Judah and its citizenry, emphasizing especially the impact that it would have on women. In the ninth, Jeremiah offered a self-pitying lament after Yahweh had so sternly rejected his advocacy in Judah's behalf to which Yahweh

responded with personal comfort and a reaffirmation of the looming national catastrophe.

1. In today's reading, Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, at times, with brutal honesty, complaining about the tribulation he is forced to endure because of his commitment to preaching Yahweh's message of repentance and looming disaster to a rebellious Judah.

? How do you feel about Jeremiah's questioning of Yahweh's truthfulness and fidelity toward him?

? What does Jeremiah mean by saying that Yahweh has "filled me with indignation"?

2. Jeremiah complains about having "sat alone because of thy hand." To appreciate the solitary life Jeremiah lived at Yahweh's command, consider the following passages.

"The word of the LORD came also unto me, saying, 'Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place'" (16.<sup>1-2</sup>).

"For thus saith the LORD, 'Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them: for I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the LORD, *even* lovingkindness and mercies. Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried, neither shall *men* lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them: neither shall *men* tear *themselves* for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall *men* give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother'" (16.<sup>5-7</sup>).

"Thou shalt not also go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; 'Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride'" (16.<sup>8-9</sup>).

? How do you feel about Yahweh asking Jeremiah to make such inter-personal sacrifices?

? How does Jeremiah serve as a type of Judah's future experiences?

3. In speaking of the message Yahweh has given him to deliver to Judah, Jeremiah says that it "was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart."

? How could Jeremiah feel this way about such a destructive and threatening message as was that which he was given to deliver?

? In general, are the scriptures "the joy and rejoicing of your heart"?

? What could you do to grow your appreciation for scripture?

## Jeremiah 15.<sup>19-21</sup>

- <sup>19</sup>Therefore thus saith the LORD,  
“If thou return, then will I bring thee again,  
and thou shalt stand before me:  
and if thou take forth the precious from the vile,  
thou shalt be as my mouth:  
let them return unto thee;  
but return not thou unto them.  
<sup>20</sup>And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall:  
and they shall fight against thee,  
but they shall not prevail against thee:  
for I am with thee to save thee  
and to deliver thee, saith the LORD.  
<sup>21</sup>And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked,  
and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible.

## Q

uestionary

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Today's reading is the final of eleven readings taken from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> chapters of Jeremiah. These two chapters represent a back and forth dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. Following is an outline of the dialogue.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 14. <sup>2-6</sup>   | Yahweh reveals an inspired lamentation with Jeremiah                                      |
| 14. <sup>7-9</sup>   | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh as Judah's advocate   |
| 14. <sup>10-12</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, informs him not to advocate for Judah                         |
| 14. <sup>13</sup>    | Jeremiah replies to Yahweh, justifying his advocacy                                       |
| 14. <sup>14-16</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 14. <sup>17-18</sup> | Yahweh shares another lamentation   |
| 14. <sup>19-22</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh, again as Judah's advocate                                    |
| 15. <sup>1-9</sup>   | Yahweh again tells Jeremiah to cease his advocacy; reiterates Judah's sins and punishment |
| 15. <sup>10</sup>    | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>11-14</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah  |
| 15. <sup>15-18</sup> | Jeremiah responds to Yahweh by bemoaning his life   |
| 15. <sup>19-21</sup> | Yahweh replies to Jeremiah, promising his support for Jeremiah                            |

In the first reading (1-6), Yahweh revealed a lamentation for Judah to sing concerning an ongoing draught. In the second reading (7-9), Jeremiah, advocating for Judah, offered a reply to the lament. This reply contained a confession of sin and a plea for relief from the draught. In the third reading (10-12), Yahweh's replied by demanding that Jeremiah cease praying for Judah. In the fourth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh's demand that he not advocate for his people (verse 13). Then, in 14-16, Yahweh responded to Jeremiah's justification for his continued advocacy. In the fifth reading (17-18), we returned to lamentation, which seemed to be a direct response to Jeremiah's report concerning the false prophets' assertion that Jerusalem will not experience famine or attack by its enemies. In the sixth reading (19-22), Jeremiah, having heard in the lamentation of the looming catastrophe, again advocated for Judah by acting as voice for the nation. In the seventh reading (15.<sup>1-4</sup>), we heard Yahweh's response to Jeremiah's advocacy for Judah. In the eighth reading (5-9), Yahweh continued to outline the catastrophe that was quickly bearing down on Judah and its citizenry, emphasizing especially the impact that it would have on women. In the ninth, Jeremiah offered a self-pitying lament after Yahweh had so sternly rejected his advocacy in Judah's behalf to which Yahweh responded with personal comfort and a reaffirmation of the looming national catastrophe. In the tenth reading, Jeremiah replied to Yahweh, at times, with brutal honesty, complaining about the tribulation he was forced to endure because of his commitment to preaching Yahweh's message of repentance and looming disaster to a rebellious Judah.



1. In today's reading, Yahweh invites Jeremiah to repent, gives him a warning, and extends promises.
    - ? Identify the language that reflects a call for Jeremiah to repent.
    - ? Identify the warning.
    - ? Identify the promises.
  - ? How do you feel about Yahweh's warning that Jeremiah is not to soften toward Judah even if they soften toward him?
  - ? Why would he make such a demand?
  2. Jeremiah is promised that he will be allowed to continue to serve as Yahweh's mouthpiece only "if thou take forth the precious from the vile."
    - ? What does this mean?
- The New International Version reads, "if you utter worthy, not worthless, words?"
- ? How does this alter or clarify Yahweh's statement here?
  - ? Does this have implications about Yahweh's views concerning Jeremiah's complaints? If so, what are those implications?

## **J**eremiah 17.<sup>1</sup>

The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron,  
and with the point of a diamond:  
it is graven upon the table of their heart,  
and upon the horns of your altars.

### **Q**uestionary

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- ? What does it say about the seriousness of Judah's sins that it is recorded with an "iron pen" and diamond?
- ? What is the significance of such hardened instruments being used to record Judah's sins on the human heart?
- ? What does it suggest about Judah's religious institutions that such hardened tools are used to record Judah's sins on the "sacred" altars?

**Jeremiah 17.**<sup>11</sup>— just scripture

As the partridge sitteth on eggs,  
and hatcheth them not;  
so he that getteth riches,  
and not by right,  
shall leave them in the midst of his days,  
and at his end shall be a fool.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? Think for a moment about a bird that sacrifices its own comfort day after day to sit on its eggs. Think upon that same bird as it abandons its unhatched eggs. Think of those eggs abandoned in the nest to rot and decay. Now consider the immense wealth that so many have accumulated by abusing and oppressing others.
- ? How do such wealthy—the majority of the wealthy—come off looking like “fools”?

**Jeremiah 21.**<sup>11-12</sup>— just scripture

<sup>11</sup>And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, “Hear ye the word of the LORD; O house of David, thus saith the LORD;

<sup>12</sup>Execute judgment in the morning,  
and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor,  
lest my fury go out like fire,  
and burn that none can quench it,  
because of the evil of your doings.

**Q**uestionary

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1. Yahweh demands that political leaders—the king of Judah in this case—“deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor.”
  - ? What type of activities would you include under the rubric of “spoiling”?
  - ? “Oppressors” come in the form of both individuals and institutions. What examples of both individual and institutional oppression would you point to in your own society?
2. The fact that the Lord is addressing the political leader indicates that the “deliverance” that the Lord expects from him is less private and more public—it is a matter of public policy.
  - ? How can public policy protect the vulnerable from the more powerful—oppressor in God’s language?
  - ? How well do your society’s public policies “deliver” the “spoiled” from the individuals and institutions that oppress them?
  - ? How well do American public policies “deliver” the “spoiled” from the individuals and institutions that oppress them?
  - ? To what examples can you point in which U.S. public policy oppresses vulnerable people rather than proactively “delivering” them?
3. When political leaders do not legislate in a manner that delivers the vulnerable from being spoiled by oppressive individuals and institutions, they can expect God’s “fury” to “go out like fire.”
  - ? How do you feel about such a strong response from God due to unjust economic oppression and inequality?
  - ? What did Yahweh’s “fury” look like in the case of ancient Judah?
  - ? How safe from such “fury” of the Lord is your society? American society?

**Jeremiah 22.**<sup>3-5</sup>— just scripture

<sup>3</sup>Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. <sup>4</sup>For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. <sup>5</sup>But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.

**Q**uestionary

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? Who are today's "spoiled" that you as an individual and the nation as a public are obligated by covenant to "deliver"?

? Who are today's "oppressors" who are doing the spoiling? It isn't you is it? Your nation?

A just society is assured their a king will "enter in by the gates of this house." An unjust society is assured that their "house shall become desolate." In other words, a nation is assured of a continuation of government only if it is just.

? How do you feel knowing that social injustice will produce a collapse of government?

**Jeremiah 22.**<sup>13-14</sup>— just scripture

<sup>13</sup>Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness,  
and his chambers by wrong;  
that useth his neighbour's service without wages,  
and giveth him not for his work;

<sup>14</sup>That saith,  
'I will build me a wide house  
and large chambers,'  
And cutteth him out windows;  
and it is cieled with cedar,  
and painted with vermilion.

**Q**uestionary

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In the same breath, as it were, Jeremiah speaks of the wealthy cheating working people of their ability to support themselves on a fair wage, and the wealthy building themselves homes of the nicest and most expensive materials.

- ? What is the relationship between these two selfish practices?
- ? How does our society and its wealthy business owners, slight workers for their service to companies?

**Jeremiah 22.**<sup>15-17</sup>— just scripture

<sup>15</sup>Shalt thou reign,  
because thou closest thyself in cedar?

Did not thy father eat and drink,  
and do judgment and justice,  
and then it was well with him?

<sup>16</sup>He judged the cause of the poor and needy;  
then it was well with him:

was not this to know me?  
saith the LORD.

<sup>17</sup>But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for  
thy covetousness,  
and for to shed innocent blood,  
and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What is the significance of and a modern analogy to closing oneself “in cedar”?
- ? How do you feel about the fact that economic covetousness and violence are nearly always linked in scripture?
- ? Why does covetousness inevitably lead to violence?
- ? Why is advocating for “the poor and needy” the same as knowing God?

**J**eremiah 22.<sup>21</sup>— just scripture

I spake unto thee in thy prosperity;  
but thou saidst,  
‘I will not hear.’  
This hath been thy manner from thy youth,  
that thou obeyedst not my voice.

**Q**uestionary

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- ? What thoughts come to your mind and what feelings do you have when you consider that this criticism is aimed at the culture and the citizenry at large rather than any individual?
- ? That said, what would be said of your faithfulness to God at those times when things are going well for you?
- ? What can you do as an individual to influence society at large and encourage it to avoid the evil Jeremiah describes?



**Jeremiah 23.**<sup>16-17</sup>— just scripture

<sup>16</sup>Thus saith the LORD of hosts,  
Hearken not unto the words of the prophets  
that prophesy unto you:  
they make you vain:  
they speak a vision of their own heart,  
and not out of the mouth of the LORD.  
<sup>17</sup>They say still unto them that despise me,  
'The LORD hath said,  
Ye shall have peace;'  
And they say unto every one that walketh  
after the imagination of his own heart,  
'No evil shall come upon you.'

**Q**uestionary

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- ? How are American “Christian” leaders playing the role of false prophets in their unstinting support of the current president, a.k.a., Caligula?
- ? How does Caligula demonstrate that he “despises” God? Perhaps more accurately, how does he NOT “despise” God?
- ? How does he speak and act “after the imagination of his own heart”?
- ? How do these same false prophets “speak a vision of their own heart”?

Upon hearing the political pundits on radio and TV, any ancient time traveler to today’s society would think of them as “prophets.”

- ? What have politicians and pundits on the political right said and done in the past two weeks in relation to the coronavirus that would earn them the same criticism as the prophets of Jeremiah’s time?

## Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; <sup>5</sup>“Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; <sup>6</sup>take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. <sup>7</sup>And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.””

### Questionary

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In 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, removed Jehoiachin, three-month long king of Judah, from the Judean throne, carried Jehoiachin, along with a large population of Jews, into exile in Babylon, and placed the final Judean King, Zedekiah, upon the Judean throne.

Soon after this group of Jews had been taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. This letter is found in Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-23</sup>. Verses 24-28 represent a letter that Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile sent to Jerusalem’s temple priests in response to Jeremiah’s letter. Verses 31-32 represent Jeremiah’s response to Shemaiah’s letter.

We will examine the content of these communications over the course of seven readings, of which today’s is the first.

1. In his original letter, Jeremiah wrote to encourage the exiled Jews in Babylon to settle into Babylonian life for the long haul, as they would not be returning to Judah anytime soon.
  - ? Try to put yourself in the shoes of these exiled Jews. What would you think and how would you feel if, as an exile far from a home to which you longed to return, you read Jeremiah’s advice?
  - ? What, if anything, might it suggest to you about the intentions of God toward you? His feelings or affections for you?
2. Jeremiah counsels the exiled Jews in Babylon to “seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”
  - ? Again, putting yourself in the position of these exiled Jews, what would you think and how would you feel if, having been mercilessly removed from your home, you were counseled to pray for the peace of the very people who had treated you so ruthlessly?
3. Here, Jews are to pray for their enemies for their own benefit. Jesus extends the following invitation and counsel to his disciple:

“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.  
For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?  
Do not even the publicans the same?  
And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?  
(Matthew 5.<sup>44-47</sup>).

  - ? How is what Jesus asks of us different than what Jeremiah asked of the exiled Jews?
  - ? How is it harder?
  - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have as you contemplate praying for your enemies, not for your own welfare, but for theirs?

- ? What is Jesus teaching about God and his response to those who do not love and follow him when he informs us that when we think and act toward our enemies as he counsels here we are acting the part of “children of our Father which is in heaven?”
- ? What do you think and feel as you contemplate the four questions Jesus asks?
- ? Are you different in your love for others, especially “enemies” than the general population with which you are surrounded?
- ? How would these four questions be phrased in addressing an entire nation?
- ? How are these words of Jesus applied by nations in their relation one with another?
- ? Have you or do you now have a need to forgive someone who has offended you?
- ? What steps will you take to forgive and pray for them?

## Jeremiah 29.<sup>8-9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>“For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; ‘Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.

<sup>9</sup>For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD.’

### Questionary

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In 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, removed Jehoiachin, three-month long king of Judah, from the Judean throne, carried Jehoiachin, along with a large population of Jews, into exile in Babylon, and placed the final Judean King, Zedekiah, upon the Judean throne.

Soon after this group of Jews had been taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. This letter is found in Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-23</sup>. Verses 24-28 represent a letter that Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile sent to Jerusalem’s temple priests in response to Jeremiah’s letter. Verses 31-32 represent Jeremiah’s response to Shemaiah’s letter.

We are examining the content of these communications over the course of seven readings. Today’s reading is the second. In the first reading (4-7), Jeremiah wrote to encourage the exiled Jews in Babylon to settle into Babylonian life for the long haul, as they would not be returning to Judah anytime soon. To assure their security, he suggested that the exiled Jews pray for the security of their captors.

1. In today’s reading, we learn that Jeremiah’s predictions concerning the length of the Babylonian exile were not the only predictions being offered to and heard by the exiles. Jeremiah warns the exiled Jews about paying heed to the predictions of those prophets among them who are, in fact, false prophets and false predictors, telling the people nothing more than what they want to hear.  
? What, do you suppose, were those false prophets telling the Babylonian exiles about their future?

Here is an example of the false prophecy the exiled Jews were hearing. This prophecy was uttered by a prophet by the name of Hananiah.

“Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, ‘I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD’s house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon” (Jeremiah 28.<sup>2-4</sup>).

- ? What would you think, how would you feel, and what would you do if you were faced with these opposing views—one very hopeful that makes appeal to your very desires (the exile will last only two years) uttered by a prophet, Hananiah, with a long-maintained “line of authority;” the other a somewhat pessimistic view contrary to your hopes for the future (you will be in Babylon for 70 years, long enough that some of you will live and die here) uttered by a prophet, Jeremiah, who was outside official “lines of authority” and banned by temple authorities?
- ? In what ways are you faced with similar dilemmas today?
- ? Do you even consider the dilemma as possible today?
- ? Who are today’s prophets that offer false optimism and expectations as they tell members of their society what they want to hear?
- ? Who are today’s prophets that offer a more “pessimistic” picture of the future?
- ? How will you decide between them?
- ? How does the following passage apply to today’s passage?

“And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say:  
‘All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well’...” (2 Nephi 28.<sup>21</sup>).

- ? What are modern examples of false and carnal securities that we are sometimes offered?
- ? How do we know when we are responding to a message because it appeals to our prejudices, our beliefs, our hopes, and/or our fears?

## Jeremiah 29.<sup>10-11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>“For thus saith the LORD, ‘That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. <sup>11</sup>For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

### Questionary

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In 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, removed Jehoiachin, three-month long king of Judah, from the Judean throne, carried Jehoiachin, along with a large population of Jews, into exile in Babylon, and placed the final Judean King, Zedekiah, upon the Judean throne.

Soon after this group of Jews had been taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. This letter is found in Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-23</sup>. Verses 24-28 represent a letter that Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile sent to Jerusalem’s temple priests in response to Jeremiah’s letter. Verses 31-32 represent Jeremiah’s response to Shemaiah’s letter.

We are examining the content of these communications over the course of seven readings. Today’s reading is the third. In the first reading (4-7), Jeremiah wrote to encourage the exiled Jews in Babylon to settle into Babylonian life for the long haul, as they would not be returning to Judah anytime soon. To assure their security, he suggested that the exiled Jews pray for the security of their captors. In the second (8-9), we learned that Jeremiah’s predictions concerning the length of the Babylonian exile were not the only predictions being offered to and heard by the exiles. Jeremiah warned the exiled Jews about paying heed to the predictions of those prophets among them who were, in fact, false prophets and false predictors, doing nothing more than telling the people what they want to hear.

1. Yahweh assures the exiles that even in their difficult and sorrowful exiled state Yahweh is thinking of them and the good that he has planned for them.
  - ? But, 70 years is a long time. What does it mean in the mean time?
  - ? What would it mean for you, given your age, health, circumstances, etc. if you had to wait 70 years to experience a restoration of happier and freer times?
  - ? What do you think is meant by giving them “an expected end”?
  - ? What would it mean if we read that God was considering how he could give them their “hoped for” future?
  - ? How have you been helped knowing that God was aware of you in the midst of your trials?
2. The exiled Jews are paying the just price for their sin and rebellion.
  - ? How might this be likened to the feelings of “exile” from God that we sometimes feel when we think of our sins and weaknesses?
  - ? If you sometimes have feelings of unworthiness and even “exile,” might you apply the assurances of the Lord’s good feelings, intent to comfort, and desire to bestow “hope for the future” even when in the full recognition of and remorse for sin?
  - ? What might be needed for you to have such assurance even when you are in full recognition of and remorse for your sins and weaknesses?

## Jeremiah 29.<sup>12-14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me,  
and I will hearken unto you.

<sup>13</sup>And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

<sup>14</sup>And I will be found of you, saith the LORD:

and I will turn away your captivity,

and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith  
the LORD;

and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

## Questionary

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In 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, removed Jehoiachin, three-month long king of Judah, from the Judean throne, carried Jehoiachin, along with a large population of Jews, into exile in Babylon, and placed the final Judean King, Zedekiah, upon the Judean throne.

Soon after this group of Jews had been taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. This letter is found in Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-23</sup>. Verses 24-28 represent a letter that Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile sent to Jerusalem's temple priests in response to Jeremiah's letter. Verses 31-32 represent Jeremiah's response to Shemaiah's letter.

We are examining the content of these communications over the course of seven readings. Today's reading is the fourth. In the first reading (4-7), Jeremiah wrote to encourage the exiled Jews in Babylon to settle into Babylonian life for the long haul, as they would not be returning to Judah anytime soon. To assure their security, he suggested that the exiled Jews pray for the security of their captors. In the second (8-9), we learned that Jeremiah's predictions concerning the length of the Babylonian exile were not the only predictions being offered to and heard by the exiles. Jeremiah warned the exiled Jews about paying heed to the predictions of those prophets among them who were, in fact, false prophets and false predictors, doing nothing more than telling the people what they want to hear. In the third reading (10-11), Yahweh assured the exiles that even in their difficult and sorrowful exiled state Yahweh was thinking of them and the good that he had planned for them.

In today's reading, Yahweh offers the exiles additional comfort concerning their future. I have reformed the text to emphasize the restoration promised to Judah.

1. Today's reading has six statements of promise; statements that serve to "give hope for the future."
  - ? Identify each of these promises?
  - ? Consider what each of these mean and how you can apply each of them in the midst of your sin recognition and remorse?
  - ? How does the following passage relate to today's reading?

"Verily I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted, and persecuted, and cast out from the land of their inheritance—I, the Lord, have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions; yet I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels.

"Verily I say unto you, notwithstanding their sins, my bowels are filled with compassion towards them. I will not utterly cast them off; and in the day of wrath I will remember mercy" (DC 101.<sup>1-3 & 9</sup>).

- ? What, do you think, does the Lord mean, and how does he act upon his statement that "in the day of wrath I will remember mercy"?
  - ? Do you allow yourself such hope even when in full recognition of sin and weakness?
2. With the repeated "I" in reference to God, there is a strong and repeatedly emphasis on God's

personal and direct actions in behalf of Judah.

? What is the significance of this focus on God's actions?



## Jeremiah 29.<sup>15-19</sup>

<sup>15</sup>“Because ye have said,

‘The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon;’

<sup>16</sup>“Know that thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, and of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity;

<sup>17</sup>thus saith the LORD of hosts; ‘Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. <sup>18</sup>And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them: <sup>19</sup>because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the LORD.’

### Questionary

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In 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, removed Jehoiachin, three-month long king of Judah, from the Judean throne, carried Jehoiachin, along with a large population of Jews, into exile in Babylon, and placed the final Judean King, Zedekiah, upon the Judean throne.

Soon after this group of Jews had been taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. This letter is found in Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-23</sup>. Verses 24-28 represent a letter that Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile sent to Jerusalem’s temple priests in response to Jeremiah’s letter. Verses 31-32 represent Jeremiah’s response to Shemaiah’s letter.

We are examining the content of these communications over the course of seven readings. Today’s reading is the fifth. In the first reading (4-7), Jeremiah wrote to encourage the exiled Jews in Babylon to settle into Babylonian life for the long haul, as they would not be returning to Judah anytime soon. To assure their security, he suggested that the exiled Jews pray for the security of their captors. In the second (8-9), we learned that Jeremiah’s predictions concerning the length of the Babylonian exile were not the only predictions being offered to and heard by the exiles. Jeremiah warned the exiled Jews about paying heed to the predictions of those prophets among them who were, in fact, false prophets and false predictors, doing nothing more than telling the people what they want to hear. In the third reading (10-11), Yahweh assured the exiles that even in their difficult and sorrowful exiled state Yahweh was thinking of them and the good that he had planned for them. In the fourth reading (12-14), Yahweh offered the exiles additional comfort concerning their future through six statements of promise.

In today’s reading, Jeremiah turns his attention back to the false hopes being pushed by the false prophets and adds to the bleak near-future of Judah and its citizenry.

1. Previously in his book, Jeremiah complained about the false prophets, so popular among the people, and their false messages of hope.

“For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them  
every one is given to covetousness;  
and from the prophet even unto the priest  
every one dealeth falsely.

They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people  
slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace;’  
when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6.<sup>13-14</sup>).

- ? How does this relate to what Jeremiah writes to the exiled Jews in Babylon?
- ? What is the relationship between the false message of peace that the prophets offer the people

- and the fact that Jeremiah identifies them as “covetous”?
- ? What do you think and feel as you consider that the false prophets’ message of false hope has its “root” in the “love of money”?
  - ? How do you feel about individuals who are willing to sacrifice the health and security of their own people for the sake of wealth or power or prestige?
2. While Jeremiah has offered the exiles in Babylon “hope for the future,” he does not hold out much hope for those still in Judah. Apparently, even after witnessing so many of their fellow citizens carried off into captivity, those who remain have not only not repented, but have grown worse—no doubt partly due to the false hopes offered by the false prophets.
- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you hear God describe Jews still living in Judah “like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil”?
  - ? What words and phrases does Jeremiah use to describe the future of those still living in Judah?
  - ? What do you think and feel when you read the words and phrases that describe the future of Judah’s citizenry? They will experience

- “sword,”
- “famine,”
- “pestilence”

Among the nations to which they are scattered, they will be

- “a curse”
- “an astonishment
- “an hissing”
- “a reproach”

## Jeremiah 29.<sup>20-23</sup>

<sup>20</sup>“Hear ye therefore the word of the LORD, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>21</sup>Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; ‘Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes; <sup>22</sup>and of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, “The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire;” <sup>23</sup>because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours’ wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the LORD.”

### Questionary

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In 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, removed Jehoiachin, three-month long king of Judah, from the Judean throne, carried Jehoiachin, along with a large population of Jews, into exile in Babylon, and placed the final Judean King, Zedekiah, upon the Judean throne.

Soon after this group of Jews had been taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. This letter is found in Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-23</sup>. Verses 24-28 represent a letter that Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile sent to Jerusalem’s temple priests in response to Jeremiah’s letter. Verses 31-32 represent Jeremiah’s response to Shemaiah’s letter.

We are examining the content of these communications over the course of seven readings. Today’s reading is the sixth. In the first reading (4-7), Jeremiah wrote to encourage the exiled Jews in Babylon to settle into Babylonian life for the long haul, as they would not be returning to Judah anytime soon. To assure their security, he suggested that the exiled Jews pray for the security of their captors. In the second (8-9), we learned that Jeremiah’s predictions concerning the length of the Babylonian exile were not the only predictions being offered to and heard by the exiles. Jeremiah warned the exiled Jews about paying heed to the predictions of those prophets among them who were, in fact, false prophets and false predictors, doing nothing more than telling the people what they want to hear. In the third reading (10-11), Yahweh assured the exiles that even in their difficult and sorrowful exiled state Yahweh was thinking of them and the good that he had planned for them. In the fourth reading (12-14), Yahweh offered the exiles additional comfort concerning their future through six statements of promise. In the fifth reading, Jeremiah turned his attention back to the false hopes being pushed by the false prophets and added to the bleak near-future of Judah and its citizenry.

1. In today’s reading, Jeremiah moves from his discussion about false prophets in general to a discussion of and warning to two specific false prophets—Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah—who offer false security and false hope. We do not know anything about either of these men except what Jeremiah has to say about them here.
  - ? What does Jeremiah tell us about their character and habits?
  - ? What does Jeremiah tell us about their future destinies?
  - ? What do you think and how do you feel about these two men and their destinies becoming a kind of proverb among the Jews in exile?

## Jeremiah 29.<sup>24-32</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Thus shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, <sup>25</sup>“Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, <sup>26</sup>“the LORD hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the LORD, for every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldst put him in prison, and in the stocks. <sup>27</sup>Now therefore why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you? <sup>28</sup>For therefore he sent unto us in Babylon, saying, This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them.””

<sup>29</sup>And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet. <sup>30</sup>Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying,

<sup>31</sup>“Send to all them of the captivity, saying, ‘Thus saith the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: <sup>32</sup>therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the LORD; because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD.

## Q

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### uestionary

In 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, removed Jehoiachin, three-month long king of Judah, from the Judean throne, carried Jehoiachin, along with a large population of Jews, into exile in Babylon, and placed the final Judean King, Zedekiah, upon the Judean throne.

Soon after this group of Jews had been taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. This letter is found in Jeremiah 29.<sup>4-23</sup>. Verses 24-28 represent a letter that Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile sent to Jerusalem’s temple priests in response to Jeremiah’s letter. Verses 31-32 represent Jeremiah’s response to Shemaiah’s letter.

We are examining the content of these communications over the course of seven readings. Today’s reading is the eighth. In the first reading (4-7), Jeremiah wrote to encourage the exiled Jews in Babylon to settle into Babylonian life for the long haul, as they would not be returning to Judah anytime soon. To assure their security, he suggested that the exiled Jews pray for the security of their captors. In the second (8-9), we learned that Jeremiah’s predictions concerning the length of the Babylonian exile were not the only predictions being offered to and heard by the exiles. Jeremiah warned the exiled Jews about paying heed to the predictions of those prophets among them who were, in fact, false prophets and false predictors, doing nothing more than telling the people what they want to hear. In the third reading (10-11), Yahweh assured the exiles that even in their difficult and sorrowful exiled state Yahweh was thinking of them and the good that he had planned for them. In the fourth reading (12-14), Yahweh offered the exiles additional comfort concerning their future through six statements of promise. In the fifth reading (15-19), Jeremiah turned his attention back to the false hopes being pushed by the false prophets and added to the bleak near-future of Judah and its citizenry. In the sixth reading (20-24), Jeremiah moved from his discussion about false prophets in general to a discussion of and warning to two specific false prophets—Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah—who offered false security and false hope. We do not know anything about either of these men except what Jeremiah has to say about them here.

In today’s reading, the last of seven readings from Jeremiah 29, we are introduced to yet another false prophet by the name of Shemaiah. We learn that this Shemaiah, a Babylonian exile, had sent a letter to the high priest, Zephaniah, who still resided in Jerusalem. In that letter, Shemaiah complained that the religious leaders in Jerusalem had not disciplined Jeremiah, who, by Shemaiah’s estimation, was not part of an official circle of prophets, for his claims that the Babylonian captivity would be long. Shemaiah encourages Jerusalem’s religious/political leaders to place Jeremiah, as a false prophet and conspirator against the government, “in prison, and in the stocks.”

1. In response, Jeremiah wrote his own letter back to the Babylonian exiles and responded to Shemaiah's presumption.
  - ? What will be the consequences, both personal and familiar, of Shemaiah's presumption?
  - ? How do you feel about the consequences of his presumptions impacting his future descendants in such a way that there will, eventually, be no descendants?
  - ? What have you learned from this entire 29<sup>th</sup> chapter about false prophets and their false claims of personal and societal security?

## Jeremiah 31.<sup>10-11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations,  
and declare it in the isles afar off, and say,  
He that scattered Israel will gather him,  
and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.

<sup>11</sup>For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob,  
and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.

### Questionary

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1. Jeremiah has Yahweh as the subject of five verbs.
  - ? What are those five verbs?
  - ? If we suggested that one verb is unlike the other four, which verb is it that is unlike the others?
  - ? How do you feel about God being considered the agent of Israel's "scattering"?
  - ? What does it say to you about God that he is the same being who "gathers" those whom he "scatters"?
2. Jeremiah says that God will "keep [Israel], as a shepherd doth his flock."
  - ? What is the image that this imagery brings to your mind?
  - ? What does it mean to "keep" someone in this context?
3. In his great intercessory prayer, Jesus asks the following:

"Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.... I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17.<sup>11-12, 15</sup>).

In his first epistle, Peter says,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1.<sup>3-5</sup>).

- ? How do these passages enhance your understanding of what it means to be "kept by God"?
- ? In what ways have you been "kept" by God?

### **Lamentations 3.**<sup>22-26</sup>

<sup>22</sup>It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed,  
because his compassions fail not.

<sup>23</sup>They are new every morning:  
great is thy faithfulness.

<sup>24</sup>The LORD is my portion, saith my soul;  
therefore will I hope in him.

<sup>25</sup>The LORD is good unto them that wait for him,  
to the soul that seeketh him.

<sup>26</sup>It is good that a man should both hope  
and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

### **Q**uestionary

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1. Today's reading speaks twice of "hope" and twice of "waiting for the Lord."
  - ? What is the relationship between "waiting" and "hoping"?
  - ? What do you think as you consider that "hope" is an "expectant waiting"?
2. Today's reading says that the Yahweh's "mercies" and "compassions" are "new every morning."
  - ? What does this mean to you from a practical point of view?
  - ? Do you believe and live as though you can begin fresh each day, or do you hang on to the past for days? Weeks? Months? Years?
  - ? What experiences have you had that convinced you that you can begin anew each day because of God's mercy and compassion?
  - ? What does it say about the "compassion" of one who holds on to the errors of another's past?