

Bible Study # 53
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Major Prophets Series—Jeremiah 16—34

We are continuing our survey through the book of Jeremiah. We **are dealing with the middle section of the book of Jeremiah**—chapters 16—34. This section **deals with various prophecies of Judah's impending captivity**. He uses it as a type of events that will come upon the whole house of Israel at the end time. In the context of material we will look at this evening, **another thing that comes out is the persecution that Jeremiah faced as God's spokesman**. This is important to realize because down through the centuries, God's message has not been a popular message. Many times God's servants have suffered great adversity and difficulties for delivering that message. We will see that here in the book of Jeremiah and we will see some of the things Jeremiah went through.

I think it is important for us to realize that there are probably a lot of things that we're going to have to face and go through between now and the end of this age. We don't know every detail of what it's going to be, but the Bible certainly gives indications and certainly shows by example the fact that God's message has never been popular. It wasn't popular at the time of Jeremiah. It certainly wasn't popular at the time of Jesus Christ, and it's not going to be popular in our time and in our day.

The Scriptures talk about events, a Great Tribulation, and various things. As I have mentioned before, we are in a time of a relative lull; a calm before the storm. We see events—things flash upon the world scene and then they fade. But what we have to realize is that the time is going to come when these events are going to flash on the world scene and they won't fade. It will be time for things to begin to culminate and come together.

As you watch what's going on in the Middle East right now, you realize what a volatile situation it is. I'm not saying that this situation is not going to settle down, but it demonstrates the depth of emotions and the lack of real solutions that is there. As we see in the book of Daniel, when the timing is ultimately right, the events in the Middle East will come to a head, but only when things in Europe have developed to the point that Europe is ready to respond—as the book of Daniel and other prophecies show that they will.

We are not at that point now, but we're certainly moving far closer to it than we were a year ago. Consider what has transpired just since the last Feast of Tabernacles and all of the events that have happened in Eastern Europe since last Pentecost. We've gotten so adjusted to some of these things, I think we don't realize how shocking it would have been had we announced it even last Pentecost. These things really began to come together at the fall Festival season.

Things are moving along, and we are in a period of relative calm. A period of relative calm can be used in one of two ways. It makes an ideal time to go to sleep. There is not a whole lot to disturb your rest, so people can use it to either "go to sleep at the switch" or they can use it for time of preparation, recognizing that it is going to come to an end and they need to be prepared. Because when things happen, they will happen quickly enough, that if you're not prepared, there won't be time to prepare. That's part of the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:2-12)—the five wise and the five foolish. The five wise were prepared. The five foolish weren't. It ultimately comes down to that.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong drew the analogy many, many years ago, not as a matter of a dogmatic statement, but his own personal feeling was that the parable of the ten virgins—the five wise and the five foolish—would ultimately see fulfillment in the Laodicean and the Philadelphian eras. He felt the Church would, at that time, divide down the middle—five wise and five foolish. That was his personal opinion on that. I heard him say that over twenty years ago. When I heard him say it, to me at the time, it seemed very far-fetched. I couldn't imagine that. But as the years have gone by, I have appreciated his wisdom and insight more and have realized that as a possibility. I am not saying dogmatically that is exactly what it is going to be, but that is certainly a possibility. I know that it is one possibility that Mr. Armstrong leaned towards.

The point that I am making is as we go through Jeremiah, and as we focus on the events of Jeremiah, it is important that we realize that we're not simply looking at dead history. We're not simply looking at old remote events. There are events, in some cases, directly prophetic of our own time, and in other cases, we are looking at events that are typical of the kind of things that happen to God's servants and God's work. We're looking at events that parallel things through which we may very well go through—things through which many of God's servants down

through the centuries have gone through. We have lived in a time of relative tranquility and peace. Individuals may have faced persecution perhaps on the job or in a family context because of their beliefs. But in terms of organized systematic governmental persecution, we have not faced anything very intense and very long term for quite awhile.

Another thing we will notice in this section is specific information of Jeremiah regarding the king and what was to happen to the house of David. The promise had been made that the dynasty of David would continue. Jeremiah, in his ministry, was actually there at a time when the temple was destroyed and when all the things that seemed to be a part of the fulfillment of God's covenant and God's promise were swept from the scene. The temple was destroyed, the king's sons were executed, and the king was blinded and taken prisoner. The independence of the nation ended, the city of Jerusalem burned, and the Jews were taken into captivity. You had a destruction take place. Did that mean that God's promises were of no avail? Absolutely not! Those promises were to continue, and Jeremiah played a vital role in the fulfillment of some of those promises.

We also have an interesting section that deals with Judah's partial observance of the Sabbatical year and the events that transpired afterwards. Basically, what it amounted to was that the Babylonians put a siege around Jerusalem and the Jews were scared. They figured they had "had it." Ever see how, when people really get scared, they are ready to "cut a deal" with God? Maybe you've done that. The Jews knew that they weren't doing what God said to do. One of the outstanding things they weren't doing was that they had not been observing the Sabbatical year.

The Sabbatical year is a law that applies to a nation. It is a national economic law. It has to do with a release of private debt in the seventh year. It had to do with servants being given liberty at the end of that time and various things. It had to do with the land being able to lay rest, with servants being given their freedom and with private debt being forgiven. It was a law that God instituted to keep the nation economically on an "even keel."

Right now our nation is so burdened down with debt that it's just a matter of time. God made for periodic adjustments because wealth will become mal-distributed, and there can come such inequities that things eventually collapse. The

Sabbatical made provision for a fresh start. Those who worked harder were rewarded for it. But the Sabbatical made provision for a fresh start, an opportunity for private debt to be forgiven. You could not build up massive debt because private debt was going to come to an end every seventh year. You simply didn't build up a gigantic private debt. The economy would not be based on something like that.

The Jews (those who were in position of power) were looking at opportunities to make money. They didn't want to release debt. They didn't want to release slaves. Since they didn't want to do these things, they hadn't. When the Babylonians surrounded the city and they thought they were all going to be killed, they got scared and started trying to "cut a deal" with God. Oh, they were repentant and sorry; they would do all of this stuff. Jeremiah laid it out to them. He told them what they needed to start doing, so they did. They made an announcement. They released all the debt and turned loose the slaves. They did everything. They started observing the Sabbatical year.

Just a short time after they did that, the Egyptians launched an army that headed up to the area of northern Mesopotamia, toward Carchemish. The Egyptian army was going to launch an attack on the Babylonians. The Babylonians, who had Jerusalem surrounded, pulled the siege. They lifted the siege and the armies left. They went to fight against the Egyptians.

You know what the Jews did? They sat back and said, 'Boy, that's a relief. We didn't have to depend on God to rescue us after all. The Egyptians came to our aid. We knew those Egyptians would help us out. Let's forget about this Sabbatical year stuff. Bring the slaves back. We're going to exact a debt. We're going to do all the stuff. We're not going to wind up losing this money. We don't have to worry about that; the Egyptians have bailed us out.'

Immediately they went back to doing what they had been doing before. The Babylonians promptly smashed the Egyptian army and came back to Jerusalem. If you make a deal with God, you better fulfill your part of it. God can deliver us in various ways. Humanly, people want to trust what they can see. The Israelites wanted to put their trust in Egypt. They felt like if they could just get the Egyptians on their side, the problems would be solved. What they needed to realize was that the only way problems can be solved is to get God on your side. It's not a matter of talking God into seeing it our way; it's

a matter of coming to see it His way and making sure we get going in that direction.

There's a lesson of faith here. Again, we see the tendency of human nature—it wants to walk by sight. It does not want to walk by faith. We want to trust what we can see, touch, taste and feel—what we can sense with the five physical senses. And, in reality, the only thing that can be depended on is something that can't be discerned by the five physical senses. It is the power of God.

We find in this section, Jeremiah 17:9-10, the Biblical definition of human nature.

In Jeremiah 17:19-27, we see God's rebuke of people for failure to properly keep the Sabbath.

In chapter 18, we focus in on a lesson of God being the Potter and we being the clay. We look in on false shepherds.

In Jeremiah 31:31-34, we see a prophecy of the New Covenant and the Holy Spirit.

In Jeremiah 16, Jeremiah was told how bad things were going to get. In fact, he was told not to marry and raise a family at that time because of the terrible captivity and the things that were going to occur. Notice the attitude of the people as God's servants told them of these things.

Jeremiah 16:10, ““And it shall be, when you show this people all these words, and they say to you, ‘Why has the Lord pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?’”” They said, ‘Why we are good people! God wouldn't do those things to us. What's so bad about us?’ That's what people still think. ‘We're better than old “so-and-so.” We're better than somebody else. We are not the best, but we're sure not the worst. God wouldn't do those things to us.’

God makes it very plain.

Verses 11-12, ““then you shall say to them, ‘Because your fathers have forsaken Me,’ says the Lord; ‘they have walked after other gods and have served them and worshiped them, and have forsaken Me and not kept My law. And you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one walks according to the imagination of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me.’””

Each one of you just doing your own thing; you're walking after the imagination of your evil heart.

If that was descriptive of ancient Judah, is it descriptive of us today? Have we not, as a nation, forsaken God? Have we not refused to keep God's law? We can say that our ancestors did that, and we've done worse than they did because

we have turned away from the portions of right and wrong that they clung to. We are getting to the point where we want to legalize sin and outlaw righteousness—a very upside-down perverted approach.

Verse 13, ““Therefore I will cast you out of this land....””

Up until now, the great event that has defined the history of God's people and the history of Israel was the Exodus. That was kind of the great point from which everything else flowed.

Verses 14-15, ““Therefore behold the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘that it shall no more be said, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers.’”

God talks about the events of the future when Israel goes into captivity and they will finally be delivered again. It will be an event that will greatly overshadow, in terms of size and magnitude, the events of the Egyptian captivity and the Exodus from Egypt.

There is going to be a future Exodus of bringing the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He will drive them. He will bring them back. This is a prophecy that goes beyond Judah.

Verse 15 makes plain that it is a prophecy to the children of Israel. Realize that Jeremiah was writing one hundred twenty years after the ten tribes of Israel had already gone into captivity. The ten tribes were gone; they were history. Jeremiah is talking about events yet future. He is talking about events concerning the children of Israel, the house of Israel. The events that occurred to Judah were, in many ways, a type of end-time events to the house of Israel. These things are made plain. He describes what is going to happen. He describes that captivity is ultimately going to come. Eventually, God will deliver and He will bring them back. It will be an event of such magnitude that it will absolutely overshadow everything that has ever gone before.

Verse 19, ““...The Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things.’”” As He deals with the nations, they will come up to be converted. They will want to learn God's way.

Notice what God says about putting our faith in human help.

Jeremiah 17:5, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord.’” “Cursed be the man who trusts in man”—putting your faith and confidence in human beings and what they can do and losing sight of God and the reality of His power. If you get your focus on the human element, you’re under a curse. What’s the curse? The curse is that you are dependent on a weak, frail, human being, just like you are. You are trusting in a human being who is just as limited as you are. We cut ourselves off from access to the great power of the Eternal God and we put confidence in human beings.

He goes on and compares that.

Verses 7-8, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters....” You have a continual source of help.

Then we have some things about human nature defined for us.

Verses 9-10, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” We are told that the primary ingredient of human nature is self-deceit. We kid ourselves. One of the hardest things for any of us to do, as human beings, is to be totally, brutally, frankly honest with and about ourselves and about our motives.

Have you ever noticed that if you want to do something, you can find a lot of good excuses as to why you should buy this, you should do that, or go here, etc. You can come up with a lot of good reasons that justify it. If you don’t want to do something, you can come up with a lot of pretty good-sounding excuses as to why you shouldn’t or you can’t. ‘I don’t think I can’—all these things that come to mind. We can come up with all these good things as to why we don’t think we can. There is a difference between a reason and an excuse.

“The heart is deceitful above all things.” It’s hard for us to really come to grips with our motives. We can kid ourselves. We can deceive ourselves. That is a crucial part of human nature. We can “lock in” and we can never work on a problem we don’t see. We have to see it in order to work on it. We have to honestly face something in order to deal with it. This is a very crucial part of human nature. “Who can know it?” “The heart is deceitful above all things.” First and foremost we

kid ourselves. We make up excuses and justifications. It’s hard for us to really come to grips with the real reason we do things.

God says He searches the heart. He tries the mind. If we really want to see as God sees, God will show us, but you have to want to see. It’s a matter of examining why we do what we do. Why do we do or refrain from doing certain things? It takes time to get down to the heart and core of our real motivations. That’s a part of what Christianity and internalizing the law of God is all about. Christianity is much more than merely external observance. Christianity is about internalizing a new way of thinking. Obviously, if we internalize a new way of thinking, it’s going to be reflected in what we do on the outside. If we’re externally disobedient, then it’s a pretty good indication we’re not internally doing what we should do either.

However, the reverse is not true. A person can outwardly conform to everything and yet inwardly, be simply like the Pharisees. We’re told that our heart is the seat of our emotions and of our thinking. The heart is deceitful above all things. We need God’s help to really properly perceive and not kid ourselves.

God begins to rebuke the nation concerning some of the sins. He refers to Sabbath breaking.

Verses 21-23, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction.’”

He talks about the consequences of not hallowing the Sabbath.

Verse 27, “But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.” The specific reference to bearing a burden was burdens of merchandise, particularly from agricultural districts. People were simply bringing in merchandise into Jerusalem. They were bringing forth things from the house with which to barter and trade for produce.

The Jews went to great lengths, after the captivity, to define as to what was a burden. They got into great debates among the rabbis trying to define how much is a burden. By the time of

Christ, they had so “nit-picked” the thing apart that they had come out with the rabbitical ruling that anything exceeding the weight of three figs constituted bearing a burden on the Sabbath. That is a carnal-minded approach.

Let’s understand why it’s a carnally-minded approach. The carnal mind wants a line drawn so they can get as close to it as possible. The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God. It really does not want to be as close to God as it can be. It wants to be as close to the world as it can be, and it wants an exact line. It wants to get up just as close as it can and kind of lean over the cliff but not lean over so far as to fall.

The rabbis said, ‘Since the attitude of the people is that they are going to go as far as we’ll let them, then what we need to do is to draw the line way back over here. That way, nobody gets really close to the cliff.’ Nobody went too far because they drew the line so far that no one could get close. What the rabbis said was that they were going to build a hedge around the law. Their reasoning was, ‘Look, we went into captivity because we violated the law, particularly idolatry and Sabbath breaking. What we need to do is build a hedge around the law so that people can’t even get close to breaking the law. We’ll stick on all these “do’s” and “don’ts.”’ You will have to go far beyond the limits we set in order to break the law. It will keep everybody “in line.”’ That’s a carnal-minded approach because it’s dealing from the premise that people are going to go as far as they can go, as far as you’ll let them get by with.

I think we need to understand that God is not going to have anybody in His Kingdom with that approach. The approach that God wants is to get as close to Him as we can. Our whole direction needs to be that we want to get as close to God as we can get. Not as close to the world as we can get by with, but as close to God as we can get. It’s a different approach. When you have that approach, you don’t have to build a hedge around the law because you’re not trying to get up to the edge to lean over. You’re not trying to “cut the corners” and take the liberties. You’re trying to apply the principle.

We’re not only to observe the law but also to understand and to apply in our hearts and minds the principles behind the law. That’s why the Pharisees got into this contention with Christ. Remember where He had healed the man who was paralyzed and He told him to rise, take his bed and walk—and the guy did. And the Pharisees got all “bent out of shape.” The fellow

wasn’t picking up his Sealy Posturepedic; that wasn’t what he was carrying. What he had was like a sleeping bag. It probably wasn’t even that much. It was just a little mat. He rolled it up and put it on his shoulder. Christ didn’t have the guy staggering down the street carrying a king-size bed and headboard on his back. That was not the point. He was healed. What was he going to do? Was he going to go off and leave it and not have the mat to lie down on anymore? It was silly. There was nothing in God’s law that forbade the fellow to roll up the mat or blanket, stick it on his shoulder and go on. The Pharisees took the approach of trying to build a hedge around the law of humanly imposed “do’s” and “don’ts.”

We have to understand that the tendency of human nature is to veer from one ditch to the other. We need to realize that we need to obey the law, but we need to go beyond simply obeying the letter of the law. We don’t need to go beyond in the sense of inventing a whole lot of humanly-imposed ideas. We need to understand the principle and we need to apply the principle. We need to realize that when God talks about some of these things, there is a principle involved. There is a particular way that God wants His people to be, and we want to fit in with that. We want to be made conformable to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29), not conformable to the image of the society around us (Romans 12:2).

It goes on and further develops that in chapter 18.

Jeremiah 18:1-6, we have the story where Jeremiah was told to rise and to go down to the potter’s house.

I want to mention something. A number of years ago, there was an art show that was going on. It sounded interesting and we decided to go down and take a look and see what they had. The thing that I particularly remember about it was the potter that they had there. He had some beautiful vases and art objects that he had made. He was working at a potter’s wheel. It was very interesting to watch him. I had never seen a real potter working before. As I watched him, Jeremiah 18 was running through my mind.

When a group of us gathered around, he started fresh. He picked out a lump (or brick) of clay. The first thing he did with this brick of clay that he picked out was to lay it down on this table and start beating on the thing with his fist. It was hard and it wasn’t very pliable. He pounded on it for a little bit. After he had beat on it for a little while, he had this little bowl of water and he sprinkled a

little water on it. After he had beat on it for a little bit with his fist, it began to kind of lose that rigid brick-like shape. He sprinkled a little water on it and pounded on it a little more. He tore it in two and then put the two together. He'd reach back, put a little water on it and work with it. Gradually, instead of being hard and very difficult, it became more and more pliable. He was working it back and forth. When he had it really loosened up and really malleable, he plunked a big lump on the potter's wheel and began working with the treadle to make this potter's wheel turn. It was just incredible. Within a matter of minutes, this beautiful vase took shape. Before, it had just been a lump of clay; now it was a beautiful vase. The potter's wheel kept turning it around. He got out some instruments, put some fine touches on it and got it just right. Then he ran a string under it to separate the bottom of it from the potter's wheel. He got it loose and set it aside. He said he would let it dry for a little bit and then he would oven bake it to harden it. Then it would be painted and baked again. He described the rest of the process. What happens when God first selects us? What happens when God calls us and begins to work with us? He's the Potter; we're the clay. He selects us. He calls us out. He chooses us from the midst of all these other lumps of clay. But then He has to bring us to the point that we can be worked with. Some of us are a little harder lump of clay than others. What does He do? Well, He has to pound on it for a little while. He has to bring us to the point that we can be molded and shaped because you can't shape a lump of clay until it is malleable and can be worked with.

You have to be pliable. Therefore, the first thing you have to do is get some of the stiffness out of it. What does God do? He pounds on us a little bit. A few trials come along. It gets our attention and takes a little of the stiffness out. What does He do? He begins to add some of His Spirit. That's what the water is. Water is even used in the Bible as a symbol of God's Spirit. God begins to add in some of His Spirit, and that Spirit makes us more and more pliable. He keeps working with us and working with us, adding in a little more Spirit. He keeps working with us until finally we're responsive to Him. Then at the point that we really become responsive, He can make us what He wants us to be. Then that character is hardened.

There is an analogy that is drawn; the trials and tests we go through are like being put through the

fire (I Peter 1:7) and hardened. Because once you've fired a piece of pottery, nothing else can ever be made out of it. It can be destroyed and made into dust, but you could never take it, reshape it and make something else. It has lost that elasticity, that ability to be shaped. God ultimately gets us just like He wants us. In effect, He fires our character to where it hardens and to where we are set. There may be a few little decorative touches that He puts on, but, basically, it becomes set. It's an interesting analogy.

God goes through that with Jeremiah. It's a good analogy to think about and to realize that God says, 'I am the Potter and you are the clay. Jeremiah, you want to find out how I work with you and what I'm doing. Go down to the potter's house; look and see what he does.'

Is prophecy conditional?

Jeremiah 18:8, "'if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.'" If a nation against whom God has pronounced punishment turns from their evil, He will turn from what He was purposing to do. The example of that is Nineveh, in the book of Jonah, repenting of their sins. Prophecy is conditional if a prophecy of punishment is given. Upon a lack of repentance, God describes the things that He is going to do—how there would be a captivity that would come and, v. 17, the nation would be scattered. These events were going to occur.

In Jeremiah 19, he talks about some of those things.

Verse 8, he talks about the city being made desolate.

Verse 9, he describes that the nation will have such an extent of famine that there was, literally, cannibalism that occurred. That literally occurred during the first siege of Jerusalem. Josephus records that there were some instances of it in the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Undoubtedly, it is going to be paralleled again in the events that mark the beginning of the tribulation, the famine and the things that are going to occur. There are going to be some very, very serious things.

Then there is the response to God's message being delivered. They weren't happy. They didn't like it and the government officials didn't like it.

Jeremiah 20:1-2, "Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashhur struck

Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord.” Here he was ready to throw Jeremiah in jail. He was going to punish him. He said, ‘You shouldn’t say things like this.’ People become very antagonist when the truth is told. Jeremiah made it plain to Pashhur what was going to happen to him.

Jeremiah 21:1-2, “The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur...‘Please inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon makes war against us....’” He said, ‘The king of Babylon is making war against us, and we want to know if God will intervene for us.’ Here’s the irony of it. They were ready to throw him in jail. They were mad at him. Yet when they got scared and their “back got against the wall,” they came to him and asked him to inquire of the Lord for them. They knew where God was working.

There are some interesting examples that are mentioned in Mr. Herbert Armstrong’s autobiography of some similar type events in the early years of the work. There are certain ones that he mentioned. There was a particular church that really had no use for him. They were of a Pentecostal variety, and they figured that they were spiritual and he wasn’t. They had all kinds of things to say about him until the time when the pastor’s wife fell over “under the spirit” and they couldn’t revive and bring her back. Immediately, they set out to look for him. When “push came to shove,” they knew whose prayers were answered. It’s the irony sometimes, and this attitude is reflected right here in Jeremiah 21. Jeremiah came and explained what was going to occur. He told them exactly what was going to happen and how.

Verse 10, “For I have set My face against this city for adversity and not for good....”

He goes on to explain why all these calamities were going to come.

Jeremiah 22:9, “...“Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshiped other gods and served them.”” They hadn’t obeyed God. They hadn’t served God.

Verse 21, “I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, “I will not hear.” This has been your manner from your youth, that you did not obey My voice.”” Again they had this attitude and this lack of obedience to God.

Jeremiah 23:1-6, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture,’ says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My

people: ‘You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,’ says the Lord. ‘But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,’ says the Lord. ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘That I will raise up David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

The term “pastor” is a term that means “shepherd.” This certainly can apply both in the national sense as well as in the religious sense. It certainly would apply to false ministers and false religious leaders. It simply refers to those who are to be the shepherds of God’s flock. Instead of properly tending the flock, they have been fleecing the flock. God says, ‘I am going to deal with that. I am going to hold them accountable, and things are ultimately going to change.’

It shows the righteous Branch that God will raise up. The One who is characterized as David’s Righteous Branch will be ruling over all—in other words, Jesus Christ. Ruling under Him will be various righteous shepherds—that’s us. It describes the consequences of what has occurred, the things that set the stage for the prophecies.

Then it describes the future Exodus.

Verse 8, “...“As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.” And they shall dwell in their own land.”

Here we have a prophecy that clearly comes down to the end time.

Verses 10-11, “For the land is full of adulterers; for because of a curse the land mourns...For both the prophet and the priest are profane....”

Verse 14, “Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah.” We have a description of how God characterizes the nation and the result of what He is going to do as a consequence of that.

Jeremiah 24 has the parable of the figs. We have two baskets of figs: one is characterized as very good fig and the other is characterized as very bad figs. The good figs symbolized those who had already been taken captive to Babylon, over whom God would watch and would ultimately bring back to the land. This happened a generation later under Zerrubabel. The bad figs symbolized those left behind and those who had gone to Egypt.

Verses 9-10, they would suffer many punishments which were yet to come.

In Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah continues his prophecies and the things that were going to occur. He explains they were going into captivity and why they were going into captivity.

Jeremiah 25:5-7, ““They said, “Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you. Yet you have not listened to Me,” says the Lord, “that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.”””

Verses 11-12, “““And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,” says the Lord; “and I will make it a perpetual desolation.”””

God describes the events that were going to occur and the seventy years that were prophesied. It wasn't totally clear, even at that time, as to what exactly the seventy years was about. In fact, it's interesting. Daniel who was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah had been studying this.

Daniel 9:2, “in the first year of his reign [speaking of Darius] I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord, given through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Daniel had been studying this. He had been trying to understand it. He was in Babylon. He had been taken captive from Jerusalem. He didn't understand exactly what the seventy years meant—when did it start and when did you stop it? How did this seventy years run? He had been studying the book of Jeremiah.

Daniel 1:2, the books of the Bible had been taken to Babylon along with the artifacts that had been taken from the temple. Daniel had access to them. He had been studying it trying to understand. Finally he did. He understood it shortly before it happened. The details generally become plain as we get closer to the time of fulfillment. The seventy years, basically, would extend from about 604 B.C., which was Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion, down to 534 B.C., which is when the Jews actually returned. Cyrus issued the decree in 535 B.C., but it took several months to get back. It was actually 534 B.C. before they returned. So it was seventy years from the time of the first invasion and captivity until the return of the captives from Babylon.

The people got upset in what Jeremiah had to say.

Jeremiah 26:11, “And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, ‘This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.’”

‘Boy, we need to get rid of this guy.’ Great persecution began to come. I think we can understand that and even some of the parallels right on down to our day.

In Jeremiah 27:1-7, we have indication of how God was going to give Babylon dominance.

In vv. 12-18, we have Jeremiah's advice to the king and the information that he brought out.

By the time you get to chapter 29, Jeremiah had some advice for the captives of Babylon. He wrote a letter.

Jeremiah 29:1, “Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.” This would include Ezekiel who was one of the priests who had been carried captive. And it would include Daniel. This was the letter that was written and it described the seventy years. Undoubtedly, this was the letter that Daniel was referring to in the book of Daniel when he was trying to understand, trying to grasp the significance of it.

Verses 4-7, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take

wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.”

They were told that they were to settle down there, build houses, get married and raise their families. They were told they would not be coming back, to not put off those events and to pursue them day in and day out. The time would come when they would be delivered, but they should be pursuing their normal activities in the meanwhile. That was the appropriate way.

In some ways, we could parallel that today. What should we be doing? We need to go about pursuing our normal activities and being productive individuals. Yet we need to be spiritually prepared and ready, realizing that this society, the Babylon in which we live, is not going to last.

It continues and describes some of the persecution that came in.

Jeremiah 30:2, “Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: “Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you.”” Jeremiah was told to write in a book the words that God had spoken, and this is the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was told to write down and describe all these things.

Then we’re told of Jacob’s trouble.

Verse 7, “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.” Now this is clearly referring to the Great Tribulation Jesus talked about.

Matthew 24:21, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no nor ever again shall be.”

In Jeremiah 30:7, we are told, ““...that day is great, none is like it...”” You can’t have two times that are worst than any other time. Clearly, both describe the worst time; therefore, it’s the same time. One of the things that characterize the Tribulation is that it is the time of Jacob’s trouble. He also brings out what will occur after God brings them back from captivity, after He saves them out of that Tribulation.

Verse 9, ““But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.”” King David is going to be resurrected and is going to be king. They are

going to serve Jesus Christ and they are going to serve King David. God will bring them back.

Verse 10, ““...Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid.””

There is no way you can take the description here and apply it to the return of the Jews to Judea in our time because they certainly are not dwelling at rest and with no one making them afraid. That area is filled with terrorists, and there are all kinds of things going on. That is not the fulfillment of this event right here. This is yet future, after the return of Jesus Christ.

Verse 18 describes the great Exodus of the future.

Verse 24, “...In the latter days you will consider it.” It brings out that this prophecy is set in the latter days.

Jeremiah 31 describes the return of Israel.

Verses 7-8, Israel is being re-gathered and the remnant will be saved and brought up from the north country. They are going to be taken, not to Egypt, which is south, but they are going to be taken to the north country. The clear reference is the area up in Europe, the area where the Beast power is centered, which is north of Jerusalem. They are going to be re-gathered and brought back.

Jeremiah 31:10, “Hear the word of the Lord O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.”” It describes that gathering together.

It describes a time of rejoicing after the re-gathering.

Verse 13, “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow.”

One thing as just a kind of aside—it’s interesting that when you read of music in the Bible, it is a unifying factor, a culturally unifying factor. The idea of different music for different generations is a concept alien to the Bible. Music in our age and society, in the twentieth century (particularly the latter portion), has become a divisive factor in society. It has become divisive to generations.

Different music is appropriate for different occasions. There is formal music that is appropriate for occasions of public worship, to set an atmosphere of worship and reverence. There was the Levitical choir and orchestra. But there is also music that is appropriate for other occasions, music that is more informal. Here it

describes a time of rejoicing. Music in this case was appropriate for a kind of impromptu street dance—a time of festivity and rejoicing. We find that this is the role that it traditionally played.

We have to understand the extent to which our modern problems are something unusual. That's not always been. When you go back years ago, some of you remember that normally when there was a dance in the community, everybody was there, young and old people. They all enjoyed and took part in the occasion.

This is what is described here. We are looking at what God intends music to be; music is a culturally unifying factor. Music can express emotions and feeling in a way that virtually nothing else can. God has designed that and designed the laws that actually regulate music in terms of why music affects us as it does because music does have an effect. Certain music can stir you up or slow you down. It can raise or lower your blood pressure and heart rate. They have proven that in clinical studies. You can play a stirring march or soft lullaby, and it has a different effect. There is different music for different occasions.

There is a reference to Rachel.

Verse 15, "...A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." This scripture is quoted in Matthew 2:17-18. The reason Bethlehem is considered the city of Rachel is because Rachel died in Bethlehem giving birth to Benjamin. She died and was buried there. Bethlehem was in the territory of Benjamin. In that sense, it was considered Rachel's city. She was identified with it because she died there and was buried there. The Benjamites (Rachel's descendants) dwelt there.

In Matthew 2:18, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem. Herod knew that the Messiah had been born, at least the One who was reported to be King of the Jews. Because Herod didn't want any competition, he sent the soldiers in to kill all the babies there in Bethlehem. This verse was quoted. It was a poetic reference to the devastation that took place. It describes, figuratively speaking, Rachel weeping for her children. It is a poetic reference to the destruction and devastation that occurred, and it specifically referred to Rachel because of Bethlehem being identified with her. Herod very directly fulfilled it at the slaughter of the infants. Figuratively, it could even refer forward to the time and events of the tribulation when

many of Rachel's end-time descendants will be slaughtered.

We have a description of the New Covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31-33, "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them...But this is the covenant that I will make...I will put My laws in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"

This will ultimately be fulfilled after the return of Christ. It will be a time when that covenant is being written in the hearts of everyone, and there won't be anybody left to be taught. The new covenant will ultimately be completed when all have been converted or have rejected it and been destroyed. God is making the new covenant. It is made with us right now, and the rest of the world will have the opportunity to enter into the new covenant at a future date.

The basis of the new covenant is not that the law is being done away; it is that the law is being written in our hearts and in our minds. In other words, we are trying to learn to think like God. We are not trying to edge as close to worldliness as we can. We are trying to think like God. We are not trying to see what we can get away with. It's having the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). God will put His laws into their hearts and into their minds—convert them. That's what "conversion" means. It means "a change, a transformation." It is more than just external conformity; it is an internal transformation. This is very, very crucial and important.

Jeremiah 32:2-3 goes back and describes Jeremiah's imprisonment.

Verses 3-5, people were upset at what he was saying, the things he was doing and the message he was proclaiming.

I call your attention to more references to the fact that there was a difference between Judah and Israel.

Jeremiah 32:30, "'because the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only evil before Me from their youth...'"

Verse 32, "'because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah...'"

We have this clear reference to the fact that there is a distinction between them.

Jeremiah 33:7, "'And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and

will rebuild those places as at the first.”” This has not yet been fulfilled. Judah came back; Israel has not. That is yet future. It is another reference that clearly shows that Israel’s identity would be preserved down to the end; otherwise, how could they be brought back?

Verses 17-18, “For thus says the Lord: “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually.””

Verses 20-21, “Thus says the Lord: “If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers.””

God describes this covenant. This message was spoken shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, and with it, the cessation of the functioning of the Levitical priesthood and of the reign of the house of David from Jerusalem.

This scripture shows that in spite of appearances, vv. 25-26, God intended to keep His covenant. He would preserve the house of David and the house of Levi. Other scriptures show that while David’s dynasty would continue an uninterrupted reign over the house of Israel, it would not be restored to Jerusalem until Christ comes. The Levites would also be restored to a functioning priesthood at that time.

Notice what he said about David.

Verse 17, “...“David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.”” Now the family of David had not ruled over the house of Israel for more than three hundred years. By the time Jeremiah was writing this, the house of David and the family of David had not ruled over the house of Israel for over three hundred years. They had been ruling over the house of Judah. But this says they are going to rule over the House of Israel. We will notice that there are clear references in Jeremiah and Ezekiel to Jeremiah’s role in transferring the throne of David from Judah to Israel. We will notice some of that next Bible study. We will notice the commission that Jeremiah was given and how it ended up.

Jeremiah 34 recounts the occasion that I mentioned at the beginning of the Bible study. It recounts the siege of the city of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. It recounts Judah’s temporary

repentance and observance of the Sabbatical year, then the Egyptians coming and the Jews thinking they were “off the hook.” They went back to their old ways. Then God said, ‘Just look out. You’re going to get the old punishment.’

You can tie that in with the statement in Galatians 6:7 where God said, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

You don’t “put one over” on God. It just doesn’t work that way. Human nature finds it difficult to realize that God sees and knows and that there isn’t any way that we would ever “put something over” on God. This is a clear lesson and parallel, here in Jeremiah 34, of the attitude of wanting to get out of trouble. But they didn’t have an attitude of really wanting to change. Sometimes that happens. We have to examine our own life and make sure we don’t do something just trying to get out of trouble and not really motivated by a desire and a heart that wants to change. We want God’s law in our hearts and in our minds. That’s the new covenant, being converted, being changed and transformed by a renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

As we go to God for that and for that help, God will work with us. He will add in His Spirit. He may have to work us like the potter does the clay. He may have to pound on us for a little bit to get us softened up where we can be worked with. Some of us take a little more pounding than others. God is going to do it because He is preparing to shape and form us and make us a vessel fit for the Master’s use. We are being shaped and transformed.

A lot is packed here in the book of Jeremiah. We will conclude the book of Jeremiah next Bible study.