

Bible Study # 52
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Major Prophets Series—Jeremiah 1—15

This evening we are getting into the book of Jeremiah. We **are getting into the account of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry.** Jeremiah's ministry covered a period of about 40 years. He began his ministry during the reign of King Josiah. He continued during the reign of King Josiah and all the way down until the final invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. From Judah, Jeremiah went into Egypt with the Jews who fled into Egypt. From Egypt, he proceeded by way of Spain all the way into Ireland. Some of that is gone into in the booklet, *What's Ahead for America and Britain?*

A major part of Jeremiah's commission involved the transferring of the throne of David from ruling over the house of Judah to ruling over the house of Israel. There would be a continuation of his throne and dynasty. A lot of that culminates in the book of Jeremiah. It was during the time of Jeremiah's ministry that there was what appeared to be an apparent end to that promise because the Babylonians came in and conquered Judah.

They took the Jews into captivity. They conquered Jerusalem and burned the temple. They sacked Jerusalem and killed the sons of King Zedekiah. They put out the eyes of Zedekiah and transported him in chains to Babylon. He came to a very gruesome and horrible end. In fact, the very last sight that he saw was the murder of his sons. The Babylonians murdered his sons before his eyes and then they blinded him. His sons being murdered was the last sight that he saw. Then they led him in chains to Babylon—a very horrible end.

Was that the conclusion of the story of David's dynasty? No, it wasn't. Zedekiah's sons were killed, but other scriptures show that his daughters were not. Jeremiah was responsible for safeguarding the daughters. There was one, in particular, who traveled with Jeremiah to Ireland who had a major part in the transferring of the throne of David from ruling over Judah to ruling over Israel.

One of the interesting things that we come upon in the story of Jeremiah is the relationship that Jeremiah had with King Josiah. It kind of sets the stage for the story. King Josiah was the king when Jeremiah first began to prophesy. There is something rather unusual about this. Generally

when we picture a prophet, the picture that comes to our mind is of an elderly man with a long white beard and kind of leaning on his staff. Some of God's prophets were elderly. But Jeremiah was, from all indications, about 17 years old when he started as a prophet. You don't generally think of a teenage prophet. Jeremiah was 17 and Josiah, who was the king, had just turned 20. They were a couple of young men, one a teenager and one just barely out of his teens. In fact, in a lot of ways, Jeremiah and Josiah kind of grew up together.

Remember the story of Josiah? He was proclaimed king when he was eight years of age (2 Kings 22:1). He did not actually have authority and power as king. He was under the oversight of the high priest, Hilkiah (2 Kings 22:4, 8). When we read Jeremiah 1:1, we find that Hilkiah the priest was none other than Jeremiah's father. Josiah was about three years older than young Jeremiah.

The father of Jeremiah, Hilkiah the priest, was the guardian of the young king. Hilkiah was responsible not only for the training and teaching of his own children, but serving as guardian of the king while he was a minor. Hilkiah was what would be termed the "Chairman of the Counsel of Regency"—in other words, the group that oversaw the affairs of state until the king became of age.

In 2 Chronicles 34:3, we're told that when Josiah became 16, he began to really, very seriously seek to learn more of God's way. He took a very serious interest in God's truth as a teenager. When he became 20 years of age, he assumed the full authority of kingship. He launched the most vigorous reform movement in the history of the nation.

It is interesting to note that a 20-year-old king and a teenage prophet spurred the most vigorous, intense and complete reform movement in the history of the nation. I think that is a picture that is not often grasped or realized. God can and has worked, through the years, with young people as well as middle-aged people and old people. It is certainly possible for young men to respond to God. It is possible for young people to respond to God working in their lives.

It's important to realize that it was a time when all of the zeal, drive and intensity of youth was channeled in a very positive way. Even though Jeremiah was quite young, he was dealing with a king who was only about three years older than he was. That relationship continued on through the years of Josiah's active kingship.

There was about a 15-year period of Josiah's life that remained. Josiah died fairly young. He was cut off in his prime.

The book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah to lament the death of Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:25). Josiah was not only his friend but also his king. Lamentations served as a lament for what was going to happen to the nation.

God was impressed by the zeal Josiah evidenced. God had said the nation was going to be punished, but God also promised that He would not do it during the lifetime of King Josiah. God had promised that as long as Josiah lived, He would protect the nation, but when Josiah died, it was all over with—and that is basically what happened.

Lamentations was a lament at the death of King Josiah and for the events that would transpire to the nation of Judah and of Jerusalem in the aftermath of his death. And in that sense, it was prophetic of the events of the Great Tribulation ahead of us. Later, when we go through the book of Lamentations, we will notice the extent that it is a prophecy of the Great Tribulation. The events and captivity that befell ancient Judah prefigured the events of the Great Tribulation, which will be the same thing but in a much grander scale.

This evening we'll **cover the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry.** His ministry stretched over a period of over 40 years. It began when he was quite young and continued on up into his latter years. Actually, it continued past 40 years, but it is at that point that we lose sight of it because the story drops in the book of Jeremiah after Jeremiah's departure to Egypt. We don't have the continuation of the story of his ministry in Egypt, and then on to the areas of Tarsus and Spain and then on up to Ireland, but we do have accounts of it in secular history.

The first 15 chapters of the book of Jeremiah, which we will cover this evening, **focus primarily on God's indictment of the sins of Israel—the forsaking of Him as the true God.** God lists the indictment. He starts out by setting the stage. One of the themes that runs through so many of the prophets is first a formal indictment of their sins. This formal indictment of their sins sets the stage for the punishment that is to come. The punishment, in turn, sets the stage for the repentance that will result. The repentance, in turn, sets the stage for God's deliverance and then God's ultimate blessing, which is what God wanted to give all along.

But for God to continue blessing in the midst of disobedience is to be detrimental to the overall long-term welfare of the person. If God continues to just indefinitely bless us in the midst of disobedience, it serves to harden us in the way of disobedience. God wants us to be a part of His Family. God desires to give the nation His blessing, but the nation has to come to an attitude of obedience. They had to come to repentance, and God was going to deal with them to bring them to that repentance.

God starts out by indicting them. He showed why He was going to have to deal with them severely—why He was going to have to punish them. Then He explained what the punishment was, what the result of the punishment would be in terms of repentance, and then what the final deliverance would be.

The indictment against Israel focuses in on their forsaking of the true God. They forsook the true God. They went after false religion in place of the true God; added to that are the sins of violence, sexual immorality and a total lack of seeking for real truth and justice. There's also a condemnation of Israel learning the way of the heathen. We'll notice in Jeremiah 10 a reference to the Christmas tree. God shows the punishment and the captivity that He is going to bring on the nation. In these chapters, He also alludes to Israel's final repentance, deliverance and restoration.

Jeremiah 1:1, we pick it up, "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin..." As I mentioned earlier, Jeremiah's father was Hilkiah the priest. Anathoth was a small village on the outskirts of Jerusalem. It was one of the priestly locations; it was one of the cities of the priests. Actually, it was more of a village.

Verse 2, we are told that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in the days of Josiah, in the 13th year of his reign. Josiah became king when he was eight years old; that would be when Josiah was 21 years of age.

Verse 5, God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations." God said, 'I had you picked out for a job before you were ever born.'

Some of these scriptures are quoted in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul to explain what he termed "the election of grace." "Election" is simply another way of saying "selection." The point is that you and I were selected. God chose us in accordance with His plan and purpose. It

was an act of God's grace, of God's mercy. We were not chosen because of some particular thing about ourselves. We didn't earn or deserve it. It was not because God was so impressed with us that He said, 'Boy, I certainly need him. I can't make it without him.' God does the choosing and God chooses on the basis that He chooses. God has the right to make decisions. He has the right to decide.

God chose to deal with Jeremiah and He chose to deal with Jeremiah before Jeremiah was ever born. He had done nothing good or bad, one way or the other, to deserve this calling. God had made up His mind about the job that He had for Jeremiah before he was ever born. God began to deal with him and said, 'I have you in mind; I have set you aside as a prophet to the nations.'

Jeremiah's response was that he couldn't do it.

Verse 6, "Then said I: 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.'" He said, 'I'm just a kid; how can I go out and go to the nations? How can I do those things? I'm just a kid.'

Verse 7, God said, 'Don't say that because I'm the One who's sending you. You're going to go wherever I send you; whatever I tell you, that's what you're going to say. I'm with you and I'll take care of you and inspire you. I will give you the words you need to speak.'

Then Jeremiah's commission was laid out. He had a specific commission.

Verse 5, he was ordained a prophet to the nations. He had a specific commission to go to nations (plural), not simply to ancient Judah.

Verse 10, "See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."

He was to root out and pull down, destroy and throw down. And he was to build and to plant. This is a poetic illusion to what he was to do. He would preside over, as a prophet, the pulling down of the temple, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the rooting out of the nation and the pulling down or the overthrow of the throne. But his commission was not to stop there. His commission was also to build and to plant. He was to preside over the transfer of the throne to the house of Israel because God had made a promise to David that He would establish his dynasty and his throne forever. He would not deal with David's family as He had dealt with Saul's. The family of Saul was absolutely removed from the kingship.

2 Samuel 7:13-16, God told David, "....If he [your seed] commits iniquity, I will chasten him.... But My mercy shall not depart from him, And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." "If your descendants sin, I will punish them, but I will not remove them. I will not take My mercy away from them; I will not remove them.'

God continued His explanation to Jeremiah of the job that He had for him.

Jeremiah 2:2, "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem,"

What did God say to Israel?

Verse 3, "Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them,' says the Lord." God has never intended to confine His dealings to Israel or to never move beyond Israel in His dealings. Rather, God started with Israel; Israel was the firstfruits. The fact that Israel was designated as firstfruits presupposes there was an increase that was to come—an increase that would include all of mankind. Israel was simply God's starting point.

If you remember the law of the offerings, the firstfruits were holy to God. God told Israel that when they began to harvest their crop, the firstfruits (the first part) was holy to Him. They gathered in the whole crop, but the firstfruits were holy to God. In the same way, God has begun His harvest of mankind. He chose Israel to be His firstfruits. That's where He started. Israel was chosen as the firstfruits and was to be holy to God.

Exodus 19:5-6, God offered them a covenant and an opportunity to be a holy nation. They were to be holy in the same sense that they would be set apart by having God's law. If they followed God's law, God would dwell in their midst. God would be the source of their holiness. God promised them protection and deliverance.

"All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them,' says the Lord." God said He would bless, defend and protect them. But we're going to see that there was a problem. He said, 'Look what I did for you. This is My message. This is the calling I gave you. This is what I chose you to have a part in. This is what I've done.'

Jeremiah 2:7, "I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination." This is what God has to say about the land that He's granted our

forebearers. He brought them into a bountiful country. But the land has been defiled. God's heritage has been made an abomination. We have defiled it. We have polluted it physically, morally and spiritually. We've made God's heritage an abomination. We look at some of the things that have been done, the things man has done with what God has given us.

Then God goes into an indictment of the religious leadership.

Verse 8, "The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers [KJV, "pastors"] also transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit." He said, 'The people that should have been teaching you, those to whom you looked for religious guidance, have deserted Me.'

Verse 9, "Therefore I will yet bring charges against you," says the Lord, 'and against your children's children I will bring charges.'" He said, 'I am going to continue to deal with you and to get the point across.'

Verse 11, "Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit." Look around and see if you can find an example of a nation that has changed their gods, which are yet not gods. God says to look at the pagan nations; they have been faithful to their paganism.

Isn't it incredible? You go over to some of these pagan countries and they're still worshiping the same idols they worshiped centuries and centuries ago. God says, 'The pagans have been faithful to paganism, and yet My people haven't been faithful to the truth.' Isn't that an incredible thing!

This is the tendency. We see it throughout the Scriptures. The tendency of the people of God who have the truth is to not appreciate it. They take it for granted and gradually let it be watered down. This has always been the tendency of human nature. It's easy to take it for granted. This is what ancient Israel did. We read that and say, 'How could those people be so carnal and do that?' Yet we have to recognize the tendency that can come up, even with God's people and with God's Church. God's Church can gradually take God's truth for granted and not really be excited about it, to value and appreciate it and then to gradually kind of water it down—to let it water down until it becomes blended more and more with worldliness. After a while, it finally comes to a point where God's people have lost their identity.

This is the story repeated over and over in the Old Testament and it is the warning we have in the New Testament. It is the tendency of human nature. We have those examples and it should be a warning for us. That's going to be the tendency of human nature. We're going to have to swim against the tide to do anything else.

Verse 13, "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water." Talk about a bad trade! Here, on the one hand, you have an artesian well and you don't appreciate that. You want to make a cistern. A cistern is not an ideal source to depend on for water. This is a broken cistern, which means whatever you are going to put in is going to dribble out and you won't have anything at all. If someone was willing to trade an artesian well as his water source for a broken cistern, you would think, 'That's pretty dumb!'

It's a very descriptive picture. When you get the picture, you see that's what God says our people have done spiritually. Here is God, the source of living waters. The Holy Spirit is compared to living waters. That's like an artesian well; the water comes bubbling up. There's a source of flowing water there that anybody can have—a source of pure water bubbling up from down deep inside the earth. God compares that to His Holy Spirit, which is a source of life. It flows out. He contrasts it with a trade for a broken cistern. He says, 'My people, Israel, have made a trade and they have really made a bad deal.' We certainly want to make sure that we don't make that trade. God indicts them for not only rejecting the truth but for choosing error.

Verse 19, "Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will reprove you." A lot of the punishments that are going to come upon us are cause and effect; there are consequences to our actions that will come upon us. A lot of things that are going to happen to this nation are the results of the things we have sown. We reap what we sow.

In Jeremiah 3, God begins to draw another analogy to His relationship with Israel. Now we get into the relationship of a marriage relationship. In Exodus 19, God entered into a covenant with Israel. That covenant was a marriage covenant; God established with ancient Israel a marriage relationship.

In Jeremiah 3:1, He describes Israel having played the harlot with many lovers, and yet God says that He is still offering them an opportunity

to return. Here was Israel who had been so unfaithful to God, figuratively, having played the harlot. Israel lived as a prostitute with all sorts of other lovers—with other nations. God says Judah didn't learn anything from what Israel did.

Jeremiah 3:8, “Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.”

Verse 14, “Return, O backsliding children,’ says the Lord; ‘for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.’” Even though God has to put away faithless Israel and remove His protection from her, He pictures Himself in the role of the husband. He was the Protector and Provider. Israel was to be faithful and be a faithful helper. Israel was to further the plan and purpose that God had. Israel was to be supportive, a helper, one who is fitting and suitable. Instead of being faithful, Israel was faithless. But God says that He was still going to give them an opportunity to repent, to change, to learn, to turn around and go the other way. He tells them to repent, to “return, O backsliding children.” He says, ‘Eventually when you do, I am going to bring you back out of captivity.’

Verses 15-18, “And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land.... At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. 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 as an inheritance to your fathers.” —“The land of the north.”

If you go north of Palestine, you're going up into Europe. Judah and Israel are going to be regathered together. Now that has not happened yet. Judah is the only part of the 12 tribes that ever returned to the Promised Land. When Israel went into captivity, they never came back. They never returned. We will notice that at a later time Judah returned. But this is a time yet future, a time when Judah and Israel would return together. That's after the return of Christ. At that time they will have right and proper leadership

and be regathered from the land of the north. It is brought out that God is our source of help.

Jeremiah 4:1, “If you will return, O Israel,’ says the Lord, ‘Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved.’” There is a need for change. There is a need to repent, to put away sin and to put away the abominations out of God's sight. We can't continue in sin and expect God will approve.

Verse 4, God talks about circumcision of the heart, “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,” Clean up our lives. This is prophetic of the Holy Spirit and is an allusion to the understanding that came about in the New Testament, of the circumcision that had a spiritual implication (Romans 2:25-29). It talks about God's word going forth and the results.

Verse 15, “For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim...” That had to be a future prophecy because Ephraim, Dan and all the others had long since gone into captivity well over 100 years before Jeremiah ever prophesied. It was looking all the way down to our day to God's work going forth from the British Isles and throughout Europe—going forth from that area. It was something that was not fulfilled until this point in time.

Verse 20, it talks about what is going to happen, “Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered.”

Verse 22, “For My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

Verses 27-30, God talks about the destruction that is going to come, and yet He says, “For thus says the Lord: ‘The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black, because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, nor will I turn back from it. The whole city shall flee from the noise of the horsemen and bowmen. They shall go into thickets and climb up on the rocks. Every city shall be forsaken, and not a man shall dwell in it. And when you are plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life.’”

God describes Israel under the guise of a harlot. She arrays and adorns herself in the traditional manner of the harlots, the harlots of antiquity. You can go through certain districts of many cities; you drive down the street and you can see some that are pretty much “decked out.” Jeremiah 4:30 comes to mind. They have the “look.” They don’t have to hold up a sign saying what their profession is. All you have to do is look at the way they’re “decked out”—how they’re dressed, all painted up and “bleached out.” You know exactly what they’re peddling.

God describes Israel in that connotation, ‘You’re looking at your lovers [other nations]. You think that somehow you are going to be able to appeal to them.’ He describes Israel under the guise of an unfaithful wife; when confronted with calamity, she thinks somehow she can be pulled out of the calamity by trying the old trick of enticing the lovers. He uses descriptive, poetic language that was descriptive of the women of ill repute. God describes that even when Israel was confronted with her calamities, instead of turning to Him, she started trying to “finagle” around as to how she could entice allies to come to her rescue. God says, ‘It’s not going to do any good; you have to learn the lesson.’

Jeremiah 5:1, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her.” Look and see if there’s any truth in judgment. God says you are not going to see much of that.

Verses 7-8, “How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots’ houses. They were like well-fed lusty stallions; every one neighed after his neighbor’s wife.”

God describes the immorality. God says, ‘When I blessed you, when you were prosperous and you had everything, instead of appreciating and valuing it, you lined up like troops for the harlots’ houses for every kind of immorality.’ It describes the allusion of everyone neighing after his neighbor’s wife—absolute rampant immorality. Immorality absolutely undercuts and is destructive to a society because morality is the guardian of the family. Morality guards and protects the family. It gives sanctity and “specialness” to the family. When morality breaks down, the family falls apart; when the

family falls apart, the community and nation fall apart.

The family is our basis of connecting to the past and to the future. When you think in terms of family, you think of those who’ve come before you and whose contribution you appreciate and value. But you also think in terms of the future. You have children and grandchildren, and in terms of what you’re doing, you’re thinking not just for yourself, but for them. There’s a sense of connection with the past and with the future. When people think in terms of family, they build the future. When people think only in terms of “here and now” and self, there is no concept of the future. When all they’re after is self-gratification, they don’t care what the consequences are tomorrow. The attitude is: ‘I don’t care what happens, I’ll be dead by then.’

It’s kind of like the famous quote that is attributed to King Louis XV of France. His son Louis XVI was the king when the French Revolution came about. Louis XV was pretty much of a waster. He squandered things and he knew that he was not properly governing the nation. He made the statement on more than one occasion, “After me, the flood!”

Some say, ‘I don’t think it will happen in my lifetime, but when I’m gone, it’s all going to come tumbling down. But I don’t care because I’m not going to be here.’ –No sense of concern or loyalty. What kind of world am I leaving to my children and grandchildren? ‘I won’t be here and if I’m not here, who cares!’ That’s a pretty selfish, self-centered approach. The world is filled with that, and the more there is a disintegration of the family and family loyalty, the more people don’t care what kind of world they are leaving. ‘Hey, I’m not going to be here; what do I care?’

Even economically we are running up this astronomical debt. The ones who are running it up think the bill won’t come due until after we’re dead. ‘Let the children and grandchildren worry about it. We don’t care if we build up something that won’t last. All it needs to do is last through our lifetime. That’s all we care about.’ This is a selfish, self-centered approach. That means you’re setting up a society to collapse—a society where immorality is rampant, a society that is selfish, self-centered and greedy. It’s only thought is for “here and now.” Right now! The only problem with “right now” is that, eventually, tomorrow and the day after are going to come.

A society that will endure and last is a society that is in preparation, a society that is building something that will last. The whole concept of craftsmanship is building something that will last. We talk about the extent to which we have become a “throw-away” society. So many things that are built, within a few years they are falling apart. They are not even built to be fixed—just throw it away and get another one.

A lot of this attitude gets back to the whole concept of morality—a selfish, self-centered society. A society that has lost its moral bearings is a society that cannot long endure. God describes that.

Jeremiah 5:11, “For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously with Me,” says the Lord.”

Verse 15, “Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,” says the Lord. ‘It is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say.’”

Notice here that this is a prophecy to the house of Israel, not a prophecy to the house of Judah. Jeremiah had prophecies for Judah (referring to his own day and his own time), but the house of Israel had gone into captivity over 100 years before Jeremiah ever wrote this. So, these prophecies look way beyond his day. These prophecies come on down to our day, at the end time. He talks about that and the events that are going to come in. He says, ‘I’m going to bring this nation upon you.’

Verse 16, “Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty men.” It’s interesting that the word “German” literally means “man of war.” “Ashur,” who is the ancient ancestor, means “strong.” When He says they are mighty men (of war), it is really a play on words of the name of the nation that was going to be used as the instrument of punishment.

Verses 17-19, “And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; they shall destroy your fortified cities, in which you trust, with the sword. Nevertheless in those days,” says the Lord, ‘I will not make a complete end of you. And it will be when you say, “Why does the Lord our God do all these things to us?” then you shall answer them, “Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours.””

God says, ‘You haven’t wanted to serve Me; I’m going to let you find out what service is.’ Those who don’t want to voluntarily submit to God are going to have a chance to submit at the end of the point of a bayonet to the German Gestapo of the future. Then they will find out it really wasn’t so bad to serve God. How glad we would be for the chance to serve God instead of serving the Beast power of the future.

Matthew 11:28, 30, it’s going to give new meaning to these verses when Christ said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, . . . For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” You think it’s hard to serve God? Stick around for a few years and try serving the Germans. You’ll find out we never had it so good.

The events that are going to happen in the Great Tribulation are going to far overshadow the events of World War II and the Holocaust; there will be no comparison. The magnitude of the events of the Tribulation will so overwhelm and overshadow those events that there will be no comparison. The events of World War II won’t even be mentioned because the events of the future are going to be so much worse and on such a greater scale. That’s hard to imagine.

Matthew 24:21, Jesus said, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.” It’s going to surpass everything and anything that has ever happened, which means it is going to surpass the Holocaust, the atrocities that Stalin wrought in Russia, that Hitler wrought, and that all the dictators have wrought. These things are going to be paled by the magnitude of what is going to occur.

Jeremiah 5:23, ““But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; they have revolted and departed.””

Verse 25, ““Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good things from you.””

Verse 31, ““The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so.”” People don’t want to hear the truth; they like it that way. That’s the incredible thing. People don’t like it if you start telling them the truth. They resent that. They want to be told that everything’s great and everything’s fine. They’re not anxious to have the leaders tell them the truth.

Let’s see a little more of what God has to say about the religious leaders.

Jeremiah 6:13-15, “Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, “Peace, peace!” when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,” says the Lord.”

God says that from the least of them to the greatest, they’re given to covetousness. God says that is really the motivating factor. A lot of people in the world have begun to recognize that. Turn on the Sunday morning “comedy hour” (if you want to call it that way); they spend more time begging for money than anything else. Then we had all these scandals that hit. God says, ‘Look, the whole bunch is given to covetousness. Money is what they’re after. They’re in it for what they can get.’ He says, ‘They are all dealing falsely. They’ve healed the hurt of My people slightly.’ Did God say that none of them have ever done anything that’s any good? No, He didn’t say that. They may have helped a little bit here and there, slightly. But they haven’t really solved the problem. They say, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” They weren’t ashamed of what they had done. They hadn’t really turned from the abominations that are done in God’s sight.

Verse 17, God says, “Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, “Listen to the sound of the trumpet!” But they said, “We will not listen.”” God sets a watchman. This work was raised up when God raised up Mr. Herbert Armstrong and threw him into this work. We are now a part and a continuation of this end-time work of God.

God raised up His work (the Philadelphia era of His Church) to be a watchman, to proclaim a message, even though the nation is not really going to listen and to hearken.

Jeremiah 7:2-9, “Stand in the gate of the Lord’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, “Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord!”” Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.” For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly

execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know.”

Verse 10, you do all these things, “and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, “We are delivered to do all these abominations?””

People were trusting in lying words saying, “the temple of the Lord.” In other words, God’s house is here. We are God’s people and God won’t let anything happen to us. A lot of people think, ‘The United States is the bastion of democracy, the best hope of mankind. God wouldn’t let anything happen to us. After all, we’re the best He has.’ Well, let’s not kid ourselves!

Here’s their approach: ‘the law is done away and we’re delivered to do all these abominations.’ They say that it’s okay because the law is done away. God says, ‘That is not the case.’

Verses 17-18, “Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven;” This describes the origin of hot cross buns and why they come out at Easter time. “Easter” is the English spelling and pronunciation of the ancient Babylonian god Astarte, the queen of heaven.

The Catholic Church has simply taken the old Babylonian goddess Astarte or Easter (as they call her now) and they continue to worship the queen of heaven. Those of you who come out of a Catholic background realize who the queen of heaven is, don’t you? They talk about the queen of heaven; they call her Mary. Mary was the mother of Jesus. She was certainly given the greatest honor that any human woman could ever be given. She was chosen by God to literally give birth to God in the flesh—to give birth to Jesus Christ—and to be entrusted to bring Him up, to train Him and to teach Him. There’s no place in the Bible where Mary is called the queen of heaven.

The one called the queen of heaven here was the old Babylonian goddess. That’s why, today, what’s called the Roman Catholic Church is

nothing but a continuation of “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Revelation 17:5). That’s what it is, just a continuation of the same old Babylonian Mystery Religion. The same old customs are right on down to our day. Everything they do goes right back to ancient Babylon. You can read about it. In just a page or two (Jeremiah 10), we come to the Christmas tree. All these things go way back.

Verses 22-24, “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying “Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.” Yet they did not obey or incline their ear,”

The sacrifices were not a part of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was not based on the sacrifices. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He did not originally speak to them concerning sacrifices. That’s not what the Old Covenant was about. The sacrifices were added after they broke the Old Covenant. They were added because of disobedience; they were added as a schoolmaster. The Sabbath wasn’t added. The holy days weren’t added. The laws of God were not added; that was part of the Old Covenant to begin with. The sacrifices were added. God didn’t originally speak of the sacrifices when He brought them out of Egypt.

Galatians 3:24, “Therefore the law was our tutor....” KJV, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster....” God added the sacrifices as a schoolmaster.

God talks about the things the nation did.

Jeremiah 7:25-26, “Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck.” God said, ‘Yet you haven’t listened.’

Jeremiah 8:5, “Why then has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return.”

Verse 9, “The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have?” When you reject God’s word, what kind of wisdom are you going to find?

Verses 10-11, “...because from the least even to the greatest everyone is given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly,” “Slightly,” that’s all it amounts to.

In Jeremiah 9 is the prophecy of the catastrophes and calamities that are going to happen.

Jeremiah 9:11, “I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins and a den of jackals [KJV, “dragons”].” The word actually means “coyotes” and things of that sort. “Dragons” is a bad translation. In other words, it is going to be deserted. There will be wild animals.

Verse 9, continuing, “...I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant.”

Verses 12-14, “...Why does the land perish and burn up like a wilderness, so that no one can pass through? And the Lord said, ‘Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the imagination of their own heart and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them...’” They have done these things and as a result, there will be war and captivity.

Verse 16, “I will scatter them also among the Gentiles, whom neither they nor their fathers have known. And I will send a sword after them until I have consumed them.” This shows that the nation was going to go into captivity for its sins.

Verses 23-24, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,’ says the Lord.”

God says don’t glory in the physical things. Don’t glory in what you know or how strong you are or what you have. Don’t place your confidence in the physical. Those things will let you down. Money can be wiped out overnight. You can have a stock market crash; rapid inflation occurs. You can have all kinds of things happen. That’s not something that is foolproof. Physical strength can fail. Wisdom is limited. Whatever you know, it’s human knowledge and it is limited. Don’t take pride in the physical, but rather, the thing to have confidence in is that you know the true God.

Verse 26, “Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest

corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.” This shows that God is concerned about circumcision of the heart. Circumcision of the heart is a cutting away of the old attitudes and thoughts, the cutting away of the old attitudes of mind. He describes the Gentile nations as being uncircumcised and all the house of Israel as uncircumcised in the heart. Circumcision of the heart is the most important circumcision of all.

In Jeremiah 10:1-8 is the description of the Christmas tree—a pagan custom that God’s people are not to follow.

Jeremiah 10:1, “Hear the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel.” This is not addressing Judah because this sin is not the sin of Judah; it is the sin of the house of Israel—our people, our nation.

Verse 2, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Do not learn the way of the Gentiles [KJV, “heathens”];” Don’t learn heathen pagan customs.

Verses 3-4, “For the customs of the people are futile [vain; then He describes one of them]; for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple.” They go and cut a tree. They bring it back and make it stand up straight. They decorate it and make it all glittery and pretty. Kind of sounds familiar, doesn’t it? God says that’s the custom of the heathens. Don’t learn the way of the heathen.

Every year right around Christmas time, an article will come out in one of the local newspapers about the origin of Christmas. They will readily tell you that Christmas trees go back to pagan customs and pagan traditions and ideas. They will readily admit, ‘We got this custom from the ancient Babylonians or that custom from the Egyptians or the Assyrians, and aren’t all these nice pagan customs okay?’ People sometimes make the excuse, ‘That’s not why we do it.’ God says, ‘Don’t learn the way of the heathen.’

You can look at any number of worldly customs mentioned in the Bible in a negative way, and people say, ‘Yeah, but that’s not why we do it today.’ No, the reason we do it today is because we’re trying to be just like everybody else. Why do people decorate their house for Christmas? It’s not because they are trying to worship the sun god. It’s because they’re trying to be like their neighbors; they are trying to blend in.

Would you like to be the one to explain to Christ when He asks why you did do so-and-so? ‘Well, everybody else was doing it. I didn’t want to stand out.’ Wouldn’t you feel really good about giving that explanation? Don’t you think He would be really impressed with that? Somehow, I just don’t think it will “wash” too well. People miss the point. If we just learn the way of God, we have all we can handle. Why go out and start learning the way of the heathen, trying to mix it in and creating our own way of doing things?

Verse 23 is a very important verse, “Oh Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”

Proverbs 3:5-6, that is just another way of saying, “...lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

It’s not just inherently a part of us to know just what we should do. “The way of man is not in himself; it’s not in man that walks to direct his steps.” We don’t know by ourself. That’s why God tells us; God reveals to us. We are like God’s little children and God teaches and tells us.

Can you imagine just turning a little baby loose and not giving him any guidance? The way that they should go is not just inherent in them. They’ll do all kinds of things because they don’t know better. Some things they do can be so dangerous and destructive. We’re just grown up little babies. Spiritually we are still just kind of crawling along. The way of mankind is not in himself. Apart from God revealing it to us, we don’t know by ourselves. God reveals it to us not because He’s trying to give us a hard time, but because He loves us and doesn’t want us to hurt ourselves. Why did you set rules and restrictions for your little babies and your little children? Was it because you didn’t want them to have fun? Of course not! It’s because you didn’t want them to hurt themselves, to do something dangerous and wind up inflicting permanent damage upon themselves.

Jeremiah 11:2-5, “Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, “Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,”

that I may establish the oath which I have sworn to your fathers,””””

Verses 7-8, “““For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, ‘Obey My voice.’ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the imagination [KJV, margin, ‘stubbornness’] of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do,”””” God says, ‘I have warned them. I have told them.’

Verse 10, ““They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.”” God describes the covenant. God’s covenant message to our people, over and over again, has been a simple direct message: “Obey My voice!” Verse 7 brings that out.

Verse 8 shows that Israel proceeded to go its own way and will therefore receive, as a result, all of the curses mentioned in the book of the covenant. Go back and read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Read the curses of the book of the covenant. God made a covenant and He said, ‘Obey My voice; just obey My voice.’ The nation has not done that. It has refused the admonition that has been given and repeated over and over. There are going to be consequences to come about. They have gone into the imagination of their evil heart, in the stubbornness of their own heart. They’ve just done their own thing. They do the things they want to do. God describes that.

Let’s notice a couple of places to illustrate that the house of Israel and the house of Judah are distinct and separate. I would suggest you read the booklet, *What’s Ahead for America and Britain?* Understanding where our nations are identified in the Bible is the basis of understanding much of prophecy. If you don’t understand who is being talked about when it says “Israel,” then you can’t understand Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos and all the others.

Verse 10 is one place that shows a clear distinction between Israel and Judah, ““...the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My Covenant which I made with their fathers.”” That’s one place that shows a clear distinction between Israel and Judah. It shows that they are distinct.

Jeremiah 13:11, “““For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house

of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me,” says the Lord, “that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they would not hear.””” God describes the events that were going to come.

He shows in Jeremiah 11:10 and Jeremiah 13:11 that the House of Israel and the House of Judah are distinct and separate. Jeremiah was writing over 150 years after Israel had ceased to be a nation. Northern Israel had gone into captivity. Jeremiah still regarded them as a distinct, separate people. Israel is not the same thing as the Jews. The term “Jew” only refers to “the descendants of Judah.” It refers to the House of Judah; “Jew” is an English slang term for “Judah.”

In Jeremiah 12, the events of the captivity are cited.

Jeremiah 12:4, “How long will the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither? The beasts and birds are consumed, for the wickedness of those who dwell there, because they said, ‘He will not see our final end.’” It talks about all the things that have happened and the events that have occurred.

Verse 7, ““I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies.”” God allowed the punishment to come.

Verses 15-16, ““Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land. And it shall be, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, ‘As the Lord lives,’ as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people.”” God will deal with them and He will bring them back.

Jeremiah 13 describes what He is going to do and how He’s going to call them to repentance. He talks about Judah being carried into captivity.

Jeremiah 13:19, “The cities of the South shall be shut up, and no one shall open them; Judah shall be carried away captive, all of it; it shall be wholly carried away captive.”

Jeremiah 14 talks about the drought that was coming.

Jeremiah 14:2, “Judah mourns, and her gates languish;”

Verse 4, there was a lack of rain.

Verse 14, “...‘The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false

vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.”

He says that they will perish along with the others.

Verse 15, “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, “Sword and famine shall not be in this land”—“By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed!””

In Jeremiah 15, we see a description showing three categories of the calamities and events that are going to occur.

Jeremiah 15:2, “... “Thus says 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.’”” He describes all the calamities and events that are going to occur and the reason that these things were going to happen to Judah.

Verse 4, “I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.” God says Judah went into captivity because of the sins of wicked King Manasseh. The nation never recovered from that. Things got so far off the track for so long, they never got back.

God tells us that when they get into trouble, they say, ‘I’m sorry,’ but they don’t mean it.

Verse 6, “...I am weary of relenting!” What He is talking about is the old “broken record” of people. When they get in trouble, they say, ‘I’m sorry’ and do not really mean it. He’s not talking about a genuine turning away from our own ways. He’s talking about the same old thing, over and over and over again. That gets old. The events are described.

Jeremiah describes his regard for God’s word in a very descriptive poetic term.

Verse 16, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.” Jeremiah describes God’s word. It was delightful food. The word of God should be like our spiritual food. Part of the way we are spiritually nourished is taking in God’s word. Jeremiah says, ‘Your words were found and I ate them.’

Matthew 4:4, Jesus said, “...“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”” That needs to be our attitude toward God’s word. Jeremiah describes in the latter part of the chapter the attitude that

God is pleased with, the attitude of desiring God’s word and, Jeremiah 15:17, an attitude of not sitting in the assembly of the mockers. Having the right attitude toward God and God’s word—not taking it for granted, not mocking, but really appreciating and valuing what God says. Our attitude needs to be one of really appreciating God’s truth and God’s calling.

We are clearly living in very momentous times. You do not, *at all*, want to take for granted the tremendous things that God has opened our minds to see and understand. We want to value and appreciate them.

With that, we will conclude the Bible Study.