

# JEREMIAH - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

## THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

### What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
- b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Does Jeremiah contribute significantly to our understanding of God? If not to our understanding, how about the understanding of the universe looking on? In what ways is Jeremiah outstanding, compared to other books we have studied? Are there some things uniquely emphasized in Jeremiah? What were the circumstances under which Jeremiah wrote? What was Jeremiah's position in society?

Jeremiah, known in Hebrew as *Yirmeyahu* or *Yirmeyah* and in Greek as *Ieremias*, has a name that probably means "Yahweh establishes" or "Yahweh casts." Most of his writing was actually done by his "secretary" Baruch (See Jeremiah 36:4,27,28,32) who has an apocryphal book named after him. Jeremiah 52, like Deuteronomy 34, is a historical summary of events, some of which took place some time after Jeremiah's death. Jeremiah came from the priestly family of Eli and Abiathar who were deposed from the high priesthood by David and Solomon. (See 1 Kings 1:7; 2:26,27) Thus he grew up in Anathoth, about 2 ½ miles (4 Km) northeast of Jerusalem. His ministry began in 628/627 BC. and continued until at least 586 BC when Jerusalem fell the final time to Nebuchadnezzar. If the book were organized chronologically it would look something like this:

During the reign of: **Manasseh** 696 (695)-642 B.C.: Jeremiah born about 645 B.C.

**Amon** 642-640 B.C.: Jeremiah still a child

**Josiah** (640-609 BC): Jeremiah 1-6; 14-16

**Jehoahaz** (609 BC): reigned only three months.

**Jehoiakim** (609-598 BC): Jeremiah 17; 7-11; 26; 35; 22:1-19; 25; 18-20; 36:1-4; 45; 36:5-32; 12.

**Jehoiachin** (598-597 BC): Jeremiah 22:20-30; 13; 23.

**Zedekiah** (597-586 BC): Jeremiah 24; 29-31; 46-51; 27; 28; 21; 34; 32; 33; 37-39.

**After the fall of Jerusalem:** Jeremiah 40-44; 52.

**Jeremiah dies:** sometime around 580 B.C.

See extended chronology of Jeremiah in Appendix.

"Jeremiah's life and Jeremiah's book are a single piece. He wrote what he lived, he lived what he wrote. There is no dissonance between his life and his book. Some people write better than they live; others live better than they write. Jeremiah, writing or living, was the same Jeremiah.

"This is important to know because Jeremiah is the prophet of choice for many when we find ourselves having to live through difficult times and want some trustworthy help in knowing what to think, how to pray, how to carry on. We'd like some verification of credentials. This book provides the verification.

"We live in disruptive times. The decades preceding and following the pivotal third millennium are not exactly unprecedented. There have certainly been comparable times of disruption in the past that left everyone reeling, wondering what on earth and in heaven was going on. But whatever their occasion or size, troubles require attention.

"Jeremiah's troubled life spanned one of the most troublesome periods in Hebrew history, the decades leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., followed by the Babylonian exile. Everything that could go wrong *did* go wrong. And Jeremiah was in the middle of all of it, sticking it out, praying and preaching, suffering and striving, writing and believing. He lived through crushing storms of hostility and furies of bitter doubt. Every muscle in his body was stretched to the limit by

fatigue; every thought in his mind was subjected to questioning; every feeling in his heart was put through fires of ridicule. He experienced it all agonizingly and wrote it all magnificently.

“What happens when everything you believe in and live by is smashed to bits by circumstances? Sometimes the reversals of what we expect from God come to us as individuals, other times as entire communities. When it happens, does catastrophe work to re-form our lives to conform to who God actually is and not the way we imagined or wished him to be? Does it lead to an abandonment of God? Or, worse, does it trigger a stubborn grasping to the old collapsed system of belief, holding on for dear life to an illusion?

“Anyone who lives in disruptive times looks for companions who have been through them earlier, wanting to know how they went through it, how they made it, what it was like. In looking for a companion who has lived through catastrophic disruption and survived with grace, biblical people more often than not come upon Jeremiah and receive him as a true, honest, and God-revealing companion for the worst of times. (*The Message*)

During the ministry of Jeremiah major world events took place as well. **Babylon** rose to world dominance by conquering **Assyria** at Nineveh in 612 BC and later **Egypt** at Carchemish in 605 BC. **Jerusalem was conquered twice and finally was besieged 30 months and completely destroyed in July of 586 BC.**

**This book is almost a spiritual autobiography of Jeremiah.** He seemed to have a very sensitive nature, and was normally shy and retiring. He struggled with great inner conflicts. See Jeremiah 11:18-23; 12:1-5; 15:10-18; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18; compare Jeremiah 1:4-10; 6:11; 8:21-9:1.

“There is uncertainty among Old Testament scholars concerning the meaning of the name ‘Jeremiah.’ Some suggestions are: ‘YAHWEH hurls,’ or “‘Yahweh sets free.’ The most literal translation is ‘Yahweh loosens (the womb).’ The name appears in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament in both a long and a short form...

“The Book of Jeremiah reveals much about the personal feelings of the prophet himself, including his reluctance with regard to the divine call to a prophetic ministry (Jer.1:5-8), and his lament over his circumstances as a true prophet of YAHWEH (Jer.15:10; 20:7-18). He was a young man at the beginning of his ministry (Jer.1:6), and evidently, in obedience to the command of God (Jer.16:1-4) he remained unmarried throughout his life. Judging from his purchase of the field from Hanamel (Jer.32:8-10), he was a man of means.

“As a faithful and true prophet of YAHWEH, Jeremiah often stood alone among the religious leaders of his day and his countrymen (e.g., Jer.26:8,9; 27:16-18), and even among his family and in the city of his birth (Jer.11:21; 12:6). His life truly exemplified the statement of Jesus, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house” (Matt. 13:57).

**“THEME:** The Coming Judgment

“The Book of Jeremiah provides a record of the sermons, discourses, symbolic actions, and prophetic utterances of the prophet. The book was written to demonstrate the authority and reliability of the prophetic word, and to give divine authentication to the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. The messianic prophecies contained in Jeremiah find their full and complete realization in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

“The book points to the inevitable and inescapable judgment of God upon Israel for her rebellion and disobedience. Because of idolatry and sinful indulgence, God’s wrath will fall upon the Hebrew nation in the form of the coming captivity (586-538 B.C.). Jeremiah continually sought, though in vain, to turn the people back to God.

**“CHRONOLOGY:** One of the critical problems regarding the interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah is the lack of chronology. Its arrangement is especially bewildering to the logic of the western mind. Adding to the problem is the fact that the Septuagint leaves out one-eighth of the book and places the prophecies against the nations (Jer. 46-51) after Jer.25:13. No one has been able to give an adequate solution to the problems of chronology. One must remember that the book represents the

grief and heartaches of the “weeping prophet” (Jer.9:1,10). The fact that they are not chronological only accentuates the sense of despondency.

“**JOSIAH’S REFORM:** The Book of the Law was discovered in the temple by Hilkiah the priest in 622 B.C. (2 Kings 22:8-14). Josiah initiated a reform which had as its motive the reinstatement of YAHWEH worship. While the goal of this reform was worthy, it is clear that the results were shallow and outward. Jeremiah may have supported the movement in its early stages, but as it became apparent that it was only superficial he began to call for true repentance (Jer.7:1-20) and obedience (Jer.11:1-17). Jeremiah’s break with the superficial reformation came when he preached his temple sermon (Jer.26:1-24), illustrated with the wooden and iron yokes (Jer.27:1-28:17). Hananiah’s denouncement of Jeremiah (Jer.28:10-14) shows the opposition of the establishment to Jeremiah’s call for authentic reform.” (*Believer’s Study Bible*)

“Jeremiah is rightly considered among the major prophets. His book is longer than Isaiah and is also longer than either Ezekiel or the 12 Minor Prophets combined. Its important subject matter includes timely messages to God’s people in the closing days of Judah, and prophecies concerning the Messiah and the new covenant. The book customarily appears between Isaiah and Ezekiel in the Old Testament Canon.

“Jeremiah’s text has come down in differing forms. In the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint), it is shorter and shows a different arrangement of the material in chapters 46-51. Both the Hebrew and Greek texts of the book have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. No compelling reason exists, however, for abandoning the traditional form of the original Hebrew text reflected in our English translations.” (*King James Version Study Bible*)

**For more detail on the dates of events in Jeremiah see appendix: *The Time Line for Jeremiah.***

2. When did the children of Israel behave as well as suggested in Jeremiah 2:1-3? (compare Jer. 31:18-20; Ezekiel 20:4-26) Or is God just being very generous here? Didn’t that whole generation who passed through the wilderness have to die because of their rebellion?

“**Jeremiah 2:2** The Hebrew word translated “kindness” is *hesed*; it usually refers to God’s lovingkindness expressed in His covenant relationship with Israel. God’s *hesed* denotes persistent and unconditional tenderness, kindness, and mercy, a relationship in which God seeks after man with love and mercy. Man’s *hesed* is pictured in the loving bride who clings to her beloved bridegroom. This state of betrothal between God and Israel is the period from Israel’s deliverance out of Egypt to the establishment of the covenant at Sinai. Here it refers to Israel’s love for YAHWEH, which the nation had expressed in days gone by. In v. 7 the words “a bountiful country” (*karmel*, Heb.) literally mean “a garden land.” The picture is one of protection and security made possible by God’s presence and goodness.” (*Believer’s Study Bible*)

“The word translated **kindness** is often used in contexts dealing with covenant relationships. The word often speaks of that love that God shares with believers as members of His own family. Here the establishment of the family relationship is emphasized by linking God’s redemption of His people from Egypt, and the time that followed, to the loving period of early marriage. As the rest of the chapter unfolds, the imagery of the bride is used to catalog Israel’s sins: she had been seduced into idolatry (vv. 4-8); she had forsaken the refreshing waters of marriage for the broken cisterns of infidelity (vv. 9-13); she had left her divine husband for a wayward life among the surrounding nations (vv. 14-19); and she had stooped to the level of base spiritual harlotry by worshiping false gods and engaging in false religious practices (vv. 20-28). Even veteran harlots would blush at what God’s bride had done (vv. 32, 33). Her prostitution was both flagrant and incurable (vv. 34-37). Accordingly, judgment must come. For further instances of Israel as God’s bride, see Isaiah 54:4-17; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1-3.” (*King James Version Study Bible*)

“Chapter 2 is presented in the form of a covenant lawsuit, an indictment brought by God against His people (2:1-3:5).” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

These first few verses need to be compared to what God said to David's descendants about him. (See handout # 46 - **David - A Man After God's Own Heart?**) God is always incredibly gracious towards His children, even when their record is not very good. How sad that the only period that God could look back on as being a wonderful period of "fellowship" lasted only a brief time from Egypt to Sinai. There were other brief times when things were pretty good: while building the tabernacle at Sinai; maybe during the times of David and Solomon while preparing for and building the Temple. Why were these times so few and so brief?

3. Jeremiah spends a great deal of time discussing the worship of different "gods" and how the people had left the true God to go after other "gods." (Jeremiah 2:11; 3:13; 7:16-19) Can you think of any other nation that changed its "gods?" Was Israel irreligious during this period? When He complained that they had changed "gods" were they aware that they had done this? Or was it that in their minds, they had changed their picture of God? Although they paid tithe, worshiped on the Sabbath, and observed all the ceremonial requirements, did they really know God? What could possibly have been so attractive in those heathen religions? Why does God have such a hard time holding His people and getting them to worship Him? Doesn't He have the power? Can you produce what God wants most by power and force? How could God have lost one-third of the angels (Revelation 12:4)

**Jeremiah 2:11:**<sup>11</sup> No other nation has ever changed its gods, even though they were not real. But my people have exchanged me, the God who has brought them honour, for gods that can do nothing for them. *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

**Jeremiah 3:13:**<sup>13</sup> Only admit that you are guilty and that you have rebelled against the Lord, your God. Confess that under every green tree you have given your love to foreign gods and that you have not obeyed my commands. I, the Lord, have spoken. *Good News Bible*

If God could accomplish what He wants most by the use of force or power, the great controversy would have been over as soon as it began! God has never lacked power. But He chooses to limit His power in order to allow us freedom. (See handout #13 - "**Love**") "Go where one might, no nation could be found as wicked as Israel who had forsaken the living and true God in exchange for gross idolatry." (*King James Version Study Bible*) "The only nation whose god was truly God, was at the same time the only nation that exchanged its God for others." (*Nelson Study Bible*) It is important to note that Judah was not *irreligious* during this time. They believed that they were *worshiping* their other gods as they went about their immorality, etc. But they also professed to worship Yahweh at the same time. Do you think you could move back and forth between fertility cult worship and the worship of Yahweh?

4. What does it do to your mind to worship a "glued-together god" (1 Samuel 5:1-5), or a "piece-of-firewood god?" (Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 2:27; 3:9; 10:2-16) What do you think the children of Israel were thinking when they worshiped the Baals and then rushed to the temple? (Jeremiah 7:9-11) Did they think two "gods" were better than one-like having extra insurance? Did they not recognize the incompatibility of these other religions with their true religion? What difference did they see in their two "gods"? What does it mean to worship a "god"? Can you truly worship two different "gods" at the same time? Do we?

**Jeremiah 2:27:**<sup>27</sup> You will all be disgraced—you that say that a tree is your father and that a rock is your mother. This will happen because you turned away from me instead of turning to me. But when you are in trouble, you ask me to come and save you. *Good News Bible*

**Jeremiah 3:9:**<sup>9</sup> and was not at all ashamed. She defiled the land, and she committed adultery by worshipping stones and trees. *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

**Jeremiah 10:2-16:**<sup>2</sup> He says, "Do not follow the ways of other nations; do not be disturbed by unusual sights in the sky, even though other nations are terrified."<sup>3</sup> The religion of these people is worthless. A tree is cut down in the forest; it is carved by the tools of the woodcarver,<sup>4</sup> and decorated with silver and gold. It is fastened down with nails to keep it from falling over.<sup>5</sup> Such idols

are like scarecrows in a field of melons; they cannot speak; they have to be carried because they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them: they can cause you no harm, and they can do you no good.”<sup>6</sup> Lord, there is no one like you; you are mighty, and your name is great and powerful.<sup>7</sup> Who would not honour you, the king of all nations? You deserve to be honored. There is no one like you among all the wise men of the nations or among any of their kings.<sup>8</sup> All of them are stupid and foolish. What can they learn from wooden idols?<sup>9</sup> Their idols are covered with silver from Spain and with gold from Uphaz, all the work of artists; they are dressed in violet and purple cloth woven by skilled weavers.<sup>10</sup> But you, Lord, are the true God, you are the living God and the eternal king. When you are angry, the world trembles; the nations cannot endure your anger.<sup>11</sup> (You people must tell them that the gods who did not make the earth and the sky will be destroyed. They will no longer exist anywhere on earth.)<sup>12</sup> The Lord made the earth by his power; by his wisdom he created the world and stretched out the heavens.<sup>13</sup> At his command the waters above the sky roar; he brings clouds from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning flash in the rain and sends the wind from his storeroom.<sup>14</sup> At the sight of this, people feel stupid and senseless; those who make idols are disillusioned, because the gods they make are false and lifeless.<sup>15</sup> They are worthless and should be despised; they will be destroyed when the Lord comes to deal with them.<sup>16</sup> The God of Jacob is not like them; he is the one who made everything, and he has chosen Israel to be his very own people. The Lord Almighty is his name. (GNB)

How do you suppose the first people who read these passages felt about them? It seems so foolish to us! Is it actually possible to worship two different “gods” at the same time? How does this fit with what Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13? Are we “worshiping” another god when we strive to insure our safety, comfort and retirement by accumulating a great deal of this world’s goods? If one comes to trust or rely on something is that similar to “worshiping” it? In our day we don’t believe there is more than one “God” although He may be known to us in various forms as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If we believe in the Trinity are we polytheists as some Moslems and others claim?

**Matthew 6:24:** “No one can be a slave of two masters; he will hate one and love the other; he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (GNB)

**Luke 16:13:** “You cannot be the slave of two masters. You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than to the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (CEV)

5. Is God angry when we worship other “gods”, or do we just lose by becoming like them? (Jeremiah 2:5,19; 7:19; Hosea 9:10; Romans 1:18-31) How many different “gods” were they worshiping? (Jeremiah 2:32,33; **3:9,12,13,23,24**; 10:14; **11:13**; see also Psalms 121)

**Jeremiah 3:6-24:** <sup>6</sup> When Josiah was king, the LORD said to me, “Have you seen what Israel, that unfaithful woman, has done? She has turned away from me, and on every high hill and under every green tree she has acted like a prostitute. <sup>7</sup> I thought that after she had done all this, she would surely return to me. But she did not return, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it all. <sup>8</sup> Judah also saw that I divorced Israel and sent her away because she had turned from me and had become a prostitute. But Judah, Israel’s unfaithful sister, was not afraid. She too became a prostitute <sup>9</sup> and was not at all ashamed. She defiled the land, and she committed adultery by worshiping stones and trees.<sup>10</sup> And after all this, Judah, Israel’s unfaithful sister, only pretended to return to me; she was not sincere. I, the Lord, have spoken.”...

<sup>13</sup> Only admit that you are guilty and that you have rebelled against the Lord, your God. Confess that under every green tree you have given your love to foreign gods and that you have not obeyed my commands. I, the Lord, have spoken.

<sup>14</sup> “Unfaithful people, come back; you belong to me. I will take one of you from each town and two from each clan, and I will bring you back to Mount Zion. <sup>15</sup> I will give you rulers who obey me, and they will rule you with wisdom and understanding. <sup>16</sup> Then when you have become numerous in that land, people will no longer talk about my Covenant Box. They will no longer think about it or remember it; they will not even need it, nor will they make another one. <sup>17</sup> When that time comes,

Jerusalem will be called 'The Throne of the Lord', and all nations will gather there to worship me. They will no longer do what their stubborn and evil hearts tell them.<sup>18</sup> Israel will join with Judah, and together they will come from exile in the country in the north and will return to the land that I gave your ancestors as a permanent possession."

<sup>19</sup> The Lord says, "Israel, I wanted to accept you as my child and give you a delightful land, the most beautiful land in all the world. I wanted you to call me father, and never again turn away from me. <sup>20</sup> But like an unfaithful wife, you have not been faithful to me. I, the Lord, have spoken."

<sup>21</sup> A noise is heard on the hilltops: it is the people of Israel crying and pleading, because they have lived sinful lives and have forgotten the Lord their God. <sup>22</sup> Return, all of you who have turned away from the Lord; he will heal you and make you faithful. You say, "Yes, we are coming to the Lord, because he is our God. <sup>23</sup> **We were not helped at all by our pagan worship on the hilltops. Help for Israel comes only from the Lord our God. <sup>24</sup> But the worship of Baal, the god of shame, has made us lose flocks and herds, sons and daughters—everything that our ancestors have worked for since ancient times.**" (GNB)

**Jeremiah 11:13:** "The people of Judah have as many gods as they have cities, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem have set up as many altars for sacrifices to that disgusting god Baal as there are streets in the city." *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

We are so surrounded by sin that we hardly notice that it is going on. Do we even have any true idea of what it is doing to us? One of the biggest gaps in the Bible in my opinion is that there is so little discussion of what sin actually does to people? Adam and Eve could walk comfortably in God's presence. If we saw God in His glory today it would consume us instantly. (Exodus 33:20) What has changed? If we understood better what sin does to us, maybe we wouldn't be so comfortable with it!

6. Does God seem less gracious in Jeremiah than in some other books where all is "good news?" (Jeremiah 3:12,13; 15:1-9; 23:1-8) Has God become very severe and harsh?

When you love someone very much and you see that they are about to be destroyed, either by their own actions or by some impending doom, do you speak quietly and graciously to them? Or would strong and loud language in such a situation be appropriate even for God? Jeremiah is full of very strong language.

7. God had appointed Israel to evangelize the world. (Jeremiah 3:17) How hard did He push them to try to get them to do this? What did he have to do to Jonah? Daniel and his friends? Jonah was certainly no "Missionary Volunteer"-under his "duress" did he deliver a good, clear message about God? Most of the Jews apparently knew so little of the truth about God that even if they had been sent to a place to witness they would have done a terrible job. What about us?

Why were the children of Abraham placed in the land of Palestine at the crossroads of the ancient world? Wasn't it so they could witness to nations all around them? Did they ever successfully do this? What about in the days of David and Solomon when they actually ruled over most of their neighbors?

Before we become too critical, how well are we doing? There are people all around us that need to learn about the God that we know. Are we finding better and better ways to reach out to them? However, before we rush out to tell the world the "good news" are we sure that we understand it clearly ourselves? We can never fully understand God in this life. But are we sharing what we know? Why is God still waiting in our day? Is He waiting for us to give the world a clear picture of Him? What did Peter mean when he said:

**2 Peter 3:12:** as you wait for the Day of God and **do your best to make it come soon**— the Day when the heavens will burn up and be destroyed, and the heavenly bodies will be melted by the heat. *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

What time period is Jeremiah talking about in Jeremiah 3:17,18? Was there ever a time when the whole world gathered at Jerusalem to worship? Or is that time still future? See Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 37:16-28; Hosea 1:11; Zech. 2:10-12; 14:16-19. These verses seem to suggest that this time is still future.

8. What do you think of a God who would tell you not even to pray for your friends and family who had been taken off into captivity? (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 1 John 5:16) Does it do any good to pray for someone who is blatantly misbehaving and who has no intention of changing? (Jeremiah 14:19-15:2) Why would God not want to forgive? Will such a thing ever happen again? (See Revelation 22:11)

**Jeremiah 7:16:** <sup>16</sup> The Lord said, “Jeremiah, do not pray for these people. Do not cry or pray on their behalf; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.” *Good News Bible*

**Jeremiah 11:14:** <sup>14</sup> “Jeremiah, don’t pray to me or plead with me on behalf of these people. When they are in trouble and call to me for help, I will not listen to them.” *Good News Bible*

**1 John 5:16:** <sup>16</sup> If you see your brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray to God, who will give them life. This applies to those whose sins do not lead to death. But there is sin which leads to death, and I do not say that you should pray to God about that. (*GNB*)

**Jeremiah 14:19-15:2:** <sup>19</sup> Lord, have you completely rejected Judah?

Do you hate the people of Zion?

Why have you hurt us so badly

that we cannot be healed?

We looked for peace, but nothing good happened;

we hoped for healing, but terror came instead.

<sup>20</sup> We have sinned against you, Lord;

we confess our own sins

and the sins of our ancestors.

<sup>21</sup> Remember your promises and

do not despise us; do not bring disgrace on Jerusalem,

the place of your glorious throne.

Do not break the covenant you made with us.

<sup>22</sup> None of the idols of the nations can send rain;

the sky by itself cannot make showers fall.

We have put our hope in you, O Lord our God,

because you are the one who does these things.

<sup>15:1</sup> Then the Lord said to me, “Even if Moses and Samuel were standing here pleading with me, I would not show these people any mercy. Make them go away; make them get out of my sight.” <sup>2</sup>

When they ask you where they should go, tell them that I have said:

Some are doomed to die by disease—

that’s where they will go!

Others are doomed to die in war—

that’s where they will go!

Some are doomed to die of starvation—

that’s where they will go!

Others are doomed to be taken away as prisoners—

that’s where they will go!” *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

Surely we understand from the rest of Scripture that God is forgiveness Personified. He wants to save and heal everyone. But, of course, that is not possible in a universe where all are free. So God does the best thing He can do under the circumstances. God will not sacrifice our freedom. He died to preserve that. In these passages He is telling us that even He cannot save people against their will! So, as He weeps, He allows groups of His own children to go off to disaster in various

directions because that is what they have chosen for themselves by their rejection of Yahweh as their God.

9. How could God through Jeremiah make a statement like the one found in Jeremiah 7:22-23? How could God even suggest after what we have read in Exodus 20 through Leviticus 27 that He did not give commands to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices? (Notice that the *NIV* and *The Clear Word* change the whole meaning of the verse by adding the word “just”! Compare the reading of *The New Century Version*.)

Jeremiah 7:22:

(Biblia Hebraica) yaijx/h VyB] ytiwxi aI w0kyt/baAa, yTirBdAal ;yKi<sup>22</sup>  
.j bzfi. hI / [ yrbDAI [ 'yrx]mi ArameIt/a

<sup>22</sup>ofti ouk ej al hsa pro; tou; patera" umwn kai; ouk ejeteilamhn aujtoi" ej hmera/, h| ajnhgagon aujtou;" ej gh Aiguptou, peri; ol okautwmatwn kai; qusia",

<sup>22</sup> “For I did not speak with your fathers, Nor did I command them in the day of My bringing them out of the land of Egypt, Concerning the matters of burnt-offering and sacrifice,” *Young’s Literal Translation*

<sup>22</sup> “For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.” *KJV; ASV*

<sup>22</sup> “For I spoke not unto your fathers, nor commanded them concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt;” *1890 Darby Bible*

<sup>22</sup> “I gave your ancestors no commands about burnt offerings or any other kinds of sacrifices when I brought them out of Egypt. <sup>23</sup> But I did command them to obey me, so that I would be their God and they would be my people. And I told them to live the way I had command them, so that things would go well for them.” (*GNB*)

<sup>22</sup> “For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not *just* give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, <sup>23</sup> but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.” (*NIV*)

<sup>22</sup> “For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.” *The Revised Standard Version*

<sup>22</sup> “For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.” *NRSV*

<sup>22</sup> “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 and sacrifices.” *The New American Standard Bible and 1995 update*

<sup>22</sup> “In speaking to your fathers on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I gave them no command concerning holocaust or sacrifice.” *The New American Bible*

<sup>22</sup> “When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I did not tell them anything about burnt offerings and sacrifices.” *God’s Word*

<sup>22</sup> “For when I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice.” *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*

<sup>22</sup> “At the time I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I didn’t command them to offer sacrifices to me.” *The Contemporary English Version*

<sup>22</sup> “It wasn’t offerings and sacrifices I wanted from your fathers when I led them out of Egypt. That was not the point of my command.” *The Living Bible*

<sup>22</sup> “When I led your ancestors out of Egypt, it was not burnt offerings and sacrifices I wanted from them.” *The New Living Translation*

<sup>22</sup> “When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I did not speak to them and give them commands only about burnt offerings and sacrifices.” *The New Century Version*

<sup>22</sup> “For when I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I said nothing to them, gave them no orders, about burnt offerings or sacrifices.” *The New Jerusalem Bible*

<sup>22</sup> “When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt I didn’t just tell them about sacrifices and offerings.” *The Clear Word*

<sup>22</sup> When I brought your fathers from the land of Egypt, I said nothing to them, I gave them no orders, about burnt-offerings or sacrifices;” *Moffatt*

God is trying to say something of great importance here. If you look carefully at the early chapters of Leviticus you will notice statements such as:

Leviticus 1-3: <sup>1:2</sup> ...When you offer an animal sacrifice... <sup>3</sup> If you are offering... <sup>10</sup> If you are offering... <sup>14</sup> If you are offering... <sup>2:1</sup> When any of you present an offering... <sup>3:1</sup> When any of you offer..

Do these words sound like commands? This sounds like God is saying, “You are already doing these things, let Me make some suggestions about how to improve what you are doing.” There is good evidence that other religions were offering sacrifices of all kinds. No doubt the Hebrew people were already familiar with this kind of “worship.”

But God did command them to do certain things:

**Exodus 6:6:** <sup>6</sup>So tell the Israelites that I say to them, ‘I am the LORD; I will rescue you and set you free from your slavery to the Egyptians. I will raise my mighty arm to bring terrible punishment upon them, and I will save you. <sup>7</sup>I will make you my own people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the LORD your God when I set you free from slavery in Egypt. <sup>8</sup>I will bring you to the land that I solemnly promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as your own possession. I am the LORD.’ “ <sup>9</sup>Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to him, because their spirit had been broken by their cruel slavery. (*GNB*)

What God really wanted was a working relationship with them in which they would come to know Him better. God made many promises to them. Collectively these were known as the covenant. He promised to bless them in wonderful ways. But they didn’t even believe it when Moses told them! So God had to proceed with the plagues. These plagues were not just to convince the Egyptians to let Israel go, but were also to convince the Hebrews that their YHWH was something more than other “gods”. Finally, they realized that YHWH was doing something on their behalf and they followed Moses and Aaron out into the wilderness. But it wasn’t long before there was complaining and all sorts of troubles.

“This verse is not to be understood as a denial that God commanded the sacrifices to be made. Rather it is an argument against substituting sacrifice for obedience. Sacrifices were not God’s major concern. The people thought they were pleasing God when they offered sacrifices, but they did not obey God in their general way of living. God rejects such sacrifice (v. 21; cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Is. 1:11; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8).” (*Believer’s Study Bible*)

“These verses do not minimize the importance of the Old Testament sacrifices, but call attention to the necessity of the believer living a life of total obedience and devotion to God. The Scriptures consistently teach that religious observances devoid of spiritual reality are worthless (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22, 23; Ps. 40:6-8; Is. 1:10-20; Mic. 6:8).” (*King James Version Study Bible*)

“Sacrifices without the inner worship of the heart were of no interest to God; the people might as well eat the sacrifices themselves if they offered them that way. This prophetic condemnation of empty ritual is all the more remarkable because the sacrificial system revealed to Moses was still in force. Jeremiah is not alone in speaking this way; see 1 Sam. 15:23; Is. 1:11-15; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-25; Mic. 6:6-8.” (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

“God’s command was, **Obey My voice.**” (*Spirit Filled Life Study Bible*)

“Faith is not a one-time, sensational event in one’s life, neither is it a state of moral and spiritual perfection to which a handful of super-saints attain. Faith is a dynamic, lifelong journey that each believer is on. At any given moment, we are either moving toward God or turning away from Him.

“The people of Jeremiah’s day stood under God’s judgment because they turned away from Him—they “went backward and not forward” (Jer. 7:24). Rather than cultivate a growing relationship with the Lord based on sustained, faithful obedience, they went their own way and followed the “dictates of their evil hearts” (7:23-24).

“May that not be true of you! The only way to make progress in your journey of faith is to keep moving toward God as best you know how. You may fail and fall at times, but the main thing is to keep turning back toward God, not away from Him. Paul described this dynamic in his own spiritual experience: “Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).” (*Word-In-Life Study Bible*)

“This is one of those difficult passages of the Bible in which the literal and superficial meaning seems to contradict the plain statements of other scriptures. Jeremiah appears to deny that at Sinai God gave any instruction regarding sacrificial offerings. It is, however, not necessary to understand his language in that way. That the prophet is not denying the validity of the sacrificial system is clear from other statements from his own mouth (Jeremiah 17:26; 31:14; 33:11, 17-24). How then is his statement to be understood? Jeremiah is obviously employing a rhetorical device by which in a comparison of two ideas the predominance of the one is shown by the denial of the other. Other examples of this device are: (1) Gen. 45:8. Here Joseph tells his brethren that it was not they that had sent him to Egypt, but God, though patently his brethren had had a large hand in the affair. (2) Ex. 16:8. Here Moses tells the rebellious multitude that their murmurings were not against him but against God, though their complainings had clearly been directed against Moses. A similar device was employed by Jesus (Luke 14:26). Taken literally, His words appear to command men to hate the members of their own families. However, He was simply seeking to emphasize that love of God must supersede love to men. By “hate” He meant “love less.”

“The passage emphasizes that obedience to moral law ranks above obedience to a ceremonial system (see 1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 51:16,17). External observances were designed to aid in preserving sincere obedience (see Deut. 6:1-3), but never to be a substitute for holiness of heart. Of the type of worship rendered to God by Jeremiah’s compatriots, God had never spoken at Sinai.” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, article on Jeremiah 7:22)

10. Did the darkened minds of the people really comprehend what Jeremiah was saying to them? (Jeremiah 7:27,28) Did they really understand that they were at the end of their options? (Jeremiah 15:1-9; 23:1-8) Did they, in retrospect understand the reason for their captivity? (see Daniel 9:1-21) When God said that they should acknowledge their “rebellion”, what was He talking about specifically? (Jeremiah 3:13)

**Jeremiah 7:27,28:** <sup>27</sup> “So, Jeremiah, you will speak all these words to my people, but they will not listen to you; you will call them, but they will not answer. <sup>28</sup>You will tell them that their nation does not obey me, the Lord their God, or learn from their punishment. Faithfulness is dead. No longer is it even talked about. *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

These are pretty strong words. But all the evidence seems to back them up. In some ways they were like a child who thinks that he can eat his cake and have it too! They wanted all the privileges of being faithful followers of Yahweh without any of the responsibilities. They wanted to hide away in the temple and worship idols and commit all kinds of terribly sinful practices and yet have God reward them and protect them as if they were a faithful people.

It would seem that after watching their city being surrounded and their armies defeated several times and large groups of people being taken off into captivity they would realize that things were getting serious, but the record suggests that they did not change their practices at all. They may even have gotten worse. Many years later Daniel seemed to understand. But then, all the true prophets of God seemed to understand! Is it possible that they really thought that some of those false prophets were telling them the truth? Could they distinguish in any way between the true and the false? Did they reject the true prophets just because they didn't like the messages they were getting from them? Did they accept the false prophets just because they liked their message? After living in a city under siege for two-and-a-half years shouldn't they have realized that things were pretty serious?

11. What were the real messages of Jeremiah? What is God saying about Judah and about Himself in these passages? Jeremiah 3:11-18 (Compare John 13:34,35); 7:23-28; 9:23-26 (Compare Romans 1:16); 14:7,21; 31:31-34. Have you ever gloried that you understand and know God? **Is the gospel primarily about "God's plan to save you and me?" or "The truth about God's character and His government?"** What divided the Universe in the beginning? Are we surprised to find such insights about God, in the *Old* Testament? What was the actual covenant that God wanted to have with His people? Is God asking for something more than a ceremonial religion? What does it mean to "know the Lord" or to "be His people?" (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:38-41) If we really understand what kind of religion God wants, we will realize that the most natural thing of all is to grow up, intellectually and spiritually, and we will begin doing what is right because it is right!

**Jeremiah 3:11-18:** <sup>11</sup> Then the Lord told me that, even though Israel had turned away from him, she had proved to be better than unfaithful Judah. <sup>12</sup> He told me to go and say to Israel, "Unfaithful Israel, come back to me. I am merciful and will not be angry; I will not be angry with you for ever." <sup>13</sup> Only admit that you are guilty and that you have rebelled against the Lord, your God. Confess that under every green tree you have given your love to foreign gods and that you have not obeyed my commands. I, the Lord, have spoken.

<sup>14</sup> "Unfaithful people, come back; you belong to me. I will take one of you from each town and two from each clan, and I will bring you back to Mount Zion." <sup>15</sup> I will give you rulers who obey me, and they will rule you with wisdom and understanding. <sup>16</sup> Then when you have become numerous in that land, people will no longer talk about my Covenant Box. They will no longer think about it or remember it; they will not even need it, nor will they make another one. <sup>17</sup> When that time comes, Jerusalem will be called 'The Throne of the Lord', and all nations will gather there to worship me. They will no longer do what their stubborn and evil hearts tell them. <sup>18</sup> Israel will join with Judah, and together they will come from exile in the country in the north and will return to the land that I gave your ancestors as a permanent possession." *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

**Jeremiah 7:23-28:** <sup>23</sup> But I did command them to obey me, so that I would be their God and they would be my people. And I told them to live as I had commanded them, so that things would go well for them. <sup>24</sup> But they did not obey or pay any attention. Instead, they did whatever their stubborn and evil hearts told them to do, and they became worse instead of better. <sup>25</sup> From the day that your ancestors came out of Egypt until this very day, I have kept on sending my servants, the prophets, to you. <sup>26</sup> Yet no one listened or paid any attention. Instead, you became more stubborn and rebellious than your ancestors.

<sup>27</sup> "So, Jeremiah, you will speak all these words to my people, but they will not listen to you; you will call them, but they will not answer. <sup>28</sup> You will tell them that their nation does not obey me, the

Lord their God, or learn from their punishment. Faithfulness is dead. No longer is it even talked about.” *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

**Jeremiah 9:23-26:** <sup>23</sup> The Lord says,

“The wise should not boast of their wisdom,  
nor the strong of their strength,  
nor the rich of their wealth.

<sup>24</sup> If anyone wants to boast,  
he should boast that he knows and understands me,  
because my love is constant,  
and I do what is just and right.  
These are the things that please me.  
I, the Lord, have spoken.”

<sup>25-26</sup> The Lord says, “The time is coming when I will punish the people of Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and the desert people, who have their hair cut short. All these people are circumcised, but have not kept the covenant it symbolizes. None of these people and none of the people of Israel have kept my covenant.” *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

**Jeremiah 31:31-34:** <sup>31</sup> The Lord says, “The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.<sup>32</sup> It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Although I was like a husband to them, they did not keep that covenant.<sup>33</sup> The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.<sup>34</sup> None of them will have to teach his fellow-citizen to know the Lord, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the Lord, have spoken.” *Good News Bible*

These are the passages that describe what God wants. God asks us to obey Him, not just because He wants to exert His control over us to prove who is “boss” but because He is the One who really knows what is best for us! Unfortunately, this is one of the hardest lessons for humans to learn. We also want to believe that we know what is best for ourselves.

God asks of us a very simple thing. He asks us to make Him the number one thing in our lives. He asks us to keep Him constantly in view, in our thoughts, and in our desires. He asks us to study the Bible to learn what kind of a person He is. If we are willing to put aside our selfishness and prejudice and really come to know our heavenly Father we will gradually come to be like Him. This works by the natural laws of the mind. Just as small children grow to be like their parents by observing and copying in every way they can, God asks us to “observe” and “copy” Him. We cannot do this on our own. It is completely beyond our power. But God will do it for us if we simply give Him the opportunity by doing our best to “observe” and “copy”. When this takes place our lives and minds and hearts are transformed into His likeness.

**2 Corinthians 3:18:** “All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory.” *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

“It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.” *Great Controversy* 555.1

See *Isaiah - A Teacher’s Guide - #5*.

12. Jeremiah talks a lot about “knowing the Lord.” (See Jeremiah 2:8; 5:4,5; 8:7; 9:3,6,24; 16:21; 22:16; 24:7; 31:34) What do you think is implied by this expression? Why do you think the use of reason

and careful use of the mind have been made fun of in religious circles down through the years? Who do you suppose would lose if everyone would critically examine the reasons for his faith? It is often suggested that religion is a matter of the heart and not of the mind, but the heart is really only good for pumping blood, so what do we mean by these expressions? In Jeremiah's day, the heart was thought to be the seat of thinking and reason, and the bowels the seat of the emotions. (Jeremiah 4:19; 31:20, *KJV*)

See #11 above and *Ezekiel - A Teacher's Guide* - #5.

**Jeremiah 24:7:** "I will give them the desire to know that I am the Lord. Then they will be my people, and I will be their God, because they will return to me with all their heart." *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

There are also many references in the book of Ezekiel to "knowing the LORD". In fact, properly understood, I believe "knowing the LORD" is the key to salvation. Getting to know God is how we get to be His friends. (See John 15:1-15) If we can really get to be His friends, all the other "details" can be worked out easily!

Getting to know God is a lifelong experience (it will extend for eternity). It requires effort in the form of Bible study and prayer and meditation. Mainly what we are talking about is spending "time" with God. This is described as the perfect condition of those who will live in the new kingdom of God: Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14. The essence of being in heaven is "knowing the LORD."

"In a far greater way, the intimacy of the believer with God makes the realization of God's relation to His people under the terms of the new covenant to be a full and living experience. Moreover, not just Israelites but all believers (those who **know** God, v. 34) are now called under the new covenant **my people**. (See 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 3:6-9, 15-18, 26-29; Titus 2:14.) These features of vital inwardness and a universality of the knowledge of God stand out as the two great distinctive elements in the new covenant." (*King James Version Study Bible*)

**"Jeremiah 31:34:** No more shall every man teach: No longer would intermediaries like priests or prophets be needed to show the people how to **know the LORD**. From youngest to oldest, from peasant farmer to kings and princes, all would know God. Knowledge of God is a major theme of Jeremiah (2:8; 4:22; 5:4; 8:7) as well as of other prophets (see Hos. 5:4). This knowledge is an intimate relationship with God evidenced by faith, obedience, and devotion." (*Nelson Study Bible*)

"Scripture speaks of "knowing" God as the spiritual person's ideal: namely, the fullness of a faith relationship that brings salvation and eternal life, generating love, hope, obedience, and joy (Ex. 33:13; Jer. 31:34; 8:8-12; Dan. 11:32; John 17:3; Gal. 4:8, 9; Phil. 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 8:8-12). The dimensions of this knowledge are intellectual (knowing the truth about God; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 100:3); volitional (trusting, obeying, and worshiping God); and moral (practicing justice and love; Jer. 22:16; 1 John 4:7-8). Faith's knowledge focuses on Jesus Christ, the incarnate God and the mediator between God and man. Faith seeks specifically to know Christ and His power (Phil. 3:8-14). The knowledge fostered by God's covenant agreement with us is reciprocal, with affection on both sides: we know God as ours because He knows us as His (John 10:14; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19)." (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

**"Jeremiah 31:31-34** God would establish a new covenant with His people. Unlike the covenant at Sinai which demanded outward obedience to external laws, this covenant would consist of inward spiritual renewal, which would enable the people to live in a right covenantal relationship with God. The new covenant is internal, universal, and unconditional. All people have the opportunity for intimate personal relationship with the Lord. A primary element of this new covenant is forgiveness (Heb. *salach*). God would remember their sins no more. NT writers find the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:7-13)." (*Woman's Study Bible*)

"Knowing God means, in part, having a personal relationship with Him, thanks to Christ's work on the cross. Yet centuries before Christ came, Scripture was describing what that sense of

personal intimacy with God would be like. The Lord privileged Jeremiah with a vision of this “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31), or way of relating to people, that Jesus would initiate. God intends that the hope expressed in Jer. 31 would be the experience of every genuine believer. The Lord promised that:

- God’s children would *know* Him, not just know about Him (31:34).
- God Himself would be their teacher (31:34), as He became Jesus’ teacher (John 5:19; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10).
- His teaching would go beyond a mere collection of moral precepts, and even beyond an external code of ethics, to the inscription of His Word (His “law”) on the hearts of His children, where it would shape their identity and behavior (Jer. 31:33).

“The New Testament further reveals that the words that God has promised to write on the hearts of His people are written by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:1-3), who empowers them to live in a manner that reflects the very character of God. This profound truth of God’s new covenant is so significant that Jer. 31 is quoted three times in the New Testament (John 6:45; Heb. 8:10; 10:16-17).” (*Word-In-Life Study Bible*)

13. Have we SDA’s come to the place where we are not much use to God any more? Is He ready to give us up forever? (4ST44:1:2) The church has had so much bad PR lately. Will there ever be a time when we could actually say something good, and specific about our God? Could we ever specifically say, “God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be! He is not even the kind of God that some of His so-called friends have made Him out to be!” What was Israel saying to the nations about their God?

**“It was in order that *the heavenly universe* might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God’s government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped....Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ’s life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?-The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels.” *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899 (4ST 44:1:2) [Emphasis supplied]

**Romans 3:3,4:** “What if some of them have shown a lack of faith? Can their lack of it nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! God must prove true, though every man be false; as the Scripture says,

‘That you may be shown to be right in what you say,  
And win your case when you go into court.’” *Goodspeed*

God has taken His case into the court of the universe and laid it out before His own children/His creatures. Does this sound like the behavior of a Sovereign God? Does God need to win His case in the eyes of His children? Absolutely! Not that He has to, but He chooses to! That is how much our freedom means to Him. He cannot allow any of us to enter heaven unless we are completely and absolutely convinced that He has fully answered all of Satan’s accusations in the great controversy. Otherwise, questions might arise again and even rebellion. There would be no reason to allow this whole sin experiment to proceed this far unless it is to preserve the record so it will never need to happen again.

And God plans for us to have a part in vindicating His name!

**Ephesians 1:9,10:** “In all his wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. <sup>10</sup>This plan, which God

will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.” (GNB)

**Ephesians 3:9,10:** <sup>9</sup> and of making all people see how God’s secret plan is to be put into effect. God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages,<sup>10</sup> in order that at the present time, **by means of the church**, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms. *Good News Bible*

**Colossians 1:19,20:** <sup>19</sup> For it was by God’s own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. <sup>20</sup> Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son’s blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven. *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

Please note carefully that God must succeed in this controversy even if **every one of us** fails! But we will not all fail. God plans to work through us to finish His gospel “by means of the church”. So God is waiting patiently for us to do our part.

How can we correctly represent God to our neighbors and friends? The result will be nothing short of miraculous!

**Matthew 5:13,14:** <sup>13</sup> “You are like salt for the whole human race. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It has become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it.

<sup>14</sup> “You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, **so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.**” (GNB)

Have you ever known anyone who is doing this?

14. Now that we have come to where the prophets actually describe God letting His people go off into captivity, how do you think God felt about this? (Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; 14:19-15:2; 23:1-8; 31:20; Hosea 11:7,8)

**Jeremiah 8:18-9:1:** <sup>18</sup> My sorrow cannot be healed; I am sick at heart. <sup>19</sup> Listen! Throughout the land I hear my people crying out,

“Is the Lord no longer in Zion? Is Zion’s king no longer there?”

**The Lord, their king, replies, “Why have you made me angry by worshiping your idols and by bowing down to your useless foreign gods?”**

<sup>20</sup> The people cry out, “The summer is gone, the harvest is over, but we have not been saved.”

<sup>21</sup> My heart has been crushed because my people are crushed; I mourn; I am completely dismayed. <sup>22</sup> Is there no medicine in Gilead?

Are there no doctors there? Why, then, have my people not been healed? I wish my head were a well of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, o that I could cry day and night for my people who have been killed. *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

**Jeremiah 14:19-15:2:** <sup>19</sup>“Lord, have you completely rejected Judah? Do you hate the people of Zion? Why have you hurt us so badly that we cannot be healed? We looked for peace, but nothing good happened; we hoped for healing, but terror came instead.

<sup>20</sup> We have sinned against you, Lord; we confess our own sins and the sins of our ancestors.

<sup>21</sup> Remember your promises and do not despise us; do not bring disgrace on Jerusalem, the place of your glorious throne. Do not break the covenant you made with us.

<sup>22</sup> None of the idols of the nations can send rain; the sky by itself cannot make showers fall.

We have put our hope in you, O Lord our God, because you are the one who does these things.

<sup>15:1</sup> Then the Lord said to me, **“Even if Moses and Samuel were standing here pleading with me, I would not show these people any mercy. Make them go away; make them get out**

of my sight.<sup>2</sup> When they ask you where they should go, tell them that I have said: Some are doomed to die by disease— that’s where they will go!

Others are doomed to die in war— that’s where they will go!

Some are doomed to die of starvation— that’s where they will go!

Others are doomed to be taken away as prisoners— that’s where they will go!” (GNB)

**Jeremiah 23:1-8:** <sup>1</sup> How terrible will be the Lord’s judgement on those rulers who destroy and scatter his people!<sup>2</sup> This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the rulers who were supposed to take care of his people: “You have not taken care of my people; you have scattered them and driven them away. Now I am going to punish you for the evil you have done.<sup>3</sup> I will gather the rest of my people from the countries where I have scattered them, and I will bring them back to their homeland. They will have many children and increase in number.<sup>4</sup> I will appoint rulers to take care of them. My people will no longer be afraid or terrified, and I will not punish them again. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

<sup>5</sup> The Lord says, “The time is coming when I will choose as king a righteous descendant of David. That king will rule wisely and do what is right and just throughout the land.<sup>6</sup> When he is king, the people of Judah will be safe, and the people of Israel will live in peace. He will be called ‘The Lord Our Salvation’.

<sup>7</sup> “The time is coming,” says the Lord, “when people will no longer swear by me as the living God who brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Instead, they will swear by me as the living God who brought the people of Israel out of a northern land and out of all the other countries where I had scattered them. Then they will live in their own land.” *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

**Jeremiah 31:20:** “Israel, you are my dearest son, the child I love best.

Whenever I mention your name, I think of you with love.

My heart goes out to you; I will be merciful.” *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

What message do you get from these verses? I believe that God is loving and kind and doing His best to reach out to us to get us to realize that He has our best interests at heart. Sometimes this involves some pretty severe discipline such as the exile and captivity, but most of the time God reaches out in mercy and love.

15. Do you see the picture of God as given by these prophets getting more and more obscure and confused or more and more clear as we approach the end of their kingdom? Doesn’t it seem almost like the darker the background (the general condition of the people), the brighter the picture appears? Jeremiah 9:23,24 suggests that we could even come to the place of boasting about God. What would this mean? Paul knew and understood God very well, and he was proud of this. (Romans 1:16,17) Does our knowledge of God make us feel different-give us an exhilarating sense of freedom? There is no worse loss of freedom than to feel fear. Does your knowledge of God make you afraid? Are you afraid of what God may do to you in the future?

Was anyone taking the opportunity to boast about Israel’s God in the days of Jeremiah? Or did the entire world feel, along with most of the children of Israel that Yahweh had let them down? Didn’t it seem like the Babylonian “gods” were the more powerful ones in their day? If you had been Yahweh at that point, what would you have done? How could you get the world and the universe (God’s larger watching and listening public) to realize that you are doing everything possible short of tampering with people’s freedom to get them to do what is best?

16. Is it fair for the good to suffer with the bad? Jeremiah suffered, even though he was good and had done his best to warn the people of what would come if they did not repent. How honored was Jeremiah?

This is always a tough question. Books have been written about it. What would Job have had to say about this question? “*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*” is a recent and provocative book on the question. But stop and think about the alternatives. If God always blessed the “good”

people and always cursed the “bad” people would people do what is right just because it is right, or would they do what is right because of the rewards? Would everyone turn into a “rice Christian”? Would all principle go out the door?

This is exactly the problem that we have seen repeatedly in the Old Testament. They really believed that God always blesses the “good” and curses the “bad” and therefore they felt justified in extrapolating that argument to say that the rich people were definitely the good people, otherwise God wouldn’t be blessing them so much. Then when Jesus came along, they knew He was a “bad” person, because He was “poor”! When Jesus was handing out the free food and the free healing the whole world seemed to want to follow Him. But when He started to raise questions about why they were following Him, they all left! (See John 6:25-71) If we all followed this practice then the great controversy would be won by the highest bidder! Should we do what is right because it is profitable or because it is right? If this is what God wanted He could easily have out-bid the Devil!

This would raise the eternal question of motives. We would always wonder why people were doing what they were doing. Is it really important for us to act on principle? Jeremiah certainly didn’t have it easy. He suffered for what he believed in. It wasn’t easy to speak out about the sins of the people and especially the leaders.

17. What did God say would happen to Babylon? What hope did Jeremiah leave for the captives? Jeremiah 25:11-14; 29:10-14; see Daniel 9:1-2; compare Jeremiah 30:3; 31:16,17

**Jeremiah 25:11-14:** <sup>11</sup>“This whole land will be left in ruins and will be a shocking sight, and the neighboring nations will serve the king of Babylonia for seventy years. <sup>12</sup>After that I will punish Babylonia and its king for their sin. I will destroy that country and leave it in ruins for ever. <sup>13</sup>I will punish Babylonia with all the disasters that I threatened to bring on the nations when I spoke through Jeremiah—all the disasters recorded in this book. <sup>14</sup>I will pay the Babylonians back for what they have done, and many nations and great kings will make slaves of them.” (GNB)

**Jeremiah 29:10-14:** <sup>10</sup> “The Lord says, ‘When Babylonia’s seventy years are over, I will show my concern for you and keep my promise to bring you back home. <sup>11</sup> I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call to me. You will come and pray to me, and I will answer you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me, and you will find me because you will seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> Yes, I say, you will find me, and I will restore you to your land. I will gather you from every country and from every place to which I have scattered you, and I will bring you back to the land from which I had sent you away into exile. I, the Lord, have spoken.’ *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

**Jeremiah 30:3:** “because the time is coming when I will restore my people, Israel and Judah. I will bring them back to the land that I gave their ancestors, and they will take possession of it again. I, the Lord, have spoken.” *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

**Jeremiah 31:16, 17:** <sup>16</sup>“Stop your crying and wipe away your tears. All that you have done for your children will not go unrewarded; they will return from the enemy’s land.

<sup>17</sup> There is hope for your future; your children will come back home. I, the Lord, have spoken. *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version*

**Jeremiah 25:26:** “...Every nation on the face of the earth had to drink from it. Last of all, the king of Babylonia will drink from it.” (GNB)

**Jeremiah 50:1-3:** <sup>1</sup>This is the message that the LORD gave me about the city of Babylon and its people: “Tell the news to the nations! Proclaim it!

Give the signal and announce the news! Do not keep it a secret!

Babylon has fallen! Her god Marduk has been shattered!

Babylon’s idols are put to shame, her disgusting images are crushed!

<sup>3</sup> “A nation from the north has come to attack Babylonia and will make it a desert. People and animals will run away, and no one will live there.” (GNB)

**Jeremiah 50:8-16:** “People of Israel, run away from Babylonia! Leave the country! Be the first to leave! <sup>9</sup> I am going to stir up a group of strong nations in the north and make them attack Babylonia. They will line up in battle against the country and conquer it. They are skillful hunters, shooting arrows that never miss the mark. <sup>10</sup> Babylonia will be looted, and those who loot it will take everything they want. I, the LORD, have spoken.”

<sup>11</sup> The LORD says, “People of Babylonia, you plundered my nation. You are happy and glad, going about like a cow threshing corn or like a neighing horse, but your own great city will be humiliated and disgraced. **Babylonia will be the least important nation of all; it will become a dry and waterless desert.**

<sup>13</sup> **Because of my anger no one will live in Babylon; it will be left in ruins, and all who pass by will be shocked and amazed.** “Archers, line up for battle against Babylon and surround it. Shoot all your arrows at Babylon, because it has sinned against me, the LORD. Raise the war cry all round the city! Now Babylon has surrendered. Its walls have been broken through and torn down. I am taking my revenge on the Babylonians. So take your revenge on them, and treat them as they have treated others. <sup>16</sup> Do not let seeds be sown in that country or let a harvest be gathered. Every foreigner living there will be afraid of the attacking army and will go back home.” (GNB)

It is interesting to notice how well Jeremiah predicted the exact history that would take place for Israel as well as Babylon. While God used Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army to punish Judah and many of the surrounding nations, (even calling Nebuchadnezzar His servant for doing this: Jeremiah 25:8,9; 27:6; 43:10) they also would face their day of judgment.

**Jeremiah 25:8,9:** “So then, because you would not listen to him, the LORD Almighty says, <sup>9</sup>I am going to send for all the peoples from the north and for my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. I am going to bring them to fight against Judah and its inhabitants and against all the neighboring nations. I am going to destroy this nation and its neighbors and leave them in ruins for ever, a terrible and shocking sight. I, the LORD, have spoken.” (GNB)

18. After having worked with the children of Israel approximately 800 years before the time of Jeremiah (1400-600 B.C.) Does God seem to be enjoying a great deal of “success”? What is God trying to work toward? Was the problem that God didn’t have enough power?

This is primarily a thought question. Why would God work for so many years with a nation that apparently continued to fail in accomplishing what He wanted them to do? Did God know that this would happen in advance? Should God have worked with some other group instead? Why would God continue to work with the children of Israel and Abraham even after the exile if He knew in advance that they would finally crucify His Son? Is it necessary for any group of humans to fully succeed in following God’s plan before He can succeed in His plan for planet earth? (See Romans 3:4)

Has the Christian church done better than the descendants of Abraham in correctly representing God? What about your church or my church? What about you or me? Does God need to wait for us for any reason before He can finish His work? (See 2 Peter 3:12)

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**Appendix:**  
**Ellen G White Comments:**

“Among the righteous still in Jerusalem, to whom had been made plain the divine purpose, were some who determined to place beyond the reach of ruthless hands the sacred ark containing the tables of stone on which had been traced the precepts of the Decalogue. This they did. **With mourning and sadness they secreted the ark in a cave, where it was to be hidden from the**

**people of Israel and Judah because of their sins, and was to be no more restored to them. That sacred ark is yet hidden. It has never been disturbed since it was secreted.**" {PK 453.2}

Law Preserved in Ark.--"And He [Christ] gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communicating with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written by the finger of God." Nothing written on those tables could be blotted out. **The precious record of the law was placed in the ark of the testament and is still there, safely hidden from the human family. But in God's appointed time He will bring forth these tables of stone to be a testimony to all the world against the disregard of His commandments and against the idolatrous worship of a counterfeit Sabbath**" (MS 122, 1901). {1BC 1109.2}

"Because of Israel's transgression of the commandments of God, and their wicked acts, God suffered them to go into captivity, to humble and punish them. Before the temple was destroyed, God made known to a few of his faithful servants the fate of the temple, which was the pride of Israel, and which they regarded with idolatry, while they were sinning against God. He also revealed to them the captivity of Israel. **These righteous men, just before the destruction of the temple, removed the sacred ark containing the tables of stone, and, with mourning and sadness, secreted it in a cave where it was to be hid from the people of Israel, because of their sins, and was to be no more restored to them. That sacred ark is yet hid. It has never been disturbed since it was secreted.**" 4aSG 114.4; 1SP 414.3; SR 195.1

"When the loud cry, "It is finished," came from the lips of Christ, the priests were officiating in the Temple. The lamb prefiguring Christ--for to Him all the sacrificial offerings pointed--had been brought to be slain. Clothed in his significant and beautiful dress, the priest stood with lifted knife, as did Abraham when he was about to slay his son. With intense interest the people look on. But the earth trembles and quakes, for the Lord Himself draws near. **With a rending noise, the veil of the Temple is torn from top to bottom by an unseen hand, throwing open to the gaze of the multitude a place once filled with the presence of God. In this place the Shekinah once dwelt. Here God had once manifested His glory above the mercy seat. No one but the high priest ever lifted the veil separating this apartment from the rest of the tabernacle. He entered in once a year to make an atonement for the sin of the people. But lo, this veil is rent in twain. No longer is there any secrecy there.**" {12MR 416.2}

After the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, it was rebuilt about five hundred years before the birth of Christ, by a people who from a life-long captivity had returned to a wasted and almost deserted country. There were then among them aged men who had seen the glory of Solomon's temple, and who wept at the foundation of the new building, that it must be so inferior to the former. The feeling that prevailed is forcibly described by the prophet: "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" [HAG. 2:3.] Then was given the promise that the glory of this latter house should be greater than that of the former. {GC88 23.3}

**But the second temple had not equaled the first in magnificence; nor was it hallowed by those visible tokens of the divine presence which pertained to the first temple. There was no manifestation of supernatural power to mark its dedication. No cloud of glory was seen to fill the newly erected sanctuary. No fire from Heaven descended to consume the sacrifice upon its altar. The Shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy-seat, and the tables of the testimony were not to be found therein.** No voice sounded from Heaven to make known to the inquiring priest the will of Jehovah. 4SP 24.1; GC 24.1; PK 596.3-597; RH, January 16, 1908 par. 13; *The Truth about Angels* 145.2

### ***The Time Line for Jeremiah***

Year	Event	Reference
640-609 B. C.	Josiah was king of Judah	2 Kin. 22:1—23:30
628/627 B. C.	Josiah's reform began with the removal of high places and all vestiges of foreign cults.	2 Chr. 34:1-7
627 B. C.	Ashurbanipal, last of the great Assyrian rulers, died.	
627/626 B. C.	Jeremiah was called by God to prophetic office.	Jer. 1:1, 2
626 B. C.	Nabopolassar, gaining independence from Assyria, founded the Neo-Babylonian Empire.	
622 B. C.	Josiah repaired the temple; the Book of the Law was found	2 Kin. 23:1-25; 2 Chr. 34:8-35:19
614 B. C.	Medes, led by Cyaxares, captured Asshur, the old Assyrian capital.	
612 B. C.	Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell to the Media-Babylonian coalition	
609-605 B. C.	Egypt ruled Palestine and Syria	
609 B. C.	Josiah was killed by the Egyptian army at the Battle of Megiddo.	2 Kin. 23:29; 2 Chr. 35:20-25
609 B. C.	Jehoahaz (Shallum) ruled Judah for three months. His reign marked a turn in the court's attitude toward Jeremiah	2 Kin. 23:31-34; 2 Chr. 36:1-4; Jer. 22:11, 12
608-597 B. C.	Jehoiakim (Eliakim) was king of Judah.	2 Kin. 23:34—24:7
605 B. C.	Babylon gained supremacy in the Near East by defeating Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish	Jer. 25:1; 46:2
605 B. C.	Deportation in which Daniel was taken	
605 B. C.	Jeremiah summarized his work to Baruch	Jer. 45:1-5
604 B. C. Nov. or Dec.	Jeremiah's scroll was read in the temple and palace and burned during reign of Jehoiakim	Jer. 7:1-15; Jer. 26:1-24; Jer. 36:1-26
602 B. C.	Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar	2 Kin. 24:1
598/597 B. C.	Nebuchadnezzar retaliated; deportation of Jews to Babylon in which Ezekiel was taken	2 Kin. 24:8-16
598-597 B. C.	Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) ruled Judah for three months before being deported to Babylon	2 Kin. 24:8-16; 2 Chr. 36:9, 10; Jer. 22:24-30

597-586 B. C.	Zedekiah (Mattaniah) ruled Judah	2 Kin. 24:17—25:7; 2 Chr. 36:11-14; Jer. 52:1-11
593 B. C.	Seraiah visited Babylon in the midst of revolt and unrest	Jer. 51:59
588 B. C. (January 15)	Beginning of Siege against Jerusalem	2 Kings 25:1 2 Chr. 36:13-21; Jeremiah 52:3b-11
587 B. C.	Jeremiah was in a cistern while Jerusalem was under siege	2 Kin. 25:1; Jer. 32:1, 2; 37:1—38:28; 39:1; 52:4; Ezek. 24:1, 2
587 B. C.	Jeremiah purchased a field at Anathoth	Jer. 32:6-15
586 B. C. (July 18)	The wall of Jerusalem is breached	Jeremiah 52:6,7
586 B. C.	Jerusalem was destroyed; the Jews were deported to Babylon; Jeremiah was released	2 Kin. 25:2-10; Jer. 39:1—40:7; 52:5-28
586 B. C. (August 14-17)	Nebuzaradan arrives in Jerusalem; The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed	2 Kings 25:8,9; Jeremiah 52:12,13
587-582 B. C.	The governor Gedaliah was murdered. Some Jews fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them	2 Kin. 25:22-26
581 B. C.	Fourth deportation of Jews to Babylon	Jer. 52:30
561 B. C. (March 31)	Jehoiachin was released from prison	2 Kin. 25:27; Jer. 52:31

adapted from *Woman's Study Bible*