LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE ONE

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD

Scripture Reading: Jer. 1:1-3

In our life-study of the Word, we now come to the book of Jeremiah. Although many of us may not be familiar with Jeremiah, I hope that the Lord will stir up our interest in this book and show us its intrinsic purpose.

The book of Jeremiah has as its particular nature and standing God's tenderheartedness plus God's righteousness. Our God is a tenderhearted God, and He is absolutely righteous. He is full of compassion, sympathy, and tender care, yet He is righteous. As the righteous God, He cannot spare those who have sinned against Him; He has to judge them. He is such a God.

This book is also an autobiography in which Jeremiah tells us of his situation, his person, and his feeling, revealing his tender heart. Jehovah is the tenderhearted God, and in being tenderhearted Jeremiah is absolutely one with God. Because Jeremiah often wept, even wailed, he is called the weeping prophet. In his weeping Jeremiah represented God. Thus, God could use a prophet like Jeremiah to express Him, speak for Him, and represent Him on earth.

This book also deals with Israel. Israel is stubborn, evil, wicked, and stiff-necked, knowing nothing of repentance or of returning to God. Israel is altogether not one with God.

Jeremiah also speaks much concerning the nations. According to this book, in the sight of God, all the nations, all the Gentiles, are animals, acting as if they do not have a human spirit. They do not bear any kind of image or likeness of God nor understand anything of God.

In the book of Jeremiah four parties are revealed. The first party is God, who is tender, loving, compassionate, and

righteous. The second party is Jeremiah, a timid young man raised up by God to be His mouthpiece to speak for Him and express Him. As God's mouthpiece, Jeremiah is one with God in being tenderhearted, loving, and righteous. In contrast, Israel, the third party, is evil and stubborn, and the fourth party, consisting of the nations, is even worse.

Let us now go on to consider, in an introductory way, certain important aspects of the book of Jeremiah.

I. THE AUTHOR

A. Jeremiah

The name Jeremiah in Hebrew means "Jehovah exalts." This name also means "Jehovah tears down." The real contents of the book of Jeremiah are that God exalts some and tears down others.

B. A Priest

1. Born of Hilkiah

Jeremiah was a priest, born of Hilkiah, a priest, in the small city of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1). By birth Jeremiah had the position of a priest.

2. Called to Be a Prophet over the Nations

Whereas Jeremiah was born a priest, he was called to be a prophet over the nations (vv. 2-3). Hence, he was a priest-prophet not only over Israel but also over the nations. For this reason, he speaks very much concerning the nations. No other prophetic book speaks as much about the nations as the book of Jeremiah.

a. Beginning from the Thirteenth Year of Josiah's Reign

Jeremiah's ministry began from the thirteenth year (629 B.C.) of Josiah's reign and continued until the eleventh year (588 B.C.) of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, until the captivity. Jeremiah ministered for forty-one years, and every one of them was a terrible year. Within these forty-one years, there were at least three exiles. Eventually, nearly

all of the children of Israel were exiled, ending, in the sight of God, their history as God's elect. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple was burned, and the people were carried away. This means that, in a sense, God gave up Israel.

b. Ministering in Judah and for a Short Time in Egypt

Jeremiah ministered in Judah and, at the end, for a short time in Egypt. He did not want to go to Egypt, but certain rebellious ones captured him and took him with them to Egypt. History tells us that he was murdered in Egypt.

c. A Contemporary of Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Daniel, and Ezekiel

Jeremiah was a contemporary of the prophets Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. Some of them were captured and taken to Babylon, but Jeremiah was not. He remained in the fathers' land in Jerusalem.

d. An Overcomer Speaking for God

Jeremiah was an overcomer speaking for God in the process of the captivity of God's degraded elect.

e. His Book Being a Collection of History, an Autobiography, and His Prophesying

Jeremiah's book is a collection of history, of his autobiography, and of his prophesying. He spoke much concerning the history of Israel, he presented a full story of his life, and he uttered many prophecies. Some of Jeremiah's prophecies were negative, and others were positive. Negatively, Jeremiah predicted that Israel would be captured and that the temple would be destroyed. Jeremiah told Zedekiah to welcome the Babylonian army and thereby save the entire city of Jerusalem and the temple; otherwise, the city would be destroyed. However, Zedekiah was stubborn and refused to take Jeremiah's word. When Zedekiah tried to escape, he was captured and brought to Nebuchadnezzar. The king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and then he put out

Zedekiah's eyes and bound him in fetters of bronze to bring him to Babylon (39:4-7). Jeremiah witnessed these things.

The positive side of Jeremiah's prophecy was wonderful. For example, he prophesied that Israel would be restored by God (23:3-8). He also prophesied that God would raise up to David a righteous Shoot who would reign as a King and act prudently and whose name would be called "Jehovah our righteousness" (vv. 5-6). This is a great prophecy concerning Christ, a prophecy not found in any other book. Furthermore, Jeremiah prophesied concerning the new covenant which God would make with Israel (31:33-34). Paul quoted this prophecy and applied it to the covenant in the New Testament (Heb. 8:10-12; 10:16-17). Although this covenant is good for the New Testament believers, the Jews presently have no part in it because of their unbelief and rebellion.

II. THE SUBJECT

The subject of the book of Jeremiah is Christ being made the righteousness of Jehovah to God's elect as their center and circumference in God's dealings with Israel and the nations. No matter how stubborn, wicked, and corrupt Israel, God's elect, may be, God will eventually make Christ the righteousness of Jehovah to them. Today Israel does not have any righteousness, but when Christ becomes the righteousness of Jehovah to them, no one, including Satan, will be able to accuse them.

Furthermore, when Christ becomes righteousness to God's elect, He also becomes their center and circumference in God's dealing with them and with the nations. Jeremiah is a book concerning God's dealing first with Israel and then with the nations. The center and circumference of God's dealing is Christ. As God deals with Israel and the nations today, Christ is the center and circumference. For example, the recent changes in Europe and Russia are God's doing for Christ to be the centrality and universality. The book of Jeremiah is not concerned merely with God's tenderheartedness and righteousness and with His chastisement of stubborn, stiff-necked Israel. The intrinsic reality of this book is God's

dealing with Israel and with the nations for Christ to be the center and circumference in everything.

III. THE CONTENT

The content of Jeremiah is God's carrying out of His economy through the chastisement of Israel, His elect, in love with His tender care, compassion, and sympathy, and His judgment upon the nations in righteousness to match His love, that Israel may manifest Christ, who is their divine righteousness (23:6; 33:16) as their centrality and universality, by their being made a new creation with the inner law of the divine life and the capacity of this life to know God (31:33-34).

According to the book of Jeremiah, God's love is a composition of His tender care, compassion, and sympathy. Even while He chastises His elect people Israel, He is compassionate toward them. Regarding this, God can be compared to a father who weeps as he disciplines his child because he loves the child. In this book Jeremiah wept on God's behalf; his weeping expressed God's feeling. We may say that God wept within Jeremiah's weeping, for in his weeping Jeremiah was one with God.

God carries out His economy not only by chastising Israel in love but also by judging the nations in righteousness. His righteousness matches His love. Actually, God's judgment upon the nations comes out of His love for them and results in His salvation of them in His love.

God chastises Israel in love and judges the nations in righteousness so that Israel may manifest Christ. Today the nation of Israel does not manifest Christ but remains in unbelief. But the day will come when every one of Israel, great and small, will manifest Christ, having Christ as their centrality (their being) and their universality (their expression). When Antichrist is about to destroy the entire people of Israel, Christ will come down from the heavens to deliver them from Antichrist. The Spirit of grace and supplications will be poured out upon them, they will look upon the One whom they have pierced, and they will wail over Him

(Zech. 12:10-14). From that time onward the people of Israel will manifest Christ.

God will not only deliver Israel from Antichrist but will make them a new creation with the inner law of the divine life and the capacity of this life to know God (Jer. 31:33-34). This means that God will put Himself into them as the divine life. Within this life there are the inner law and the capacity to know God. As believers in Christ, we all have such a capacity. Before we were saved, there was no way for us to know God. But when we were saved, the divine life entered into our being with its capacity to know God. One day the people of Israel will also have this capacity. God will make a new covenant with them and come into them as the divine life with its law and capacity. In this way they will become a new creation and will manifest Christ as their centrality and universality.

Jeremiah 23:6 and 33:16 both reveal that Christ, the Shoot, the descendant of David, will be made the righteousness of Jehovah to Israel. Then Israel will have Christ as the center and also as the expression. God will fulfill in them the promise of the new covenant to enter into them to be their life. By the capacity of this life, they will know God, serve God, and worship God. Today we, the believers in Christ, are partaking of this new covenant. At the time of Christ's second coming, Israel also will begin to partake of the new covenant.

IV. THE CENTRAL THOUGHT

The central thought of the book of Jeremiah is that the God of love, in His everlasting love, earnestly yearns that Israel, His beloved yet distracted elect, would turn to Him from the other gods, all of their idols (2:28; 11:13), that they may gain His incarnated Christ as the righteousness of Jehovah to them as their central being and universal expression. Thus, in spite of the fact that His degraded elect, according to their nature by birth, are wicked (12:1; 30:23), have a heart which is deceitful above all things (17:9), and cannot possibly be changed in any way, as the Cushite cannot change his skin or the leopard his spots (13:23), they may be redeemed from their fall by the redemption of Christ and be

saved from their sinful nature, not only from their sin and wickedness, by the divine life of Christ with its divine capacity of the inner life, not with the outward law of dead letters, to be renewed (as indicated by the new covenant they have received of God) that God could be their God and that they could be God's people (31:31-33) to participate in the enjoyment of the riches of the Triune God. This participation of theirs in the riches of God will be in the millennium in the coming age of restoration and will ultimately consummate in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

Perhaps you are wondering how we know that Jeremiah speaks of the incarnated Christ. This is indicated by the word in 23:5 and 33:15 concerning Christ as the righteous Shoot that will be raised up to David by God. Christ will be the descendant of David, and this means that He will become a man in the flesh. This is the incarnated Christ. This incarnated Christ, the righteous Shoot, will become the righteousness of Jehovah to Israel to be their central being and universal expression.

In order to demonstrate that what we have said regarding the central thought of Jeremiah is accurate, I would like now to consider three portions from Jeremiah and one from Lamentations. If we put these portions together, we will see that our understanding of the central thought of Jeremiah is according to the intrinsic content of this book and is not merely a human interpretation.

Regarding Israel, the elect of Jehovah, Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water." Jeremiah might have been weeping as he spoke this word. This word concerning the fountain of living waters is actually a New Testament thought. Jeremiah's word here is very similar to that of the Lord Jesus in John 4:14, where He said to the Samaritan woman, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life."

Lamentations 3:22-25 says, "It is Jehovah's lovingkindness that we are not consumed, / For His compassions do not fail; / They are new every morning.... / Jehovah is my portion... / Therefore I hope in Him. / Jehovah is good to those who wait on Him." Here Jeremiah speaks not of God's love but of His lovingkindness and of His compassions. Compassion is different from mercy. Compassion is a tender, inward feeling, and mercy is the outward expression of this feeling. Jehovah's compassions, like the dew, are new every morning. Immediately after speaking of God's lovingkindness and compassions, Jeremiah utters a personal word: "Jehovah is my portion...I hope in Him." Here Jeremiah seemed to be saying, "Although the children of Israel have been exiled, I still have hope in Jehovah. I hope in the One whose lovingkindness and compassions toward us do not fail. He is my portion, and He is good, not only to me, but to all who wait on Him."

Jeremiah 23:5 and 6 say, "Behold, days are coming, / Declares Jehovah, / When I will raise up to David a righteous Shoot; / And He will reign as King and act prudently / And will execute judgment and righteousness in the land. / In His days Judah will be saved, / And Israel will dwell securely; / And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness." This "righteous Shoot" is Christ incarnated to be a descendant of David in the flesh. At the time this word was written, David's descendants had become evil, and it seemed that no more kings would come out of David's tribe. But Jeremiah prophesied that one day God would raise up a new sprout, a new branch, a righteous Shoot, to reign as King and act prudently. This word regarding Christ's reigning as a King will be fulfilled in the millennium. As Isaiah 53 indicates, the word regarding Christ's acting prudently refers to His acting wisely in His resurrection. Furthermore, the fact that His name will be called "Jehovah our righteousness" means that He has something to do with us. Here His name is not called the righteousness of Jehovah, but Jehovah *our* righteousness, indicating that He becomes one with us to be our righteousness. This also is a New Testament thought.

The fourth portion I would like to consider is Jeremiah 31:33 and 34. "This is the covenant which I will make with

the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah: I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And they will no longer teach, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for all of them will know Me, from the little one among them even to the great one among them, declares Jehovah, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." The law spoken of here is related to the divine life. God is saying that He will put His life into them and that with this life there is a law. Actually, this life is the law. We may use an apple tree as an illustration. An apple tree has its own law. The law of an apple tree is the life of the apple tree. Because of this law, an apple tree spontaneously produces apples. There is no need to say, "Apple tree, I command you not to produce bananas but to produce apples. Also, your apples should be round and not square." The life of the apple tree will regulate it in such a way that it will produce apples. The principle is the same with our human life. Our human life has a law which regulates our living as human beings. The divine life is the highest life, and this life within us is an inner law that regulates us.

According to Jeremiah 31:33, this divine law is not only put into our spirit but is also written, inscribed, on our hearts. This corresponds to the New Testament teaching about the divine life spreading from our spirit into our heart and mind.

Jeremiah 31:34 tells us that all the house of Israel will know Jehovah, from the little one to the great one among them. This also applies to us, the New Testament believers, today. What makes us different from others is that we have the inner law of the divine life with its capacity and ability to know God and to know that God is our God and that we are His people. Today, as the new creation, we should conduct ourselves according to the inner instruction of the law of life. Eventually, Israel will be the same as we are now; they also will become a new creation in the divine life and know God according to the capacity of the divine life.

We may compare our reading of the book of Jeremiah to picking fruit from trees in an orchard. In picking fruit we do

not care about old branches or dry leaves; we care for the ripe fruit. Likewise, in our study of Jeremiah, we should not gather "branches" and "leaves" but "fruit." Those who pay attention to the branches and leaves and those who appreciate the fruit are both right, but only those who collect the fruit are spiritually benefited. In these messages in the life-study of Jeremiah, my burden is to present not branches and leaves but fruit. I believe that even in this introductory word there are a number of "apples," "peaches," and "pears" for you to enjoy. The portions concerning the fountain of living waters, the righteous Shoot who will reign as a King, the Lord's lovingkindness and compassions and His being our portion, and the new covenant with the law of the divine life surely are marvelous fruit for our enjoyment and enlightenment. Whereas many readers of Jeremiah concentrate on the branches and leaves, I would urge you to concentrate on the fruit.

V. THE SECTIONS

Finally, in this introductory word we need to see that the book of Jeremiah has four sections. The first section is Jeremiah's call and commission (ch. 1). The second section covers Israel's sin against Jehovah and Jehovah's punishment upon Israel (chs. 2—45). The third section concerns Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon the nations involved with God's elect, Israel (chs. 46—51). The last section is a supplement to the history of captivity (ch. 52).

As we have indicated, in these four sections there are four parties: God, Jeremiah, Israel, and the nations. The first two parties are good, and the second two are evil. In a very real sense, the book of Jeremiah is a drama in which an important part is played by each of these four parties.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWO

CRUCIAL ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE REVELATION IN JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: John 5:39-40; Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 31:33-34

In the foregoing message we emphasized the subject, the content, and the central thought of the book of Jeremiah. As a way of reviewing these matters, in this message I would like to say a word concerning certain crucial aspects of the divine revelation in Jeremiah.

THE BIBLE TESTIFYING CONCERNING CHRIST

In John 5:39 and 40 the Lord Jesus said to the Jewish religionists, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me. Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." To "search the Scriptures" may be separated from "come to Me." The Jewish religionists searched the Scriptures but were not willing to come to the Lord. These two should go together. Because the Scriptures testify concerning the Lord, they should not be separated from the Lord. We may contact the Scriptures, yet not contact the Lord. Only the Lord can give life.

From the time the Pentateuch was written until today, the Jews have been studying the Scriptures, but they do not know Christ or come to Him, even though the Scriptures testify concerning Him. It is quite possible that this may be our situation as we study the Bible and particularly, in the case of this life-study, the book of Jeremiah. Because of this, I would like to point out that my burden in these messages is not to have a Bible study but to seek Christ as life. Life is different from mere letters (2 Cor. 3:6b).

Furthermore, I am burdened that we would see God's economy in this book. We should not understand the Bible in a natural way but according to the divine revelation regarding God's economy. During the last thirty years, the Lord's recovery of the truths has reached the matter of God's economy, and my messages have therefore been focused on God's economy.

CHRIST BEING MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JEHOVAH TO GOD'S ELECT

The book of Jeremiah reveals that Christ is made the righteousness of Jehovah to God's elect (23:6; 33:16). Why is it necessary for Christ to be made God's righteousness to God's people? Someone might answer by saying that Christ must be made the righteousness of Jehovah to God's elect people because in themselves they are wicked and corrupt and altogether without righteousness; and unless Christ becomes righteousness to them, God cannot have anything to do with them. Such an answer is good, but it is lacking in light and in vision and remains on the level of a mere Bible study. The best way to answer this question is to answer according to the revelation in the New Testament concerning God's economy.

God's economy is to make Christ everything, to make Christ the centrality and the universality, for the producing of God's increase, God's enlargement, which is the church. The increase, the enlargement, of God is the fullness of God for His expression. The consummation of this fullness will be the New Jerusalem. If we consider the New Jerusalem as it is described in Revelation 21 and 22, we will see that the New Jerusalem is God's eternal increase with Christ as the center and the circumference.

We may say that in eternity past God was a "bachelor," meaning that He was alone without anyone to match Him. In eternity future, however, God will no longer be a bachelor but will have the New Jerusalem as His wife (Rev. 21:9-10). This wife will also be the tabernacle (Rev. 21:3). This wife, this tabernacle, is the increase of God. Thus, the New Jerusalem, the consummation of God's selected people, is the

enlargement of God. Christ is the centrality and universality of this enlargement. This is God's economy.

If we see this, we will know why it is necessary for Christ to be made the righteousness of Jehovah to God's people. According to the book of Jeremiah, Israel was wicked and provoked God's wrath, and because of this God came in to punish and chastise them. Actually, Israel's evil and wickedness prepared the way for Christ to come in to be their righteousness. If Israel had been righteous, how could Christ have become their righteousness? It would have been impossible. But according to Paul's thought, their unrighteousness and sinfulness provided the opportunity for Christ to come in and be made the righteousness of Jehovah to them. Therefore, the subject of Jeremiah is Christ being made the righteousness of Jehovah to God's elect as their center and circumference. Eventually, Israel will manifest Christ, who is their righteousness, as their centrality and universality. This manifestation will consummate in the New Jerusalem.

GOD'S WAY TO MAKE CHRIST EVERYTHING, THE CENTER AND THE CIRCUMFERENCE, TO ISRAEL

We have seen that the subject of Jeremiah is God's carrying out of His economy through the chastisement of Israel, His elect, in love, with His tender care, compassion, and sympathy, and His judgment upon the nations in righteousness, to match His love, that Israel may manifest Christ, who is their divine righteousness as their centrality and universality, by their being made a new creation with the inner law of the divine life and the capacity of this life to know God (31:33-34). Concerning this, I would like to ask the following question: In what way does God make Christ everything, the center and the circumference, to the people of Israel? Someone might answer this question by saying that the way God does this is for Christ to be incarnated as the Shoot of David, to be crucified, and then to become the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. This, however, is the *means* by which God makes Christ everything to us; it is not the *way* in which God makes Christ everything to us.

God's way to make Christ everything to His people involves righteousness, redemption, and the divine life. We have seen that Christ is made God's righteousness to us. Now we need to see that this requires redemption. Without redemption Christ cannot be made righteousness to us. Apart from redemption God cannot give us anything. The basis on which the divine life is given to us is the redemption of Christ.

Redemption is implied in Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the new covenant in 31:33 and 34. The last part of verse 34 says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." According to Ephesians 1:7, forgiveness is equal to redemption. This verse says, "In whom [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses." Here redemption and forgiveness are in apposition, indicating that they refer to the same thing. This is our ground for saying that redemption is implied in the word regarding forgiveness in Jeremiah 31:34. God, in the new covenant, will forgive our iniquity. This is a matter of redemption.

God's way to make Christ everything to His elect is by the way of righteousness and by the way of redemption. It is also by the way of the divine life. The divine life is given on the basis of Christ's redemption through God's justification, which is based on His righteousness. Life implies the law of life with its ability and capacity. These three matters—righteousness, redemption, and life—are fully developed in the New Testament. Although the way in which God makes Christ everything to us is developed in the New Testament, it is already revealed intrinsically in the book of Jeremiah. This means that in Jeremiah we see something of the New Testament.

Apparently Jeremiah is a book concerned with Israel's sin and wickedness and with God's chastisement of Israel. Actually this is not the case. The book of Jeremiah, like the Bible as a whole, was not written for this purpose. The Bible, including the book of Jeremiah, was written for God's economy. It was written to show us that God wants to be increased, to be enlarged, in order to have a fullness for the expression of Himself. Since this is the subject and content

of the entire Bible, why should the subject and content of Jeremiah be different? The basic element of the divine word in Jeremiah is not Israel's sin and God's chastisement; the basic element is God's economy. This is a crucial matter that we all need to see.

THE ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION OF THE REVELATION IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Finally, I would like to ask a third question: What is the ultimate consummation, the ultimate issue, of the revelation in the book of Jeremiah? The ultimate consummation of the divine revelation in this book is the New Jerusalem. We know this by the fact that the entire Bible consummates in the New Jerusalem.

The New Jerusalem is the consummation of God's new creation. In the book of Jeremiah, the new creation is indicated by the new covenant in chapter thirty-one. The new covenant produces something new, and this new thing is the new creation. God's new creation is His increase, His enlargement, becoming His fullness.

We use the word *fullness* here to denote not the riches of God but the expression of God. This word denotes not the riches of what God is but the expression of these riches, the full expression of the rich being of God. We may use a glass of water as an illustration. A glass that is full of water is rich in water. But when a glass of water is so full that it overflows with water, we have not only the riches of water but also the outflow of water as the fullness, the expression, of the water. God's fullness, therefore, is His expression in full. The New Jerusalem, the consummation of the Bible, will be the fullness, the expression, of God.

Eventually, according to the new covenant, Israel will be redeemed, saved, and renewed so that God will be their God and they will be God's people to participate in the enjoyment of the riches of the Triune God. This participation will be in the millennium in the coming age of restoration and will ultimately consummate in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THREE

THE INTRINSIC CONTENT OF JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: Jer. 2:13; Lam. 3:22-25; Jer. 23:5-6; 31:33-34

In the foregoing message we pointed out that the entire Bible, including the book of Jeremiah, was written for God's economy. My burden in this life-study of Jeremiah is that you would see what the Lord has shown me from the Word concerning God's economy. If you see this vision, your life will be affected, and the Lord's recovery will be enriched. In this message I am burdened to give a word on three portions from Jeremiah (2:13; 23:5-6; 31:33-34) and one from Lamentations (3:22-25). The totality of the matters covered in these verses is God's economy.

ISRAEL, THE ELECT OF JEHOVAH, COMMITTING TWO EVILS

In Jeremiah 2:13 we have God's word to Israel, the elect of Jehovah, concerning two evils which they have committed.

Forsaking Jehovah, the Fountain of Living Waters

Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water." God's intention in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to satisfy His chosen people for their enjoyment. The goal of this enjoyment is to produce the church as God's increase, God's enlargement, to be God's fullness for His expression. This is the heart's desire, the good pleasure (Eph. 1:5, 9), of God in His economy. The full development of this thought is in the New Testament, but it is sown as a seed in Jeremiah 2:13.

God's economy is to dispense Himself as the living water to produce His increase, His enlargement, to be His expression. This thought is developed in the writings of John. In John 1:1 and 14 we see that the Word, which was God, became flesh, full of grace and reality. Verse 16 goes on to say, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace." In chapter four of John the Lord Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman concerning living water (vv. 10, 14). In John 7:38 He said, "He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." In Revelation 21 and 22 we have a vision of the New Jerusalem, which is a great sign of God's increase for His expression. Revelation 22:1 and 2 show us that in the New Jerusalem the river of life flows and that in this river grows the tree of life as the life supply to support and sustain the entire city. What we have in the writings of John is surely the growth of the seed sown in Jeremiah 2:13.

This thought is strengthened by Paul's writings. For example, 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body…and were all given to drink one Spirit." To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and to be lost in Him; to drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and to have our being saturated with Him. In 1 Corinthians 10:3 and 4 Paul, using the Old Testament types, speaks not only of drinking but also of eating. "All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ." The spiritual food refers to manna (Exo. 16:14-18), typifying Christ as our daily life supply; the spiritual drink refers to the living water that flowed out of the cleft rock (Exo. 17:6), typifying the Spirit, who flowed out of the crucified and resurrected Christ as our all-inclusive drink. Our drinking of God as the living water is for the church as His increase; our drinking is for the producing of His enlargement, His fullness, for His expression.

Hewing Out for Themselves Cisterns, Broken Cisterns, Which Hold No Water

In Jeremiah 2:13 we see not only something positive—the

fountain of living waters—but also something negative—the children of Israel's forsaking this fountain to hew out for themselves broken cisterns, which hold no water. This negative thing indicates that Israel, like Adam in Genesis 3, had become fallen. Adam fell by forsaking the tree of life and turning to another tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Israel fell by forsaking God as the fountain of living waters and turning to a source other than God. This source is signified by the cisterns, which Israel labored to hew out for themselves.

God was burdened that Israel would drink Him to become His increase as His fullness that they might express Him. Israel should have drunk of God as the fountain of living waters, but instead they committed two evils. The first evil was to forsake God; the second evil was to hew out cisterns as another source. Those cisterns, however, were broken and could hold no water. This indicates that apart from God as the fountain of living waters, nothing can quench our thirst, nothing can satisfy us. Nothing apart from God Himself dispensed into us as living water can make us His increase for His expression.

JEHOVAH'S COMPASSIONS NEVER FAILING BUT BEING NEW EVERY MORNING

Lamentations 3:22-25 says, "It is Jehovah's lovingkindness that we are not consumed, / For His compassions do not fail; / They are new every morning. / Great is Your faithfulness. / Jehovah is my portion, says my soul; / Therefore I hope in Him. / Jehovah is good to those who wait on Him, / To the soul that seeks Him." Although Israel forsook God, He did not cast them away. God's elect may fail Him, but His compassions never fail; rather, they are new every morning. Because of His compassions, lovingkindness, and everlasting love, God would never give up His elect yet distracted people.

We should not think that we are better than Israel, and we should not read the Bible for others but for ourselves. Every book of the Bible has something to do with us. If we apply this principle, we will see that not only did Israel have idols, but we also have idols. Jeremiah said, "According to

the number of your cities / Are your gods, O Judah" (2:28). Do we not also have idols in our daily life? Every day we offend God by worshipping idols. To treasure anything other than God is actually to worship an idol. Every day we treasure something other than God. We have idols, but God has compassions. We are evil, but God is compassionate. It is of His lovingkindness that we are not consumed. If it were not for God's compassions, He would have given up on us long ago. But He has not given us up, for His compassions continue anew every day. His compassions keep us in His hand for His economy.

JEHOVAH RAISING UP TO DAVID A RIGHTEOUS SHOOT, AND HIS NAME BEING CALLED JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the middle of Jeremiah's long and detailed account of Israel's wickedness (chs. 2—45), he tells us that Jehovah will raise up to David a new Shoot. "Behold, days are coming, / Declares Jehovah, / When I will raise up to David a righteous Shoot; / And He will reign as King and act prudently / And will execute judgment and righteousness in the land. / In His days Judah will be saved, / And Israel will dwell securely; / And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness" (23:5-6). This righteous Shoot is Christ incarnated to be the descendant of David. In Matthew 1:1 Christ is called "the son of David." He is the new branch, the new sprout, of David. As such a branch He is a righteous Shoot. From the time of His infancy, He has been altogether righteous.

Jeremiah 23:5 tells us that Christ, the righteous Shoot, "will reign as King and act prudently." This requires that He be in resurrection and ascension. If Christ were not in resurrection and ascension, He could not be the King. The word *King* in this verse therefore implies Christ's resurrection and ascension. When Christ was a child, He could not be the King. But having passed through resurrection and entering into ascension, He is now the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the Ruler of all the kings of the earth (Rev. 17:14;

19:16; 1:5). Furthermore, in His resurrection and ascension, He acts prudently.

Jeremiah 23:6 goes on to say that His name will be called "Jehovah our righteousness." This name is repeated in 33:16. "In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely; and this is the name by which she will be called: Jehovah our righteousness." As God's elect, we, like Israel, have no righteousness in ourselves. Our heart is deceitful above all things and is incurable (17:9), and we have a sinful nature that can never be changed (13:23). We are hopeless, but our hope is in Him. Our hopeless situation—our unchangeable condition of evilness, wickedness, and deceitfulness—prepares the way for Christ to come in to be our righteousness. God has not abandoned us or given us up; rather, He has made Christ our righteousness. Because Christ is our righteousness, we are still here enjoying Him.

JEHOVAH MAKING A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

Putting His Law within Them

The last portion we will consider is 31:33 and 34. "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah: I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And they will no longer teach, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for all of them will know Me, from the little one among them even to the great one among them, declares Jehovah, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." In speaking of the new covenant that He would make with His elect, God said that He would put His law within them. This is not the law of letters—it is the law of life. If God's law were not the law of life, He could not put His law into our being. The law that God puts into us is the law of His own life. The law is actually the life. This means that God puts Himself into us as life, and this life is the law that He puts into us.

God's life, which is God Himself, is a law that regulates us. Just as a cat is regulated by the law of the cat life and a human being is regulated by the law of the human life, so are we regulated by the law of the divine life.

Writing His Law upon Their Hearts

In verse 33 God, speaking of His law, says that He will "write it upon their hearts." God not only puts His law within us, but He also writes it upon our hearts. To write here means to inscribe. God writes His law upon our hearts by moving from our spirit into our heart to inscribe what He is into our being. This indicates that in the new covenant God does not ask us to do anything, for in the new covenant He does everything.

They Being His People, and All of Them Knowing Him, from the Little One among Them Even to the Great One among Them

Under God's new covenant, Israel will be His people, and He will be their God. Today we, the believers in Christ, are God's people, and He is our God.

In verse 34 God says, "All of them will know Me, from the little one among them even to the great one among them." To know God does not simply mean that we know that God is triune and that He is holy and righteous. To know God is to live God, and to live God is to know God. For example, we may hate, but God loves. Thus, if we know God, we will live Him by loving others. Also, God is compassionate. To know Him is to live Him as the compassionate One. This is something that the elders in particular need to do. A compassionate elder is an elder who knows God. Furthermore, God is considerate. To know Him is to live Him as the One who is considerate.

We can know God in such a way only because He has put His life into us, and this life is just God Himself. This life is our inner life law with its capacity. As believers in Christ, we all, from the little one to the great one, have this capacity to know God by living Him.

God Forgiving Their Iniquity and Remembering Their Sin No More

In the last part of verse 34 God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." As we pointed out in the previous message, this involves redemption (Eph. 1:7). Since God forgives, to know God is to forgive others and to not remember their sin. This is to live out Christ's redemption.

All the matters in Jeremiah 31:33 and 34 are developed in the New Testament. In Hebrews 8 Paul quotes these verses in order to show us that today we have the inner law, the law of life. In the new covenant, which is the better covenant (Heb. 7:22), God has put Himself into us as life, and this life is our inner law. This inner law is our capacity to live God in order to be God's people. Thus, we can live and have our being in the same way God does. He is forgiving and does not remember the sins of His people, and we can be the same.

THE ULTIMATE ISSUE OF JEREMIAH'S REVELATION

What is described in Jeremiah 31:33 and 34 is actually the new creation. The ultimate issue of Jeremiah's revelation is the new creation, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Therefore, intrinsically speaking, Jeremiah is the same as the New Testament. The intrinsic content of the book of Jeremiah is the base of the New Testament. The New Testament is thus the development of Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah, which is full of speaking concerning Israel's sin and God's wrath, chastisement, and punishment, reveals that God wants to be the fountain of living waters for our satisfaction in order to produce His increase for His expression. Even though we have failed, He does not fail. It is of His lovingkindness that we are not consumed, and His compassions do not fail but are new every morning. God's compassions upon us in our failure prepare the way for Christ to come in first to be our righteousness and then our redemption and our life. Righteousness, redemption, and life with its law and capacity—all these are Christ. It is by such

a righteousness, redemption, and life that God makes Christ everything to His elect. Christ is the center and the circumference of God's people, and He is also the centrality and universality of God's dealing with all the peoples on earth. This is the intrinsic content of the book of Jeremiah.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE FOUR

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN FULFILLING HIS ECONOMY

Scripture Reading: Jer. 2:13; Lam. 3:22-25; Jer. 23:5-6; 31:33-34

In this message I would like to give a further word on Jeremiah 2:13; Lamentations 3:22-25; Jeremiah 23:5-6; and 31:33-34. The intrinsic content of these verses shows us God's economy.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN DESIRING TO BE THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS TO HIS ELECT PEOPLE

Jeremiah 2:13 reveals that God is the fountain of living waters. Why does God desire to be the fountain of living waters for His elect people to drink that their thirst may be quenched and that they may be satisfied? God's purpose in wanting to be the fountain of living waters for His elect to drink is that He would be increased and enlarged. Many Christians have not paid attention to this matter. Have you ever heard that God wants to be enlarged? When some hear this, they say, "How can God be enlarged? Is He not already large enough? It is blasphemy to say that God can be enlarged." Concerning this matter of God's enlargement, let us come back to the Bible and see what the Bible says.

God as the Satisfying Water to His Elect

In the Bible there is the thought that God is the satisfying water to His elect. Psalm 36:8-9a says, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life." Here *fatness* means food, or the life supply, and the river is the river of life. In typology the fatness of God's house refers to the rich produce of the good

land. All the riches that were offered to God became the fatness of His house. As we enjoy this fatness, we drink of the river of life, the river of God's pleasures.

In the Bible there are a number of places where God is signified by a river. The first is in Genesis 2:10-14. God created man in His own image and then placed him in the garden of Eden in front of the tree of life. The tree of life is first mentioned in verse 9. Then verse 10 goes on to say, "A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads." This river, therefore, is closely related to the tree of life. Another verse which speaks of a river is Psalm 46:4. "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." Ezekiel 47 tells of the prophet's vision of a river flowing out of the temple of God. In John 4 the Lord Jesus speaks of living water (v. 10) and of a spring of water gushing up into eternal life (v. 14); and in John 7, He speaks of rivers of living water (v. 38). In 1 Corinthians 10:4 we have Paul's word about spiritual drink. Finally, in Revelation 22:1 we have a word concerning the river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. It is through the flow of this river that God's economy is accomplished.

The Fountain of Living Waters for God's Expression through His Increase

God needs to be the fountain of living waters to us because He has an economy. What is God's economy? God's economy is to have an expression of Himself. God does not want to express Himself by Himself alone; rather, He wants to express Himself through His counterpart. For this reason, God created man and put him in the garden of Eden. Eventually, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18a). In typology this signifies that it is not good for God to be alone. This indicates that the first husband mentioned in the Bible was not a human being but God. Who is His counterpart? Adam, who was created in God's image, was to be God's counterpart. In order to be God's counterpart, Adam had to drink of God, to receive God into him that he might have the divine life with the divine nature and the divine

element in order to be divine to match God. Because God, the Husband, is divine, the wife, His counterpart, should also be divine that she might match Him. Since it was not good for the man to be alone, God builded from Adam's rib a woman to match him (Gen. 2:21-23).

I would emphasize the fact that God needs to be the fountain of living waters to His elect because He has an economy, and His economy is to produce a counterpart, a bride, for Himself. The purpose of God's economy is that God would no longer be alone but would have a wife to be His increase, His enlargement, and thus to match Him as the Husband. This is the significance of the word *increase* in John 3:30. In this verse John the Baptist, speaking of Christ, says, "He must increase." In the previous verse John had said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." The increase in verse 30 is the bride in verse 29. The Bridegroom is Christ, and the bride is His increase, His enlargement. Just as Eve was the increase of Adam, being built from Adam's rib, so God's elect as the bride are the increase of Christ as the Bridegroom.

MAN BECOMING UNFAITHFUL AND UNCHASTE AND FORSAKING GOD FOR IDOLS

God intended to dispense Himself into man as man's satisfaction that God might be enlarged, but man became unfaithful and unchaste and forsook God for idols. This forsaking of God began in the garden of Eden. Eve, the wife of Adam, was not faithful to God but was seduced by the serpent to turn from God to Satan, symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Through Eve Adam also was seduced and ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. In this way man turned away from God to idols. Every branch of the tree of knowledge is an idol. Whatever we possess, and even whatever we are, can be an idol. Israel was evil and unfaithful to God in forsaking God for idols. In the matter of such unfaithfulness to God, we are the same as Israel.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN LEADING US INTO HIS ECONOMY

Although we are unfaithful, God is faithful. Lamentations

3:23b says, "Great is Your faithfulness." The chorus of a well-known hymn on God's faithfulness (*Hymns*, #19) says, "'Great is Thy faithfulness!' 'Great is Thy faithfulness!' / Morning by morning new mercies I see; / All I have needed Thy hand has provided— / 'Great is Thy faithfulness,' Lord, unto me!" We may understand what the Bible says and what this hymn says about God's faithfulness either in a natural way or in a spiritual way. When you sing this hymn, how do you understand the word *faithfulness?* If you understand God's faithfulness in a natural way, you may think that He is faithful primarily in the matter of material provisions or physical blessings. When some say that God is faithful, they mean that He is faithful to take care of their material needs. However, in 1 Corinthians 1:9 Paul says, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." God is faithful in this matter, but He may not be faithful to provide you a large house or a well-paying job. I would not deny the fact that God is faithful in caring for our welfare. My point is that God's faithfulness is not according to our natural understanding.

Consider the sufferings of the apostle Paul. He was called, commissioned, burdened, and sent by God, but wherever he went he had troubles. For example, as soon as he began to preach Christ, he began to suffer persecution. He even had to escape from Damascus by being lowered down the wall in a basket. Does this mean that God was not faithful to Paul? No, it means that God's faithfulness is not according to our natural understanding.

When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we might have expected to have peace and blessing. But instead we might have had many troubles and might have lost our security, our health, or our possessions. When some Christians experience such things, they may question God's faithfulness and ask why He did not prevent hardships from happening to them.

We need to realize that in allowing us to have troubles, God is faithful in His purpose to turn us from idols and bring us back to Himself. Our peace, safety, health, and possessions may become idols to us, and God is faithful to take these things away so that we may drink of Him as the fountain of

living waters. If our house or our possessions become idols to us, we drink of them and not of God. God's faithfulness is a matter of dealing with these idols and causing us to drink of Him.

God is faithful in leading us into His economy, and His economy is for us to drink Christ, to eat Christ, to enjoy Christ, to absorb Christ, and to assimilate Christ that God may have His increase with us to fulfill His economy. This is God's faithfulness.

Instead of drinking of God as the fountain of living waters, Israel drank of their idols. Therefore, God used the Babylonians to deal with these idols and also to destroy Jerusalem and even the temple, which had become an idol to them. We need to see that we are not better than Israel. Anything can become an idol to us. But God is faithful in fulfilling His economy. In His faithfulness He deals with our idols that we may drink of Him. We all need to drink of God as the fountain of living waters, receiving Christ into us and assimilating Him, so that He may increase for the fulfillment of God's economy to have His expression through His counterpart.

Whereas God is faithful, we are neither faithful nor chaste but go to many other husbands. After failing God, we may receive some mercy and grace and therefore repent and weep, saying, "How pitiful I am! For a long time I have not loved the Lord very much, and I have not attended the meetings." While we are repenting and weeping, God is rejoicing. However, if we repent and weep too much, even our repentance may become an idol. We may testify in a meeting, saying that we have thoroughly repented to God. But this may be a matter of self-boasting and be a self-made idol. Therefore, after repenting, we should begin to drink of the living waters, praising God, giving thanks to Him for everything, and enjoying Him. This is what God wants. God is not interested in anything other than our enjoyment of Christ.

GOD NOT BEING DISAPPOINTED, AND HIS COMPASSIONS NOT FAILING

We may think that because of our failure, we are hopeless. Thus, it is profitable to consider Lamentations 3:22-25. "It is

Jehovah's lovingkindness that we are not consumed, / For His compassions do not fail; / They are new every morning. / Great is Your faithfulness. / Jehovah is my portion, says my soul; / Therefore I hope in Him. / Jehovah is good to those who wait on Him, / To the soul that seeks Him." These words were written after the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and carried away many into captivity. According to some historical books, Lamentations was written while Jeremiah was sitting on a small mountain overlooking the destroyed city of Jerusalem. Surely, the people of Israel must have felt that God had given them up and that they were finished. On the one hand, Jeremiah was weeping; on the other hand, he was writing. In his writing he could say that it was of Jehovah's lovingkindness that they were not consumed. He could say that they were still there and that God had not given them up. The princes, the prophets, and the priests had failed, but God's compassions do not fail; rather, they are new every morning. Jeremiah could even declare that Jehovah was his portion and that he hoped in Him, for He is good to those who wait on Him. Why is there hope in Him? There is hope in God because with God there is no disappointment.

ISRAEL'S FAILURE OPENING THE WAY FOR CHRIST TO COME IN TO BE THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS

At this point we need to see that Israel's failure opened the way for Christ to come in to be their righteousness. The situation is the same with us today. Our failure opens the way for Christ to come in.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 speaks of Christ's coming in. "Behold, days are coming, / Declares Jehovah, / When I will raise up to David a righteous Shoot; / And He will reign as King and act prudently / And will execute judgment and righteousness in the land. / ...And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness." This righteous Shoot is Christ as the descendant of David. The day is coming when all Israel will receive Christ as their righteousness. They forsook Him, but their forsaking of Him has opened the door for Him to come in to be their righteousness. Then they may

say, "Lord, we do not have anything that God can recognize as righteousness, but You have come to be our righteousness."

According to the prophecy of Jeremiah, no matter how evil and wicked Israel may be and no matter how often they have forsaken God to hew out broken cisterns for themselves, Israel will be restored. In the restoration of Israel, Christ will be their righteousness, redemption, and life (31:33-34), and Christ will be exalted to be their centrality and universality. God will come in to dispense Himself into His elect as the divine life to be their life and life law with its capacity to know God and to live God. Eventually, they, like Paul and the believers in Christ today, will be a new creation.

NOT BEING DISAPPOINTED BUT BEING ASSURED THAT GOD HAS A WAY TO CAUSE US TO MATURE AND TO BRING US INTO THE NEW JERUSALEM

If we fail God today, we should not be disappointed. God has a way to deal with us. He has a way to cause us to mature and then to bring us into the New Jerusalem. If we are overcomers, we will enjoy the reward in the millennium. If we are defeated, we will suffer punishment in the millennium, but eventually we will be matured and enter into the New Jerusalem. Some Christians may love the world today, but sooner or later God will come in to take away the "toy" of the world, and they will repent. Then He may say, "Child, you don't need to repent anymore. Simply take Christ in and rejoice with Me."

There is no need for us to worry about our situation. God is patient, sympathetic, and compassionate, and He will take the time to make us mature. Every believer, whether presently weak or strong, will be in the New Jerusalem, and everyone there will be mature. Whether we seek God diligently or only a little, God has a way to make Christ our righteousness, our redemption, our life, our life law, and our life capacity so that we can be matured. Every real believer in Christ will reach maturity and be in the New Jerusalem. Thus, we should not be dismayed or discouraged. Rather, we should be encouraged.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE FIVE

JEREMIAH'S CALL AND COMMISSION

Scripture Reading: Jer. 1:4-19

In this message we will consider 1:4-19. This portion tells us first how Jeremiah was called by God and then how he was commissioned by Him.

I. JEREMIAH'S CALL

In verses 5 through 8 we see Jeremiah's call.

A. Appointed by God as a Prophet to the Nations

In verse 5c God said to Jeremiah, "I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Literally, the Hebrew word translated *appointed* here means "given." God gave, appointed, Jeremiah to be a prophet not only to the nation of Israel but to all the nations.

1. Known by God before Being Formed in the Womb by Him

In verse 5a God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." Realizing the poor situation of Israel in relation to Him, God knew Jeremiah even before He purposely formed him in his mother's womb to be a prophet.

2. Sanctified by God before Coming Forth from the Womb

God also said to Jeremiah, "Before you came forth from the womb, I sanctified you" (v. 5b). How good it is that before Jeremiah was born he was already sanctified!

B. Responding with Excuses

Verse 6 tells us that to God's call Jeremiah responded with excuses.

1. Saying That He Did Not Know How to Speak

"Then I said, Alas, Lord Jehovah! / Behold, I do not know how to speak" (v. 6a). Jeremiah seemed to be saying, "Lord, how can I be a prophet? I do not know how to speak!" Many of the saints in the Lord's recovery today offer such an excuse for not functioning in the church meetings. If they are encouraged to prophesy in the meetings, they may say that they do not know how to speak.

2. Saying That He Was a Youth

Jeremiah also excused himself by saying, "I am a youth" (v. 6b). He felt that he was too young to be a prophet. Some of the new ones among us may have the same feeling about speaking for the Lord. To such a person God would say, "You are not too young. As long as you have been born of Me and baptized, you are not too young to speak for Me." God does not regard as legitimate the excuse that we do not know how to speak or the excuse that we are too young.

C. Affirmed by Jehovah

In verses 7 and 8 Jehovah affirmed Jeremiah's call. "But Jehovah said to me, / Do not say, I am a youth; / For everywhere I send you, you shall go; / And everything I command you, you shall speak. / Do not be afraid of their faces, / For I am with you to deliver you, declares Jehovah." Here God seemed to be saying to Jeremiah, "Do not care about human faces. They mean nothing. I am with you, and no one is stronger than I or greater than I."

II. JEREMIAH'S COMMISSION

Verses 9 through 19 speak of Jeremiah's commission.

A. Touched on His Mouth by Jehovah's Hand

Verse 9a says, "Then Jehovah stretched out His hand and touched my mouth." Since God is absolutely spiritual, how

could He have touched Jeremiah's mouth with His hand? We do not know and we cannot explain this. We only know that Jeremiah was in fact touched on his mouth by Jehovah's hand.

B. Jehovah Putting His Words into Jeremiah's Mouth

After touching Jeremiah Jehovah put His words into his mouth. Jehovah said to him, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth" (v. 9b). This enabled the prophet to speak for Him. The principle is the same with us today. When God puts His words into us, we have much to speak for Him.

C. Jehovah Having Appointed Him over the Nations and over the Kingdoms

"See, I have appointed you this day / Over the nations and over the kingdoms / To pluck up and to break down, / To destroy and to tear down, / To build up and to plant" (v. 10). On the negative side there was to be the plucking up, the breaking down, the destroying, and the tearing down; on the positive side there was to be the building up and the planting. Here we are reminded of the two meanings of Jeremiah's name: "Jehovah exalts" and "Jehovah tears down." The plucking up, the breaking down, and the destroying are Jehovah's tearing down. The building up and the planting are Jehovah's exalting. Surely every negative thing—everything of Satan, sin, and the world—must be torn down. Along with this we have Jehovah's building up and His planting, both of which involve His word. God's word is a building up of Christ and a planting of Christ. This is for the exalting of Christ.

D. Given to See Two Visions

According to verses 11 through 16, in his commission Jeremiah was given to see two visions.

1. The Rod of an Almond Tree

The first vision was of the rod of an almond tree. "Then the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, What do you see, Jeremiah? And I said, I see the rod of an almond tree. And Jehovah said to me, You have seen well, for I am watching

over My word to perform it" (vv. 11-12). The Hebrew word for *watch* is the root of the word for *almond*. Here the rod of an almond tree signifies that God was watching over His word (the word of punishment) to perform it.

Moses had warned Israel that if they did not obey the voice of Jehovah their God, they would be cursed in every way (Deut. 28:15-68). For example, Moses said, "Your heaven, which is above your head, will be brass, and the land, which is under you, iron. Jehovah will make the rain of your land powder and dust" (vv. 23-24a). After Moses spoke these words, God sent prophets to the people of Israel to remind them to keep His word. However, Israel did not obey God's word. Therefore, at Jeremiah's time, many centuries after the time of Moses, God came to watch over His word in order to fulfill it, that is, to execute His word to punish Israel.

2. The Boiling Pot Facing Away from the North

The second vision given to Jeremiah to see was of the boiling pot facing away from the north. "Then the word of Jehovah came to me a second time, saying, What do you see? And I said, I see a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north. And Jehovah said to me, Out of the north evil will be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land" (Jer. 1:13-14). Here the word *north* refers especially to Babylon, and the word *evil* refers not to sinful things but to calamities. Thus, the boiling pot facing away from the north signifies that out of the north calamities would be let loose (4:6b) upon all the inhabitants of the land of Israel. Prior to this time, the calamities had been restricted. But now God will call all the families from the kingdoms of the earth, and they will come and set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah (1:15). In this way Jehovah will utter His judgment on Israel concerning all their wickedness—their forsaking Him, offering sacrifices to other gods, and worshipping the work of their own hands (v. 16). Because of all these things, God was coming in to punish Israel.

E. Charged by Jehovah

In verses 17 through 19 we see that Jeremiah was charged by Jehovah.

1. To Gird Up His Loins and Rise Up to Speak His Words to Israel, Not Being Dismayed before Them

Jeremiah, who was born a priest but was called to be a prophet, might have been a timid, fearful person. This timid person was given a charge by Jehovah. In the first part of this charge, God said to him, "You therefore gird up your loins, and rise up and speak to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, lest I dismay you in their presence" (v. 17). If Jeremiah had been dismayed before the people, God would have dismayed him.

Today, in the matter of functioning in the church meetings, many saints are dismayed. But we should not be dismayed by anyone, and we should not be afraid of anyone. No matter who is present in the meeting, we should not be dismayed. Rather, we should function to speak for the Lord.

2. To Be Made by Jehovah into a Fortified City, into an Iron Pillar, and into Brass Walls

In verses 18 and 19 we have the second part of Jehovah's charge to Jeremiah. "I am now making you today into a fortified city and into an iron pillar and into brass walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. And they will fight against you, but they will not prevail against you; for I am with you, declares Jehovah, to deliver you." Why was it necessary for God to make Jeremiah into a fortified city, into an iron pillar, and into brass walls? This was necessary because a battle was raging. The kings, the princes, the priests, and the people of the land were enemies not only to Jeremiah but also to God. These enemies were fighting against God, and Jeremiah was sent to represent God and fight for Him. Those who fought against Jeremiah fought against Jehovah because Jeremiah and Jehovah were one. For this reason, God wanted Jeremiah to know that He

was with him and that He had made him into a fortified city, into an iron pillar, and into brass walls.

The Bible tells us that on earth there is always a battle raging between God and those who oppose Him and fight against Him. God does not fight by Himself directly but through His servants who have been sent by Him. This was the situation in Jeremiah's time. God sent His army—a young man named Jeremiah—to fight against those who opposed Him. Jeremiah was equipped by God to such an extent that he became a fortified city. Because God was with him to deliver him, the opposers would not prevail over him.

In the Lord's recovery today, we also face opposition, condemnation, and rejection, and we also must fight for God. As we are sent by God to fight for Him, He fights through us. In this fighting our weapons are God Himself and the truth revealed in the Bible.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE SIX

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(1)

TWO EVILS OF ISRAEL

Scripture Reading: Jer. 2:1—3:5

In 2:13 Jehovah says of His people, "My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water." In this message on Israel's sin against Jehovah and Jehovah's punishment of Israel, we will consider these two evils of Israel.

I. FORSAKING JEHOVAH, THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS

The first evil of Israel was to forsake Jehovah, the fountain of living waters.

A. Jehovah God Considering Himself a Husband to His Beloved Elect, Israel

In the book of Jeremiah, Jehovah God considers Himself a husband to His beloved elect, Israel, and Israel a wife to Him. Jeremiah 2:1—3:5 may thus be regarded as a conversation between a husband and wife.

B. Jehovah Remembering the Love of Israel's Bridal Days

"Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says Jehovah: / I remember concerning you the kindness of your youth, / The love of your bridal days, / When you followed

after Me in the wilderness, / In a land that was not sown" (2:2). There was a bridal day, a wedding day, for Jehovah and Israel, and Jehovah, the Husband, still remembered that day of love.

C. Israel Being Holiness to Jehovah

"Israel was holiness to Jehovah, / The firstfruits of His increase" (v. 3a). The word *increase* here means produce from the earth. God gained some increase from the earth as produce, and Israel was the firstfruits of this produce. As the firstfruits, Israel was valuable to God. God treasured Israel as holiness to Him, as the firstfruits of His increase from His field.

D. Going Far Away from Jehovah

"Thus says Jehovah: / What iniquity did your fathers find in Me, / That they have gone far away from Me / And have walked after vanity / And are vain?" (v. 5). The word *vanity* in this verse refers to idols. Israel walked after vanity, and they themselves became vain; they worshipped idols and as a result they made themselves nothing.

E. Forgetting Jehovah

Israel also forgot Jehovah, who brought them up from Egypt through the wilderness of deserts and the shadow of death and brought them into the land of the fruited field (vv. 6-7).

F. Their Priests Not Asking concerning Jehovah, Their Shepherds Transgressing against Jehovah, and Their Prophets Prophesying by Baal

"The priests did not say, / Where is Jehovah? / And those who handle the law did not know Me, / And the shepherds transgressed against Me, / And the prophets prophesied by Baal / And followed after things that did not benefit them" (v. 8). The priests did not know where God was, and those who handled the law did not know God. How could they handle Jehovah's law if they did not know Him? This is impossible. Furthermore, the shepherds, the rulers, transgressed against

Jehovah, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, that is, in the name of Baal, an idol. This was the situation of the people of Israel.

G. Exchanging Their Glory for Idols

"Has a nation ever exchanged its gods, / Even though they are no gods? / But My people have exchanged their glory / For that which does not benefit them" (v. 11). Here the words *their glory* mean "their God." The people exchanged their God for idols, for that which was vain and did not benefit them.

H. Their Forsaking Jehovah Their God Being an Evil and Bitter Thing

It was an evil and bitter thing that the people of Israel had forsaken Jehovah their God (v. 19). They forsook Him, the fountain of living waters, and went away from Him to idols.

I. Being like Jehovah's Wife Committing Fornication with Many Lovers

Finally, in forsaking Jehovah, the fountain of living waters, God's people were like Jehovah's wife committing fornication with many lovers (3:1). Israel realized that Jehovah was her Husband, but she continued to commit fornication with many lovers, with many idols. Such was the sinful condition of Israel.

II. HEWING OUT FOR THEMSELVES CISTERNS, BROKEN CISTERNS, WHICH HOLD NO WATER

Israel forsook Jehovah as the fountain of living waters. This was Israel's first evil. Israel's second evil was to hew out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which hold no water.

A. Toiling to Make Broken and Waterless Cisterns to Replace the Fountain of Living Waters

The word in 2:13 about cisterns is, of course, a figure of speech portraying Israel's toil in making something to replace God as the fountain of living waters. To hew out a cistern

from rock is very hard labor. Then the cistern may become broken. Once a cistern is broken, the water in it leaks out. This is a picture of human labor and enterprise. We may labor to get something for ourselves, but then our "cistern" develops a crack, and we lose whatever we have gained.

B. Choosing Many Idols to Replace the Unique God

Israel chose many idols, which are of no benefit, to replace the unique God, who is their glory (2:11). This is very similar to what is described in Romans 1:23, where Paul speaks of those who "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and reptiles."

C. Exchanging the Reality of God for the Falsehood, the Vanity, of Idols

Israel exchanged the reality of God for the falsehood, the vanity, of idols (Jer. 2:5). They "exchanged the truth of God for the lie" (Rom. 1:25a). All idols are vanity; thus, to pursue an idol is to pursue vanity.

D. Worshipping and Serving the Creation Rather Than the Creator

Israel worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25b). They worshipped and served not only the things of God's creation but also the things of their own creation—idols of wood, stone, and metal.

E. Seeking the Egyptians' and Assyrians' Help instead of Seeking God's Blessing

Israel sought the Egyptians' and Assyrians' help (man's help) instead of seeking God's blessing (Jer. 2:17-18, 36; Isa. 31:3). They did not trust in God's blessing but in man's help.

F. As the Wife of Jehovah, Forsaking Her Chastity to Commit Fornication

As the wife of Jehovah, Israel forsook her chastity to

commit fornication, having a harlot's forehead and refusing to be ashamed (Jer. 2:20, 23-25; 3:1-3).

G. Practicing Apostasies Rather Than Keeping Her Faithfulness

Israel practiced apostasies rather than keeping her faithfulness (2:19). Apostasy is a matter of leaving the way of God and taking another way to follow things other than God. This is what Israel did.

H. Increasing the Number of Their Gods according to the Number of Their Cities

Israel increased the number of their gods (idols) according to the number of their cities (vv. 27-28). Wherever there was a city, there was an idol.

I. Having Forgotten Jehovah for Days without Number

In 2:32 Jehovah says, "Can the virgin forget her ornaments, / Or the bride her attire? / But My people have forgotten Me / For days without number." Israel had forgotten Jehovah for days without number, for so many days that they could not be counted. This means that they had forgotten Him for a very long time. In this matter, they were different from the virgin, who could not forget her ornaments, or the bride, who could not forget her attire. This word concerning ornaments and attire indicates that God is our ornament and attire; that is, God is our beautification. Although God was Israel's beautification, Israel forgot Him.

J. Making Themselves the Degenerate Shoots of a Foreign Vine to Suffer Jehovah's Correcting Punishment

Israel made themselves the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine to suffer Jehovah's correcting punishment (vv. 21, 19, 29-30; 3:3a). In punishing them Jehovah did not even give them the showers or the spring rain. He caused the heavens above to be as brass, not giving them any supply.

K. In Spite of Her Fornication, Jehovah Being Willing to Return to Her Again

"It is said, / If a man divorces his wife / And she goes from him / And becomes another man's wife, / Will he return to her again? / Will not that land be / Utterly polluted? / But you have committed fornication with many lovers. / Yet return to Me, declares Jehovah" (3:1). This indicates that in spite of Israel's fornication, which was like that of a divorced wife, Jehovah would return to her again, if she would return to Him. This is Jehovah's compassions, and His compassions do not fail; they are new every morning. But whether or not Israel would experience God's compassions depended upon whether or not she would return to God.

L. Calling Jehovah Her Father, the Guide of Her Youth

"Have you not just now called out to Me, My Father, / You are the guide of my youth?" (v. 4). This indicates that if Israel would return to Jehovah, she would say to Him that He is her Father, the Guide (Companion) of her youth. This shows the situation and condition of Israel.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE SEVEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(2)

ISRAEL'S RETURN OR JEHOVAH'S CORRECTION FOR HER APOSTASY

Scripture Reading: Jer. 3:6—4:31

In 3:6—4:31 we see that Israel could either return to Jehovah or receive His correction for her apostasy. God's correction is a matter of His chastisement.

I. ISRAEL THE WIFE'S APOSTASY

Jeremiah 3:6-11 speaks of Israel the wife's apostasy. To commit apostasy is to leave the right way and go another way; it is to leave God and turn to idols. In this section of His holy Word, Jehovah as a Husband deals with the apostasy (unfaithfulness) of His treacherous wife.

A. Israel Having Been Divided into Two Kingdoms

Israel had been divided into two kingdoms: the north was called the kingdom of Israel, and the south, the kingdom of Judah.

B. The Northern Kingdom of Israel Becoming the Apostate

The northern kingdom of Israel became the apostate and committed spiritual fornication (adultery) with idols (vv. 6, 9).

The idols were Israel's evil lovers. Israel should have had only one husband, but instead she had many lovers, many idols.

C. The Northern Kingdom of Israel Being Divorced by Jehovah

Because of her fornication, which polluted the land, the northern kingdom of Israel was divorced by Jehovah (vv. 8a, 9).

D. The Southern Kingdom of Judah Also Committing Fornication

Israel's treacherous sister, the southern kingdom of Judah, saw what Israel did and what happened to her. However, Judah did not fear but went and committed fornication also (vv. 7-8). Judah saw that her sister was punished for the evil thing she did, but Judah did not learn from this. Rather, she followed Israel to do the same thing.

E. The Treacherous Southern Kingdom of Judah Not Returning to Jehovah with All Her Heart

In spite of all this, the treacherous southern kingdom of Judah did not return to Jehovah with all her heart, but instead falsely (v. 10).

F. Jehovah Saying to Jeremiah That Israel the Apostate Has Shown Herself to Be More Righteous Than Judah the Treacherous

In verse 11 Jehovah said to Jeremiah that Israel the apostate has shown herself to be more righteous than Judah the treacherous. Israel was better than Judah.

II. ISRAEL THE WIFE'S RETURN— A LOVING PLEADING OF JEHOVAH THE HUSBAND

Jeremiah 3:12—4:2 covers Israel the wife's return—a loving pleading of Jehovah the Husband. What we have here is not Israel's actual return but the aspiration of Jehovah the Husband for her to return.

A. Jehovah Sending His Prophet to Ask Israel, His Apostate Wife, to Return and Acknowledge Her Iniquity

Jehovah sent His prophet to call to the north (referring to Assyria, to which Israel was captured) and ask Israel, His apostate wife, to return and acknowledge her iniquity—her transgression against Him in turning to strange gods under every flourishing tree (vv. 12-13).

B. Jehovah's Promise

In asking Israel to return, Jehovah made promises to her.

1. To Not Drop His Countenance on Her

In verse 12 Jehovah promised that He would not drop His countenance on her; for He is merciful and will not preserve, that is not exercise, His anger forever. He may be angry temporarily but not forever.

2. To Take Her and Bring Her to Zion

Being a Husband to Israel, Jehovah promised to take them, one from a city and two from a family, and bring them back to Zion (v. 14). This means that He would still receive them, that He would still take them back.

3. To Give Her Shepherds according to His Own Heart

Jehovah also promised to give Israel shepherds according to His own heart (v. 15). Such shepherds would feed her knowledge and understanding. Israel was foolish and did not know anything, but these shepherds would give her the proper knowledge and understanding of God.

C. A Revival Being Promised to Her by Him

In verses 16 through 18 we see that a revival was promised to Israel by Jehovah.

1. She Being Multiplied and Increased in the Land

In the promised revival Israel would be multiplied and increased in the land (v. 16a).

2. The Ark of the Covenant No Longer Being Cared For by Her

"They will no longer say, The ark of the covenant of Jehovah! And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it or visit it; it will not be made again" (v. 16b). At that time the ark of the covenant will no longer be cared for by Israel as God's meeting place with her, as His meeting place with His people, for Christ will be present with her and reign in Jerusalem.

In Samuel's time, when the children of Israel went out to fight, they brought the ark out to fight for them. Of course, the ark was a type of Christ as the embodiment of God Jehovah. However, they became superstitious concerning the ark, and it became for them a kind of idol. They had no heart for God, yet they treasured the ark. Eventually, this ark did not help them or fight for them. They were defeated and captured, and the ark also was captured (1 Sam. 4:10-11). In their view God was defeated. Actually, He was not defeated but prevailed over Satan.

Today many Christians consider the Bible in a superstitious way, making it an idol. They treasure the Bible, yet they may care little for the very God revealed in the Bible. Such Christians have made the Bible something separate from God, when actually the Bible should be one with God. Today is a time of degradation, but a time will come when Christ, the embodiment of God, will be with us, and we will have no need for the Bible. Likewise, when Israel is revived, no one will care for the ark because Christ will be present with Israel and reign in Jerusalem.

3. She Calling Jerusalem the Throne of Jehovah

"At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah, and all the nations will be gathered to it because the name of Jehovah is at Jerusalem" (Jer. 3:17a). This indicates that in this time of revival Christ will be the King reigning over her, and all the nations will be gathered to Jerusalem. This time of revival refers to the millennial kingdom.

4. She No Longer Walking after the Stubbornness of Her Evil Heart

In the revival promised by Jehovah, Israel will no longer walk after the stubbornness of her evil heart (v. 17b).

5. The House of Judah Walking with the House of Israel

"In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land which I have given to their fathers" (v. 18). This indicates that the house of Judah and the house of Israel will be recovered to a normal condition. It is not normal for them to be divided and to fight with each other. In the restoration the situation between them will become normal again. This means that in the revival the twelve tribes of Israel will no longer be divided but will be one.

D. He Considering How to Put Her among the Sons and Give Her a Pleasant Land and Considering Also That She Will Call Him Her Father

"But I said, / How I will put you among the sons, / And give you a pleasant land, / An inheritance of the most ornate of the nations! / And I said, You will call Me, My Father, / And will not turn away from Me" (v. 19). The word *ornate* here means beauty upon beauty or beauty added to beauty. This indicates that the holy land is the most beautiful land. In His heart God considers the holy land the land above all lands.

According to this verse, Jehovah considers that Israel will call Him, "My Father." How could a wife do this? The Bible reveals that God is our Husband and that we are His counterpart. The Bible also reveals that we were created by God to be His creatures but that, as believers, we were regenerated by God to be His sons. Hence, God is not only our Creator but also our Father. Israel was a female, Jehovah's wife. But she did not keep her position and was not faithful. She left her Husband and went to many lovers, all of whom were her Husband's enemies, yet her Husband begged her to

come back to Him. Instead of giving her up, her Husband did many things to bring her back. When she does return, she is not able to repent to Him as His wife, so she considers Him not as her Husband but as her Father. This is not positive, for it indicates that she is still stubborn. For a wife to repent to her husband for her unchastity is a very difficult thing. Israel would repent to God as her Father but not as her Husband. This is the significance of her saying to God, "My Father."

E. The House of Israel Dealing Treacherously with Jehovah

As a woman acts treacherously by departing from her husband, so the house of Israel dealt treacherously with Jehovah (v. 20). Her children wept and supplicated (prayed particularly) on the bare (indicating without any man) heights, for they perverted their way and forgot Jehovah their God (v. 21).

F. The Pleading of Jehovah the Husband

Jehovah the Husband was pleading by calling, "Return, O apostate children; / I will heal you of your apostasies" (v. 22a).

G. Her Children Coming to Jehovah, Confessing That He, Jehovah, Is Their God

Eventually, her children came to Jehovah, confessing that He, Jehovah, is their God, admitting that their worship on the hills and mountains in a tumult was in vain and that their salvation surely is in Jehovah their God, and feeling shameful for the sins of their fathers and for their sinning against Jehovah their God since the beginning of their relationship with God (vv. 22b-25).

H. Jehovah's Promise concerning the Nations Blessing Themselves in Him

Jehovah promised her that if she returns to Him, if she puts away her abominations from His presence and does not move freely, and if she swears, "As Jehovah lives, in truth

and in justice and in righteousness," then the nations will bless themselves in Him and in Him they will glory (4:1-2).

III. JEHOVAH THE HUSBAND'S CORRECTION

Jehovah the Husband's correction is found in 4:3-31.

A. Admonishing Her to Break Up Her Fallow Ground and Not to Sow among Thorns

Jehovah admonished her to break up her fallow ground and not to sow among thorns (v. 3); He also admonished her to circumcise herself to Jehovah and remove the foreskins of her heart (v. 4a). This indicates that as they were busy worshipping idols, they were sowing among thorns. But the proper land, the land in which they should have been sowing, remained fallow, untouched. They should sow everything in the presence of God, with God, and for God. This is to use the land properly. Instead they worshipped idols and sowed among thorns. Thus, God advised them to stop that kind of sowing and return to the fallow ground.

B. Warning Them with Evils, Woes, and Afflictions

In verses 4b through 31 Jehovah warned them with evils (calamities), woes, and afflictions. He warned them with all kinds of sufferings.

1. His Wrath Going Forth like a Fire

In 4b Jehovah spoke of His wrath going forth like a fire and burning Israel. Such a fire would bring in calamities.

2. Evil and Great Destruction Coming from the North

Jehovah said that He was bringing evil and great destruction from the north, referring to Babylon (v. 6b).

3. A Lion Coming Up to Make Her Land a Waste and Her Cities Ruins

"A lion has come up from his thicket, / And a destroyer of nations has set out. / He has gone forth from his place / To

make your land a waste; / Your cities will be ruins, / Without an inhabitant" (v. 7). The lion here refers to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was a destroyer of nations and he would make Israel's cities ruins.

4. The Heart of the King and of the Princes Failing

The heart of the king and of the princes will fail; the priests will be appalled, and the prophets will be astounded (v. 9).

5. The Sword Reaching to the Soul

In verse 10 Jehovah says that the sword reaches to the soul.

6. A Hot Wind Coming from Him

A hot wind, a wind too strong for winnowing or for purging, will come from Jehovah (vv. 11-12). This is another indication that God will send all kinds of calamities to chastise rebellious Israel.

7. The Enemy Coming Up like Clouds

The enemy comes up like clouds, and his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles (v. 13). This is a description of the swiftness of the Babylonian army.

8. Besiegers Coming from a Distant Land

According to verse 16b, besiegers are coming from a distant land, giving out their voice against the cities of Judah.

9. The Sound of the Trumpet Being Heard

In verse 19b Jehovah tells them that they hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

10. Destruction upon Destruction Devastating the Whole Land

Destruction upon destruction will devastate the whole land (v. 20). What calamities there will be!

11. The Fruitful Land Becoming a Wilderness

The fruitful land becomes a wilderness, and all its cities are torn down. The whole land is a desolation (vv. 26-27). This desolation is caused by the Babylonian army.

12. She Becoming the Desolate One

Israel becomes the desolate one. Although she dresses in scarlet, is adorned with ornaments of gold, and enlarges her eyes with paint, she beautifies herself in vain. Her lovers despise her; they seek her life (v. 30).

13. Her Cry Being like That of a Woman in Travail

Israel's cry will be like that of a woman in travail, and her anguish like that of a woman bringing forth her first child. Her voice will gasp for breath, and she will stretch out her hands, saying, "Woe is me, / For my soul is fainting before murderers" (v. 31).

C. Jehovah the Husband's Correction Being His Reaction to His Wife Israel's Wickedness

Jehovah the Husband's correction is His reaction to His wife Israel's wickedness (vv. 4, 17-18, 22). His chastisement is His reaction to her sinfulness.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE EIGHT

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(3)

JEHOVAH THE HUSBAND'S FURTHER COMPLAINT AGAINST ISRAEL THE WIFE'S WICKEDNESSES AND HIS DETERMINATION IN CORRECTING HER

Scripture Reading: Jer. 5—6

In this message we will consider chapters five and six of Jeremiah. In chapter five we have Jehovah the Husband's further complaint against His wife, and in chapter six we see His determination in correcting His wife.

I. JEHOVAH THE HUSBAND'S FURTHER COMPLAINT AGAINST ISRAEL (ACTUALLY JUDAH) THE WIFE'S WICKEDNESSES IN DETAIL

Chapters two through four of Jeremiah are Jehovah the Husband's complaint against Israel the wife's apostasy, her spiritual fornication—her worshipping and making of idols. By doing this Israel broke the first four commandments of the law (Exo. 20:1-11), which concern her relationship with God. The first three commandments require man not to have idols but only to have God (vv. 3-7); the fourth commandment requires man to have satisfaction and rest only in God and in all that God has accomplished for man (vv. 8-11). Chapter five of Jeremiah is Jehovah the Husband's further complaint against Israel the wife's wickednesses in detail. The details concerning her wickednesses show that she also broke the last five commandments of the law (Exo. 20:13-17), those concerning man's relationship with man. These commandments

are concerned with killing, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting.

As a priest, Jeremiah was very knowledgeable concerning the law. He knew the Ten Commandments, and he wrote about the wickedness and sinfulness of Israel according to the sequence of the Ten Commandments.

A. No One Executing Justice and Seeking Faithfulness

"Go to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, / And look now and know, / And seek in her open squares / If you can find a man, / If there is anyone who executes justice, / Who seeks faithfulness; / And I will pardon her" (Jer. 5:1). Here we have a summary of Jehovah's complaint: no one was executing justice or seeking faithfulness. There was no faithfulness among them.

B. Refusing to Take Correction

Verse 3 exposes Israel's attitude toward God's correction. "You have stricken them, / But they did not writhe; / You have consumed them, / But they refused to take correction. / They have made their faces harder than rock; / They have refused to turn." Even though they were sinful, they would not receive God's correction.

C. Knowing the Way of Jehovah and the Ordinance of Their God, but Having Broken the Yoke and Torn Off the Bonds

"Surely these know the way of Jehovah, / The ordinance of their God. / But together they both have broken the yoke; / They have torn off the bonds" (v. 5). In the law there are not only the Ten Commandments but also many ordinances, regulations of God's just and righteous law. Israel knew these ordinances but would not follow them.

D. Committing Adultery and Trooping to the House of Harlots

"When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery / And trooped to the house of harlots. / Like well-fed horses

they roam about, / Each one neighing after his neighbor's wife" (vv. 7-8). This indicates that the people were adulterous, utterly sinful. The visitors to the house of harlots were like a troop, like an army.

E. Not Trembling before Jehovah

Israel did not tremble before Jehovah, who has set the sand as a boundary for the sea (v. 22). Rather, they had a stubborn and rebellious heart, and they turned aside and went away (v. 23).

F. Among Them Wicked Men Being Found Who Lie in Wait like Fowlers Crouching

"For wicked men are found among My people; / They lie in wait like fowlers crouching; / They set a trap, / They catch men" (v. 26). These wicked men set up a "net" to catch their prey. This is a matter not only of lying but also of stealing and greed. They certainly were lawbreakers.

G. Their Houses Being Full of Deceit

"Like a cage full of birds, / So their houses are full of deceit; / Therefore they have become great and rich" (v. 27). This refers to their gain from deceiving others. Their houses were full of what they had gained through deceit.

H. Surpassing in Deeds of Wickedness

"Indeed they surpass in deeds of wickedness; / They do not judge the cause, / The cause of the orphan, but they prosper; / And the right of the needy they do not judge" (v. 28). They did not judge in a just way the cases of ordinary people; neither did they treat the orphans justly and rightly.

I. The Prophets Prophesying Falsely, and the Priests Ruling by Their Own Authority

"The prophets prophesy falsely, / And the priests rule by their own authority; / And My people love it this way" (v. 31). The priests actually were judges, and they should have judged the cases of the people according to God's law. However, they judged, ruled, by their own authority. This means that they

ruled according to their opinion. The people loved it this way. This may indicate that the people were bribing the priests.

II. THE HUSBAND'S DETERMINATION IN CORRECTING THE WIFE

Chapter six describes Jehovah the Husband's determination in correcting His wife.

A. Evil Looking Down from the North

Jehovah said, "Evil looks down from the north, / And great destruction. / The comely and delicate one, / The daughter of Zion, I will cut off" (6:1b-2). The word *evil* here refers to calamities, and the word *north* refers to Babylon. God was about to send calamities and destruction from the north (vv. 22-26).

B. Jehovah Saying That War Should Be Prepared against Her

"Prepare war against her; / Rise up, and let us go up at noon. / ...Rise up, and let us go up at night / And destroy her palaces" (vv. 4-5). In these verses God speaks to the Babylonians. He will use them in His correction of Israel.

C. The Husband Making Her a Desolation and an Uninhabited Land

"Be admonished, O Jerusalem, / Lest My desire for you depart, / Lest I make you a desolation, / An uninhabited land" (v. 8). This indicates that, through the Babylonians, the Husband would make her a desolation and a land that is no longer inhabitable.

D. The Enemy Thoroughly Gleaning Her Remnant like a Vine

The enemy will thoroughly glean her remnant like a vine; they will pass their hand again over her branches like a grape gatherer (v. 9). The houses of Israel will be turned over to others, fields and wives together, and the Husband will stretch out His hand over her inhabitants (v. 12). God will stretch out His hand to chastise them.

In verse 9 we have a figure of speech: a vineyard with its grapevines. According to God's law, once the grapes were harvested, no one was allowed to pick the gleanings, for the remnant of the grape harvest was to be for the poor. However, the Babylonians would harvest the "grapes" from the "vine" of Israel, and then come again to glean the vine thoroughly. This means that they would come more than once to take the people captive.

E. The Husband Now Bringing Evil on Her and Now Laying Stumbling Blocks before Her

"Listen, O earth; I am now bringing evil / On this people. . . . / I am now laying before this people stumbling blocks, / And fathers and sons together / Will stumble against them; / A neighbor and his friend will perish" (vv. 19, 21). On the one hand, Jehovah would bring evil, calamity, upon Israel; on the other hand, He would set up stumbling blocks before the people in order to stumble them.

F. The Husband's Determination in His Reaction to Her Evils

This chapter discloses the Husband's determination in His reaction to the wife's evils (vv. 6-7, 10, 13, 15, 19-21, 28-30). Her actions were evil, and God's punishment was His reaction to these evil actions.

As I conclude this message, I would like to summarize chapters two through six in a simple way. In chapters two through four is Jehovah's major complaint, against His wife's apostasy, spiritual fornication—idolatry, by which she broke the first four commandments of the law concerning God. In chapters five and six is Jehovah's minor complaint, against His wife's evil conduct, by which she broke the last five commandments of the law concerning men. Israel broke the first four commandments by worshipping idols and the last five commandments by not executing justice or seeking faithfulness.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE NINE

A WORD CONCERNING ISRAEL'S HISTORY AND THE SITUATION OF ISRAEL IN THE SUNSET OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

Scripture Reading: Jer. 5—6; 1:1-8, 18-19

In this message I would like to give a word concerning Israel's history and the situation of Israel in what may be called the sunset of the divine revelation.

ISRAEL'S HISTORY

In Egypt and in the Wilderness

Israel was in Egypt under the yoke of the Egyptians and the tyranny of Pharaoh. God sent Moses to release them from this yoke and tyranny and bring them out of Egypt into the wilderness to Mount Sinai. At Mount Sinai the heavens were opened to Israel, and God gave them the revelation concerning the tabernacle and its utensils. He also gave them the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, telling them how to worship God and giving them detailed instructions regarding how to eat, dress, and conduct themselves. From that time Israel began to be a people under the divine revelation in every way.

In the beginning Israel obeyed the divine revelation somewhat. They built the tabernacle according to the revelation they received, and, in keeping with this revelation, they also began to worship God by means of the priesthood and the sacrifices. However, as they were traveling in the wilderness, they began to degrade from the revelation they had received from God through Moses. The book of Numbers records many cases of their degradation from God's law, that is, from God's revelation.

The Repetition of the Divine Revelation

When the people of Israel were about to enter the good land, Moses repeated the divine revelation; he repeated the revelation of God's law. This repetition is found in the book of Deuteronomy. (The word *Deuteronomy* means "second law" and thus signifies a respeaking of the divine law.) In this repetition Moses charged them especially that when they entered the good land, they were to tear down the idols, destroy the places of idol worship, and slaughter the idol worshippers. For example, concerning the idol worshippers Moses commanded Israel, saying, "You shall utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor shall you show them any favor....But you shall deal with them in this way: their altars you shall tear down, their pillars you shall shatter, their Asherim you shall hew down, and their idols you shall burn with fire" (Deut. 7:2, 5).

In the Good Land

Israel, however, did not obey the commandment to utterly destroy the idol worshippers. Instead, they spared them and did not wipe them out. As a result, Israel could not fully possess the good land.

Because Israel spared the idol worshippers, there was war again and again between Israel and the people in the land. This war is described in the book of Judges. The judges were the strong ones, the leading ones, who fought for Israel against the idol worshippers. After the period of the judges, David, who was brought in by Samuel, fought all the inhabitants of the land and gained nearly the entire land. Although David was not allowed to build the temple, he received the design of the temple from God and prepared the materials and the temple site on Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham offered Isaac (1 Chron. 28:11-12, 19; 29:1-2; 21:18-26; 2 Chron. 3:1). Following the design which his father received from God, Solomon, David's son, built the temple in approximately 1000 B.C. That was the highlight of the nation of Israel.

Solomon was a wise king. He was so wise that the queen of Sheba visited him in order to prove his wisdom (2 Chron.

9:1-12). However, Solomon did not remain in a good spiritual condition for his entire life. In his old age he was led by his many heathen wives to worship idols (1 Kings 11:1-8). He took the lead to depart from God and to degrade from His revelation. Nearly all of Solomon's descendants continued his apostasy.

In the Time of Jeremiah

This apostasy continued until the time when Jeremiah was charged by God to prophesy. Jeremiah began to prophesy in 629 B.C., twenty-three years before Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar. God charged Jeremiah to condemn Israel's sins in forsaking God and becoming wicked in their conduct. They had forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and, hewing out broken cisterns, they had turned to idols and were worshipping them (Jer. 2:13). Furthermore, society was filled with murder, fornication, greed, lying, and stealing. Even the king was greedy, for, as we will see, he commanded the people to build him a palace but did not pay them for their labor. The people were not faithful either to God or to one another. For instance, in 5:7 and 8 Jehovah says, "Why should I pardon you? / Your children have forsaken Me / And sworn by those who are not gods. / When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery / And trooped to the house of harlots. / Like well-fed horses they roam about, / Each one neighing after his neighbor's wife."

Before the time of Jeremiah, Isaiah prophesied against Israel, saying that Israel had become like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 1:9-10). However, Israel did not change but continued in her wickedness until Jeremiah's time. Nevertheless, through Jeremiah God spoke to Israel as her loving, sympathetic, and compassionate Husband, saying that He remembered the love of her bridal days (Jer. 2:2). God sighed over Israel and longed for her to return to Him. Israel had forsaken Him as the unique Husband and had gone to many other husbands. Moreover, the people were evil to one another, killing, fornicating, lying, and stealing.

Israel was so corrupt that it was difficult for God to find a prophet to speak for Him. The princes, priests, and prophets were all corrupt. Where could God find a faithful, honest

prophet? Unable to find such a prophet in Jerusalem, God went to the city of Anathoth in the land of the small tribe of Benjamin, and there He called a young man named Jeremiah and commissioned him to speak for Him. When Jeremiah excused himself by saying that he was a youth and that he did not know how to speak, Jehovah said to him, "Do not say, I am a youth; / For everywhere I send you, you shall go; / And everything I command you, you shall speak. / Do not be afraid of their faces, / For I am with you to deliver you" (1:7-8). Jehovah went on to say that He would make Jeremiah into a fortified city, into an iron pillar, and into walls of brass against the whole land. The kings, princes, priests, and people would fight against him, but they would not prevail against him (vv. 18-19). Those who fought against Jeremiah were actually fighting against Jehovah. He was Jehovah's one-person army. No one would defeat him because Jehovah was with him. Thus, Jeremiah could not escape God's commission but was constrained to accept it.

THE SUNSET OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

As Jeremiah went forth to fulfill God's commission, he spoke to the king, the princes, the priests, and to the people. Jeremiah told the king that he was sinful and that if he did not repent and return to God, he would be taken captive. He rebuked the princes and the rulers for deceiving the people and for wrongly taking things from them. He exposed the prophets for prophesying falsely and the priests for ruling by their own authority and not by the divine revelation. He told the people that they were not executing justice or seeking faithfulness. Rather, they were treating the needy ones unjustly. Instead of heeding Jeremiah's word, they hated him and even put him in prison. The priests arrested Jeremiah and handed him over to the princes, who then cast him into prison. This indicates that Israel had no regard for God's law, for His revelation.

At that time Israel was in the sunset of the divine revelation. When Israel was at Mount Sinai, that was the dawn of the divine revelation. That was the time of sunrise. But afterward, concerning the divine revelation, Israel was in

a situation of decline. Eventually, by the time of Jeremiah, Israel was in the sunset. They had given up everything concerning God and His revelation, and eventually they came to be in a dark night.

Jehovah the Husband Chastising Israel the Unfaithful Wife

Israel's situation forced God to chastise them, to punish them. When God chastised Israel, He regarded Himself as the Husband and Israel as the wife who had fallen into fornication. For this reason, in chapters two through six God's tone in rebuking Israel is that of a husband speaking to an unfaithful wife.

The Case of Zedekiah

The case of Zedekiah, the last king, is an illustration of God's chastisement of His people. One day Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah, who was in prison. The king questioned him secretly in his house, asking, "Is there any word from Jehovah?" (37:17a). Zedekiah was inquiring concerning Israel and himself as king. Jeremiah told Zedekiah that there was a word from Jehovah, and the word was that Zedekiah would be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon (v. 17b).

On another occasion Zedekiah had Jeremiah brought to him that he might speak privately with him (38:14). He told Jeremiah that he wanted to ask him something and that Jeremiah should not hide anything from him. Jeremiah replied, "If I tell you, indeed will you not put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me" (v. 15). Assured by the king that he would not be put to death, Jeremiah went on to say, "Thus says Jehovah, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will indeed surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, you will live, and this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your house will live. But if you do not surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will burn it with fire, and you will not escape out of their hand" (vv. 17-18). The king knew that he should obey this word. However, he was afraid of what might

be done to him by the Jews who had deserted to the Chaldeans. Although Jeremiah told him that they would not do anything to harm him, Zedekiah did not take Jeremiah's word, but instead dismissed him with the charge that he not tell anyone about what he had said to the king.

Instead of listening to Jeremiah, Zedekiah continued to resist the Babylonian army, which was besieging Jerusalem. After the city was captured, Zedekiah fled (39:4). The army of the Babylonians pursued him and overtook him. Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar, who pronounced judgments on him. Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. After this, he put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him in bronze fetters to bring him to Babylon (vv. 5-7).

Jerusalem Being Destroyed and Jeremiah Being Preserved

Eventually the Babylonian army burned the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Jeremiah witnessed these things. Regarding Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that they look after him and do no evil to him (vv. 11-12). Jeremiah was bound in chains among the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon (40:1). However, he was released from his chains. The captain of the guard said to him, "Now, behold, I release you today from the chains which are on your hands. If it is good in your sight to come to Babylon with me, come, and I will look after you; but if it is evil in your sight to come with me to Babylon, let it be so. See, all the land is before you; wherever it is good and right in your sight to go, there go" (v. 4). Thus, Jeremiah the prophet was set free.

Jeremiah 6:9 says, "Thus says Jehovah of hosts, / They will thoroughly glean like a vine / The remnant of Israel; / Pass your hand again over the branches / Like a grape gatherer." This word has been fulfilled. Some years after Zedekiah was captured and Jeremiah was released, the Babylonians came again to "glean" the land of Israel, taking more people into captivity. This was the situation of Israel in the sunset of the divine revelation.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(4)

ISRAEL'S HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP TO JEHOVAH

(1)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 7—10

In this message on Israel's sin against Jehovah and Jehovah's punishment upon Israel, we will begin to consider Israel's hypocritical worship to Jehovah.

I. ISRAEL'S (ACTUALLY JUDAH'S) HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP TO JEHOVAH THEIR GOD

A. A Worship of Superstition

Israel's (actually Judah's—7:21; 9:26) hypocritical worship to Jehovah their God was a false worship and was a worship of superstition.

1. Trusting in the Words of Falsehood concerning the Temple of Jehovah

In their superstitious worship, Israel trusted in the words of falsehood that said, "The temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah, these buildings are the temple of Jehovah" (7:4). To them even the temple had become an idol and something of superstition. Thus, Jeremiah told them not to say these words regarding the temple of Jehovah.

2. Doing Many Wicked Things and Then Coming and Standing before Jehovah and Saying That They Would Be Delivered

On the one hand, the people of Israel worshipped God; on the other hand, they were given to stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, burning incense to Baal, and going after other gods. After doing such things, they would come and stand before Jehovah in the house which is called by His name and say, "We are delivered!" (vv. 9-10). By saying this they were deceiving themselves and cheating themselves.

3. Trusting in the House Called by Jehovah's Name, Which Had Become a Den of Robbers in Their Eyes

Israel trusted in the house called by Jehovah's name, which had become a den of robbers in their eyes (vv. 11, 14; Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). This indicates that their worship to God had altogether become a falsehood.

B. A Worship in Vanity

Israel's worship to Jehovah was also a worship in vanity.

1. Trusting in Words of Falsehood

In their worship in vanity, Israel trusted in words of falsehood that did not benefit them (v. 8).

2. Jehovah Charging the Prophet Jeremiah Not to Pray for Them

Jehovah charged the prophet Jeremiah not to pray for them and not to intercede with Him, for He would not hear him (v. 16).

3. Jehovah Their God Not Caring for Their Burnt Offerings and Sacrifices

Israel offered to Jehovah many burnt offerings and sacrifices. But since they did not hear Jehovah's voice and walk in all the way that He commanded them, He did not care for their burnt offerings and sacrifices (vv. 21-23).

II. THE EVILS OF ISRAEL (ACTUALLY JUDAH) AS THE HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIPPERS OF GOD

As the hypocritical worshippers of God, Israel (actually Judah) committed many evils.

A. Oppressing the Sojourner, the Orphan, and the Widow

They oppressed the sojourner, the orphan, and the widow, and they shed innocent blood. They also went after other gods to their own ruin (v. 6).

B. Stealing, Murdering, Committing Adultery, Swearing Falsely, and Burning Incense to Baal

Jeremiah 7:9 speaks of Israel's stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, burning incense to Baal, and going after other gods which they had not known.

C. Making Cakes for the Queen of Heaven and Pouring Out Drink Offerings to Other Gods

In verse 18 Jehovah says, "The children gather wood, and the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke Me to anger." Here the queen of heaven is Nimrod's wife Semiramis; later she was known as Artemis in Ephesus (Acts 19:27). It is hard to believe that God's elect, His chosen people, could degrade to such an extent that they would make cakes for the wife of Nimrod. This was a matter of both fornication and idolatry.

D. Not Listening or Inclining Their Ear to God's Command

"This is what I commanded them, saying, Hear My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and walk in all the way which I command you, that it may go well with you" (v. 23). However, Israel did not listen to the voice of Jehovah their God but walked in the counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts and went backward and not forward (v. 24).

E. Stiffening Their Neck

They stiffened their neck and did more evil than their fathers (v. 26).

F. Not Listening to the Voice of Jehovah Their God and Not Taking Correction

Israel did not listen to the voice of Jehovah their God and did not take correction. Truth perished and was cut off from their mouth (v. 28). They had given up the truth and no longer spoke about it.

G. Doing That Which Is Evil in Jehovah's Sight

Israel did that which was evil in Jehovah's sight. They set up their abominations in the house which was called by His name, to defile it (v. 30). This means that they set up idols in the house of Jehovah.

H. Building the High Places of Topheth to Burn Their Sons and Daughters in the Fire

Israel even went so far as to build the high places of Topheth to burn their sons and daughters in the fire (v. 31).

I. Turning Away in Perpetual Apostasy

Israel turned away in perpetual apostasy. They held fast to deceit and refused to turn back (8:5). Israel's apostasy was not temporary—it was perpetual.

J. Not Speaking Rightly and No One Repenting of His Wickedness

They did not speak rightly (v. 6a), and no one repented of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" (v. 6b). Rather, everyone turned to his own course, like a horse rushing headlong into battle (v. 6c).

K. Not Knowing the Ordinance of Jehovah

Israel did not know the ordinance (of the law) of Jehovah. They were unlike the stork, which knows its own appointed

times, and the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane, which keep the time of their coming (v. 7). These birds knew the time of their coming and going, but Israel was not knowledgeable concerning the times of God's intention.

L. Having Rejected the Word of Jehovah and Having No Wisdom

"The wise men are put to shame; / They are dismayed and are taken; / Behold, they have rejected the word of Jehovah, / And what wisdom do they have?" (v. 9). Having rejected the word of Jehovah, Israel had no wisdom.

M. Everyone Wresting Unjust Gain

Everyone was wresting unjust gain. From the prophet even to the priest, everyone was dealing falsely (v. 10). Both the prophets and priests had become corrupt.

N. Provoking Jehovah to Anger with Their Graven Images and with Strange Idols

The people provoked Jehovah to anger with their graven images and with strange idols (vanities—v. 19).

O. All of Them Being Adulterers and an Assembly of Treacherous Men

All of them were adulterers and an assembly of treacherous men (9:2). They bent their tongue like their bow, and falsehood, and not truth, prevailed in the land, for they proceeded from evil to evil and did not know Jehovah (v. 3). They taught their tongue to speak falsehood, and they wearied themselves committing iniquity (v. 5). Their tongue was a deadly arrow and spoke deceit (v. 8a). Each spoke peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart he laid an ambush for him (v. 8b).

P. All the House of Israel Being Uncircumcised in Heart

Finally, in verse 26 Jehovah says that all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.

From the verses we have covered in this message, we have seen a vivid picture of the corruption of Israel. Israel was corrupt with God and with one another; they were corrupt in every way.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE ELEVEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(5)

ISRAEL'S HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP TO JEHOVAH

(2)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 7—10

In this message we will consider further Israel's hypocritical worship to Jehovah.

III. JEHOVAH'S CORRECTION TO ISRAEL, HIS HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIPPERS

A. Jehovah Doing to the House That Is Called by His Name as He Did to Shiloh

The tabernacle and the ark were once at Shiloh, a place which eventually was defeated and overtaken. In 7:12-14 Jehovah says that He will do to the house that is called by His name, in which Israel trusts, as He has done to Shiloh.

B. Jehovah Casting Israel Out from before Him

Jehovah will cast Israel out from before Him, as He cast out all the seed of Ephraim (v. 15).

C. Jehovah Making the Valley of Topheth the Valley of Slaughter to Bury Them

Jehovah will make the valley of Topheth the valley of slaughter to bury them, and their corpses will be food for the

birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth (vv. 32-33). Jehovah will cause the voice of gladness and the voice of joy to cease, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem. He will make the land a waste (v. 34). There will be no joy; instead, the whole land will be a waste.

D. The Bones of the People Being Brought Out from Their Graves and Spread Out to the Sun, to the Moon, and to All the Host of Heaven

The bones of the kings of Judah, of its princes, of the priests, of the prophets, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be brought out from their graves and spread out to the sun, to the moon, and to all the host of heaven, which Israel has loved and served and which she has gone after, sought, and worshipped. These bones will not be gathered up or buried; rather, they will be left like dung on the surface of the ground. Death will be chosen rather than life by the remnant of her evil family that remains in all the places where Jehovah has driven them (8:1-3). What a picture we have here!

This picture indicates that Israel had degraded to such an extent that, with them, the divine revelation was in the sunset. Actually they were already in darkness and had no light.

E. Jehovah Giving Their Wives to Others

In 8:10 Jehovah says that He will give their wives to others and their fields to those who will possess them.

F. The Enemy Coming to Devour the Land and Its Fullness

Verse 16 goes on to say that the snorting of the enemy's horses is heard from Dan and that at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come to devour the land and its fullness, the city and those who dwell in it.

G. Jehovah Sending Serpents among Israel

Jehovah is sending among Israel serpents, adders, to bite them (v. 17).

H. Jehovah Leaving Them, and Her King Not Being in Her

Jehovah is leaving them, and her King is not in her (v. 19). Her harvest has passed, the summer has ended, and the people are not saved (v. 20). Their recovery has not occurred (vv. 21-22).

I. Jehovah Refining and Testing Israel

According to 9:7, Jehovah will refine and test Israel.

J. Jehovah Making Jerusalem a Heap of Ruins

Jehovah will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a habitation of jackals. He will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant (v. 11).

K. Jehovah Feeding Israel with Wormwood

Jehovah will feed Israel with wormwood and give them poisonous water to drink (8:14; 9:15). Their food will be bitter and their drink poisonous.

L. Jehovah Scattering Israel among the Nations and Sending the Sword after Them

Jehovah will scatter Israel among the nations and send the sword after them until He has consumed them (9:16).

M. A Voice of Wailing Being Heard from Zion

Jeremiah 9:19 speaks of a voice of wailing which was heard from Zion. The voice said, "How we are ruined! / We are utterly put to shame! / For we have forsaken the land / Because they have cast down our dwellings."

N. Death Coming Up through Israel's Windows

Death has come up through Israel's windows. It has entered their palaces to cut off the children from the streets

and the young men from the open squares. The corpses of men will fall like dung on the surface of the field and like a sheaf after the reaper, and there will be no one to gather them (vv. 21-22).

O. Jehovah Punishing All Those Who Are Circumcised and Yet Uncircumcised

"Behold, days are coming, declares Jehovah, when I will punish all those who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised" (v. 25). Israel had been circumcised physically, on their body, but not psychologically, in their inner being.

P. Jehovah Shaming Every Goldsmith by His Idol

Jehovah will shame every goldsmith by his idol and will punish the molten image of falsehood, for such images are vanity, the work of delusion (10:14-15).

Q. Jehovah Slinging Out the Inhabitants of Israel and Bringing Distress on Them

Jehovah is slinging out the inhabitants of Israel and bringing distress on them (v. 18). He is casting them away like stones.

R. A Great Commotion Coming from the North Land to Make the Cities of Judah a Desolation

A great commotion is coming from the north land (Babylon) to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a habitation of jackals (v. 22). The nations have consumed Jacob and brought him to an end (v. 25).

IV. JEREMIAH THE PROPHET'S REACTION

Jehovah came in to correct His hypocritical worshippers, and Jeremiah reacted to Jehovah's correction of Israel. We see Jeremiah's reaction in certain portions of chapters eight, nine, and ten. These portions show us that the prophet's reaction was very tender, sympathetic, and compassionate.

A. Longing for Someone to Comfort Him, and His Heart within Him Being Faint

Jeremiah longed for someone to comfort him in his sorrow, and his heart within him was faint (8:18). He could hear the voice of the cry of the daughter of his people in a land far away. For the brokenness of the daughter of his people he himself was broken (vv. 19, 21). In verse 22 he said, "Is there no balm in Gilead? / Is there no physician there? / Why then has the recovery of the daughter of my people / Not occurred?" Here we have the sighing of the prophet over the people of Israel.

B. Wishing That He Could Weep Day and Night for the Slain of the Daughter of His People

In his reaction to the situation concerning Israel, Jeremiah wished that his head were waters and his eye a fountain of tears, that he might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of his people (9:1). Then he went on to say, "Oh, that I had a traveler's lodging place in the wilderness / That I might leave my people and go away from them, / For all of them are adulterers and an assembly of treacherous men" (v. 2). Jeremiah was disgusted with Israel and wished that he could live in the wilderness apart from them.

C. A Word Spoken by the Prophet for the People of Israel

In 10:19-25 we have a word spoken by the prophet for the people of Israel. In verse 19 Jeremiah speaks about his hurt, wound, and affliction. In verse 21 he says that the shepherds, who are stupid, have not sought Jehovah and therefore have not prospered. All their flock is scattered. In verses 24 and 25 he spoke to Jehovah, saying, "Correct me, O Jehovah, but in measure, / Not in Your anger lest You bring me to nothing. / Pour out Your wrath on the nations / Who do not know You / And upon the families / Who do not call on Your name; / For they have consumed Jacob, yes, consumed him and brought him to an end, / And they have made his habitation desolate."

V. JEHOVAH'S FEELING CONCERNING ISRAEL'S SUFFERING OF HIS CORRECTION

In chapter nine we see not only Jehovah's correction to Israel, His hypocritical worshippers, but also His feeling concerning Israel's suffering of His correction.

A. Taking Up a Weeping and Wailing for the Mountains and a Lamentation for the Pastures of the Wilderness

Jehovah said that for the mountains He would take up a weeping and wailing, and for the pastures of the wilderness, a lamentation. He would do this because they had been burned up so that no one passed through, and the sound of cattle was not heard. Both the birds of the sky and the beasts had fled and gone (9:10). Then Jehovah said, "I will make Jerusalem heaps, / A habitation of jackals; / And I will make the cities of Judah / A desolation without inhabitant" (v. 11). This indicates that although Jehovah was punishing Israel, He was still sympathetic toward them. On the one hand, He was punishing Israel; on the other hand, He was sympathizing with His punished people.

B. Saying That the Mourning Women Should Come and Take Up a Wailing for Us

"Thus says Jehovah of hosts, / Consider, and call for the mourning women to come, / And send for the skillful women to come; / Let them hasten and take up a wailing for us, / That our eyes may shed tears / And our eyelids may pour forth water. / For a voice of wailing / Was heard from Zion: / How we are ruined! / We are utterly put to shame! / For we have forsaken the land / Because they have cast down our dwellings" (vv. 17-19). Here Jehovah proposed that the mourning women, professional wailers, come and wail "for us." In these verses the words *us* and *our* indicate that Jehovah joined Himself to the suffering people and was one with them in their suffering. The sympathetic God who punished was also among His punished people. He joined Himself to them and stayed with them. Eventually, those who wailed were wailing not only for Israel but also for

Jehovah. Jehovah Himself was weeping in sympathy for His people. He was like a mother who, while spanking her child, weeps along with her child.

VI. THE WORDS OF WISDOM TO THE ERRING AND SUFFERING ISRAEL

Jeremiah's writing in these chapters is inclusive. He wrote about Israel's hypocrisy and corruption, Jehovah's correction of Israel, his own reaction to this correction, and Jehovah's feeling regarding Israel's suffering of His correction. Finally he gave some words of wisdom to the erring and suffering Israel. As the last item in this message, we will consider these words of wisdom.

A. A Word concerning Glorying in Jehovah

Jeremiah 9:23 and 24 say that the wise man should not glory in his wisdom, the mighty man should not glory in his might, and the rich man should not glory in his riches. Rather, the one who glories should glory in that he has insight and knows Jehovah, the One who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth and delights in these things. This word of wisdom about glorying in the Lord is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:17.

B. There Being None like Jehovah

In Jeremiah 10:6 the prophet declares that there is none like Jehovah; He is great, and His name is great in might. In verse 7 he continues, saying, "For it befits You, / For among all the wise of the nations / And in all their kingdoms / There is none like You."

C. Jehovah Being the True God

Jehovah is the true God. He is the living God and the eternal King (v. 10).

D. Jehovah Being the One Who Made the Earth by His Power

Jehovah is the One who has made the earth by His power,

who established the world by His wisdom. By His understanding He stretched out the heavens (v. 12).

E. A Man's Way Being Not in Himself

Finally, in verse 23 Jeremiah declared that he knew that a man's way is not in himself. It is not in the man who walks to direct his step.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWELVE

GOD'S ECONOMY WITH HIS DISPENSING IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: Jer. 2:13; Lam. 3:22-23; Jer. 23:5-8; 31:33-34

After spending more than sixty-six years in studying the Bible, I can testify that the highest peak of the revelation in the Word is the revelation concerning God's economy and God's dispensing to produce the New Jerusalem. It is very important that we have this view when we read the book of Jeremiah. Otherwise, we will not have a clear and proper understanding of Jeremiah's writing. Thus, in this message I am burdened to give a word regarding God's economy with His dispensing in the book of Jeremiah.

GOD'S GOAL—THE NEW JERUSALEM

The Bible consummates with the revelation of the city of New Jerusalem. This indicates that the New Jerusalem is God's goal. The vision of the New Jerusalem is the conclusion of the Bible, which has one thousand one hundred eighty-nine chapters. All the books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, are related in some way to the New Jerusalem as God's goal. However, because the Bible speaks of so many other things, in our reading of the Word we may easily be distracted and not see God's goal. In His wisdom, God does not directly say in the Scriptures that His goal is to have the New Jerusalem. Instead, knowing that the New Jerusalem is too wonderful for us to imagine, He reveals this matter by using the Bible with its plain words, stories, histories, types, figures, and shadows. By all these different means, He reveals His thought concerning the New Jerusalem and depicts the various aspects of the New Jerusalem.

BECOMING ONE WITH GOD AND LIVING HIM FOR HIS CORPORATE EXPRESSION

God has an economy, and this economy involves a plan with many arrangements. God's aim in His economy is to have a group of human beings who have His life and nature inwardly and His image and likeness outwardly. This group of people is a corporate entity, the Body of Christ, to be one with Him and live Him for His corporate expression. As God is expressed not only by the Body but also through the Body, He is glorified. When He is glorified, His people are also glorified in His glorification. In this way God and man are one in glory.

In this oneness we, God's people, are not separate from God, but we definitely remain distinct from Him. We are one with God in life, in nature, in element, in essence, and in constitution. We are also one with Him in purpose, goal, image, and likeness. Nevertheless, no matter how much we are one with God, we do not share His Godhead and will never share it. Man remains man, and God remains God. Yes, in the incarnation of Christ, God became a man, but He did not give up His Godhead. Rather, He has reserved and preserved the Godhead for Himself alone. Thus, man is still limited, and God still possesses the unique Godhead.

The group of human beings who are one with God in every way except in the Godhead is symbolized, signified, depicted, and portrayed by a wonderful, holy city—the New Jerusalem. We need to keep this vision before us as we come to the book of Jeremiah.

GOD PRESENTING HIMSELF TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AS A FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS

In Jeremiah 2:13 we have the first crucial matter in this book concerning God's economy. In this verse God, through the prophet, presents Himself to the children of Israel as a fountain of living waters. In principle, God did the same thing in Genesis 2, after the creation of man. God did not say to man, "You must know that I am your Creator. Remember that you are My creature and that you should be holy and loving, just as I am." Instead of giving such a charge to man, God

placed him in a garden, in front of two trees—the tree of life, which signifies God, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which signifies Satan (Gen. 2:9). Then God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (vv. 16-17). This indicates that God wanted man to partake of Himself as signified by the tree of life. Immediately after the first mention of the tree of life, we are told that "a river went out of Eden to water the garden" (v. 10). It is significant that the last chapter of the Bible also speaks of the tree of life and the river of water of life (Rev. 22:1-2).

The picture in Genesis 2 of the tree of life and the river indicates that God is both the tree of life and the living water for man's existence. What God desires of man is that man would eat of Him as the tree of life and drink of Him as the water of life. Through our eating and drinking of Him, God is able to dispense Himself into us as our life and our life supply.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE ENTIRE BIBLE

As I have been carrying out the life-study of the Scriptures, I have sometimes pointed out that the particular book we were studying is an abstract of the Bible. The reason I say this is that all the books of the Bible are concerned with the same thing. Thus, now I wish to say about Jeremiah what I have said about other books: The book of Jeremiah is an abstract of the entire Bible. We have already seen that the book of Jeremiah is an abstract of the Bible in the sense that it presents God as the fountain of living waters. Let us now go on to consider another way in which this book is an abstract of the Scriptures.

In Genesis 3 the devil appeared in the form of a serpent, and both Adam and Eve were seduced by him to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Jeremiah the serpent also comes in to distract God's people from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge. Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, /

The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water." This tells us that Israel had been distracted from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge, from the fountain of living waters to the idols (the cisterns). The children of Israel might have said, "We are not worshipping idols—we are hewing out cisterns." They did not realize, however, that by hewing out cisterns they were turning to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. My point here is that in Jeremiah we can see the two trees. Chapters two through ten show us the same two trees that were in Genesis 2. In these chapters of Jeremiah, God seemed to be saying, "Foolish people! Why do you not come to Me? Why do you not partake of Me as the tree of life? Why do you go to the other tree, to the idols?" By turning to the other tree, Israel had forsaken God and His law.

A WORD CONCERNING THE LAW

At this juncture I would like to say a word concerning the law of God. Paul tells us that the law was not a part of God's original purpose. Originally, God did not intend to give us the law. Why, then, was it given? Why did God come in to give the law? In Galatians 3:19 Paul explains that the law "was added because of the transgressions." This means that after God presented His purpose to man, man did not accept God and His purpose but instead began to do things according to himself. For this reason, God came in to add the law.

Although the law is something added, it nevertheless has a positive function. The positive function of the law is to present a portrait of God. In the Ten Commandments we see a picture of what God is. The first five commandments are based on Jehovah God's uniqueness and jealousy, and the last five commandments are based on Jehovah God's attributes of love, light, holiness, and righteousness. By using the law to present a picture of Himself, God was indicating that He wanted His people to become His duplication.

ISRAEL'S BREAKING OF THE LAW REACHING ITS PEAK AT THE TIME OF JEREMIAH

While the law was being given to Moses on Mount Sinai,

the children of Israel were doing many evil things in violation of the Ten Commandments. In particular, they sinned against God by worshipping the golden calf. Throughout the centuries Israel continued to break the commandments of the law more and more. Eventually, their breaking of the law reached the peak at the time of Jeremiah.

The people of Israel went so far as to have a kind of coordination in their worship of idols. Regarding this, in Jeremiah 7:18 God says, "The children gather wood, and the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke Me to anger." What a coordination! It seemed that in making idols and worshipping them, everyone had a function. It is hard to believe that God's people could have degraded to such an extent.

At Jeremiah's time the people of Israel were doing many other kinds of evil things. In committing adultery they "trooped to the house of harlots" (5:7). They roamed about like well-fed horses, "each one neighing after his neighbor's wife" (v. 8). They dealt falsely in order to wrest unjust gain. They had altogether lost the image and likeness of God and had become serpents and scorpions. Thus, in the sight of God, Israel had come to the end and was finished. God's prophet Jeremiah wanted nothing to do with the people and said, "Oh, that I had a traveler's lodging place in the wilderness / That I might leave my people and go away from them, / For all of them are adulterers and an assembly of treacherous men" (9:2). He no longer wanted to see the wickedness of Israel.

GOD NOT GIVING UP ISRAEL

Apparently God had given up Israel and would have nothing more to do with them. Actually God did not give up His people. He knew what He was doing with Israel, and He knew that He had a glorious goal to reach. Therefore, although He chastised them, He still had compassion on them. Both God and Jeremiah sympathized with the people of Israel in their suffering of God's punishment (9:10-11, 17-19; 8:18-22; 9:1; 10:19-25). Knowing God's sympathy toward Israel, Jeremiah could say, "It is Jehovah's lovingkindness

that we are not consumed, / For His compassions do not fail; / They are new every morning. / Great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). In His lovingkindness and compassion, God preserved Israel, and Israel continued to exist. Furthermore, among His degraded elect who had been sent into exile, God had His overcomers such as Daniel and his companions.

In addition, Jeremiah prophesied concerning the coming restoration of Israel (23:3-8; 33:1-26). In this time of restoration, God will gather His dispersed and scattered people back to the holy land. Eventually, Jeremiah prophesied that Christ would come as the righteous Shoot (23:5-6).

CHRIST BEING THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN FULFILL GOD'S ECONOMY

Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Christ indicates that only Christ can fulfill God's economy. Only Christ is the answer to God's requirements in His economy. In fulfilling God's economy, Christ is first our righteousness and then our redemption and our all-inclusive inner life. As our life supply, Christ is our food and drink.

All these aspects of Christ are fully developed in the New Testament. In particular, the New Testament reveals that Christ is our life (Col. 3:4). Christ's being our Savior and Redeemer is for His being our life. As our life, Christ is everything to us. He is our food, our drink, our energy, our power, our capacity, our strength. In and through such a Christ, we become one with God in life, nature, image, and appearance.

What Christ is to us today He will be to Israel at the time of His coming back. At His coming back, Israel will repent and receive Christ (Zech. 12:10—13:1). They will receive Christ as their righteousness, redemption, and life, and they will drink of the fountain of living waters and eat of the tree of life. As a result, Israel too will be constituted with God and become one with God in life, nature, image, and appearance.

A PICTURE SHOWING THAT WE ARE NOTHING AND THAT CHRIST IS EVERYTHING TO US

The picture portrayed by Jeremiah concerning Israel is a picture of us as believers in Christ today. This means that

we are the same as Israel. Like Israel, we once had a "bridal day" (Jer. 2:2), a time when we pledged our love to the Lord and told Him that we loved Him to the uttermost. However, many believers have left their first love (Rev. 2:4) and have become degraded according to the pattern presented in Revelation 2 and 3. We may be disappointed with such a situation, but God is not disappointed. He knows that there will be a time of restoration and that sooner or later we will be willing to be subdued.

Eventually we will all be submissive to the Lord and recognize that we are evil; we will confess that we are a totality of sin. When we realize this, we will say, "Lord, I am nothing, but You are my everything. I am sin, but You are my righteousness. I am dead, but You are my life." Moreover, we will realize that along with the divine life with its sense, law, and capacity, we also have the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). We will see that day by day we are being sanctified, renewed, and transformed, and that the time is coming when we will be conformed to the image of Christ and be glorified. Whereas God will always be God with the unique Godhead and whereas there will always be a distinction between us and God, we will nevertheless be constituted with God and be one with Him in life, nature, element, essence, image, and appearance so that we may be His corporate expression for eternity.

Some may find it hard to believe that this revelation concerning God's economy with His dispensing can be found in the book of Jeremiah. We should be reminded that Jeremiah speaks of God's being the fountain of living waters and of Christ's being our righteousness. The book also speaks of the new covenant with all its blessings. After Israel's failure, God came in to say, "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah: I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be My people" (Jer. 31:33). In Hebrews 8 Paul quotes this portion of Jeremiah and applies it to us, the New Testament believers. This means that the new covenant with its privileges and blessings is for us to enjoy today. Israel will have this enjoyment later, after the Lord's coming back.

Jeremiah truly is an abstract of the Bible. As such an abstract, this book is a picture showing us that we are nothing and that Christ is everything to us. If we see that we are nothing, we will not expect anything of ourselves. Rather, according to God's economy with His dispensing, we will take Christ as our life, our life supply, and our everything.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(6)

ISRAEL'S BREAKING OF JEHOVAH'S COVENANT

Scripture Reading: Jer. 11—13

In this message we will consider Jeremiah 11 through 13. These chapters are concerned with Israel's breaking of the covenant. We have already covered this matter somewhat, but here Jeremiah gives us a fuller picture of the breaking of the covenant.

I. THE COVENANT OF JEHOVAH WITH ISRAEL

A. Made in the Day That Jehovah Brought Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai

The covenant of Jehovah with Israel was made in the day that Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai (11:4, 7; Exo. 24:3-8; Heb. 9:18-20). Regarding this covenant, in Jeremiah 11:3 and 4 Jehovah says, "Cursed is the man who does not listen to 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, Listen to My voice and do the things according to all which I command you; and you will be My people and I will be your God."

B. The Covenant of the Law of the Ten Commandments

The covenant of Jehovah with Israel, called the first

covenant and also the old covenant, was the covenant of the law of the Ten Commandments.

1. The First Five Commandments

The first five commandments, based on Jehovah God's uniqueness and jealousy, demand man to honor, serve, and love God as the unique and jealous God (Exo. 20:3-12). God's uniqueness and jealousy require that we honor, serve, and love Him.

It is significant that in the arrangement of the Ten Commandments, the commandment concerning honoring our parents, the fifth commandment, is ranked with the commandments regarding God and the keeping of the Sabbath. This indicates that, as children, we need to realize that our parents are our source, and as our source they should be considered God's representatives. Thus, the commandment concerning honoring our parents is ranked with the first four commandments concerning God and His Sabbath. To disobey, dishonor, despise, and do evil to our parents means that we reject God.

2. The Last Five Commandments

The last five commandments, based on Jehovah God's attributes of love, light, holiness, and righteousness, demand man to have virtues according to God's attributes in his relationship with others (Exo. 20:13-17). These commandments indicate that God wants us to express Him in our daily life.

3. Given to Test Man and Expose Man

The law of the Ten Commandments was given to test man and expose man as to his genuine nature and condition (Rom. 3:20b; 5:20a; 7:7b). If the Ten Commandments had not been given to us, our actual situation and condition could not be exposed to ourselves, and we would not be clear concerning ourselves. But through the trial of keeping the commandments of the law, our nature, situation, and condition are exposed and become clear to us.

4. The Law of the Ten Commandments Becoming Weak through Man's Flesh

The law of the Ten Commandments has become weak through man's flesh (Rom. 8:3a). In itself the law is good and spiritual; it has become "weak through the flesh." Because we are so fleshly, the law becomes weak.

a. The Law Being Holy, Righteous, Good, and Spiritual

Although the law has become weak through man's flesh, the law itself is holy, righteous, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 16, 14a).

b. Man Being Fleshy, Sold under Sin

Whereas the law is holy, righteous, good, and spiritual, man is fleshly, even fleshy. This is the reason Paul says, "I am fleshy, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14b). Paul realized that he was contrary to all that was portrayed by the law. He also portrayed man as being fleshy and, having lost his liberty, as being sold under sin.

C. A Covenant Based on Man's Works to Keep the Law

The covenant of Jehovah with Israel was a covenant based on man's works to keep the law. Concerning this, Paul says in Galatians 2:16, "Knowing that a man is not justified out of works of law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, we also have believed into Christ Jesus that we might be justified out of faith in Christ and not out of the works of law, because out of the works of law no flesh will be justified."

1. Not like the Covenant of Promise Given to Abraham nor like the Covenant of Grace Given to the New Testament Believers

The covenant with Israel is not like the covenant of promise given to Abraham, nor like the covenant of grace given to the New Testament believers (Rom. 6:14b). Actually the covenant of promise given to Abraham and the covenant

of grace given to the New Testament believers are the same covenant. With Abraham this covenant was a matter of promise; with the believers it is a matter of fulfillment.

2. Not by Man's Faith in God but by Man's Works in Himself

Jehovah's covenant with Israel was not by man's faith in God but by man's works in himself (Gal. 2:16). This covenant was altogether a matter that was wrapped up with the self instead of with God. The new covenant is different. The new covenant is based upon faith in God and it is wrapped up with God. If we do not have God, we do not have the new covenant. Without God, there is no way for us to experience the new covenant.

D. Israel Becoming a Total Failure under the Test of the Law

Israel became a total failure under the test of the law. They became such a failure that they might know certain things.

1. Unable to Keep the Law

Through their failure under the test of the law, Israel was to learn that they are unable to keep the law and that they have no righteousness by the law (Rom. 8:3a; 9:31; 10:3). It is impossible for any fleshly person to have righteousness by the law.

a. Their Sinful Nature Unable to Be Changed

The sinful nature of the people of Israel cannot be changed, just as a Cushite cannot change his skin or the leopard its spots (Jer. 13:23).

b. Their Heart Being Deceitful and Incurable

Jeremiah 17:9a says, "The heart is deceitful above all things / And it is incurable." Since Israel's heart was deceitful and incurable and their nature was sinful, it was impossible for them to keep the law.

2. Needing Christ to Be Jehovah as Their Righteousness

Through their total failure in keeping the law, Israel was also to come to know that they needed Christ to be Jehovah as their righteousness (Jer. 23:6b; 33:16b; 1 Cor. 1:30). Christ, the very God and the Savior, must be their righteousness.

3. Needing to Have the Divine Life with Its Law in the New Covenant of God

Finally, through their failure in keeping the law, Israel was to know that they needed to have the divine life with its law in the new covenant of God (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16-17).

II. ISRAEL'S BREAKING OF THE COVENANT OF THE LAW AND GOD'S PUNISHMENT OVER THEM

Chapters eleven through thirteen of Jeremiah speak both of Israel's breaking of the covenant of the law and of God's punishment over them.

A. Israel's Breaking of the Covenant of the Law

"The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers" (Jer. 11:10c). This clearly reveals that Israel broke the covenant of the law.

1. By Their Idolatrous Worship

Israel broke the covenant of the law by their idolatrous worship (11:10b, 13, 15a, 17b; 13:10b, 27a). Such worship is against the first five commandments of the law.

2. By Their Evil Conduct

Israel broke the covenant also by their evil conduct (11:8, 10a, 19; 12:2b, 4a, 14a; 13:27a). Such conduct was against the last five of the commandments of the law. By their conduct and behavior in their daily living, Israel absolutely broke the commandments concerning murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting. Thus, by their idolatrous worship and by their

evil conduct, they completely annulled the law. As far as they were concerned, the law was of no effect.

B. God's Punishment over Israel

1. Needed for the Sake of His Righteousness and Holiness

Although God's intention in giving Israel His law was to test and expose them, He still needed to punish them for the sake of His righteousness and holiness. Holiness refers to God's nature, and righteousness, to God's acts. Because of their idolatry (11:8, 10b-11, 13-14, 17; 13:10b, 27) and their evil conduct (11:10a, 11, 15b-16, 19-23; 13:9), God had to punish Israel. His holiness and righteousness required this punishment.

2. God Eventually Returning to Them and Having Compassion on Them

Jeremiah 12:15 reveals that eventually God will return to them and have compassion on them and bring them back from their captivity.

III. JEREMIAH THE PROPHET'S REACTION

Finally, in 13:17 we see Jeremiah the prophet's reaction to Israel's breaking of the covenant and to God's punishment over Israel. Jeremiah said that his soul will weep in secret places for their pride, and his eye will weep bitterly and shed tears because the flock of Jehovah has been taken captive.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(7)

JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT OF ISRAEL WITH DROUGHT

Scripture Reading: Jer. 14:1—15:9

In this message we will consider Jehovah's punishment of Israel with drought.

I. A CURSE FOR ISRAEL'S BREAKING OF JEHOVAH'S COVENANT

Jehovah's punishing Israel with drought was a curse for Israel's breaking of Jehovah's covenant. In Deuteronomy 11:17 Moses warned the people of Israel that if they turned aside from Jehovah and served other gods, the anger of Jehovah would burn against them and He would shut up heaven so that there would be no rain. Deuteronomy 28:23 refers to this curse by saying, "Your heaven, which is above your head, will be brass, and the land, which is under you, iron."

A. The Ceasing of God's Heavenly Supply to the Earth

The curse of drought was the ceasing of God's heavenly supply to the earth. Such a thing took place during the time of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1), and it will happen again in the future (Rev. 11:6a; Zech. 14:18).

B. The Cutting Off of God's Nourishment to His People

Deuteronomy 11:14 and 15 say, "I will give rain for your

land in its season, the early rain and the late rain, so that you may gather your grain and your new wine and your fresh oil. And I will put grass in your field for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied." These verses speak of God's giving rain for the nourishment of His people. It is He who gives "the early rain and the late rain, in its season" and who "preserves the appointed weeks of the harvest" (Jer. 5:24). However, as a curse for Israel's breaking of Jehovah's covenant, "the showers have been withheld, / And there has been no later rain" (3:3). This means that, as a punishment, God's nourishment to His people has been cut off.

II. JEHOVAH'S MESSAGE THROUGH JEREMIAH THE PROPHET TO THE PUNISHED ISRAEL (ACTUALLY JUDAH) CONCERNING THEIR DROUGHT

In 14:1-6 we have Jehovah's message through Jeremiah the prophet to the punished Israel (actually Judah) concerning their drought. God asked Jeremiah to tell His people that He would be sending a drought upon them, and in these verses we have Jeremiah's description of the suffering of Israel during this time of drought.

A. Judah Mourning and Her Gates Languishing

According to verse 2, Judah mourns, and her gates languish. In black garments they mourn on the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.

B. The Servants Finding No Water in the Cisterns and Returning with Their Vessels Empty

The nobles, those of the upper class, send their servants for water. The servants come to the cisterns and find no water. They return with their vessels empty; they are ashamed and confounded and cover their heads (v. 3).

C. The Farmers Being Ashamed and Covering Their Heads

There has been no rain on the earth. Because the ground

is cracked from the lack of rain, the farmers are ashamed and cover their heads (v. 4).

D. The Hind in the Field Giving Birth and Abandoning Its Young

Even the hind in the field gives birth and abandons its young because there is no grass (v. 5).

E. There Being No Herbage

The wild asses stand on the bare heights. They pant after the wind like jackals, and their eyes fail, for there is no herbage (v. 6).

III. JEREMIAH THE PROPHET'S INTERCESSION

In 14:7—15:9 we have Jeremiah the prophet's intercession.

A. His Intercession

In his intercession Jeremiah confesses that they have sinned against Jehovah. Their iniquities testify against them, and their apostasies have become many. Nevertheless, he prays that Jehovah will act for His name's sake (14:7). Then Jeremiah continues his intercession, saying, "O Hope of Israel, / Its Savior in a time of distress, / Why should You be like a sojourner in the land, / Like a traveler who turns aside to lodge for the night? / Why should You be like an astonished man, / Like a mighty man who is unable to save? / Yet You are in our midst, O Jehovah, / And we are called by Your name; / Do not leave us" (vv. 8-9).

B. Jehovah's Refusal

Jeremiah interceded for Israel, but Jehovah refused to listen to the prophet's intercession. Instead of accepting the people, He said that He would remember their iniquity and punish their sins (v. 10). Then Jehovah went on to say to Jeremiah, "Do not pray for the welfare of this people. When they fast, I will not listen to their ringing cry; when they offer up a burnt offering and a meal offering, I will not accept them; but by sword and by famine and by pestilence I will consume them" (vv. 11-12).

C. The Prophet's Prayer concerning the False Prophets, and Jehovah's Answer

In verse 13 the prophet prayed concerning the false prophets, saying, "Ah, Lord Jehovah! Behold, the prophets say to them, You will not see sword, nor will you have famine, for I will give you assured peace in this place." In His answer to Jeremiah's prayer, Jehovah said that the prophets prophesied falsehood in His name, that they prophesied a false vision, that they themselves would be consumed by sword and by famine, and the people to whom they prophesied would be cast out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword (vv. 14-16).

D. The Reaction of the Prophet, Who Was One with the Punishing Jehovah

Verses 17 and 18 reveal the reaction of the prophet, who was one with the punishing Jehovah.

1. The Oneness of Jeremiah and Jehovah

In verse 17 Jehovah said to the prophet, "You shall speak this word to them, / Let my eyes run down with tears / Night and day, and let them not cease; / For the virgin daughter of my people is broken with great brokenness, / A very grievous wound." Here we see that Jehovah and the prophet were joined as one. The prophet was one with the punishing God to sympathize with the people. On the one hand, God punished them; on the other hand, God was still sympathetic, and the prophet was one with Him in being sympathetic.

2. The Prophet Not Knowing Where to Go

In verse 18 we have the word of the prophet. "If I go forth into the field, / Then behold, those slain by the sword; / And if I come into the city, / Then behold, those diseased with famine. / For both the prophet and the priest / Will go about in a land that they do not know." This indicates that the prophet felt that there was no place where he could stay. He did not know where to go.

E. The Prophet's Further Intercession

Verses 19 through 22 record the prophet's further intercession. Verse 21 says, "Do not hold us in contempt, for Your name's sake; / Do not dishonor Your throne of glory; / Remember and do not break Your covenant with us." This word indicates that Jeremiah's intercession was based upon Jehovah's name, His throne of glory, and His covenant. Verse 22 continues, "Are there among the vanities of the nations any that can bring rain, / Or in the heavens any that can give showers? / Are You not He, O Jehovah our God? / Therefore we wait for You, / For You have made all these things." Here we see that Jeremiah's intercession was based also upon Jehovah's power to bless His people. Furthermore, this verse indicates that the prophet's intercession was with the waiting of the people for Him.

F. Jehovah's Answer to the Prophet's Intercession in Begging for Mercy

Jeremiah 15:1-4 gives Jehovah's answer to the prophet's intercession in begging for mercy. Jehovah said to Jeremiah, "Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My soul would not turn toward this people. Send them out of My sight and let them go" (v. 1). God was so disgusted with Israel that He wanted them taken out of His sight. If they asked the prophet where they should go, he was to say, "Thus says Jehovah, / He who is for death to death, / And he who is for the sword to the sword, / And he who is for famine to famine, / And he who is for captivity to captivity" (v. 2). Jehovah went on to say that He would visit them with four kinds of punishment: the sword to slay, the dogs to tear, and the birds of heaven and beasts of the earth to devour and destroy (v. 3). Finally, He said that He would make them a horror among all the kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem (v. 4).

G. The Punishing Jehovah's Sighing for His Punished People

Verses 5 through 9 are a record of the punishing Jehovah's sighing for His punished people. Verse 6 is of particular interest. "You have forsaken Me, / Declares Jehovah. / You keep going backward, / And I have stretched out My hand against you / And have destroyed you; / I have become weary of repenting." Again and again God had determined to punish Israel, but He had repented. Now He told Jeremiah that He was weary of repenting and would repent no more. This shows how evil Israel had become and how patient God had been with them.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(8)

JEHOVAH'S FURTHER COMMISSION TO JEREMIAH AND HIS FURTHER STATEMENT OF JUDAH'S SINS

(1)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 15:10—17:27

In this message we will begin to consider Jehovah's further commission to Jeremiah and His further statement of Judah's sins.

I. JEHOVAH'S FURTHER COMMISSION TO JEREMIAH

Jehovah's further commission to Jeremiah is covered in 15:10 through 16:9.

A. Jeremiah's Remorse and Jehovah's Encouragement and Strengthening

In 15:10-14 we see Jeremiah's remorse and Jehovah's encouragement and strengthening. In these verses there are three parties: Jeremiah, his mother, and God. Jeremiah was disappointed and said to his mother, "Woe is me, my mother, because you bore me, / A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole land. / I have not lent with interest, / Nor have they lent to me; / Yet everyone curses me" (v. 10). Surely, no mother would be happy to hear such a word from her son. Whereas Jeremiah's mother was silent, God came in to say something to him.

I feel that it is very significant that as Jeremiah was speaking to his mother, God came in to speak to him. This indicates that God was always with Jeremiah. Wherever Jeremiah went, God was there with him. Whenever Jeremiah spoke, God was present to participate in the conversation. God was with Jeremiah even when he, in his disappointment, was talking to his mother. She might have been very happy about how God spoke to her son to encourage and strengthen him.

In His speaking to Jeremiah, God spoke not as the Divine Being, as the mighty One, but almost as if He were a man, talking in a very human and personal way. According to the record of this book, as God dealt with His people, He often spoke to them in such a way. For instance, when He addressed Israel as His apostate wife and lovingly pleaded for her to return, He spoke in a human way.

After Jeremiah told his mother that everyone was cursing him, Jehovah intervened and said to him, "Surely I will set you free for your good; / Indeed I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you / In a time of trouble and in a time of distress. / Can one break iron, / Iron from the north, or bronze? / Your wealth and your treasures / I will give as plunder without price, / And that for all your sins, / And within all your borders. / I will cause your enemies to bring it / Into a land which you do not know; / For a fire is kindled in My anger, / Which will burn against you" (vv. 11-14). We need to pay attention to the pronouns *your* and *you* in verses 13 and 14. In verse 13 God refers to "your wealth" and "your treasures." Whose wealth and treasures are these? They must be the wealth and treasures of Israel. However, God spoke this word not directly to Israel but to Jeremiah. Surely, the word *your* here includes the addressee. This means that God regarded Jeremiah the prophet as being one with Israel. Israel's wealth and treasures were also Jeremiah's wealth and treasures. This indicates that God considered the entire nation of Israel as one entity. Because Jeremiah was a part of this entity, when the wealth and treasures of Israel were given to their enemies, Jeremiah also became poor. The wealth and treasures of Israel, and also of Jeremiah, would be brought

to a land which they did not know. God had kindled a fire in His anger, which would burn against them. In this matter also, Jeremiah was included.

Here we have not only three parties—Jeremiah, his mother, and Jehovah—but also a fourth party—Israel. God's word was addressed to Jeremiah, but in speaking to Jeremiah He included the children of Israel together with Jeremiah. In speaking to Jeremiah and to Israel, God spoke as if He were a human being talking to other human beings. He spoke as one of the four parties participating in this conversation.

B. Jeremiah's Petition for Jehovah's Care and Jehovah's Answer with a Further Commission to Him

Jeremiah responded to Jehovah's speaking by petitioning Him for His care. "O Jehovah, You know; / Remember me and visit me, / And avenge me of my persecutors. / In Your longsuffering do not take me away; / Know that for Your sake I bear reproach" (v. 15). By using the word *know* in his petition, Jeremiah seemed to be reminding God concerning his situation. Jeremiah's petition indicates that no matter how strong and spiritual he might have been, he was still human. As he asked God to remember him and visit him, he seemed to be saying, "O Jehovah, do not forget me. Do not give me up. I need You to remember me, to visit me, and to avenge me of those who are persecuting me for Your sake."

In particular, Jeremiah prayed that, in His longsuffering, Jehovah would not take him away. Jeremiah seemed to be saying, "Jehovah, You are a God who can suffer a long time. I ask that in Your longsuffering You do not allow my persecutors to kill me. You are kind and compassionate, and You may allow my persecutors to go on doing evil things for a long time. I ask that, during the time of Your longsuffering, You will not allow my persecutors to take my life."

The next verse (v. 16) is very unusual and does not seem to fit here. In this verse Jeremiah says, "Your words were found and I ate them, / And Your word became to me / The joy and rejoicing of my heart, / For I am called by Your name, O Jehovah, God of hosts." According to the entire revelation

in the Holy Bible, God's words are good for us to eat, and we need to eat them. When we eat God's words, His word becomes our heart's joy and rejoicing.

In this verse Jeremiah says not only that he found and ate God's words but also that he was called by Jehovah's name. The Hebrew words translated "I am called by Your name" may also be rendered "Your name is called over me." In either case, Jeremiah was saying that he belonged to Jehovah and was under His name.

In verse 17 Jeremiah goes on to say, "I did not sit in the assembly of mockers, nor did I exult. / Because of Your hand I sat alone, / For You have filled me with indignation." The word *mockers* here does not denote despisers but those who mock others by rejoicing in a light way. Such mockers were probably mocking Jeremiah, who did not exult and who was not happy. Furthermore, because Jehovah's hand was upon Jeremiah, he sat alone. Jehovah's hand held him down and constrained him to sit quietly and endure the mocking. Although Jeremiah was quiet, he was filled with indignation. It was impossible for him to have joy or to rejoice.

Verse 17 depicts Jeremiah's suffering. Because of his suffering and disappointment, he said to his mother, "Woe is me." She was silent, but Jehovah talked with Jeremiah to encourage and strengthen him. I cannot tell from Jeremiah's answer whether he accepted or rejected God's encouragement. It seems that God spoke in one way according to His feeling and that Jeremiah responded in a different way according to his feeling. Jeremiah seemed to be saying to Jehovah, "I am not happy, and I am not rejoicing. I am suffering, and I am full of indignation because Your hand is upon me."

Verse 18 continues, "Why is my pain unceasing, / And my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? / Will You indeed be to me like a deceitful brook? / Like waters that fail?" The Hebrew word for *fail* literally means "are not sure." Jeremiah had been hurt, wounded, and he made his complaint to God, asking Him if He would be like a deceitful brook or like waters that fail.

In verses 19 through 21 we have Jehovah's response to Jeremiah's complaint. In His response He gave Jeremiah a

further commission. Verse 19 says, "Therefore thus says Jehovah, / If you return, I will restore you; / You will stand before Me; / And if you bring out the precious from the worthless, / You will be as My mouth; / They will turn to you, / But you will not turn to them." The pronoun *you* here may be a further indication that God considered Jeremiah as being one with Israel. Surely Israel needed to return to God and be restored by Him. We may also say that Jeremiah, who was quite disappointed, also needed to return to God in order to be restored by Him. God told Jeremiah that if he returned to Him, he would be restored and would stand before Him.

God went on to tell Jeremiah that if he brought out, that is, uttered, the precious things from the worthless, he would be as His mouth. Jehovah's word concerning uttering precious things may indicate that He regarded Jeremiah's speaking in the previous verses as worthless. God might have been saying, "Jeremiah, what you have just said is not precious—it is worthless. You cannot be My mouth if you speak worthless things. You need to bring out the precious things from the worthless. If you do this, you will be My mouthpiece, My prophet, to speak for Me and to speak forth My word." God continued by telling Jeremiah that if he would be as His mouth, the people of Israel would turn to him. However, he was not to turn to them.

In verse 20 Jehovah told Jeremiah that to the people of Israel He would make him a fortified wall of bronze. They would fight against him, but they would not prevail against him, for Jehovah would be with him to save him and deliver him. He also promised that He would deliver Jeremiah from the hand of the wicked and redeem him from the grasp of those who terrorize (v. 21).

C. Jehovah's Restrictions to Jeremiah for His Further Commission

In 16:1-9 we see Jehovah's restrictions to Jeremiah for His further commission. Jehovah said to him, "You shall not take a wife for yourself nor have sons or daughters in this place. For thus says Jehovah concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place and concerning their mothers who

bear them and concerning their fathers who beget them in this land: They will die grievous deaths and will not be mourned nor buried; they will be as dung on the surface of the ground and will be consumed by sword and by famine, and their corpses will become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth" (vv. 2-4). Because this was to be the future and destiny of the land, Jeremiah was not to take a wife or have children. If he had had a wife and children, they certainly would have suffered.

Jehovah's word to Jeremiah about not having wife or children surely was a restriction to him. This indicates that if we would be a mouthpiece of God and speak for Him, we must be restricted. Others may have the freedom to do certain things, but we will not have such freedom.

Verses 5 through 9 tell us of the further restrictions placed upon Jeremiah by God. He was to be restricted from both mourning and feasting. Jehovah charged him not to enter the house of mourning and not to mourn or lament for the people of Israel, for He has taken away His peace, lovingkindness, and compassions from them (v. 5). Both the great and the small would die in this land. They would not be buried, and they would not be mourned (v. 6). The people would not break bread in mourning to comfort anyone for the dead, and they would not give them a cup of consolation to drink for mother or father (v. 7). Concerning feasting, Jehovah said to Jeremiah, "You shall not enter the house of feasting to sit with them and eat and drink. For thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will cause to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of gladness and the voice of joy, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride" (vv. 8-9). This reveals that instead of joy there would be suffering.

In these verses Jehovah was indicating to Jeremiah that, as God's mouthpiece, he would suffer. Throughout the generations, those who have been used by God to speak for Him have always suffered. This was the situation with Brother Nee. I was with him for many years, and I can testify that he suffered greatly. There was hardly a day of peace, a day without misunderstanding, criticism, and opposition. Because

he was one who spoke for God, he was one who suffered many things from many people.

If we do not speak for God, we may not encounter problems. But speaking for God will bring problems. The more we speak for Him, the more problems we will have. However, our speaking for God should not depend on our choice. On the contrary, our speaking for God should always depend on God's revelation.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(9)

JEHOVAH'S FURTHER COMMISSION TO JEREMIAH AND HIS FURTHER STATEMENT OF JUDAH'S SINS

(2)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 15:10—17:27

In this message we will continue to consider Jehovah's further commission to Jeremiah and His further statement of Judah's sins.

II. JEHOVAH'S FURTHER STATEMENT OF JUDAH'S (AS ISRAEL'S) SINS

This further statement of Judah's (as Israel's) sins is in 16:10—17:27.

A. Israel's Inquiry concerning Their Sins That Caused Jehovah's Visitation in the Great Evil against Them, and Jehovah's Answer to Them

In 16:10-18 we have a record of Israel's inquiry concerning their sins that caused Jehovah's visitation in the great evil against them, and Jehovah's answer to them. The people would ask why Jehovah has pronounced great evil against them, and they would ask what was their iniquity and what was their sin against Jehovah. When they inquired in this way, Jeremiah was to tell them that their fathers forsook Him and went after

other gods and that they have done more evil than their fathers. Therefore, Jehovah would cast them far away from this land into a land which they have not known (vv. 10-13).

In answering the inquiry of the people, Jehovah also made a promise to them regarding their restoration. "Therefore behold, days are coming, declares Jehovah, when it will no longer be said, As Jehovah lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but, As Jehovah lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of the north and from every land where He had driven them; for I will bring them back to their own land, which I gave to their fathers" (vv. 14-15). Jehovah would do this after He had recompensed double for their iniquity and their sin, because they had profaned His land and their abominations had filled His inheritance (v. 18).

The conversation in these verses is very human. The people inquired of God in a human way, and He responded also in a human way. In His response, He explained the reason for the great evil, the calamities, that had come upon them, and He promised to bring them back to the land. He would even send "fishermen" to catch them and "hunters" to hunt for them in order to gather them and restore them.

B. Jeremiah's Praise to Jehovah and Jehovah's Acknowledgement of His Praise

Verses 19 through 21 speak of Jeremiah's praise to Jehovah and of Jehovah's acknowledgement of his praise. In his praise Jeremiah said, "O Jehovah, my strength and my stronghold, / My refuge in the day of distress; / To You the nations come / From the ends of the earth and say, / Surely our fathers inherited falsehood / And vanity, in which there is no profit. / Shall a man make gods for himself, / Though they are no gods?" (vv. 19-20). As Jeremiah praised Jehovah, he spoke to Him in a very human way. In His acknowledgement of Jeremiah's praise, Jehovah said, "Therefore behold, I am causing them to know; / At this time I will cause them to know / My hand and My might, / And they will know that My name is Jehovah" (v. 21). Jehovah's speaking here was also quite human. The

conversation recorded in these verses is much like a conversation between two human beings.

C. Judah's Sin and Its Consequence

In 17:1-4 we have a word about Judah's sin and its consequence. Judah's sin is written with an iron pen. With the point of a diamond, it is engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of their altars. God will give their wealth and treasures as spoil, and they themselves will let go of their inheritance. Jehovah will cause them to serve their enemies in a land which they do not know, for they have kindled a fire in His anger which will burn forever.

D. The Curse of Trusting in Man and the Blessing of Trusting in Jehovah

Jeremiah 17:5-8 is a word about the curse of trusting in man and the blessing of trusting in Jehovah. Concerning the blessing of trusting in Jehovah, verses 7 and 8 say, "Blessed is the man who trusts in Jehovah / And whose trust Jehovah is. / And he will be like a tree planted by water, / Which sends out its roots by a stream, / And will not be afraid when heat comes; / For its leaves remain flourishing, / And it will not be anxious in the year of drought / And will not cease to bear fruit."

These verses can be understood in two different ways—according to the natural understanding and according to God's economy. According to the natural understanding, these verses seem to indicate only that if we trust in God, we will be blessed, mainly in a material way. However, the revelation here includes much more than this. According to God's economy, the one who trusts in God is like a tree planted by water, signifying God as the fountain of living waters (2:13a). The tree grows beside the river by absorbing all the riches of the water into it. This is a picture of God's dispensing. In order to receive the divine dispensing, we as the trees must absorb God as the water.

The thought here is the same as that in 1 Corinthians 3:6, where Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth." The watering is for the tree's absorbing, and the

absorbing is the receiving of God's dispensing. The tree grows with God as the Supplier and the supply. The supply is the riches of the supplying God dispensed into us as the plants so that we may grow into God's measure. Eventually, the plants and God, God and the plants, are one, having the same element, essence, constitution, and appearance.

Jeremiah 17:7 and 8 are not concerned merely with such a shallow matter as trusting in God to receive material blessings. Actually these verses refer to God's economy carried out by His dispensing. God is the living water to be dispensed into our being in order to become our very constituent. We all need to see the crucial significance of absorbing God as the living water that we may be constituted with His element and essence.

E. The Deceitful and Incurable Heart of Man and the Searching, Test, and Reward of Jehovah

Jeremiah 17:9-11 is concerned with the deceitful and incurable heart of man and with the searching, test, and reward of Jehovah. "The heart is deceitful above all things / And it is incurable; / Who can know it? / I, Jehovah, search the heart / And test the inward parts, / Even to give to each one according to his ways, / According to the fruit of his doings. / As a partridge broods over what she has not laid, / A man makes riches but not rightly; / In the midst of his days they will leave him, / And at his end he will be a fool." Even this word regarding the deceitful and incurable heart of man is related to God's economy with His dispensing. Yes, man's heart is corrupt and deceitful; its condition is incurable. Nevertheless, even such a heart can be a tablet upon which God writes His law. Concerning this, Jehovah says, "I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts" (31:33). This reveals that God has a way to put Himself into man. Once He has come into man, God will spread from man's spirit into his heart. This is God's way, according to His economy, to deal with the heart of fallen man.

F. Jeremiah's Trusting Prayer to Jehovah

In 17:12-18 we have Jeremiah's trusting prayer to Jehovah.

Jeremiah began his prayer by saying, "A throne of glory set on high from the beginning / Is the place of our sanctuary. / You are the hope of Israel, O Jehovah; / All who forsake You will be put to shame" (vv. 12-13a). Verse 13b goes on to say that those who turn away from Jehovah will be written in the earth because they forsook Him, the fountain of living waters. Then Jeremiah continues his prayer, saying, "Heal me, O Jehovah, and I will be healed; / Save me and I will be saved, / For You are my praise. / Behold, they say to me, / Where is the word of Jehovah? / Let it come now! / But as for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd after You, / And I have not desired a day of disaster. / You know that what came out of my lips / Was before Your face. / Do not become a terror to me; / You are my refuge in an evil day. / Let those who persecute me be put to shame, but as for me, do not let me be put to shame; / Let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed. / Bring upon them an evil day, / And break them with a double destruction" (vv. 14-18). We need to understand this trusting prayer according to God's economy and dispensing. In order to interpret this prayer correctly, we need to receive God, the speaking and dispensing One, into us.

G. Jehovah's Warning concerning the Keeping of His Sabbath

In 17:19-27 we have Jehovah's warning concerning the keeping of His Sabbath. God told Jeremiah to go and stand in the gates of Jerusalem and tell all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who enter through these gates that they should take heed to their souls and bear no burden on the Sabbath day. On the Sabbath they were not to bring anything through the gates of Jerusalem; they were not to bring out any burden from their houses; and they were not to do any work (vv. 19-22). They were told to sanctify the Sabbath day, as Jehovah had commanded their fathers, who did not listen to Him or incline their ear. If the present inhabitants listened to Jehovah and sanctified the Sabbath day, then the kings and princes who sit on the throne of David would come through the gates of the city, and the city would be inhabited

forever (vv. 24-25). However, if they did not listen to Jehovah and sanctify the Sabbath day, then He would kindle a fire in the gates of the city, and the fire would devour the palaces of Jerusalem and not be extinguished (v. 27).

The Sabbath signifies that God has done everything, completed everything, and prepared everything and that man must stop all his work. Working on the Sabbath is profane. To work on the Sabbath is an insult to God and to what He has accomplished. Instead of working in such a way, we should take in God as our enjoyment, drinking of Him as the fountain of living waters. To sanctify God's Sabbath is to stop our work and to take what God has done for us.

The New Testament also is mainly of these two aspects: to receive God as the living water for our enjoyment (John 4:14; 7:38) and to stop our work. God has accomplished everything, and He is ready for us to enter into His eternal enjoyment in the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem we will not work; we will only drink, praise, enjoy, and rejoice. This is God's economy.

In 16:10—17:27 God gave a further statement concerning Judah's sins. How marvelous it is that even in such a portion of the Word we can see something regarding God's economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

A FULL PICTURE OF GOD'S ECONOMY BY HIS DISPENSING

Scripture Reading: Jer. 15:10—17:27

In this message I would like to give a brief word concerning God's economy as it is presented in the book of Jeremiah. In chapters fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen of Jeremiah we have a full picture of God's economy by His dispensing.

JEREMIAH'S DISAPPOINTMENT

Jeremiah 15:10—16:9 is a record of a conversation involving three parties: Jeremiah, his mother, and Jehovah. Jeremiah spoke in a human way, and God also spoke in a human way, speaking as if He were a human being. In this conversation and in Jehovah's further statement of Judah's sins (16:10—17:27), God's economy is revealed.

The book of Jeremiah reveals that God surely judges the evil ones, and sometimes He uses certain evil ones to judge other evil ones. This was the situation in chapter fifteen. God was intending to judge the people of Israel, and He sent Jeremiah to tell them that He would use the Babylonians to punish them. They responded by persecuting Jeremiah, and this caused him to be disappointed. In his disappointment Jeremiah said to his mother, "Woe is me, my mother, because you bore me, / A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole land. / I have not lent with interest, / Nor have they lent to me; / Yet everyone curses me" (15:10). Jeremiah's mother was silent, but Jehovah came in to comfort and encourage him, saying, "Surely I will set you free for your good; / Indeed I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you / In a time of trouble and in a time of distress. / Can one break iron, / Iron from the north, or bronze?" (vv. 11-12). The word *iron* here

refers to the Babylonians. God was assuring Jeremiah that He would use the Babylonians to punish Israel. After hearing this, Jeremiah petitioned Jehovah for His care, saying, "O Jehovah, You know; / Remember me and visit me, / And avenge me of my persecutors. / In Your longsuffering do not take me away; / Know that for Your sake I bear reproach" (v. 15). Jehovah answered with a further commission to Jeremiah (vv. 19-21) and also by placing restrictions on Jeremiah for His further commission (16:1-9). Finally, Jehovah gave a further statement of Judah's (as Israel's) sins.

CRUCIAL ASPECTS OF GOD'S ECONOMY

In this record of Jeremiah's speaking to Jehovah and Jehovah's speaking to Jeremiah, we see some crucial aspects of God's economy.

Nourished with the Divine Supply

In 15:16 Jeremiah says to Jehovah, "Your words were found and I ate them, / And Your word became to me / The joy and rejoicing of my heart, / For I am called by Your name, O Jehovah, God of hosts." This indicates that the word of God is good for us to enjoy. God's word makes our heart joyful.

What is crucial here is the revelation that God's word is the divine supply as food to nourish us. Every kind of food has a nourishing element. God's word, the divine supply, surely contains the element of nourishment. This nourishment is related to the divine dispensing, to God's dispensing Himself into us. Through the word as our food, God is dispensing His riches into our inner being to nourish us that we may be constituted with His element.

Trees Planted by Water

Another aspect of God's economy is revealed in 17:7 and 8. "Blessed is the man who trusts in Jehovah / And whose trust Jehovah is. / And he will be like a tree planted by water, / Which sends out its roots by a stream, / And will not be afraid when heat comes; / For its leaves remain flourishing, / And it will not be anxious in the year of drought / And will not cease to bear fruit." These verses indicate that we, the

believers in Christ, are God's planted trees. These verses also indicate that God is likened to water. God has planted us by Himself as the river of water. God is not only our food; He is also our drink, the water that goes along with the food. Our drinking of God as water is also a matter of His dispensing. As He dispenses Himself into us as water, God is supplying us with the rich element of His being that we may be constituted with His divinity. In this way, we human beings are constituted with the divine nature.

Enjoying the Fountain of Living Waters

Jeremiah 17:13 speaks of Jehovah as the fountain of living waters. God's intention in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to His chosen people for their enjoyment. Stubborn Israel offended God to the uttermost, even forsaking Him as such a fountain of living waters (2:13). God desires to be the fountain of living waters for us to drink that our thirst may be quenched and that we may be satisfied. According to chapter seventeen, eventually the one who trusts in the very God who nourishes us and who waters us will enjoy Him as the fountain of living waters.

The food, the water, the very God, and the fountain of living waters—all these are one. Moreover, these are basic points of the divine thought concerning the carrying out of God's economy by His dispensing. As God accomplishes His economy by dispensing Himself into us, He is our food, our water, and our fountain of living waters. How marvelous it is that in a portion of the Word concerned with God's chastisement of His sinful and evil people, we have such a full picture of God's economy by His dispensing!

KEEPING GOD'S SABBATH BY ENJOYING HIM, RESTING IN HIM, AND BEING SATISFIED IN HIM AS THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS

In 17:19-27 we have a word about keeping Jehovah's Sabbath. We should consider this word in relation to the foregoing points regarding God's economy. We all need to learn that the way to keep God's Sabbath is to enjoy Him,

to rest in Him, and to be satisfied in Him as the fountain of living waters. We should not do anything in ourselves or of ourselves. Rather, we should simply rest in this fountain and enjoy this fountain. The significance of keeping the Sabbath ordained by God is to take this fountain of living waters as our enjoyment, rest, and satisfaction. There is no need for us to do anything; we should simply be satisfied with all that God has done and accomplished.

In ancient times, those who were busy laboring on the Sabbath were those who had forsaken Jehovah. Having forsaken God, they labored in hewing out cisterns for themselves. The ones who labored in this way did not have any rest or satisfaction. Eventually their cisterns became broken and could hold no water (2:13). However, with those who trusted in Jehovah the situation was entirely different. On the Sabbath they could say, "Hallelujah for another day for us to rest in our God and be satisfied in Him! We are satisfied in Him for His rest and satisfaction. God rests with us, and we rest with Him to enjoy Him." This is God's economy.

COMING TO THE ORCHARD OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH TO PICK RIPE FRUIT

Through more than sixty years of studying the Bible, I have learned to pay attention to what is precious. In other words, I have learned to pick the "fruit" in the Word. For this reason, in the first message of this life-study, I pointed out that we may compare our reading of the book of Jeremiah to picking fruit from trees in an orchard. In picking fruit we do not care about old branches or dry leaves; we care for ripe fruit. The "old branches" and "dry leaves" in the fifty-two chapters of Jeremiah are there for the purpose of showing us the "fruit," that is, of showing us Christ as He is revealed in this book. The aspects of God's economy covered in this message should certainly be regarded as ripe fruit.

We will see more fruit when we come to chapter twenty-three. Verses 5 and 6 say, "Behold, days are coming, / Declares Jehovah, / When I will raise up to David a righteous Shoot; / And He will reign as King and act prudently / And will execute

judgment and righteousness in the land. / In His days Judah will be saved, / And Israel will dwell securely; / And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness." *Jehovah our righteousness* refers to Christ in His divinity, and *a righteous Shoot* refers to Christ in His humanity. The Christ revealed here is the One who will be our life. Christ's being our life is based upon His redemption and God's justification. This life is nothing less than Christ as Jehovah to be the fountain of living waters. In this fountain we have all things concerning God for our enjoyment.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(10)

JEHOVAH AS THE POTTER AND ISRAEL AS THE POTTERY

Scripture Reading: Jer. 18—20

The subject of this message is Jehovah as the Potter and Israel as the pottery. Jehovah is the Potter, and we, His chosen people, are the pottery in His hand.

As the Potter our God has the absolute right over us. Regarding us, He has the right to do whatever He likes. This thought is found not only in Jeremiah 18 through 20 but also in Romans 9. I believe that Paul was considering these chapters of Jeremiah as he was writing Romans 9 concerning God's sovereignty in His selection. In verse 21 he asks, "Does not the potter have authority over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?" God, the Potter, certainly has such authority. His selection is according to His absolute right. He may choose one vessel and reject another. He has the full right to do anything in any way to His pottery.

From Jeremiah's word in 15:10—17:27, we can see that there was something within him that was different from God's thought regarding Israel. I believe that the feeling within Jeremiah was that God's judgment upon Israel was too severe. At least he was not satisfied with the situation. In a sense, he was arguing with God. Instead of arguing with God directly, Jeremiah argued indirectly by expressing his feeling to his mother, saying, "Woe is me, my mother, because you

bore me, / A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole land" (15:10a). This is a strong word. God did not give Jeremiah's mother an opportunity to respond but came in to speak with Jeremiah and even to argue with him. As God spoke to Jeremiah, He asked him, "Can one break iron, / Iron from the north, or bronze?" (v. 12). Here God was indicating that He was determined to use the Babylonians as iron to judge and punish Israel.

Following this section in which he tells of his experience of arguing with God, Jeremiah went on to write a section concerning Jehovah as the Potter and Israel as the pottery. This section makes it very clear that God is absolutely free to do whatever He desires to His people. He has the full right, just as a potter has the full right over the pottery. If we see this, we will be able to understand these three chapters.

I. JEHOVAH AS THE SOVEREIGN POTTER

Jeremiah 18:1-10 reveals Jehovah as the sovereign Potter, the One with the absolute right over His pottery.

A. The Potter Working and Reworking the Pottery

Jehovah told Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house (vv. 1-2). Jeremiah saw that the potter was working and reworking the pottery at his wheel into another vessel, as it seemed good for him to make (vv. 3-4). This indicates that the potter has the full right to do whatever he desires with the clay.

B. Jehovah as the Sovereign Potter Being Able to Do with the House of Israel, as the Clay in His Hand, in Changeable Ways

Jehovah as the sovereign Potter is able to do with the house of Israel, as the clay in His hand, in changeable ways according to Israel's condition (vv. 6-10). Verse 6 says, "Am I not able to do with you, O house of Israel, as this potter does? declares Jehovah. Behold, as the clay is in the hand of the potter, so you are in My hand, O house of Israel." This word to Israel was also a word to the prophet, a word that would clear up his concept. Jehovah seemed to be saying to

Jeremiah, "Do not hinder Me from doing whatever I will to do with the house of Israel. Israel is clay in My hand, and I deal with them in changeable ways. Depending on their condition, I can punish them or exalt them."

II. THE EVIL CONDITION OF ISRAEL

Verses 11 through 23 speak of the evil condition of Israel. This word was God's further vindication of Himself to Jeremiah. Although God had the full right, He would not punish Israel in a way that was unfitting. Here Jehovah seemed to be telling Jeremiah, "I am not unwise in dealing with Israel, and neither am I doing something that is not fitting. Look at Israel's condition. If you consider their condition, you will agree with Me that they need to be punished."

A. Not Returning and Amending Her Ways

Israel did not return and amend her ways but walked after her own devices and did according to the stubbornness of her evil heart (vv. 11b-12). This is God's vindication of Himself in light of Israel's evil condition.

B. Having Forgotten Jehovah, Burning Incense to Vanity

As a virgin she did a very horrible thing—forgetting Jehovah and burning incense to vanity, to idols (vv. 13-15a). She had been a virgin betrothed to Jehovah, but she forsook Him, the reality as her fiancé, and turned to idols, which are vanity.

C. Having Been Stumbled in Her Ways from the Ancient Paths, Walking on Bypaths

Israel had stumbled in her ways from the ancient paths, walking on bypaths, on a way not cast up (v. 15b). The ancient paths were the right paths, which their forefathers had taken. Whereas the right way, the ancient way, leads upward, the bypaths lead downward. To take the bypaths is to go downward; to take the ancient paths, a way that is cast up, is to go upward. In the Lord's recovery today, we are taking

the upward way, the ancient paths, which the apostle Paul and the other apostles took.

D. Making Their Land an Astonishment

Because of their evil condition, Israel made their land an astonishment, a thing to be hissed at, to be despised, forever (v. 16).

E. Devising Plots against Jeremiah the Prophet

Furthermore, they plotted against Jeremiah. "Then they said, Come, let us devise plots against Jeremiah; for the law will not perish from the priest or counsel from the wise or a word from the prophet. Come, let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not hearken to any of his words" (v. 18). They contended with him and dug a pit for his life, having hidden snares for his feet and having made counsel against him for his death (vv. 19-20a, 22b-23a). How evil they were!

F. Forcing the Prophet to Turn His Intercession for Them before Jehovah to a Curse upon Them

Originally, Jeremiah the prophet interceded for them. However, their opposition forced the prophet to turn his intercession for them before Jehovah to a curse upon them (vv. 19-23).

G. Forcing Jehovah to Form Evil and Devise a Plan against Her

Israel also forced Jehovah to form evil and devise a plan against her (v. 11a). Thus, in verse 17 He said, "Like the east wind I will scatter them / Before the enemy; / I will show them My back and not My face / In the day of their calamity." I believe that all these evils should have convinced Jeremiah that God's judgment of Israel was right.

III. ISRAEL AS A POTTER'S EARTHENWARE JAR TO BE BROKEN

In 19:1-13 God showed Jeremiah that Israel was as a

potter's earthenware jar which had been spoiled and needed to be broken.

A. Illustrated in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the Entrance of the Potsherd Gate

The breaking of Israel as a potter's earthenware jar was illustrated in the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entrance of the potsherd gate (vv. 1-3). A potsherd is a fragment of broken pottery. Israel would be punished and broken by God into potsherds at the gate that leads into the valley of the son of Hinnom, a place where evil persons and things were burned.

B. Because of Israel's Evils

This breaking would take place because of Israel's evils. Their evils included forsaking Jehovah, estranging this place from Him, burning incense in it to other gods, filling this place with the blood of the innocent, and building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal (vv. 4-5).

C. Jehovah Wanting to Break Israel as the Potter's Earthenware Jar

Verses 6 through 13 reveal that Jehovah wanted to break Israel as the potter's earthenware jar, to make the place of Judah and Jerusalem the valley of slaughter as the valley of Topheth for the burial of their corpses. He would make Jerusalem an astonishment and a hissing, and make her eat the flesh of her sons, daughters, and neighbors.

IV. JEREMIAH'S REPEATED PROPHECY CONCERNING ISRAEL, ISRAEL'S PERSECUTION OF JEREMIAH, JEHOVAH'S DEALING WITH ISRAEL, AND JEREMIAH'S ACCUSATION AGAINST ISRAEL AND HIS CURSING OF HIS BIRTHDAY

A. Jeremiah's Repeated Prophecy concerning Israel

In 19:14 and 15 we have Jeremiah's repeated prophecy

concerning Israel. This prophecy declares that the God of Israel is bringing evil upon Jerusalem and all its cities because they have stiffened their neck so as not to hear His words.

B. Israel's Persecution of Jeremiah

In 20:1-2, 7-10 we have a record of Israel's persecution of Jeremiah. They struck him, put him in the stocks, mocked him, reproached him, derided him, defamed him, and terrified him by denouncing and entrapping him. Israel surely did many evil things to the prophet Jeremiah.

C. Jehovah's Dealing with Israel

Jeremiah 20:3-6 speaks concerning Jehovah's dealing with Israel. Jehovah will give all Judah and all its wealth, all its precious things, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will exile them to Babylon and strike them with the sword.

D. Jeremiah's Accusation against Israel and His Cursing of His Birthday

In 20:11-18 we have Jeremiah's accusation against Israel and his cursing of his birthday.

1. His Accusation against Israel

In his accusation against Israel, Jeremiah asked Jehovah to let him see His vengeance on Israel. Jeremiah was assured that Jehovah was with him like a mighty one who terrifies and that his persecutors would stumble and not prevail. They would be greatly ashamed, having an eternal humiliation that would not be forgotten (v. 11). Then he went on to say, "Jehovah of hosts, who tries the righteous, / Who sees the inward parts and the heart, / Let me see Your vengeance on them, / For I have revealed my cause to You. / Sing to Jehovah; / Praise Jehovah; / For He has delivered the soul of the poor / From the hand of the evildoers" (vv. 12-13).

2. His Cursing of His Birthday

Immediately after accusing Israel Jeremiah cursed his

birthday (vv. 14-18). Verses 14 and 15 say, "Cursed be the day / On which I was born; / Let not the day be blessed / On which my mother bore me. / Cursed be the man who brought good news / To my father, saying, / A male child has been born to you, / Causing him much joy." Jeremiah concluded his cursing of his birthday by saying, "Why is this? Did I come out from the womb / To see trouble and sorrow, / That my days may be spent in shame?" (v. 18). As a man of God, Jeremiah would never curse God; neither would he curse God's people. But he exercised the right to curse himself.

Why did Jeremiah curse his birthday? The answer is that he was in a dilemma and that this dilemma forced him to curse his birthday. Jeremiah's dilemma was of three factors. The first factor was God's determination to punish Israel severely. The second factor was Israel's evil condition, which was deserving of God's punishment. The third factor was Israel's rejection of Jeremiah's word and their persecution of him. Because of these three factors Jeremiah had no way to go on and therefore cursed his birthday.

As we consider Jeremiah's situation, we realize that to speak for God is not an easy thing. God always determines what we must speak. If we go along with Him, we will offend people. Eventually, some will defame us, speak lies about us, and even set traps to ensnare us. A faithful servant who speaks for God will always be in such a dilemma.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE NINETEEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(11)

JEHOVAH'S CONDEMNATION OF AND PUNISHMENT UPON THE KINGS AND PROPHETS OF JUDAH

(1)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 21—23

In this message we will begin to consider chapters twenty-one through twenty-three. These chapters are concerned with Jehovah's condemnation of and punishment upon the kings and prophets of Judah.

I. JEHOVAH'S CONDEMNATION OF AND PUNISHMENT UPON THE KINGS OF JUDAH WITH THEIR PEOPLE

In 21:1—23:8 we have a word regarding Jehovah's punishment upon the kings of Judah with their people.

A. Jehovah's Condemnation of the Kings of Judah with Their People

1. Not Listening to Jehovah's Warning to Execute Judgment and Righteousness

Jeremiah 22:21 says, "I spoke to you in your prosperity; / But you said, I will not listen. / This has been your way from your youth, / That you have not listened to My voice." Here we see that the kings with their people did not listen to Jehovah's voice. In particular, they did not listen to the warning to execute judgment and righteousness, to deliver him who has been robbed from the hand of the oppressor,

and not to mistreat, not to do violence to, the sojourner, the orphan, or the widow, nor shed innocent blood in their land (21:12; 22:3, 5).

2. Forsaking the Covenant of Jehovah Their God

According to 22:9, the kings of Judah with their people forsook the covenant of Jehovah their God and worshipped other gods and served them.

3. Building Their Large House by Unrighteousness and Their Spacious Upper Chambers by Injustice

They built their large house by unrighteousness and their spacious upper chambers by injustice, using their neighbor's service without wages and not giving him recompense for his work (22:13). They had eyes and a heart only for their unjust gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression and doing violence (vv. 14-17).

4. As Shepherds of Jehovah's People Having Scattered His Flock and Driven Them Away and Not Visiting Them

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture, declares Jehovah. Therefore thus says Jehovah, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who feed My people: You have scattered My flock and driven them away and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your deeds, declares Jehovah" (23:1-2). The kings and the nobles were the shepherds of God's people, but they failed to do the proper shepherding.

B. Jehovah's Punishment upon the Kings of Judah with Their People

In these three chapters we also see Jehovah's punishment upon the kings of Judah with their people.

1. Giving the Kings of Judah with Their People to Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon

Jehovah would give the kings of Judah with their people to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to exile them to a strange country that they might no longer return and see the

land of their birth (21:1-10; 22:10-12, 25-28). In their exile, they would be in a foreign country and under the power of others.

2. Burning the City of Jerusalem and All That Is around Her

Jehovah declared that He would punish the kings of Judah with their people by burning the city of Jerusalem and all that is around her, making it a ruin, a wilderness, that is not inhabited (21:11-14; 22:1-7).

3. Jehoiakim the Son of Josiah, King of Judah, to Be Buried with the Burial of a Donkey

In 22:18 and 19 we have a word concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and in verses 29 and 30, a word concerning Coniah (Jeconiah) the son of Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was to be buried with the burial of a donkey and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem. Coniah was to have no seed to sit on the throne of David to rule in Judah.

4. Jehovah Intending to Visit upon the Kings of Judah the Evil of Their Deeds

Jehovah pronounced woe to the kings of Judah as shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of Jehovah's pasture. He intended to visit upon them the evil of their deeds (23:1-2).

C. Jehovah's Promise of Restoration to Israel

In the midst of His word of condemnation and punishment, Jehovah gave a promise of restoration to Israel (23:3-8).

1. Jehovah Gathering the Remnant of His Flock out of the Lands Where He Has Driven Them

Jehovah said that He would gather the remnant of His flock out of all the lands where He has driven them and that He will bring them back to their pasture. Also, He said that they would be fruitful and would multiply (v. 3). Concerning this promise of restoration, verses 7 and 8 go on to say, "Therefore behold, days are coming, declares Jehovah, when

they will no longer say, As Jehovah lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, As Jehovah lives, who brought up and led back the seed of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where I had driven them, that they might dwell in their own land."

2. Jehovah Raising Up Shepherds over Them Who Will Feed Them

In verse 4 Jehovah said that He would raise up shepherds over them who will feed them, and they will no longer fear or be dismayed, nor will any be missing.

3. Jehovah Raising Up to David a Righteous Shoot (Christ), Who Will Reign as King and Act Prudently and Will Execute Judgment and Righteousness in the Holy Land

According to verse 5, Jehovah will raise up to David a righteous Shoot, that is, Christ, who will reign as King and act prudently and will execute judgment and righteousness in the holy land. This is a very crucial matter.

In the coming restoration Christ will come as the Shoot of David. This means that He will come as the descendant of David. However, in this verse Jeremiah does not use the word *descendant*. If he had used this word, verse 5 would have been indicating merely that Christ is a human being born as a descendant of David. There would not be any thought or notion concerning the divine life. However, the word *Shoot* indicates Christ's humanity, and it also implies life.

A shoot is a new, fresh sprout of a tree, especially a sprout of a tree that has been cut down. Suppose a tree has been cut down to the ground and only a stump remains. After a while a new sprout springs out of this stump. This sprout is a shoot. As the Shoot of David, Christ is a new sprout from the stump of David. The royal family of David was like a large tree, but because of the apostasy of Solomon and his descendants, that tree was cut down, mainly by Nebuchad-

nezzar, leaving only a stump in the earth. When Christ was born, a new, fresh sprout came out of this stump.

The birth of Christ as such a Shoot was wholly a matter of life, and His birth was rich in its implications regarding life. This life has grown and spread to such an extent that Christ is now the King to rule and to act prudently.

At the time of Christ's coming nearly two thousand years ago, the tree of the royal house of David was merely a stump in the ground. In bringing forth Christ as the Shoot of David, God brought together two descendants of David—Joseph, a descendant of Solomon, and Mary, a descendant of Nathan, another one of David's sons. Christ was conceived in Mary, not through Joseph as the father but through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20), to be something divine and holy (Luke 1:35).

In the days prior to the birth of Christ, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus for a census to be taken of all the inhabited earth, and all went to be registered, each to his own city (Luke 2:1, 3). Since Joseph was of the house and family of David, he went with Mary to Bethlehem, David's city. While they were there, Mary gave birth to Jesus and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Christ's birth at Bethlehem was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Micah 5:2. Because of Herod's persecution, Joseph took the child and His mother to Egypt (Matt. 2:14). Eventually, after the death of Herod, Joseph returned to Nazareth with the child and His mother (vv. 19-23). This was the beginning of the fulfillment of Jehovah's promise concerning the raising up of Christ as the Shoot, as the new sprout, of David.

4. In His Days Judah Being Saved, and Israel Dwelling Securely, and His Name Being Called, Jehovah Our Righteousness

"In His days Judah will be saved, / And Israel will dwell securely; / And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6). This verse reveals that the name of this Shoot is called "Jehovah our righteousness," indicating that Christ, as a descendant of David, is not merely

a man but is the very Jehovah who created the heavens and the earth, selected Abraham, set up the race of Israel, and was the Lord of David, the One whom he called Lord (Matt. 22:43).

At Jeremiah's time there was no righteousness among God's people. But Jeremiah prophesied that Christ would come as a Shoot who is Jehovah Himself to be the righteousness of God's chosen people (1 Cor. 1:30). Thus, while God was condemning, punishing, and chastising His people, He intended to be incarnated as a Shoot unto David so that He could be His people's righteousness. Based on Christ's coming as Jehovah to be their righteousness, the evil race of Israel can be restored.

In order to be His people's righteousness, Christ first had to die for them. He had to shed His blood to wash away their sins and accomplish redemption, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). Based on the redemption accomplished through the death of Christ on the cross, God can justify His people. God's people are justified by standing on the redemption of Christ and receiving Christ as God to be their righteousness. We have no righteousness in ourselves. "All our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment" (Isa. 64:6). Although in ourselves we do not have any righteousness, we have One who is God Himself as a man and who died on the cross to shed His blood to accomplish redemption for us. With this redemption as the basis, we can believe in Him to receive God's forgiveness, and God can justify us, make Christ our righteousness, and clothe us with the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10).

As the Shoot of David to be Jehovah our righteousness, Christ is the all-inclusive One. With Him we have divinity mingled with humanity. With Him we have the righteousness which is God Himself to be our righteousness, and we have redemption. With Him we have the life-giving Spirit and the riches of life, including the element of life, the law of life, and the sense of life. Actually, the life we have in Christ as the Shoot of David and as Jehovah our righteousness is the processed and consummated Triune God to be everything to us. The revelation concerning such a Christ is surely a

wonderful “fruit” found among the “dry leaves” and “dead branches” in the “orchard” of the book of Jeremiah!

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY

(AN ADDITIONAL MESSAGE)

EXPERIENCING AND ENJOYING CHRIST AS THE SON OF DAVID AND THE SON OF ABRAHAM

Scripture Reading: Jer. 23:5; Matt. 1:1; Rev. 22:16; Matt. 22:42-45; Rom. 1:3

In the New Testament there are a great many aspects of the experience and enjoyment of Christ. The more we study these aspects, the more we are brought into the excellency of the knowledge of Christ (Phil. 3:8). Through this excellency of the knowledge of Christ, we enter into the rich experience and enjoyment of Christ. In this message we will consider the experience and enjoyment of Christ as the son of David and the son of Abraham.

CHRIST AS THE SON OF DAVID

The New Testament opens with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). In this verse there are two titles of Christ: *son of David* and *son of Abraham*. It is surely significant that the very first verse of the New Testament mentions these two titles.

If we know the New Testament as a whole, we will realize that the entire New Testament is wrapped up with these titles. In Revelation 22:16 the Lord Jesus refers to Himself as "the Root and the Offspring of David." In His divinity, Christ is the "Root of David," his source; in His humanity, He is the "Offspring of David," his issue. Hence, Christ is the Lord of David as the Root, and He is also the seed, the

branch, of David as the Offspring (Matt. 22:42-45; Rom. 1:3; Jer. 23:5).

Some may think that Matthew 1:1 is simply a revelation telling us how Christ came into mankind through being the son of Abraham and the son of David. However, the titles *son of David* and *son of Abraham* are not simply for us to know the revelation concerning Christ's person. These titles are for us to experience Christ and enjoy Him.

The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the fact that Christ is the son of David (9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9). Solomon, the son of David, was a type of Christ in three main aspects. First, he was a type of Christ inheriting the kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12b, 13; Jer. 23:5; Luke 1:32-33). Second, Solomon had wisdom and spoke the word of wisdom. In Matthew 12:42 Christ, the greater Solomon, also had wisdom and spoke the word of wisdom. Third, Solomon built the temple of God (2 Sam. 7:13). As the son of David, Christ builds up God's temple, the church.

To Bring Us into the Kingdom of the Heavens

The title *son of David* signifies the kingdom. Christ, the son of David, is the King, the Ruler. As the son of David, Christ brings us into the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5:3).

For Us to Participate in the Divine Authority

Christ's being the son of David is also for us to participate in the divine authority. According to the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus has given us the authority to bind and to loose. "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens" (16:19). The Gospel of Matthew is concerned with the kingdom of the heavens, which is a matter of authority. The church revealed in this book represents the kingdom to reign. Hence, the authority to bind and to loose is given not only to Peter, the apostle for the church in 16:19, but also to the church itself (18:17-18).

Matthew 28:18-19 is another portion of the Word which reveals that we participate in the divine authority. "Jesus

came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Because all authority has been given to the Lord Jesus, the son of David as the heavenly King, He has sent His disciples to go and disciple all the nations. They go with His authority.

CHRIST AS THE SON OF ABRAHAM

Christ is also the son of Abraham. In the Old Testament there was a clear prophecy that Christ would be the son of Abraham.

Isaac, the son of Abraham, was a type of Christ in three main aspects. First, Isaac brought the blessing to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16, 14). Second, Isaac was offered to God unto death and was resurrected (Gen. 22:1-12; Heb. 11:17, 19). Third, Isaac received the bride (Gen. 24:67). This is a type of Christ as the promised One who brought the blessing to all nations, who was offered to God unto death, who was resurrected, and who will receive His bride (John 3:29; Rev. 19:7).

To Bring Us the Divine Blessing

As the son of Abraham, Christ brings us the divine blessing. Concerning this, Galatians 3:14 says, "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." The blessing here is the blessing promised by God to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). This promise has been fulfilled, and this blessing has come to the Gentiles, the nations, in Christ through His redemption by the cross.

For Us to Inherit God

Christ, the son of Abraham, brings us the divine blessing for us to inherit God. Galatians 3:29 says, "If you are of Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise." Abraham's seed is only one, Christ (Gal. 3:16). Hence, for us to be Abraham's seed we must be of Christ, that is, a part of Christ. Because we are one with Christ, we

are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise, inheriting God's promised blessing, which is the all-inclusive Spirit as the ultimate consummation of the processed Triune God to be our portion.

Acts 26:18 refers to the believers' divine inheritance. This inheritance is the Triune God Himself with all that He has, all that He has done, and all that He will do for His redeemed people. This Triune God is embodied in the all-inclusive Christ (Col. 2:9), who is the portion allotted to the saints as their inheritance (Col. 1:12).

Ephesians 1:13 and 14 reveal that the Spirit is "the pledge of our inheritance." Since God is our inheritance, the Holy Spirit is the pledge of this inheritance to us.

GOD'S COVENANTS WITH ABRAHAM AND DAVID

In the Old Testament God made a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:4-18; 17:1-2; 22:17-18) and also with David (2 Sam. 7:8-16). In order to understand how we may experience and enjoy Christ as the son of David and the son of Abraham, we need to consider these two covenants.

The Covenant with Abraham—the Covenant concerning the Blessing

The covenant God made with Abraham concerned God's coming to be the blessing to His chosen people. This covenant is related to God's purpose in creating man. God made mankind to be His vessels to contain Him. God made man in His own image and after His likeness so that man could contain God, taking God as his life and life supply. For man to take God as his life and life supply is the greatest blessing in the universe. This is the enjoyment of the Triune God. However, due to the fall, this great blessing was lost by man.

Although man fell, God could not give up His eternal purpose. Satan's doings cannot annul God's purpose. The created race had fallen, but God continued working to fulfill His purpose by coming to a chosen race. The created race, the race of Adam, was a failure, so God came to another race, the chosen race, the race of Abraham. Whereas Adam was

the head of the created race, Abraham was the head of the chosen race.

God made a covenant with Abraham, and this covenant concerns God's being the enjoyment and everything to His chosen people. Galatians 3:14 indicates that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham. In this fulfillment, the processed Triune God consummated as the all-inclusive Spirit is the blessing to God's chosen people. In the gospel, we have received the all-inclusive Spirit as God's consummation to be the life, life supply, and everything for our enjoyment. As a result of the covenant God made with Abraham, the processed Triune God as the consummated Spirit has become our enjoyment.

Galatians 3:29 tells us that because we are of Christ, we are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise. What will we inherit? We will inherit the processed Triune God consummated as the all-inclusive Spirit. If we realize this, we will understand why Christ had to be the son of Abraham. Christ had to be the son of Abraham to fulfill God's covenant with Abraham so that God, after being processed, could be our blessing. Now for us to enjoy Christ as the son of Abraham means that we enjoy the Triune God promised to Abraham. This is a matter of blessing.

The Covenant with David—the Covenant concerning the Kingdom

If we study the history in the Old Testament, we will see that after God made the covenant with Abraham, His people had failure after failure and defeat after defeat. The blessing could not come, because the earth was full of rebellion against God. Therefore, God came to a man after His heart (1 Sam. 13:14), David, the son of Jesse, and made a covenant with him. Whereas the covenant with Abraham concerned the blessing, the covenant with David concerned the kingdom. God must have a kingdom, a realm, a sphere, on earth with His chosen race to exercise His administration under His full, divine authority. Without such a kingdom, God does not have a realm in which to accomplish His purpose. In order to be the blessing to His chosen people, God needs a kingdom, a

realm, filled with His authority. Then in this administration He can come in to exercise whatever is on His heart to be the blessing promised to His chosen people.

THE WAY THE GOSPEL IS PRESENTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It would be helpful at this point to consider the way the gospel is presented to us in the New Testament. It is presented first with these words: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 4:17). This indicates that the gospel is presented first not in the way of life, as in John, but in the way of the kingdom, as in Matthew. The reason for this is that there is the need of a kingdom, a realm, a sphere, for God to exercise Himself to give us His all-inclusive being. Even in John, the gospel of life, we are told that if we are not regenerated, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). There is the need of a kingdom so that God can exercise Himself to dispense Himself into us as our life blessing. Therefore, in the gospel, we receive Jesus Christ first not as life but as the King.

In Matthew we have the King-Savior; in Mark, the Slave-Savior; in Luke, the Man-Savior; and in John, the God-Savior. If we do not repent and receive the Lord as the King-Savior, we cannot have Him as the Slave-Savior, the Man-Savior, and the God-Savior.

We need to repent not only because we are sinful but because we are rebellious. We are even enemies of God. We need to repent of our rebellion. We sin because we are rebellious. If we did not rebel, we could not sin. Because we are rebels, we need to repent to receive Christ as our authority, as our Sovereign and King, that He may rule in us and over us in God's kingdom. This is the reason that in Matthew 1:1 Christ is presented first not as the son of Abraham for the blessing but as the son of David for the kingdom.

Once there is the kingdom, the kingdom becomes the realm, the sphere, for God to exercise Himself to bless us. We all like to receive the blessing, but we may not realize that the blessing requires a sphere of God's authority, a sphere under God's administration. Without such a sphere,

there is no way for God to come in to bless us. If we are not under God's administration, receiving Him as our Sovereign, there is no way for Him to bless us. Therefore, in our experience as believers, our Savior, Jesus Christ, must first be the son of David for the kingdom and then the son of Abraham for the blessing.

RECEIVING CHRIST FIRST AS THE SON OF DAVID AND THEN AS THE SON OF ABRAHAM

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that we must receive Christ first as the son of David and then as the son of Abraham. To receive Christ as the son of David is to recognize His kingly status and to realize that we should be under His kingship and sovereignty. He comes to us not merely as the Savior but as the King-Savior. If He is not the King to us, He cannot be our Savior. If we are not under His authority, His administration, we cannot be saved. Salvation comes to us under His administration, under His kingship. If we say, "O Lord Jesus, I take You as my King," we will be saved to the uttermost.

If we have Christ as the son of David, the greater Solomon, we will also have Him as the son of Abraham, the real Isaac. This means that if we have the kingdom, we will also have the blessing. This is the blessing of life, the blessing of the processed Triune God consummated as the all-inclusive Spirit. Many of us can testify that by receiving Christ as our King we enjoy the processed Triune God as our blessing. The more we are under the Lord's ruling, the more we enjoy the Triune God as our blessing.

Matthew 28:19 speaks of the believers' being baptized into the Triune God—into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is the enjoyment of the Triune God. As the son of David and as the son of Abraham, Christ brings us into the Triune God. As long as we have the son of David and the son of Abraham, we have the Triune God, and we are in the Triune God. This is the divine blessing in the divine kingdom.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(12)

JEHOVAH'S CONDEMNATION OF AND PUNISHMENT UPON THE KINGS AND PROPHETS OF JUDAH

(2)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 21—23

In this message we will continue to consider Jehovah's condemnation of and punishment upon the kings and prophets of Judah.

II. JEHOVAH'S CONDEMNATION OF AND PUNISHMENT UPON THE PROPHETS OF JUDAH WITH THE PRIESTS AND WITH THE PEOPLE

In 23:9-40 we have a word regarding Jehovah's condemnation of and punishment upon the prophets of Judah with the priests and with the people.

A. Jehovah's Condemnation of the Prophets of Judah with the Priests and with the People

In these verses we first see Jehovah's condemnation of the prophets of Judah with the priests and with the people. This condemnation is of five aspects.

1. The Land Being Full of Them as Adulterers

In His condemnation, Jehovah said that the land was full of them as adulterers (v. 10a). So many among the people had become adulterers.

2. Both the Prophets and the Priests Being Profane

Both the prophets and the priests were profane. Even in Jehovah's house, the temple, their wickedness had been found by Him (v. 11). To be profane is to be worldly. Instead of being sanctified, separated unto God as a holy people, they were profane.

3. The Prophets of Samaria Prophesying by Baal, and the Prophets of Jerusalem Committing Adultery

The prophets of Samaria prophesied by Baal and led Jehovah's people Israel astray—an offensive thing (v. 13). In the prophets of Jerusalem Jehovah saw a horrible thing: the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood. They strengthened the hands of the evildoers so that none turned from their wickedness. All of them had become to Him like Sodom and her inhabitants like Gomorrah (v. 14). Their profaneness had gone forth from them in Jerusalem into all the land (v. 15b).

4. Prophesying to Lead the Kings with the People to Vanity, and Speaking a Vision of Their Own Heart, Not out of the Mouth of Jehovah

The prophets prophesied to lead the kings with the people to vanity (v. 16a). Here *vanity* means idols. They also spoke a vision of their own heart, not out of the mouth of Jehovah (v. 16b). They were continually saying to those who despised Jehovah, "Jehovah has spoken, You will have peace." To everyone who walked in the stubbornness of his own heart they were saying, "Evil will not come upon you" (v. 17). They told the people that there would be no calamities and that no bad things would happen to them. How evil were the prophets of Judah!

Jehovah did not send these prophets, but they ran forth. He did not speak to them, yet they prophesied (v. 21). If they had stood in Jehovah's council and had caused the people

to hear His words, they would have turned them from their evil way and from the wickedness of their deeds (v. 22).

5. Considering Jehovah as a God Who Is Near and Not Far Off, Not Filling the Heavens and the Earth, and Daring to Prophesy Falsely in His Name of the Deceit of Their Own Heart

"Am I a God who is near, declares Jehovah, / And not a God who is far off? / Can a man hide himself in secret places, / So that I will not see him? declares Jehovah. / Do I not fill the heavens and the earth? / Declares Jehovah" (vv. 23-24). This word indicates that the prophets of Judah considered Jehovah as a God who is near and not far off, not filling the heavens and the earth.

These prophets dared to prophesy falsely in Jehovah's name; they were "prophets of the deceit of their own heart" (v. 26). As they prophesied in this way, they said, "I have dreamed; I have dreamed," thinking to cause Jehovah's people to forget His name "with their dreams which they tell, each one to his neighbor, even as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal" (vv. 25, 27). They prophesied false dreams to lead Jehovah's people astray by their lies and by their boasting, not rendering any profit to His people. Concerning this, Jehovah said, "Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams, declares Jehovah, and who tell them and lead My people astray by their lies and by their recklessness, although I did not send them or command them; neither do they profit this people at all" (v. 32).

Verse 30 says, "Therefore behold, I am against the prophets, declares Jehovah, who steal My words, each one from his neighbor." When these prophets were stealing Jehovah's words, they were pretending to have received the words of Jehovah. Have you ever heard of such a stealing, a stealing not of gold or silver but of God's words? Nevertheless, such a thing happened at Jeremiah's time, and it still happens today.

Jeremiah was a genuine prophet who received words from God. Although there were other genuine prophets, most of

the prophets in Judah were false. These false prophets could not have a way to receive Jehovah's word, so they listened to those who spoke for God and then stole the words of Jehovah spoken by them.

The principle is the same today. Someone receives a revelation from God through the Word and then speaks this revelation. Others then take this word and speak it as if it were their own. They do not give any credit to the one who received the revelation; instead, they pretend that they themselves have received this revelation from God and that the words they are speaking are their own. To do this is to steal the word. I know of cases where certain people used my messages on Romans and on Revelation without giving me credit. What a shame for Christians to do such a thing! Concerning this, we should be honest and have a high ethical standard. If we use the words of someone else, we should give credit to that person.

In verse 28 Jehovah says, "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell the dream; and he with whom is My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the straw to the grain? declares Jehovah." The word of God which came forth from Jeremiah was grain, but the word of the false prophets was straw, chaff. For the word to be grain means that it is food for our nourishment and that it contains the divine essence to be dispensed into our being.

The new Christian books published today contain a great deal of chaff but very little grain. Among the Christian books published after 1945, it has been hard to find even one book that is rich in nourishing grain or a book filled with the divine revelation concerning God's plan. Regarding the divine revelation, many today are in darkness and have straw instead of grain.

In verses 28 and 29 Jehovah compared His word to grain, to fire, and to a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. On the positive side, the word of God, as a grain of wheat, dispenses God as life into us to nourish us. On the negative side, the word, as fire, burns us and many of the things in which we have confidence; and the word, as a hammer, breaks down our self, our natural life, our flesh, our lusts, and our

concepts. Our heart may be like rock, but the word of God can break us in pieces so that Christ can be ministered to us as life-giving grain.

B. Jehovah's Punishment upon the Prophets of Judah with the Priests and with the People

Jeremiah 23 also shows us Jehovah's punishment upon the prophets of Judah with the priests and with the people. This punishment also is of five aspects.

1. Jehovah Making Their Way like Slippery Paths to Them

Jehovah will make their way like slippery paths to them. In the darkness they will be driven and fall in it. He will bring evil on them in the year of their punishment (v. 12).

2. Jehovah Feeding Them with Wormwood

Jehovah will feed them with wormwood and will give them poisoned water to drink (v. 15a).

3. Jehovah's Wrath Going Forth like the Storm Wind, Even a Whirling Tempest Which Will Whirl Down on the Head of the Wicked Prophet

Jehovah's wrath will go forth like the storm wind, even a whirling tempest which will whirl down on the head of the wicked prophet. The anger of Jehovah will not turn back until it has executed and until it has accomplished the purposes of His heart (vv. 19-20).

4. Jehovah Being against the False Prophets

Jehovah will be against the false prophets, who have perverted the words of the living God. He will punish them and their household (vv. 30-38).

5. Jehovah Utterly Forgetting Them and Casting Away from His Presence Them and the City Which He Gave to Them and to Their Fathers

Jehovah will utterly forget them and cast away from His presence them and the city which He gave to them and to their fathers. He will bring upon them eternal reproach and eternal humiliation, which will not be forgotten (vv. 39-40).

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(13)

JUDAH'S CAPTIVITY AND JUDAH'S REACTION TO JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: Jer. 24—26

In this message we will consider Jeremiah 24—26, a section concerning Judah's captivity and Judah's reaction to Jeremiah.

I. JUDAH'S CAPTIVITY

Judah's captivity is described in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five.

A. Jeremiah's Vision of Two Baskets of Figs

In chapter twenty-four Jeremiah received a vision of two baskets of figs. The fig tree is the national symbol of Israel. In the sight of God, the people of Israel are a fig tree. The fig tree cursed by the Lord Jesus (Matt. 21:18-22) was full of leaves but was fruitless, signifying that at that time the nation of Israel was full of outward show but had nothing that could satisfy God. Hence, He cursed the fruitless fig tree.

1. Placed before the Temple of Jehovah

Jeremiah tells us that Jehovah showed him two baskets of figs placed before the temple of Jehovah (Jer. 24:1a). Both baskets of figs were presented to God in front of the temple.

2. After Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon Had Exiled the King, the Princes, the Craftsmen, and the Smiths to Babylon

Jeremiah saw this vision after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had exiled Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, the princes of Judah, the craftsmen, and the smiths to Babylon (v. 1b).

3. One Basket of Very Good Figs

"One basket had very good figs, like first ripe figs" (v. 2a). This basket of good figs signifies those Israelites whom the God of Israel had sent from the holy land to the land of the Chaldeans (vv. 2-7).

a. Jehovah Regarding Them for Good

"Thus says Jehovah, the God of Israel, Like these good figs, so I will regard those who are exiled of Judah, whom I have sent from this place to the land of the Chaldeans, for good" (v. 5). We might think that Jehovah would have no regard for the exiles; however, here we are told that He would regard them for good.

b. Jehovah Setting His Eyes upon Them for Good

According to verse 6, Jehovah said that He will set His eyes upon them for good, bring them back to the holy land, build them up and not tear them down, and plant them and not uproot them.

c. Jehovah Giving Them a Heart to Know Him

Jehovah also promised that He will give them a heart to know Him, that He is Jehovah. They will be His people, and He will be their God, for they will return to Him with their whole heart (v. 7).

4. The Other Basket of Very Bad Figs

"The other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten because of their rottenness" (v. 2b). This basket of figs signifies Zedekiah, the king of Judah, his princes, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remained in the holy land and

those who dwelt in the land of Egypt (vv. 8-10). Those who were living in Egypt were those who had escaped for security from the holy land to Egypt.

a. Jehovah Making Them like the Bad Figs

Concerning Zedekiah, his princes, the remnant in Jerusalem who remained in the holy land, and those dwelling in Egypt, Jehovah said that He would make them like the bad figs (v. 8).

b. Jehovah Making Them a Terror to All the Kingdoms of the Earth for Evil

Jehovah said that He would make them a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth for evil, to be a reproach, a proverb, a byword, and a curse in all the places where He would drive them (v. 9). Here *byword* indicates mocking, and *proverb* signifies a formal expression of derision. Because of God's judgment, they would be put in such a low condition that they would be mocked and derided by the nations.

c. Jehovah Sending Sword, Famine, and Pestilence upon Them

Finally, Jehovah promised that He would send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them until they were consumed from the land which He had given to them and to their fathers (v. 10).

B. Jeremiah's Prophecy concerning All the People of Judah

In chapter twenty-five we see Jeremiah's prophecy concerning all the people of Judah.

1. Beginning from the Thirteenth Year of Josiah the Son of Amon, King of Judah

Jeremiah's prophecy in this chapter began from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. Verses 1 through 3 say, "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that is, the first

year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon), which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even unto this day, these twenty-three years, the word of Jehovah came to me, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you have not listened." Nebuchadnezzar came into power as king in 607 B.C., and the next year he attacked Judah, seizing Jerusalem and capturing a number of the people. In his prophecy, Jeremiah told the people of the evils, the calamities, that were coming upon them, and he advised them to repent and return to God.

As we read the book of Jeremiah, we should keep in mind that this book was not written according to the historical sequence. Rather, Jeremiah, inspired by the Spirit, wrote a book that is a composition of history, prophecy, and autobiography. However, although this book does not follow a historical sequence, it often conveys a spiritual sequence.

2. Jehovah Sending from the North Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, to Attack Israel, and Israel Serving the King of Babylon Seventy Years

Jeremiah's prophecy concerning all the people of Judah includes three things. First, in verses 3 through 11 Jeremiah prophesied that because Israel did not listen to the prophets to turn from her evil way, Jehovah would send from the north Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to attack Israel and make her an astonishment, a hissing, and an eternal reproach. Jeremiah also prophesied that Israel would serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

3. Jehovah Punishing the King of Babylon and Making the Nation of Babylon an Eternal Desolation

Second, Jeremiah prophesied that after the seventy years Jehovah would punish the king of Babylon and make the nation of Babylon an eternal desolation (vv. 12-14).

4. Jehovah Punishing All the Nations of the Earth

Finally, here Jeremiah prophesied that Jehovah would also punish all the nations of the earth beginning from Israel, until all the inhabitants of the earth would be slain by Jehovah (vv. 15-38).

II. JUDAH'S REACTION TO JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 26 records the reaction of the people of Judah to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning their destiny.

A. Jeremiah's Prophecy

In the first seven verses of chapter twenty-six, we have Jeremiah's prophecy.

1. In the Beginning of the Reign of Jehoiakim

The word of this prophecy was given to Jeremiah in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (v. 1).

2. In the Court of the House of Jehovah

Jehovah charged Jeremiah to stand in the court of the house of Jehovah and speak to all the cities of Judah, who came to worship in the house of Jehovah (v. 2). When the people came to worship in the temple, Jeremiah was to take that as an opportunity to prophesy to them.

3. Advising the People of Judah to Listen to His Word and Turn from Their Evil Way

Jeremiah advised the people of Judah, including the priests and the prophets, to listen to his word and to turn from their evil way (vv. 3-7). Otherwise, Jehovah would make the temple like Shiloh (7:12-14; 1 Sam. 4:10-11) and the city of Jerusalem a curse to all the nations of the earth. If Israel did not listen, repent, and turn, their destiny would be like that of Shiloh, which was defeated and destroyed, and they would become a curse to the nations.

B. The Priests, the Prophets, and All the People Seizing Jeremiah

The priests, the prophets, and all the people seized Jeremiah, saying, "You will surely die!" (Jer. 26:8-11).

C. Jeremiah Speaking to All the Princes and All the People

Jeremiah answered and said that Jehovah had sent him to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words which they had heard. Then he told them to amend their ways and deeds and listen to the voice of Jehovah their God, and Jehovah would repent of the evil He had spoken against them (vv. 12-13). Regarding himself, Jeremiah went on to say, "But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and upon her inhabitants; for truly Jehovah has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears" (vv. 14-15). Jeremiah's attitude here was excellent.

D. The Princes and All the People Speaking to the Priests and to the Prophets

The princes and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets that Jeremiah was not worthy of a sentence of death, for he had spoken to them in the name of Jehovah their God (v. 16).

E. Some of the Elders Speaking to All the Assembly of the People about How Hezekiah and All the People of Judah Listened to the Word of Micah the Prophet

Some of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly of the people about how Hezekiah king of Judah and all the people of Judah listened to the word of Micah the prophet. Hezekiah feared Jehovah and entreated His favor, and Jehovah repented of the evil which He had spoken against them (vv. 17-19a). Then the elders said, "But we are

about to bring a great evil on ourselves" (v. 19b). The speaking of these elders was quite good.

F. Uriah Prophesying in the Name of Jehovah against Jerusalem and the Land Words like All Those of Jeremiah

In verses 20 through 23 we are told that another man by the name of Uriah prophesied in the name of Jehovah against Jerusalem and the land words like all those of Jeremiah. The words of Uriah confirmed and strengthened Jeremiah's prophecies. The king Jehoiakim sought to put Uriah to death, but he fled to Egypt. Then the king sent people to Egypt to bring him back to the king. The king slew him and threw his corpse into the graves of the common people. This exposes how evil King Jehoiakim was.

G. Jeremiah Being Preserved by Ahikam the Son of Shaphan

Under God's sovereignty, Jeremiah was preserved by Ahikam the son of Shaphan (2 Chron. 34:20) and was not given into the hands of the people to put him to death (Jer. 26:24).

Chapter twenty-six indicates that Jeremiah was the object of much discussion. Some wanted to put him to death, whereas others spoke against this. Eventually, even though the king wanted him to be put to death, Jeremiah was preserved.

Jeremiah was forced into such a dilemma that he even cursed the day of his birth (20:14). God was determined to judge and punish Israel, yet He still wanted Israel to listen to His word, repent, and return to Him. But Israel would not return. Instead, the king, the priests, the prophets, and the people became worse and worse. They persecuted Jeremiah and derided him, and it seemed to Jeremiah that there was no way for him to go on living.

Although Jeremiah was preserved, because of the different opinions, nothing was attained toward the accomplishment of God's goal. Whether the people were for Jeremiah or against him, the opinions had the same result—God's purpose

was frustrated. Both those who were for Jeremiah and those who were against him were kept away from God's dispensing. They were distracted from Him as the fountain of living waters (2:13). Distractions are the devil's devices to keep God's people from receiving the divine dispensing.

God's intention is to be everything to His chosen people that they may trust in Him and rely on Him for everything. If they do this, they will receive God's dispensing. But Satan knows and hates God's intention, so he frustrates God's people by the worship of idols. According to the teaching of the New Testament, behind every idol is a demon (1 Cor. 10:19-22). On the one hand, idols are vanity in the sight of God. On the other hand, behind the idols are demons, things that are devilishly real. Behind every opinion is also a demon. This was the situation with the opinions expressed about whether Jeremiah should live or die. According to the spiritual scene, the unseen view, in the book of Jeremiah, there were demons behind the idols and also behind the ideas.

God's goal in sending Jeremiah was to bring Israel back, not to the right opinion, teaching, or instruction, but back to God directly as the source, the fountain, of living waters that they might receive His dispensing. But all the different opinions kept God's people away from His dispensing.

My desire in these messages is that you would receive something according to the central line of the divine revelation concerning God's dispensing to fulfill His economy. My aim in this life-study is neither opinion nor teaching; my aim is to infuse you with God's economy by His dispensing. I hope that you will see God's economy in the book of Jeremiah.

We have often said that Christ is the centrality and universality in God's economy. However, this should not become a mere slogan to us. Rather, our heart must be touched by God's center, by the centrality and universality of Christ regarding God's economy. We need to be touched by this center so that in every book and every chapter of the Bible we would see Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(14)

JEREMIAH'S GENUINE PROPHECIES VERSUS THE OTHERS' FALSE PROPHECIES

Scripture Reading: Jer. 27—29

In this message we will cover chapters twenty-seven through twenty-nine. These chapters are on Jeremiah's genuine prophecies versus the others' false prophecies.

I. CONCERNING NEBUCHADNEZZAR AS BONDS AND YOKES ON ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS AROUND HER

Jeremiah 27:1-15 concerns Nebuchadnezzar as bonds and yokes on Israel and the nations around her.

A. Jeremiah's Genuine Prophecy

1. Jehovah Having Given Israel and All the Nations around Her to Nebuchadnezzar

Jeremiah prophesied that Jehovah had given Israel and all the nations around her into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. They should all be under his yoke (as demonstrated by the prophet Jeremiah with the bond and yoke put on him) and serve him and his son and his son's son until the time of revenge upon his own land comes (vv. 2-7, 11-12).

2. Any Nation or Kingdom Not Serving Nebuchadnezzar to Be Punished by Jehovah unto Death

Any nation or kingdom not serving Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and not putting its neck under his yoke would be punished by Jehovah unto death with sword, famine, and pestilence (v. 8). In verse 13 Jeremiah went on to say, "Why will you die, you and your people, by sword, by famine, and by pestilence, as Jehovah has spoken concerning the nation which will not serve the king of Babylon?"

B. The False Prophecy of Israel's Prophets, Diviners, Dreamers, Soothsayers, and Sorcerers

In this chapter we also have the false prophecy of Israel's prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, and sorcerers (vv. 9-10). The diviners, the soothsayers, and the sorcerers practiced witchcraft, contacting demons. They were demonic persons, not in the sense of being demon possessed but in the sense of having regular contact with demons. Instead of contacting God, they continually contacted an evil, demonic source. This was the way they lived.

1. Saying That Israel Will Not Serve the King of Babylon

The false prophecy given by these prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, and sorcerers was that Israel would not serve the king of Babylon (vv. 9, 14).

2. The Result of Their False Prophecy

They prophesied falsely with the result that Israel would be removed far from their land. Jehovah would drive them out, and they would perish (v. 10). "For I have not sent them, declares Jehovah; but they prophesy falsely in My name, with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you" (v. 15).

II. CONCERNING THE BRINGING BACK OF THE VESSELS OF THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH

Jeremiah 27:16-22 is concerned with the bringing back of the vessels of the house of Jehovah.

A. The Others' False Prophecy

Nebuchadnezzar had taken some of the vessels of the house of Jehovah and had brought them to Babylon and put them in the house of his god (Dan. 1:1-2). In their false prophecy, the false prophets told Israel that in a short time these vessels would be brought back from Babylon (Jer. 27:16).

B. Jeremiah's Genuine Prophecy

In verses 17 through 22 we have Jeremiah's genuine prophecy concerning the bringing back of the vessels of the house of Jehovah.

1. Telling the People to Serve the King of Babylon and Live

In his genuine prophecy, Jeremiah told the people to serve the king of Babylon and live, and the city of Jerusalem would not become a desolation (v. 17).

2. The Vessels Left in the House of Jehovah Being Carried to Babylon and Remaining There until the Day When Jehovah Visits Israel

The vessels which were left in the house of Jehovah, in the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem would be carried to Babylon and remain there until the day when Jehovah visited Israel. Then Jehovah would bring the vessels up and restore them to the holy land (vv. 18-22).

Concerning the vessels of the house of Jehovah, there were two different kinds of prophecies. These different prophecies confused the people, and it was hard for them to discern which were genuine and which were false.

III. CONCERNING THE BREAKING OF THE YOKE OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR, THE KING OF BABYLON, AND THE BRINGING BACK OF THE VESSELS OF THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH AND ALL THE EXILES FROM JUDAH TO BABYLON

The prophecies in chapter twenty-eight concern the breaking of the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and the bringing back of the vessels of the house of Jehovah and all the exiles from Judah to Babylon.

A. The False Prophecy of Hananiah, the Son of Azzur

Verses 1 through 11 deal with the false prophecy of Hananiah, the son of Azzur.

1. Saying That Jehovah Would Break the Yoke of the King of Babylon from All the Nations within Two Years

Hananiah, the son of Azzur, prophesied falsely that within two years Jehovah would break the yoke of the king of Babylon from all the nations, as demonstrated by Hananiah's taking the yoke from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and breaking it (vv. 2, 10-11). This false prophecy involved not only speaking but also a demonstration. Jeremiah had put on a yoke to indicate that the people of Israel would be put under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. In demonstrating his false prophecy, Hananiah took the yoke from Jeremiah and broke it.

2. Saying That within Two Years Jehovah Would Bring Back All the Vessels of the House of Jehovah and All the Exiles Who Went to Babylon

In his false prophecy, Hananiah also said that within two years Jehovah would bring back to the holy land all the vessels of the house of Jehovah and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon (vv. 3-4).

B. Jeremiah's Genuine Prophecy

Jeremiah's genuine prophecy is in verses 12 through 17.

1. Telling Hananiah That He Had Broken Wooden Yoke Bars but Had Made in Their Place Iron Yoke Bars

After Hananiah had broken the yoke bar from the neck of Jeremiah, the word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah, telling him to go and speak to Hananiah (v. 12). Jeremiah was to say to him, "Thus says Jehovah, You have broken the wooden yoke bars, but you have made in their place iron yoke bars" (v. 13).

2. Jehovah Having Put an Iron Yoke upon the Neck of All These Nations

Jeremiah went on to say that Jehovah, the God of Israel, had put an iron yoke upon the neck of all these nations that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and they would serve him (v. 14).

3. Saying to Hananiah That Jehovah Had Not Sent Him and That He Made This People Trust in Falsehood

Finally, Jeremiah said to Hananiah that Jehovah had not sent him and that he had made this people trust in falsehood (v. 15). He also told him that he would die that very year because he had spoken rebellion against Jehovah. This prophecy was soon fulfilled, for the prophet Hananiah did die in that very year in the seventh month (vv. 16-17). This should have helped all the people to discern who was genuine and who was false.

IV. CONCERNING THE DESTINY OF THE CAPTIVES IN BABYLON AND OF THOSE WHO REMAINED IN JUDAH

Chapter twenty-nine is concerned with the destiny of the captives in Babylon and of those who remained in Judah. The children of Israel had been divided into two groups: one group in exile, in Babylon, and one group remaining in Judah.

A. Jeremiah's Genuine Prophecy concerning the Captives in Babylon

Let us first consider Jeremiah's genuine prophecy concerning the destiny of the captives in Babylon (vv. 1-7, 10-14).

1. Sending a Letter

The prophet Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, to the priests, to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon (vv. 1-2).

2. Telling the Exiles to Build Houses for Their Dwelling

In his letter Jeremiah indicated to the exiles that they should expect not to return shortly but to stay in Babylon a long time. Thus, he told them to build houses for their dwelling, to plant gardens for producing food, to have marriages that they may multiply, and to pray for the peace of the city where they dwell that they may have peace (vv. 4-7).

3. Jehovah Visiting Them and Bringing Them Back to the Holy Land

Jeremiah prophesied that when the seventy years of exile were fulfilled, Jehovah would visit them and bring them back to the holy land. His thoughts about them were thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give them a latter end and a hope (vv. 10-14).

B. The False Prophecies of the Prophets, Diviners, and Dreamers among the Exiles

The false prophecies of the prophets, diviners, and dreamers among the exiles deceived them and said that Jehovah had raised up for them prophets in Babylon (vv. 8-9, 15).

C. Jeremiah's Genuine Prophecy concerning Those Who Did Not Go into Exile

In verses 16 through 18 Jeremiah prophesied concerning the king who sat on the throne of David and concerning all the people who dwelt in Jerusalem and who did not go into

exile. He told them that Jehovah was sending upon them sword, famine, and pestilence, with which He would pursue them. He would make them like vile figs, which cannot be eaten because of rottenness. He would also make them a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth to be a curse, an astonishment, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where He had driven them.

D. The False Prophecy of Ahab, the Son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, the Son of Maaseiah

In verses 21 through 23 we have a word about the false prophecy of Ahab, the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, the son of Maaseiah.

1. In the Name of Jehovah

Ahab and Zedekiah prophesied falsehood in the name of Jehovah (vv. 21a, 23b).

2. Jehovah Delivering Them into the Hand of Nebuchadnezzar

The result of their false prophecy was that Jehovah would deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he would strike them by roasting them in the fire (vv. 21b-22).

3. Their Folly in Israel

Ahab and Zedekiah committed folly in Israel and committed adultery with their neighbors' wives (v. 23a).

E. The False Prophecy of Shemaiah the Nehelamite

Verses 24 through 29 speak of the false prophecy of Shemaiah the Nehelamite.

1. Sending Letters

Shemaiah had sent letters in his own name to all the people who were in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah, the son of Maaseiah, the priest, and to all the priests (v. 25).

2. Saying That Jehovah Had Made Zephaniah a Priest instead of Jehoiada the Priest

Shemaiah said that Jehovah had made Zephaniah a priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, that there should be officers in the house of Jehovah over every madman who prophesies so that he might put that man in stocks and in the iron collar (v. 26). Then Shemaiah asked, "Now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth, who prophesies to you? For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, It will be long; build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their produce" (vv. 27-28). Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet (v. 29).

F. Jeremiah's Genuine Prophecy concerning Shemaiah

Verses 30 through 32 record Jeremiah's genuine prophecy concerning Shemaiah.

1. Jehovah Charging Jeremiah to Write to All the Captives in Babylon

Jehovah charged Jeremiah to write to all the captives in Babylon, saying that Shemaiah the Nehelamite had prophesied falsely and had made the exiles trust in falsehood (vv. 30-31).

2. Jehovah Punishing Shemaiah and His Seed

According to verse 32, Jeremiah prophesied that the result of Shemaiah's false prophecy would be that Jehovah would punish him and his seed so that he would not have anyone living among the exiles and would not see the good that Jehovah was about to do to His people. Shemaiah would be punished by Jehovah in this way because he had spoken rebellion against Jehovah.

In these three chapters we see that false prophets were speaking false prophecies. Jeremiah stood against them to prophesy the genuine word from God. Between Jeremiah's genuine prophecies and the others' false prophecies there was a constant struggle.

We may apply the situation described in these chapters to the situation in Christianity today. At Jeremiah's time there were only two groups, but today in Christianity there are many groups: Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Protestant denominations, the Brethren assemblies, the Pentecostal and charismatic groups, and the independent groups. Because of this shameful situation, it is difficult to help new believers to have a proper realization of the church.

The real church is the Body of Christ as an organism of the living Triune God. According to the Bible we have been born of God by receiving the divine life to become parts of Christ. All these parts of Christ are members of His universal Body, the church, the divine organism of the Triune God to express Him, the living One. Such a church is unique and does not have a name. Christ as a living person can have only one Body, and this one Body is something of life, not organization. The church is not something organized; it is an organism produced by Christ's life. In this organism every member must function. Every member of the Body of Christ must function in life as a minister, an evangelist, a shepherd, and a teacher for the building up of the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(15)

JEHOVAH'S PROMISE CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

(1)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 30—31

Jeremiah 30—33 is a portion concerned with Jehovah's promise concerning the restoration of Israel. In this message we will begin to consider the various aspects of this promised restoration revealed in chapters thirty and thirty-one.

I. JEHOVAH APPEARING TO ISRAEL FROM AFAR

Jehovah appeared to Israel from afar (from the wilderness where they followed Him—2:2b). Jehovah said that He loved Israel with an eternal love (the bridal love—2:2a); therefore, He has drawn them with lovingkindness (31:3). Jehovah went on to say, "I will build you again, and you will be built, / O virgin of Israel. / Again you will adorn yourself with your tambourines / And will go forth in the dance of those who make merry. / Again you will plant vineyards / On the mountains of Samaria; / The planters will plant / And will partake of the fruit" (vv. 4-5).

II. JEHOVAH TURNING THE CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

Jehovah will turn the captivity of Israel and Judah and

will bring them back to the land which He gave to their fathers, and they will possess it (30:3).

A. Jehovah Telling Jacob Not to Fear and Israel Not to Be Dismayed

In verse 10a Jehovah declared that Jacob, His servant, should not fear and that Israel should not be dismayed. He would save them from afar, and their seed from the land of their captivity. Then He promised, "Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease, / And none will frighten him. / For I am with you, declares Jehovah, to save you; / For I will make a full end of all the nations to which I have scattered you; / But I will not make a full end of you" (vv. 10b-11a).

B. From the Land of the North and from the Uttermost Parts of the Earth

Jehovah promised to bring them from the land of the north and to gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth (31:8a).

C. A Great Assembly Returning to the Land of Israel

A great assembly will return to the land of Israel. This assembly will include the blind, the lame, the pregnant woman, and the travailing woman (v. 8b).

D. They Coming with Weeping and Jehovah Leading Them with Supplications

They will come with weeping, and with supplications Jehovah will lead them. He will cause them to walk by the water brooks in a straight way, in which they will not stumble; for He is a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is His firstborn (v. 9).

E. Jehovah Redeeming Israel from the Hand of One Stronger than Them

According to verses 11 through 14, Jehovah will redeem Israel from the hand of one stronger than them. They will come and sing in the height of Zion, and they will flow forth

to the goodness of Jehovah—to the grain, to the new wine, to the fresh oil, and to the young of the flock and of the herd. Their soul will be like a watered garden, and they will not languish any more. Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old men together, and Jehovah will turn their mourning to gladness, comfort them, and cause them to rejoice after their sorrow. He will fill the soul of the priest with abundance, and His people will be satisfied with His goodness.

F. He Who Scattered Israel Gathering Them and Keeping Them

He who scattered Israel will gather them and keep them, as a shepherd his flock (v. 10).

G. There Being Hope for Israel's Latter End

There will be hope for Israel's latter end, that their children will return to their own border (v. 17).

H. Jehovah Creating a New Thing in the Earth

"Set up road markers for yourself; / Make signposts for yourself; / Pay attention to the highway, / The way you went; / Return, O virgin of Israel; / Return to these cities of yours. / How long will you wander here and there, / O apostate daughter? / For Jehovah has created a new thing in the earth: / A female will encompass a mighty man" (vv. 21-22). When the children of Israel are brought back, something new will happen. A female, a weaker one, will encompass, will help, a mighty man.

III. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL TAKING PLACE AFTER JEHOVAH'S CHASTISEMENT OF ISRAEL WITH JUSTICE

The restoration of Israel will take place after Jehovah's chastisement (punishment) of Israel with justice (30:11b).

A. Jehovah Not Leaving Him Unpunished

Jehovah will not leave him unpunished. His hurt is incurable, and there are no healing medicines for him

(vv. 12-13). Jehovah has struck him with the striking of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, because of the greatness of his iniquity (vv. 14-15). All those who consume him will be consumed, and every one of them will go into captivity. Jehovah will bring him recovery and will heal him of his wounds (vv. 16-17).

B. Ephraim Lamenting

Jehovah says that He has heard Ephraim lamenting. As Ephraim lamented, he said, "You have chastised me, and I was chastised, / Like an untrained calf; / Bring me back that I may be restored, / For You are Jehovah my God. / For after I turned back, I repented; / And after I was instructed, / I struck myself on the thigh. / I was ashamed and even confounded, / For I bear the reproach of my youth" (31:18-19).

C. Jehovah Having Mercy on Ephraim

Jehovah asked, "Is Ephraim a precious son to Me? / Or a child of My good pleasure?" (v. 20a). Then He went on to say that as often as He has spoken against him, He will surely remember him more. He will surely have mercy on him (v. 20b).

IV. JEHOVAH TURNING THE CAPTIVITY OF THE TENTS OF JACOB AND HAVING COMPASSION ON HIS DWELLING PLACES

Jehovah will turn the captivity of the tents of Jacob and will have compassion on his dwelling places (30:18a).

A. The City Being Rebuilt on Its Mound, and the Palace Being Inhabited after Its Own Manner

The city will be rebuilt on its mound, and the palace will be inhabited after its own manner. Out from them will come thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry (vv. 18b-19a).

B. The City of Jerusalem Being Built unto Jehovah

In 31:38-40 Jehovah declares that days are coming when the city of Jerusalem will be built unto Jehovah.

C. The Word That Will Be Said When Jehovah Turns Again Israel's Captivity

When Jehovah will turn again Israel's captivity, they will say in the land of Judah and in its cities, "Jehovah bless you, O habitation of righteousness, / O mountain of holiness" (v. 23). Here *habitation of righteousness* refers to Jerusalem, and *mountain of holiness,* to Mount Zion. Judah and all its cities will dwell together in it, the farmers and they who wander with the flocks (v. 24).

D. Jehovah Satisfying the Weary Soul and Filling Every Languishing Soul

Jehovah will satisfy the weary soul and fill every languishing soul (v. 25).

E. Jehovah Sowing the House of Israel with the Seed of Man and with the Seed of Beast

Jehovah will sow the house of Israel with the seed of man and with the seed of beast (v. 27). This indicates that the living of everything will be rich in life. Jehovah also said that as He has watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring evil, He will watch over them to build and to plant (v. 28).

V. JEHOVAH MULTIPLYING ISRAEL

Jehovah will multiply Israel, so that they will not be few. He will cause them to be honored, so that they will not be small (30:19b).

A. Their Children Being as They Were of Old

According to verses 20 and 21, their children will be as they were of old, and their assembly will be established before Jehovah. Their leader will be one of them, and their ruler will come out of their midst. Jehovah will bring him near, and he will approach Him.

Here Jehovah speaks of one leader, not of many leaders. If there were more than one leader, there would be different

opinions, and these opinions would cause divisions. According to God's ordained way, there will be one leader. Thus, there will be no more opinion and no more division.

B. The Seed of Israel Not Ceasing from Being a Nation before Jehovah Forever

Jeremiah 31:35 speaks of Jehovah as the One who gives the sun for light by day and the order of the moon and the stars for light by night and who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar. In the next verse Jehovah says, "If this order departs / From before Me, declares Jehovah, / Then the seed of Israel will also cease / From being a nation before Me forever." However, the seed of Israel will not cease from being a nation before Jehovah forever, just as the ordinances of the sun, the moon and the stars, and the roaring of the waves of the sea will never depart. We have a similar word in 33:25 and 26. "Thus says Jehovah, If My covenant with respect to day and night does not stand, if I have not established the statutes of heaven and earth, then I will also reject the seed of Jacob and David My servant and will not take rulers from his seed to be over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for I will turn their captivity and will have compassion on them." Both portions use the same illustration to indicate that from the time of restoration, that is, the coming millennium, Israel will exist forever. They will not cease from being a nation.

C. Jehovah Not Casting Off All the Seed of Israel for All They Have Done

Jeremiah 31:37 is a word of assurance that Jehovah will not cast off all the seed of Israel for all they have done. "Thus says Jehovah, / If the heavens above can be measured, / And the foundations of the earth below can be examined carefully, / Then I will also cast off all the seed of Israel / For all they have done." This verse indicates that their descendants will never be cut off.

VI. THERE BEING A GREAT DAY, A TIME OF DISTRESS, FOR ISRAEL

Jeremiah 30:5-8 reveals that there will be a great day, a time of distress, for Israel.

A. The Time of the Great Tribulation for Three and a Half Years

Verse 7a says, "Alas! For that day is great, / And there is none like it; / And it is a time of distress for Jacob." This great day, this time of distress, is the time of the great tribulation for three and a half years (Matt. 24:21; Dan. 12:7b; Rev. 13:5, 7a). Jeremiah 30 refers to the great tribulation during the last three and a half years of this age.

B. Israel Being Saved out of It

Jeremiah 30:7b tells us that Israel will be saved out of this great tribulation (Dan. 12:1).

C. Jehovah Breaking Israel's Yoke from upon Her Neck and Tearing Off Her Bonds

In Jeremiah 30:8 Jehovah promised that, in that day, He will break the yoke from upon Israel's neck and tear off her bonds. The strangers will no longer make her serve them.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(16)

JEHOVAH'S PROMISE CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

(2)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 30—31

In this message we will continue to consider Jehovah's promise concerning the restoration of Israel. We will focus our attention on the crucial matter of the new covenant.

VII. JEHOVAH, AS THEIR HUSBAND, MAKING A NEW COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

Jeremiah 31:31-34 reveals that Jehovah, as their Husband, will make a new covenant with Israel. "Behold, days are coming, declares Jehovah, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, declares Jehovah" (vv. 31-32). This new covenant was enacted by the Lord Jesus when He was about to die on the cross for the accomplishment of redemption. As He was instituting His supper, He said, "This cup is the new covenant established in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). No doubt, the new covenant here is the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31. This new covenant is

emphasized by Paul in Hebrews 8, where he quotes Jeremiah 31 in a very particular way.

In the entire Bible God made eight covenants with man, seven in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. The first was God's covenant with the created man (Gen. 2:8-9, 15-17), and the second was His covenant with fallen man (3:8-21). After the flood, God made a covenant with Noah (9:1-17). Later, God made a covenant with Abraham (12:2-3, 7-8; 15:4-18; 17:1-2; 22:17-18), and this covenant was repeated with Isaac (26:3-5) and with Jacob (28:13-15). The fifth covenant was made with the children of Israel at Mount Sinai (Exo. 20—23); the sixth was made with those who were to inherit the land (Deut. 28—29); and the seventh was made with David (2 Sam. 7:8-16). The eighth covenant is the new covenant.

In the Bible, however, only two of these covenants are designated by numbers. The covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai is called the first covenant (Heb. 8:7, 13; 9:1), and the new covenant is called the second covenant (Heb. 8:7). After the new covenant, God will not make any other covenants, for the new covenant is the consummation of God's covenanting with His people.

The first covenant is called the covenant of law, and the second covenant is altogether wrapped up with God's divinity. The law is a portrait, a picture, of God, depicting Him. But the law is not God Himself. The Ten Commandments give us a full portrait of what God is, but they do not give us the person of God. In contrast, the content of the new covenant is God Himself.

A. Jehovah Putting His Law within Them and Writing It upon Their Hearts

The first item of the new covenant is found in Jeremiah 31:33a. "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah: I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts." What kind of law can be put into people and be written upon their hearts? Such a law must be a law of life, and this law itself must be a life. Otherwise, it could not be put into us.

Furthermore, this law will be written upon our hearts, indicating that it will spread from the center of our being, our spirit, to the circumference, our heart. Thus, this law must be God's life, the divine life, and God's life is God Himself. In the new covenant God will put Himself into His chosen people as their life, and this life is a law.

Every life is a law. For example, the dog life is the dog law, and the bird life is the bird law. Likewise, the life of the peach tree is the law of the peach tree. The principle is the same with human beings. As human beings we have a human life, and this human life is a law that regulates us in every way. In particular, the law of the human life regulates the growth and development of a human being and causes all the parts of one's body to be in the right place and to function in the right way.

God's life is the highest life, and the law of this life is the highest law. The New Testament calls this life eternal life, a life that is divine, uncreated, and indestructible. This eternal life is embodied in Christ (1 John 5:11), and it is actually Christ Himself (John 14:6). The law of this life is wrapped up with the life-giving Spirit, who in Romans 8:2 is called "the Spirit of life." Hence, God, Christ, and the Spirit are this life, and through our regeneration this life is now within us to function as a law to us. This law is righteous and holy, and it is a law of love and of light. Because the eternal life within us is a law, it controls, governs, regulates, and restricts us in everything. What a marvelous law we have within us!

The law of life within us is for God's economy. Without giving us His life as the inner law, God has no way to accomplish His economy. God's economy is to dispense Himself into our being that our being may be constituted with His being to be one constitution with His being. This can be accomplished only by God putting Himself into us as the divine life.

Today hardly any Christians pay attention to the divine life as the inner law. Where can you hear a word about this in the Catholic Church, in the Orthodox Church, or in the Protestant denominations? Even the Brethren speak of this only in a very limited way. In Pentecostalism there is much interest in outward things but not in the inner law of life.

In the Lord's recovery, however, we place great emphasis on eternal life and on the inner law as the function of this life.

The divine life has a function, and with this function there is a capacity, an ability. We can be holy because we have the capacity of holiness. We can be righteous because we have the capacity of righteousness. We can love others, even our enemies, because the divine life within us has the capacity to love.

The teachings in the New Testament are just to develop this capacity, to encourage this capacity to grow. Likewise, all the messages given by this ministry are to strengthen and develop the divine life in its capacity for its function. The goal of this function is for God to dispense Himself into us to accomplish His economy, that is, to produce the increase of God for His expression, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.

B. Jehovah Being Their God, and They Being His People

In Jeremiah 31:33b we see the second item of the new covenant. "I will be their God, and they will be My people." From the time we were saved, we have had the desire that God would be our God. For God to be our God implies a great deal. This means that He will be known by us, understood by us, apprehended by us, and lived by us. It also means that we will be constituted with Him to be utterly one with Him.

C. They No Longer Teaching Each Man His Neighbor and Each Man His Brother, for All of Them Will Know Him

"They will no longer teach, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for all of them will know Me, from the little one among them even to the great one among them, declares Jehovah" (v. 34a). This word indicates that we will know God to such an extent that we will not need anyone to teach us.

When I was a young Christian, I had a problem with this verse. I did not understand how we could do without teaching.

Eventually I began to see that this word about knowing God and not needing others to teach us is related to the spontaneous, automatic function of the divine life within us. As an illustration, let us suppose that a child is given two different things to taste, something bitter and something sweet. The child will automatically reject what is bitter and receive and enjoy what is sweet. This reaction is a matter not of teaching but of taste. By the sense of taste, which is an aspect of the function of human life, the child knows to reject what is bitter and to receive what is sweet. The proper teaching the child receives regarding the sense of taste will serve to develop, but not to replace, the life capacity within the child.

The principle is the same with knowing God through the function of the divine life, the eternal life, within us. Eternal life has a special function, and this function is to know God (John 17:3). To know God, the divine person, we need the divine life with its function. Eventually, there will be no need for outward teachings, for we will know God by the function of the divine life.

No religion on earth can replace the new covenant or even compare with it. Confucius and Socrates were good, but they could not put themselves into their followers as life. Only Jesus Christ as the embodiment of God can do this. Throughout the centuries He has put His life into millions of persons. As believers, we all have received His eternal life. This is indicated strongly in John 3:16. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." By believing into Christ we have received eternal life, the divine life. This divine life is the centrality and universality of our Christian life. This life is nothing less than Christ Himself, and Christ is the very God. Since we have God within us as life, we can know Him, apprehend Him, live Him, and be constituted with Him. Furthermore, by dispensing Himself into us as life, God is accomplishing His economy, that He may have a corporate expression of Himself for eternity.

Today we know Christ as our life (Col. 3:4). He is the divine life, the eternal life, the uncreated life, the life that is all-inclusive. Because we know the divine life, we can

experience the divine dispensing—God's dispensing Himself into us that we may become His increase, His enlargement, for His expression. This is God's intention, God's goal, God's purpose, God's economy with His dear dispensing.

The Triune God has been processed and consummated in order to dispense Himself into our being. Now, through this dispensing, we have the capacity to know God and to be His people.

D. Jehovah Forgiving Their Iniquity and Remembering Their Sin No More

In Jeremiah 31:34b we have yet another aspect of the new covenant. Here Jehovah says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Our sin and iniquity are great problems, but they have been dealt with. Before Jeremiah spoke of the new covenant, he spoke concerning Christ as the righteous Shoot of David, as the One whose name will be called Jehovah our righteousness (23:5-6). This One has accomplished redemption; He has taken away our sin. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). He has solved the problem of sin, and now He is our redemption and our justification. In Him we have been justified by God, and God has forgiven our iniquity and our sin. Because we have been justified, there is no obstacle or frustration to keep us from having fellowship with God and to prevent Him from dispensing Himself into us. Because we have been redeemed, justified, forgiven, and cleansed, we are free to contact God, and He is free to work Himself into us.

God has forgiven our sin, and He does not remember it. As a result, there can now be communication, fellowship, between us and God. Day by day we may converse with Him, enjoying Him and receiving His dispensing.

VIII. ISRAEL SERVING JEHOVAH THEIR GOD AND DAVID THEIR KING

A further promise of Jehovah concerning the restoration of Israel is in Jeremiah 30:9. Here we are told that Israel will serve Jehovah their God and David their King, whom Jehovah will raise up for them in the time of the millennium.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE INNER LAW—
THE CENTER OF THE NEW COVENANT

Scripture Reading: Jer. 31:31-34

In this message I would like to give a brief further word on the new covenant, focusing on the inner law as the center, the centrality, of the new covenant.

NOT TO BE ANNULLED

According to the principle of the Bible, a covenant should never be annulled. This is especially true of a covenant enacted by God. Like the sun, the moon, and the stars, the new covenant will remain forever (31:35-37; 32:40; 33:20-26).

THE INNER LAW OF LIFE BEING THE CENTER OF THE NEW COVENANT

The center, the centrality, of the new covenant is the inner law of life. Jeremiah 31:33a says, "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah: I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts." This law is not an outward law but an inward law. In its essence, this law refers to the divine life, and the divine life is nothing less than the life-giving Spirit, the all-inclusive Christ, and the processed and consummated God. These three are one. The life-giving Spirit is the reality and realization of the all-inclusive Christ, and the all-inclusive Christ is the embodiment of the consummated God. Thus, this inner law, remaining in our being all the time, reminds us that the very processed and consummated Triune God—the Spirit, the Son, and the Father—is with us all the time. We may say that the law is with us. But this law is the divine life, and the divine life is the processed and consummated

Triune God—the marvelous source as the Father, the wonderful element as the Son, and the excellent essence as the Spirit. This is the center, the content, and the reality of the new covenant.

THE FUNCTION OF THE INNER LAW OF LIFE

The Divine Capacity

As we consider the essence of the inner law of life, we see that this law has another aspect, that is, its function. This law functions. The function of the inner law refers to the divine capacity. In this law there is the divine capacity, and the divine capacity is almighty. This divine capacity can do everything in us for the fulfillment of God's purpose. There is not a positive thing concerning the carrying out of God's economy that this divine capacity is unable to do. According to its life, the law of the new covenant is the Triune God, and according to its function, it is the divine capacity.

Causing the Believers to Be Constituted with God That They May Become His Increase for His Expression

The divine capacity of the inner law of life can live God. This capacity can also cause the believers in Christ to be constituted with God. Because the believers are constituted with God, they as a corporate people are God's expression. Although the believers are constituted with God, there is still a distinction between them and God. God remains God with the Godhead, and we, the believers, are made the same as God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. This means that except for the Godhead, we are exactly the same as God. Since we are the same as God in life and in nature, we become His increase, His enlargement, as His fullness to express Him. This is the highest aspect of the capacity of the inner law of life.

Constituting Us to Be the Body of Christ

Another aspect of this capacity is related to the Body of

Christ. In addition to causing us to be constituted with God, the capacity of the inner law constitutes us to be the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 5:30). This means that the divine life has the capacity to make us the Body of Christ. Furthermore, this capacity has all the abilities of all the functions of the Body. I hope that we all will be deeply impressed with the centrality and function of the inner law of life.

THE CENTRAL LINE OF THE DIVINE REVELATION UNVEILING GOD'S ECONOMY WITH HIS DISPENSING

The central line of the divine revelation is to unveil God's economy with His dispensing. God's dispensing is simply to put Himself into us as the inner law of life. On the one hand, we have the divine life, which is the Triune God. On the other hand, we have the divine capacity. By this capacity we have the ability not only to know God but also to live God and even to be constituted with God. What a capacity! Furthermore, this capacity can constitute us to be the members of the Body of Christ, including all kinds of functions: those of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—the joints of the rich supply—and those of every part of the Body that functions in its measure (Eph. 4:11, 16). In essence the inner law of life is God in Christ as the Spirit, and in function this law has the capacity to constitute us with God and to constitute us the members of the Body of Christ with all kinds of functions, all kinds of abilities. I am happy, and even excited, to see this law operating in the saints in the Lord's recovery. Hallelujah for this wonderful law of life!

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(17)

JEHOVAH'S PROMISE CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

(3)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 32—33

In this message we will consider chapters thirty-two and thirty-three. These chapters are a continuation of Jehovah's promise concerning the restoration of Israel.

I. ZEDEKIAH, THE KING OF JUDAH, IMPRISONING JEREMIAH AND CONDEMNING HIS PROPHECY

In 32:1-5 Zedekiah, the king of Judah, imprisoned Jeremiah and condemned his prophecy concerning the capturing of the city of Jerusalem and Zedekiah. Later, Zedekiah was caught while trying to escape. Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons in his presence and then put out his eyes and took him to Babylon, where he died. With Zedekiah, a pitiful king, the kingship of the royal family was terminated.

II. JEREMIAH BUYING THE FIELD OF HIS COUSIN HANAMEL IN ANATHOTH ACCORDING TO JEHOVAH'S WORD

In verses 6 through 15 Jeremiah bought the field of his cousin Hanamel in Anathoth according to Jehovah's word, signifying that houses, fields, and vineyards would again be

bought in the holy land. This indicates that although Jerusalem and Zedekiah would be captured, God would still keep the holy land with His people. In God's intention the holy land would remain a fit place for His people to live.

III. JEREMIAH DEALING WITH JEHOVAH

Verses 16 through 25 speak of Jeremiah's dealing with Jehovah. Jeremiah asked Jehovah why He told him to buy the field since the city of Jerusalem had been given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Jeremiah could not understand this. Here the fellowship between God and Jeremiah was very intimate, like the fellowship between intimate friends. In asking about the field, Jeremiah addressed God as if He were his close friend.

IV. JEHOVAH'S ANSWER TO JEREMIAH

Jehovah's answer to Jeremiah, found in verses 26 through 44, is very interesting.

A. Jehovah Giving the City of Jerusalem into the Hand of the Chaldeans

Jehovah said that He was giving the city of Jerusalem into the hand of the Chaldeans, and Nebuchadnezzar would take it, because of the evils of Israel which she had done to provoke Him (vv. 28-36).

B. Jehovah Gathering Israel Out from All the Lands Where He Had Driven Them

Jehovah went on to say that although He had driven Israel in His wrath and in His great indignation, He would gather them out from all the lands where He had driven them and would bring them back to the holy land and make them dwell there in safety (v. 37). Here we see that Jeremiah came to know God's intention and that His intention, revealed in His word to Jeremiah, became His promise to the prophet.

C. Israel Being Jehovah's People, and Jehovah Being Their God

According to verse 38, Israel would be Jehovah's people,

and He would be their God. After making this promise, Jehovah said, "I will give them one heart and one way, to fear Me all the days, for their own good and for the good of their children after them" (v. 39).

We, the chosen people of God, should all have one heart and one way. We should have one heart to love God, to seek God, to live God, and to be constituted with God. This means that we love to be the expression of God. The one way is just the Triune God. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6a).

Christians today are divided because they take many different ways other than Christ. The Catholic Church has the Catholic way, and the Orthodox Church has the Orthodox way. Each denomination and independent group has its own way. The Presbyterians have one way, and the Pentecostals have another way.

What should be our way in the Body of Christ? As the Body of Christ, we should take the way of the inner law, which is the Triune God with His divine capacity. We should all have one heart to love Him, and we should all take Him as our life and our way. This one heart and one way is the one accord (Acts 1:14). If we do not have one heart and one way, we cannot be in one accord.

For eternity in the New Jerusalem there will be only one way. John tells us, "He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month" (Rev. 22:1-2a). In the middle of the street, the river of water of life flows, and in the river the tree of life grows. This indicates that the way, the life, and the life supply are all one. It also indicates what our way should be today. Our way in the Lord's recovery is life; it is the inner law of life; it is the very Triune God Himself.

I am sorry to say that in recent years there was a turmoil among us, and this turmoil brought in division. The reason for this turmoil was that certain ones wanted to take a way other than life, a way other than Christ, the Triune God, and

the inner law. Divisions are always the result of taking a way other than Christ. If we keep ourselves to the one way, there will be no division. We praise the Lord that in His restoration He will give His people one heart to love Him and express Him and one way to enjoy Him.

D. Making an Eternal Covenant with Them That He Will Not Turn Away from Them

In Jeremiah 32:40-44 Jehovah said that He would make an eternal covenant with them that He will not turn away from them. He will do them good. He will plant them in the holy land, and fields will be bought there.

This eternal covenant is the new covenant (31:31-34). It is by this covenant that God will not turn away from us and will plant us in Christ, our good land, and Christ in all His aspects will be bought by us. To buy Christ is to pay a price to gain Christ by forgetting the things that are behind and pursuing Christ (Phil. 3:13-14).

God's answer to Jeremiah surely was wise and wonderful.

V. THE WORD OF JEHOVAH COMING TO JEREMIAH A SECOND TIME AS A REAFFIRMATION OF HIS PROMISE CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

While Jeremiah was still imprisoned, the word of Jehovah came to him a second time as a reaffirmation of His promise concerning the restoration of Israel (33:1-26).

A. Jehovah Bringing the City of Jerusalem Recovery and Healing

Jehovah promised to bring the city of Jerusalem recovery and healing. He said that He would reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth and would turn the captivity of Israel and build them up as in the former time. He also promised that He would cleanse them from their iniquity, by which they have sinned against Him, and forgive all their iniquities, by which they have sinned against Him and have transgressed against Him (vv. 6-8).

In verse 9 Jehovah made this further promise concerning Jerusalem: "It will be a name of gladness and a praise and a glory to Me before all the nations of the earth, who will hear of all the good that I am about to do for them; and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and because of all the peace that I am about to provide for it." In addition to being a promise concerning Jerusalem, this is also a picture of today's church life.

B. There Being Heard in the City of Jerusalem the Voice of Gladness

According to verses 10 and 11, there will be heard in the city of Jerusalem the voice of gladness, the voice of joy, the voice of the bridegroom, the voice of the bride, and the voice of those who say, "Praise Jehovah of hosts, for Jehovah is good, for His lovingkindness is forever." He will turn the captivity of the holy land.

C. In the Holy Land There Being a Habitation of Shepherds Making Their Flock Lie Down, and the Flock Again Passing under the Hand of the One Who Counts Them

Verses 12 and 13 say, "Again there will be in this place which is a waste, without man and without beast, and in all of its cities, a habitation of shepherds making their flock lie down. In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland and in the cities of the south and in the land of Benjamin and round about Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah, the flock will again pass under the hand of the one who counts them." This is a picture of the church life. In the church life shepherding is a crucial matter. In the church we need to count the flock. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God paid attention to the number of His people. In Numbers God numbered the tribes of Israel; in the Gospels the Lord sent first twelve and then seventy; and in Acts 2 three thousand were saved, and in Acts 4 "the number of men came to about five thousand" (v. 4). If we neglect the number of our "flock," we will neglect our duty, and our flock may remain small in number. However, if we

care for the number of the flock, eventually the Lord will multiply our flock to the extent that we will not be able to count them (Jer. 33:22). This should be the situation in the church life.

D. Jehovah Establishing the Good Word Which He Has Spoken concerning the House of Israel and concerning the House of Judah

Jehovah will establish the good word which He has spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah (v. 14). He will cause to shoot forth a Shoot (Christ) of righteousness unto David, who will execute justice and righteousness on the earth (v. 15). This word regarding Christ as the Shoot of righteousness unto David is related to the new covenant, the center of which is the inner law of life. This law is the Shoot of David, and the Shoot of David is Christ. Christ is the inner law; He is the center, the reality, and even the essence of the new covenant.

Verse 16 continues by saying, "In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely; and this is the name by which she will be called: Jehovah our righteousness." In 23:6 it is Christ who is called Jehovah our righteousness, but here it is the city of Jerusalem which is called by this name. The fact that both Christ and Jerusalem are called by the same name seems to indicate that, just as Christ and the church are one today, so in the restoration Christ and the city of Jerusalem will be one.

E. His Covenant with David His Servant Never Being Broken

As no one can break Jehovah's covenant with respect to the day and His covenant with respect to the night, so that day and night will not be at the appointed time, so His covenant with David His servant can never be broken, so that he will not have a son to reign on his throne. Likewise, His covenant can never be broken with the Levitical priests as His ministers (vv. 17-21).

F. Jehovah Multiplying the Seed of David His Servant and the Levites His Ministers

Verse 22 says that as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so Jehovah will multiply the seed of David His servant and the Levites His ministers.

G. Jehovah Not Rejecting the Seed of Jacob and David His Servant

If Jehovah's covenant with respect to day and night does not stand, if He has not established the statutes of heaven and earth, then He will also reject the seed of Jacob and David His servant and will not take rulers from his seed to be over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for He will turn their captivity and have compassion on them (vv. 23-26; 31:35-36). Here God is assuring His people that just as the universe remains forever, so the people of God and the royal family will also remain forever.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(18)

ISRAEL'S STUBBORNNESS IN THEIR SINNING AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEREMIAH'S FIRMNESS IN HIS SPEAKING FOR JEHOVAH

(1)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 34—36; 45

In this message we will begin to consider Israel's stubbornness in their sinning against Jehovah and Jeremiah's firmness in his speaking for Jehovah.

I. BEFORE THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

A. Nebuchadnezzar's Invasion and Zedekiah's Destiny

While Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon with all his army was fighting against Jerusalem and all of its cities, Jeremiah was sent by Jehovah to speak to Zedekiah king of Judah (34:1, 6-7). Jeremiah was to tell Zedekiah that Jehovah was giving Jerusalem into Nebuchadnezzar's hand to be burned with fire and that Zedekiah would not escape from his hand. Rather, Zedekiah would surely be captured and given into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, but he would die in peace (vv. 2-5).

B. Zedekiah's Dishonesty in Keeping God's Commandment, and Jehovah's Punishment

Jeremiah 34:8-22 describes Zedekiah's dishonesty in keeping God's commandment and Jehovah's punishment. King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to set free their servants, but afterward they turned around and brought their servants back into subjection. Then Jehovah spoke through Jeremiah that because they profaned His name when they turned and took back the servants, not listening to Him, transgressing His covenant, and not establishing the words of the covenant they had made before Him, He was proclaiming liberty to them to sword, to pestilence, and to famine. He would make them a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, giving them—the princes, the eunuches, the priests, and all the people—into the hand of their enemies who sought their life, and their corpses would be food for the birds and the beasts. Jehovah would also give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies who sought their life and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, which had withdrawn from them and would be brought back by Him to fight against Jerusalem, capture it, and burn it with fire. Moreover, Jehovah would make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.

C. The Example of the Rechabites

Chapter thirty-five gives the example of the Rechabites. In the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, Jehovah asked Jeremiah to invite the house of the Rechabites to the house of Jehovah to drink wine. However, they would not drink it, because their father Jonadab the son of Rechab had commanded them not to drink wine nor to build a house, nor to sow seed, nor to plant a vineyard, but to dwell in tents all their days.

Then Jehovah sent Jeremiah to tell the inhabitants of Jerusalem that the Rechabites obeyed the command of their father, but the inhabitants of Jerusalem had not listened to Him. Therefore, Jehovah, the God of Israel, was bringing on

Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil which He had spoken against them. However, Jeremiah said to the Rechabites, "Because you have listened to the commandment of Jonadab your father and have kept all his commandments and have done according to all that he commanded you; therefore thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab will never lack a man to stand before Me forever" (vv. 18-19).

D. Jehoiakim's Stubbornness in Burning Jeremiah's Book of Prophecy, and Jehovah's Punishment

Chapter thirty-six continues with Jehoiakim's stubbornness in burning Jeremiah's book of prophecy, and Jehovah's punishment. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, Jehovah asked Jeremiah to write on a scroll book all the words which He had spoken to Jeremiah concerning Israel, concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations from the day He spoke to him, from the days of Josiah even to that day. Then Jeremiah asked Baruch the son of Neriah to write from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Jehovah, which He had spoken to him, on a scroll book (vv. 1-4).

The word of Jehovah came to Baruch through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You said, Woe is me! For Jehovah has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and have not found rest" (45:3). Then Jehovah said further, "Behold, what I have built I am about to tear down; and what I have planted I am about to pluck up, even this whole land. And are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh, declares Jehovah, but I will give your own life to you as spoil in all places where you may go" (vv. 4-5). Then Jeremiah commanded Baruch to read the scroll to the people in the house of Jehovah on the day of fasting and to all the people of Judah who came from their cities. Baruch did accordingly (36:6-8).

In the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, in the fast proclaimed before

Jehovah, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah in the book in the house of Jehovah to all the people in Jerusalem and to all the people who came from the cities of Judah. A leader among them, after hearing the word, went down to the king's house and told the princes there what he had heard in that book. Then the princes sent someone to Baruch to ask him to come to them with the scroll in his hand and read it to them. After hearing all the words in it, they turned in fear one to another and told Baruch that they had to report all those words to the king. They asked Baruch and Jeremiah to hide themselves and to let no one know where they were (vv. 9-19).

The princes went to the king in the court, and the scroll was read to the king and to all the princes who stood by him. As the scroll was being read, the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, and the fire of the brazier was burning before him. After listening to three or four columns, the king would cut it with a scribe's knife and throw the pieces into the brazier, until the whole scroll was consumed in the fire (vv. 20-23). The king and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid and did not rend their garments. Rather, the king commanded his son and others to seize Baruch and Jeremiah, but Jehovah hid them (vv. 24-26).

Then, after the king had burned the scroll, Jehovah told Jeremiah to take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned (vv. 27-28). Concerning Jehoiakim, Jeremiah was commanded to say, "Thus says Jehovah, You have burned this scroll, saying, Why have you written in it, saying, The king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land and will cause man and beast to cease from it?" (v. 29). Jeremiah was to tell Jehoiakim that he would have no one to sit on the throne of David and that his corpse would be cast out to the heat by day and to the frost by night. Jehoiakim was also told that Jehovah would punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity and that He would bring on them and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem and on the men of Judah all the evil that He had spoken

against them. Although He had spoken to them concerning these things, they would not listen (vv. 30-31).

Then Jeremiah took another scroll, and Baruch the scribe wrote on it from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim had burned; and many more words like those were added to them (v. 32). From this we see that although Israel was stubborn in sinning against Jehovah, Jeremiah remained firm in his speaking for Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(19)

ISRAEL'S STUBBORNNESS IN THEIR SINNING AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEREMIAH'S FIRMNESS IN HIS SPEAKING FOR JEHOVAH

(2)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 37—38; 39:15-18

In this message on Israel's stubbornness in their sinning against Jehovah and Jeremiah's firmness in his speaking for Him before the fall of Jerusalem, we will cover chapters thirty-seven and thirty-eight and a part of chapter thirty-nine.

E. The First Step of Jeremiah's Imprisonment

Chapter thirty-seven concerns the first step of Jeremiah's imprisonment. Zedekiah the son of Josiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had made king in the land of Judah, reigned as king instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim. Neither Zedekiah nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of Jehovah spoken through Jeremiah the prophet. Zedekiah sent someone with a priest to Jeremiah, asking him to pray to Jehovah their God for them.

At that time Jeremiah came in and went out among the people, not having been put in prison yet. The army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt, and when the besieging Chaldeans heard the news, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

Then Jehovah charged Jeremiah to tell the king of Judah that Pharaoh's army, which had come out to help Judah, was returning to its own land of Egypt, and the Chaldeans would return and fight against the city of Jerusalem, capture it, and burn it. Jehovah said, "Do not deceive yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans will surely go away from us; for they will not go away. For even if you had struck down the whole army of the Chaldeans, who are fighting against you, and only wounded men remained among them, they would rise up each one in his tent and burn this city with fire" (vv. 9-10).

When the Chaldeans had withdrawn from Jerusalem, Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his portion there. But he was seized by the captain of the guard at the Gate of Benjamin and falsely accused of trying to desert to the Chaldeans. When he was accused Jeremiah said, "It is false! I am not deserting to the Chaldeans" (v. 14a). However, the captain of the guard did not listen to him but seized him and brought him to the princes. The princes were angry with Jeremiah, struck him, and put him in prison, where he remained many days.

Later, Zedekiah the king sent and took him out; and the king questioned him in the king's house secretly, asking, "Is there any word from Jehovah?" Jeremiah answered, "There is," and then he said, "You will be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon" (v. 17). He also said to Zedekiah the king, "In what have I sinned against you or against your servants or against this people, that you have put me in prison? And where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land?" (vv. 18-19). Then he asked the king not to send him back to prison, lest he die there. So Zedekiah the king commanded that Jeremiah be placed into the court of the guard and gave him a loaf of bread daily from the bakers' street until all the bread was gone from the city. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

F. The Second Step of Jeremiah's Imprisonment

In chapter thirty-eight we have a record concerning the second step of Jeremiah's imprisonment. The princes heard

Jeremiah speaking to all the people that he who remained in the city would die, but he who went out to the Chaldeans would live and that the city would surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon and he would capture it. When the princes heard this, they said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the men of war who are left in this city and the hands of all the people by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm" (v. 4). In reply, Zedekiah the king said, "Behold, he is in your hand, for the king can do nothing against you" (v. 5). Then the princes cast Jeremiah with ropes into a pit in the court of the guard, and he sank into the mire.

When the eunuch Ebed-melech, the Cushite, heard about this, he went to the king and told him the evil that the princes had done to Jeremiah the prophet, who would die in the pit because of the famine. Then Zedekiah the king commanded the eunuch, the Cushite, to take with him thirty men to bring Jeremiah out of the pit before he died. And the eunuch did accordingly.

Then Zedekiah the king sent men to bring Jeremiah to himself at an entrance of the house of Jehovah. He said to Jeremiah, "I am going to ask you something; do not hide anything from me" (v. 14). Jeremiah replied, "If I tell you, indeed will you not put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me" (v. 15). Then Zedekiah swore to Jeremiah secretly, saying that as Jehovah, who had made his soul, lives he would not put him to death or give him into the hand of those who sought his life.

After Zedekiah made this promise, Jeremiah said to him, "Thus says Jehovah, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will indeed surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, you will live, and this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your house will live. But if you do not surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they will burn it with fire, and you will not escape out of their hand" (vv. 17-18). When Zedekiah heard this, he told Jeremiah that he was afraid of the Jews who had deserted to the Chaldeans,

that they would give him into their hand and they would abuse him. Jeremiah assured Zedekiah that they would not give him up. Then he went on to say, "Listen now to the voice of Jehovah in what I am speaking to you, and it will be well with you, and your soul will live. But if you refuse to surrender, this is the word that Jehovah has shown me: Then behold, all the women who have been left in the house of the king of Judah will be brought out to the princes of the king of Babylon.... They will lead out all your wives and your sons to the Chaldeans, and you yourself will not escape from their hand but will be seized by the hand of the king of Babylon, and you will cause this city to be burned with fire" (vv. 20-22a, 23).

After Jeremiah spoke these words, Zedekiah charged him not to let anyone know of these words and he would not die. Then he told Jeremiah how to answer the princes when they came to him and tried to find out what the conversation was between the king and Jeremiah. Jeremiah did according to the word of the king and remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was captured.

G. The Destiny of Ebed-melech

Jeremiah 39:15-18 concerns the destiny of Ebed-melech. When Jeremiah was shut up in the court of the guard, the word of Jehovah came to him and charged him to tell Ebed-melech the Cushite that Jehovah, the God of Israel, was about to bring His words against that city for evil before him. Jehovah would deliver him, and he would not be given to the people of whom he was afraid. Jehovah would save him, and he would not fall by the sword. Rather, he would have his own life as spoil because he had put his trust in Jehovah.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(20)

ISRAEL'S STUBBORNNESS IN THEIR SINNING AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEREMIAH'S FIRMNESS IN HIS SPEAKING FOR JEHOVAH

(3)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 39:1-14; 40:1—41:18

Jeremiah 2—45 speaks of Israel's sin against Jehovah and Jehovah's punishment upon Israel. Not only before the fall of Jerusalem, but even in the fall and after the fall of Jerusalem, Israel remained stubborn in their sinning against Jehovah. Yet Jeremiah remained firm in his speaking for Jehovah.

II. IN THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

Jeremiah 39:1-10 is a record concerning the fall of Jerusalem.

A. The Capture of Jerusalem

In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came to Jerusalem and besieged it (39:1). In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city and Jerusalem was captured (vv. 2-3).

B. The Punishment upon Zedekiah

In verses 4 through 10 we see the punishment upon

Zedekiah. When Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw the Chaldeans, they fled from the city by night by way of the king's garden. However, the army of the Chaldeans pursued after them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he judged him. The king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and also slew all the nobles of Judah. Then he blinded (put out) Zedekiah's eyes and bound him in bronze fetters to bring him to Babylon.

Following this, the Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. The rest of the people, both those who deserted to Nebuchadnezzar and those who remained, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard carried into exile to Babylon. But some of the poorest people the captain of the bodyguard left in the land of Judah and gave them vineyards and fields at that time.

III. AFTER THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

In 39:11-14 and 40:1—44:30 we have a record of certain things that happened after the fall of Jerusalem.

A. The Release of Jeremiah

In 39:11-14 and 40:1-6 there is a word regarding the release of Jeremiah.

1. From the Court of the King's Guard

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon commanded Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard to take Jeremiah and look after him and do no evil to him but deal with him just as Jeremiah would tell him (39:11-12). So Nebuzaradan and all the chief officers of Nebuchadnezzar sent men and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard and gave him to Gedaliah to take him home. And he dwelt among the people (vv. 13-14).

2. From the Chains among the Exiles

While Jeremiah was bound in chains among all the exiles

of Jerusalem and Judah, who were being exiled to Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard let him go (released him) from Ramah (40:1). He said to Jeremiah, "Now, behold, I release you today from the chains which are on your hands. If it is good in your sight to come to Babylon with me, come, and I will look after you; but if it is evil in your sight to come with me to Babylon, let it be so. See, all the land is before you; wherever it is good and right in your sight to go, there go" (v. 4). While Jeremiah still had not turned away, the captain of the bodyguard said that he should return to Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Then he went on to say that Jeremiah could go wherever it was right in his sight to go. After speaking to Jeremiah in this way, the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present and let him go. Then Jeremiah came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and dwelt with him among the people who were left in the land (vv. 5-6).

B. The History of the Remnant of Judah from Gedaliah to Johanan

In 40:7—44:30 we are given the history of the remnant of Judah from Gedaliah to Johanan.

1. The Gathering of the Remnant of Judah to Gedaliah

Jeremiah 40:7-12 describes the gathering of the remnant of Judah to Gedaliah.

a. Gedaliah Speaking to Them

When all the leaders of the forces in the field heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah over the land and had committed to him all the poor of the land who had not been exiled to Babylon, they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah (vv. 7-8). Gedaliah swore to them, saying, "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans; remain in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will be well with you" (v. 9). Then he said that he would dwell in Mizpah to stand before the Chaldeans who came to them, but they, the remnant of Judah,

should gather wine, summer fruit, and oil and put them in their holds and dwell in the cities which they had taken (v. 10).

b. The Jews from Other Lands Coming to Gedaliah

All the Jews who were in Moab and among the children of Ammon and in Edom and who were in all the lands also heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah and had appointed over them Gedaliah. All of them returned from all the places to which they had been driven and came to Gedaliah at Mizpah in the land of Judah (vv. 11-12).

2. The Murder of Gedaliah

Jeremiah 40:13—41:10 tells about the murder of Gedaliah.

a. The Report of the Conspiracy

Johanan and all the leaders of the forces who were in the field came to Gedaliah and told him that Baalis the king of Ammon had sent Ishmael to take his life. However, Gedaliah would not believe them (vv. 13-14). Then Johanan said secretly to Gedaliah that he would go and strike Ishmael so that Ishmael would not take Gedaliah's life. Johanan said, "Why should he take your life, and all the Jews who are gathered to you be scattered and the remnant of Judah perish?" (v. 15). But Gedaliah would not let Johanan do it, for he said that Johanan was speaking falsehood concerning Ishmael (v. 16).

b. The Murder

In the seventh month Ishmael of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, and ten men with him came to Gedaliah and ate bread together in Mizpah. Then Ishmael and his ten men struck down Gedaliah with the sword and put him to death (41:1-2). Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with Gedaliah as well as the Chaldeans, the men of war. No one knew about it. On the next day eighty men came from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria with meal offerings and incense in their hands to bring to the house of Jehovah. Ishmael went down to meet them and asked them to come to Gedaliah. When they came into the midst of the

city, Ishmael and his men slew them and cast them into the pit, except ten who had hidden stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey in the field. Then Ishmael took captive all the remnant of the people who were in Mizpah: the king's daughters and all the people whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard had committed to Gedaliah. Then he went to cross over to the children of Ammon (vv. 3-10).

3. Johanan's Victory over Ishmael

When Johanan and all the leaders of the forces with him heard of all the evil of Ishmael, they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael. When all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan and all the leaders of the forces with him, they rejoiced and turned around and came back to Johanan. Ishmael escaped from Johanan with eight men and went to Ammon (vv. 11-15).

4. The Direction of Johanan and the Remnant of Judah

Johanan and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the remnant of the people from Mizpah whom he brought back from Ishmael: mighty men, men of war, women and little children, and eunuchs. They went and stayed in the lodging place of Chimham (cf. 2 Sam. 19:38, 40), near Bethlehem, in order to go and enter into Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans because of the murder of Gedaliah by Ishmael (Jer. 41:16-18).

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT UPON ISRAEL

(21)

ISRAEL'S STUBBORNNESS IN THEIR SINNING AGAINST JEHOVAH AND JEREMIAH'S FIRMNESS IN HIS SPEAKING FOR JEHOVAH

(4)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 42—44

In this message we will continue to consider Israel's stubbornness in their sinning against Jehovah and Jeremiah's firmness in his speaking for Jehovah after the fall of Jerusalem. In particular, we will cover further aspects of the history of the remnant of Judah from Gedaliah to Johanan (40:7—44:30).

5. The Dishonesty of the Remnant and the Leaders in Asking Jeremiah to Pray for Them

Jeremiah 42:1—43:7 reveals the dishonesty of the remnant and the leaders in asking Jeremiah to pray for them after the fall of Jerusalem.

a. All the Leaders of the Forces, Johanan, Jezaniah, and All the People Begging Jeremiah to Pray for Them

In 42:1-3 all the leaders of the forces, Johanan, Jezaniah, and all the people, from the least even unto the greatest,

begged Jeremiah the prophet to pray for them concerning the way in which they should go and the thing which they should do. Jeremiah said that he would pray to Jehovah their God according to their words and that whatever Jehovah answered them he would tell them and not withhold anything from them (v. 4). Then they said to Jeremiah, "May Jehovah be a true and faithful witness against us, if we do not do according to every word with which Jehovah your God sends you to us. Whether it is good or whether it is evil, we will listen to the voice of Jehovah our God, to whom we send you, that it may be well with us, when we listen to the voice of Jehovah our God" (vv. 5-6).

b. The Word of Jehovah Coming to Them through Jeremiah

Jeremiah did not speak in a rush but rather waited for ten days. After ten days the word of Jehovah came to them through Jeremiah, saying that if they would still remain in the land, He would build them up and not tear them down, and He would plant them and not pluck them up (vv. 7-10). They were told that they should not fear the king of Babylon, for Jehovah was with them to save and deliver them from his hand. Jehovah would show compassions to them, that the king of Babylon might have compassion on them and might bring them back to their own land (vv. 11-12). However, if they would not remain in the land and would not listen to the voice of Jehovah their God, but would go to the land of Egypt and dwell there, then the sword would overtake them in Egypt, and the famine would follow hard after them, and they would die there in Egypt (vv. 13-16). Jehovah's wrath would be poured out on them when they went to Egypt, and they would become an execration, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach, and they would see the land no more (vv. 17-22).

c. Azariah, Johanan, and All the Proud Men Saying to Jeremiah That He Was Speaking Falsehood

When Jeremiah finished speaking, Azariah, Johanan, and all the proud men said to him, "You are speaking falsehood; Jehovah our God has not sent you to say, You shall not go to

Egypt to sojourn there" (43:2). They went on to say that Baruch was inciting him against them so as to give them into the hand of the Chaldeans to be put to death or taken into exile to Babylon. So Johanan, all the leaders of the forces, and all the people did not listen to the voice of Jehovah to remain in the land of Judah, but Johanan and all the leaders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah and came to the land of Egypt as far as Tahpanhes (vv. 3-7).

6. The Word of Jehovah through Jeremiah concerning the Destiny of the Remnant of Judah in Egypt

Jeremiah 43:8—44:14 is a record of the word of Jehovah through Jeremiah concerning the destiny of the remnant of Judah in Egypt.

a. Jehovah Asking Jeremiah to Take Large Stones and Hide Them in the Mortar in the Brickwork at the Entrance of Pharaoh's House in the Sight of the Jews

Jehovah asked Jeremiah to take large stones and hide them in the mortar in the brickwork at the entrance of Pharaoh's house in the sight of the Jews (vv. 8-9). Jehovah, the God of Israel, said that He was going to send Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and set his throne above those stones which He had hidden, and Nebuchadnezzar would spread his canopy over them (v. 10). He would come and strike the land of Egypt. He would burn the houses of the gods of Egypt and smash the pillars of the temple of the sun in the land of Egypt (vv. 11-13).

b. Jehovah Speaking Further through Jeremiah to the Remnant of Judah

Jehovah spoke further through Jeremiah to the remnant of Judah that His wrath and anger had poured forth and burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. They became a waste and a desolation because of their wickedness which they did to provoke Him to anger, in that

they went to burn incense to serve other gods, not listening to His servants the prophets (44:1-6). They had seen all these things.

Jehovah went on to ask them why they were still doing a great evil against their souls, provoking Him to anger with the works of their hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt, that they might be cut off and become a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth (vv. 7-8). Then He asked them if they had forgotten the wickedness of their fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah and of their wives, and their own wickedness and the wickedness of their own wives, which they did in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. They had not become contrite even to that day (vv. 9-10). Therefore, Jehovah, the God of Israel, would set His face against them for evil, even to cut off all Judah. Furthermore, He would take the remnant of Judah who had set their faces to go to the land of Egypt, and they would all be consumed in the land of Egypt by sword and by famine. He would punish those who dwelt in the land of Egypt as He had punished Jerusalem: with sword, with famine, and with pestilence (vv. 11-14).

7. The Argument between a Great Assemblage of Those Who Knew That Their Wives Burned Incense to Other Gods and All the Women Who Stood By, and Jeremiah the Prophet

According to 44:15-30 there was an argument between a great assemblage of those who knew that their wives burned incense to others gods and all the women who stood by, and Jeremiah the prophet.

a. Answering Jeremiah That They Would Not Listen to the Word Which He Had Spoken to Them in the Name of Jehovah

They answered Jeremiah, saying that they would not listen to the word which he had spoken to them in the name of Jehovah. Instead, they would surely do everything which had gone out of their mouth, burning incense to the queen of

heaven and pouring out libations to her, just as they themselves and their fathers, their kings, and their princes did in the streets of Jerusalem, for they had plenty of food and were well off and did not see evil (vv. 15-17). They continued by saying that since they had ceased burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, they had lacked everything and had been consumed by sword and by famine. They made cakes to the queen of heaven, making images of her and pouring out libations to her, with their husbands (vv. 18-19).

b. Jeremiah Answering That Jehovah Had Remembered the Incense They Had Burned in the Cities of Judah and in the Streets of Jerusalem

Jeremiah answered, saying that Jehovah had remembered the incense they had burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem (vv. 20-21). Jehovah had been no longer able to bear it. Therefore, their land had become a desolation and an astonishment and a curse, without inhabitant. Because they had sinned against Jehovah, that evil had happened to them (vv. 22-23).

Jeremiah said further to them that Jehovah, the God of Israel, said that they and their wives had both spoken with their mouths and had fulfilled it with their hands, that they would surely perform the vows which they had vowed to burn incense to the queen of heaven and to pour out libations to her. Therefore, Jehovah said to all Judah who dwelt in the land of Egypt that He was watching over them for evil and not for good, and all the men of Judah who were in the land of Egypt would be consumed by sword and by famine until there was an end of them. All the remnant of Judah who came to the land of Egypt to sojourn there would know whose word would be established, His or theirs. He would punish them in Egypt and would give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, just as He had given Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (vv. 24-30).

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

THE PRINCIPLE OF BEING ONE WITH GOD AS REVEALED IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: Jer. 42:1—43:7; 2:13; 17:9; 13:23; 23:5-6; 31:33

In this message I would like to give a word on the biblical principle of being one with God as revealed in the book of Jeremiah.

GOD FULFILLING HIS ECONOMY BY DISPENSING HIMSELF INTO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE

The book of Jeremiah unveils how God fulfills His economy by dispensing Himself into His chosen people. This is the principle that God wants us to see in the first forty-five chapters of this book, chapters that cover many points and provide many illustrations.

THE TWO BASIC SINS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

In 2:13 Jehovah speaks concerning the two basic sins committed by the children of Israel. The first sin was forsaking Jehovah as the fountain, the source, of living waters; the second sin was hewing out for themselves broken cisterns that could not hold water. This second sin was a matter of not trusting in God but of trusting in themselves to do something for their own enjoyment. These two sins govern the entire book of Jeremiah.

The principle in the Bible is that God does not want His chosen people to take anything other than Himself as their source. After God created man, He placed him in front of the tree of life, which signifies God as life. By doing this God was indicating that He wanted man to partake of the tree

of life, not anything else. To partake of the tree of life is to take God as our unique source, as our source of everything.

What is sin? Sin is a matter of leaving God and doing something by ourselves and for ourselves. This is exactly what the children of Israel did. They forsook God as the fountain of living waters for their supply, and, according to their opinion, they did whatever they could to work out something by themselves for their enjoyment. I wish to emphasize that sin is to forsake God and to do something by ourselves and for ourselves. This is the principle throughout the Bible, and Jeremiah repeated this principle again and again so that we would be impressed.

Jeremiah 34—45 is a section of twelve chapters showing us the stubbornness of Israel in sinning against Jehovah. In these chapters one thing is made clear—that Israel has forsaken God as the source, the fountain, of living waters. Consider, for example, the situation with Gedaliah. Although he was faithful in caring for Jeremiah, God's prophet (40:5-6), he did not seek the Lord's word (vv. 13-14), because this was not his habit. He did not take God as his source to be one with Him and to receive whatever issued from Him. If he had been such a person, the first thing he would have done would have been to receive the word of God.

BEING ONE WITH GOD TO RECEIVE THE WORD OF GOD

To take, receive, and keep the word of God, we must be absolutely one with God. We must trust in Him, rely on Him, and not have any opinion that comes out of ourselves. We should simply enjoy what God has done and what He will do for us. This is the way to fulfill God's economy, and this is the new covenant. In the new covenant we are one with God and let Him write Himself into us as our life and as our life law with its capacity for us to function. We all need to see this.

The principle of the Bible, especially of the New Testament, is that God opens Himself to us that we may enter into Him, receive Him, and become one with Him. Then He will be in us, and we will be in Him, taking Him as everything. The first thing we will take is His word to express His

thought, His will, His heart's desire, and His good pleasure; we will not care for our opinions or preferences. In this way we become His mouthpiece to speak Him forth to others for their supply.

THE STUBBORNNESS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL DUE TO THEIR NOT BEING ONE WITH GOD

If we see this, we will realize that the stubbornness of the children of Israel was due to their not being one with God. For example, Johanan, the leader of the remnant, strongly determined to go to Egypt to take refuge. He feared that the Babylonians would come to avenge the murder of Gedaliah. But God wanted them to remain in the holy land to be a remnant of His people. God would visit them and grace them and even use them to be His people as a testimony of the living God on earth. However, they altogether misunderstood God by their consideration and by their opinion. Nevertheless, all the leaders of the forces and all the people begged Jeremiah the prophet to pray for them concerning the way in which they should go and the thing which they should do, promising him that whether it was good or evil, they would listen to the voice of Jehovah (42:1-6). They said they would obey because they expected Jeremiah to go along with them. They expected that he would give them a "sugar-coated" word. Jeremiah, who was not one to speak such a word, told them that he would pray to Jehovah according to their words.

Instead of being in a hurry to speak, Jeremiah waited for ten days. After ten days the word of Jehovah came to them through Jeremiah, telling them not to go to Egypt but to remain in Judah. Jehovah said, "If you will still remain in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up" (v. 10a). This indicates that He would bless them, and they would enjoy Him. However, if they did not listen to this word but went to the land of Egypt, they would die there. Concerning this, Jehovah said, "If indeed you set your faces to go to Egypt and go to sojourn there, then the sword, which you fear, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, about which you are worried, will follow hard after you there in Egypt;

and you will die there. And all the men who set their faces to go to Egypt, to sojourn there, will die by sword, by famine, and by pestilence; and they will have no survivors or any who have escaped from the evil which I will bring on them" (vv. 15b-17).

When Jeremiah finished speaking the words of Jehovah, all the people, including Johanan, accused him of lying. They said to him, "You are speaking falsehood; Jehovah our God has not sent you to say, You shall not go to Egypt to sojourn there" (43:2). Refusing to listen to the voice of Jeremiah to remain in the land of Judah, Johanan and all the leaders of the forces took the remnant and went to Egypt.

Once they were in Egypt, there was an argument between a great assemblage of those who knew that their wives burned incense to other gods and all the women who stood by, and Jeremiah the prophet (44:15-30). They told Jeremiah that they would not listen to him. Instead, they would burn incense to the queen of heaven (the wife of Nimrod) and pour out libations to her, just as they did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. They even went so far as to say that when they burned incense to the queen of heaven, they had plenty of food and were well off and did not see evil, but since they had ceased doing this, they lacked everything and were consumed by sword and by famine (vv. 17-18). That was a lie. When they were in Jerusalem, they were besieged and even forced to eat their children. Nevertheless, they told Jeremiah falsely that they were well off and did not experience calamities.

The children of Israel were a people who were not one with God. If they had been one with God, there would have been no problem. If they had been one with God, they would have received God's word and would have known His heart, His nature, His mind, and His purpose. If they had been one with God, then spontaneously they would have lived Him and would have been constituted with Him to be His testimony on earth.

The situation is the same among Christians today. We as Christians have also transgressed the principle of being one with God. We may not have a heart to be one with God, yet

we like to be His people. The result is that we do not go along with God's will or God's mind, but rather express our opinions and care for our likes and dislikes. This is the reason for the lack of oneness among believers today. If we are not one with God, we cannot be one with one another. Those who are not one with God do not take His will and good pleasure but express their opinions and pursue their preferences. To do this is to hew out broken cisterns that can hold no water.

OUR BEING JUSTIFIED AND RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST AS THE RIGHTEOUS SHOOT, AND THE TRIUNE GOD COMING INTO US TO BE OUR LIFE AND OUR EVERYTHING FOR THE WORKING OUT OF GOD'S ETERNAL ECONOMY BY HIS DISPENSING HIMSELF INTO US

Because we, like the children of Israel, were not one with God and did not have the heart to do God's will or take His good pleasure, we offended God, transgressed His ordinances, and committed sins against His commandments. We were a people whose heart was deceitful and incurable (17:9). We were exposed as having a nature that is sinful and rebellious, a nature that, like the Ethiopian's skin and the leopard's spots, could not be changed (13:23). Since this was our situation, how could we be reconciled to God? How could we be justified by Him and taken by Him to be His people?

Jeremiah gives us the answer in 23:5 and 6. "Behold, days are coming, / Declares Jehovah, / When I will raise up to David a righteous Shoot; / And He will reign as King and act prudently / And will execute judgment and righteousness in the land. / In His days Judah will be saved, / And Israel will dwell securely; / And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness." The only way that we can be reconciled to God and justified by Him is by Christ, the new Sprout, the righteous Shoot, who is called Jehovah our righteousness. As the righteous Shoot, He came in the flesh as the descendant of David to die on the cross and shed His blood in order to accomplish redemption for our justification.

Based upon Christ's redemption we have been justified, and the Triune God has come into us to be our life, our person,

and our everything. This creates a situation in which God is free to work out His eternal economy in us by His dispensing of Himself into our being. If we see this principle and grasp it, we will understand the entire book of Jeremiah.

THE SPIRITUAL SEQUENCE IN JEREMIAH'S WRITING

The book of Jeremiah was not written according to the historical sequence, but this book surely has a spiritual sequence. First, Jeremiah shows us the basic sins of God's people—forsaking God and hewing out their own cisterns. Then the human heart is gradually exposed as being deceitful and incurable. We are wicked and hopeless, having a fallen nature that cannot change. In order to be one with God, we need Christ as the Shoot of David to be our redemption and justification. This ushers the Triune God into us to be our life, our inner life law, our capacity, and our everything. This is the new covenant (31:33). In the new covenant, we do not do anything. Rather, we are simply one with God to let Him write Himself into us as the law of life. This law of life implies the Triune God with the highest capacity for our function. God lives in us and has the freedom, in matters great and small, to dispense Himself into our being to carry out His economy. This dispensing will bring in the restoration of all things and will consummate in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. The New Jerusalem is the consummation of the economy of God accomplished by His eternal dispensing.

In Jeremiah we see that we are redeemed, that we are justified, and that we have become one with God. Eventually we will know God, live God, and be constituted with God in His life and nature that we may be His corporate expression. This is the complete teaching of the Bible, especially in the New Testament, and this is the essence of the book of Jeremiah.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

THE SPIRITUAL SEQUENCE IN THE BIBLE AND IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: Jer. 2:13; 17:9; 13:23; 23:5-6; 31:33

In this message I have the burden to speak a word concerning the spiritual sequence in the Bible and in the book of Jeremiah. Once we see the spiritual sequence in the Bible, we will realize that Jeremiah was written according to this sequence.

THE SPIRITUAL SEQUENCE IN THE BIBLE

God Being the Source in Every Way

The Bible shows us first that God is the source in every way. After He created man, God presented Himself to man as the real and sole object for man to seek after, that is, the tree of life (Gen. 2:9).

The Fall of Man and a History of Sins

Although God placed man in front of the tree of life, wanting him to partake of that tree, man was seduced and attracted to the other tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17; 3:1-6, 11). By eating of the fruit of this tree, man became fallen, and sin entered into him. After that, the history of mankind was nothing but a history of sins, with all the nations sinning continually in every way. Then God selected the children of Abraham to be a chosen people, but eventually they became the same as the nations. This continued until the end of the Old Testament.

The Coming of Christ, the Righteous Shoot

Jesus Christ came as the righteous Shoot. Wherever He went in His ministry He encountered sin, death, demons, and

evil spirits. Just as God presented Himself as the tree of life in Genesis 2, so Christ also presented Himself as life in the Gospel of John. He presented Himself to people as the bread of life (John 6:35, 48), that is, as the tree of life, and He told them that He came that they might have life (10:10). Then He went to the cross to die for man in order to accomplish redemption for man. Through this, God has a standing to forgive man and to justify man. Eventually, this Jesus Christ became man's redemption and man's righteousness for man to receive justification from God (1 Cor. 1:30). Based upon this, Christ as the embodiment of God has entered into us to be our life, even to be our inner law of life.

The New Covenant—Its Content and Ultimate Consummation

Before He died on the cross for our redemption, the Lord Jesus established the new covenant. At His table He enacted a law to be the new covenant (Luke 22:20). All the New Testament books from Acts through Revelation tell us what the new covenant is. The content of this new covenant is the Triune God within us to be our life, our life law, our life supply, our life capacity, and our everything that we may be constituted with God in His life and nature and thereby become His increase, His enlargement, to be His fullness for His eternal expression. First, this expression is the church; second, it is the kingdom; and eventually, in the new heaven and new earth, it is the New Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of the new covenant of God to express God in a corporate way to the uttermost for eternity.

The Nations around the New Jerusalem

In the new heaven and new earth, this corporate expression will be observed by the nations, which will live around the New Jerusalem and walk by its light (Rev. 21:24).

These items from Genesis through Revelation show us the spiritual sequence in the Bible.

THE SPIRITUAL SEQUENCE IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Now we need to see that Jeremiah wrote his book of

prophecy according to the sequence of the spiritual things recorded in the Bible.

God Presenting Himself to Israel as the Source and Israel Forsaking Him to Take Their Own Way

First, Jeremiah shows us that God presented Himself to Israel as the source, the fountain, of living waters to be their rich supply. But Israel forsook Him to take their own way, to hew out for themselves cisterns of rock (Jer. 2:13).

Israel Becoming Evil

Having forsaken God as the source, Israel became evil, manifesting the wickedness within them and having a heart that was deceitful above all things and incurable (17:9). Not only so, their nature was so evil, wicked, and corrupt that nothing could change it (13:23). They became just like the people whom Jesus met in the four Gospels.

A Righteous Shoot Being Raised Up to David, and His Name Being Called Jehovah Our Righteousness

In 23:5 and 6 Jeremiah prophesied that a righteous Shoot would be raised up to David to face the situation and meet the need, and His name would be called Jehovah our righteousness. This implies redemption and also justification, for it is this One who redeemed us and became our righteousness that we might receive God's justification. In this way our situation with God has been appeased.

The Triune God Coming into Us for the Embodiment of the New Covenant

Now, based on Christ's redemption and God's justification, with Christ as our righteousness, God is free to enter into us as the Triune God, as Jesus Christ, as the life-giving Spirit. He has come into us to be our life, our life supply, our life law, our life capacity, and our everything that we may be constituted with God in His life and nature to be His enlargement, His increase, His fullness, for His expression.

We will be such an expression of God first in the church age, then in the age of restoration (the age of the millennial kingdom), and ultimately and consummately in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity. The New Jerusalem will be the embodiment of God's new covenant. The new covenant, therefore, will ultimately issue in the New Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's Prophecy concerning the Nations

We have seen that Revelation 21:24 speaks of the nations around the New Jerusalem. Jeremiah also speaks of the nations in chapters forty-six through fifty-one. Actually, the nations in the new heaven and new earth will eventually come from the nations concerning which Jeremiah prophesied. This is a further indication that the book of Jeremiah is complete, even all-inclusive.

Why does Jeremiah prophesy concerning the nations? He does this because God needs them. On the one hand, God needs a people to express Him; on the other hand, He needs another people to look at, to behold, this expression. We may say that those who express God are the "actors" and that those who witness this expression are the "spectators." For the fulfillment of His purpose, God needs both the actors—His chosen people—and the spectators—the nations. Therefore, the book of Jeremiah, following the spiritual sequence in the Bible, includes Jeremiah's speaking concerning the nations. In this matter he is the same as Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah. As we will see, the principle is the same with the books of the Minor Prophets.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS INVOLVED WITH GOD'S ELECT, ISRAEL

(1)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 46—47

After writing concerning Israel, God's chosen people, Jeremiah wrote another six chapters, chapters forty-six through fifty-one, concerning Jehovah's judgment upon the nations involved with Israel. The nations cannot avoid involvement with Israel, and Israel cannot avoid contact with the nations. In this message we will consider chapters forty-six and forty-seven.

I. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON EGYPT

In chapter forty-six we see Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Egypt.

A. Egypt Symbolically or Poetically Called Rahab and Typifying the World of Making a Living and of Enjoyment

In the Old Testament Egypt, which is symbolically or poetically called Rahab (Isa. 51:9-10; Psa. 87:4), typifies the world of making a living and of enjoyment, with which Satan occupies and usurps the people chosen by God for His economy (Gen. 12:10; 41:57—42:3; Num. 11:4-6). The name *Rahab* refers to a monster, to a large sea animal. This indicates that God regards Egypt as a monster, as an ugly, terrifying sea animal.

B. The People of Israel Going Down to Egypt

The people of Israel, as the elect of God, went down to Egypt and were usurped and enslaved by Pharaoh the king of Egypt (Exo. 1:1, 11-14), a type of Satan as the ruler of the world (John 12:31).

Because the world has many aspects, the Old Testament uses the nations to typify the world in its various aspects. The first of these types is Egypt. Egypt typifies the world in the aspect of making a living and of enjoyment, and Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, typifies Satan, the ruler of the world.

C. Jehovah Delivering the People of Israel out of the Egyptian Slavery and Tyranny

Jehovah delivered the people of Israel out of the Egyptian slavery and tyranny and brought them into the good land (Exo. 3:7-8).

D. The People of Israel Often Being Tempted to Go Back to Egypt

The people of Israel were often tempted to go back to Egypt against Jehovah's will when they were weak or in trouble (Isa. 30:1-3; 31:1-3; Jer. 43:4-7). Because Israel was in Egypt for more than four hundred years, they were accustomed to the Egyptian ways and liked the Egyptian food (Num. 11:4-6). Hence, whenever the children of Israel had problems or were weak, they desired to go back to Egypt and take Egypt as their refuge.

E. The Chaldeans Withdrawing from Jerusalem When They Heard That the Army of Pharaoh Had Come Out of Egypt to Help Judah

When the Chaldeans were besieging Jerusalem and heard that the army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt to help Judah, they withdrew from Jerusalem. Pharaoh's army returned to Egypt, and the Chaldeans returned and fought against the city of Jerusalem and captured it and burned it with fire (Jer. 37:5-8). This is a sign showing that we should

not trust in the world, where man makes a living and finds enjoyment.

F. The Army of Pharaoh Neco King of Egypt Being Defeated by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon

The army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt invaded Babylon and encamped by the river Euphrates. However, he was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (46:2). The Egyptians were soundly defeated and returned to their own land.

1. Egypt Rising Up like Her River Nile

Egypt rose up like her river Nile, whose waters surge to cover the land (vv. 7-8). But that day belonged to the Lord Jehovah of hosts, a day of vengeance to avenge Himself on His adversaries; for there was a sacrifice to the Lord Jehovah of hosts in the land of the north by the river Euphrates. The Egyptians were wounded so that even if they had used many medicines, there would have been no healing for them (vv. 9-11).

2. The King, Whose Name Is Jehovah of Hosts, Striking the Land of Egypt and Casting Down Her Army by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon

The King, whose name is Jehovah of hosts, struck the land of Egypt and cast down her army by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was a gadfly from the north coming on Egypt as a beautiful heifer. Jehovah, the God of Israel, punished Amon (the most honorable god in Egypt), Pharaoh, Egypt, and her gods and kings, even Pharaoh and those who trusted in him, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of his servants. Afterward she will be inhabited as in the days of old (vv. 13-26; 43:10-13; 44:11-30; cf. Isa. 19:1-18).

G. A Word of Comfort to Israel

Jeremiah 46:27-28 is a word of comfort to Israel. These verses say, "But as for you, O Jacob My servant, do not fear; /

And do not be dismayed, O Israel. / For, behold, I will save you from afar / And your seed from the land of their captivity; / And Jacob will return and be undisturbed / And at ease, and no one will frighten him. / As for you, O Jacob My servant, do not fear, declares Jehovah, / For I am with you; / For I will make a full end of all the nations / To which I have driven you; / Yet I will not make a full end of you, / But will correct you in measure / And will by no means leave you unpunished." Jeremiah declared God's judgment on Egypt because Israel depended on Egypt, thus offending God. Israel also suffered that judgment, so Jeremiah gave Israel this word of comfort, saying that God will come to visit them and bring them back to their land. This word will be fulfilled at the time of the restoration to come, in the thousand-year kingdom.

II. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON THE PHILISTINES

Chapter forty-seven concerns Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon the Philistines.

A. A Nation Typifying the World That Is Close to the Interest of God on the Earth and That Attacks and Damages the Testimony of God on the Earth

The Philistines were a nation called Philistia (Exo. 15:14). The Philistines typify the world that is close to the interest of God on earth and attacks and damages the testimony of God on earth. In the Old Testament the Philistines came several times to bother Israel.

B. Located alongside the Nation of Israel

The Philistines were located alongside the nation of Israel.

C. Jehovah Delivering Israel into the Hands of the Philistines Forty Years

In the time of the judges, Jehovah delivered Israel into the hands of the Philistines forty years (Judg. 13:1; 14:4).

D. Attacking and Capturing the Ark of God

Once the Philistines even attacked the ark of God and captured it (1 Sam. 4:3-11).

E. David Slaying Their Champion Goliath

At Saul's time the Philistines gathered their armies to fight against Judah, and David slew their champion Goliath (1 Sam. 17:1, 4, 45-49).

F. Jehovah Destroying the Philistines by the Army of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon

Jeremiah 47:2 says that Jehovah would destroy the Philistines by the army of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon rising up as waters rising up from the north to overflow the land and all that fills it, the city and those who dwell in it (cf. Isa. 14:29-31; Zech. 9:6b).

In this message we have considered the two aspects of the world typified respectively by Egypt and Philistia. Around the church, typified by the people of Israel, are the Egyptian world and the Philistine world. The Egyptian world attracts those in the church by their making a living and the pursuing of worldly enjoyment. These distract the church people from God's economy and from God as the fountain of living waters. The aspect of the world typified by Philistia constantly opposes and troubles the people of God and the church and hinders God's economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS INVOLVED WITH GOD'S ELECT, ISRAEL

(2)

Scripture Reading: Jer. 48—49

In this message we will continue to consider God's judgment upon the nations involved with God's elect, Israel.

III. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON MOAB

In chapter forty-eight we see Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Moab.

A. A Nation Typifying the World of Fleshly Lust That Corrupts and Frustrates God's Chosen People through the Greedy Religionists

Moab as a nation typifies the world of fleshly lust that corrupts and frustrates God's chosen people through the greedy religionists from following and walking with God in His holy way (Num. 25:1-5; Deut. 23:3-4; Rev. 2:14). It was Moab who hired Balaam, the Gentile prophet, to stumble the children of Israel.

B. Moab, the First Forefather of the Moabites

Moab, as the first forefather of the Moabites, was born of Lot through incest with his daughter (Gen. 19:30-38). In the sight of God, the source of Moab was most evil.

C. The Moabites Not Being Allowed to Enter into the Assembly of Jehovah

The Moabites were not allowed to enter into the assembly

of Jehovah even to the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3). However, a Moabitess by the name of Ruth became the mother of one of the prominent forefathers of Christ (Matt. 1:5b) because of her allegiance to Israel in the interest of God (Ruth 1:14-18). This indicates that although the Moabites were condemned, at a certain time God had compassion on them.

D. Moab to Be Destroyed and Cut Off from Being a Nation

Moab would be destroyed and cut off from being a nation. Because of his trust in his works and in his treasures, he would be captured. His god Chemosh will go forth into exile with its priests and princes (Jer. 48:1-10).

E. Moab Magnifying Himself against Jehovah

Moab magnified himself against Jehovah. Israel was a derision to him. He was very proud—his loftiness, his pride, his arrogance, and the haughtiness of his heart were heard of by people. Jehovah would therefore bring to an end in Moab the one who offered up in high places and burned incense to his gods. Moab would become a derision and a terror to all who were around him (vv. 26-44; cf. Isa. 16:6-14).

F. Jehovah Turning Again the Captivity of Moab in the Latter Days

Jehovah will turn again the captivity of Moab in the latter days (Jer. 48:47).

From this portion we can see that God is not only the God of Israel but also the God of the Gentiles. Such a people as the Moabites, whose source was incest and who were condemned by God, still received the compassion of God to produce Ruth to bring forth Christ into mankind and to have a remnant to be among the restored nations, who will be the spectators in the new heaven and new earth.

IV. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON THE CHILDREN OF AMMON

Jeremiah 49:1-6 concerns Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon the children of Ammon.

A. A Nation Typifying the World of Fleshly Lust That Fights against God's Chosen People and Misleads Them into Idolatry

Ammon was also born of Lot through incest with his daughter, as Moab was. The nation of Ammon typifies the world of fleshly lust that fights against God's chosen people and misleads them into idolatry (Judg. 11:12; 1 Sam. 12:12a; 2 Chron. 20:10-11; Psa. 83:4-8; 1 Kings 11:5, 7).

Both Moab and Ammon are the world of lust. One is the fleshly world with religion to entangle God's people, and the other is the fleshly world that fights against God's people.

B. The Ammonites Taking the Land of Gad

The Ammonites took the land of Gad and possessed it with their god Malcam (Jer. 49:1).

C. Jehovah Causing War against the Ammonites

Jeremiah 49:2a and 3 tell us that Jehovah would cause war against the Ammonites. Their nation would become a mound of desolation, and its villages would be burned with fire. Their god Malcam would go into exile together with its priests and its princes.

D. Israel Dispossessing Those Who Dispossess Him

Regarding the Ammonites, we are told that Israel will dispossess those who dispossess him (v. 2b; cf. Zeph. 2:8-9; Amos 1:13-15).

E. Jehovah Turning Again the Captivity of the Children of Ammon

Jeremiah 49:6 prophesies that afterward Jehovah will turn again the captivity of the children of Ammon.

V. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON EDOM

The word in 49:7-22 concerns Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Edom.

A. A Nation Typifying the World of the Old and Fleshly Man Who Struggles against the God-chosen and Spiritual People

Edom was a nation of the descendants of Esau, who was the twin brother of Jacob; who was hated by God and destined by God to serve his younger brother; and who was struggling in the flesh against his brother (Gen. 36:9; 25:21-26a; Mal. 1:3a; Rom. 9:13b; 1 Kings 11:14-16; 2 Kings 8:20, 22; Psa. 83:4-6; 137:7; Num. 20:21). As such a nation, Edom typifies the world of the old and fleshly man who struggles against the God-chosen and spiritual people.

B. Jehovah Bringing the Calamity of Esau upon Edom When He Punishes Him

Jehovah will bring the calamity of Esau upon Edom at the time when He punishes him. He will destroy the people of Edom, but He will preserve their orphans alive and let their widows trust in Him (Jer. 49:8-11). Even with such a people, God is very concerned for the widows and the orphans and desires that they, and all human beings, trust in Him.

C. Bozrah Becoming a Waste, a Reproach, a Ruin and a Curse

Jeremiah 49:13 reveals that Bozrah, the capital of Edom, will become a waste, a reproach, a ruin and a curse. All her cities will become eternal desolations.

D. Jehovah Making Edom Small among the Nations, Despised among Men

Jehovah has made Edom small among the nations, despised among men, because of the pride of her heart. She will become an astonishment, and people will hiss at all her wounds. No one will dwell there, nor will a son of man sojourn there, as when Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown (vv. 15-18).

E. The Purpose of Jehovah's Counsel and His Thoughts Being against Edom

The purpose of Jehovah's counsel and His thoughts were

all against Edom (v. 20; cf. Mal. 1:3-4; Lam. 4:21-22; Isa. 34:5-15; Ezek. 25:12-14; 32:29).

F. At the War of Armageddon Christ Coming to Judge the Nations from Bozrah of Edom

At the war of Armageddon Christ will come to judge the nations from Bozrah of Edom (Jer. 49:22; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:11-15, 19-21; Isa. 63:1-6). The Lord Jesus will come back first to Bozrah, and He will tread the great winepress from Bozrah to Armageddon, destroying Antichrist and all the evil armies of the world gathered there.

VI. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON DAMASCUS

In Jeremiah 49:23-27 we see Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Damascus.

A. Damascus Typifying the World That Is Close to and Involved with the Kingdom of God

Damascus was a part of Syria (2 Sam. 8:5). It was close to Israel and had dealings and wars with Israel (1 Kings 15:18-21; 19:15-16; 2 Kings 16:7-16; 1 Kings 11:23-25; 1 Chron. 18:5-6; 2 Chron. 24:23). Damascus typifies the world that is close to and involved with the kingdom of God. The Bible shows us that sometimes Damascus was one with Israel but at other times made trouble for Israel. Around the church today there is such an aspect of the world. Sometimes it is good to the church and sometimes it bothers the church.

B. Her Cities Being Put to Shame

Jeremiah 49:23 and 24 say that her cities were put to shame because they had heard an evil report. Panic took hold of her, and pain and anguish seized her, like a woman giving birth.

C. The City of Praise, the Town of Jehovah's Joy, Being Forsaken

Verse 25 indicates that the city of praise, the town of Jehovah's joy, would be forsaken.

D. Her Young Men Falling in Her Open Squares

Verse 26 speaks of her young men falling in her open squares, and all her men of war being cut off in that day.

E. Jehovah Setting Fire to the Wall of Damascus

Verse 27 says that Jehovah would set fire to the wall of Damascus, and it would consume the palaces of her king Ben-hadad (cf. Isa. 17:1-3; Amos 1:3-5; Zech. 9:1).

VII. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON KEDAR AND THE KINGDOMS OF HAZOR

In Jeremiah 49:28-33 we are told of Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor.

A. Kedar and the Kingdoms of Hazor Being Arabia, Which Typifies the World That Mixes with the People of God

Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor are Arabia (Ezek. 27:21). The people of Kedar were the descendants of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13), and they were nomadic (Psa. 120:5; S.S. 1:5; Isa. 60:7). Hazor was very much involved with Israel (Josh. 11:10-13; Judg. 4:2-3; 1 Sam. 12:9). Arabia typifies the world that mixes with the people of God.

B. Jehovah Sending the Chaldeans to Strike Down Kedar and the Kingdoms of Hazor and Destroy the Children of the East

Jeremiah 49:28-32 reveals that Jehovah sent the Chaldeans to strike down Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor and destroy the children of the east. The Chaldeans would take away their tents, their flocks, their curtains, all their vessels, and their camels. Terror would be on every side. Nebuchadnezzar had taken counsel against them and had devised a plan against them.

C. Hazor Becoming a Habitation of Jackals, an Eternal Desolation

Verse 33 declares that Hazor, which once was a good place

for flocks, would become a habitation of jackals, an eternal desolation. No one would dwell there; neither would a son of man sojourn in it (cf. Isa. 21:13-17).

VIII. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON ELAM

Finally, in Jeremiah 49:34-39 we have Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Elam.

A. Elam Typifying the World That Is the Enemy of God's Chosen People

The forefather of the Elamites was a son of Shem (Gen. 10:22). The nation of Elam was once a province of Media, with the city of Shushan as its capital (Dan. 8:2; Esth. 1:2). The Elamites were enemies of Israel (Ezra 4:9), and in the ancient time the king of Elam was defeated by Abraham (Gen. 14:1, 17). Hence, Elam typifies the world that is the enemy of God's chosen people.

B. Jehovah Being about to Break the Bow of Elam

Jehovah was about to break the bow of Elam, the chief part of their might (Jer. 49:35). He would scatter the Elamites into the nations. He would cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and He would bring evil upon them, even His burning anger. He would send the sword after them, until He would make an end of them (vv. 36-37; Ezek. 32:24).

C. In the Last Days Jehovah Turning Again the Captivity of Elam

Jeremiah 49:39 prophesies that in the last days Jehovah will turn again the captivity of Elam. This assures us that Elam will be a part of the restored nations around the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. These restored nations will be the spectators, the observers, admiring God's masterpiece, the New Jerusalem.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS INVOLVED WITH GOD'S ELECT, ISRAEL

(3)

AND A SUPPLEMENT TO THE HISTORY OF CAPTIVITY

Scripture Reading: Jer. 50—52

In this message we will first consider Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Babylon and then give a brief word on chapter fifty-two, which is a supplement to the history of captivity.

IX. JEHOVAH'S PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT UPON BABYLON

Jeremiah 50 and 51 speak concerning Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon Babylon. The word of condemnation regarding Babylon is much longer than that spoken regarding any other nation.

A. Babylon Typifying the World, Both Physically and Spiritually, That Worships Idols, Exalts Men, and Opposes God to the Uttermost

Babylon's origin and initiation was Babel, and the name Babel means confusion (Gen. 11:7-9). Babel was built by Nimrod, who was a descendant of Ham and began to be a mighty one in the earth, and the beginning of whose kingdom was Babel as the beginning of human government on earth (Gen. 10:6-11; Dan. 2:31-32, 38). It was a land full of idols, where man worshipped idols, exalted man's self, and opposed

God (Jer. 50:38b; Josh. 24:2; Gen. 11:3-4). The first king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was even identified with Satan as Satan's embodiment (Isa. 14:4, 11-15). It was this Babylon that destroyed God's holy city and His holy temple and carried the vessels of God's temple and His holy people into captivity (2 Chron. 36:17-20). The coming Roman Empire and the Roman church will both in the spiritual sense be called Babylon the Great and will be destroyed by God (Rev. 17:5; 18:2, 10). Hence, Babylon typifies the world, both physically and spiritually, that worships idols, exalts men, and opposes God to the uttermost, all of which was or will be utterly destroyed by God (Jer. 51:11; Rev. 14:8; 16:19b; 18:2, 10).

B. The Capture and Destruction of Babylon

Jeremiah 50:2 declares that Babylon is captured, that Bel (the chief Babylonian idol—Isa. 46:1) is put to shame, that Merodach (a Babylonian idol) is shattered, that her images are put to shame, and that her idols are dismayed (Jer. 51:17-18). For a nation (of the Medes—51:11, 28) has come up against her from the north (50:41; 51:48). It will make her land a waste, and there will be no inhabitant in it. Both man and beast have fled because she has sinned against Jehovah and engaged in war with Jehovah (50:3, 14, 24). This is the vengeance of Jehovah, for she has acted proudly against Jehovah, against the Holy One of Israel (vv. 15, 29). Jehovah will kindle a fire in her cities, and it will devour all those around her (v. 32; 51:30b).

C. The Children of Israel Fleeing and Escaping from the Land of Babylon and Declaring in Zion the Vengeance of Jehovah Their God

In those days and at that time, the children of Israel will come, both they and the children of Judah together; they will go along with weeping as they go, and they will seek Jehovah their God (50:4). They will ask for the way to Zion with their faces toward it, saying, "Come and let us join ourselves to Jehovah / In an eternal covenant that will not be forgotten" (v. 5). They have been as lost sheep, turning aside on the

mountains and going from mountain to hill. They have forgotten their resting place and have sinned against Jehovah, the habitation of righteousness, even Jehovah, the hope of their fathers (vv. 6-7). In verse 8a Jehovah charges them, saying, "Flee from the midst of Babylon, / And go out from the land of the Chaldeans."

Verse 17 says that Israel is a scattered sheep; lions have driven him away. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and last Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has broken his bones. Therefore, Jehovah, the God of Israel, will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as He punished the king of Assyria. He will bring Israel back to his habitation, and he will feed on Carmel and Bashan. In those days the iniquity of Israel and the sin of Judah will not be found, for Jehovah will forgive those whom He will leave as a remnant (vv. 18-20).

Verse 28 speaks of a sound of those who flee and escape from the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of Jehovah their God (51:24), the vengeance of His temple. Neither Israel nor Judah has been forsaken by his God; but their land (the land of the Chaldeans) is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel (51:5). Again God's people are told to flee from the midst of Babylon and to let each man save his life. They are not to be cut off in Babylon's iniquity. This is a time of vengeance to Jehovah; He will give full recompense to Babylon (v. 6). Verses 8b through 10 continue, "Take balm for her pain, / If perhaps she may be healed. / We tried to heal Babylon, but she is not healed; / Forsake her, and let each one of us go to his own land; / For her judgment has reached to heaven / And has been lifted up to the clouds. / Jehovah has brought forth our righteousnesses; / Come and let us relate in Zion / The work of Jehovah our God."

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had devoured God's people. He had crushed them, made them an empty vessel, swallowed them up like a dragon, filled his stomach with their delicacies, and washed them away (v. 34). Thus, the violence done to them and their flesh should be on Babylon and their blood on the inhabitants of Chaldea (v. 35). Therefore, Jehovah says, "Behold, I will plead your cause / And execute vengeance for you; / And I will dry up her sea /

And make her fountain dry. / And Babylon will become heaps, / A habitation of jackals, / An astonishment and a hissing, / Without inhabitant" (vv. 36-37). Then Jehovah again charges His people to come out of Babylon, saying, "Come out from the midst of her, My people, / And let each man save his life / From the burning anger of Jehovah.…You who have escaped the sword, / Go and do not stand still; / Remember Jehovah from afar, / And let Jerusalem come up in your heart" (vv. 45, 50).

D. Jeremiah Writing in a Book All the Evil That Would Come on Babylon

In the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah, when Seraiah, the quartermaster, went to Babylon with Zedekiah, Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that would come on Babylon, all the words that are written concerning Babylon (vv. 59-60). Jeremiah told Seraiah that when he came to Babylon, he was to read all these words and say, "O Jehovah, You have spoken concerning this place, to cut it off, so that nothing should dwell in it, neither man nor animal, for it will be an eternal desolation" (vv. 61-62). Jeremiah further told him that as soon as he had finished reading this book, he was to bind a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates and say, "Thus Babylon will sink and will not rise up, because of the evil which I will bring upon it, and they will weary themselves" (vv. 63-64).

According to the Bible, the human government on earth is, in the eyes of God, altogether Babylonian from beginning to end. This is proved by the great human image in Daniel 2. This image is Babylon from the head to the toes.

As we have pointed out, the origin of Babylon was Babel, the first nation constituted by man, which opposed God, exalted man, and worshipped Satan in all the idols. Babel was formed by a mighty man named Nimrod, a type of the Antichrist. Babel has its continuation in Babylon which, in the sight of God, is the consummation of human government. At the end of the Bible, Babylon is mentioned again in its religious and material aspects (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17—18). In Revelation Babylon does not refer literally to the place of

ancient Babel but to the city of Rome. This indicates that, from God's point of view, Rome is the continuation, consummation, and conclusion of Babylon.

The image in Daniel 2 signifies four empires: the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Macedonian-Grecian Empire, and the Roman Empire. Today we are still in the Roman Empire, for the culture and customs of today are Roman. In the future there will be a further restoration of the Roman Empire. The coming Antichrist will restore the Roman Empire and will make himself the last Caesar over it. In the last seven years of this age, he will make a covenant of peace with Israel, allowing Israel to worship God with freedom. But after three and a half years, Antichrist will change his mind and begin to persecute all religion, especially persecuting the Jewish people and the believers in Christ. At that time God will consider Rome, the capital of the restored Roman Empire, as Babylon.

Historically, in the past ten or more centuries, the city of Rome has been involved, even wrapped up, religiously with the Roman church. Rome today is the capital of both the nation of Italy and of the Catholic Church. At the beginning of the great tribulation, Antichrist will destroy the Roman church (Rev. 17:16). Three and a half years later, at the end of the great tribulation, the Lord Jesus will destroy the city of Rome (18:8). At this point, the destruction of the human government, consummated in the Roman Empire, will be completed.

This corresponds to Jeremiah's prophecies concerning the punishment and judgment upon the nations which are involved with God's elect, Israel. This punishment and judgment begins with Egypt and ends with Babylon, after which there will be no more human government.

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah tell us clearly that Babylon, including the land and the people, will be cut off. Babylon is the most evil thing on earth opposed to God; and once Babylon has been destroyed, it will not be restored. Babylon began with Nimrod and it will end with the restored Roman Empire under Antichrist, which, in the sight of God, will be the continuation, consummation, and conclusion of Babylon.

When God destroys both the religious and the political Babylon, that will be the end of the judgment on Babylon prophesied in Jeremiah 50 and 51.

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE HISTORY OF CAPTIVITY

Jeremiah 52 is a supplement to the history of captivity. As such a supplement, this chapter covers five matters: the fall of Jerusalem (vv. 1-16); the plundering of the temple (vv. 17-23); the exile of the people of Judah (vv. 24-27); the number of those exiled by Nebuchadnezzar from Judah (vv. 28-30); and the lifting up of Jehoiachin king of Judah (vv. 31-34). This chapter is the definite fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies as a justification to this genuine prophet and a condemnation to the false prophets (ch. 29).

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

BABYLON—THE BEGINNING AND THE ENDING OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT

Scripture Reading: Jer. 50—51

In this message I would like to give a brief further word concerning Babylon.

JEREMIAH'S WRITING CONCERNING THE NATIONS BEGINNING WITH EGYPT AND ENDING WITH BABYLON

After writing concerning Israel, God's chosen people, Jeremiah wrote six chapters concerning the nations involved with Israel. His writing concerning these nations begins with Egypt and ends with Babylon. As we have seen, Egypt typifies the world of making a living and of enjoyment. Now we need to see that Babylon is not only the end but also the beginning of human government.

BABYLON BEING THE ENTIRE HUMAN GOVERNMENT ON EARTH

The great human image in Daniel 2 represents the totality of human government on earth, which began at Babel and ends with the Roman Empire. The head of that human image is Babylon, and the feet and the toes are the Roman Empire. But in God's eyes the entire image is Babylon.

According to the historical understanding, the four parts of the great image represent four empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Macedonia-Greece, and Rome—but in the sight of God all these empires are Babylon. Since the head of the image is Babylon, the entire image from the head to the toes must be Babylon. Thus, in the eyes of God, the entire human government of the human race on earth is Babylon.

THE TWO ASPECTS OF BABYLON THE GREAT

In Revelation the restored Roman Empire is called Babylon the Great (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2). Babylon the Great has two aspects—a political aspect (Rev. 18) and a religious aspect (Rev. 17).

The Political Aspect

The political aspect of Babylon the Great includes many material things and many things related to the international trade and commerce upon the earth (Rev. 18:9-19). This indicates that communism will not be long lasting. At the end time, the political situation of the world will not be communistic, for international trade, not merely national commerce, will be thriving.

The Religious Aspect

Babylon the Great also has a religious aspect. The religious Babylon, the Roman church, was established when the papal system was built up, and it gradually spread into political circles, until eventually the Roman church was wrapped up with and became one with the Roman Empire. Thus, in Revelation the Roman Empire is likened to a beast, and the Roman church is likened to a woman riding on a beast (13:1; 17:3). This indicates that the two—the Roman Empire and the Roman church—are one.

TODAY'S WORLD SITUATION BEING ALTOGETHER ROMAN

Both politically and religiously, today's world situation is altogether Roman. This means that the world situation is under the influence of Roman politics and Roman religion. Most of the present governments were adopted based on Roman law and Roman administration. In other words, modern government is built upon Roman principles of law and government. Furthermore, the Roman church is prominent in many nations, and the pope has a high political standing. Hence, today, both politically and religiously, the entire earth has been Romanized. In a very real sense, the whole world is Roman.

SATAN INITIATING THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT WITH NIMROD AT BABEL

Satan initiated the Roman government not only two thousand years ago but also with Nimrod at Babel (Gen. 10:8-10). At Babel, Satan caused the human race to rebel against God, to worship idols, and to exalt man's self (Gen. 11:1-9). There man built a high tower, a monument, to make a name for himself.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE REMOVAL OF ALL ROMAN THINGS FROM THE EARTH

Since the whole world has become Roman, under the influence of Roman government and Roman religion, it may seem that God has been defeated. However, the book of Revelation shows us that our God surely has not been defeated.

At the end of this age, the Roman Empire will be restored and strengthened to produce its last Caesar, Antichrist, the man of lawlessness (Rev. 17:9-11; 2 Thes. 2:3-4, 8), who will be very powerful. It is he who will destroy the Roman church at the beginning of the great tribulation. Concerning this, Revelation 17:16 says, "The ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked and will eat her flesh and burn her utterly with fire." That the ten horns and the beast will hate the harlot and make her desolate means that Antichrist and the ten kings of the restored Roman Empire will persecute the Roman church. They will make the Roman church "desolate and naked," meaning that they will destroy her, rob her of her riches, and expose her; they will "eat her flesh," meaning that they will kill her members; and they will "burn her utterly with fire," meaning that they will annihilate her altogether.

Then, at the end of the tribulation, Christ will come down from the heavens, with the overcomers as His army, to fight against Antichrist directly and defeat him and cast him alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19). That will be the last fighting of man against God, a fighting that began at Babel and that will increase and intensify until the war at Armageddon. With

Christ's defeat of Antichrist, the entire Roman Empire will be destroyed and all the Roman things will be removed, cleared away, from the earth. There will be no more Roman church or Roman Empire; that is, there will be no more Babylon. Then what will be prominent on earth will not be Babylon but the New Jerusalem.

THE TWO PROMINENT CITIES IN THE BIBLE—BABYLON AND JERUSALEM

In the Bible there are two prominent cities—Babylon and Jerusalem. We see these two cities in Jeremiah and in Revelation. In the Old Testament, in Jeremiah, Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem and to make her a ruin, a desolation. At the end of the Bible, in Revelation, there are Babylon the Great and the New Jerusalem. Eventually, Babylon the Great will be destroyed, removed from the earth, and cast into the lake of fire, and the New Jerusalem will be brought in to be the prominent center of God's eternal kingdom in the new heaven and new earth.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

THE SEPARATION OF THE CHURCH, GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ELECT, FROM THE WORLD IN ALL ITS ASPECTS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOD'S ECONOMY

Scripture Reading: Jer. 46:1-28; 50—51

In this message I would like to give a further word regarding the nations in 46:1—51:64.

OUR NEED TO KNOW THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HISTORICAL EVENTS RECORDED IN JEREMIAH

Jeremiah is a book on God's economy. In the life-study of this book, my concern is not merely with the historical facts and sequence but with the spiritual significance of the historical events recorded in this book. To understand the events themselves is one thing, but to see the spiritual significance of these events is another thing. We may know the events but not know their spiritual significance. We should not read the stories in the Bible or study the Bible in black and white without knowing the spiritual significance of what we are reading or studying. Therefore, my burden regarding chapters forty-six through fifty-one is that we see the spiritual significance of Jehovah's punishment and judgment upon the nations involved with God's elect, Israel.

EGYPT SIGNIFYING THE WORLD OF MAKING A LIVING AND OF ENJOYMENT AND BABYLON SIGNIFYING THE WORLD OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD, IDOL WORSHIP, AND SELF-EXALTATION

The sequence in which Jeremiah covered God's punishment on Israel and His judgment on the nations is very significant. First, Jeremiah spoke concerning Israel's sin and Jehovah's

punishment on Israel. Then he spoke concerning God's punishment and judgment upon the nations involved with Israel. In speaking concerning the nations, he mentions Egypt first (46:2-28) and Babylon last (chs. 50—51). This indicates that, in God's view, the world is first Egyptian and then Babylonian. However, according to historical sequence, Babylon began first, from Babel (Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9). God called Abraham out of Chaldea, the land of Babel, into the good land. But later, when Abraham became weak, he drifted to Egypt.

Babel is the origin, the source, of man's worship of idols, man's rebellion against God, and human self-exaltation. After these things began, the world became Egyptian, with Egypt signifying the world in the aspect of making a living and having entertainment. At Babel man rebelled against God, worshipped idols, and exalted man's self, but at Babel there was no way to make a living or to have entertainment. Hence, according to the sequence in Genesis, Babel is mentioned first and then Egypt. During the time of famine, Egypt was nearly the only place that still had food (Gen. 42:1-2). Egypt was the place of security and enjoyment.

The book of Jeremiah presents us a picture of God's coming in to punish and judge the nations. According to this picture, the last nation to be judged is Babylon. When God judges Babylon, His judgment of the nations will be complete.

ISRAEL, A TYPE OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ELECT

The book of Jeremiah also shows us that God's elect, Israel, was very much involved with the nations. This is a type of us, God's New Testament elect, who are very much involved with the world in its many aspects. The nations in chapters forty-six through fifty-one typify nine different aspects of the world. Today the world has even more aspects. Jeremiah presents us such a picture so that we can live a church life that is not polluted by the different aspects of the world. We need to know how to have a clear separation from the world and not be wrapped up or mixed with any of its aspects. God will come in to judge the world in all its aspects and to make a clear distinction between the church as His elect and every aspect of the world.

According to Galatians 6:16, we are today's Israel. Around us are all kinds of aspects of the world. We need to ask ourselves what aspect of the world we are involved with. We may be involved with the desire to help others through humanitarian efforts, or we may be occupied with the enjoyment of worldly amusements. In either case, we are away from God.

GOD'S VENGEANCE ON BABYLON— HIS NUMBER ONE ENEMY, THE WORST NATION IN OFFENDING GOD

Babylon was the nation that destroyed the nation of Israel, the people of Israel, the holy temple of God, the holy city of God, and the holy land of God. In addition, the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar captured the holy vessels, which were used to serve God in the temple. Other people regarded those vessels as something holy, sanctified, and separated unto God and therefore did not dare to touch them. However, Nebuchadnezzar brought a great part of these vessels to Babylon and put them in the temple of his god (Dan. 1:1-2). This insulted God to the uttermost and was the reason that God's verdict on Babylon is described as His vengeance (Jer. 50:15), the "vengeance of Jehovah, the vengeance for His temple" (51:11).

Babylon was the worst nation in offending God, and its king was one with Satan (Isa. 14:4, 11-15). Babylon, therefore, is God's number one enemy, being both the beginning and the conclusion of human government on earth. Babylon will be thoroughly condemned, punished, and judged by God. God will judge Babylon to such an extent that nothing of Babylon will remain in the universe. Thus, when God destroys the restored religious and political Babylon the Great, He will rid the earth of His number one enemy, which rebels against God, exalts man, and worships idols.

JEREMIAH PRESENTING GOD'S ECONOMY TO US THAT WE MAY TURN BACK TO OUR SOURCE AND ORIGIN THE TRIUNE GOD AS THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS

Jeremiah presents God's economy to us that we may turn

back to our source and origin, the Triune God as the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13). Then we will enjoy Him and will receive His dispensing into us for the accomplishment of His economy. God will then take care to keep the world away from us.

Today in our church life there should not be anything Babylonian. We should clear away any rebellion against God, any exalting of ourselves, and any worshipping of idols. Then we will be God's elect under His dispensing to enjoy Him. Instead of enjoying Egypt as a good place for our living, we will enjoy the Triune God, and the church life will be our living. In such a situation we will be blessed by God.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW COVENANT, THE COVENANT OF LIFE, IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: Jer. 31:31-34

In this message I am burdened to give an additional word concerning Jeremiah's laying the foundation of the new covenant, the covenant of life.

GOD CARING FOR ONLY ONE COVENANT— THE NEW COVENANT OF LIFE

The Bible shows us that the desire of God's heart is to come into man as life and to be one with man. God has always liked to contact man, and in this contact He has made several covenants with man. The first covenant God made with man was the covenant with the created man (Gen. 2:8-9, 15-17), and the second was His covenant with fallen man (3:8-21). Although God had close and intimate contact with Abel, no covenant was made with him. After Noah passed through the flood, God came in to make a covenant with him and his sons (9:8-17). Then after calling Abraham, God made a covenant with him (12:2-3, 7-8; 15:4-18; 17:1-2; 22:17-18), and this covenant was repeated with Isaac (26:3-5) and with Jacob (28:13-15). Later, when God brought Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, He made a long covenant with Israel (Exo. 20—23; 24:3-8). This covenant, the covenant of the law, is called the first covenant (Heb. 8:7, 13; 9:1), the old covenant. After traveling in the wilderness for forty years, Israel came to the land of Moab, and there God made another covenant with them (Deut. 29—30). According to 2 Samuel 7, God also made a covenant

with David. Finally, in the New Testament the Lord Jesus established the new covenant (Luke 22:20).

In the Bible God made eight covenants with man, but He counts only two covenants: the covenant made with Israel through Moses and the new covenant, the covenant of life, which is considered the second covenant (Heb. 8:7). All the other covenants—the covenants with the created man, with the fallen man, with Noah, with Abraham, with Israel in the land of Moab, and with David—are considered by God as side covenants. Still, the covenant God made with Abraham corresponds to the new covenant and is the basis for the new covenant (Gal. 3). If we study all these covenants thoroughly, we will see that God cares for only one covenant, the new covenant of life.

THE CONTENT OF THE NEW COVENANT— THE PROCESSED AND CONSUMMATED TRIUNE GOD

The content of the new covenant is the Triune God, who has been processed and consummated to become everything to God's chosen people. This new covenant was promised to Israel in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Heb. 8:8-13), and it was absolutely, thoroughly, and completely fulfilled by the Lord Jesus when He established His table (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). In instituting the table, the Lord Jesus made a covenant with the New Testament believers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

The most important part of the book of Jeremiah is the portion on the new covenant. Since Jeremiah spoke regarding the new covenant, this book, in a sense, is more important than the writings of Moses, which do not say anything about the new covenant. Although Moses prophesied very much concerning Christ, the covenant God made with Israel through him had nothing to do with Jesus Christ. Based on the fact that the book of Jeremiah prophesies concerning the new covenant, the book of Jeremiah may be considered an Old Testament book that is also a New Testament book.

THE POSITION AND FUNCTION OF THE OLD COVENANT OF THE LAW

At this point, we need to say a word regarding the position and function of the old covenant of the law.

Its Position

The position of the covenant of the law was that of a concubine. In Galatians 4 Paul tells us that Abraham had two wives, representing two covenants. Sarah, the proper wife, represents the new covenant, and Hagar, the concubine, represents the old covenant of law. Because Hagar, the concubine, symbolizes the old covenant of the law, the position of this covenant is the position of a concubine. As Abraham cast out Hagar, when Christ came He put aside the old covenant and made it of no effect, replacing it with the new covenant.

Furthermore, in Romans 5:20 Paul tells us that "the law entered in alongside." This means that the law was added later, that it was not God's original intention to have the law. Rather, the law later came in alongside of something that was present before the law came. This indicates that the main line of God's economy was there already.

Its Function

Whereas Christ's ministry is a ministry of justification, Moses' ministry was a ministry of condemnation (2 Cor. 3:9a). Therefore, in God's economy Moses' ministry is not the central line. However, without the old covenant of the law made through Moses, Jeremiah could not have exposed Israel to the uttermost. In order to expose Israel, Jeremiah often referred to the covenant of the law. Here we see that the function of the law, which is something on the negative side, is to expose our fallen condition and situation. This helps us turn to the source, to the fountain of living waters, which in the New Testament is Christ as the embodiment of God.

JEREMIAH'S LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW COVENANT

In chapter thirty-one Jeremiah laid the foundation of the

new covenant, prophesying that God will put His law within us; that He will write His law into our mind that we may know God; that God will be our God and we will be His people; that we will not need anyone to teach us, because we will all have a teaching life within us; and that God will forgive our iniquity and remember our sins no longer. In the new covenant we enjoy the inner law of life. This law of life brings us God's person and also the divine capacity of the divine life, which can accomplish everything for God to fulfill His economy. By the inner law of life we have the capacity to know God, to live God, and even to be constituted with God in His life and nature so that we may be His corporate expression.

We need all the twenty-seven books of the New Testament to define this one short portion of Jeremiah 31. If we understand this portion in light of the entire New Testament, we will see that in this new covenant we have the church, the kingdom of God, God's household, the house of God as God's dwelling place in our spirit, the new man, and the Body of Christ as the fullness of the processed and consummated Triune God. Eventually, this new covenant will bring in the millennium. Ultimately and consummately, it will bring in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

Today there are many who have believed in Christ, who have received the blessing of the new covenant, and yet are not aware of the content of the new covenant and what it accomplishes and produces. Therefore, we have the burden to emphasize the new covenant again and again. May we all see the new covenant and be fully occupied with it.

LIFE-STUDY OF JEREMIAH

MESSAGE FORTY

THE KERNEL OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Scripture Reading: Jer. 2:13; 17:9; 13:23; 23:5-6; 33:16; 31:33

In this message I would like to give a very brief concluding word to this life-study of Jeremiah.

THE SHELL AND THE KERNEL

The book of Jeremiah may be likened to a walnut: on the outside there is a hard shell, and on the inside there is a kernel. When I was young, I read Jeremiah a number of times, but I touched only the "shell" of this book; I did not see anything of the "kernel." Gradually, the Lord has opened the shell of Jeremiah and has shown me the kernel. In this message, therefore, I have the burden to speak a word concerning the kernel of the book of Jeremiah.

This kernel includes three matters—what God wants from us, what we are in our fallen condition, and what Christ is to us. Jeremiah strongly presents these three matters to us, but they are concealed within the shell. In order to see these three things, we need to "crack" the shell of Jeremiah and concentrate on the kernel inside.

WHAT GOD WANTS FROM US

What God wants from us is mentioned mainly in 2:13, which reveals that God is the fountain of living waters. God wants us to take Him as the fountain of living waters for our living. This means that He wants us to take Him as the source, the fountain, of our being. How can we take Him as our source? The only way to take God as the fountain of living waters is to drink of Him day by day. By drinking we take into us the living water that issues from God as the fountain.

The importance of drinking of God as the fountain is illustrated in John 4. To the Samaritan woman who had come to the well to draw water and whom the Lord Jesus had asked to give Him a drink, He said, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (v. 10). When she asked Him where He could get this living water, He answered, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life" (v. 14). The Lord's word here indicates that whatever we drink becomes one with us. When we drink of God as the fountain of living waters, He becomes one with us, and we become one with Him. The more we drink of God, the more He is one with us and the more we are one with Him and constituted with Him in His life and nature.

Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water." The most evil thing in the eyes of God is to forsake Him as the source, as the fountain of living waters, and to turn to some other source. All other sources are idols. In this verse the idols are likened to broken cisterns, which cannot hold water. People today are busy hewing out for themselves all kinds of cisterns. Actually, these cisterns are idols. As we consider this situation, we need to realize that God wants us to take Him as the fountain, the source, of our life and our being.

WHAT WE ARE IN OUR FALLEN CONDITION

Another aspect of the kernel of the book of Jeremiah is the exposure of what we are in our fallen condition. In this matter Jeremiah is very deep but also very simple. In 17:9 he speaks regarding the human heart, saying, "The heart is deceitful above all things / And it is incurable; / Who can know it?" Our heart is deceitful to the uttermost and incurable. Just as our heart is incurable, so our fallen nature is unchangeable. Thus, in 13:23 Jeremiah says, "Can the

Cushite change his skin, / Or the leopard his spots? / Then you also may be able to do good, / Who are accustomed to do evil." In our fallen condition we are corrupt and rotten; there is no way for us to change, correct, or improve ourselves. The disciples of Confucius tried to use his teachings to improve themselves, but they have failed. As fallen human beings, we are incurable and unchangeable.

WHAT CHRIST IS TO US

The third matter in the kernel of the book of Jeremiah is what Christ is to us.

The Shoot of David

Jeremiah 23:5 and 6 say, "Behold, days are coming, / Declares Jehovah, / When I will raise up to David a righteous Shoot.…And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness." Although Christ is God, He became a Shoot, or Sprout, of David. This means that He was incarnated to be a descendant of David. As a Shoot, the Sprout, of David, Christ is tender, living, and fresh.

Jehovah Our Righteousness

Christ, the righteous Shoot of David, is called Jehovah our righteousness. In our fallen condition we are corrupt, sinful, deceitful, incurable, and unchangeable. How could we ever be righteous before God? In ourselves this is impossible, but we can become righteous in Christ. Christ came to die on the cross for our sins, accomplishing redemption for us. Based upon Christ's redemption, God is able to forgive our sins, to forget our sins, and to justify us. Furthermore, with the redemption of Christ as the foundation, Christ Himself has become our righteousness. Not only have we been justified by God, but God has given Christ to us to be our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). It is a wonderful fact that Christ has become one with us to be our righteousness.

The Divine Life

Outwardly, we are justified, having Christ as our righteousness, but inwardly we are still empty. Therefore, we need

Christ to be something else to us. We need Christ as the divine life, the divine life that is wrought into our inner being (Jer. 31:33). This life is a law which works in us to dispense into our being all that God is in His rich being. As a result of this dispensing, this transfusing of God Himself into us, we are no longer empty. On the contrary, we are filled with the dispensing Triune God.

The inner law of the divine life within us has the capacity to make us one with God. In this life with its law, God is our God, and we are His people. The way for God to be our God is His divine life, and the way for us to be His people is also the divine life. Eventually, in the divine life and by the working of the law of the divine life, God will be wrought into us, and we will live Him and be constituted with Him in His life and nature but not, of course, in His Godhead.

Now we can see what God wants from us, what we are in our fallen condition, and what Christ is to us. God wants us to take Him as our source and to drink of Him every day so that He may become the river of the water of life within us. In our fallen condition we are hopeless, utterly corrupt, incurable, and unchangeable. But Christ has come to be our righteousness and our inner life. Outwardly, He is our righteousness for us to be justified by God. Inwardly, He is the divine life to fill us, to make us one with God, and even to constitute us with God that we may live God. Then we will be a corporate Body, the organism of the Triune God. This is the kernel of the book of Jeremiah.